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to 1955*

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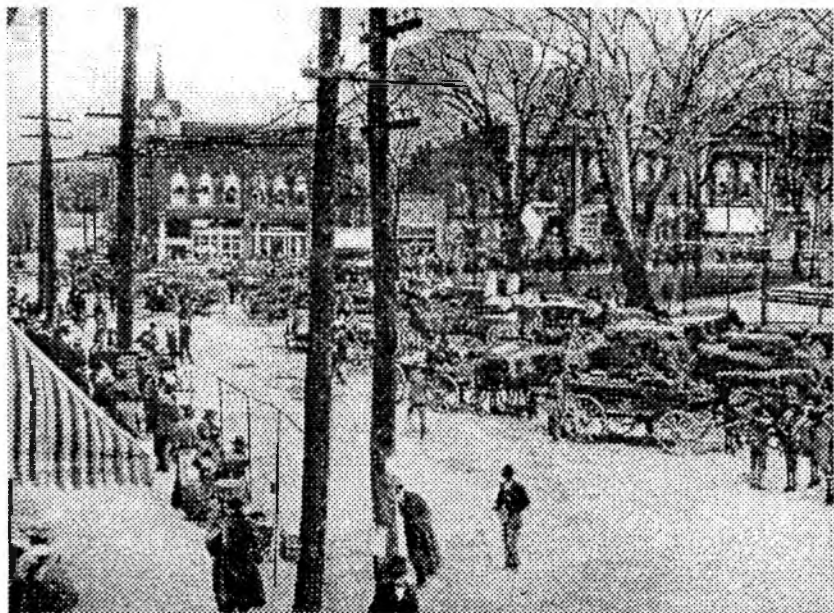
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THREE DOLLARS

WINTER 1998

THE
HISTORIC HUNTSVILLE QUARTERLY
OF LOCAL ARCHITECTURE AND PRESERVATION



AROUND THE COURTHOUSE SQUARE
1900 TO 1955

HISTORIC HUNTSVILLE FOUNDATION

Founded 1974

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Cover: *Saturday afternoon on the Square, Huntsville, Ala.* Looking at East Side Square about 1900. Notice no trolley tracks.
Courtesy Huntsville/Madison County Public Library.

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The Historic Huntsville Quarterly of Local Architecture and Preservation

Volume XXIV, No.4

Winter 1998

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From the Chairman

We often hear about life's vagaries. My father frequently told me "...the only thing certain in life is change. It is inevitable and it is continuous. You change with it or you get left behind." This change continues to be true for our Foundation. Some changes are easy; some are very hard and painful. The loss of Harvey Jones is unquestionably painful.

Adjusting to the loss of Harvey will be difficult for us. He was irreplaceable. Very few possess the understanding regarding the history of architecture and construction that Harvey had. This understanding, along with his knowledge of Huntsville/Madison County history and his willingness to give of himself in the cause of preservation, made him truly one-of-a-kind. While we mourn his loss, we must adjust and move on. Harvey would have it no other way. We will be calling on services at the state and national levels as well as developing talents and interests within our organization. The Foundation may sponsor attendees to workshops and conferences on preservation techniques ranging from establishing historic districts and acquiring endangered properties to masonry techniques and wood structure preservation. The community turns to the Foundation for assistance in these areas.

That change is continuous is apparent when one views the photographs taken in downtown Huntsville during the 50s. Many of the old buildings are gone; most of the 50s buildings are also either gone or threatened. The remaining older structures are probably in less danger of disappearing than structures approaching their fiftieth birthday. This 50s group is in extreme danger as there is little sympathy for their preservation. While older structures are safe from the wrecking ball, a significant threat in *renovation* without adherence to the tenets of preservation frequently destroys or diminishes a building's historical significance. Providing education to owners performing these renovations is a fundamental goal of our Foundation.

While change would appear to be the enemy of historic preservation, it is, nonetheless, viewed as progress by the community and those in power. Consequently, in order to carry out our mission of preserving sites and structures, we must also be prepared to adjust our approaches and procedures. Your board is working to adjust to the needs, and we appreciate your continued support in our efforts.

Ben Walker

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

Downtown Revitalization

Robert Bass, past chairman of
the National Trust for Historic Preservation

In the past 40 years, America's downtowns have changed drastically. The creation of the interstate highway system and subsequent growth of suburban communities transformed the ways in which Americans live, work, and spend leisure time. With improved transportation routes, people found it easier to travel longer distances to work or shop. Roads that once connected neighborhoods to downtown now carried residents to outlying shopping strips and regional malls. Throughout the nation, in town after town, the story repeated itself. Downtown businesses closed or moved to the mall, shoppers disappeared, property values and sales tax revenues dropped. Some downtowns sank under the weight of their own apathy. Neglected buildings, boarded-up storefronts, and empty, trash-strewn streets gradually reinforced the public's perception that nothing was happening downtown that nothing was worth saving there.

In many communities, downtown merchants and property owners tried to halt the spiral or decline by imitating their competition—the shopping mall. They covered traditional commercial buildings in aluminum, plywood, or multicolored panels and tacked garish, oversized signs onto upper-floor facades. Some communities tried to reverse the decline with even more expensive and permanent methods: closing off the entire downtown to vehicular traffic in attempts to create pedestrian environments conducive to shopping. In most cases, though, these well-meaning (but usually ineffective) efforts did not stabilize downtown sales or property values. Instead, these attempts reinforced the decline by isolating the downtown from consumers even more.

The need to revitalize downtown commercial districts is clear. A healthy, viable downtown is crucial to the economic health and civic pride of the entire community for several reasons. A healthy downtown retains and creates jobs. A healthy downtown also means a stronger tax base; long-term revitalization

establishes capable businesses that use public services and provide tax revenues for the community. A revitalized downtown increases the community's options for goods and services, whether for basic staples like clothing, food, and professional services or for less traditional functions such as housing or entertainment. Finally, revitalized downtowns are symbols of community caring and a high quality of life, factors that influence corporate decisions to locate to a community.

