**Riverside - Furniture on Fourth…** originally published in Bridges Mar’23

The community of Riverside adjacent to 4th Street NE was a happening place in the past, especially if you were looking for furniture. In addition to being a major thoroughfare to Edmonton, Riverside was one of Calgary’s earliest areas to be settled on the north side of the Bow River. Things really got going in the early 1910’s!

At 102 4th Street a fine new 2 storey Block was built in 1911 by Thomas Slingsby, an Englishman. He opened a department store but soon after ran into financial difficulties and sold out to Sigurdur Siggurdsson, an Icelander who had arrived in Calgary in 1908. Siggurdsson started Alberta Furniture, a business that became a successful over many decades. “Out of the high rent district to save you money” was the slogan for his store and over the years it grew to occupy three floors of the Slingsby Block. McClary coal ranges for $64, cedar chests for $98 and chesterfields starting at $98 were highlighted in a 1939 advertisement. In a newspaper article celebrating 30 years in business, Alberta Furniture was described as “one of the most up to date and attractive centres for furniture sales in the city”. Sigurrdsson retired in the early 1950’s but his tradition was carried forward with the next owner, Jake Smolensky. Jake was very entrepreneurial and owned Riverside Hardware in the Armour Block across 4th street and had also started Riverside Furniture nearby.

 Calgary’s significant population influx in the 1950s and 60’s led to a boom in the furniture business and the next generation of owners took full advantage of this. Jake’s son-in -law Jack Eisenberg took over the business in the mids ‘60’s Over time they gave the Slingsby Block “a facelift” and a second 3 storey building was built to the east. The revolving sign that was added to the top of the building remains to this day. In the 1980’s Eisenberg acquired more land in the area and another store was added across the street in a former TD Bank building (now the Women’s Centre). Named Roxton House, the store carried solid wood products and was dedicated to Canadian made furniture. Eisenberg’s Fine Furniture opened in 1991 across the street at 77 Edmonton Trail. This was considered a “premier showplace for luxury furniture” and attracted wealthier clientele.

Over the decades Riverside had become ‘the place’ to shop for new furnishings. Unfortunately the city’s downturn of 2008/ 2014 was hard to overcome and prompted the closure of all the Eisenberg furniture stores by 2017. Sadly after 98 years, there would no longer be furniture for sale here. New and different businesses have now occupied these prime spaces, bringing a new vibe to 4th Street and Marsh Road.

 Used furniture could also be purchased in Riverside. In 1967 the Bliss family opened “The Triple B” in the Southwest corner of the DeWaal Block (former location of Jeffries Drug store). They sold antiques as well as used furniture. Their daughter who lives in Bridgeland nowadays can recall going to auctions with her mother to find quality furniture items.

 Across 4th Street on the main floor of the Armour/ Reliance Block was Bud’s Used Office Furniture. Operating for many years, it covered the entire floor space of the two buildings and was a maze of desks and bookcases, filing cabinets, etc. from many eras. There are no doubt many interesting stories that could be told about this Calgary landmark.

 Who recognizes the Slingsby Block now? Hint – check the picture on the front page of last month’s Bridges. Come down to 4th Street in Riverside and check it out!

\*Thank you to Devon Blean for her research into the early Riverside families.

* Deb Lee, Heritage Committee