

# THE GUILFORD BUILDING NEWS

## POPULAR TAILOR REVEALS OUR HISTORY

When Jesse Locke came to the Guilford Building in 1961, he was looking for work as a tailor at a men's clothing store called the Slack Shop. The store was located in suite 100 where the leasing office is situated today. At the rear of the store through a small door, where Hallimar Properties currently keeps supplies, was the alterations department. It was there that Jesse found part-time employment.

Jesse liked his new job because it allowed him to continue his vocational training in tailoring at A&T University. After four years Jesse was hired full-time at the Slack Shop and continued working in the Guilford Building until 1972.

In 1972 the Slack Shop moved to a temporary location that now would be in our parking lot. Behind the Guilford Building facing Washington Street was a structure that housed several businesses. The shop stayed back there for nine months and then relocated to 308 South Elm Street across from the Guilford Building.

The new Elm Street location was very appealing to Jesse. From there he could keep an eye on a pretty woman named Dorothy Johnson who worked in the Guilford Soda Shop in the front lobby of the Guilford Building. (Our guard station is now positioned where the old soda shop stood.)

That soda shop was quite a place! The owner, Austin "Jimmy" James, prepared wonderful homemade specialties for his customers; fat sandwiches, deluxe hot dogs, and real ice cream milk shakes were favorite menu items. Dorothy worked the counter and served up lots of fun to go with the delicious food. People from Schiffman's Jewelers, the IRS, the City Manager's Office, Hanes-Lineberry, and Thousand 'o Prints still talk about the food and comradery that they enjoyed at the soda shop. But Dorothy's favorite customer was Jesse Locke, and after a long courtship, Dorothy and Jesse married.

Those were bright times in Jesse's personal history and in the annals of Downtown. But as years passed, Downtown fell into dark days, and Jesse's business suffered. The Slack Shop departed, and Jesse went on his own, selling and altering clothing.

By 1993 when Hallimar Properties took over the Guilford Building, Jesse was struggling in a small alterations shop across the street on south Elm. His customers were loyal, but the conditions on the street were awful. A bar called Foxx's Den had located next door to Jesse generating constant noise, disruption, and crime. Thieves broke into Jesse's shop and almost put him out of business.



**Jesse Locke**

Jesse came back to the Guilford Building in 1994, and the community banded together to clean up Downtown. The rest of the story is one of renewal and a promising future. Today Jesse and his customers feel safe in his shop on Washington Street. Jesse is really good at altering clothing and many people know that, so he stays busy to very busy. He does all kinds of alterations and works on suede and other difficult to handle materials. Also, he can special order ready-made suits in regular, portly, and extra-tall sizes up to 72.

## MORE FOR THE HISTORY BUFFS

Preservationists say that Greensboro has one of the finest collections of historically-important commercial buildings in the state, and the Guilford Building is a gem amongst the collection. Designed in the Classic Renaissance Revival style by renowned architect, Charles Hartmann, the building was considered a state-of-the-art business center when it opened in 1927.

Originally the Guilford Building was to be a hotel. The marble lobby and reception counter (later the Guilford Soda Shop where Jesse Locke met his wife and now our guard station) were built with that in mind. But as the impressive King Cotton Hotel was being built nearby on the site where the Greensboro News and Record now stands, plans for the Guilford Building changed. The King Cotton would have presented considerable competition, and it was determined that this building could operate more successfully as a bank and business center.

In plan 2, security, strength, and fire resistance became utmost construction considerations. Sturdy steel cubes were set in a rectangular shape to give this building remarkable structural strength. Much effort was directed to fireproofing, and indeed, no major fire has taken hold in the building since its construction. The building was finished with granite, terra cotta, and red face brick, which added to its fire resistance and durability.

Upper stories of the building had duraflex floors in all offices, composition rubber floors in corridors, tile wainscots and floors in restrooms, and mahogany doors throughout. Marble hallways, most of which remain today, were an attractive feature. These amenities were meant to appeal to the business or professional man of the time.

As soon as construction was finished in late summer 1927, the Greensboro Bank and Trust moved in on the main level and conducted business there for many years. In 1945 the building became known as the Guilford Building, and over time was home to two other banks: Guilford Bank and Trust and Northwestern Bank.

Just as the bank space changed hands, so did the building. First owned by Greensboro Bank and Trust, the building was obtained by Jefferson-Pilot Corporation and 1st Home Federal Savings and Loan as part of a block purchase program in the early 1980's. In June 1989 Jefferson-Pilot and 1st Home Federal Savings donated the building to Guilford County in the largest gift ever made to the county. In 1993 the county sold the building to the family-owned company called Hallimar Properties Inc.

Today most visitors and tenants in the Guilford Building are technology oriented, but many appreciate the marble and brass finishes and the old architecture. History seems to soften the hard edges of modern life.

BellSouth has installed new Digital Subscriber Line (DSL) equipment in the Guilford Building.

The new equipment allows for "FastAccess DSL" on 47 lines. Watch for more information in the October newsletter.