

# The Historic Huntsville Quarterly

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to 1955*

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## From the Editor

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## From the Editor

Thanks to all who continue to encourage me on the *Quarterly*. I offer special thanks to the Publications Committee members who are making my job a pleasure. I am still learning Pagemaker and now know how to scan and configure pictures, so any and all help is gratefully accepted.

This fall I had the opportunity to go to Cuba with a group of women from my church denomination. We travelled from Havana to Santiago de Cuba by way of Ciego de Avila. Along the way I saw cities and villages with their central plazas. Centers of cultural and social activities, these plazas all had benches, trees, flowers, and often fountains. Somewhere one could always see a monument to the revolution and/or one of its heroes. There for the citizens to enjoy, the plazas are surrounded by municipal buildings, the library, shops, churches, and restaurants with *corredors* (covered sidewalks around the square with rooms overhead). All of the Colonial buildings are national monuments and can not be changed in any way (even the interiors), but these beautiful Colonial buildings were falling down or in need of repair or paint or both. Cuba has no money to repair or preserve its heritage and so the buildings crumble. But not so in Huntsville.

Huntsville could be Havana with its central business area: shade trees, places to sit, and a fountain. At one time, downtown Huntsville around the Courthouse Square was the place to be. The summer of 1952, when I moved to Huntsville, the first place I went was downtown on a Saturday morning; I remember *High Noon* was showing at the Lyric. The Square was crowded with all sorts of people come to town to do their Saturday shopping. For Huntsville, then, was a cotton town and the rural folks had just the Saturday off. One could see people dressed in anything from their Sunday best to bib overalls and dress slacks.

Through the efforts of members like Margaret Ann Hanaw, Lynn and Harvie P. Jones, and Ben Walker who have worked to preserve the area around the Square, Historic Huntsville Foundation has helped keep some of the flavor of that period in the early 1950s around the Courthouse.

Even now the Foundation is working with the National Main Street Center to revitalize downtown. In this issue, we have comments on the value of a vital downtown from the past chairman of the Trust's Robert Bass, provided by the Main Street Center.

This issue focuses on businesses around the Square. We have contributions from people who worked or shopped in the buildings there: Maggie Bradley, Hall Bryant, Chris Hauer, Joe Lay, Mary Ann Williams. In later issues, we will try to trace the changes in the face of downtown. Your editor has spent untold hours at the library looking for pictures of downtown before 1955. I have not found many pictures of the buildings. If you have photographs of downtown, please let us get them copied for the Foundation files.

I have included an article from the Downtown Rotary Club. The club had not been meeting downtown, but has made the decision to return. Its reasons for returning to downtown are in keeping with the focus of this issue.

In the last issue of the *Quarterly*, I so optimistically stated: "In following *Quarterlys*, we will feature a section with your submissions. I also solicit memoirs [and pictures] of neighborhoods and places; these too may develop into articles or sources of articles in future *Quarterlys*. Places live in us because of our memories associated with them." Well, no one has beaten down my door nor has anyone filled my mailbox with memoirs, pictures, etc. We need your help and your pictures.

I look forward to hearing from you and sharing your contributions with our readers.

I wish to remind you again of the purpose of Historic Huntsville Foundation: “The Historic Huntsville Foundation was established in 1974 to encourage the preservation of historically or architecturally significant sites and structures throughout Huntsville and Madison County and to increase public awareness of their value to the community.”

Because of this purpose, the *Quarterly* will have a section labeled **Preservation Alert**. The section will feature sites and/or structures that are endangered or need to be watched. The new Preservation Committee chair, Stephanie Sherman, is working with a list of more than ten sites and buildings of immediate concern. The list includes Dallas Mill water tower (see vol. XXIV, No. 3 of the *Quarterly*), Downtown YMCA building, Eastside Community Center (formerly known as the Raymond Jones, then familiarly as the Dallas Street Armory), Madison County Health Department buildings on Eustis and Green (see vol. XXIV, No. 3 of the *Quarterly*), M&C freight depot (featured in this issue), the Terry-Hutchens building on Clinton and Jefferson, and the white cottage at 406 East Clinton owned by Temple B’nai Sholom. If you have questions, additions to the list, or want to work on the committee, you can call Stephanie at 256.534.0409.

Huntsville, Madison County, and Historic Huntsville Foundation have lost one of their greatest resources. Many of the buildings and sites that make our community the beautiful place it is were preserved because of Harvie P. Jones, founder and preservationist friend, who died in December. His contributions to Huntsville and Madison County preservation will be sorely missed. A memorial fund has been established in his name for Historic Huntsville Foundation to further his work.

**Margaret J. Vann**