

# KATIE HAGER

EDITOR / CONTENT CREATOR / SOCIAL MEDIA MANAGER

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PRESS RELEASE

## **Durham & Co. brings Downtown back to life**

By Katherine Hager

June 1, 2018

BRANDENBURG, KY – Once lovingly dubbed as the "place to be in Downtown," Little Dave's has been given a facelift and a new name. The 30-year-old location is now home to Durham & Co. Woodworks, a retail store offering handmade artisan products from local vendors. The project was completed in under two years by Lee and Sidney Durham, and Kendell Smith.

Citizens may recognize the rooms, but a new bartop, fixtures and displays, handcrafted products from a variety of artists, and even a viewing window that will allow visitors to watch Lee in action has revitalized the once beloved building.

Durham's will also featured Lee's own crafted items, including: furniture and other home decor, cutting boards, signs, and copper fixtures. The store is set to open the first weekend in June.

### **About Durham & Co.**

Durham & Co. are purveyors of fine furniture and local art. They take raw kiln dried lumber and turn it into beautiful furniture that will stand the test of time. The store is a platform for other craftspeople to share their work with our community and beyond.

Lee Durham began woodworking in 2003 through his high school woodshop class, since that time he has honed his craft, and will continue to do so in the coming years. Lee favors cherry wood, but has utilized walnut, maple, and oak, among others, and has incorporated copper and other metals into his projects.

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## FEATURE ARTICLE

The truth is that I will probably never go to the moon; I'll never walk on Mars, either. The closest I am likely to get to another world are the old, deteriorating buildings of the southern countryside. I love them – the alienness of their vast, empty spaces; the stark desolation, beautiful and menacing. How the endless array of broken windows and crumbling brick both swallow you up and scale you down, making all human endeavors seem almost comfortingly trivial.

All my life I have been attracted to the ideas and simplicity of eras gone-by. My favorite places are those no one really knows about: lands of extremes and contrasts, where sublime landscapes are framed by scenes of the apocalypse come early. Those very concepts have led me to invest quite a bit of time in the exploration of dilapidated architecture in Meade County and to one place in particular.

The “New Ace Theater” – a large building that sits across Main Street from Little Dave’s, on Lots 50 and 51 in downtown Brandenburg – is a hidden theater waiting to be discovered by those of us who never knew of its existence in the first place.

Construction began on the theater in 1920. Its finish date, however, remains a mystery. Upon completion, the theater and rooms above were written to be 7,560 square feet. Its flat, masonry exterior was home to a porch on the second floor for the use of the apartment tenants. Prior to having been built, the land was owned by Edward Yeakel and his wife, both of Hollywood, Calif. Yeakel financed the construction of the theater and sold it soon after in late April of 1926 to the Brandenburg Realty Company.

Looking upon it presently, no one would suspect it of the grandeur it held inside. The door is sealed shut with rust and cobwebs; to get into it is like stepping into a time capsule. Dust, dry rot, a collection of old restaurant freezers and garbage litter the floor.

The deed of Lots 50 and 51 on April 20 and 21 of 1926 reads:

“And the following personal property to-wit: 400 chairs, projecting booth, moving picture machine and equipment complete, furnace and equipment complete, and stage setting.”

Another paragraph read: “Also the following personal property; two life tone turntables, one Samson amplifier, one Kersten horn, one motiograph, one deluxe prop machine, two morelite lamp houses, one vocal light screen.”

Sometime during 1920 and 1926, the theater housed a regular vaudeville show – several theatrical performances featuring acts on the same playbill with musicians, dancers, comedians, trained animals, and magicians, and were often thought to be a show of ill-repute. It is suspected that the popularity of silent films truly inspired Yeakel to have the theater built.

“We never called it the ‘New Ace’,” Virginia Miller, Brandenburg, explained when asked what she knew of the theater. “We always called it ‘the Show’ or ‘going to the Show’.”

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## FEATURE ARTICLE (CONT.)

Miller – born in 1924 – recalled having seen some silent films at the theater, but the one she best remembered was Merian C. Cooper’s “King Kong” in 1933.

“It was in black and white, of course. I can remember being so afraid. ‘Mother, don’t look!’ I said. I hid my face in her lap.” She reminisced, “There were other movies, too, most I can’t recall now. There were a lot of businessmen involved with the theater. They wanted something wonderful for the community. It was very prosperous.”

In the time Miller visited the theater with her family, there was no restroom or water. Citizens of Meade County traveled from all over to visit and watch movies. Adults paid 25 cents to see a film, while a children’s ticket was just 10 cents.

