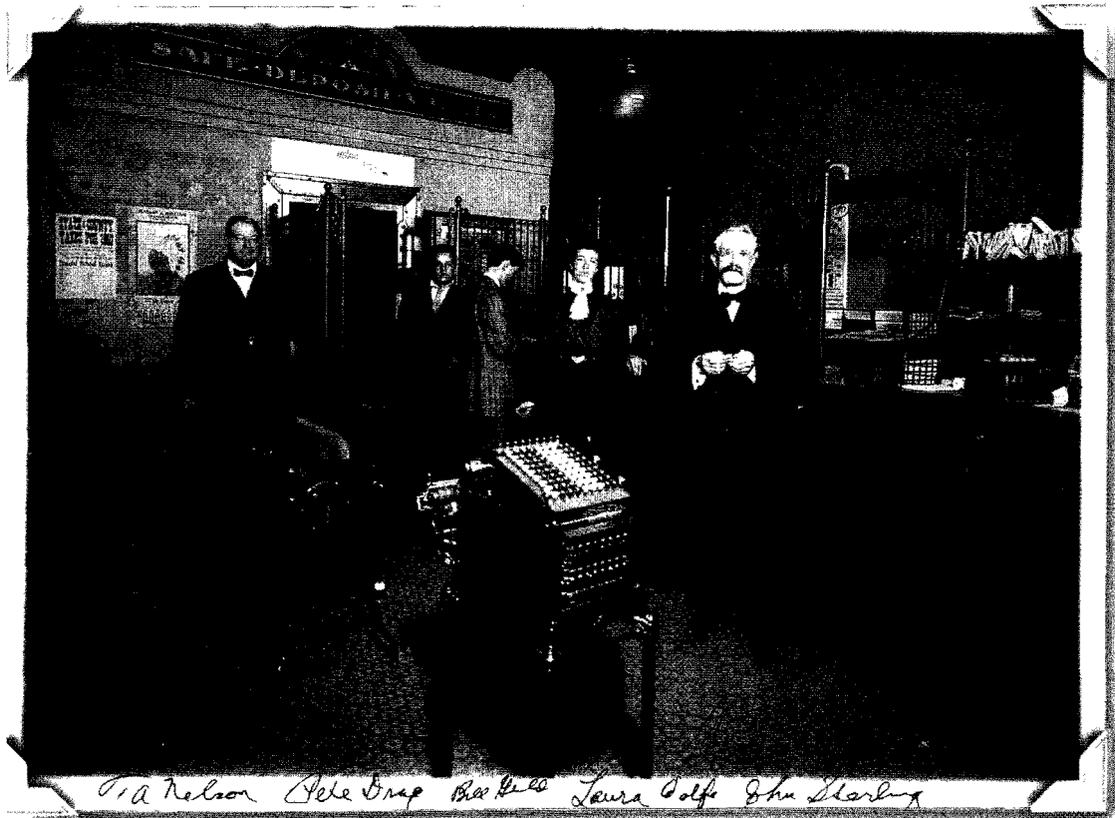


THE CENTURY BUSINESS EDITION

# THE SAN JOAQUIN HISTORIAN

A PUBLICATION OF THE SAN JOAQUIN COUNTY  
HISTORICAL SOCIETY & MUSEUM

FALL 1997



HONORING  
**UNION SAFE  
DEPOSIT BANK**

# THE SAN JOAQUIN HISTORIAN

QUARTERLY JOURNAL OF THE SAN JOAQUIN COUNTY HISTORICAL SOCIETY

CHRISTOPHER ENGH

E D I T O R

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The Society operates the *San Joaquin County Historical Museum* at Micke Grove Regional Park in partnership with San Joaquin County. The Society maintains an office at the Museum.

Manuscripts relating to the history of San Joaquin County and the Delta will always be considered. The editor reserves the right to shorten material based on local interest and space considerations. Inquiry should be made through the Museum office.

