

DEFIANCE PUBLIC LIBRARY SYSTEM



Tales of
Main Street

Downtown Defiance, Ohio

WALKING TOUR

TOUR BEGINS AT DEFIANCE PUBLIC LIBRARY, 320 FORT ST.,
AND TRAVELS SOUTH DOWN CLINTON STREET.

INFORMATION COMPILED BY SARAH MARSHALL

"NO SIGN OF THE TRADING POSTS"

There were trading posts along both banks of the Maumee River before any of the rest of Defiance as a city was laid out. These first trading posts were likely washed out by floods. There were also homes along this street that have since been lost to the floods as well. The **Fort Grounds** was always kept as a public park space. The first bridge was a wooden toll drawbridge that raised from the north side of the Maumee and was also washed out by floods in 1836-37. Levy funds helped to construct the first free bridge. In 1822, the city plat was laid out, with 150 lots on 20 blocks.

"EARLY BUILDINGS COMING DOWN AND GREEN SPACE ADDED"

Closest to the Maumee River, the one-story building constructed in 1868 was once home to **Defiance Monument Works**. The next one-story building, built in 1936, was for most of its history the **Ford Sales/Service and Operation**. The next two-story building was built in 1926 and has been a grocery store, furniture store, restaurant, and office space, having an apartment upstairs. Very recently, the city has announced that these three buildings are to be demolished. A green space with a park-like atmosphere will be added. 120 Clinton Street, now **Spanky's Bar & Restaurant**, was built in 1930 and has always housed a restaurant since its construction.

122/124 CLINTON ST.

"DEFIANCE, A GREAT PLACE TO LIVE"

This was a building built in the late 1800s, and first housed a dry goods store called **Harley & Whitaker's**. Commodore "Perry" Harley, a United States Government Official in the Philippine Islands, was partners with Rob T. Whitaker. Perry was the oldest of 13 children; parents Christian & Mary were born in Germany and immigrated to the U.S. in 1835.

In later years, it housed the **A & P Grocery Store** in the 1940s & 1950s, then **Leever Glass** from 1953-1980. It then had office spaces at street level and apartments on the upper floors. It is also memorable because it had the "Defiance, A Great Place to Live" slogan on the north side of the top of the building, painted there in the 1990s. It could be seen clearly when looking south from High Street across the river. In October 2004, there was a massive fire in the upper floors that led to the building being gutted and eventually torn down due to structural damage. It lasted almost 100 years near the Maumee River.

200 CLINTON STREET

"NO CHILD WOULD GO HUNGRY"

It all started with donuts made in a garage and delivered by a truck. The Bill and Jane Welker family really were a downtown Defiance family. Bill had worked at Arrow Tru-Line in Bryan and was to the point where he was offered retirement and his own parking space. Would he take it and stay there until retirement, or branch out on his own? He branched out on his own, with donuts.



He and a partner bought **Dixie Cream Donuts**, made in the garage and delivered by truck to stores and restaurants. It was so successful that Bill decided to open a donut shop. The shop was first on Second Street, then moved to where **Stambaugh Jewelers** is located today. His partner wasn't ready for the jump, so Bill bought him out. The donut shop became the family business; daughter Janet (Hitchcock) remembers standing on a step stool to fill donuts with jelly. Living in Ney, she learned to ride her bike by hanging on to the donut truck as it drove slowly down the road. As she got going, she let go and rode on her own. They did special donut packs for school fundraiser sales. They decided to expand into the restaurant business and sold the successful donut business to Mr. and Mrs. Delmar Partee and invited the public through an ad in the paper to continue to support the donut shop.

Tip Top Grill went into the building that was formerly a market at 200 Clinton St. Open 24 hours, and with a service window, a family could get the famous "Chicken Picnic," complete with freshly hand-breaded fried chicken, French fries, Tip Top salad and toasted buns with butter. This was

immensely popular with Defiance families. Bill was asked to cater a Johns Mansville company picnic, said "Yes, I can do that," although they hadn't catered anything before this request. With that, the catering business was off and running.

The Tip Top Catering truck is what Janet and Chuck Welker learned to drive in. Imagine that, a huge catering van with a stick shift as your first driving experience! But they learned. Jane Welker was big on every kid getting to have lunch, none will go hungry, and when her kids walked to the restaurant from school to eat lunch, if any child did not bring lunch to eat, they were invited to come along.



