

Community Profile

Huntington, West Virginia

Spring 2013



Prepared by Aaron-Michael Fox
*Downtown Huntington Neighborhood Association,
President*

Introduction

Huntington, West Virginia is a beautiful and historic city located in the Appalachian mountains at the confluence of the Guyandotte and Ohio Rivers. The first permanent settlement, Holderby's Landing, was founded in 1775 in what was then the Colony of Virginia. The modern City of Huntington was incorporated by Collis P. Huntington and Delos W. Emmons as the western terminus of the Chesapeake & Ohio Railroad at the Ohio River in 1871.

The city is the proud home of Marshall University, as well as the Huntington Museum of Art, the Huntington District, U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, the Collis P. Huntington Historical Society and Railroad Museum, Camden Park; one of the oldest amusement parks in the world, and the largest in-land seaport in the United States.



Photo by Aaron-Michael Fox

Gutzon Borglum statue of Collis P. Huntington in front of the old C&O Railroad Depot.

Huntington was famous for its electric street cars in the early years, until they were gradually replaced with gasoline-powered buses. Some of the old trolley tracks can still be seen on a few streets. Camden Park, which at 110 years old is one of the world's oldest amusement parks, was built in 1903 to encourage ridership on the trolleys (then owned by the Camden Interstate Railway Company).



Photo courtesy Vintage Huntington

One of Huntington's original electric streetcars on Third Avenue in the 1880s.

Huntington's "boom" period occurred from the founding in 1871 until the Great Flood of 1937 which claimed 5 lives, caused millions of dollars in damage, left tens of

thousands homeless, and led to the creation of Huntington's floodwalls in 1938. World War II brought another economic boom, but that was short-lived and ended along with the war in the 1940s. Huntington's population began to drop after 1950 due to urban sprawl and the decline of the steel and manufacturing industries.



A view of the historic south side of Third Avenue across from Pullman Square. The 6-story building in the center is the Anderson-Newcomb/Stone & Thomas Building.

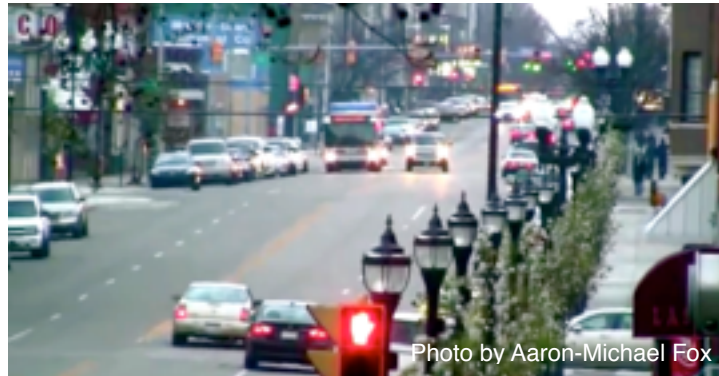
However, Huntington has seen a major revival since the opening of the Pullman Square Town Center in 2005, the filming of the Warner Bros. motion picture "We Are Marshall" in 2006, and the filming of ABC's *Food Revolution* in 2010. As of the most recent census in 2010, the city population is on the rise for the first time in 6 decades. The largest employers are Marshall University, Cabell-Huntington Hospital, St. Mary's Medical Center, Amazon, DirecTV, and the City of Huntington.

The modern Huntington metro area spans 7 counties across 3 states and is the largest in the state of West Virginia with a population of more than 360,000. Many buildings in Downtown have been restored, or are in the process of being restored, so a visitor's first impression is usually of the gothic and Art Deco architecture. Great care is being taken to make sure that new construction like the Pullman Square Town Center fits in seamlessly alongside neighboring buildings that are sometimes more than 100 years old.