SAN JOAQUIN COUNTY HISTORICAL SOCIETY & MUSEUM

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# COMMITMENT...THE BEGINNING

The Union Safe Deposit and Loan Company opened in April of 1897. Indeed, turn-of-the-century Stockton was just beginning to look like a “real” city, and the fancy new office at 30 N. San Joaquin Street was part of all that. Stockton’s 23,000 residents had just recently seen their roads paved. Horse and buggys shared busy streets with electric streetcars.

In the 1850s merchants had provided a gold-cashing service. Semi-monthly express companies shipped gold to the “Atlantic states.” Even before statehood, express companies shuttled gold between Stockton and San Francisco on a regular basis. Still, in 1897, Union Safe’s “handsome home, fitted up especially for banking purposes,” as *The Byron Times* put it, was the stuff of which civic pride is made.

Actually, the office occupied a portion of The Yosemite Theater building, a 1700-seat beauty that staged big names, from Will Rogers to John Phillip Sousa. Union Safe was on the first floor of that building amidst other offices. Employees could see Stocktonians, dressed in their finest attire, strutting past to John Pitcher Spooner’s photo studio.

Business at Union Safe Deposit and Loan Company was limited to safe deposit box rentals and loans. These services were sufficient to meet demand - for a time.

Shareholders met for the first time just a few days after Union Safe’s opening. The first board of directors included B.F. Langford of Acampo; Henry C. Meyer of Linden; and W.R. Clark, J.H. Hoskins, William E. Heffernan and Fred H. Cass, all of Stockton. W.A. Nevills of Jamestown was not present, yet he was unanimously elected president. The board wisely elected Mr. Thomas Cunningham president in 1898. Cunningham was a prominent, widely respected Stocktonian. By the time he joined Union Safe, he had already served the community as fire chief, city councilman, and county sheriff. Seven months into his third term as board president, Mr. Cunningham died suddenly of heart failure.

Union Safe redefined itself in 1906. New members were named to the board, and Thomas A. Nelson was made president.

Under T.A. Nelson’s leadership, Union Safe would no longer simply be a safe deposit box rental and loan company. Now, the Bank offered full-service banking.

Before the year was out, Union Safe announced plans to open its first branch office. The Bank would conduct business in the I.O.O.F. building, on the corner of Cotton and Main streets in Lockeford. Rent was \$10 per month.

More doors opened. In 1907, Union Safe launched into full-scale newspaper advertising. This was something the Bank and its contemporaries had previously limited to “bankers’ cards,” small ads that listed bank name, location, bank directors and officers. No pictures. They can hardly be blamed for their restraint. Among the more sedate advertisements of 1897 and thereabouts was one for Grove’s Tasteless Chill Tonic. Its headline promised that Grove’s “Makes Children As Fat As Pigs.” Apparently, tastelessness was a valued commodity at Grove’s.

Nevertheless, into the world of advertising Union Safe forged. It began running ads in the local papers for as little as eleven cents an inch.

Among the early Union Safe ads was one urging readers to “Pay All Your Bills By Check.” The ad pointed out the advantages of a checking account - including a boost to “your social standing.”



## A FAMILY'S DEDICATION BEGINS

On June 2, 1910, Mr. Edward Clement Stewart joined the board of directors. Though no one could have known it, this vote marked the beginning of a new era for the Bank. Soon, Union Safe would be regarded as a family bank.

A special meeting of the Board of Directors was called on June 15, 1911. T.A. Nelson tendered his resignation as board president. The board also accepted the resignations of E.C. Dickinson, director and J.C. Sterling, cashier. Four days later, E.C. Stewart was elected board president.

Less than a year later, E.C. Stewart could add board chairman to his title. The forty-two-year-old leader had found his mission.

By the end of 1913, the Bank's assets reached \$687,321.34 and were destined to climb higher. Stewart showed his confidence in the Bank by acquiring increasing amounts of stock. As of January, 1914, E.C. Stewart owned 966 shares of the 3429 shares on the books. He was to continue this display of confidence throughout his career.



