

# Historic Huntsville Quarterly

of Local Architecture and Preservation

## *Train Whistles and Front Porch Swings*



**Exploring Historic Madison**

*Since 1974*

*Historic Huntsville Foundation*

*has worked to preserve the  
unique architectural heritage  
of Huntsville and Madison*

*County, Alabama*

*by encouraging  
the preservation of historically  
or architecturally significant  
sites and structures and  
increasing public awareness of  
their value to the community,  
Membership in the non-profit  
foundation is open to anyone  
who shares the goals of  
the organization.*

# Historic Huntsville Quarterly

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## Contributors and Editors

**Jeanne Steadman:** Historic Huntsville Foundation Board member- Secretary for the past three years. Has restored two historic houses in Huntsville: one in Five Points and one in Old Town and currently lives in a historic home in Madison, Alabama.

**Donna Castellano:** Chairman Historic Huntsville Foundation.

**Jim Norton:** Architect and new house homeowner in Madison's historic district.

### Homeowners:

Mike and Judy Andrewjeski, 306 Church Street

Tony and Cindy Sensenberger, 17 Front Street

Stan and Jeanne Steadman, 18 Arnett Street

Dennis and Joyce Vaughn, 26 Front Street

Gerald and Peggy Wheeler, 307 Church Street

Mark and Janell Zesinger, 312 Church Street

## Introduction

*“Let us Bind the Republic together with a perfect system of roads and canals. Let us Conquer Space....”*

JOHN C. CALHOUN

South Carolina Representative to the U. S. Congress

It has become commonplace over the years to hear cries that we can conquer space in North Alabama, but when John C. Calhoun first uttered these words on the floor of the U. S. House of Representatives in 1816 he spoke of the need to knit the vast area of America together through a vast transportation network so that the young nation would not become fragmented by sectionalism and break apart.

A challenge facing our early republic was how to do just that: How to unify the disparate parts of a rapidly expanding America into a unified whole—so that one nation—not multiple nations—would develop as we continued our manifest destiny west?

We needed to get connected. Initially, we built roads and turnpikes, expanded river ways, and dug canals. But transportation entered the modern era with the invention of the steam-powered locomotive built by Englishman Richard Trevithick in 1801, a marvelous product of science and technology which made rail travel feasible and allowed man to connect towns, cities, states, regions together through miles and miles of interconnected railroad lines.

Railroads built during the 1840's and 1850's grew like tentacles from towns, ocean and river ports, drawing vast portions of the nation together through networks of railway connections. Primarily due to political reasons, Alabama's antebellum railroad development lagged behind other states. In 1850 Alabama had 112 miles of railroad compared with Georgia's 666 and Ohio's 590. By 1860, Georgia had 1,420 miles of total track, Ohio led the nation with

2,946, and Alabama hovered near the bottom with 743 total miles of railroad track.

But parts of our state experienced the boom that occurred when railroads came to town. The 1850's saw tenacious North Alabamians capitalize and construct the Alabama segment of the Memphis and Charleston Railroad—an extensive railroad system that connected the Mississippi River and its vast tributary system to the Atlantic Ocean. Along the path of this and other railroads, railroad stations grew into small towns, taking advantage of the opportunities afforded them as trade and commercial centers for an agricultural population. The town of Madison, Alabama grew and developed within this larger national context—the fulfillment of a dream by visionaries who desired to see this nation knit together by common interests and culture.

Founded during the railroad boom one hundred fifty years, Madison is also a city with roots in the modern era--an era also populated by visionaries who also desired to conquer space. In the pages that follow, the antecedents of modern-day Madison can be discovered. We are grateful to the visionaries of Madison who had the good judgment to preserve this town's wonderful history and historic houses and buildings. I am particularly grateful to Jeanne Steadman, HHF board member and officer, who wrote and assembled this double issue of the Quarterly, and to the homeowners for sharing their insights regarding living in a historic home.

Enjoy—

Donna Castellano, Chairman  
The Historic Huntsville Foundation

## OVERVIEW

I enjoyed compiling the information for this Spring 2008 HHF Quarterly because I was thrilled to have the opportunity to spread the word about Madison's historic district- particularly since I worked on the nomination process that resulted in the area being listed on the National Register in March of 2006. I love old structures and have since I was a very small child. I love history and the reading off it in a historic building where I can really feel time. It always seems to me the previous residents must still be there-just stepped away for a minute. So if the information contained here can cause one reader to feel even a measure of what I feel about old houses everywhere I will be happy.