See a video of Downtown Huntington here: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=E8Q7GgCael4>

Shortly after Pullman Square was constructed, the city began work on upgrading the street scape on Fourth Avenue and Ninth Street. Ninth Street was formerly known as the Ninth Street Plaza and was closed to vehicle traffic for years, which effectively killed most businesses located there. Once anchored by Pullman Square on the north end, the old plaza was removed in 2006 and Ninth Street has once again become attractive to new businesses. New businesses on Ninth Street include *Paula Vega's*

Cupcakes, Sprint Mobile, Pub & Oven Pizza, Huntington Ink Tattoos, Tonyia's Steel Magnolias Salon & Spa, and Lamb's Gate Market.



A view of the Old Main Corridor looking west from the campus of Marshall University.

The current project for 2013 is the section of Fourth Avenue that connects Downtown to Marshall University. That section, known as the “Old Main Corridor” continues to be upgraded yearly with new lighting, artistic and pedestrian-friendly design concepts, and bicycle lanes. A key section of the Old Main Corridor is Fourth Avenue between Eighth and Tenth Streets. That section is host to the Keith-Albee Performing Arts Center which has now "reclaimed her status as the grand dame of Downtown Huntington," according to Tyson Compton, President of the Cabell-Huntington Convention and Visitors Bureau.

Across from the Keith-Albee is the much-acclaimed restaurant; *21 at the Frederick*, which is just one of the many locally owned restaurants filling the city. *Huntington Prime, Backyard Pizza and Raw Bar, Rio Grande, and Hibachi* round out a variety of dinner options on those two blocks of Fourth Avenue. There is also Tropical Moon, a frozen yogurt shop, and Simply Whisk, a kitchen supply store, *MiAppa*, specializing in locally-made artisan products, *The Old Village Roaster* coffee shop, a hobby store, and a special event hall. New residential options are also becoming available on that same section of Fourth Avenue as developer Shane Radcliff works to transform 831 Fourth Avenue, formerly the Renaissance Bookstore, into high-end loft apartments and retail space.



The renovation of the Renaissance Building on Fourth Avenue.

Locals have taken to referring to the last few years as a “Huntington Renaissance,” and that’s a pretty accurate term; Huntington does seem to be experiencing a cultural, artistic, and economic renaissance. New businesses are opening all over the city, and most of our historic buildings have been restored, or are in the process of being restored.

Marshall University recently purchased the old Anderson-Newcomb/Stone & Thomas Building, which was built in 1902, with the intent of converting that historic structure into a state-of-the-art visual arts center. The goal being to raise the college’s presence as an innovative institution, give the visual art program more space to expand, and afford students more opportunities to become engaged in community initiatives and improve the quality of life for everyone in the city.

Arguably, the most famous attraction in Huntington is the Keith Albee Performing Arts Center. Originally built in 1928 as the Keith-Albee Theater, and under the supervision of vaudeville tycoons B. F. Keith and Edward Albee as part of their Keith-Albee vaudeville circuit, the Keith-Albee was the second-largest theater in the United States at that time--behind the Roxy in New York City. The theater was designed by Thomas W. Lamb who designed approximately 153 theaters around the world. Unfortunately, only forty-three of these grand theaters are still open, and seventy-one have been demolished. Thankfully, “the Keith” has been undergoing a full restoration since 2009.



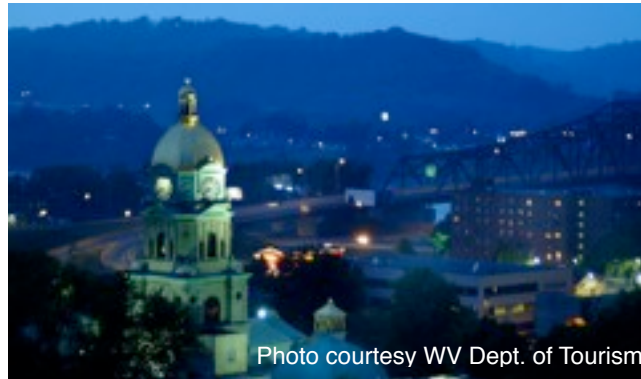
Photo courtesy Keith-Albee P.A.C.