*Edward Clement (E.C.) Stewart*

## THE FAMILY BANK



*Clarence Edward (C.E.) Stewart*

Clarence Edward, E.C. Stewart's son, joined Union Safe in 1917. His father did not play favorites. Though he was a Stanford University graduate, Clarence worked alternately as a janitor, bookkeeper, teller and errand boy.

Within a few months, C.E. was elected secretary in a special shareholders meeting. By early 1918, C.E. Stewart became treasurer and cashier of the corporation.

The elder Stewart fostered a sense of family among his employees. He is remembered for his unswerving loyalty. "Once he sized you up and found you decent and straightforward, he would stay your ally for always," a friend and associate said of him.

The 1920s roared in. C.E. Stewart became a board member. Business was percolating. Checking accounts were finally becoming popular. After years of steadfast dedication to paying all their bills with gold, or gold and silver coin, then - reluctantly - greenbacks, Stocktonians were entering the age of the checkbook.

Meanwhile, the 1919 contingent at the Lockeford branch welcomed Mr. Salma Seaver Strobridge as the new cashier. It was Mr. Strobridge who best demonstrated the underlying credo of Union Safe: Be prepared.

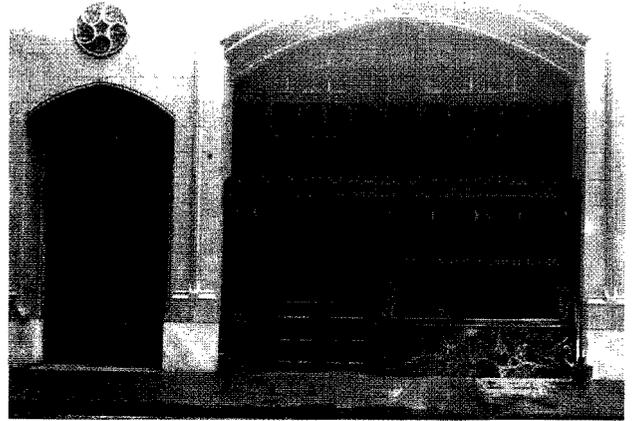
Mr. Strobridge, upon accepting the cashier position, was fully aware that the Bank had been burglarized in 1914. The Bank could be hit again, and it was. In 1921, a lone, unmasked bandit held up the Bank in broad daylight. The bandit leveled a six-shooter at Mr. Strobridge, ordered him into the vault and locked him in. He then helped himself to the cash on the counter and ran out. Mr. Strobridge would have been in quite a pickle if he had not been prepared. As historian George H. Tinkham's account puts it:

"Mr. Strobridge had anticipated being held up, and had provided himself with a flashlight and a means of removing the screws from the combination. These he kept inside the vault, and as a result of this forethought he extricated himself from his uncomfortable position in a few minutes and emerged from the vault unhurt."

By March of 1922, the main office was ready to grow. The Bank purchased Sherman & Clay, a music store, and United Cigar Company. This yielded approximately 60 feet on Main Street at a price of \$2,500 a frontage foot.

In early 1925, Bank employees moved into the new Main Street office, deemed "beautiful" by the press. They could really feel the bustle of downtown Stockton now. Streetcars hurried back and forth all day on Main Street. From the arched windows of the Bank, employees could admire the roadsters, coupes, Tin Lizzies and occasional horse drawn buggy jostling past. Main Street was the place to see and be seen, and Union Safe was in the midst of it all.

Union Safe's new building was single story, but it rested on a foundation designed to support ten stories. Because there has been sufficient existing space for growth, the Bank has yet to build beyond three stories. It feels right that this be so. As Mr. Strobridge so dramatically demonstrated those many years ago, it is smart to be well prepared - just in case.



## THE BEST ROAD TO SUCCESS

The year 1929 and the Depression years of the 1930s tested the strength of the Bank. It did not waver. A combined report of condition (rather like a condensed version of an annual report, published for view by the general public) for the year 1931 showed a healthy financial picture. The report's headline declared, "Savings Deposits Largest In History Of Union Safe Deposit Bank."

