

# The Historic Huntsville Quarterly

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*One Dollar*



*Winter*

*1979*

**THE HISTORIC HUNTSVILLE  
QUARTERLY**  
Of Local Architecture & Preservation



# THE HISTORIC HUNTSVILLE QUARTERLY

of Local Architecture and Preservation

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## from the Editor

*This issue of the QUARTERLY is devoted to an examination of Huntsville's downtown and the historic commercial buildings that create its distinctive identity. Since the area lost its primary function as a retail center to the outlying shopping malls, it has suffered a lack of focus and purpose. The older buildings were considered an embarrassment to Huntsville's image of itself as a modern space-age city, and consequently, they were demolished or wrapped with aluminum. Fortunately this attitude is changing, and people are recognizing that the commercial buildings are as much of a cultural and historic resource of the community as are the old houses.*

*The downtown is now slowly reviving as the governmental, legal, professional, and tourist and entertainment center for the region. The tourists who are expected to visit the Huntsville Depot Museum, Constitution Hall Park, and the residential historic districts will create a market for a variety of specialty shops and restaurants. Conversion of the upper floors of the commercial buildings to apartments would further increase this pool of customers and bring life to the area after the offices are closed as well as provide a viable function for otherwise unusable space.*

*The value of a National Register listing is already obvious in the areas of Old Town and Twickenham. The city planning commission is currently working on a nomination to the National Register for the eligible commercial structures of the downtown. However, an historic district is not being created at the present time; instead, each building accepted to the Register will be individually listed. This will constitute a formal recognition of its historical/architectural significance while allowing the owner to partake of certain tax advantages.*

*Obviously much work still needs to be done. Empty buildings remain prime targets for demolition, and the area cannot afford to lose any more of them. The quality of the downtown environment derives as much from its scale, concentration and texture as it does from the individual buildings themselves. Those streets that are most attractive are the ones that are not broken by empty lots or disrupted by structures of inappropriate size or material.*

*Of course, it is not enough just to save the buildings; a new use must be found for them so that they are financially self-supporting. The goal is to achieve a viable, lively area that attracts people because it is a pleasant place to stroll, visit, do business and live. With the support and encouragement of the community, Huntsville's downtown can become as successful and attractive as Old Town and Twickenham. It can again become the heart of the city.*

# DOWNTOWN HUNTSVILLE

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*The First Alabama Bank was designed by George Steele in 1835 in the Greek Revival style which adapted the Greek temple form to every conceivable use. It is a beautiful example featuring the raised portico with six Ionic columns supporting a triangular pediment, a low gable roof, and a plain entablature that encircles the building. The sides are*



*stuccoed brick to match the masonry facade which originally contained only the massive central entrance. The structure is smooth, white, and elegant.*

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## I. Its Architecture and Preservation

*This article is a patchwork of lengthy excerpts from a recent book by Randolph Langenbach entitled A FUTURE FROM THE PAST: THE CASE FOR CONSERVATION AND REUSE OF OLD BUILDINGS IN INDUSTRIAL COMMUNITIES.\* It is this editor's belief that a knowledge and understanding of the material in this report is vital to the success of local preservation efforts in downtown Huntsville. Since the book cannot expect to reach a wide audience, this condensed version has been assembled featuring those sections most pertinent to local conditions. Surely Langenbach will forgive.*

*Although Langenbach is writing about the industrial communities of the Northeast, specifically those textile towns that have lost many of their mills, what he has to say about the future of these towns seems particularly applicable to Huntsville's central business district since it shares many of the features typical of these towns such as numerous cleared lots that remain undeveloped and a variety of vacant older buildings awaiting either a new use or the wrecker. His insights and proposals are equally valid for underutilized and threatened buildings everywhere; he understands the need to preserve older commercial structures not only for the sense of historic identity they provide the town but also for sound economic reasons.*

*\* A joint publication of the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development and the Massachusetts Department of Community Affairs, 1978.*

Langenbach begins with a description of Cologne, Germany, after it was leveled by bombs during World War II, and he goes on to write that

the results are the same in America where large areas have been leveled by cranes and bulldozers. There is, however, one difference - Cologne was completely rebuilt. With the careful restoration of what little survived, and the construction of new buildings in that same urban pattern and scale as the older city, Cologne today gives the impression of a city filled with history and character despite the fact that it was almost 90 percent destroyed during the war. Despite all odds, Cologne has put the sense of "time" back into its city fabric, while cities in the United States have seemed bent on removing what historic identity they might already possess, trading it for a homogenized and standardized appearance calculated

to be that which is the least offensive because it is so basically unstimulating.

In the face of economic hardship, communities have frequently undertaken massive clearance. In hope of renewal and rejuvenation, they have stripped away the principal features which gave them their identity, their industrial and commercial buildings, in the misplaced hope that they might somehow suddenly achieve a new and more modern identity without them.

This is a particularly destructive process, since not only has it robbed many communities of their visible past, but it has also failed frequently to attract the intended new development. Even at giveaway prices, developers do not always come, and the land often remains fallow for years, with a debilitating influence on the adjacent areas.

When new development is thwarted by the cost of assembling and clearing land, Urban Renewal can help, but clearance itself does not create that demand. In many old industrial cities, it is the lack of any real need for new development which has distorted the Urban



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More typical of the majority of early commercial buildings in Huntsville is this structure at 313 Franklin that was erected in 1841. Only seventeen feet wide and three stories high, it is a straightforward, functional design built of brick and relieved by the most restrained ornament. The upper windows retain the original twelve panes per sash, and the stone lintels are incised with a rectilinear pattern. The doorways have simple transoms, and even the balconies are plain except for a small trefoil centered in each arch.