The inside of the Keith Albee Performing Arts Center during the modern restorations.

The signature achievement in the restoration of the Keith for this year, was the restoration of the famous front sign. After standing watch over Fourth Avenue for decades and being featured in hundreds of pictures and postcards, two Hollywood movie premieres, and being struck by lightning numerous times; the sign had to be taken down in 2011. A massive "Save Our Sign" effort was organized that funded the full restoration of the sign, which was reinstalled in May of 2012.

Municipal Efforts

For the last 3 years, the City of Huntington has invested considerable time and financial resources into the Old Main Corridor Project listed in the introduction. The City also unveiled a comprehensive cleanup campaign in 2013 that includes a ban on all furniture from being stored outside--except that which is designed specifically for exterior use, and a crackdown on code enforcement beginning this summer.



A view of the Cabell County Courthouse and the Robert C. Byrd Bridge crossing the Ohio River.

At the behest of the Mayor, a citywide cleanup effort will give residents and business owners approximately 12 weeks to spruce up their properties before the city starts enforcing numerous ordinances that prohibit tall weeds and grass, litter and household items that belong indoors but are being stored on porches or in front yards.

The looming zero-tolerance policy is part of Mayor Steve Williams' multi-pronged approach to improving the quality of life in the city through code enforcement. The city also will hire additional code enforcement officers, reinstate the Fire Department's Fire Prevention Bureau and seek the ability to issue on-the-spot citations from the West Virginia State Legislature.

The Huntington Police Department was recently recognized by the FBI for being the #1 police force in our region for the second straight year, and the city now has the lowest crime rates in 27 years. The City of Huntington also hired a graffiti abatement specialist in January of 2013 to work with the City on designing and implementing a new Graffiti Abatement System to make sure all new graffiti is removed from the city within 24 hours of its application.

See a welcome video from Huntington Police Chief Holbrook here: http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=7pWwHG_AKJo

Huntington is a beautiful city, but it is also a hard-working city, and that includes the streets and buildings. The rivers temper a lot of the weather, but the Appalachian winters still take their toll on the city. We have all the potholes you would expect for a city that moves more tonnage than any other city in America, despite spending more than a million dollars every year to patch them.

Business Efforts

The Pullman Square Town Center provided a much needed spark to Downtown Huntington, which has seen an explosion of new development since the Square opened in 2006. Unlike Downtown development of the past, we are not tearing down our historic buildings, but rather finding new ways to keep them in use.



Photo by Mark Webb

The *Huntington Prime Penthouse & Piano Bar* at the top of the West Virginia Building overlooking the Ohio River and Pullman Square.

Huntington Prime was Huntington's first restaurant to specialize in a locally-inspired menu in 2007. The very modern and contemporary-styled restaurant makes use of both the ground and penthouse floors of the West Virginia Building, which is the tallest building on the Huntington skyline and was built in 1924.

See video of *Huntington Prime* here: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=1lja2Ge5KEE>

The redevelopment of our historic *Shops at Heritage Station* is one of our crowning achievements for 2012/13. The redevelopment has required a concerted effort between local entrepreneurs, concerned citizens, the Cabell-Huntington Convention & Visitor's Bureau, and the Cabell County Parks & Recreation District.



Photo courtesy Vintage Huntington

The original B&O Railroad Depot in 1894.

The *Shops at Heritage Station* are located in the old Baltimore & Ohio Railroad's Huntington Depot which was originally constructed in 1887. The complex includes an original steam engine with a "pullman" train car, and a building that used to house one of Huntington's first banks--which was once robbed by the James Gang. That structure is currently occupied by *Bottle & Wedge*, a specialty beer and cheese shop.

