

## *The History of the Nashville House*

The Nashville House has a very long and interesting history! This is from "Brown County Indiana Histories and Families, compiled by the Brown County Historical Society":

In 1867 John Watkins, who owned a water-powered gristmill on Salt Creek, decided to build an inn for travelers. A frame structure on the southeast corner of Van Buren and Main was the result. Perry Hanna's father constructed the foundation for the inn. Through the years the inn was called Hampton Hotel, Hobbs House, Browning Hotel, King's Hotel, Pittman Inn and Nashville House depending on who owned the building. In late 1926 Fred Bates Johnson was in the hotel lobby talking to Clint Moore, the manager. He made the remark that what Nashville needed was a modern hotel. He immediately found himself in a real estate transfer. He and his partner, Jack Rogers, bought the hotel for \$6,000 from James Tilton, the owner. In the spring of 1927 Fred Johnson and Jack Rogers employed an architect to plan a change. The hotel was completely remodeled. The old building along East Main was divided into two wings and one wing was moved until both wings faced Van Buren. A new lobby connected the two sections. The lobby ceiling contained beams from old oak trees found on Bear Wallow Hill. There were murals by George LaChance. Twenty-one guest rooms were upstairs. The Pioneer Room served as a breakfast room. The main dining room was cheerful with red-apple wallpaper. A store selling Brown County handcrafts was entered from the lobby or from East Main. Called the Brown County Folks Shop and run by Portia Sperry it became renowned. The fireplace in the lobby was memorable. It was built from stones in the basement wall of the wing that had been moved. Electricity for Nashville House was brought over from Columbus. Large tanks buried in the front yard contained water pumped from Salt Creek. All drinking water was carried in buckets from the pump on the courthouse lawn. Dale Bessire, the well known artist, was foreman of the construction crew. Priscilla Johnson has recorded how she and her husband, Fred Bates Johnson, searched in Indiana for the antiques they bought for guest rooms and lobby.

The grand opening of the new Nashville House occurred on the first Sunday of October 1927. It was a most successful afternoon but Priscilla Johnson found herself washing dishes long after the guests had left. In 1936 Fred Bates Johnson, who lived in Indianapolis, and Jack Rogers, of Bloomington, divided their Brown County holdings. Fred settled for land they jointly owned. Jack Rogers became the proprietor of the Nashville House. The hotel was a valued center for visitors and tourists. There are many famous names on the old hotel registers.

On September 24, 1943, Nashville House burned to the ground. It might have been saved had there been sufficient water. Nashville's only fire-engine with a hand-operated pumping unit was not in working order. Salt Creek was dry. A bucket brigade without water could not save the hotel. The whole town turned out to help remove furnishings from rooms and lobby, and items for sale in the Brown County Folks Shop. On July 17, 1947 the rebuilding of Nashville House began. It is now a restaurant with a country store. It is owned by Andy Rogers, the son of Jack Rogers.