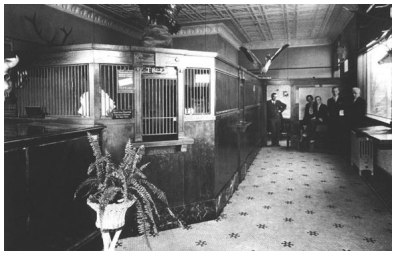

First National Bank in the early 1930s. Identified, left to right, are C.E. Wilson, Nelle Tucker, Arvel Jones, Elmer Hollman and H.J. Hollman. On Dec. 16, 1939, Farmers & Merchants National Bank merged with the First National Bank of Hooker. Courtesy photos

By ROBERT PIERCE

• Leader & Times

Dr. L.G. Blackmer moved to Hooker, Okla., in 1914, and upon his arrival, he immediately established the town's First National Bank.

The bank opened for business in May 1914, and in 1917, the bank was authorized to sell Liberty Bonds after America's entrance into the First World War.

The bank has survived two robberies and President Franklin D. Roosevelt's bank holiday, when he declared all banks to forestall customer panic and runs on banks.

By 1940, the economy improved, and the bank bought the building from C.F. Rose, with Blackmer buying the balance of the building for his medical office.

In December 1944, FNB was once more authorized to sell war bonds during the Second World War.

A grand opening took place in 1949 after the bank was remodeled, adding a new vault, bank fixtures and 306 safety deposit boxes.

Blackmer served as president of the bank until 1952, at which time he became chairman of the board.

On Dec. 16, 1939, Farmers & Merchants National Bank merged with Hooker FNB, and in January 1952, C.E. Wilson took over the reins as president.

Before the bank's 70th anniversary, construction of a new building was completed in time for a grand opening in April 1983.

Mary Beth Ebersole, who today serves as a vice president for Hooker's FNB, said although the bank hasn't seen many changes since then, it has been growing in the last few years.

Ebersole said Wilson himself was a cashier in the bank's early days before becoming president, and since 1992, Wilson's grandson, Charles Butler, has served as head of FNB.

This isn't the family's only connection to the Hooker bank, according to Ebersole.

"His mother, who is Charlotte Butler, and her sister, Imogene, C.E. Wilson's children, have also been directors of the bank," she said. "That family has been involved with the bank since 1914."

Ebersole said having a bank that is family-owned is something that is rarely seen these days, and the next generation of Wilson's family is continuing the tradition.

"We're kind of proud of that," she said. "Charlie's son, Shannon, is also working here in the bank now, so it continues on. He's a senior vice president and a director also."

As is the case with pretty much all industries in modern times, computers have become a big part of business at First National.

"We're definitely becoming more involved with technology as time goes on," Ebersole said. "Those changes are ongoing. Our bank focuses on customer service and hometown banking qualities, and that's where we want to keep our focus at."

Like most other banks, FNB likewise offers ATMs and online banking, but Ebersole said Hooker's money institution still has plenty of foot traffic coming through its doors.

"We pop popcorn on Fridays, and we encourage them just to come in and visit," she said. "We still have pretty good traffic inside the bank. We're small town, so it's easy for people to just drop in. We're still pretty happy with the amount of traffic that comes in."

Ebersole said Hooker's FNB has a great small-town feel.

"We're friends with our customers," she said. "They come in and say hello."

With construction on the original facility taking place in 1949 and a new building constructed in 1983, one would think it was time for FNB to once again be upgraded, but Ebersole said there are no such plans at this time.

"I think we're pretty pleased with the building we have," she said. "We still have plenty of room, and as far as I know, there are no plans to change the actual building itself."

Ebersole said everyone at the bank looks forward to being the Hooker community's headquarters for financial services for the next 100 years.

"Continue serving our customers," she said of the bank's future plans. "We like what we do, and we hope to do it for 100 years more."