



Brenda Vineyard Runyon and the First Woman's Bank of Tennessee

It was following the First World War that Brenda Vineyard Runyon organized the First Woman's Bank of Tennessee, after being challenged to do so by a local business. The Bank was situated in the Arlington Hotel on the public square in Clarksville, and began operations on October 6, 1919. The bank was the first in the United States to be managed and directed entirely by women. Its opening produced something of a sensation, and deposits totaling twenty thousand dollars came in the first day. That the bank's establishment at a time, when women had recently experienced successes in their war efforts and in the temperance movement and were moving ever closer to gaining the vote, should have surprised no one.

Founder and president Brenda Vineyard Runyon led the 1916 drive for a city/county hospital in Clarksville. An active leader in community efforts, she was director of the Clarksville Branch of the American Red Cross during World War I, and served as sole female member of the school board. She also taught Sunday school at the First Baptist Church, and with her husband, physician Frank J. Runyon, raised two sons. Both Doctor and Ms Runyon were born in Trenton, Todd County, Kentucky.

Welcoming deposits from men and women, Runyon encouraged women to become savers and investors in the 1920s. Ms Runyon resigned her position in 1926 due to failing health and was unable to secure a successor. The banking venture, therefore, remains closely linked with Runyon, and its short life makes it seem more a novel experiment than a viable financial institution. The First Trust and Savings Bank of Clarksville absorbed the First Woman's Bank in 1926 and was itself later taken over by Commerce Union Bank before that institution became part of Sovran Bank and then Nations Bank.