Tip Top Grill advertisement from the Crescent-News, dated October 19, 1953.

Chuck recalled that, several times, different children came to eat with them. When there was a fire in town, they set up tables with coffee urns for the firemen. Once, during the blizzard of 1978, they had heard that Ridgeville Corners was completely out of bread, no one could get to the store, and he drove the van loaded with bread to them.

When asked about how the **Black Lantern**, formerly the basement storage area, came to be, they said it was a request from Defiance College to have a place, a beer garden of sorts, for the college students

to have a place to hang out. The basement was renovated, Bill and Jane shopped at antique stores for tables and décor, and The Black Lantern was created.

But, as a lot of things go with college students, they were a little too zealous and a little destructive for the space that was created. It was no longer a college hang out, but a restaurant geared towards an adult crowd. A dance floor was added to the Black Lantern and also a party room was added upstairs at Tip Top, complete with a trap door in the ceiling for balloons to drop out of at the right time. All the while, the family was the heartbeat of the business. They hired people to work for them, but the family was at the center. They learned to depend on each other, know hard work and responsibility, and serve the community they loved.



Black Lantern advertisement from the Crescent-News, dated Nov. 2, 1967.

In 1963, the **Holiday Inn Motel** was built on the north side of Defiance. This was the second hotel in town after the Henry Hotel had been built. It had rooms, a cocktail bar, a restaurant, and meeting rooms. Bill Welker managed the dining facilities, while Marion Rogliatti was the innkeeper. Another expansion for the family business, Janet remembers having to help out with the breakfast on Sunday morning before she could head to college her freshman year at the University of Cincinnati “smelling like sausage, grease and eggs.” She went for accounting, and was to take over the business side of things for her mother.

There were struggles in the family, and when Bill and Jane divorced, the decision was made for the Tip Top Restaurant to close and **Charlie’s Deli** would be the business in the new space. Janet and Chuck remember the day the sign with the chicken in a top hat was taken down on November 23, 1987. They both were emotional and tears were shed for the family restaurant. **Charlie’s Down Under** would be the evolution of the basement space.

The Tip Top catering business continued. Chuck and Janet both agreed this was the biggest addition to their family business. They catered huge company picnics, the Girl Scouts at Camp Libbey for summers, the Junior League luncheons, and dinners in Toledo, once catering a meal at the Masonic Temple in Toledo for a speaking engagement of former President Gerald Ford. Chuck remembers a coffee maker he designed and built that had the boiler outside of the kitchen area. There were two Secret Service men standing outside leaning on it when he fired it up. They both were jolted with surprise! He expanded on the catering business on his own and moved away from Defiance. His largest catering event was for 22,500 in Chicago. Eventually, he came back and opened Breadstyx in the former Tip Top Restaurant space. He shared that it was almost named “Buns and Roses.”

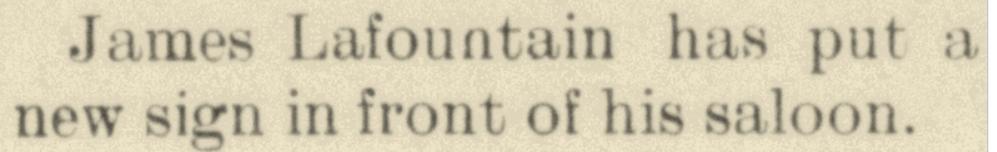
The Welkers had several other restaurants in the area. Bill wanted to own the whole block of buildings on the west side of the 200 block of Clinton St. He did own three adjoining buildings and rented them out. At different times, different family members lived in the apartment upstairs. They built the roof apartment themselves. At one point, a grandmother lived there to take care of “baby Rick” while the parents and other members of the family worked downstairs.

Janet got involved with the yarn shop later in her life and with that got involved with other women who owned Defiance businesses. They wanted to celebrate and honor the downtown and the Lilac Festival was created from that group. Now we have the **DDVB** and other organizations that regularly hold events downtown. Chuck was a member of several community groups that supported Defiance. I only got the chance to sit down with the two of them, but know that the entire Welker family was dedicated to their community.

220 CLINTON STREET

"LAFOUNTAIN SALOON: ONE OF TWO IN DEFIANCE"

The LaFountain brothers all had businesses in Defiance. Two were saloon owners, and one a barber. Of the two



James Lafountain has put a new sign in front of his saloon.