Information furnished by The Main Street Project
From the National Main Street Center
National Trust for Historic Preservation
1785 Massachusetts Avenue NW
Washington, DC 20036



Fig.1 Architectural drawing of proposed restoration of the Hundley Building facade, 128 South Side Square.
Courtesy Marc Goldmon of Fuqua, Osborn Architects, P.C.

The Kiddie Club

Saturdays at the Lyric Theater

Mary Ann Searcy Williams

The Lyric Theater is very much a part of my childhood memories. Anyone who went to Huntsville Junior High and was a preteen in Huntsville, Alabama, in the late 1940s or early 1950s went to the Lyric on Saturday morning. The Kiddie Club was a part of life for most of the kids I knew.

I actually started going to the Kiddie Club at the old WFUN radio station on Holmes Avenue, which is now the H.C. Blake building. My cousin Margaret Belle Mahoney Crow and I got up early on Saturday mornings and would go down to the radio station where John Garrison let us sing on the air. Our favorite song at that time was "Nobody Likes Me, Think I'll Go Eat Worms." Others also came to sing. That was the beginning of the now famous (or infamous) Kiddie Club.

I don't remember the date of the first Saturday that John Garrison came to the Lyric Theater, but it was the meeting place for young people. John was the MC for years, but he did not try to hold order or control any behavior in the audience. Amazingly, I can't ever remember any trouble. It cost a dime to get in and five cents for popcorn. We usually started the morning at Woolworth's five and dime to get a Sugar Daddy sucker. That cost a nickel and lasted for most of the morning. We would meet all our friends and plan our act for the morning. By now, we had graduated to a larger group and our regular song at this time was "We've Got a Lovely Bunch of Coconuts." No one had told me at this time that I could not carry a tune, so I sang as loud as I wanted without any fear of rejection.

There was an applause meter on the side of the stage, and prizes were given for the best act. I should clarify that by saying that a prize was given to the performance getting the largest mark on the applause meter. I remember one Saturday when Barbara Byrne Ward brought her younger sister, Judy Byrne Heacock, to sing. Judy was barely old enough to talk, but got up on the stage and sang a solo. All of Barbara's friends sat very close to the meter so that she would win, and she did.

The Kiddie Club was just the beginning of a long day at the Lyric. After the club, the movie started. It always began with a serial. We loved the serials. They must have been the forerunners of present-day soap operas. We were always left with the hero or heroine in a terrible situation, so that we had to return the next Saturday to see if the hero or heroine was able to overcome. There were several regular serials. Rocket Man, Flash Gordon, and The Black Whip were all favorites. After the serial, there was always a cartoon, usually Looney Toons, but occasionally we were treated to the Three Stooges or Bud Abbott and Lou Costello. The feature film was always a western. Western stars were popular at this time. Some of the stars of this time were Lash LaRue, Tim Holt, Hop-a-Long Cassidy, Johnny Mack Brown. Of course the stars that remained popular for many year were Roy Rogers and Dale Evans, and Gene Autry. Roy and Dale were, by far, the favorites for most of my friends, but I had to claim that Johnny Mack Brown was my favorite because he went to school with my Daddy at the University of Alabama.

When we got to high school, we did stop going to the Kiddie Club but continued to go to the Lyric. My first date was at the Lyric Theater. The Lyric continued to be the meeting place and social center for Huntsville High teens in the 1950s. It was where we first held hands, had a real date, and sometimes got our first kiss. We grew up there.

Barbara Ward's painting titled *First Kiss* may say what the Lyric meant to a lot of us. The building may not exist at this time, but the memories are still there for many Huntsvillians.

Note: Mary Ann Searcy Williams is a native of Huntsville; her father, the late Robert Benjamin Searcy, Jr., (Speck) was mayor of Huntsville from 1952 to 1964. Mary Ann grew up on Locust Street and attended East Clinton School, Huntsville Junior High School, and Huntsville High School (now the Annie Merts Center), where she was a cheerleader for the Crimson Panthers.

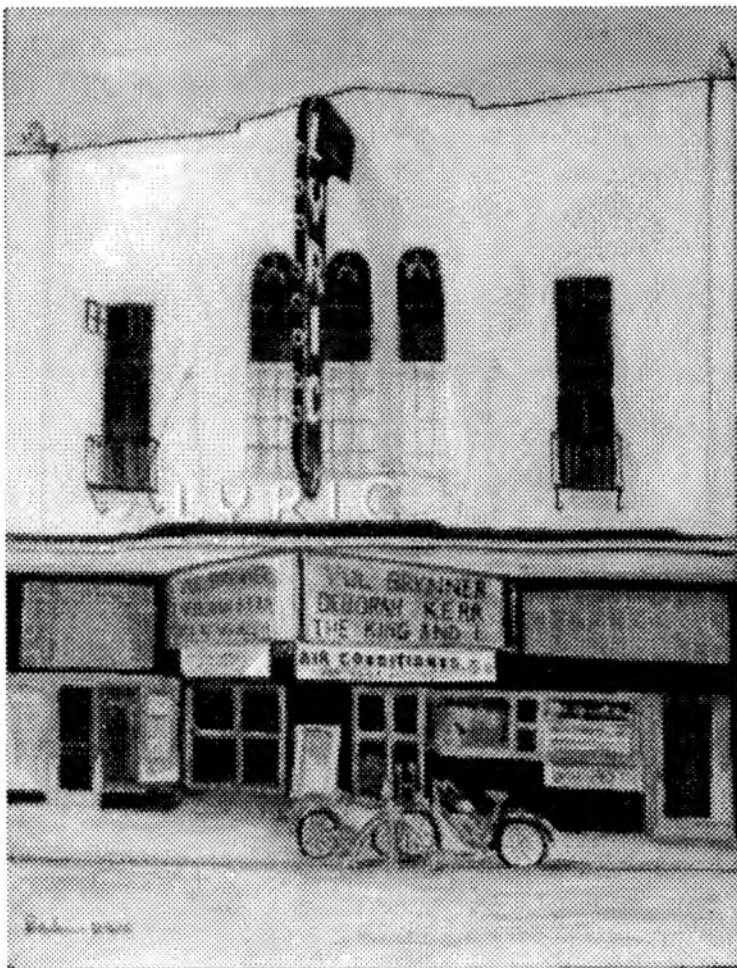


Fig. 1 *First Kiss*, painting of Lyric Theater on North Washington Street.

