

The 1980s and Beyond

Back in the 1940s, Chicago banker Edward Brown compressed volumes of history about the public's image of bankers into a single characterization. A good banker, he said with good-natured yet telling wit, is bald, overweight and suffering from hemorrhoids. The baldness conveyed maturity, a paunch meant prosperity and hemorrhoids, in his words, "give a look of concern to one's face."

In 1984, "Newsweek" magazine suggested a revision: "A good banker has a punk haircut, to show he's receptive to new ideas; a lean waistline, indicating his aggressiveness, and a clear case of ulcers — from trying to please so many different customers at one time."

Montana bankers have yet to count any punk-rock musicians among their ranks, but by the 1980s it was obvious the industry was dancing to a new and futuristic beat. Gone were the days of protection from competitors; deregulation had consigned banking's money-handling monopoly to old Charles Hamilton's "museum of antiquities." Gone were many of the tried and true banking methods of the past; scientific advances not only had soared far beyond the old Boston ledger, they had begun to bring into question the ultimate fate of bricks-and-mortar banking itself. Hands-off politics had joined with high-tech hardware to thrust banking into a brave new world by the 1980s — a world where the surest verity had become the certainty of change.

The full potential of the silicon chip was relatively slow to invade banking's staid environs. Even as computers digested

By the 1980s, ledgers were losing out to computers throughout Montana's banking industry.

Automatic teller machines, such as this ATM in a Helena supermarket, were a natural consequence of electronic banking.