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Renewal Program into a process consisting mostly of demolition.

This belief in perpetual progress became deeply rooted in the nation's consciousness during the period of massive and rapid industrial growth

portance. It is essential to the health and humanity of a community environment.

Stability in the built environment is needed to instill confidence in the future, whereas constant destruction

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*Italianate became so popular for commercial buildings following the Civil War that most of the structures on the Square were in this style at one time. The Donegan Block on North Side Square illustrates its elements admirably - a smooth brick wall sharply pierced by individual round or segmental headed windows of tall, thin proportions. Each opening is draped with a bulging cast iron molding and accented by a keystone. The building is crowned by an elaborate, bracketed metal cornice, here combined with a row of huge dentils. The Donegan Block was built in 1870 by James Donegan to replace a previous building of the same name that had burned in 1867. In 1967 the Italianate windows were restored and the ground floor remodeled.*



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and westward expansion which the United States experienced during the late nineteenth century. Indeed, the Industrial Revolution itself inculcated the concept that "new" is almost inherently good. A state of almost continuous change has become a condition of life in modern industrial society. In a context such as this it is easy to confuse the PRODUCT of change with the PROCESS, and to place positive value on anything that is new and different without understanding its true impact on a community.

What underlies this discussion is the conviction that building conservation is of more than just practical im-

and rebuilding can tear at the very heart of a community. The dislocation and emotional feeling of loss can break down the pride and respect which ordinary citizens may have in their home town. That which they had identified as being their world ceases to be part of them. The civic image can often seem abstract and foreign as familiar old structures are replaced by glass and steel and concrete - or worse, by dead asphalt.

A community needs to preserve its historic identity, not simply in order to profit from tourists, but to give strength and permanence to its local community. How can a Huntsville citizen "say nice



things to strangers" if his or her image of the real Huntsville has been carted away in a wrecker's truck?

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*A Good Book Store, once T.T. Terrys, on South Side Square is also an Italianate style building erected about 1880, but its design incorporates another 19th century material - cast iron. Its use became so widespread at mid-century that entire commercial facades were created of cast iron and attached to brick party walls. It was thought, falsely, to be fireproof, and it permitted a greater proportion of window to wall than did masonry. But local builders used it mostly as columns on ground floor facades as seen here. Although the building burned last summer leaving nothing but the front wall, it should be preserved as the facade for a new structure. Its original first floor design and cast iron columns with ornate support brackets are rare in Huntsville.*

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One of the long-term benefits of preservation is that old buildings do not depreciate in the way that new construction almost always does. This is not to say that the normal tax rules do not apply to renovated old buildings, but that in terms of their future value, it can be shown that old buildings often increase in value as they become older. This applies not only for great examples of period architecture, but also for more modest, but well preserved, examples of the local vernacular styles, and holds true for both the value of the property as real estate, and its ability to generate income from commercial activity.

Even the finest buildings of a recent period do not have the chance to last until the public interest in their antiquity and history can protect them. The existence of cranes and bulldozers makes it possible to wipe out whole districts in a matter of days, eliminating one of the major past impediments to redevelopment - the difficulty and cost of demolition by hand. Understanding this, it is important that cities plan for their future by protecting the significant buildings of a more recent vintage so that they do have a chance to last, allowing the surrounding areas to acquire the depth of character which only time can provide.

Planning for the eventual historic value of a particular building or group of buildings is like buying a long-term bond which will mature to produce a worthwhile dividend for the whole city in the future.

*The heart of Langenbach's report is a discussion of six conservation techniques that can be*

used to encourage reuse of older buildings and to protect them until such uses emerge.

1. PRESERVE MIXED USE WITH-  
IN URBAN AREAS. In order to make use of old buildings and districts to the fullest, especially in smaller cities, mixed uses must be encouraged. Traditionally, renewal efforts have tended to wipe out diversity from areas under the notion that decay is caused by uses which appear to be in conflict. The notion that residential areas, commercial districts, and industrial areas should be homogeneous and isolated from each other is apparently based on the observation that in areas which are experiencing decline, the mixture is often unpleasant, with businesses replacing fine old homes, and slum apartments filling the upper floors of deteriorated commercial buildings.

Yet, mixed uses can also be extremely beneficial, especially when an old area is being improved by adapting existing buildings into new uses. While slum housing in the upper stories of commercial structures frequently coincides with the deterioration of a downtown area, it is not the housing per se which is at fault, but conditions under which it has been introduced. Downtown areas of older communities can clearly benefit from the placing of renovated apartments on the upper floors of buildings which would otherwise remain vacant.

The introduction of residential uses into commercial areas means that these areas can function on a twenty-four hour basis, and shops located there can develop a stable group of customers. In this way buildings which might have been replaced by one-story structures can thus be preserved.



As the 19th century advanced, architectural styles became more exaggerated and picturesque as is amply demonstrated by the Schiffman building on East Side Square. It was erected prior to the Civil War, but in 1895, the owner completely remodeled it in the Romanesque Revival style. Although it retains the tall, narrow proportions typical of antebellum building, everything else has been changed. The wall is quarry-faced, gray masonry, the fenestration is irregular and varied, arches are used for openings and as accents, bays bulge out, turrets spiral skyward, and exquisite foliate designs decorate keystones, capitals, and piers. No surface is left untouched; it is a massive, vigorous, slightly outrageous, and absolutely delightful design. Stylistically it is the antithesis of the First Alabama Bank, and it is fitting that they should face each other across the Square.