E.C. Stewart was rightfully proud of the Bank's position. He was quick to squelch any speculation that the Bank might be bought out by the Bank Of Italy (now known as the Bank of America).

One of the first people local stockbroker Hal Nelson met upon coming to Stockton in 1937 was E.C. Stewart. They quickly formed a friendly rapport. "I would walk into the Bank from time to time and say, 'Do you have any samples?' E.C. would reach into his pocket, pull out a shiny penny and hand it to me. That's how he was with his customers. That relationship - he knew his customers. It was all about trust and friendliness."



*(E.C.) Stewart*

## MAY WE HELP YOU?

The dramatic jump in population after World War II spurred the economy and boosted banking around the state. Union Safe continued to prosper, and with the tough days of the 1930s behind, community service hit its stride.

In 1943, C.E. Stewart was appointed to Dameron Hospital Association's Board of Membership. The group, made up of community leaders, directed the hospital's growth. Years later, as he stepped down, C.E.'s son, Don, took his place.

C.E.'s wife, Helen, was a crusader. She supplied the energy behind a number of community projects. Not content to simply limit her involvement to financial support, she rolled up her sleeves and worked. In addition, she served as a nursing aide during and after World War II. She lent a hand at San Joaquin General and was a dedicated Red Cross volunteer.

Don Stewart joined Union Safe in 1947. He came to the Bank almost directly out of high school, learning the banking business as his father C.E. Stewart had before him - by working. Don has carried on the family tradition of community service. In 1993, he was named Stocktonian of the Year by the Stockton Association of Realtors. The choice was supported by the entire community, including The Stockton Record, which said of him:



*Donald R. Stewart*

"Banker Donald R. Stewart's name has been synonymous with public service in Stockton for four decades.

From eight years on the Stockton Unified School District board in the late '50s and early '60s to today, he has not said no when the community asked for his help.

From United Way to the 49er Council of the Boy Scouts to St. Mary's Interfaith Dining Room to Harrison School for the developmentally challenged to public-safety programs and political efforts, Don Stewart has been there when needed. He has hosted countless fund-raising barbecues for charitable and civic organizations at the family Chestnut Hill Farms in Linden...Don Stewart is being honored as Stocktonian of the Year for what he does for the community. His wife, Thelma, was honored as 1980's Stocktonian of the Year for her endless contributions to the community..." The editorial ended with a passage that fits well the Stewart family, and the Union Safe family as a whole. "True service does not seek power over those served, nor does it desire gratitude or economic gain. Authentic service is simply the act of caring...a person dedicated to serving others realizes that life is not a race in which we must pass other people by, but a pilgrimage which we take together."

# A TIME OF CHANGES

The 1950s and 1960s were filled with changes, both big and small. Stockton's population grew to more than 71,000. Most of the growth was north of the Calaveras River. Housing developments and shopping centers seemed to pop out of the ground overnight. Lincoln Village stretched across most of the former Benjamin Holt Ranch. Lincoln Center sprang up. Stockton was heading off in new directions, and so was Union Safe.

