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# Five Points: A Bright and Shining Star

*Gwen Walker*

In September 1999, the Huntsville Preservation Commission unanimously voted to recommend that the City Council establish the Five Points Historic District. On October 28, 1999, the City Council cast its final vote, and the Five Points Historic District was born. This was the culmination of months and months of work by residents of the district, city officials, and others. At that same time, the Five Points Historic District Association was organized and is now busy at work in several areas to help preserve and protect this unique neighborhood and to formulate and implement great plans for its future.

Five Points has been an integral part of the fabric of Huntsville. This area was the first annexed by the City of Huntsville and thus became its first “suburb.” The names of the streets are a roll call of the early movers and shakers of the young city: Pratt, Wellman, Wells, Ward. The names of those who have resided in this neighborhood—Pierce, Russell, Grey, Ray, Sparkman, Walker, Locke, Goodson—are all names still familiar to long-time Huntsvillians. Businesses that have located and flourished in the still bustling commercial district—Zesto’s, Star Market, Brownie Drug Store, Propst Drugs, Lanza Grocery Store, The Pub, Jean’s Dress Shop, and Service Cleaners, to name a few—are icons, some still thriving and all remembered by those who have called Huntsville home.

A pivotal point in the history of the city occurred in the late 1800s. Up to the time of the Civil War in 1861, the economy of the area was driven by agriculture, mainly the growing and marketing of cotton. After the end of the War, industrialists and investors began pouring into the South looking for sites to build mills and plants and a labor force to put into them. Here they found an impoverished and war-ravaged people leaving the farms, looking for work, desperately needing jobs. These two forces came together and changed the face of Huntsville forever.



**East Huntsville Addition**, surveyed May 9, 1892—The four block section left undivided was intended as a park. It was later bought by Emma Wells and subdivided. Courtesy Susan Bridges & H/MCPL (Plat Book 1, p35).

A group of men called The Northwestern Syndicate came to Huntsville from South Dakota. This group included W.I. Wellman, W.S. Wells, James A. Ward, and T.W. Pratt. They joined in a partnership with Col. J.F. O'Shaughnessy and three Huntsvillians—Milton Humes, J.R. Stevens, and C.H. Halsey. This group incorporated and became the Northwest Land Association (NLA). The January 6, 1892 Huntsville *Weekly Democrat* wrote, "The entire capitalization, it is understood, is \$6,000,000 and is very pleasant news to our citizens." Pleasant news, indeed; this was a huge amount of money, even by today's standards.

In addition to starting many of Huntsville's largest mills, this group also began to plan a neighborhood known as the East Huntsville Addition. This neighborhood was never owned by or part of a mill property, but was one of the development projects undertaken by the

*Five Points Area—The trolley tracks, and there vicinity to the homes, can be seen through the middle of the photo, just at the level of the woman's elbow.*

*Courtesy Emery/ Bridges.*



NLA. Platted in on February 13, 1888, the future Five Points land was deeded by the North Alabama Improvement Company to the NLA in 1892. Officers of the NLA included W.S. Wells, President and W.I. Wellman, Secretary. Mr. Wellman was also the president of the downtown Farmers' and Merchants' Bank.

In 1900 the announcement was made that the East Huntsville property, now Five Points, was to be placed on sale. It was described in various newspaper publications as "the prettiest residential section in Huntsville" and the "flower" of the residential areas. The Huntsville *Mercury* concluded one article stating, "Certainly the most fastidious prospector will be pleased with the property soon to be offered the public in east Huntsville, and those with sufficient forethought to make the first selections will deserve the congratulations of their friends and a discriminating public."

The jewel of a neighborhood sitting with the foot of Monte Sano to the east, historic Maple Hill Cemetery to the south, Old Town Historic District to the west, and a visible symbol of the city's progressive outlook—Interstate 565—to the north, Five Points is again coming alive. A bright and shining star, it illuminates the rich history of the past and points the way to promises of the future.

*Gwen Walker lives in Five Points on Pratt Ave. She has been published in the Old Huntsville Magazine, where a version of this article previously appeared. Ms. Walker also serves as the Secretary and Chairperson of the History Committee of the Five Points Historic District Association (FPHDA).*