From the Defiance Express, Sept. 25, 1901

saloon owners, James was the most level-headed. He had a saloon on the east side of Defiance, where **Nila's Café** used to be located. August LaFountain owned the one across from the courthouse. He made several improvements according to articles in the newspaper, putting in a pool table, creating a new sign for the front of the store, and even equipping it with new stools.

He was prone to episodes of manic behavior, and one such instance made the newspaper; the headline was "A Startling Affair." His neighbor was Chip Palmer, self-identified as a newspaper agent. "Gus" was seen to jump the fence into his own yard, then went inside where an argument ensued with his wife. Chip went to the house and "pluckily" broke up the argument, according to the paper. Somehow in the argument, Gus picked up his 3-year-old daughter and attempted to throw her over the fence. Again, Chip came to the rescue and "luckily" caught the girl in his arms, according the paper. Gus grabbed two white shirts, and said that within the hour he would be in the river. He also went to the saloon and grabbed all of the money. He was later picked up by the police, "locked up," and Dr. Holcomb was sent for. Not long after, articles in the paper said he threatened to move his saloon first to Paulding, then to Oakwood. Eventually, his brother James bought him out and ran two saloons.

312 CLINTON STREET

"COLLEGE OF MUSIC ENTERTAINMENT FRIDAY WAS PAR EXCELLENCE!"

Defiance had its very own College of Music in this building in 1883. Classes were taught and recitals were given. Also, public performances drew huge crowds and they needed more room, so the college leased the entire third floor of the building on the next block owned by Holgate-Harley-Tiedeman. The street level was the original location of the **Cobb & Harley Store**, then when Alonzo Harley, son of Christian Harley and brother to Commodore Perry Harley, bought out Cobb, it became **Harley's Lion Store**, a clothing store.

Charles E. Bronson started a real state office on the second floor in 1871. Charles is the father of Edward Bronson, the photographer and later Mayor of Defiance in 1916. Bronson Park is named after Edward as well. Newly renovated, it is a place that children have enjoyed for many years.

Leo the Lion came to Defiance and enjoyed a place of honor in the store. Leo is life-sized, made of iron, and was cast in Pittsburgh. Children loved to sit on the back of the lion every time they visited the store. Alonzo built the next block to the south and moved his Lion Store there. When the store was discontinued, the lion was saved by William G. Jarvis, who operated a glove and mitten factory on Perry Street. He lived on the Maumee River, and the lion stood there looking over the river on St. Rt. 111. Wonder if that is the same lion that opens the annual Halloween Parade in Defiance?



*From the Defiance
Democrat, Jan. 15, 1891*

402-404 CLINTON ST.

"IT IS NOW OPEN, AND PRESENTS A VERY METROPOLITAN APPEARANCE"

In August 1899, there was a great band concert during the grand event of a new dry goods store opening in Defiance called **Craven and Ruess**. The two owners, Craven and Ruess, selected the very best for the shoppers in Defiance. There were some other days of excitement at the store. One evening, a man named Chas Doud was caught stealing a cape out of the store window. He pled guilty and was fined and sentenced to 35 days at the stone yard. Wonder if he got to keep the cape?

Another exciting event was when a roll of linoleum was moved and several rats ran out and scampered around the store. All of the ladies working jumped onto the counter. A customer stepped up and tried to shoo them out the door, but without much success. The police were eventually called to vacate the rats. One other instance led to the fire department being called. Smoke was seen rolling out of the basement window one evening.

Art Craven was called and upon checking the basement, did not see anything on fire. They then noticed that someone was burning a pile of wood along the bank of the canal built in 1843, which used to run directly behind the store. The smoke was brought in by the draft in the cellar and then directed out front at street level. All was saved in the store. Later, this became Uhlman's department store, Charles and Company department store, then A-1 Furniture. It is now the home of **Fort Defiance Antiques**.



From the Crescent-News, April 20, 1904

426 CLINTON STREET

"DO UNTO OTHERS AS YOU WOULD HAVE THEM DO UNTO YOU"

James Cash Penney opened a store in Defiance as one of a chain in 1922, just 20 years after the company began. The store opened Sept. 2, 1922 and expanded twice, in 1954 and 1957. It was two floors, a basement, a balcony, and a second-floor annex. There was even a fabric department on the balcony. It was said that the downtown merchants liked to play tricks on each other. Once, the manager of Toledo Edison put a sign in the **JCPenney** window that said, "Everything in the store---50% off." Of course, the manager at the time, Edward Wanley, got him back by putting up a Christmas tree in the Edison building's front window--- in July!