Courtesy Barbara Byrne Ward.



Fig.1 North Side Square looking east, circa 1945. Parking places are filled; one can see that downtown is a busy place. Notice Struve Building on corner of Washington and Randolph Streets.
Courtesy Huntsville/Madison County Public Library.

To Move or Not to Move?

from *Downtown Rotary Club, summer 1998*, newsletter

To Move or Not To Move?

At their January 1998 meeting, the past presidents of the Club unanimously agreed that for the long term viability of the Club, we should return to the downtown area. An opinion poll taken last Rotary year revealed that the membership agrees.

Reaffirming and Strengthening Our Traditions

By common consent these traditions and issues are based on the minutes of the December 12 meeting and were endorsed by all of the participants. It was agreed that these traditions and issues would be presented to the Club Board of Directors and to the general membership in order to provide a context for Club goals, plans, or policies that may be developed in the future.

Three Traditions

Our Club has three strong traditions that began when our Club was founded in 1917. They are:

- (1) We are a *Downtown Club*.
- (2) We are a *Senior Leadership By Invitation Club*.
- (3) We are a *Service Club for the Larger Community*.

This week more information is provided on #1 of our three traditions. Additional information on tradition #2 and tradition #3 will be provided in subsequent publications of our weekly bulletin.

(1) We are a Downtown Club

A sense of *place* has always had value for people. We speak of the “old home place,” or “where have you come from?” We often remember our personal or family history by reference to *place*. Being clear about *place* provides a sense of stability and continuity. *Place*, or where we meet, is part of who we are as a Rotary Club. So, in terms of *place* we have always been a *downtown* club. Downtown is where our civic *heart* has been for over 80 years.

Rotary's presence downtown is an important affirmation of the financial, judicial, political, medical, mental health, artistic, legal, and entertainment center of our city and county.

Also, not insignificantly, we believe that by returning to the downtown area, our Tuesday meeting attendance will move back up to its previous level prior to our moving out of the downtown area.

The Von Braun Center appears to be an excellent possibility even though that may mean a dues increase. Our dues have been at the lowest end of the 50 largest clubs for several years. Parking is more than adequate; and because it is in a parking garage, it will provide protection during inclement weather.

Recommendation 1

Therefore we strongly recommend that the Board of Directors return our Club meetings to the downtown as soon as that is feasible and practicable.

Note: The Downtown Rotary Club now meets in the South Hall of the Von Braun Center on Tuesdays.



**Fig.2 South Side Square, fall 1942, looking toward the Hundley Building and Harrison Brothers Hardware Store. Notice awning on Hundley Building.
Courtesy Huntsville/Madsion County Public Library.**



Fig.1 The Schiffman Building, corner of East Side Square and Eustis Street. Notice the trolley tracks in this undated photograph.
Courtesy Huntsville/Madison County Public Library.

**I. Schiffman & Company, Inc.,
Dodge-Plymouth Agency
314-316 Franklin Street, Huntsville, Alabama**

INTERVIEW with Mrs. Maggie Whitt Bradley

I began working for I. Schiffman & Company, Inc., at its Dodge-Plymouth Agency in 1948; the Agency was located at 314-316 Franklin Street where Constitution Village is now located. Prior to opening an automobile dealership, I. Schiffman & Co., Inc., sold wagons and buggies from this location. The Agency building was one-story facing Franklin Street with a large storage area facing Madison Street. A painted window sign proclaimed us: I. Schiffman & Co., Inc., Dodge-Plymouth Agency.

The floor of the building was painted with red and green squares. The brass inside and outside, around the windows, and in the showroom, was cleaned every week. The city kept the sidewalks and street clean; we washed the sidewalks three times a week or more. The building was hot in summer; fans were used for cooling but had little effect. Radiators, however, kept us warm as toast in winter.

Since WWII had just ended, cars were scarce; customers had to get on a waiting list; and business was booming! Each month we received four new Dodges and four new Plymouths. We sold and financed all the cars we could get.

And a new year model car was an event! Word-of-mouth and newspaper advertisements announced a one-day *Grand Showing*. The new model was put on display in the showroom and hundreds of people came to look and buy. Mementos would be given the ladies. I remember one year we gave live, miniature orchids. When the showroom model sold, another would be brought in from the storage lot out back.

In 1948, the Dealership employed twenty people: Denton Given, Sales Manager, with four salesmen; Grady Jones, Parts Manager, with one assistant; Lem Gattis, Shop Foreman, with six mechanics and one "grease monkey"; William "Buck" Sublett, Body Shop Foreman, with one assistant and two men

on the wash racks. Mr. Given and I worked in the office; William Davis, Bookkeeper, was located in the I. Schiffman & Co. office at 231 East Side Square.

Saturday was THE shopping day, especially for farmers. It seemed as if all of Madison County was downtown on Saturday. All the department stores and businesses were located around and off the Courthouse Square and every business, including the Courthouse, was open from 8 a.m. to 5 p.m. on Saturday. Normal business hours were 8 to 5, Monday through Friday. Employee benefits consisted of four paid holidays a year and one to two weeks of paid vacation each year.

I was called periodically by Mr. Lawrence Goldsmith, Sr., (President) and Mr. Lawrence Goldsmith, Jr., (Secretary-Treasurer) of I. Schiffman & Co., Inc., located at 231 East Side Square, to take dictation. I would take my Gregg Shorthand pad back to the Agency and transcribe/type on my brand new Royal manual typewriter. Other office equipment I used included a Burroughs Style #9 adding machine, Burroughs typewriter and a cash register. An interesting story told me by one my co-workers was how they had to manually verify the addition/subtraction/multiplication/division against the first adding machine owned by the company in the 1930s.

