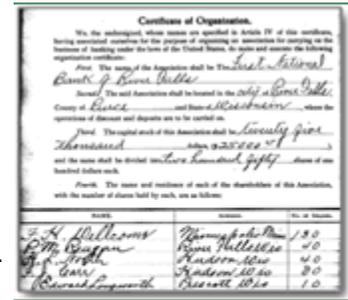


# The History behind First National Bank of River Falls

## A Community Bank

For more than a full century, the First National Bank of River Falls has played a key role in building the economy and supporting the community of River Falls and the surrounding Pierce-St. Croix County area.

Chartered on January 4, 1904, the bank was the vision of a group of men who were promoting the settlement and economic development of the Upper Midwest. The goal of these men, who were bankers from the Twin Cities and other towns in western Wisconsin, was to rebuild and expand the economy of an area that was recoiling from the end of the era in which wheat and lumber had fueled its prosperity. Within one year, local business and civic leaders had acquired the bank's assets, and in early 1905, local ownership and control of the bank was finalized – and has been ongoing ever since. George Theodore Smith – one of the early settlers of River Falls, a former mayor, leading businessman, and the owner of the Main Street building occupied by the bank – was elected President of the First National Bank, starting a family tradition that continues to this day.



Five bankers organized to start the First National Bank in River Falls in 1904.

From that first year, we have focused on being a premiere community bank.

## Family Owned & Operated

We continue to be locally owned and operated, directed by a board that consists of River Falls and Prescott business and civic leaders, and we focus on serving the needs of our local communities.



First National Bank office in the 1920s: President A.W. Lund (sitting) with employee Erwin Davison.

From 1905, G.T. Smith served as bank president until he retired in 1927 and passed the torch to his children, grandchildren, and great-grandchildren.

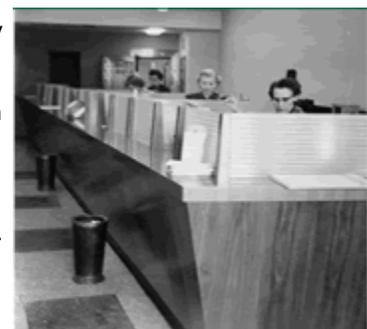
G.T.'s son, Jefferson Franklin Smith, had learned the banking business in Canada after returning from military service in World War I. Jeff Smith was first elected president in 1929 and was re-elected until his sudden death in 1963. At that point, Jeff's son, David M. Smith, who had been serving the bank as cashier, was elected president and led the bank through the turbulent '60s, the inflationary '70s and '80s, and the deregulation of the '80s and '90s. David Smith continued as president until his unexpected death in August, 1994. Since then, the bank has been led by three other presidents – Philip G. Betzel, Thomas J. Palmer and the current President, Jeffrey J. Johnson. The Smith family of River Falls continues to play key roles in the bank's management, with David's daughters, Patti Smith Neir Chairman of the Board from 2012 until her death in August, 2016 and Sandy Smith Wurm, now Chairman of the Board.

## In Touch With National Programs

Starting with an initial capital investment of \$25,000 (the minimum then required by the U.S. Office of the Comptroller of the Currency to charter a national bank), the bank has continued to grow, despite the "bank panics" and depressions of the early 20th century and the deregulation, mergers, and acquisitions of the later 20th century.

In 1914, we became one of the first banks to join the newly established Federal Reserve. We have continued to maintain a close working relationship with the Fed. In 1972, our bank received a rare honor when then-President David Smith was elected to the Ninth District Federal Reserve Board of Directors.

In 1934, the bank also joined the new Federal Deposit Insurance Corporation, established to protect customers' deposits after the Great Depression resulted in so many losses. Before the Depression, the First National was one of two banks in River Falls. Like so many banks in the country, the other River Falls bank did not survive the Depression, and the First National remained as the town's only bank for many years afterward.



Tellers work at the "newly remodeled" bank in the 1950s.

## Focused on Building Our Community

First National has played a prominent role in the development of business and industry in the city. Through our lending policies and community support programs, we have focused on growing the wealth and supporting the residents of our local area. Our financial support of local industries resulted in many jobs for the people of River Falls, and our leadership in such civic projects as a new hospital, public library building, and local YMCA has helped ensure the high quality of life area residents enjoy.

We have also been a key presence in the River Falls business district in our first 100 years. For the first 70 years, the bank occupied a building on West Main Street, just north of its intersection with Elm Street. By the 1970s, we had expanded into all the office space in that building and needed more. In 1974, we constructed a new building at the corner of Locust and Main streets and moved into a portion of that space. Since that time, we have filled the space in that building and built an addition.

## Expanding to Prescott

In our 90th year, we established our Prescott branch when we saw a need for a locally owned and operated bank in that city 12 miles southwest of River Falls. The growth of the Prescott branch exceeded our expectations, and halfway through its first decade, we had to build a new and larger building to handle the Prescott business.

## Opening a Third Branch

The University of Wisconsin - River Falls is an important part of the city of River Falls. Though our bank is situated close to the University, when a new Student Center was built, our Bank felt we could serve the needs of the students, faculty, and the University itself better by having a branch office located within the new Student Center complex. In January 2007 our third branch office was opened at the University of Wisconsin - River Falls.

## Taking the Lead to Improve Service

In addition to its focus on building the community, our success has stemmed from being a leader in adapting to changes in the industry.

From our early promotion of safe-deposit boxes in the 1920s, the First National has led the way in bringing consumer innovations such as night depositories, walk-up windows, and drive-up banking to River Falls.

We added telephone banking in the early days of that innovation and were the first to install an ATM machine in the city. In the 1970s, we were an early adopter of computer technology to improve the speed and quality of our services, and in 2000, we were the first local bank to offer customers Internet banking.



This proofing machine at the FNB in the 1950s was once a modern innovation in banking.

Throughout our history, the support of businesses, individuals, and civic organizations has been the hallmark of our mission. By keeping the bank a community bank, through local ownership and management, we have ensured that local needs are met and that the community's financial gains stay here to prosper our customers and the Pierce-St. Croix County communities that we serve.



Behind the teller desk at the First National Bank in the 1950s – adding machines have been replaced by computers.

The bank is proud of its family of employees who serve not only the bank's customers but also the communities in which they live. Employees are active at city and county levels, Chamber, Economic and Business Development, Educational Programs in the schools and for the public, fund-raising which varies from a city hospital or library to the YMCA to the American Cancer Walk, programs for the arts, programs aimed at the welfare of the citizens and many church groups. First National employees are proud of their communities and feel privileged to help make them a better place to live and raise their families.