During the war years, people would tell servicemen that they could go to Mr. Wanley and he would give them shoes, socks, or clothing, and he did. Also, cash if they needed it. He also gave the local hospital sheets from the store during WW2 when sheets were being rationed. POWs from Germany and Italy, living in a Defiance Camp, sometimes did yard work for him, and he and other merchants got together to offer the POWs a special Christmas dinner.

The founder, Mr. Penney, would visit the store every five years or so. He would stay in a Defiance hotel and have dinner with the Wanleys. The last time he visited was in the early 1940s. His motto was always shared with the family and staff of the store, "Do unto others as you would have them do unto you." When the mall was built in Defiance, JCPenney moved to that location in 1986. It has since closed its doors this past year, but was a beloved Defiance department store from downtown to the Northside location.

Penneys
ALWAYS FIRST QUALITY
422-424 Clinton St.
Defiance, Ohio

FOUNDER'S DAYS
We said to Mr. Penney, "Founders Days are your days. Tell us how to celebrate." Mr. Penney said, "Show me what we can do today when we put all our resources behind a demonstration of the Penney value that made us famous."

Our dinnerware buyer's answer:
19.99
ALL 69 PIECES
53 pc. quality Melamine®
service for 8
plus 16 matching plastic tumblers!
Choose from 3 beautifully decorated patterns: "Wheat & Leaves," "Country Shaker," or "Daphne." Dishwasher safe and detergent proof. All pieces are break resistant, cups resist permanent staining.

SET INCLUDES 8 each: plates, saucers, cups, soup/cereal bowls, salad plates, fruit/dessert plates, 1 each: vegetable bowl, sugar w/cover, creamer, platter, plus 16 plastic tumblers.

63 pc. stainless steel tableware
service for 8
24.99
INCLUDES THESE EXTRAS:
1 EACH: pierced tablespoon, sugar shell, butter knife, gravy ladle, cold meat fork, plus 8 tall drink spoons.
8 EACH: knives with serrated blades, forks, salad forks, soup spoons, 2 tablespoons, 16 teaspoons.

Berkeley Square
Quality heavyweight stainless steel, polished to a lovely mirror bright finish. Knives have hollow handles and forged serrated blades. All pieces are carefully balanced and proportioned for comfortable handling. 3 richly patterned designs to choose from: "Rose Duet," "Berkeley Square" or "Whispering Sand." Exclusively Penney's!

Like It! Charge It! Shop Without Cash! DAILY 9:00 A.M. TO 5:30 P.M.
FRIDAY 9:00 A.M. TO 9:00 P.M.

Crescent-News, Nov. 3, 1967

524 CLINTON STREET

"THE ATMOSPHERE IS WHAT REGULARS SAY KEEPS THEM COMING BACK"

Kissner's Restaurant is a Defiance institution, in operation for 93 years now. The cherry and mahogany bar with the nailed-down barstools is the first thing you notice when you walk in the restaurant. Then, as you look for a place to sit, you realize that it is a popular place to eat. It is amazing, the way it makes you feel as though you've stepped back in time. The tin walls with hooks for coats and the still-used dumbwaiter to transport food to the second floor are a nod to a classic period in Defiance's history. Where else can you go in the surrounding area for a fried pork brain sandwich? This became a popular sandwich when the stockyards of the 1880s really took off. The current owner, Karl Kissner, started working at the family restaurant when he was only 11 years old. The bar caught fire in 1981 and Karl made sure that the bar was rebuilt as accurately as possible. He also had to send away to England once for the exact mold that was used in making the restaurant's tin walls.

602 CLINTON STREET

Constructed between 1890 and 1892, this three-story building was originally the **Citizen's Opera House**. It had 378 seats on the main-floor level, 278 in the balcony, 318 in the gallery (upper area of the balcony) and six boxes, three on either side that would accommodate six patrons each. There was also a ballroom originally on the second floor. The grand opening was October 21, 1892. People who donated money towards the building of the opera house were given special tickets with reserved seating for the first performance.