In the mid 1950s, Chrysler began allocating and contracting a monthly quota of vehicles with its dealers. Mr. Goldsmith, Sr., didn't like this business practice and gave up the Agency. We then operated the business as I. Schiffman & Co., Inc., selling International Trucks and used cars. In the 1960s, the business was closed; in 1967 the property was sold to the Huntsville Housing Authority.

The I. Schiffman Building, 231 East Side Square, has changed very little since 1948. Most of the original building with its furniture, fixtures, and equipment is still intact. I do remember the basement designated a Civil Defense shelter. I also remember the James Steak House located next door as offering a good noon meal and a favorite restaurant of the farmers and tradesmen.

The I. Schiffman Building has always had people living on the second and third floors. In fact, Tallulah Bankhead was born here.

The face of downtown Huntsville has certainly changed. I miss the old Courthouse and the Saturday morning crowd of shoppers and friends. But history has a way of repeating itself, if not in total, then in bits and pieces. So, perhaps what was “old” will again become “new and improved.”

Note: Mrs. Maggie Whitt Bradley has been employed by the I. Schiffman & Company for 50 years and three Schiffman generations. Mrs. Bradley is a native of Madison County. Her late husband was also a native of Madison County. Mrs. Bradley’s father was born in Limestone County, Alabama; and her mother, in Lincoln County, Tennessee.

Note from Margaret Anne Hanaw: The interview was given to Phyllis O’Connell, October 10, 1998, over apple cider and a turkey sandwich, at the office we share and where Maggie still works.



Fig.1 East Side Square, circa 1947, showing Hill's Grocery, looking north.
Courtesy Huntsville/Madison County Public Library.



Fig.2 East Side Square, looking south, Armed Forces Day, May 1955,
showing Hill's Grocery with awning down.
Courtesy Ben Walker from his father J.B. Walker's collection.

This letter has been written in response to a request from the Foundation. It is followed by another letter to the Quarterly from former resident, Chris Hauer. Editor

Hill's Grocery Store East Side Square

Joseph D. Lay

To the Historic Huntsville Foundation

Gene King has asked me to provide you with some information about Hill's Grocery store on East Side Square. My knowledge will probably be of little help to you due to my age at the time my father was manager, but in any event my comments are as follows.

I am Joseph D. (Joe) Lay, born in Huntsville, March 1, 1931. My parents are Alice W. Lay and the late Conaway (Connie) Lay. My mother, Alice Lay, still resides in Huntsville. I was graduated from Huntsville High School in 1949 and Auburn University in 1953. I have not lived in Huntsville since graduating from Auburn. I am presently retired and a resident of Greensboro, North Carolina.

My father, Connie Lay, was manager of Hill's Grocery from (date unknown) to about 1946 or 1947 when he opened his own grocery store. I have no photographs of the store.

Hill's Grocery was one of three modern self-serve groceries in Huntsville in the early 1940s. It had a plateglass store front with a canvas let-down awning operated by a manual cranking device. (See Fig.2) There was a stairway built into the sidewalk in front and covered by heavy metal doors that was used for access to the basement. The basement was used for storage and trash removal. The alley behind the building wasn't used much. There was a second floor above the store that had been used as an apartment in prior years but was also used for storage during the early to mid 1940s.

Selling Desirable Business Property In Huntsville, Ala.

AT AUCTION

THURSDAY, APRIL 28th, AT 1:30 P. M.

Mr. Howard Gentle has commissioned us to sell on the above date to the highest bidder, regardless of price 20' x 36' brick store building, located at 300 Church Street, Huntsville, Also 30' x 157 1/2' brick store building on 5th street in Huntsville, and 10' x 120' lot North and adjacent to the 5th street building. (See rules and details below).

★
\$100
Cash
Prizes
Given
Away
★



★
\$100
Cash
Prizes
Given
Away
★

300 Church Street Building

SALE 11 will be the building pictured above. Sale will be on premises. Commencing promptly at 1:30 p. m. It is one of Huntsville's better built buildings, sturdy constructed, 27' high walls, metal siding, fluorescent light fixtures, built in refrigeration, metal awning. The fine building with it's corner location, at 300 Church Street, is the home of one of Mr. Gentle's Super Markets. Possession of this property will be given within 15 days from date of sale. As the owner plans to move stock and fixtures to his third square store in Huntsville. Anyone interested in buying this building and continuing this dairy business, may arrange purchase of stock and fixtures from Mr. Gentle's privately investigate the possibilities. We offer as interested persons, as well as a modest profit to the successful bidder.

Fig.3 Undated flyer for auction, cited by Dr. Hauer as example of first Huntsville store to use the term "super market."
Courtesy Harrison Brothers Hardware Store.

Some merchandise was displayed on the sidewalk, but the merchandise was limited to bags of charcoal, watermelons, and other bulky items. Adjoining the store to the right was James Steak House and to the left was Wimpy's Grill, a combination hamburger joint and pool room. The store was heated but not air-conditioned. Cooling was provided by overhead fans. An overhead fan was also over the front door to help keep out flies. The store had a candy and cigarette counter to the left of the entrance where the clerk also packaged beans and dried fruit. These were purchased in bulk and packaged in 1- and 2-pound bags before being placed in the shelves for sale.

The Courthouse Square was extremely crowded on Saturday nights with shoppers and sightseers. Saturday was the traditional shopping day for farmers. Customers parked on the square and nearby streets in available spaces, and their groceries were carried to their cars by the clerks. No home deliveries were made except for a few within a block or so from the store.

Some memories from that time: Most trash and garbage was removed by a man and wife team who were very heavy, wore overalls, and drove a horse-drawn wagon. The only other horse-drawn wagon that I remember was an ice wagon that made deliveries to both businesses and residential areas. At times, rats were kept under control by several of the clerks shooting them in the basement using .22s.