Cities in the past rarely developed areas which were dominated solely by a single use, and there is no justification for insisting that they are better off today without that mixture of uses.

2. LET THE BUILDINGS BE THE GUIDE! One of the important qualities of old buildings is their ability to generate ideas for reuse based on their inherent qualities. Cities grow up because of the actions of the people in them. These actions can best be generated from a sense of personal pride and feeling for the environment.

Old buildings representative of a community's history and character have the power to excite people to develop economic and educational activities which would not have otherwise even been thought of.

3. DESIGNATE HISTORIC DISTRICTS. Historic districts in large cities have usually been enacted to prevent redevelopment, but in depressed areas they can serve to promote renovation and development. The problem in depressed areas is that deterioration feeds on itself; pervasive decay discourages an individual from fixing up his property. The lack of stability created by the uncertainty of what other people will do with their property ends up causing everyone to do nothing.

The selection of an area as an historic district can be a positive force because it stimulates outside interest in the quality and heritage of the area, controls the changes which people can make on buildings within the district, and helps to encourage people to improve their properties consistent with a common purpose and plan. It can also serve to

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As the 19th century ended, more restraint was applied to commercial design. The Struve-Hay building at Jefferson and Holmes is a structure in transition from the picturesque to the functional. Built in 1900, it has lost the second story above two of its stores, and the ground floor is altered beyond recognition although several of the cast iron pilasters are discernable. The Victorian influence erupts in the corner tower capped by a pyramidal roof and peak finial.

There is a metal cornice, but it is greatly simplified and the brackets are minimal. The handling of the second floor indicates a more modern approach; the windows are grouped under a single lintel, the sill runs unbroken across the entire facade, and there is some use of brickwork to create pattern. This is the start of a movement away from APPLIED ornament.



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Even though the Everett building on Washington was built in 1899, it is more contemporary than the Struve-Hay. Towers, metal cornices, and elaborate moldings have all been eliminated; instead the building derives its design from an imaginative use of brickwork and from its pattern of fenestration. The facade is divided into bays by brick pilasters which set up a repetitive pattern across the wall that is reinforced by the identical, closely spaced windows. The flush masonry lintels span each bay and would have created a color



contrast before the building was painted. The store is terminated by a brick parapet that alternates courses of stepped brick with a band of brick dentils. The center bay repeats the end bays while its increased height provides a focal point. It is an elegant, even delicate, design achieved through a thoughtful use of material and structural elements. There is nothing applied; everything is integral to the structure.

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attract outside funds in the form of preservation and rehabilitation grants and loans.

This legal designation places a recognized value on the buildings which may have formerly only been considered "old" and "run down." It protects property owners who want to rehabilitate their property but who are fearful that such rehabilitation might be negated by drastic and inconsistent changes made to the nearby properties.

4. RENOVATE A SINGLE STRUCTURE IN AN AREA. Another approach to community renewal is spot renovation. This approach, which can be particularly effective in residential areas, has potential also in commercial and industrial areas if the conditions are right.

The concept is for some private or public organization to renovate one key building in a rundown area in order to stimulate similar improvement nearby. In many instances this strategy is successful, with owners of adjacent properties following the example.

There are certain key factors which must be observed to make spot renovation and rehabilitation work: (a) The support of local financial institutions must be obtained so that people may borrow the funds necessary for improving their properties. (b) The renovation on the prototype building must be suitable for the neighborhood. (c) The area must have a degree of cohesiveness, community spirit, and identity. (d) There must be a reasonable proportion of

owner-occupied buildings in the area.

5. LEAVE SOME OLD BUILDINGS ALONE. To "leave buildings alone" does not necessarily mean that they will continue to run down, or that they will cause further decline in the community, since it is not often the buildings alone which cause a community to decline.

In fact, there are real advantages which may accrue to a town which has mills or commercial buildings remaining in an unrenovated state. The reason is that, as construction costs are driven higher, more industries will seek to buy and renovate existing older buildings. If a city has cleared away all its older buildings, then firms moving into the community must build new structures.

Since costs of new construction are so high as to prohibit cheap rental space in most new buildings, it will in turn be difficult to attract industries as investments which depend upon the availability of inexpensive space.

6. ESTABLISH A "SPACE BANK" FOR THE FUTURE. The conventional belief has been that the existence of buildings is justified only if they are fully used. Cities have traded the blight of underused buildings for the blight of vacant lots. Neither condition is healthy.

As long as buildings exist, there is hope that they might someday be used. With empty sites there is often only the unsubstantiated dream that someone for some reason might eventually build upon them.

The real problem, therefore, is how to conserve the buildings long enough so that, when the use for the space finally emerges, the building will be there to provide it.

