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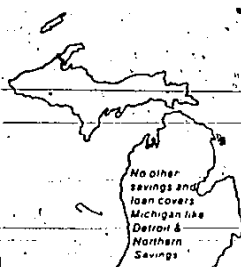
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## The Changed Look of BANKS AND BANKERS

There was a time, not long ago, when a typical bank building had walls of massive stone blocks. It had small windows, narrow doors and the front elevation resembled a Greek temple, complete with classic Ionic columns. The marbled interior possessed the warmth and homey charm of an Egyptian tomb. The total effect was one of solidity, changelessness and absolute safety for anything stored within its walls. It was a fortress for your money.

The people who worked within reflected the same philosophy. They were conservative acting and conservative dressing. A banker wore dark suits and white shirts and radiated wisdom and integrity. After all, you entrusted him with your money and you wanted him to take his responsibility seriously.

Bankers and banks have not been well treated in literature. The young Jesus routed the money lenders from the temple.

In his "Merchant of Venice," Shakespeare made a villain of Shylock, the moneylender. If Shakespeare seemed to reveal a twinge of sympathy for Shylock, it is for the man, not his profession.

Indeed, it still goes on. Watch the westerns on TV. The town banker may occasionally be a pretty good guy, but he is a stingy pretty good guy. More often, he is an unwitting bad guy in a black suit who short-sightedly refuses to lend the hero the money he needs to save his ranch or complete his railroad. Nothing is mentioned of the fact that the ranch might never have been there at all if someone, probably a bank, hadn't put up capital for it.

**BUT CHANGE** comes to everything, even banks. (There is probably a pun there, if you want to work on it.) Today a bank building, especially a suburban one, can be a small, light, airy building with glass all around. Inside, there's carpeting, air conditioning and background music. No longer is a bank a bastion.

The people, too, defy the old images. There are mini-skirts. The men wear red shirts, white ties, sport coats and sideburns. The old austerity is gone as banks and bankers humanize themselves.

Banks have gone from austerity to downright frivolity. On the east side of Detroit is the Eastern Market. The walls of its buildings are painted with heroic murals and cartoons. One of these is a wild-eyed bull grazing on a pile of money. It represents a bank.

Then there's that extremely helpful talking bank building of the radio commercials. It blunders around the city handing out books of advice on money management, returning ball point pens, and sitting on people's sandwiches. Its finest rescue came when it saved an impecunious couple

from a diet of beef nose braised in muscatel, with breaded lettuce.

In bringing laughs to radio listeners it also breaks down old ideas that banks are cold and stand-offish institutions.

**BANK SPOKESMEN** advance several reasons for the turn-about in bank imagery. One is competition. With the growth of credit unions and savings and loan companies, the banks found their old reticence was harmful. If they were going to compete for small loans, car financing and other personal finance, they had to pitch in and ask for the business.

Another influence, one bank spokesman said, is growing sophistication on the part of the public.

"Thickness of the walls is no longer important. Most people have come to realize that a bank is mostly a book-keeping operation. Physical defense of money isn't our primary function."

The spread of banks into suburban areas has also influenced their architecture toward modernity. After all, a fortress is difficult to fit into a residential neighborhood.

## Spending Money

Nearly everyone in Observerland is engaged in making and spending money. Although not necessarily in that order. The management of money is one of life's greatest spurces of joy and sorrow.

But if it weren't for the banks and other financial institutions in our neighborhoods, the handling of money would be a lot more frustrating and complicated than it is. Today there is a bank, credit union or savings and loan association at nearly every major suburban street intersection.

What, actually, does a bank do? It takes in money from depositors, then turns around and lends out money to people who need it. It pays interest to depositors and charges higher interest to the people it lends to. The difference between the two interest rates is the bank's profit.

This is a vast oversimplification, of course. But it illustrates the principle.

Banks, credit unions, savings and loan associations and other public lending institutions are strictly regulated by state and federal law. These regulations place ceilings on the rate of interest that may be paid on deposits, and in many cases the amounts that may be charged for loans. This severely limits the ways in which they can compete with each other.

A bank may advertise that it pays as high an interest rate as any other bank. But it can't claim to pay a higher rate, because they are all

Continued on Page 6