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## Reflection: An Outsider's View of Huntsville's Historic Downtown

*Brad Grant*

While Huntsville has its abundance of futuristic attractions and institutions, the city is equally devoted to its past. Huntsville's historic downtown is packed with 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> century residential and commercial properties. As I wander through the area certain things catch my eye. For example, full-length columns crowned with capitals of inverted scrolls are used on numerous monumental masterpieces. The exterior of the Regions Bank on the square is constructed solely out of stone and even has stone steps leading up to the front door. The Greek styled columns and the smooth stonework give depth to the highly distinguished, historic architecture of the bank. The stone generates a firm, durable, and tough appeal which I love. I believe the stone shows power with its dynamic fashion and presence.

Brick and stone seem to have been the preferred building materials. Another ornate example of masonry construction is the Episcopal Church of the Nativity, located just off the square. This masterpiece is constructed out of handmade brick and is adorned with dramatic stained-glass windows of all dimensions. The house of worship is set-off and enclosed with a wrought-iron fence, a masterful piece of artwork in itself. This vigorous structure has a strong presence and yet remains an integrated part of the area.

My feet notice another feature of the downtown historic district: many sidewalks are constructed out of handmade brick which show wear with time, tree growth, and expansion. The imperfections of the brick are a result of the brick maker's hands, which create the wrinkles, ridges, and folds. These imperfections give each brick its individual character and charm that I adore. The individualistic texture is unmatched by conventional, modern brick.

The buildings and storefronts of times past present the American style with a totally different flair. Buildings built without modern technological advances add to the town's uniqueness. Building materials were handmade as opposed to factory made, thus giving the historic frameworks of Huntsville and America the one-of-a-kind look and feel. Even though modern architecture gives a sense of style, and is, in most cases, a commendable piece of design, I still prefer the more historic look.

*Brad Grant is a freshman at UAH and a resident of Winchester, Tennessee. He has always loved historic styled homes and businesses. This is his first reflection piece on the topic of historic structures and preservation.*