During the war years, it was not unusual to see red, green, or yellow people in the Saturday crowds. I was told these were Redstone Arsenal workers who had been exposed to chemicals, probably in making smoke grenades for the Army. (They were entirely colored, skin and hair, an unusual sight.) Every year predictions were made that the Courthouse would collapse into the Big Spring.

I realize this information is limited, but hope that it will be of some small benefit to you.

Note: The following letter is a response to Mr. Lay's request for more information from his friend, Dr. Hauer.

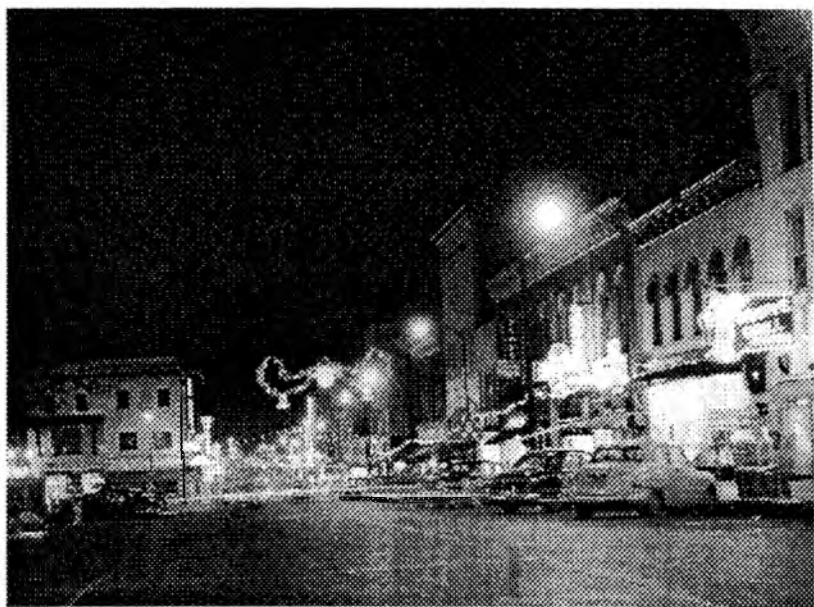


Fig.4 Night scene of East Side Square, looking north, Christmas 1956. Hill's Grocery is next to Wimpy's Grill. The interior is well lighted. Courtesy Huntsville/Madison County Public Library.

Grocery Shopping on the Old Courthouse Square

Dr. Chris Hauer, Jr., FSA, FRSA

I got a late night, long distance call from my friend, Joe Lay. He had been contacted by a representative of Historic Huntsville *Quarterly* in regard to the old H.G. Hill store on the East Side of the Courthouse Square (see Fig. 1, page 18) in Huntsville. Joe's father was the manager during the store's latter years. "I was just a little kid then. I don't remember anything about it," he said. "You're a bit older. I told them to contact you." They did.

I do remember a little about downtown Huntsville prior to 1940 BA (Before Arsenal). My knowledge of the grocery business came, so to speak, from the ground up. My grandfather, John G. Hauer, operated a well-known truck farm and bedding plant business on Governors Drive(then 5th Avenue). Half the site is now owned by the First Baptist Church. My uncle, Joe Hauer, drove the delivery truck. We would load the truck with fresh in-season produce (and bedding plants during the spring) in the evening. The next morning about 4:30, Joe would head out on his first delivery trip. My brother, Dilly, and I regarded it as a great treat to go on these rounds. We got to see Huntsville before sunrise and sometimes had breakfast at Braley's Barbecue on North Washington Street.

Many of the stores were still dark and deserted when we left the delivery at the door or on the loading dock. We made the delivery to the front door of the Hill store. I don't think it had a back loading dock. The truck frequently had to go back home for a second load, but we kids had to miss the second round when school was in session. Sometimes a call came in the middle of the day from a grocer who had sold out of something. I believe orders as small as a bushel of turnip greens or a few dozen tomato plants were delivered when someone could be spared from other work to drive the truck.

The Courthouse Square used to be a center of the grocery trade. There was Mr. Lonnie Simmons' store on the southwest corner of the Square, at Madison Street and Fountain Row (now Circle). The location became Hopper's Hardware when Mr. Simmons retired. Now the site is part of a parking deck. Also on South Side Square was Pitsinger's Market and a grocery in the T.T. Terry Store (see Fig.5, page 25) with the H.G. Hill store on East Side Square. H.G. Hill later became a part of the Winn Dixie chain. What is now called the Farmer's Market was also located on the Square. Farmers would bring their trucks and wagons and park them on the inside of the Square in the parking slots that surrounded the Courthouse, so it was called the Curb Market. To get the congestion and the litter off the Square, a market house was built in Big Spring Park north of the current City Hall; it was also called the Curb Market. (My family never sold at the Curb Market. The wholesale produce and wholesale/retail bedding plant trade was all we could manage.)

There was even a grocery department on the Clinton Street side of Dunnnavants Department Store before its great fire in 1940. Finally, the Howard Gentle Super Market, the first to use the term *super market*, (see Fig.3, page 20) appeared on North Side Square. The other downtown *chain store* (as folks called them), and H.G. Hill's chief competitor, was the A&P that took over the former Stockton automobile agency building on the corner of Eustis and Greene streets (See Fig.6, page 25). The agency had been housed in three adjoining structures. The center one was torn down to create a parking lot and the southern end became the store. There was a loading dock in the rear of the building. The half block across the street, bounded by Greene, Eustis, and Randolph, was occupied by the handsome "Old Post Office" building that stood for years after the U.S. Postal Service moved to the "New Post Office" (now the Federal Courthouse) at Clinton and Jefferson. First the Old Post Office and later its Eustis Street neighbor, the Elks Theatre, fell victim to progress, creating the parking lot that now fills that space.



Fig. 5 South Side Square, circa 1950.
 Courtesy Huntsville/Madison County Public Library.



Fig.6 A&P Super Market on the corner of Greene and Eustis, circa 1950.
 Courtesy Huntsville/Madison County Public Library.

