**Headline:** 201 E. 1st: A family’s legacy

**Subhed:** Home to Mann, Wyatt & Rice law firm, the blonde-brick building at the corner of 1st and Poplar holds the history of Hutchinson’s Mann family: A story of success, tragedy and building the American dream

By Rachel Hixson

When Scott Mann opens the door to his law firm’s office building each morning, he’s greeted by family history.

He walks down a hall where he remembers watching his architect father design some of Hutchinson’s most prominent and iconic buildings. He makes calls in an office where his Great-Uncle Bob spent decades working. He closes the door each evening to the building constructed by his great-grandfather’s brother 70 years ago.

Founding partner of Mann, Wyatt & Rice Injury Attorneys, Scott is the fourth generation of Manns to operate a business out of the mid-century modern building at 1st and Poplar in Hutchinson. It was first built in 1949 by Arthur R. Mann, a renowned Kansas architect and Scott’s great-great uncle. Arthur designed the building as office space for his architectural firm, Mann & Co., which he first founded in 1908. Arthur ran Mann & Co. out of the property until the early 60’s when he turned over operation to his son, Robert, a partner in the firm. Eventually Robert, or “Bob,” handed the reins to Norman Mann, Scott’s father who had joined the firm in 1958.

Scott, 59, was born in Hutchinson and spent many of his childhood days at the Mann & Co. office building watching his father and relatives work. Characterized by its blonde brick, black iron, ceiling-to-floor windows, and simple geometric designs, the building was the latest of the latest when it went up at 201 E. 1st. The Hutchinson News called it “modernistic” and “a prime example of the type of building which gradually is changing the face of Hutchinson.”

It’s no surprise the property was on the cutting edge. Mann & Co. Architects were known to employ the latest architectural advancements and trends and had a reputation for excellence. Locally, the firm is responsible for designing the Hutchinson Sports Arena, the middle and high schools, Holy Cross Church and school, Grace Episcopal Church, Trinity United Methodist Church, the Elks Lodge, and many other iconic public buildings and private residences across the state and region.

Excellence seems to run in the blood of the Mann family. Scott comes from a line of successful attorneys and architects who have built, grown, and maintained their own companies. He’s spent more than 20 years developing his firm, Mann, Wyatt & Rice, into an esteemed, regional operation with six lawyers and a staff of 11 serving four states. Before him, Arthur dedicated nearly 50 years to building Mann & Co. Architects into a respected and prosperous firm that is still thriving today. Other Manns who grew up in the Hutchinson area went on to establish successful law and architectural firms in other states.

As such, the building at 201 E. 1st serves as somewhat of a monument to the Mann family’s local lineage of resourcefulness and success. The property hasn’t always housed a Mann, however. There was a 29-year period where it was owned outside the family, and unfortunately that time was marred by personal tragedy for the Mann family. It was a period that shaped Scott’s future.

**201 E. 1st changes hands, and a plane crash changes Scott**

Architect Norman Mann moved with his wife Marilyn to Hutchinson in 1958 to join the family business. He was soon made partner at Mann & Co. Architects, ran the firm with his Great-Uncle Bob for more than a decade, and eventually took over full management in the ’70s.

On his watch, Norman continued Mann & Co.’s impressive body of work and reputation, putting his stamp on Hutchinson’s middle and high schools - which were cutting edge at the time - Prairie Hills Middle School, The Farmer’s National Bank in Buhler, First National Bank headquarters and branches, the YMCA, and many other large civic and private projects across the region and into Colorado.

It was during the First National Bank projects that Norman met Nation Meyer, the bank’s CEO. As a friendship developed between Norman and Nation, so did a business deal. The Manns’ decided it was in the firm’s best interest to sell 201 E. 1st to Nation and move Mann & Co. back into an office at First National Bank - where Mann & Co. had coincidentally first operated for about 5 years. 201 E. 1st became home to Nation’s company, First National Travel, for the next 29 years.

Norman ran Mann & Co. out of the bank for only a short time when tragedy struck. Along with being a gifted architect, Norman was also a pilot and often flew the company plane to out-of-town meetings. On Sept. 16, 1977, he and fellow architect Winston A. Schmidt were flying home from a school board meeting in western Kansas to discuss a school expansion project when a severe storm sent the plane careening into a field near Coldwater, killing both passengers.

Lynn Schwartzkopf, current president and CEO of Mann & Co., was a young associate architect at the time of the crash. He still remembers coming into the office the following morning and asking the receptionist if she knew where Norman was. She said she had no idea.

“I could tell from the sound of her voice that she was very worried,” he said.