*From the Defiance Republican Express,
July 28, 1892*

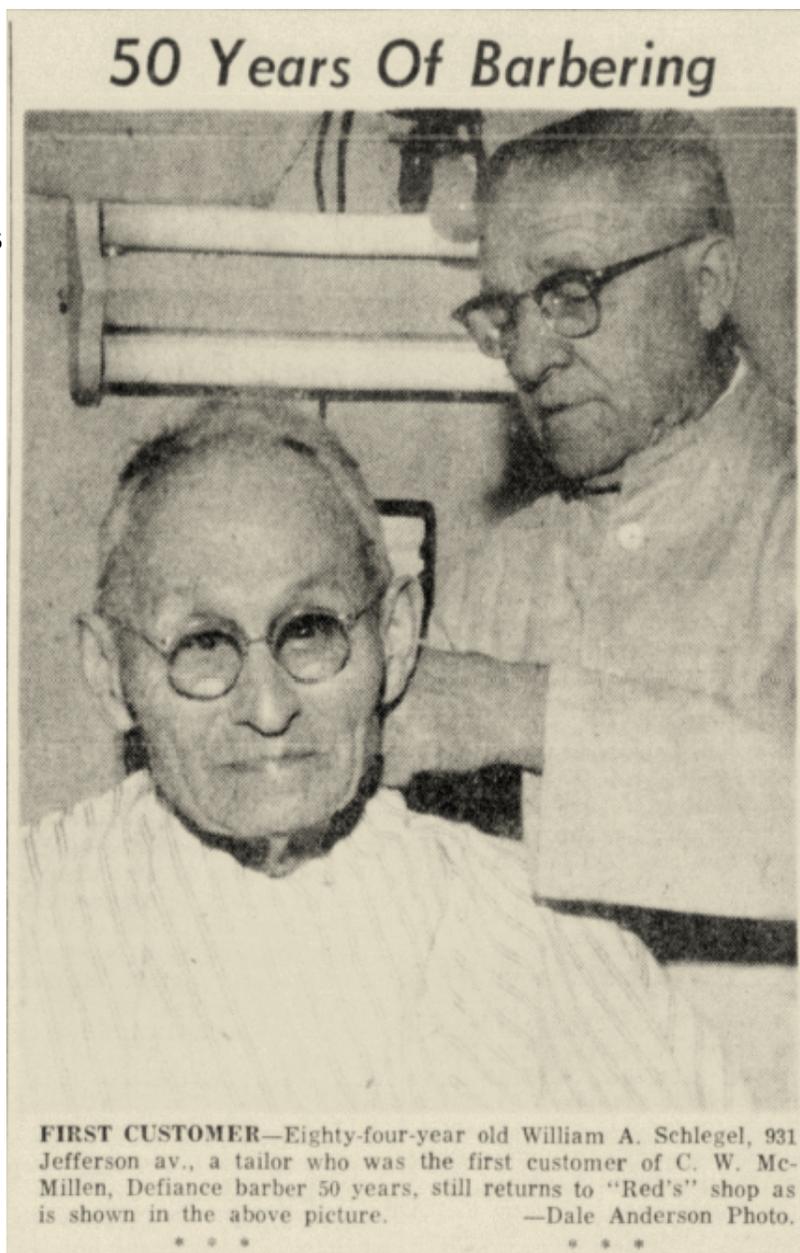
Miss **Clara Morris** was the first actress to perform at the opera house. She once was the highest paid stage actress on Broadway during the 1870s–early 1890s. Her fee was a then–astounding \$500 per night, but her acting career was blindsided by back trouble. She left the legitimate stage for Vaudeville, earning \$800 per week. She ultimately quit acting altogether and by 1905 became a successful writer.

Over the years there were plays, musical performances, magic performance, religious talks, comedies, and political speeches given at the Opera House. Eventually, it wasn't profitable anymore, and the bank foreclosed on it in 1898. A lot of the furnishings inside were sold. It officially closed as an Opera House around April 6, 1898, but not for long! Edward S. Bronson would save the day by purchasing the Opera House in July of that year. He would act as manager of the building. The public was very happy with this arrangement because of the magnificence of the building and also, it was the only place in Defiance to hold large public gatherings/performances. It reopened on November 30, 1898. It enjoyed another 22 years as an opera house, was renovated a few times, and hosted Vaudeville acts of the day. During prohibition, they held public debates about the issue.