But no such downtown parking area existed in the 1930s and 1940s.

Photographs in the Huntsville Public Library Heritage Room reveal that the H.G. Hill store was housed in one of downtown Huntsville's nicer Italianate store buildings. The second floor had five roundhead windows with hood moldings. Flamboyant is perhaps the most apt term for its overhanging eaves and their decorative brackets. The next building to the north was also Italianate. It was taller, with eight second floor windows, and was divided into four storefronts. But its signature architectural features seem more restrained by comparison. [Editor's note: The *Quarterly* was unable to locate these photographs.]

The H.G. Hill store occupied a double storefront with plate-glass shop windows and an entrance on the south. It was equipped with an awning extending the full width of the store that could be let up or down by inserting a crank into a geared device. This was a common technology in the days before air conditioning, anodized glass, and Cool Vent aluminum awnings. The awning was lowered to ward off the heat of the sun. (If you were caught out in a sudden shower, you always hoped some merchant had left an awning deployed. But merchants usually tried to raise them before storms because some caught and held water, and all were vulnerable to wind damage.)

Mr. Connie Lay was the manager of the Hill store. He was a courteous, energetic, and very hard working person. I recall my father remarking on more than one occasion that he didn't know Mr. Lay's salary, but whatever it was, H.G. Hill was getting a lot more than the company paid for. I still have a mental picture of Mr. Lay rushing to the front of the store to assist a customer, wiping his hands on his apron as he went. Mr. Lay and his brother, Bob Lay, who made many friends while driving the Betsy Ross bread delivery truck, eventually took over the former Linville Market on the west side of Madison Street, near Fagan Creek and operated it as Lays' Market.

The H.G. Hill store on the Square (its last sign calls it a super market) was doomed by social change. People had once walked to the store or sent a domestic on foot to do their daily shopping. People increasingly went shopping in their cars. The A&P store (see Fig.6, page 25) had the advantage of a small parking lot. When the first Huntsville Kroger store opened on Clinton Street, it had a much larger parking lot. The Hill store only had on-street parking, and that would become metered parking. The store was also rather small, only two typical downtown store fronts wide. I remember it as being rather shallow. There simply wasn't space to sustain the super market concept.

H.G. Hill thus built a new store on a wedge-shaped lot between Greene and Walker streets at Meridian, with a parking lot in the rear; and, in due course, the downtown store was closed. With the passage of time, other markets in the downtown and on its periphery followed suit. The H.G. Hill store building and many of its counterparts and neighbors were demolished.

Residents of today's Twickenham might once have walked to a major market downtown or to a neighborhood grocery on the southern or western fringe of the district. Now there isn't even a gas station/convenience store within leisurely walking distance. One may suspect that residents of the historic district who covet the more relaxed lifestyle of an earlier day would welcome the resurrection of the downtown Hill store or one of its contemporary competitors!

Note: Chris Hauer, Jr., is a native of Huntsville, Alabama. He holds the AB from Birmingham-Southern College, the MDiv from Vanderbilt Divinity School and the PhD from Vanderbilt University. He is a fellow of the Society of Antiquaries of London, the Royal Society of Arts, and the Winston Churchill Memorial in the USA. Dr. Hauer is married to Elizabeth Buchanan Hauer, also of Huntsville. They have two adult children. Dr. Hauer is retired from the faculty of Westminster College, Fulton, Missouri. His professional publications are in Biblical and Jewish studies and archaeology. He has avocational interests in British antiquities and in the work of Sir Christopher Wren.



Fig. 1 South Side Square looking east (undated photograph). Notice unpaved street, no wires, Schiffman building facade, and the old Episcopal Church. H.C. Blake Company, Inc., will rent building third from right on South Side Square in the early 1890s. Courtesy Huntsville/Madison County Public Library.

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.

Preservation Alert: The freight depot.

Excerpts from The Memphis & Charleston Railroad in Alabama 1850-1898: The Railroad Comes to Huntsville *Historic Huntsville Quarterly*, 1981, Vol. VII, No.3

Linda Bayer Allen

The Memphis and Charleston Railroad Company (M&C) was chartered through Alabama in 1850, and the Alabama commissioners then acquired the property of the Tennessee Valley Railroad (TVRR) along whose route the M&C tracks were laid. For \$75,000, paid in stock, the M&C received not only the tracks and land of the TVRR, but also the warehouses, depots, shops, and tools.

Construction of the M&C began in Madison County in the summer of 1851 when the engineers arrived to survey the route. The track was completed in sections so that by 1855 one could travel by train from Memphis to Pocahontas, then take a stage line into Tuscumbia, transfer back to the train for the trip from Tuscumbia to Huntsville, and continue to Stevenson, again by stage, to connect with the Nashville and Chattanooga Railroad. The section of road between Decatur and Huntsville had been completed in October of 1855; the train whistle could be heard daily as the track layers approached within two miles of the Huntsville depot. Finally on October 13 the first engine "General Garth" entered town, and regular service with Tuscumbia began shortly thereafter...

The following year, 1856, the M&C opened their Railroad Hotel on the present site of Dilworth Lumber Company, across the tracks from the depot. [Note: now a professional office complex] It was under the operation of James M. Venable and became known as Venable's Hotel. During the Civil War it closed but was opened after being thoroughly refitted and newly furnished. In 1873 the railroad offered for sale all of its real estate along the tracks including "that valuable property in Huntsville know as the Donegan Hotel, together with many lots lying near the depot." ...

Although the railroads' most pressing concerns throughout the 19th century were the operation of the trains and the development of new technologies, they were also forced to create a new building type—the depot—for which there existed no historical precedent. The earliest depots were designed for the purely functional considerations of selling tickets and providing shelter from the elements. However, by the end of the 19th century, they had evolved into something quite different: they had become the gateway to and the symbol of the city.