Heritage Station was turned into a shopping center called "Heritage Village" during the dark days of Urban Renewal in the 1970s. For decades, the beautiful station sat hidden and virtually unused just two blocks from the city center, until Create Huntington got involved in 2006 (more on Create Huntington in the Community Involvement section).

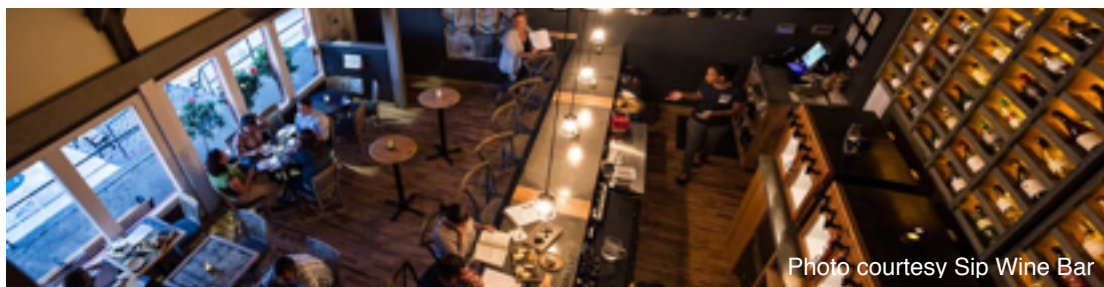


The modern-day Shops at Heritage Station

Happily, today Heritage Station is a busy artisan retail complex, full of locally-owned shops, and home to regular public events like the annual Diamond Teeth Mary Blues Festival.

New locally-owned artisan shops at Heritage Station include: *the Wild Ramp*: a local Market, *All About You*: Hair & Nail Salon, *Bottle & Wedge*: Beer, Wine, and Cheese Shop, *CommonGround Shoppes*: uncommon, handcrafted, home and garden goods, *Finds & Designs*: vintage furniture and up-cycled clothing, *Jameson Cigar Co.*, *the Red Caboose*: artisan gifts, *River & Rail Bakery*, *Let's Eat*: localvore restaurant, and *Sip*: Huntington's first and only wine bar.

See a video of the Shops at Heritage Station here: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=E0FL4xIFD00>



Sip Wine Bar inside the Shops at Heritage Station

It's safe to say that every shop in Heritage Station has a loyal following, but it seems that the most popular of all the shops is the Wild Ramp Market. The market is a revolutionary concept in our region, that strives to create a farmer's market in a retail environment.

The store is staffed by volunteers, which keeps prices low and maximizes profits for suppliers, who keep 90% of all sales. The market is beneficial to both consumers, who get healthy and affordable, locally-grown products; as well as suppliers who do not have to waste time standing by their products as with a traditional farmer's market.

The market is a heated and cooled interior space and open year round with hours that are convenient for both producers and the consumers (Tuesday-Saturday 11am-7pm).

Residential

As with Downtown business, there has been an explosion of interest in Downtown residency, with several historically commercial buildings being renovated to accommodate residential units on the upper floors.



The Frederick Building marquee, as seen in the motion picture *We Are Marshall*.

The Frederick Building was built in 1906 as a luxury hotel, but no longer operates as a hotel, and is being remodeled into luxury apartments with offices throughout. The lobby has been restored and is open to the public; it is a favorite spot for local photographers and host of Create Huntington's weekly "Chat 'N Chews" (see Community Involvement section). The ground floor is occupied by several businesses including the much-acclaimed *21 at The Frederick* restaurant, and *Wright's Clothiers* which has occupied the corner space since 1911.



An ad for the newly-renovated West Virginia Building apartments.

On the same block as the Frederick Building is the West Virginia Building, which is the tallest building on the Downtown skyline and was built in 1924. After almost a century as a commercial building, it is currently being renovated into an upscale residential high-rise. The ground floor is occupied by *Huntington Prime*'s main restaurant on the Fourth Avenue side, and the *Village Collection* on the Ninth Street side.