The Opera House changed hands in 1920 and was bought by two gentlemen out of Indiana named Thomas and Henry. It was then renovated, the gallery or upper balcony removed and the ceiling lowered. The owners wanted “high class” Vaudeville and motion pictures shown every evening and Saturday afternoon. They built a canopy over the entrance, naming the movie house the **Valentine Theatre**. The building had another reinvention when the front area and the three stories were given steel frames. These were to benefit a one and only hotel in Defiance, managed by Harry C. Henry, with an entrance on the southeast side of the building. The hotel was given extravagant décor and housed 50 rooms. Hotel Henry was a sight to see, with an electric sign with over 300 lights. No expense was spared. There was even a new feature added: an electrically refrigerated and circulating ice water system! There was also an elevator with an attendant to help guests get to their floors.

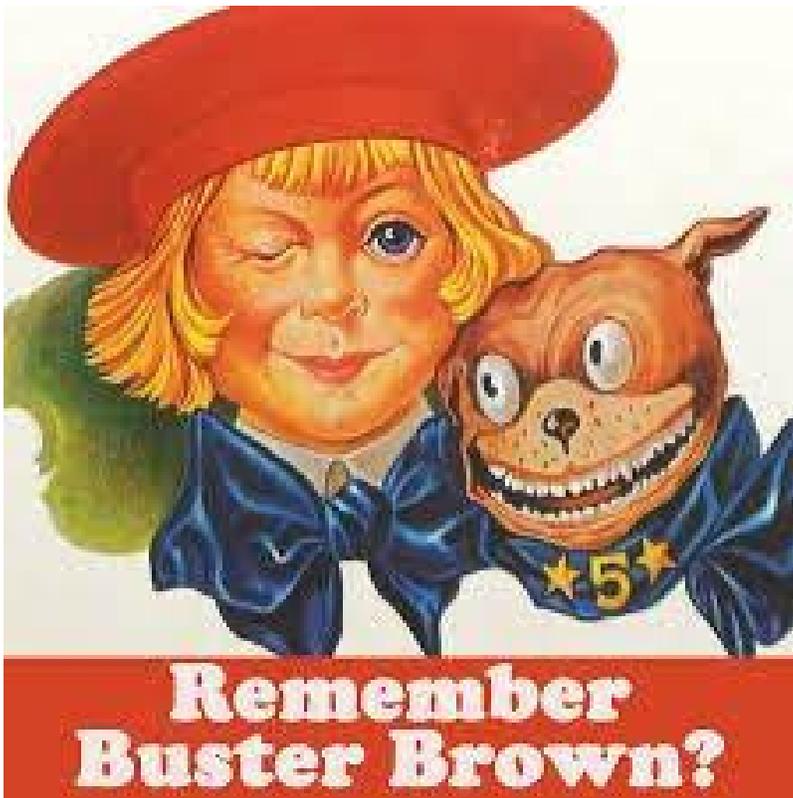
"HAIRCUTS WERE 25 CENTS, SHAVES WERE 15 CENTS, AND BUSTER BROWNS WERE ALL THE RAGE"

There was a card/gift shop at street level, as well as a barbershop in the basement area with a street-level entrance. C.W. (Red) McMillen worked the barber chair for 50 years, the last years being in this location. He remembered the day he started: haircuts were 25 cents, shaves 15 cents, and "**Buster Brown**" haircuts were all the rage. He also said that at times the customers could "get rough," but he was always able to keep things under control. It is no wonder that boxing was listed as one of his hobbies in a newspaper article about his life. Hotel Henry lasted for 47 years in Defiance, the last few being very unprofitable. It had eventually become very rundown, and the building was owned by various theatre companies after Mr. Henry sold it. November 3, 1975 was its last day as a hotel. What to do now with this landmark building? The **Valentine Theatre** continued to show movies until the last one was shown in 1997. The building has housed two different church groups since then.



Barber C.W. ("Red") McMillen (right) is pictured at work in the July 27, 1955 edition of the Crescent News. Longtime customer William A. Schlegel, a tailor, is in the chair.

BEHOLD: THE BUSTER BROWN HAIRCUT!