Earlier forms of transportation, the canals and turnpikes, usually had provided no special buildings for passengers but instead used convenient inns or taverns as their collection points. When railroading began, the companies were forced by economics to invest all their funds in track, bridges, and equipment in order to start operations as quickly as possible. There was no money to spare for depots, and railroads continued the earlier practice of operating out of public houses. However, the necessity for depots quickly became apparent, and they were soon erected in every town the railroad entered. The earliest and those in small towns tended to resemble cottages, perhaps in an effort to reassure a skeptical public that railroad travel was safe by providing it with a domestic image.

Furthermore, unlike Europe, the United States at the start of railroading was composed of numerous small cities spread at great distances from each other so there was no need for large scale stations; but as the 19th century progressed, cities grew, the railroads became large and successful, and depots became the focal point for the whole community. Gradually railroads replaced water and turnpike travel; consequently, it was through the depot that goods, people, and news arrived and departed. In short, the depot became the most important building in the community.

After the Civil War, railroad technology was concentrated on luxury, safety and speed. The depots grew into impressive, opulent structures and became "...to the 19th century what monasteries and cathedrals were to the 13th century. They are truly the only real representative building we possess.... Our

metropolitan termini have been leaders of the art spirit of our time.” (*Building News*, 1875) The railway terminal became the symbol of the age; it represented the progress of modern technology and civilization. It was this symbolic role of the station that led to the building of ever larger and more impressive structures. By the turn of the century, Grand Central station in New York City had a concourse that was 125 feet wide, 375 feet long and 120 feet high. Obviously these gigantic dimensions were not based on functional considerations but rather were an “... attempt to contribute splendid, monumental structures to the urban scene... public buildings should be supremely impressive.” (*The Railroad Station*, 1956) The residents of each city identified with their local stations, and each station was viewed by travelers as the image of its city.

Architecturally the stations were representative of the numerous revival styles which achieved popularity in 19th century America, and often they influenced architectural taste through their prominence. To the designer, either the railroad engineer or a professional architect commissioned by the company, stations were a challenge since they were a totally new type of building. There existed no historical precedents to consult for either plan or style so that numerous experiments were tried in both areas. Those architectural styles that were considered most suitable for depots were Italianate, Gothic, Romanesque, and Classical Baroque. The first three could incorporate towers of various design, which provided an immediately identifiable image and also housed the railroad clock, which in early days often served as the official time for the town.

After 1900 the railroads began to experience steady competition from the automobile, which was more convenient; the bus, which was cheaper; and the airplane, which was quicker. In order to meet this competition, the railroads found it necessary to cut expenses, the most obvious being the massive, ornate terminals. Economy often forced several railroads to consolidate their operations in a single building in each city, which produced the union station serving the trains and customers of more than one road.

Siting was another factor that contributed to the prominence of the terminal. In the pre-automobile era, it was slow and tedious to move goods and people to and from the station so that a centralized location within the business district and convenient to the most people was essential. Conversely, a business site near the depot was the most desirable causing the city to grow up around the station.

In 19th century America, the train's arrival at the local depot was the primary means of contact with the outside world through its delivery of merchandise, mail, newspapers, food, money, and people.

During the years of its operation, the M&C erected numerous stations along its line. The first building phase was completed just in time for the Civil War. Because of the road's strategic importance during that conflict, many of these depots were destroyed and had to be rebuilt in the late 1860s. The M&C ran through a sparsely populated, rural area so that the depots were, for the most part, modest frame structures. The railroad was principally a freight line built to haul cotton. Although after the Civil War, the tonnage of both lumber and stone exceeded that of cotton; because of this, the M&C stations were predominantly freight depots incorporating a ticket office. Also common during the days of steam were stops without depots where the train took on fuel and water. These water stops, established by the railroad, often grew into small communities, which were referred to as tank towns. The frequent stops were observed by an English traveler who commented: "Upon second-class lines, especially in the Southern states, the popular criticism upon a slow train, that 'it stops at every wood pile,' has in it not much of exaggeration."

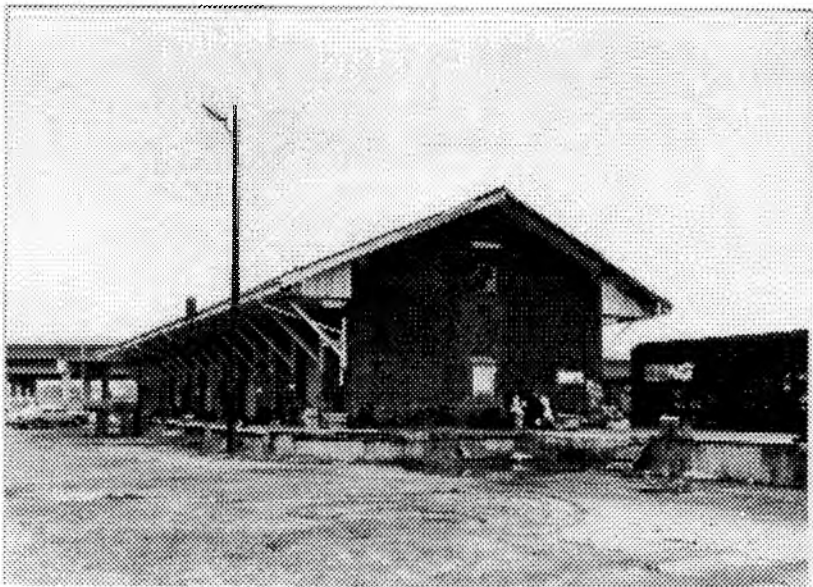


Fig.1 West end of 1856 freight depot, December 1994.
Courtesy Harvie P. Jones.



Fig.2 Track side and office of 1856 freight depot, December 1994.
Courtesy Harvie P. Jones.



Fig.3 Office end of freight depot, October 1998. Notice Courthouse in background.
Courtesy Malcolm Tarkington.



Fig.4 Track side and office end of freight depot, showing roof with shingles stripped off, October 1998.
Courtesy Malcolm Tarkington.

