

The Historic Huntsville Quarterly

Volume 24
Number 4 *Around the Courthouse Square, 1900
to 1955*

Article 9

12-21-1998

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Recommended Citation

Bryant, Hall B. jr. (1998) "H.C. Blake Company, Inc., 104 South Side Square," *The Historic Huntsville Quarterly*: Vol. 24: No. 4, Article 9.

Available at: <https://louis.uah.edu/historic-huntsville-quarterly/vol24/iss4/9>

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H.C. Blake Company, Inc., 104 South Side Square

Hall B. Bryant, Jr.

The South Side Square building was rented first by my great uncle Hall C. Blake, starting in the early 1890s then by my father Hall Blake Bryant, Sr. The building was rented from the Schiffmans and Lawrence Goldsmith, Sr., and Jr. (See Fig.4 page 25 and Fig.1 on page 28.) I don't think there were a lot of signed leases. Businesses paid rent; and if they did not want the rent to increase, they paid for their own repairs.

As Huntsville was a small cotton town, the Courthouse Square was the center of town and commerce. Every building on the Square was full with family-run (usually) businesses. Our building was on the Square, which put it in an ideal location. The Square with the Courthouse was busy. On Saturdays, the Square was packed with locals, farmers, preachers, etc.

I don't remember any trash collection as such. Everyone swept the walk in front of the business and kept it clean. Help could always be hired off the street to clean, paint, assist in the store, etc. Business owners didn't have to worry about workers' compensation suits or medical insurance. If people wanted money, they worked.

I remember my father saying about the Depression that we had little or no work, no money coming in. Business was very slow, but we stayed in business by taking care of our long-term customers. People would pay as they could. Dad said that it seemed everyone worked together. World War II created Redstone Arsenal. Since we were an established plumbing company, H.C. Blake Company, Inc., benefited from the work created by the arsenal's opening.

The only heat in the store until 1950 was a coal-burning barrel stove. Upstairs was one very dirty toilet room. The building had oiled floors, high ceilings, a creaky dark upstairs, and a dungeon-like basement where we stored plumbing supplies. The high double-front doors stayed open nine months out of the year. Grocery stores on the Square had produce in racks on the sidewalk, and clothing stores also had merchandise on racks in front of the businesses.

In the late 1950s, the building next door on South Side Square was torn down to create the new offices for Ford, Caldwell & Payne Attorneys. H.C. Blake Company, Inc., moved to Holmes Street (now Avenue) near Brogan Creek. Then, Holmes Street was U.S. 72, a major highway and lined with trees and beautiful well kept homes of all ages.

Note: Hall B. Bryant, Jr., is a native of Huntsville. His family settled in Huntsville in the early 1820s and has been in the plumbing business since 1884. H.C. Blake Company, Inc., has been a part of the city's growth from the time it was a rural county seat to when it became the Rocket City. Hall attended Huntsville public schools and was graduated from Auburn University. He and his wife, Susan, have four children.