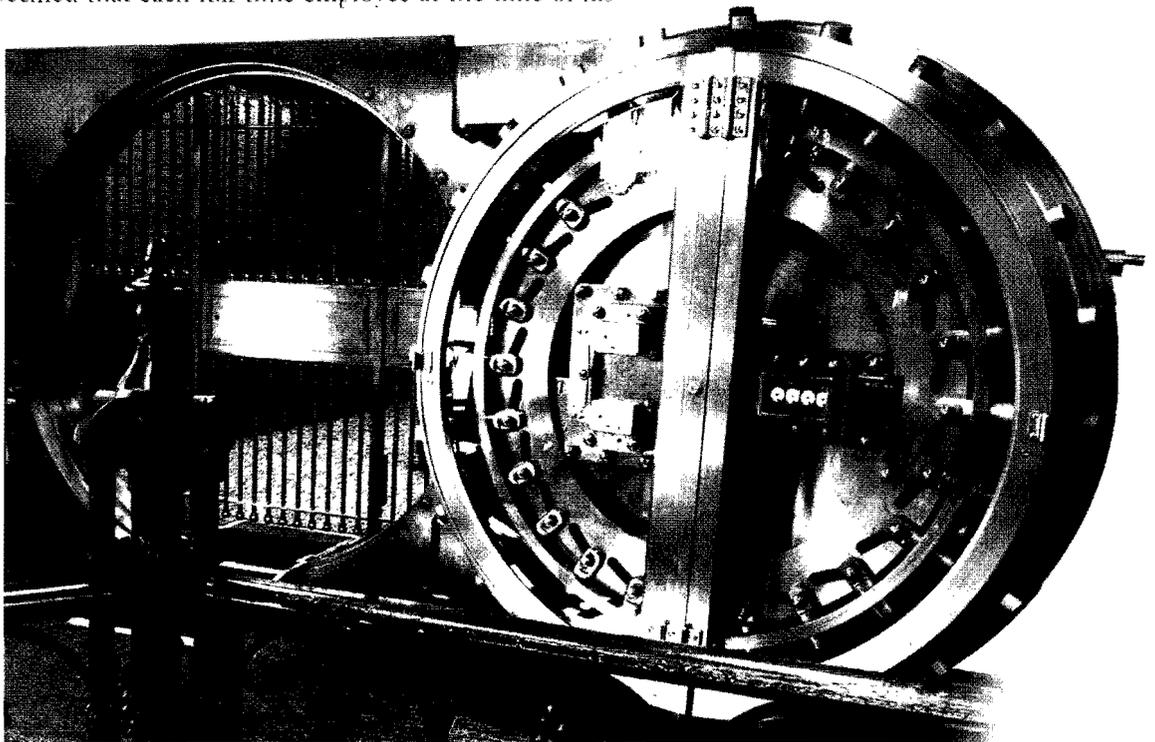
In the early days, lending officers were also tellers, working at the cages for both jobs. In 1955, board members decided to add on the store space to the east of the Bank so the lending officers could be seated at desks. The collection of loans could now be followed more closely.

Bigger changes came in November of 1959. C.E. Stewart was elected president of Union Safe, officially assuming duties that he had been handling for some time. A little more than two months later, his father, E.C. Stewart, died. He was ninety years old.

Family involvement in Union Safe continued by the election to the board of C.E. Stewart's son-in-law, George Malloy, in 1961. He served as attorney for the Bank for many years and continues to serve as director.

More news soon followed. A Stockton Record article read: "Veteran Stockton banker Edward C. Stewart, who died Jan. 24 at the age of 90, did not forget the people who worked for him. Stewart, for more than 50 years as president of Union Safe Deposit Bank, remembered more than 50 employees in his will...When he wrote the will, Stewart specified that each full-time employee at the time of his

death receive one share of preferred stock in the Bank for each year of service...  
...Stewart also bequeathed varying amounts to friends and associates, and left \$1,000 to the Children's Home of Stockton..."





**GROUND BREAKING** — James Hammond, Sr., watches the shovel at yesterday's groundbreaking for the new Union Safe Deposit Bank to be constructed in Lockeford. Watching



Don R. Stewart, left, President of Union Safe Deposit Bank, and C. E. Stewart, Chairman of the Board, proudly turn the first earth at the groundbreaking ceremony for Union Safe Deposit Bank's newest full-line West Lane Office, Tuesday, August 5th, 1980.

**UNION SAFE  
DEPOSIT BANK**  
OFFICES IN STOCKTON AND LOCKEFORD  
MEMBER FDIC



## A GRAND OPENING

As the 1970s approached, Union Safe began breaking ground at various points in Stockton and Lockeford. New offices and relocations made way for the Bank's growth. Groundbreaking ceremonies were almost commonplace.

