

= Wirgman Building =

The Wirgman Building was an early 19th century Federal @-@ style commercial and residential building located on East Main Street (U.S. Route 50) in Romney , West Virginia . Following its completion around 1825 to serve as the Romney branch office for the Bank of the Valley of Virginia , the Wirgman Building at various times served as a location for every subsequent bank established in Romney , to include the Bank of Romney and the First National Bank of Romney . During the American Civil War , the building was used as a military prison . For a time , the Wirgman Building 's second floor housed the offices and printing plant of the Hampshire Review newspaper . By 1937 , the ground floor of the Wirgman Building housed office and mercantile space , and the second floor was divided into apartments . After the Wirgman Building sustained damage in a fire in 1964 , it was demolished in 1965 to make way for the construction of the new Bank of Romney headquarters building . Prior to its demolition , the Wirgman Building was photographed and documented by the National Park Service 's Historic American Buildings Survey in 1937 .

= = History = =

In 1790 , the trustees of the Town of Romney commissioned John Mitchel to draft a cadastral survey map of Romney . Prior to this survey , Thomas Fairfax , 6th Lord Fairfax of Cameron had commissioned a similar cadastral survey of Romney sometime before the town 's incorporation on December 23 , 1762 . On June 30 , 1790 , Mitchel submitted to the trustees a " Plan of the Town of Romney , " which divided the town into 100 land lots of equal size , with four lots adjacent to the courthouse comprising the " publick " square . The Wirgman Building was later built upon the " publick " land lot numbered " Lot 76 " . Romney 's first cemetery was present on the lot when it was a part of the courthouse square . The cemetery 's interments were located on the actual site , and to the rear , of the future Wirgman Building .

= = = Bank of the Valley of Virginia = = =

The Wirgman Building was erected around 1825 by William Vance to house the office of the newly established Romney branch of the Bank of the Valley of Virginia , which was headquartered in Winchester , Virginia . In an act of the Virginia General Assembly on February 5 , 1817 , the Bank of the Valley of Virginia was authorized to open branches in Berkeley , Hampshire , Hardy , and Jefferson counties if citizens in each of the aforementioned areas could raise 100 @,@ 000 USD in stock to establish a branch . This provision was met when the necessary stock was raised , and the Bank of the Valley of Virginia branch in Romney was opened around 1825 in the Wirgman Building . In 1845 , historian Henry Howe traveled through Romney and described the town as " one of considerable business , and has a branch of the Bank of the Valley , several stores , and about 350 inhabitants . " The bank branch continued to operate from the Wirgman Building until the Bank of the Valley of Virginia in Winchester suspended its operations and those of its branches following the outbreak of the American Civil War in 1861 .

= = = American Civil War = = =

Throughout the American Civil War , the Wirgman Building was frequently used as a military prison by both Confederate States Army and Union Army forces during their occupations of Romney . In the Spring of 1862 , a spy for the command of Stonewall Jackson , Lieutenant John Blue , was captured by Union Army soldiers while he was conducting a reconnaissance mission to determine the size and strength of the Union Army forces occupying Romney . Pending his transfer to a military prison in Wheeling where he was to be tried as a suspected spy , Blue was imprisoned in a room on the second floor of the Wirgman Building . During the early morning on Easter Day , Blue disabled the only guard on duty , disguised himself in a Union Army coat and headgear and proceeded to barricade the remainder of the prison garrison within the Wirgman Building . Blue

walked to the periphery of the town of Romney unnoticed by the occupying Union Army forces , and successfully made it to safety .

= = = Hampshire Review = = =

The Hampshire Review newspaper occupied the building 's second floor with its offices and printing plant from 1884 to 1895 . John J. Cornwell , who later became West Virginia 's governor , and his brother William B. Cornwell purchased the newspaper in 1890 . The newspaper continued to operate from the second floor of the Wirgman Building until 1895 , when the Cornwell brothers relocated the Hampshire Review office and printing plant to the first floor of their new brick building on West Main Street . In the newspaper 's printing plant on the second floor of the Wirgman Building , the Hampshire Review was printed by a hand @-@ operated Benjamin Franklin printing press .