The increase in residents has also led to an increased interest in neighborhood associations and neighborhood watch groups, with many new groups forming in the last couple of years such as the Downtown Neighborhood Association and the Forest Hills Neighborhood Association, bringing the total to 14 officially-sanctioned neighborhood groups citywide.



Street painting festival in Gallaher Village, sponsored by the Forest Hills Neighborhood Association.

The most important thing to come out of the new interest in neighborhood groups has been an appreciation for promoting art where it belongs, and sternly prohibiting it from being applied where it doesn't belong. As Huntington's downtown dwindled and the city fell on harder financial times in the late-1990s and early-2000s, a rather severe graffiti problem was allowed to take root. Since 2009, however, a citizen-led group that started at a Create Huntington "Chat 'N Chew" (see Community Involvement section), has been working to remove this blight from our city and has so far removed more than 3,500 graffiti "tags" from the Downtown neighborhood.

The original graffiti problem, however, was exacerbated by a lack of education and resources, which left many of our beautiful historic buildings scarred by improper removal techniques. While we have made great strides toward becoming a graffiti-free city, we are still working to repair and restore some of the lasting damage from the past.

Community Involvement

The organization we are most proud of is “Create Huntington.” Create Huntington began in 2006 when then-Mayor David Felinton, Marshall University President Dr. Stephen Kopp and a group of citizens came together to discuss the best way to improve Huntington’s economic future. Five focus groups were selected to review economic trends and discuss a direction: Family Life, Technology, Culture and the Arts, Community Development, and Tourism.



A typical Create Huntington “Chat ‘N Chew” in the lobby of the Frederick Building.

Today Create Huntington works to empower citizens to create a Huntington in which they love to live, by: creating forums for discussing ideas and connecting people, such as the weekly Thursday evening “Chat ‘n Chew” meetings, the Facebook group, and the website; facilitating local projects through matching grants and scholarships to better help manifest ideas into actions; and empowering community leaders to grow their projects through educational workshops.

According to Create Huntington member Jessica Pressman: "It is what people might not know about Create Huntington -- that we are focused on positivity and bringing people together to create opportunities to help people make a difference, It's just a bunch of regular people. The people here aren't specifically trained to work in public policy, but it's people who want their community to be better and have found a passion for a way to do it. We want people to see us here and know that anyone can make a difference in their own community."

Some positive projects that have come out of Create Huntington are: an “Adopt Your Block” Litter Getter program, “CAFE Huntington,” a monthly “Cash Mob” of a local business, the Diamond Teeth Mary Blues Festival, local art gallery “Gallery 842,” a Graffiti Abatement Initiative, the revitalization of Heritage Station, the Huntington

Community Gardens, the Huntington *Petsafe* Dog Park, the new bike lanes on Fourth Avenue, the Paul Ambrose Trail for Health, and several farm startups, recycling projects, and neighborhood associations.



A couple of the historic bridges in Ritter Park.

Huntington is home to a beautiful and historic park system which is maintained by the Cabell County Park & Recreation District. The oldest and most used park in Huntington is Ritter Park. Widely considered the "Crown Jewel" of Huntington's park system, Ritter Park is located in South Hills overlooking Downtown. The park opened in September of 1913 on land that was originally bought by the city as a site for an incinerator. Neighbors understandably objected to that idea, and lumberman C.L. Ritter offered to donate additional land if the total tract was used for a park. Thankfully, the city took him up on the offer.

See a video of Ritter Park in the Fall here: <http://vimeo.com/19787266>

An award-winning rose garden, which contains more than 1,000 plants and has been nationally-recognized for it's All-American Rose Selections, is an accredited test-garden that attracts locals as well as tourists from the entire tri-state area and is a favorite spot for weddings and receptions. The 100-acre-plus Ritter Park enjoys both summer and winter use thanks to seasonally covered tennis courts and a sledding hill for when it snows.