On April 28, 1969, the El Dorado office opened, on the southeast corner of El Dorado and Willow streets. Developers had created a large business center in the north-central area of the city. Union Safe moved in to meet the area's banking needs.

The office's parking lot was constructed where a house, once owned by E.C. Stewart, once stood. Construction crews razed it to make way for the new office. Union Safe built a community room in the office's basement for use by local organizations.

The Lockeford office relocation in December of 1969 came next. A published account, dated December 11, 1969, read as follows:

"The new Lockeford Union Safe Deposit Bank will hold their open house Sunday, December 14th. The bank will offer its customers many new conveniences, one of which will be large safe deposit boxes, with a comfortable adjoining room that allows the individual privacy while examining the contents of their box. The spacious interior of the bank is a blend of contemporary with the old look of dark woods and brass lighting fixtures. An exceptional point of interest is the antique bank safe door, of copper and hand tooling."

In between grand openings, other business was conducted. On January 4, 1973, Don R. Stewart was elected president of Union Safe. His father, C.E. Stewart, was named board chairman. "Our challenge in the years ahead," Don said in the Bank's employee newsletter, "is to continue to improve the quality of service to our customers. We must respond to the changing needs of today's customer. Banking is much more complicated these days and our customers are faced with more financial options than they've ever had. We have to meet those needs."

Next came another office opening. Groundbreaking ceremonies for the fourth and largest office were held in April of 1975. In June of 1976, the office at Pershing Avenue and Quail Lakes Drive opened for business. Its design was of the

same used-brick, modified ranch style look, used for other offices. This from an article in *The Stockton Record*:

“The one-story and mezzanine building, with full basement and an area of 17,500 square feet, represents an investment of nearly \$1 million, according to bank officials...The 8,000 square-foot basement will house storage files, employees’ lounge and kitchen facilities. There will be rest rooms and a second lounge on the 1,500 square-foot mezzanine. Eleven teller windows will be located on the 8,000 square-foot main floor, along with executive offices and other departments. There will be four drive-up teller windows with the entrance on Quail Lakes Drive and the exit on Pershing Avenue...”

In January of 1977, the vitality of Union Safe surged higher. President Don R. Stewart recruited C. Joseph Crane to join the team. The new first vice president and chief administrative officer quickly became known for his ability and high energy level. By October, Mr. Crane was a board director.

Just a few days later, Helen Stewart joined husband Clarence and son Don on the board. She remained on the board for many years, a constant source of support and dedication to the Bank and the community it served.

The Hammer and West Lane office opened in April, 1981. That same year, the Trust and Personnel departments were built, using the parking space area adjacent to the Main Street drive-up at the main office. In 1985, the office at Weber and California streets opened.

This active period of grand openings was to continue into the 1990s. Before the decade closed, however, Mr. Clarence Edward Stewart, “a real gentleman,” as he has been described, passed away. He died November 18, 1986. He was 94 years old.



*L-R: Ralph B. McClure, C.J. Crane, Don R. Stewart, C.E. Stewart, George A. Malloy, Jay Rock, George B. Lagorio*



## APPROACHING A CENTURY

It was 1987, the Bank's 90-year anniversary. Don R. Stewart became chairman of the board. C. Joseph Crane took on the job of president.

Business flourished. On November 13, 1987, after nine months of negotiations, Center State Bank merged into Union Safe Deposit Bank. Through the merger, Union Safe brought its number of offices to twelve in San Joaquin and Stanislaus counties. Assets grew to \$432,000,000, with loans totaling \$268,000,000. Deposits were \$392,000,000. The expanded facilities, staff and financial resources that came from the merger increased Union Safe's impact on the two counties.

Center State Bank was headquartered in Modesto. It had two offices in Modesto - its main office on "H" Street and an office on Tully Road. There was an office in Ripon, Escalon, Empire and Salida. The Tully and Empire offices closed in 1992.