What is proposed is that communities, instead of viewing excess unused space as a liability, see it as a potential asset to be preserved for the future. Just as forests and wilderness areas are held in reserve, and deserve being retained even when we have no present need for them, so too



*Harrison Brothers erected this double store on South Side Square in 1902, and nothing seems to have been altered since. Although it has a metal cornice, it is not bracketed, and it serves to emphasize the strong horizontal lines of the upper floors created by bands of contrasting stone which continue even across the piers. The street level retains the standard late 19th century storefront design. Huge sheets of plate glass provide display space while the band of vertical panes above increases the natural light inside the store. The double doors are centered, recessed, and up one step. An unusual feature are the two exposed metal beams that span each bay and support the brick wall of the upper stories.*



*During the late 1920's, a new commercial style became fashionable called Art Deco which was not a revival but a new style appropriate to the modern machine age. The Kress building on Washington, now the Breakers, was built by the Kress Company in 1931 in this style. Its emphasis is vertical and sharply machined. Terra cotta mullions separate the grouped windows which are recessed and highlighted at the top with stylized polychromed terra cotta. The cornice is a narrow strip of geometric low relief.*

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the empty space within industrial and commercial buildings is a resource for the future which we would be wise to retain.

What is needed is a plan which takes positive action to preserve old buildings when they become vacant or when they are being only partially used. It is suggested that, in effect, a "space bank" be created in these cities and towns, that a certain amount of empty floor space be expected and protected from demolition or neglect under the belief that unused floor space is better for the community than empty lots.

The first step is for the

city or town to adjust the taxes on a property so that the unused floors are taxed at a lower rate than those in use, or that for tax purposes the building is considered to be smaller than it is in reality.

On a community wide basis, the taxes should be determined by taking into account the amount of space which is in use or in demand, and not the amount of space which is in excess of that demand, and, therefore, for which some immediate use is unlikely. This would help to prevent the demolition of partially used buildings to save on taxes.

There may even be room for a more direct approach. The

city, or some civic organization, might purchase easements on the unused space, a procedure which is commonly applied to protect building facades. In this way responsibility would be transferred to the community for a period of years, and the space maintained, with any subsequent rentals of that space returning funds to the central kitty.

How can anyone really say that destruction is justified because "something better is built in the place of the buildings destroyed." Is it not better to add to the sum total of the record of human creativity than to subtract from it? Is it not better to allow people to be enriched by the products of all ages rather than just those of our own?

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*The Henderson National Bank was built in 1948 in the Art Moderne style which was an outgrowth of Art Deco. It was part of the national obsession with streamlining that affected the design of everything from toasters to airliners. The bank is a smooth masonry block with a rounded or streamlined corner, sharply cut windows flanked by bands of reeding, and two panels of stylized low relief at the cornice. The foundation and doorway are of contrasting green masonry.*



*The reveals of the entrance are stepped back to create a vertical emphasis that contrasts with the widely spaced, horizontal ribbons of ashlar on the wall, which create bands of reeding where they cross the entrance frame. Streamlining, vertical reeding, geometric low reliefs, and polychromatic effects were all features of Art Moderne. It is important to recognize the architectural merit of recent buildings while they are still relatively young so that they can survive to be old and venerable.*

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The key to the success of the "space bank" concept is building management. Buildings must continue to be maintained and all efforts should be directed to avoid complete abandonment of any single structure. Tax relief can be made contingent upon preservation of a well-kept appearance and of proper fire protection and security.

*In a postscript, Langenbach asks:*

What is it that says that a particular structure has to go? What are the rules that say that a new building, a new road or etc., must be exactly in the particular location, displacing the old building in question? Is not the present generation at least creative enough to meet the current human needs without destroying those things which give the cities the kind of character and identity which make them worth living in? \*

## II. Its Revitalization

It is unrealistic to assume that the downtown will again be a major retail area for Huntsville, but it is ideally suited to become the financial, professional, governmental and cultural center for the region.

Some of the small-scale, 19th century buildings have already been demolished, but those that remain are perfect for conversion to offices and specialized retail businesses. This is apparent by the increasing number of persons who are rehabilitating these buildings or erecting new ones on vacant land within the district. At the present time, 90% of the attorneys in private practice and 50% of the architects have their offices downtown or in the adjoining historic districts. Both the city and county government offices are located downtown in new structures, and many of the city's financial institutions have either their main office or a branch there.

The downtown is also suited for historical development as a tourist attraction. On the west is the Von Braun Civic Center which is already bringing many people into the downtown area who would stay longer if there were more attractions for them. On the north is the 1860 railroad depot which is being renovated for use as a transportation museum. One block south of the Square, the re-creation of Constitution Hall Park is currently underway.

The Weeden House, an early antebellum home, is being restored by the Huntsville Housing Authority. And on the east boundary of the downtown are two residential historic districts containing over 500 homes representative of 150 years of domestic architectural styles; both districts are already listed on the National Register of Historic Places.

While the development of the downtown should focus on its suitability as an office and cultural center, it also needs retail establishments to serve the office workers and tourists with goods and services, especially restaurants and speciality shops. The area should encourage small, specialized businesses that would attract the type of clientele who frequent the area for other reasons.

The Alabama Space and Rocket Center is already attracting 266,000 people to the city each year, and in 1977 the Civic Center brought 51,500 people into the downtown for conventions and trade shows who spent about eight million dollars while in Huntsville. The creation of additional museums and historic attractions would encourage a great percentage of these visitors to stay longer which would increase the amount spent in the city by them.

If the downtown museums and surrounding environment could attract at least a quarter of the out-of-town visitors expect-



ed by the Civic Center and the Space and Rocket Center this year, that would bring close to 100,000 people into the area who would require goods and lodging. In fewer than five years with good public relations, the downtown should be attracting tourists on its own.

The increased activity and development created by a large influx of tourists would give the downtown area a vitality and attractiveness which would make the area desirable for non-tourist related development. By stressing the unique, historic character of the area, it would achieve an ambiance favored by people who are tired of plastic, mass-produced shopping malls and suburban, car-dependent sprawl.

