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New Life For Old Walls

Richard Davis

To most people living in Huntsville, it is a small town with small town ways, still experiencing growing pains, struggling to get up there with the big boys. If you have moved here from a city the size of Atlanta, New York or Chicago, then Huntsville seems especially to have that character.

Being a native of Huntsville as was my father, grandfather and great-grandfather, and growing up on a farm, I remember that the only time you could afford a new pair of shoes or a pair of pants was when you brought in a good cotton crop. Such memories as these make one really appreciate the way our city has grown and prospered through the years. I feel we as a city have made a great statement and contribution to the 20th century.

It is nice to be able to look back to our youth and see in our mind's eye, not the present hustle and bustle of today's world, but a time when things were much less frantic. I can still remember my great-aunt, Buell Davis, saying that if having the good old days back meant milking cows twice a day, bringing in firewood every day for cooking, and feeding six or eight fieldhands, then you could have the good old days with her blessing. I am sure that to her country life was as hectic as life was to those living in town.

I would often accompany my father to town when he would come to sell produce to the grocery stores and cafes. Many of the places were in the Lincoln mill area. There was the grocery store in the building that now houses the Girl's Club. That building also housed a barbershop, movie theater, and public shower. For a dime on a Saturday you could get a haircut, shower, and see a matinee at the theater upstairs. Across the street was Davy's Cafe. where you could get the best burgers in town. A pool hall was next door. My

father would always say that when I got older he better never see me there. Just why, I don't know, but I imagine that if the building had been standing when I did get older, that would have been one of the first places I would have gone just to see what I had missed. Dad would always take me to Mr. Condra's ice cream shop next door to Davy's Cafe and the pool hall, to get a popsicle which Mr. Condra had made himself.



Years later I was to acquire the property and open a furniture refinishing shop in that same ice cream shop. Then I opened an antique shop two doors down in a building that had once been a mercantile store but which I remembered to be the home of the Dr. Pepper Bottling Company.

My earliest recollections of the building which is now Village Antiques date back to 1955. After leaving school at Lincoln Elementary I would often stop on my way home to look in the window of the Dr. Pepper Bottling Company and watch the bottles as they traveled down the conveyor belts to be filled and then placed in wooden crates for delivery to Huntsville stores.



Built in 1922 by John McKinney and his wife, the building originally was both business and residence to the couple. Downstairs was a thriving mercantile store, and upstairs John and his wife made a comfortable nine room apartment for themselves. After the McKinneys closed their store in the forty's the Dr. Pepper company leased the building for many years. When I purchased the building in 1989 it had fallen into great disrepair and decay. Although the renovation is still not complete, I have been able to open

what I hope is a unique antique shop. It offers not only a selection of both Southern and European furniture and accessories, but a fine line of classic grand pianos as well.



Meridian Street, and in particular the Lincoln Mill area, seems to have gone a complete circle. First the main hub of business going north from Huntsville, it later seemed to be the forgotten area of town. But now it is experiencing a resurgence of business and cultural activity. It is really exciting to see an area have a rebirth, but even more exciting and satisfying to think that I have had a part in this rebirth, however small it might have been.