PREMIER BANK PARKING LOT
600 BLOCK, CLINTON STREET

"THE OWNER INTRODUCED AN INNOVATION: THE FIRST TALKING PICTURE"

The **Royal Theater** used to stand where the parking lot for Premier Bank is today. It was a one-story building, and one of the first motion picture theaters in Defiance. Admission was five cents, and it was run by Mr. English from Bowling Green. Many Vaudeville acts performed there as well. On several occasions, Anna Davison sang before a performance. Anna was the mother of "Wild" Bill Davison, the jazz musician who was born in Defiance and lived part of his life in the Defiance Public Library. She pursued a music career of her own and later, when he was world famous, she would say that they were twins born 30 years apart.

The first talking picture innovation was simply a man behind the screen narrating silent films. The place was ventilated by electric fans, and local jokesters would let loose some sneeze powder which would cause the reader to sneeze...and swear. All part of the show!



Anna Davison, mother of jazz musician "Wild" Bill Davison and a musician in her own right.

501-503 CLINTON STREET

"IT MAY BE A MONSTER,
BUT IT'S A NICHE,
NEVERTHELESS"

German immigrants Reinhard Brown (originally Braun) and his wife Emilie learned the bakery trade when they lived in Baltimore. They opened a bakery there in 1868 and moved to Defiance in 1873. They opened a bakery here as well and continued with the name **Baltimore Bakery**. They were one of the first bakeries to make sliced and wrapped loaves of bread and also innovated the waxed paper wrappers. First the bread was in cellophane and then in clear plastic bags. They delivered their bread with a horse and buggy-style wagon.

The name 'Baltimore Bakery' was kept until 1904. They also lived at the location of the bakery on Clinton St. Later, they built the bakery on Downs St. in 1938. They continued to bake bread and buns but wanted to create something that would be their niche. They came up with a garlic bread that boosted their sales \$7.8 million in 1992. The major market for the bread was the Midwest, but they did ship as far as Florida and the West Coast. The bakery employees designed a complex system that could produce 55 loaves a minute.

Bunny Bread was a brand that they also produced. Bunny Bread began in 1925 in Anna, Illinois. The Lewis brothers created the recipe for the soft sliced bread that could stay fresher longer, and eventually produced buns as well. Jack Lewis Sr. sold the rights to Bunny Bread to American Bakers Cooperative to expand distribution of Bunny products. Around 1957, Brown's Bakery started baking it in Defiance.

Later, they produced Hostess products and closed their doors in November of 2012 when Hostess ceased production nationwide. The bakery itself had a long run of 139 years.

505 W. 2ND STREET

"BUT, THOSE PIES..."

A favorite diner...every downtown needs one, and **Bud's** fits the bill for Defiance. It started as a simple hamburger shop in 1939. It was built by Bud Deatruck, and was the 2nd Bud's Hamburger Shop for him, the original being in Hillsdale, Michigan. It stayed open until 1941, but quickly reopened in 1942, owned by Glen Hiatt, who still called it Bud's Hamburger Shop. After 10 years, he sold it to Elden Mayer. Elden and his wife Marilyn owned it for 13 years before selling it to his brother Lowell, a veteran of WW2. They made updates and even moved the grill from the front window area to the back. The classic counter with stools invites many to sit down and drink a good cup of coffee. Just a few booths complete the seating area. During the 45 years that Lowell and his wife Pat ran the shop, they maintained the daily specials and the ever-popular pie. Always in a glass case, the pie begs to be ordered for dessert! Still in the family, they sold the business to their son Matt, who owns and runs it to this day.



Bud's Restaurant, 505 W. 2nd Street, Defiance

311 CLINTON STREET

"YOU ARE CORDIALLY INVITED TO STOP AT THE STUDIO AND DISCUSS YOUR PICTURE NEEDS"

In 1941, The **Charles Kniffin Studio** was in the street-level shop and featured framed portraits in its windows. Originating from Napoleon, Charles had studied photography in New York schools of photography. He studied portraiture, commercial art, landscapes, and natural color. He completed the courses at both the New York Institute of Photography and the School of Modern Photography. His wife Patricia also studied at the School of Modern Photography. He set up shop and quickly became immersed in the community. He was a mentor in the Defiance Camera Club and helped judge several photography competitions. He took photographs of downtown Defiance in everyday life as well as several industrial plants in town.



