

The face of Adam Kiesel may have also been placed on the building as a sort of good luck charm. It's possible that it was put there to prevent any fires from once again ravaging the south side of the square.

Others claim that the face is an image of Puck, the trickster made famous in Shakespeare's *A Midsummer Night's Dream*. It has also been said to be an image of a pagan deity or mythological figure.

More realistically, the face may simply be an architectural feature known as a grotesque, which is similar to a gargoyle but serves as a decoration on a building rather than a functional architectural feature.

Regardless of whose face is above the door of the former First National Bank and why it is there, the story surrounding Adam Kiesel and his place as Newark's first "firebug" has withstood the test of time as a popular and widespread local legend.

References:

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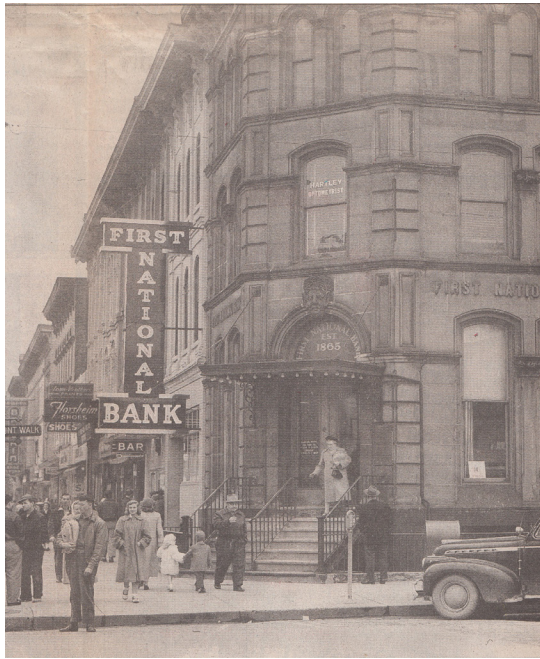
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First National Bank

The First National Bank is one of downtown Newark's most interesting buildings. Located on the corner of South Park Place and Third Street, the former bank building is well known for its prominent architectural features, including a carving of a mischievous face over the doorway. According to local legend, the face is that of Adam Kiesel, Newark's first "firebug."

Adam Kiesel was born in Germany and immigrated to the United States in 1854. After serving in the Civil War, Kiesel returned to Newark and started a business on the south side of the square. He bought a building located next to the present site of the former First National Bank. At the time, South Park Place was occupied by rundown wooden buildings and was considered to be a bad part of town.

As the story goes, Kiesel found himself in an alcohol-fueled rage one evening in 1868. His business was failing and he needed a way out. Whether by accident or by intent, Adam Kiesel set fire to his store. The building was quickly engulfed in flames and rapidly spread to the other buildings along South Park Place. Because of Kiesel's actions, nearly the entire south side of the square was destroyed.

Adam Kiesel was arrested and charged with arson. Law enforcement officials believed that Kiesel set fire to his own building in order to claim the insurance money. However, there's a twist to this story. After his indictment, the citizens of Newark decided that Kiesel had done them all a service by ridding the city of the blighted buildings on the south side of the square. Because of the public outcry in support of him, Kiesel was acquitted of arson and heralded as a sort of public hero.



South Park Place as it appeared before 1868

In 1869, after the fire, the newly formed First National Bank purchased the property on the corner of South Park Place and Third Street at a price of \$4,500. Under the direction of Jerome Buckingham, who was the bank's first president, the building was completed for occupancy in 1870.



First National Bank after its completion in 1870

As a detail on the new building, a local sculptor was commissioned to carve a face to look out over the main entrance of the bank. This sculptor is widely believed to have been T.D. Jones, a local artist who is known for his bust of Abraham Lincoln located in the Ohio Statehouse Rotunda. The carving has also been attributed to John R. Jones. Precisely who sculpted the visage is not known for certain.

The face is said to be that of Adam Kiesel himself. Legend claims that Kiesel's face was placed on the building as a memorial and to thank him for ridding Newark of the rundown and seedy businesses that once lined the south side of the downtown square.