Much demolition, in the name of progress, has already taken place in the downtown, but enough notable 19th and early 20th century structures remain

to give the district a unique flavor if they are rehabilitated and put to a contemporary use. There are today in the downtown approximately 325,000 square feet of vacant space in existing buildings. The majority of it is eligible for the historic rehabilitation tax advantages. At the present, the downtown employs almost 4,000 people; however, if the vacant space were occupied by offices and/or stores, approximately 1,000 more jobs would be created. In addition, there are numerous tracts of empty land available for development which would become highly desirable with the increased activity in the downtown.

Rehabilitating the downtown to create a total historical area will provide Huntsville with a prime tourist attraction that, in turn, will benefit the city by revitalizing the area and making it a desirable place to work and conduct business.\*



*This photograph shows North Side Square in 1939 - before the age of aluminum siding. At the far right is the old Henderson Bank before it burned. The next four buildings have been hopelessly "modernized." Watson's (Marja's) has only had the street level changed. The Donegan Block to its left looks even better today since the three square windows on the second floor that Montgomery Ward installed have been replaced by replicas of the originals; notice that the building was then light with dark moldings. The building on the far left bears faint resemblance to today's structure. Each store sported a cloth awning and the street was paved with brick.*

## News...



THE DALLAS MILL WAS ACCEPTED to the National Register of Historic Places on September 18, 1978. This is the first industrial structure in Madison county to receive national recognition for its historical and architectural significance.

Construction on the Dallas Mill began in April of 1891 on fifty acres of land in the East Huntsville Addition just north of the city limits along the tracks of the Memphis and Charleston Railroad. Operation of the mill began in November, 1892, and by 1894 it was running 25,000 spindles and 704 looms. Because the mill was located outside the city and drew many of its operatives from the countryside, housing and public buildings had to be provided for them by the company. An entire village complete with school, churches, stores, and recreation facilities grew up around the mill.

Dallas Manufacturing Company was extremely important to Huntsville as it was the first large weaving mill to locate here in the lean years following the Civil War. Its construction on the edge of town provided the town with a financial base which had been lacking since the war. As one contractor predicted, "it settles

a doubt as to Huntsville's future (and) gives a renewed confidence." Other textile firms quickly followed the example set by Dallas, and soon Huntsville was surrounded by cotton mills and their accompanying villages. The influx of people and money resulted in a building boom for Huntsville during the early 20th century that only came to a halt in 1930 when the effects of the depression reached here.

Dallas was shut down during much of the 1930's as a result of the depression and of labor union activity. In 1944 Dallas began selling the mill cottages to employees and finally sold the mill property itself in 1949. The Dallas Manufacturing Company was dissolved in 1952.

The Dallas mill building is a fine example of 19th century brick mill architecture with its repetitive rows of large arched windows to provide light and ventilation, its distinctive towers which rise above the roofline, and the enormous smokestacks - those ubiquitous symbols of 19th century industrial prosperity.

Dallas Mill is located on the south side of Oakwood Avenue just east of the railroad tracks.

THE NATIONAL TRUST FOR HISTORIC PRESERVATION has awarded the Historic Huntsville Foundation a Summer Intern for 1979. The Foundation's proposal was one of 35 selected for funding from across the country. A college student majoring in preservation, architectural history, or architecture will spend twelve weeks in Huntsville this summer creating renderings for the facade restoration of selected commercial buildings in the downtown. The completed designs will be presented to the building owners who will be under no obligation. It is hoped, however, that they then might be convinced to restore their buildings.

The intern also will compile an audiovisual production combining all of his proposals into a program that can be presented by the Foundation to various civic groups to create public support for a revitalized downtown.

The intern will be selected by the Foundation in February from a list of student applicants submitted by the Trust.

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ALABAMA AD VALOREM TAXATION UPDATE: If you own property that is individually listed on the National Register of Historic Places, it is now eligible for the 10% assessment ratio regardless of its use. To qualify for the change to Class III, you must present to the tax assessor the letter from the Alabama Historical Commission informing you that the property has been added to the National Register. This should be done between October 1 and December 31, 1979.

If you own property located in either Twickenham or Old Town Historic Districts that is

NOT used as a single family, owner-occupied residence and you wish to take advantage of the reduced ad valorem assessment rate for historic properties, you must have the property CERTIFIED before October 1, 1979. This requires filing a certification application with the U.S. Secretary of the Interior. If the property contributes to the historic significance of the district, the Secretary will notify you by letter to that effect. This letter must be presented at the tax assessor's office between October 1 and December 31, 1979, and it must be dated prior to October 1, 1979.

Owner-occupied, single family residences within the districts will automatically receive the 10% assessment ratio and need not be certified now. If you have questions about the certification procedure or wish to file a certification application, contact Linda Bayer at the Huntsville Planning Commission.

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THE GUDENRATH BUILDING AT 102-106 North Washington Street may have been demolished before you read this. The owner, Mr. Bobby Yarbrough, had already signed a demolition contract before HHH became aware that the building was in danger.

The structure has stood vacant for several years with the usual attendant deterioration. The owner naturally decided that it was cheaper to pay taxes on a vacant lot than on an old, empty building, hence the demolition contract. This is the sequence of developments that Huntsville cannot afford to have repeated if the downtown is to retain any of its historical identity for the future.