On July 31, 1991, Union Safe opened an office in the new Brookside development. The next year, the Eastridge office in Modesto opened. The following month Union Safe purchased Valley Commercial Bank, bringing the Waterloo and Thornton offices into the fold. In April of 1996, Union Safe received approval from the FDIC and State Banking Department to purchase Great Valley Bank. Great Valley's four offices - Modesto, Oakdale, Ceres and Hughson - brought the number of Union Safe's offices to eighteen.

Meanwhile, the Stewart legacy continued to grow as well. More of E.C. Stewart's descendants were elected to the board during this time:

Richard S. Prince, *grandson, was elected in 1987*

John C. Thornton, *husband of great-granddaughter*

*Jane Helen Malloy Thornton, in 1995*

Marian S. Malloy, *granddaughter, in 1996*

Geneva A. Logue, *great-granddaughter, in 1996.*

# SOMETHING OLD, SOMETHING NEW

A lot has changed since that first board meeting held in the Yosemite building 100 years ago. The scratching of old-style pens has been replaced by the clicking of computer keyboards. Customers discuss their business with loan officers while seated at desks, rather than standing at the teller's cages. Gold and silver coins have given way to paper currency and personal checks.

The essence of Union Safe Deposit Bank, the very element that has made it successful - The Stewart Family - remains the same. They are still actively involved in Union Safe's operations and are committed to supporting the communities that the Bank serves.

The Stewarts and Union Safe understand that, no matter how much the world changes, the business that gets the business is the one that provides the very best in customer service. Our local advantage has made us more responsive than the competition. Not many non-local banks make their senior management accessible to their customers. But we do.

In July 1996, Mr. Joseph H. Johnson was appointed president and CEO of Union Safe Deposit Bank. He brought with him a commitment to maintain the traditional values of the Bank and its historic focus on customer needs while appropriately using today's technology. Union Safe will demonstrate that well-managed technology will support and enhance those traditional values.

For example, Union Safe recently offered check imaging to our customers and will introduce the convenience of PC banking soon. Our customers will be able to conduct most banking transactions from home. We will also offer a debit card, tied to the customer's checking account, that will make immediate payment for purchases anywhere a VISA card is accepted.

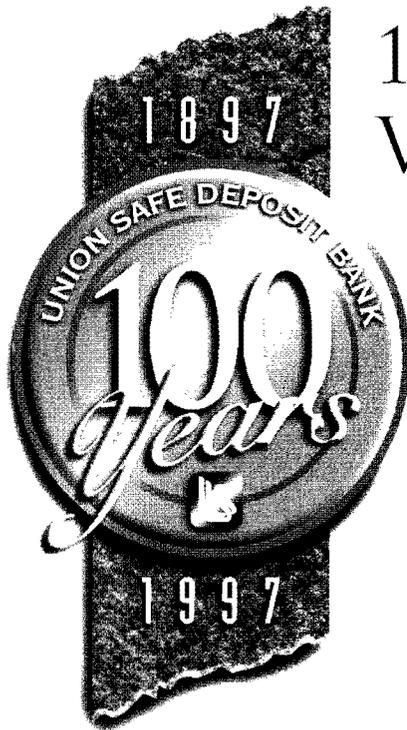
Union Safe is also developing a cash management product for businesses. With this product, business owners will maximize return on their idle cash, conduct transactions from their place of business and offer direct payroll deposit to their employees.

The ability to keep up with the times and the market has always been a strength of this Bank. It comes from understanding what each trend and change really means.

We understand that today's customers are individuals. Some will embrace the new technology and the independence it affords. Others will continue to do business with their favorite teller. That's okay, too.

We will begin our next 100 years with distinction. Union Safe Deposit Bank has been, is now, and always will be - The Bank of Choice.





# 100 YEARS OF VALUED CUSTOMERS... OUR MOST VALUED ASSET.

*We have taken pride in helping our customers build a community to be proud of. From making loans to building houses and businesses. To raising families and sending kids to college. It is a century of community spirit from our banking customers that has been our motivation and most valued asset.*

The Bank of Choice



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