As a contributing property to the Ritter Park Historic District, which includes the surrounding Craftsman, Colonial, Classical, and Tudor Revival homes, the park provides, according to one area resident, "a sense of place and the feel of home."

Recent additions include the nationally-acclaimed playground noted for its climbing boulders, zip line, bongo drums, and the new *Petsafe* Dog Park that opened in June 2012.



Photo by Mark Webb

The Grand Opening of Huntington's *Petsafe* Dog Park in June of 2012.

In 2011, Huntington won *Petsafe's* first nationwide "Bark for Your Park" contest. Huntington logged more than 87,000 votes and was awarded the grand prize of \$100,000 to build a new dog park in Ritter Park. Phase I of Huntington's *Petsafe* Dog Park was completed and opened to the public in June of 2012. Construction of Phase II of the park began in December of 2012.

See the story of Huntington's Dog Park here: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=E9wKN3wsQOw>

The Huntington area has wrestled with health problems for several years, problems that were made famous in 2010 by the television show *Jamie Oliver's Food Revolution* on ABC. Before and since, concerned Huntingtonians have been working to improve the health and quality of life in the city of Huntington. One of the more popular projects has been the Paul Ambrose Trail for Health.



Photo by Phoebe Patton Randolph

New construction on the Guyandotte section of the Paul Ambrose Trail for Health (PATH).

The Paul Ambrose Trail for Health (PATH) is a growing bicycle and pedestrian trail system in the city. The namesake, Dr. Paul Ambrose, was a promising young physician who was killed at the Pentagon in the terrorist attacks on Sept. 11, 2001. Dr. Ambrose

© **Downtown Huntington Neighborhood Association 2013**

was dedicated to family health and preventative medicine to fight obesity, and the trail system is a way for his efforts to continue to have an impact in Huntington.

The Rahall Transportation Institute Foundation, in association with the City of Huntington and various community members, has designed the trail system to incorporate many of Huntington's amenities and workplaces to allow the citizens of Huntington an alternate means of transportation. The PATH is vital to Huntington's continued efforts towards the redevelopment and growth of the city, as it will help cut congestion, connect business and communities, and provide healthy recreational opportunities for residents.

Best Idea

Huntington's best idea for 2012/2013 would have to be a project of the Wild Ramp Market called the "30 Mile Meal" Project (30MM) which is a "hyper-local" food initiative that focuses on increasing direct marketing between farmers/producers and food businesses within 30 miles of Downtown Huntington.

The desire for fresh local food has become very important as many of us realize that most of the produce we are offered in our supermarkets is neither fresh nor local. We have been eating green (unripe) or spoiled produce for so long in our community that many people have never experienced what fresh, ripe vegetables and fruit taste like! Here in the Huntington area we are fortunate to have many small farms nearby who grow vegetables and fruit, and produce poultry, eggs, beef, bison, pork, lamb, and so much more.



Photo by Noelle Horsfield

Fresh local produce at the Wild Ramp Market in the Shops at Heritage Station.

The mission of the 30MM-Huntington is to develop a vibrant and thriving local foods economy by promoting (both regionally and nationally) and growing local food related businesses; as well as make Huntington a regional dining and local food destination. Increasing the consumer base and attracting new consumers to the area through local food attractions will aid in increasing the overall dollars spent in Huntington and

surrounding areas. This will increase business profits, increase demand and improve economic development, and increase revenues for the city.

The 30MM-Huntington brand will follow the food products, and the producers and handlers of the products are eligible to display the brand label, indicating their involvement. The primary objective of the label is to assist consumers in locating local foods and to increase the consumption of locally produced foods.