The Gudenrath building was erected in 1900 by Otto and Joseph Gudenrath who had hired the architect H. D. Breeding to design the structure. Breeding maintained an architect's office in both Huntsville and Chattanooga for several years around the turn of the century before eventually moving to Birmingham where he worked until his retirement about 1930.

The specifications called for a structure 75 feet front and 80 feet deep of two stor-

The Gudenrath family, who ran a wholesale grocery as well as the bakery, disappeared from Huntsville about 1930, perhaps as a result of the depression. In 1934 the Yarbroughs hired Huntsville architect Edgar L. Love to remodel the Gudenrath building, primarily to convert the second floor into a suite of doctor's offices.

A number of Huntsville merchants have leased space in the Gudenrath through the years, most recently the Twickenham Pharmacy. The American



ies. "The first floor will consist of three stores of 20 feet each, running back the full length of the building, and the second floor will be divided into many commodious offices. The Messrs. Gudenrath will operate a steam bakery in one of the stores." <sup>1</sup> In 1908 the building contained a bakery and two grocers.

In 1918 the Gudenraths sold the property to William M. and G. Walter Yarbrough for \$18,000.

<sup>1</sup> MERCURY, March 14, 1900, page 5.

Red Cross and the Tennessee Valley Council of the Boy Scouts also maintained offices in it.

The Gudenrath is one of the finest commercial buildings of downtown Huntsville. Its two-story, red brick facade is divided into three bays by continuous raised piers that are terminated above the cornice by contrasting masonry caps. Each bay of the second floor features four, round-headed windows accented by masonry arches with keystones that

spring from brick impost. A contrasting ashlar sill runs unbroken across each bay. A corbel table separates the two floors and is repeated below the brick cornice which is capped by a thin ribbon of stone.

The structure is visually exciting, relying for its effect on a repetition of facade elements, contrasting materials and an imaginative use of brickwork. The increased height and slight variations in the center bay impart to the building a strong presence and balance.

Demolition of the interior of this landmark commercial building has already begun. However at this writing, the building could still be restored and put to a new, viable use. Its demolition would not only deprive the downtown of one of its better buildings, but also would be a serious loss to that block of Washington street by creating a gaping hole next to the Dunnivant's building. The Gudenrath building is eligible for the National Register and the tax benefits that ensue as a result of such listing.

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MR. WILLIAM C. ALLEN OF Jackson, Mississippi, will be the speaker for the second program of the HHF's 1978-79 series. Mr. Allen will present a slide lecture on "Historic Architecture and Preservation in Mississippi." His particular interest is the architecture of Natchez, and he has numerous slides of the mansions in this antebellum town. Mr. Allen is an architectural historian who received his master's degree from the University of Virginia. He worked for the state historic preservation office of

Mississippi until last October as Chief of the Restoration and Development Section. He is now a free-lance restorer and architectural historian residing in Jackson. The lecture will be Thursday evening, January 25, at 7:30 p.m. in the Auditorium of the Huntsville Public Library. It is open to the public.

AN EVENING OF FILMS will be the third program presented by HHF. Each film will focus on some aspect of restoration and preservation; they will be shown on Tuesday evening, February 20, at 8 p.m., in Parlor B of the Von Braun Civic Center. Open to the public.

THE FINAL PROGRAM will be a panel discussion on "Guidelines for Decorating, Furnishing and Landscaping a Historical Building for a Home or Business." Panel members will be Madelyn Hereford, Dr. and Mrs. John Hoar, and Harvilee Harbarger. This discussion will take place Tuesday evening, March 20, at 8 p.m., in Parlor B of the Von Braun Civic Center. Open to the public. \*

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*THE HISTORIC HUNTSVILLE FOUNDATION is a non-profit organization established in 1974 to encourage the preservation of historically or architecturally significant sites and structures in Huntsville and Madison county and to increase public awareness of their value to the community. Membership is open to all persons interested in enhancing Huntsville's future by preserving its significant architectural heritage. To join, send a check with your name, address, and telephone number to Evelyn Riggs, Treasure, P.O. Box 786, Huntsville, Alabama, 35804. Student - \$2.50; Individual - \$10; Family - \$15; Business - \$50; Patron - \$25-99; Benefactor - \$100 and up.*

# Reviews...

**DOWNTOWN BIRMINGHAM Architectural and Historical Walking Tour Guide**, edited by Marjorie Longenecker White. *Birmingham Historical Society* (1425 22nd Street, South, Birmingham, Alabama 35205) and *The First National Bank of Birmingham*, 1977. 142 pages, illustrated, index, paper, \$5 (add \$1 for postage and handling).

**NINETEENTH CENTURY MOBILE ARCHITECTURE An Inventory of Existing Buildings**. *Mobile City Planning Commission* (P.O. Box 1827, Mobile, Alabama 36601), 1974. 76 pages, illustrated, glossary, paper, \$4.

Both of these books are in the form of a photographic catalogue with a descriptive paragraph supplied for each structure; but, the resemblance ends there.

**DOWNTOWN BIRMINGHAM**, as the title implies, covers only the central part of the city and consequently is concerned mostly with commercial buildings. The Mobile book is an inventory of existing 19th century structures, and the majority of these are residences. Only buildings that can be dated to the 19th century are included, while the Birmingham book covers the total period of downtown development from the city's founding in the 1870's to the present decade.

**NINETEENTH CENTURY MOBILE ARCHITECTURE** begins with a two page introduction which explains the general architectural development of the city and the methods used for collecting the material. This inventory is seen as a way to encourage architectural continuity in the construction and reconstruction of the city and as a guide for touring the historic areas of the city.

