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Take a Walk

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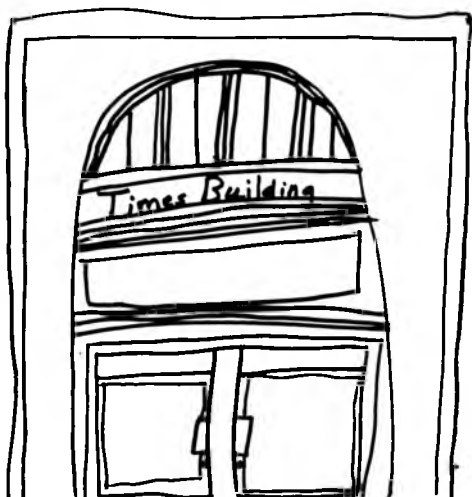


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*Drawing of the Times Building on
Holmes Avenue
by
Kathryn Wilburn
&
Tho Nguyen*

TAKE A WALK

by

CAROL KAMBACK

Last year, Huntsville City School teachers began leading their students out of the classrooms and onto the streets. And there the children learned their history, reading, science, math, and art lessons.

Supported in part by a grant from AmSouth BanCorporation and the Polaroid Corporation, over fifty teachers attended workshops to learn how to conduct a Walk Around the Block, a concept devised by Ginny and Dean Graves of the Center for Understanding the Built Environment (CUBE) in Kansas City. On these walks, students go on a visual scavenger hunt and document their findings by photographing, drawing, rubbing, and writing descriptions.

The teachers have tailored their walks to whatever they are teaching in their classrooms. For instance, second graders at Chapman Elementary recognized the ABC's in buildings in their neighborhood and found a fulcrum in a nearby park. Fifth graders from the Academy for Academics and Arts walked in Old Town, studying architectural styles in preparation for designing houses for the town they created as

they studied economics and city planning. And Chapman fifth graders, studying structures in their science class, found trusses and cantilevered canopies at the Von Braun Civic Center.

In May, a group of fifth graders from Chapman, Colonial Hills, and Lincoln went on a Walk Around Downtown as a part of their study about historical preservation. Before leaving the classroom, they established their own criteria for preservation decisions. They decided that if a building meets any one of the following criteria, it could qualify for preservation:

- It has historical significance.
- It is of architectural interest.
- It contains outstanding workmanship and good materials.
- It is a candidate for adaptive reuse, thus saving money and resources.

Using these criteria, they evaluated buildings downtown.

They started by considering the Monroe Office Supply building, on the corner of Holmes and Green, which is the proposed site for the new Arts Center. The students quickly decided this building did not meet their criteria and the Arts Council would probably want to start from scratch.

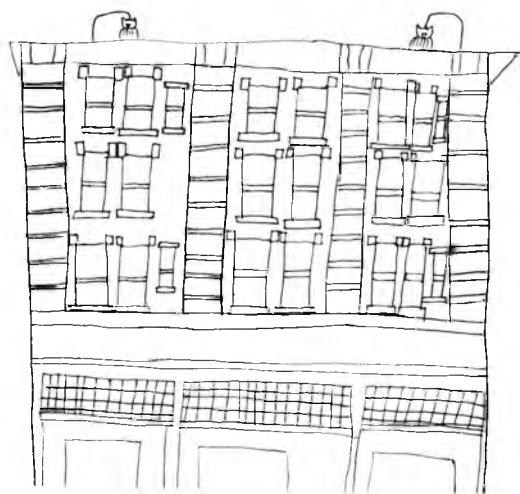
Next, they approached the old Huntsville Times Building. The first thing that fired their imaginations were the sidewalks along the building, as they thought of how exciting it would be if the glass block could be restored and the whole walk underlit. As they photographed and drew, they decided that this building fit all of their criteria and was definitely a candidate for adaptive reuse, as an apartment and/or office building, possibly with stores on the bottom floor.

They were pleased to find several existing examples of adaptive reuse—such as the Yarbrough Hotel and Dunnivant's Department Store, now office buildings, and the old Halsey Grocery warehouse, now the Smith-Holland

Gallery. They walked under the canopy leading to the Heritage Club and admired the patio behind Bubba's. (Of course, the main attraction on this walk was the promised stop at Gorin's.)

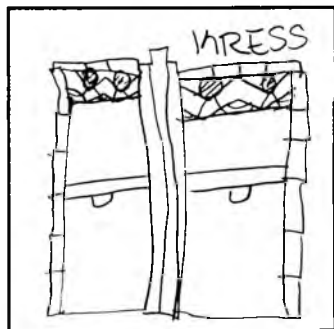
While the students saw much creative reuse of older structures, they worried over the Kress and Belk's buildings, feeling that they, with other old store sites, all would meet their preservation criteria. And the romantic imaginings of 11-year-olds, as they thought of new stores and downtown apartments and sidewalks that lit up their feet, were tempered with questions (from their teacher) about such issues as where people will park and how businesses will attract phantom customers.

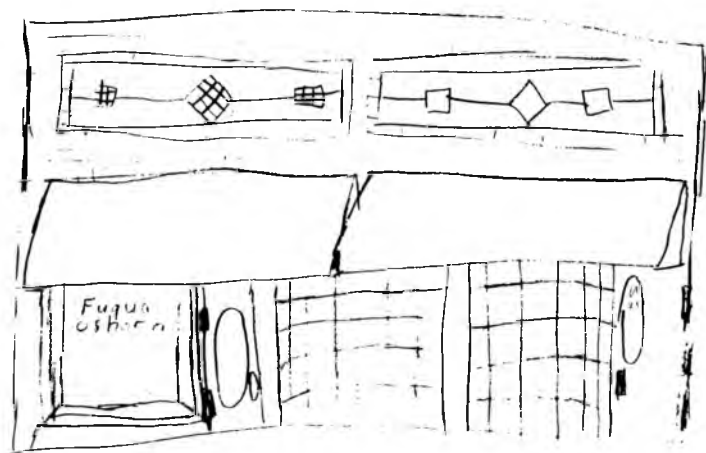
This Walk Around the Block probably raised more questions than it answered, which often happens. But as teachers continue to use our community as a visual textbook, they hope their students will grow into aware and involved citizens.



*LEFT: Yarbrough Hotel
by
Holly Rodes*

*BELOW: Windows at Kress'
on Washington Street
by
Jessica Fortune*





*Artist Unknown
(Forgot to sign name.)*