Photos

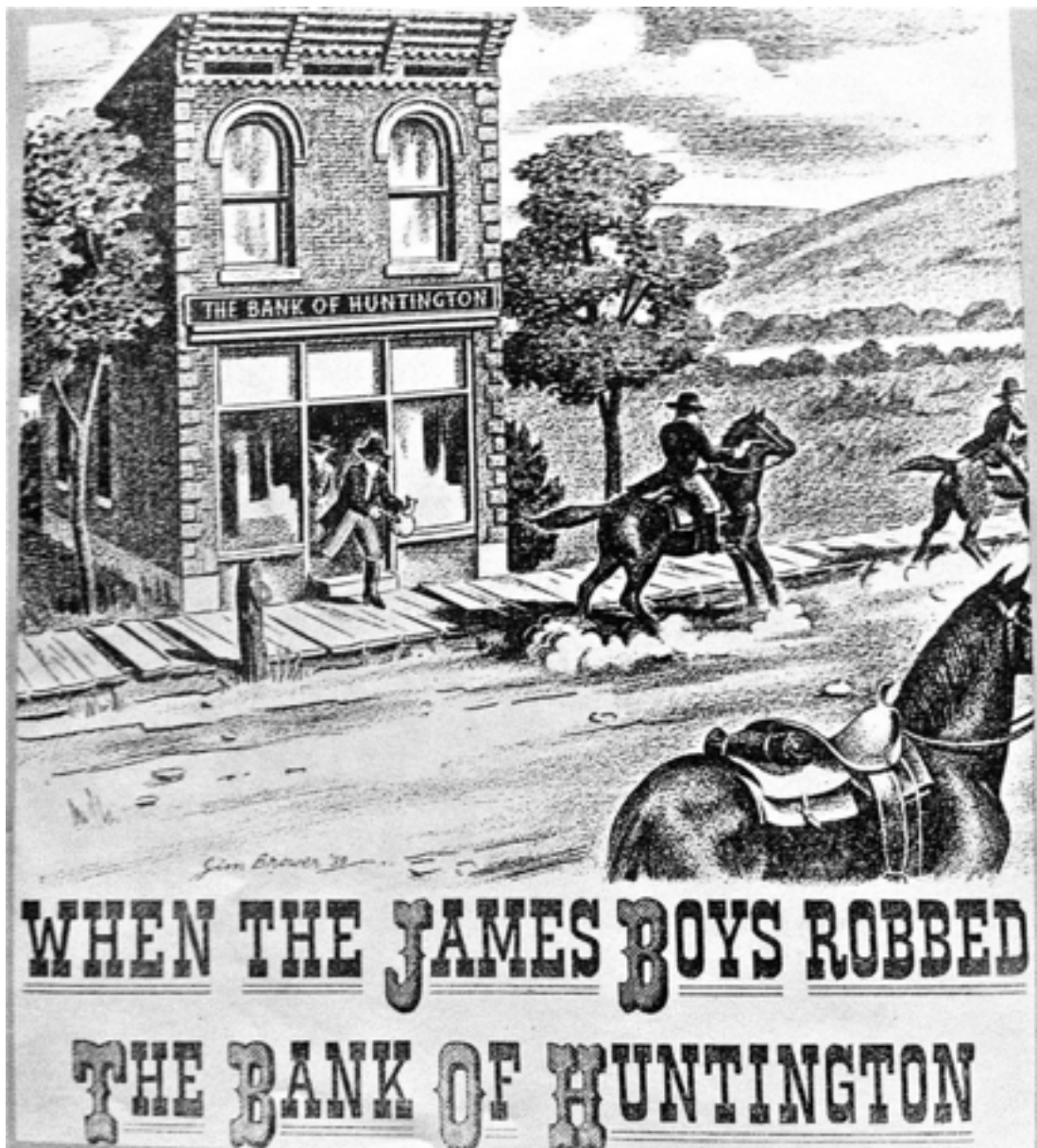




Photo by Aaron-Michael Fox

One of Huntington's signature "trolley buses" on Fifth Avenue.

Downtown in the Fall of 2012.



Photos by Aaron-Michael Fox