

The great bank robbery

The town of Daleville and notorious robber John Dillinger are linked by a historic heist

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DALEVILLE — On July 17, 1933, John Dillinger robbed the Commercial Bank of Daleville. Dillinger leapt over the railing at the bank and into history.

"The leap across the railing was a dramatic flourish that many would remember," recounts the Crime Library Internet site.

The Daleville stickup — which netted \$3,500 for Dillinger and his cohorts — came only a couple of weeks before the gang robbed a Montpelier bank of \$10,000.

But the leap — accompanied by Dillinger's saucy "Well, honey, this is a stickup" comment to teller Margaret Good — furthered Dillinger's journey toward status as something of a national criminal sensation.

By the time he was shot to death by law officers outside Chicago's Biograph Theatre a year later, Dillinger was the country's most notorious outlaw.



John Dillinger

The Daleville robbery forever linked Dillinger, Daleville and the small downtown building that housed the Commercial Bank.

Barry Wilson — whose family owns the now-empty bank building, as well as other Daleville buildings and businesses — said that public interest in the robbery continued over the years.

"Whenever we have the Dill-

inger car show, a few folks stop by and want to see it," Wilson said. "One time we had a guy dressed up like a gangster with a machine gun who posed for pictures there."

Daleville resident Alton Sneed was one of the organizers of the annual Dillinger-themed classic car show.

Sneed said the car show's co-founder, Leo Parrish, knew more about the robbery than he did.

"Leo was older than I was and knew some of the old guys who remembered that," Sneed said.

One of those who remembered the incident was Floyd C. McWilliams, who died in November 2004 at the age of 103.

A 2002 article in The Star Press recounted how McWilliams, who worked for Commercial Bank at the time, heard about the robbery.

"We've had company out here," a bank employee called and told McWilliams, who was dispatched from Muncie to the

Daleville bank to deal with the aftermath of the crime.

Wilson said he hasn't been approached about turning the bank building — which his family is offering for sale — into a tourism spot. He noted that the notoriety surrounding the robbery continues.

"We went to a Ripley's Believe It or Not museum and they had a display about it," Wilson said.

Gary McManus, a Daleville historian and pastor, said Dillinger's fame was fleeting and long ago.

"I remember reading that there were at one time two Dillinger museums in Indiana," McManus said. "One of them closed. The other is located, I believe, in Nashville — already a tourist area. Dillinger alone cannot generate interest. We have had a Dillinger car show in Daleville. I imagine that most people have no idea who Dillinger was."

■ Contact news reporter Keith Roysdon at 213-5828.

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Barry Wilson, whose family owns the now-empty bank building



THE NIGHT DEPOSIT BOX can be seen on the right side of the old Commercial Bank of Daleville building.

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