The news came in at 10:30 a.m.

“We were shocked and overwhelmed,” said Lynn, who had joined the firm in 1973. “It was total pandemonium. At the time, my partner Harry Rutledge and I had only been with the firm a couple of years, so with our limited experience with running a practice, we didn’t fully realize the gravity of the situation.”

The crash devastated the Mann family and ultimately changed the course of Scott’s life. The 16-year-old was on a path to following in his father’s footsteps and becoming an architect, but watching an attorney help his mother navigate the legal system and deal with the insurance company after his father’s death convinced him that he wanted to become a lawyer.

“If my Dad hadn’t passed away, I would probably be an architect,” Scott said. “I guarantee it. His presence would have led me in that direction, and it would have been fun to work with him.”

**Following the law leads Scott back to 201 E. 1st**

Instead, Scott now felt drawn to practicing law - another career path his ancestors followed. Scott’s great-great grandfather, Albert Mann, was a prominent attorney and judge in Colorado and Nebraska. Albert and Arthur - founder of Mann & Co. Architects - were brothers and grew up together on a farm in Stafford County, where their parents had settled after moving to America from England in 1879.

Albert and Arthur’s parents, George and Eliza, were thrilled to be able to own land in the U.S. and gifted a quarter of land (160 acres) to each of their sons to do with as they wished. Albert and Arthur both chose to sell their land to pay for an education at the University of Kansas. Albert earned a degree in law, while Arthur chose architecture.

The brother’s paths diverged from there. Albert never returned home - practicing law and seeking political offices in Colorado and Nebraska. He spent the majority of his career as a county attorney and judge in Dawson County, Neb.

Arthur brought his architectural degree back to the area, choosing to move to Hutchinson, less than an hour from his parent’s home. He set up a household on 13th Ave. with his wife Ida and established what would become Mann & Co. Architects in 1908. After operating out of First National for the first few years, Mann & Co. moved into the brand new Wiley Building in 1913. The Hutchinson News reported that Mann & Co. was among the first tenants in the now-iconic Wiley Building and set up shop before the plaster was even set.

Mann & Co. struggled through the Great Depression in the ’30s, but business took off after 1937 and by 1949, the firm had outgrown the Wiley Building, and Arthur had the office at 201 E. 1st built.

Meanwhile, his brother Albert was raising his own family in Nebraska with his wife Annie and further establishing his career as a county judge. Albert was a family man and took interest in his children’s lives and passions. That eventually extended to his grandchildren.

Albert had a close relationship with his grandson Norman - Scott’s father - and encouraged the young man to follow his dream of becoming an architect. After Norman earned a degree in architecture from the University of Nebraska, Albert encouraged him to go work for his brother, Arthur, in Hutchinson. That’s when the brothers’ family histories were joined and the legacy of law and architecture continued.

While the aftermath of Norman’s death led Scott towards law, his older brother Vonn stayed the course of architecture, and the brothers both made their way back to Hutchinson after earning degrees from the University of Kansas. Scott worked for Gilliland and Hayes law firm, while Vonn was welcomed at Mann & Co.

The two brothers were eventually able to collaborate in remodeling the building where their father had built his career decades earlier. In 1999, Scott had struck out on his own and established Mann Law in a small office on 2nd Ave. with a support staff of two. By 2003, the fledgling firm had already outgrown that office, and Scott was searching for a new location. As fate would have it, Nation Meyer was searching for a buyer for the building he purchased from Scott’s father 29 years earlier.

**Coming full circle**

At that time, 201 E. 1st. was divided into two buildings separated by an outdoor breezeway. One side housed First National Travel and the other a dentist’s office. Nation was looking for two separate buyers, but Scott convinced him to sell him the entire building.

Scott had not stepped foot in 201 E. 1st in more than 20 years. Memories came flooding back. The interior was nearly exactly the same, right down to the 54-year-old carpet.

Nation said the property was move-in ready, and the carpet would surely hold up for another 10 years.

“We had to gut it,” Scott said.

Scott collaborated with architect Hal Swanson - who designed his house - and his brother Vonn - an architectural engineer who specializes in heating and air - to remodel the building from top to bottom. They didn’t change everything. The Mann & Co. drafting rooms near the front of the building remain with their sliding glass doors and 15-foot ceilings, and the team worked to preserve the building’s original character and design.

At that time, 201 E. 1st was a spacy property for Mann Law, which consisted of Scott and a small support staff. The dentist continued to rent one side of 201 E. 1st, and Scott also rented space to his accountant.

The dentist and accountant eventually moved out, and Scott’s office space expanded. As the office space expanded, so did his practice.