My intention also is to acquaint the readers with Madison's distinctive history and architecture. By pinpointing characteristic details and forms in the houses, it is hoped that people will come to understand the late Victorian-early 20th century periods in architecture and the relationship of the Madison houses to these periods. While the houses are closely related stylistically, the history of the people connected with each house is unique and it is the history of these people in particular that creates the charm of a community like Madison. A sample of individual homes in the district will be featured, with current homeowner comments, followed by thoughts from Jim Norton, an architect, residing in the historic district who designed and built a new home that blends in beautifully with the older homes.



Railroad - Depot - Round House

## THE HISTORY OF MADISON

JEANNE STEADMAN

Madison owes its development to the coming of the Memphis and Charleston Railroad to the area in 1856. The railroad, a faster, less expensive means of shipping and transportation, attracted numerous settlers. Many of these early settlers moved to Madison from wealthy river port towns like Triana because they could not compete with the railroad in shipping cotton and other farm products.

“Judge” James Clemens, one of the first landowners in Madison, laid out the original town lots on his property in 1857. A depot was built on the first lot, and Thomas J. Clay was appointed the first depot agent. The next year Clemens completed a new survey of fifty lots, all fronting on the railroad. Each lot consisted of 3/10 of an acre.

Madison Station, as Madison was called then, grew rapidly and soon tradesmen were attracted to the area. A business district developed on the same location as the present downtown area. Madison Station took on a character retained until very recently: that of a town comprised primarily of farmers and tradesmen.



1920's Street Scene



Madison's First Drug Store in 1871. It was located where the Hughes Hardware Store is today, at the east end of Main Street. From L - R: Samuel Balch & man on right in shirtsleeves is Thomas L. Bradford. Others unknown.

During the Civil War, which brought Madison's rapid growth to a standstill, Madison had its share of battles and skirmishes. One battle in particular, "The Affair at Madison Station" involved a direct attack on the town. On May 17, 1864, Confederate soldiers attacked

and overran the Federal troops who at that time had control of the railroad. The result of the battle was that the Confederate troops captured a cache of weapons and supplies and threw them into a nearby sink hole.

After the war, Madison experienced a new surge of prosperity. Robert S. Spragins, the Probate Judge and administrator of James Clemen's estate, extended the 1859 survey to include 50 more lots. In 1869 the lots were sold at an administrator's sale. The same year of the land sale, Madison became incorporated when a group of citizens filed a petition with the Probate Judge of Madison County. At that time the town's name was changed from Madison Station to Madison by majority vote.

Soon after its incorporation, new businesses opened in Madison. Dr. G. R. Sullivan and J. W. Burton opened the first drugstore in 1871. G. W. Pride opened the first steam cotton gin in Madison in 1896 which has since burned down. In 1888 it was recorded in the Northern - Alabama Historical and Biographical that:

“Madison has eight or nine general stores, a post, telegraph, and express office; Methodist, Baptist, Christian, and three black churches, and a good academy; a very healthful place; has fine freestone water, and its society is highly moral.”

At that time, Madison had a population of 500 people. In recent years Madison has experienced many of the same influences and changes as most towns in the Tennessee Valley area. The space program and Redstone Arsenal both were responsible for an expansion of

the town and for a shift in the economy

in which farming lost its supremacy.

Another factor contributing to the growth and economic shift of Madison was the new Huntsville-Madison County Jetport in 1966.

Madison has

changed greatly since its beginnings. From a provincial farming community of 1/4 square mile, it now covers many square miles with a population of over 37,000. Yet, despite this progress and change, Madison's historic district still retains the spirit and atmosphere of a former era. We are fortunate that towns like Madison exist so that we can learn to understand and appreciate our heritage.



RailRoad Depot, Madison, AL. Depot faced south toward tracks and Main St. from Front Street.

## AN INTRODUCTION TO THE ARCHITECTURE OF MADISON

The dominant characteristic of architecture in the late 19th and early 20th centuries was diversity. The houses in Madison, all built during this period, have a consistency which underlies this diversity in form and detail. Among the more common features of this late VICTORIAN period and the first few decades of the 20th century are: steeply PITCHED, varied profile, HIP - ROOF segments for the larger houses with irregular floor plans and an "L" plan for GABLE roof structures; Verandas with pyramidal wooden posts over brick bases; the use of half octagons in projecting bay sections and BAY WINDOWS and entrances with horizontal TRANSOMS over the doors. Rather unusual reminders of an earlier period in the porches of many of the Madison houses are the TUSCAN COLUMNS. Tuscan columns became popular in American architecture during the FEDERAL PERIOD (1780 - 1825) and were even used in transitional style houses such as Jefferson's Monticello. The frequency of the use of these columns on houses in Madison attests either to a vast supply of such columns available from the area building supply firms or to a marked consensus of taste among the early home owners in Madison. Some of the large porches with Tuscan columns have a curved end which leads to another entrance at the side of the house. Other porches, especially in Cottage style houses are decorated with late Victorian GINGERBREAD patterns branching from the top of the posts which support ornamental cornices. Several of the houses built in the early decades of the last century are of the BUNGALOW type popular in this period with deep verandas covered with extensions of the gable roof, supported by short boxed-in wood pillars placed on brick bases. In the Madison examples, the form of the upper wooden posts vary from the usual tapering boxed-in frames.