“You have to remember in that time, people were working for \$1 a day. Going to the theater was a luxury not many could afford. It was special to go see a movie; teenagers saved and would walk from Weldon just to come to the Show,” said Miller. Unfortunately, the theater did not see many patrons during the following decade. The theater closed in 1940 due to World War II.

Throughout the following decades, the theater and its apartments were sold to several investors. The “New Ace” was opened once more for others to come and watch films – even the infamous “King Kong vs. Godzilla” (1962).

“There were a variety of showings – matinees and at night – but never, ever on Sundays. It was thought to be in poor taste if you went to the movies on Sundays. That was a day dedicated to family and prayer.” Miller commented on visiting the theater later in life.

In March 1973, Theodore Lee “Buck” Aebersold and his wife purchased the building for the use of his many businesses. It astonishes many that during the following year, the building weathered one of the deadliest tornadoes in Kentucky’s history. Where other historic structures and the courthouse were uprooted, the theater remained, but not without damage.

It was reported that straw from bales of hay were embedded in the two-foot thick bricks on the exterior walls.

The building remained in the Aebersolds’ possession until 2004, when Martha Page of Sacramento, Calif. acquired the building and the two lots. Page has made it clear she has no plans for the building.

It is hard to imagine the building we’ve all passed without a single thought to be something spectacular. I recently visited the New Ace to get a glimpse of what once was.

Upon entering, the very first place I came to is obscured by an old door, resting against a paneled wall. From what I could tell, someone carefully carpeted the floor in a color to only be described as “1970s green,” now moth-eaten with the passing time.

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## FEATURE ARTICLE (CONT.)

I gave it little notice, stepped over fallen boards, and made my way further into the building. It was a short walk before an entire room opened up.

The theater was so close to what I'd imagined with its aged tin ceilings – ornate with flourishes and laurels, slanted floors, and ivy scarred walls that confronted by it then, I felt an uncomfortable sort of déjà vous. The floorboards felt soft underfoot; wiring hung down from the ceiling, grasping like a shroud of tentacles. Evidence of what used to be is everywhere; a place both alive and dead.

It was almost a relief to find it the inside in ruins, because had it been in perfect condition, I don't think I would have been able to contain my anger that this place was hidden away from us all these years.

At the end of it all, there was a shocking burst of light and color. Sunlight flooded through a hole in the brick wall and gave way to the building's best kept secret: the screen that was illuminated once by ancient Hollywood greats. The curtain was still draped and drawn up, waiting for audiences that never arrive. As if the people who had once attended movies there, performed on that very stage, left in some desperate hurry.

The question begs to be asked: What does an old building become when it is untended? Is it a museum of the lives that were lived there? Or a corpse made of wood and stone, a grave?

I think not, having explored so many places like the New Ace Theater in Downtown Brandenburg. The structure of the building, the artisanship of its perfectly placed floorboards and carefully chosen ceiling, the stories of those who lived in a time when things like movies and theaters weren't mundane luxuries we take for granted today – all of it is history.

These places aren't graves; they are secret histories waiting to be read.

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## **Mourning eased with revived funeral tradition**

LOUISVILLE, KY.

Today, Art Everlasting, a funeral photography company specializing in memorial portraiture, announced its 25th anniversary. With this celebration comes the grand opening of owners John and Edwina Smith's art gallery, with works entitled Preserving Generations.

The Smiths have been in the business of funeral photography since 1993 after they met in college. The pair redefined the industry, taking on some of the most challenging situations.

Of their first years, Edwina said, "We certainly were met with very tough experiences, but it was our greatest hope that we would be able to help families in their most vulnerable of moments. We wanted them to have a weight lifted from their shoulders."

One of the fundamental parts of their business is destigmatizing death and relieving what psychologists call "death anxiety of modern culture."

"We are committed to helping others face their fears of death and showing people that it is a normal part of life. Through funeral photography, we not only help grieving families and their friends process the ending cycle of someone's life but also celebrating the continuation of the bonds that they created and cherished while here," explained John.

Funeral photography (also known as post-mortem or memorial photography) is the practice of photographing the recently deceased. It was very common in the nineteenth century when death occurred in the home and was quite an ordinary part of life.

These photographs served as keepsakes to remember the deceased. The later invention of the carte de visite, which allowed multiple prints to be made from a single negative, meant that copies of the image could be mailed to relatives.

The popularity of the practice dwindled after the 1930s but was once more revived by artists who wished to fight against the increasing medicalization of death.

"When Art Everlasting photographs services, we strive to capture the love, tenderness, and genuine emotions of the funeral while being respectful, discreet, compassionate, and professional," Edwina said, illustrating the mission of Art Everlasting.