Excerpts from M&C Stations and Stops
Historic Huntsville *Quarterly*, 1981, Vol. VII, No.3

Catherine K. Gilliam

Huntsville Freight Depot

This was the Eastern Division (all track in Alabama) headquarters for the Memphis & Charleston Railroad, thus Huntsville received lots of attention and money from the railroad company. According to newspaper accounts, grading work began in Madison County in 1852; however, the first train did not arrive in Huntsville until October 1855. It is probable that some temporary wooden structures had been erected on the Huntsville depot grounds by 1855; however, they do not show individually in the M&C reports.

Beginning in 1856, the M&C reports show construction in Huntsville every year until the Civil War as the fine brick buildings were built for use of the road. These included the freight depot, built in 1856 and still in use [Note: The freight depot stopped receiving freight July 1996 and was almost demolished in October 1998], the machine shops and engine houses, all gone now, and the three-story passenger depot and Eastern Division Headquarters, which is now on the National Register of Historic Places. Railroad buildings built in Huntsville, as taken from the M&C annual reports, are as follows: 1856 Brick FREIGHT HOUSE built, no cost given in report. This building is still in use by Southern Railway System and is very likely the oldest railroad building in the country in continuous use as a railroad facility. It has had only two owners, the Memphis & Charleston Railroad Company, 1856-1898, and Southern Railway System, 1898-1981. [Note: The current owners of the building are Norfolk-Southern.] It is known to be the oldest railroad building still in existence in Alabama.

Status Update: Huntsville Freight Depot

From the Executive Director

We have been in negotiations with a Norfolk-Southern Railroad representative in Atlanta regarding transferring the depot from the railroad to Historic Huntsville Foundation. The representative has asked us to submit our final proposal, and we are preparing information for that proposal. Although we are more optimistic than ever about our chances of taking possession of this historic building, nothing is certain until an actual agreement is signed.

Diane Ellis

Note: Linda Bayer Allen works for the City Planning Department and as part of her job works in historic preservation. She was past editor of the *Quarterly* from the fall issue in 1978 to the summer issue in 1983. She is a native of Tacoma, Washington, and has been a resident of Huntsville since 1967. Linda has been active in Historic Huntsville Foundation (HHF) from its earliest days.

Note: Catherine Kelly Gilliam is a native of Madison County. She was born in Huntsville, but grew up in Jeff, Alabama. One of her earliest memories is of helping her great uncle Lawson Kelly, who furnished all the flowers, make arrangements for Confederate Memorial Day services in Maple Hill Cemetery. Catherine's interest in preservation and HHF came from her participation in the Civil War committee, 1960-1965. She says that she was "just born doing it." For her services to the community, HHF nominated her for a Lifetime Achievement Award from the North Alabama Girl Scouts Women's Scroll of Honor, which she won in 1996.

Preservation Alert: structures on the endangered list



Fig.5 Eastside Community Center, Dallas Street, 1999.
Courtesy Diane Ellis.



Fig.6 White cottage, 406 East Clinton Avenue at Lincoln Street, 1999.
Courtesy Diane Ellis.

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Las Cien Manzanas
Rescuing the Historical Center
excerpts from *Vuelo: Guadalajara, October 1998*,
a publication of Mexicana Airlines

Elia Parra

Two years ago, in order to restore Guadalajara's downtown area to its former splendor, a group of citizens, most of them architects, resolved to renovate no less than the one hundred blocks located between Miguel Blanco, San Felipe Degoilado, and 8 de Julio streets.

The first phase of the project was launched with a 1,750,000 peso (close to 200,000 dollars) initial contribution by the Historical Center Committee. It is estimated that, in total, this project will require an investment of 50 million dollars. The original contribution was used to establish a foundation made up of the private sector, government authorities, and distinguished members of the community who, through cultural, social and athletic events, must raise the necessary funds for the project's completion.

In order to reach this goal, there has been ample cooperation from banks, foundations, and the tourism sector (airlines, hotel chains, and the recreation and entertainment industry) as well as from established merchants and those that are interested in settling in the area.

As a result of a series of bids by professionals and design, engineering, and architecture students from the city of Guadalajara, the facades of several buildings and private homes are in the process of renovation; flying buttresses were replaced by sculptures, while streets and sidewalks were paved with stone giving them a colonial air. Street signs, commercial establishments, and billboards are also being homogenized in the same Colonial style. In short it is a question of harmonizing a number of deteriorated structures with several architectonic treasures of inestimable aesthetic merit, which have existed side-by-side throughout these hundred blocks and that had not received proper maintenance for years.



Fig.1 Calle Leandro Valle en Centro Histórico in the *One Hundred Blocks*. Courtesy Adalberto R. Lanz and *Vuelo*.

Designed to make the area pleasant and safe, the project includes sidewalk cafes and restaurants, as well as establishments offering international and local haute cuisine; entertainment centers and discotheques operating at night, without interfering with the daytime commercial establishments, thus guaranteeing around-the-clock activity. In addition, promenades and pedestrian areas closed to traffic have been expanded in order to promote the purchase of certain buildings in this area and adapt them as international class, European-style hotels; to encourage cultural activities and public visits to museums and historical monuments; to facilitate traffic and access to commercial suppliers; to improve parking areas and to reorganize the street-cleaning and garbage collection services according to any new requirements that may arise.

Note: Guadalajara, Mexico, is in the midst of renovating its downtown in order to preserve its Colonial heritage. Translated from the Spanish by the magazine. A serendipity from my trip to Cuba.

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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. The Foundation is the only organization in Huntsville concerned exclusively with architectural preservation and history. Membership is open to interested and concerned citizens from across north Alabama and beyond.

The Historic Huntsville Foundation warehouse is located in the basement of Harrison Brothers Hardware Store and is open 1st & 3rd Saturdays, from 10 until 11:30 a.m. The warehouse accepts donations of architectural items and offers the items at reasonable prices to people restoring Madison County buildings 50 or more years old. Warehouse volunteers can help restorers choose pieces appropriate to their building's time. For more information, call 539-0097.

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