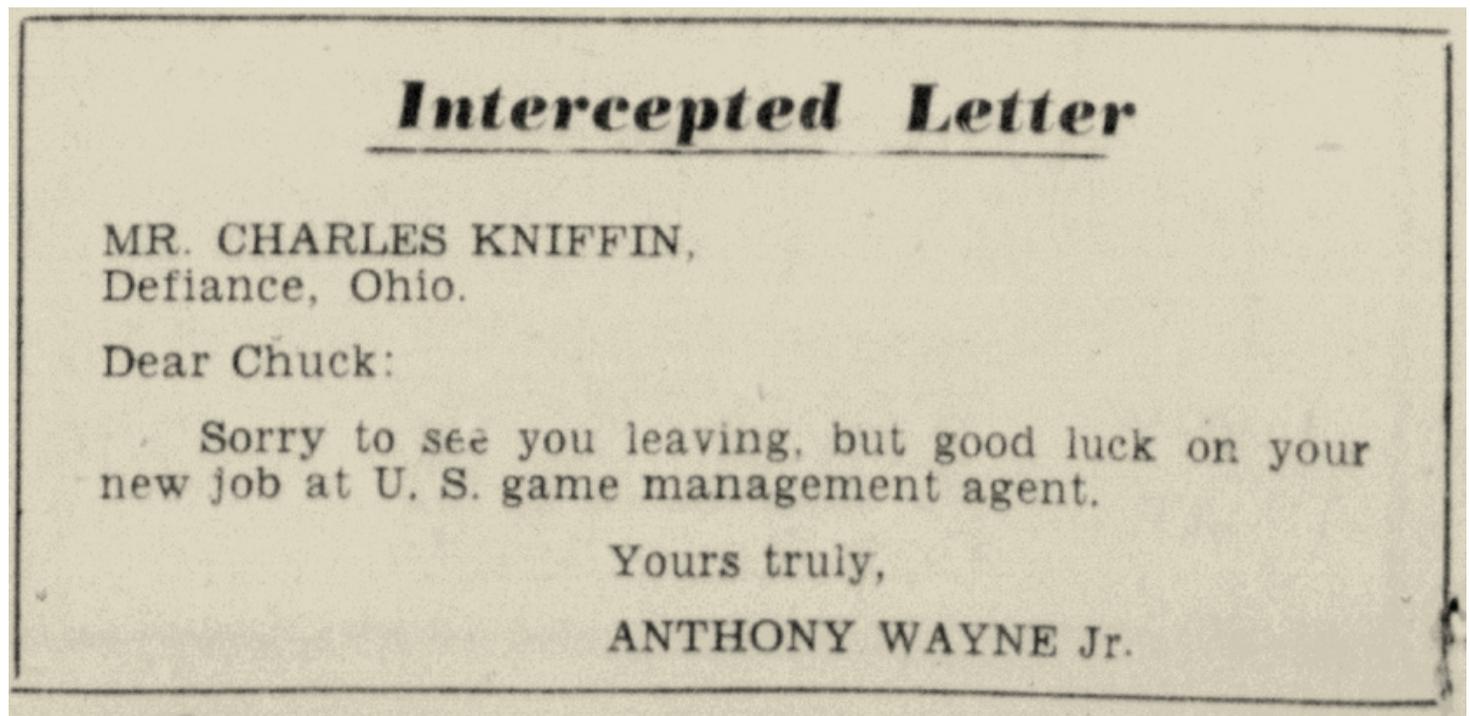
Charles Kniffin, 1950

Portraiture was a specialty. Some say he was like the Rod Brown--recently retired photographer in Defiance--of his time.

Kniffin was a volunteer fireman and helped with many fires, including one in Napoleon where it was written in the newspaper that he was one of the first men on the scene and helped to fight the fire on the rooftop without hesitation. He was an instructor on first aid, with classes for the community.

Completing a functional swimming and water safety training at the Red Cross Aquatic School at the Culver Military Academy, he became a water safety instructor at the Red Cross in Defiance. He also became involved in the Defiance County Fish and Game Association. In 1951, he graduated from the Ohio Wildlife Division's training and took a part-time position as a game warden in Fulton County, soon after accepting a full-time position and closing his photography studio. He had been photographing Defiance for 10 years, except for the 22 months he served in the Navy.

The library was gifted the "**Kniffin Collection**" of photographs by the family. They are in albums currently at the library for the public to view. The project is underway to scan and digitize the collection. The Defiance of the 1940s era is captured through the lens of Charles Kniffin.



From the Oct. 13, 1958 edition of the Crescent News.