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Introduction

Historic Huntsville Foundation

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Introduction

This issue of the **Quarterly** contains selected articles from the Huntsville Daily Times of June 28, 1925. Called the Greater Huntsville-Tennessee Valley Progress Edition, this paper celebrated the tremendous advances that had occurred in recent years. For Huntsville the 1920s was an era of general prosperity and growth: cotton textile mills and their attendant villages provided employment and attracted many new residents, numerous new houses were being erected, the downtown was experiencing a renewal as well as extensive new growth, and public facilities such as the schools and hospital were being expanded and modernized.

The articles selected from this newspaper for the **Quarterly** are generally those that describe the physical development of Huntsville. They are interesting for the portrait of Huntsville in the mid 1920s that they reveal, but they are also intriguing because they demonstrate how little local issues have changed in the last fifty years, despite the phenomenal growth of the city during the 1950s and 60s and the shift from a cotton mill economy to one based on space exploration and high technology. In 1925 the city was building the hospital and contemplating future additions to it; today the additions are far more extensive than the original structure, which—as this is written—is being dismantled after only 56 years of service. A lack of money prevented the school board in the early 1920s from providing raises for the teachers and from erecting needed school buildings until a 3-mil tax was approved in 1922 by the voters; during the last few years school funding has created a continuing controversy in Huntsville with teachers being annually threatened with dismissal unless the school budget is increased. Mr. Pettus' description of the 1880s fight over the funding of a system of free turnpikes in Madison County sounds remarkably similar to the current disagreements about the construction of the urban portion of I-565. In 1925 the city proper was very small with the majority of the population and the major industries located outside the city limits; now the limits have been expanded to include most of the settled areas although many of these same industrial complexes are still not within the city limits. The newly platted subdivisions described here were also at that time south of the existing boundaries, but they initiated the trend—which continued for half a century—of locating ever larger houses on ever larger lots ever farther south along Whitesburg Drive. Only recently has there been a shift in the housing market to smaller houses on reduced lots, often taking the form of attached townhouses. Although the economy has been chiefly responsible for this return to concentrated residential neighborhoods (such as were common during the Victorian period), the sprawling suburb of widely spaced individual houses, made possible by the automobile, remains the dream of many homeowners.

In the midst of all these articles extolling Huntsville's great leap into the twentieth century was one voice suggesting that "progress always demands some sacrifices." Miss Shreve lamented the demolition of familiar landmarks and called for the preservation and restoration of the many fine old buildings still standing in the city. Her plea to incorporate the past when planning for the future has today become a nationwide movement with federal, state and local programs aimed at renovating those structures that have escaped the relentless quest after the new and the modern that characterized much of the twentieth century.