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Introduction

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Introduction

LYNN JONES AND DIANE ELLIS

Huntsville is in the middle of a building boom. Planned communities, housing developments, and shopping centers are on the drawing board or under construction. Downtown, building cranes dot the skyline signaling a hospital's expansion, a new hotel, a condominium complex, and an office building.

Happily for preservationists, a parallel enthusiasm for reviving historic projects is also making a difference in the city's commercial center. Some examples are the condominium conversion of the Terry-Hutchens Building, the Washington Square restaurants, and the continuing restoration of the Russel Erskine Hotel (the latter featured in the *Quarterly's* Fall/Winter 2004 issue). And now it's the Times Building's turn.

Sometimes "old" buildings have to go into hibernation for a while before the spirit of restoration returns to a community and the right person comes along to revive a dormant beauty. Such is the case with the Times Building, whose elegant Art Deco façade continued to fascinate and impress residents even as its commercial vitality waned over the years. In the best case scenario the "right person" is someone with a passion for historic buildings, a vision of what they might become, and the knowledge of how to do it. In 1984 Randy Schrimsher was that right person, who just happened to be at the right place, at the right time, and rather quickly and unexpectedly became the new owner of the Times Building.

Unfortunately the time was not yet ripe to undertake the major restoration the building would need. Work progressed slowly, and unforeseen problems arose. But twenty years later, on November 20, 2005, Randy Schrimsher proudly welcomed HHF members and the community to view the nearly completed restoration of his beloved Times Building. Guests toured the building from the basement level to the magnificent 360-degree views on the eleventh floor and listened to stories related by former newspaper editors, reporters, and production staff. If only all the stories could have been recorded! It was a trip down memory lane for many, and some visitors had their own remembrances to share.

Preservation, after all, includes not just the historic building but also the history that is contained within its walls—the businesses that operated there, the people who worked there, its place in the community throughout the years.

In addition to housing the operations of a newspaper, the Times Building has been home to many other occupants. For several decades the majority of the city's doctors and dentists had offices there. A 1940s city directory lists five doctors, five dentists, and two chiropractors. Long time Huntsville residents recall dreaded visits to dentists—Dr. Coons, Dr. Dillard, and Dr. Gowan—when teeth were drilled and pulled without benefit of Novocain. Physicians included Drs. Carl A. Grote, Sr., Thomas E. Dilworth, John D. Moorman, and Frank Jordan. A sampling of other occupants of the building in the forties includes Paul A. Speake, architect; TVA Forestry Division; masseuse Patsy Canterbury; the Christian Science Reading Room; and the North Alabama Business College. Over the years some businesses moved out, with others taking their place. The *Huntsville Times* moved to its new quarters on Memorial Parkway in 1956, and with its namesake business gone, the downtown building began to lose other tenants as well. City directories in the 1960s recorded an increasing number of vacancies.

There is a certain mystique about newspapers, whose business is colorful stories. Many of us retain romantic images of newspapering from movies: heart-racing headlines on papers rolling off the presses; a newsboy's call of "Extra! Extra! Read all about it!" In this issue of the *Quarterly*, former *Huntsville Times* editor Pat McCauley recounts his days as a *Times* reporter in the forties and fifties; Patricia Ryan narrates the fascinating saga of J. Emory Pierce, the paper's first editor and the man responsible for the Huntsville Daily Times Building; Randy Schrimsher describes how it feels to buy a big building on his way home for lunch; and Linda Allen discusses the construction history that made the Times Building possible.

So enjoy, and "Read all about it!"



From this vantage point, it is easy to see how a sense of verticality was created by placing all the vertical elements in the outer plane and recessing the horizontal panels behind them. The edge piers are wider and their windows more narrow to create a strong feeling of stability at the corners of the building. The absence of a bracketed cornice permits a clean, crisply finished top. Photograph by Scott McLain