The book contains 157 entries of which the majority are (or were) residences. There are no 18th century buildings extant in Mobile although settlement there dates from about 1700. The largest number of recorded structures fall within the period from 1850 to 1870 while the last two decades of the century are represented by eleven examples of which only a couple are fully developed Queen Annes. Unfortunately no explanation is given for this disproportionate distribution. It is hard to know whether it is the result of local building conditions and tastes, of selective demolition, or of some other factor.

Based on this inventory, it appears that Mobile throughout much of the 19th century was architecturally conservative and retained two basic house types to which current stylistic features were applied. One was a three-bay, two-story, brick box with double bridged chimneys and gable roof; the other was the raised wooden cottage derived from Creole building. As other styles followed the Federal, only the detailing changed. Bracketed

eaves and a low hipped roof were concessions to the Italian Villa rage while a bay window and jigsaw woodwork indicate the late Victorian period. The most common and distinctive ornament, though, is the decorative cast iron grillwork that adorns porches and galleries, with the particular design motif of each providing a clue to its age.

It is fascinating to mentally compare how the same styles were interpreted in Huntsville and Mobile. Although they shared many elements, the end result was not necessarily the same. It is apparent that while the same style may have been popular in both places, the way it was executed depended largely on local conditions and traditions.

DOWNTOWN BIRMINGHAM is compiled as a tour guide to encourage people to look at the visual record of the city's buildings with the hope that the experience will foster an appreciation of Birmingham's history and built environment. It begins with a brief history of the town's founding and development to the present day.

The book is divided into approximately thirty short walking tours with each area sharing a common historic background. Buildings and alterations are dated, and architects and contractors are listed when known. But this is not just an objective cataloging of extant buildings; the picture of a modern parking garage is flanked by an old photograph of the building that was razed to make room for it. "Before" and "after" shots of modernized buildings show clearly what has been lost. Old views of street-

scapes during a busier day are compared with the contemporary street life. The text provides not only architectural information but also descriptions of the various businesses that inhabited the structures and the way that blocks evolve from one function to another. The book presents an excellent view of the city in transition - of the constant growth and modification that take place as the city center adapts to ever changing conditions and needs.\*

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#### MONEY

The Alabama Historical Commission has awarded preservation grants for 1979 to three restoration projects in Huntsville.

Receiving matching funds are the Weeden House, Gates Avenue, for structural stabilization, heating and air conditioning; the East Huntsville Baptist Church for interior and exterior restoration of Oak Place (George Steele's home on Maysville Road) for use as offices; and the O. R. Hundley House on Madison Street for roof, porch and window repair and exterior painting.

This money is distributed to the states by the Heritage Conservation and Recreation Service of the U.S. Department of the Interior for use in preserving National Register properties. The amounts of the grants were not available at this writing.

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#### PHOTOGRAPH CREDITS

*Collection of the Huntsville Public Library: cover, pages 10, 14, 15 and 21.*

*Linda Bayer: all others*



## And Old Views

One event that did much to sensitize the citizens of Huntsville to the need to protect their built environment was the demolition of the old courthouse in 1964 to make way for the present building, the fourth on the Square.

There is no doubt that the old courthouse was outdated for the needs of the greatly expanded community; however, consultants recommended that it be retained for use by the courts and a new building to house county offices be erected elsewhere on the Square. This would seem to be a far more satisfactory solution than the one adopted since it would have retained the original scale and space of the Square as well as the fine old structure.

Earlier in the century, in 1913, when it became obvious that additional courthouse space was needed, there was also disagreement about whether the existing courthouse, the second, should be enlarged or replaced. The second courthouse had been designed by

George Steele in 1835 and opened in 1840. After much debate among county commissioners and citizens about which course to adopt, the commissioners decided to enlarge and remodel Steele's courthouse.

A number of architects had submitted proposals both for additions and for new construction. Edgar Love, a local architect who designed many of Huntsville's early 20th century commercial and institutional structures, presented a plan for renovation and enlargement. His proposal was to add two wings to Steele's building and then completely modernize the existing part. Fortunately as part of his work, Love made measured drawings of the Steele courthouse which have been preserved.

Two other architects submitting plans were T. E. Brown of Atlanta and the R. H. Hunt Company of Chattanooga.

But the commissioners finally selected the proposal of C. K. Colley of Nashville that provided "for remodeling the building, adding another story and placing two new entrances." <sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> *MERCURY*, March 5, 1913, page 6.



The construction contract was let in June of 1913 to the Little-Clecker Construction Company of Anniston whose bid of \$59,000 was the lowest. According to the MERCURY, "the fact that the Little-Clecker Company underbid all competitors is due to their making a specialty of court house construction. They built the Jackson county court house, also that in Athens, Georgia, and have recently completed two court houses in Mississippi. The plans of Architect Colley provide a first class, strictly up-to-date building of modern construction. The old building will be torn away except the walls and two wings will be added." <sup>2</sup>

"The Little-Clecker Construction Co. is making rapid progress on the work of wrecking the court house and the ancient building has lost nearly all of its outlines. The timbers that are being taken out show the character of materials that were used 75 years ago. Yellow poplar beams 50 feet long and 12 by 18 inches hewed out of solid log are taken out and are in almost perfect condition." <sup>3</sup>

However by September, serious problems had developed; everything had been demolished except the columns of the two porticos and the foundations, and it was discovered that even the columns were so weak that they would have to be torn away or rebuilt. The commissioners, architect, and contractor met to discuss this new development; the commissioners claimed that the contractor had made the contract to rebuild the courthouse, and they seemed disposed to hold him to it -

even though the entire building had been razed. A short time later the columns were knocked down; a large crowd watching the destruction was surprised to learn that the columns were hollow and that the "cornerstone contained nothing of interest." <sup>4</sup>

The commissioners were now in the position of having to build a complete new courthouse since nothing but the foundations remained of the old one. The new building was erected on those foundations, and an east and west wing were added. The new columns were to be of hewn solid stone, the exterior walls of light or gray, best quality pressed brick, and the stonework of the best Indiana Buff limestone.