= = = Bank of Romney = = =

Banking operations in Hampshire County ceased throughout the duration of the American Civil War , and a new banking institution was not established in Romney until 1888 . By September of that year , a coordinated effort by Romney 's leading citizens amassed subscriptions for the entirety of the initial offering of 300 shares of stock for the establishment of the Bank of Romney . The shareholders of the Bank of Romney petitioned the Secretary of State of West Virginia for a charter with capital stock totaling 30 @, @ 000 USD . Following the state 's approval of its charter , the Bank of Romney commenced its operations in the Wirgman Building on December 20 , 1888 . The bank occupied two rented rooms on the Wirgman Building 's first floor , which it shared with a pharmacy . The bank initially used a safe as its bank vault and security for the bank was provided by a nightwatchman who slept in one of the bank office 's two rooms . The Wirgman Building 's security was further enhanced with the installation of wire mesh glass and bars in the windows . During the bank 's residency at the Wirgman Building , Henry Bell Gilkeson served as the bank 's president . The Bank of Romney began to outgrow its spaces on the first floor of the Wirgman Building almost immediately after its incorporation , and in 1906 it moved across Main Street to a new bank building .

= = = First National Bank of Romney = = =

The Wirgman Building again housed a banking institution four years later when the First National Bank of Romney opened on June 11 , 1910 , utilizing the former first floor office space of the Bank of Romney . The First National Bank of Romney vacated the Wirgman Building in 1911 , when it moved to its new three @-@ story building , known as " The National Building , " at the corner of Main and High Streets across from Literary Hall . At various times from its construction around 1825 until 1911 , the Wirgman Building served as the location for every subsequent bank established in Romney since the Bank of the Valley of Virginia .

= = = Later years = = =

In its final years , the Wirgman Building housed office and mercantile spaces on its first floor , and its second floor was divided into apartments . In 1937 , the National Park Service Historic American Buildings Survey (HABS) photographed and documented the architectural details of the Wirgman Building . At the time of its documentation by HABS , the building was under the ownership of Mrs. W. F. Wirgman , whose family 's surname likely gave the structure its local toponym . HABS referred to the Wirgman Building as the " Valley Bank Building " in its supplemental documentation , which was completed by Archie A. Biggs . In September 1937 , the West Virginia State Road Commission released a road map highlighting the history of the Potomac Highlands through photographs , which included a feature on the Wirgman Building and Lieutenant John Blue 's escape during its tenure as a military prison during the American Civil War .

After the Wirgman Building sustained damage from a fire in 1964 , it was purchased by the Bank of Romney and demolished along with the neighboring Brady House in 1965 to make way for the construction of the bank 's new headquarters building . Having outgrown its 1906 location , the Bank of Romney returned across Main Street to the former site of the Wirgman building following completion of the new , larger headquarters facility there in 1966 .

Two historical markers in front of the Bank of Romney are the only reminders of the Wirgman Building at its original site : the first was erected by the Stonewall Jackson Chapter of the United Daughters of the Confederacy commemorating the escape of Lieutenant John Blue from the Wirgman Building during its use as a Union Army military prison , and the second marker reads " Original Site of the Wirgman Building . Built 1825 . Razed 1965 . "

In his Buildings of West Virginia (2004) , architectural historian S. Allen Chambers asserts that of the " most significant early buildings " demolished in Romney , the Wirgman Building is one of the town 's " major losses . "

= = Architecture = =

Existing information on the architectural details of the Wirgman Building are known through the HABS supplementary documentation written by Archie A. Biggs in 1937 .

= = Exterior = =

The Wirgman Building was exemplary of the Federal style of architecture . It was a thick @-@ walled edifice rising two stories and constructed of brick . The building 's brickwork was built in the Flemish bond style on the building 's façade and in the American bond style on the building 's sides and on its rear face . The building 's façade along East Main Street measured 51 feet (16 m) , and its sides measured 41 feet (12 m) , with a rear extension measuring 34 feet (10 m) in length . The building featured a brick cornice along its roofline and parapet end walls on its sides . According to HABS documentation , the building 's bricks measured 2 ¼ x 4 ¼ x 8 ½ in size .

= = Interior = =

A circular wall , with a six @-@ panel wooden door rounded to mimic the wall 's curvature , was located between the building 's entrance hall and its stair hall . The stairway 's balustrade in the stair hall featured turned baluster shafts and a newel crafted from maple . The stairs themselves featured scrolled step ends . HABS supplementary documentation described " Coffee grinder " style locks and paneled door jambs as features of the building 's six @-@ panel wooden doors . Its doorways were reported to have maintained their original decorative molding trim , and the fireplace mantelpieces as being " delicately done . "