**Growing into 201 E. 1st**

In 2008, Scott brought on Hutchinson native Mike Wyatt. A recent Washburn University graduate, Mike was working for a Wichita defense firm but itching to move home. When he was first referred to Scott as a promising employee, the time wasn’t right. Scott had just had a bad hiring experience, and the 2008 housing market crash was a threat to Mann Law’s future.

“I thought, ‘I don’t want to hire Mike and have to let him go in 6 months. I have to see whether the work is going to continue coming in,’ ” Scott said.

The ‘08 crash proved to have no effect on the firm’s business, so Scott welcomed Mike, and has never regretted it. The first month, while Mike was still commuting from Wichita, he showed up at 7 a.m. each morning ready to work. He’s guided the firm into the new century by ushering in modern technology and establishing an auto injury law practice that has significantly grown the business.

“He’s just a go-getter,” Scott said.

Then came Mitch Rice. Scott had known Mitch as a fellow local lawyer for many years, and the two had developed a good professional relationship. Scott recognized that Mitch had an excellent combination of intelligence, personality, and work ethic. So, when Mitch found himself between law firms and was reluctantly considering opening his own practice, Scott hired him.

“Mitch is the guy that grew up in Careyville, went to Sherman Junior High and Hutch High,” Scott said. “He drag races. He just knows a whole group of people that I don’t know. He’s always generated all of his own work. He’s just always been a good guy to have around. He’s a hard worker. He’s fun.”

In 2015, Scott decided to make Mike and Mitch partners, and the current Mann, Wyatt & Rice was formed.

As the years went on, Scott continued to remodel parts of the office. A big remodel in 2014 resulted in more office space. Scott said he looked around and thought, “What am I going to do with all these offices?”

But then Scott and Mike met Jesse Tanksley in 2015. Scott grew up with Jesse’s father and was immediately impressed by the 30-year-old. When Scott, a Buhler High grad, took Jesse and his wife Brandi to dinner and discovered her father was renowned Buhler coach Jim Baker, the deal was sealed.

Next came Sam Schulte in 2017. Scott has a rule about only hiring attorneys who plan on living in Hutchinson. He broke the rule for Sam.

A Buhler and KU grad, Sam clerked for Scott one summer while in law school. Scott was already planning on hiring the young man full-time when Sam called to say he had met his future wife and they had decided to start their new life in Kansas City. With reservations, Scott agreed to have Sam work out of Kansas City.

It turned out to be a good decision. The firm had already started expanding into Missouri and Oklahoma and having an attorney in Kansas City was convenient. Since then, Colorado has been added to the region Mann, Wyatt & Rice serves.

The most recent hire is Mason Lent, Scott’s son-in-law, married to his eldest daughter, Taylor. Taylor had reservations about Scott hiring Mason because of obvious conflicts, but after working for a defense firm in Wichita for a few years, Mason felt drawn to Mann, Wyatt & Rice’s energetic atmosphere and the firm’s goals. Scott brought him on in late 2018.

**Moving into the future**

Bringing in young people helps reinvigorate the business, Scott said, and ensures the practice stays ahead of the times. Over his 35-year career, he has had to adapt as technology has changed how law is practiced.

“I started in the time where there were no computers, or if there was, it took up 12 rooms,” he said. “I still remember at Gilliland and Hayes when they said we need to get computers, and they’re going to sit on your desks. And then there was this thing called email.”

Before the wide use of computers and email, Scott and Carrie Barr - who has been his paralegal for 30 years - would spend hours typing up letters and briefs.

“I used to dictate like a mad man,” he said. “Carrie, poor gal, would have to transcribe it all into a letter. We were sending out letter, after letter, after letter. We killed a lot of trees.”

Scott now writes all of his own briefs and communicates with clients by email. The firm is moving towards being completely paperless.

As for the future, Scott isn’t exactly sure what it will hold. He’s never had a set plan for growth. That’s because it’s not about a plan for him, it’s about people.

A plan he did have was to work until he turned 55 and then retire. Fifty-five has come and gone, and Scott’s still showing up at the office and honing his practice.

He still loves what he does. He loves helping people. And he loves working in a space that holds so many memories of his father and family.

“I just think it’s really cool,” he said. “The building, in my opinion, has so much character. It’s a neat place to work. It’s fun to tell people that this was my dad’s building, and it was an architectural firm.”

*Scott Mann and his wife Teresa, known to everyone as T., have raised four daughters in Hutchinson - all either students or graduates of the University of Kansas. Mann & Co. Architects continues to thrive in Hutchinson at 1703 Landon St.*