By early 1914 construction was moving along rapidly. The hoisting derrick was placed in position in February to raise the stone columns into place on the foundations, and the cupola was being framed. But the columns remained the most interesting aspect of the work to the reporters and the spectators.

There were twenty columns, each composed of four sections with each section weighing 3000 pounds. What could have been a serious accident during their placement turned out to be merely amusing: "Breaking into four sections under the strain of the enormous weight of a big section of stone column that was being hoisted at the new court house today, the cog wheel of the hoisting derrick was thrown across the street into the stores on Exchange Row (North Side Square) nearly 200 feet distant and several hundred damage done.

<sup>2</sup> June 18, 1913, page 5.

<sup>3</sup> MERCURY, July 30, 1913, page 1.

<sup>4</sup> DEMOCRAT, October 15, 1913, page 1.

"One section, about 10 or 12 inches long, was thrown through the glass above Terry Brothers display window. After penetrating through the glass, it went through three leather suit cases and stopped in the third. Another piece went through a big window of the Goldsmith-Grosser store and smashed a telephone. Another piece went through Damson's & Abraham's plate glass window. The fourth piece went lower than the others and took a spoke out of the wheels of a buggy that was standing in front of the Terry store and in which a lady was seated...." <sup>5</sup>

By April finishing work had begun on the interior, the contract for furniture let to Office Outfitters of Birmingham for \$12,000, and the eight foot long brass arrow mounted above the dome. The completion of the courthouse was celebrated on September 10, 1914.

It would seem, however, that the unanticipated expense of having to erect an entire new building forced some work to be eliminated at the time of construction. The grand juries of 1928 and 1929 repeatedly urged the county commissioners to have various repairs made to the building. A typical report read: "The column at the north east corner of the Court House is out of plumb about four inches and its foundation is disintegrating. This condition is a constant menace to public safety and, although it has been brought to the attention of the commissioners, nothing has been done to remove the danger which threatens injury to persons who gather in large numbers at and near the column referred to. The sanitary closets in the Court House are

in bad state of repair and are poorly kept. There are leaks in the roof of the north and south porches. Radiators in the Circuit Court room and in the Inferior Court are leaking, causing damage to the cork floor in the Circuit Court. The interior of the Court House presents a dingy and unkept appearance...it is specially recommended that the entire interior of the Court House be painted." <sup>6</sup>

That April a contract was let for the painting. "Colors have not been definitely decided upon but shades proposed are dark gray for the lower portion of the walls and a lighter shade of gray for the upper portion, and canary for the ceiling. With the exception of several rooms, the court house has never been painted, and the work to be done will make a great improvement in its appearance." <sup>7</sup> Additional repairs were made in the next few years.

In 1962 with lack of space again a pressing problem for the county, the commissioners voted to demolish this courthouse and replace it with a large, modern structure. Two years later the demolition contract was signed and the building razed. The twenty fluted columns were saved for possible reuse elsewhere, and the brass arrow found a new home atop the First Alabama Bank on West Side Square. \*

<sup>6</sup> *COMMUNITY BUILDER*, February 23, 1928, page 3.

<sup>7</sup> *WEEKLY TIMES*, April 19, 1928, page 4.

<sup>5</sup> *MERCURY*, March 11, 1914, page 6.

## from the Chairman

I am happy to report that the 1979 Calendar of Historic Huntsville was a complete sell-out before Christmas (to the dismay of a number of last minute shoppers)! Proceeds from the calendar sales will be used to establish a much needed Foundation revolving fund. A less tangible but possibly more important outcome of the calendar project has been the increased awareness of and appreciation for Huntsville's historic buildings and interest in the activities of our Foundation.

Thanks to Dorothy Chaffee, student director of the UAH Art Gallery, for the special reception for HHF members on December 20. The photographic exhibit of Huntsville architecture grew out of a class taught by Professor John Sarn.

Your 1979 HHF dues are now due. In case you have forgotten, individual memberships are \$10; family, \$15; patron, \$25; and business, \$50. Please mail your check promptly to Evelyn Riggs, Treasurer, P. O. Box 786, Huntsville, Alabama 35804. As a member you receive free of charge four issues of the HHF QUARTERLY and are eligible for reduced admission to all programs sponsored by the Foundation. We appreciate your continued support and hope to increase our membership substantially this year.

Mr. Louis Booth of Lockwood-Greene Engineers and Architects, Spartanburg, South Carolina, has contacted our Foundation with regard to the Dallas Mill. His firm has all the original architectural drawings and plans for the mill and also drawings for much of the original machinery. He offered to have copies made of all this material and will donate it to our Foundation.

Thanks to all of you who have helped make this a spectacular year for the Historic Huntsville Foundation.

*Lynn Jones*





*from*

**Historic Huntsville Foundation, Inc.**

**P. O. Box 786**

**Huntsville, Alabama 35804**