The iron fences, made in Cincinnati by the Stewart Iron Works, Co., in front of three of the houses in Madison create period accents that are distinctive. The GOTHIC REVIVAL (1870 - 1910) detail is especially noticeable in the tops of the gate post framework. Those which are more complete in original detail have diamond point and fleur-de-lys FINIALS.

*Words in caps appear in glossary.*

## **Gillespie - Andrewjeski**



### **Gillespie - Andrewjeski House, 306 Church St. Madison, AL**

The Gillespie-Wikle home was built in 1897 by William H. Gillespie. Thomas and Fannie East (Burton) Bradford married and moved into the home in 1906. The style is a Victorian cottage with a bay area in front with three windows. The porch extends from the right end of the bay to the side of the home. Another interesting feature of the home is that it originally had no hallways.

Mrs. Ora Wikle, a Madison school teacher, lived in the home for approximately twenty years. She was the daughter-in-law of Dr. Luther L. Wikle, a Madison physician who lived across the street at 309 Church Street. Mrs. Wikle built an addition to the north side of the home and rented this as an apartment for a number of years.

## Living with History

When we moved from Atlanta almost three years ago, we had no idea where in the Huntsville area we would live. We were not all that familiar with the area and thought we wanted to buy a home that needed little or no work. But we discovered that the Tennessee Valley area had wonderful historic neighborhoods.

We looked at homes in the Huntsville/Madison area mostly, but were also intrigued with homes in Athens and Decatur. We were taken with this small Victorian Cottage on Church Street in Madison. On Church Street there were porches on almost every house – and people who sat outside on the porch swings – and spoke to you when you passed by. A church was only a block away and you could hear the bells peal regularly. Two blocks away was Main Street and the train tracks. The regular sound of the train whistle was a welcome sound to us, and has become a delight to our grandchildren. We felt that this house being available as we made move to Huntsville must be fate. We bought the house the day we saw it.

We didn't realize that when we made the move to Huntsville that we would be taking on a major renovation project as we have with this 111 year old house that seems to be in need of almost everything. But it is a labor of love (some say a form of insanity) and after over thirty three years of marriage, Judy and I feel like we've finally "come home".

MIKE ANDREWJESKI



## **Thomas - Wheeler**



### **Thomas - Wheeler Home 307 Church Street**

Built in 1910 by Dea T. Thomas, the style of this home is Queen Anne Victorian. The two-story "T" style features an unusual central entry with a split staircase with a balcony or "open hall." There is a sleeping porch on the second floor rear. The home also has a full front porch. It features 11-foot ceilings downstairs and 9 foot upstairs. The original wide baseboards, bulls eye window trim and door trims remain. The home has been added to in the rear. In the 1950's, the home was divided into three apartments. A previous owner later restored the home to a single home.

## Living with History

We purchased our home in 1986. Both Jerry and I wanted a large two story home where we could raise our children. The first time we saw it we fell in love. We purchased the home and immediately began restoration. I told someone at the time we would be restoring this home for a lifetime. Little did I know that statement would turn out to be true. We have loved every minute of it and have so many precious memories.

PEGGY WHEELER



*Thomas - Wheeler Home 307 Church Street*



## **Balch - Zesinger**



### **Balch -Zesinger Home Early 1880's. 312 Church Street**

The Burton-Balch bungalow was built between 1880 and 1885. The original exterior of the home was board and baton. The original home also featured a porch at the back of the house that separated a summer kitchen and dining room from the rest of the house. This feature was replaced during later renovations.

The home is a basic bungalow design that has been added onto at least twice. Each addition has been to the back of the house resulting in a home that is significantly deeper than it is wide which disguises its size when viewed from the street.

## Living with History

We have lived in our 1885 Bungalow since April of 2007 and have enjoyed our “new” home every day. We took a leap-of-faith and purchased the home sight-unseen from Northern Virginia and



*Balch -Zesinger Home. 312 Church Street*

fortunately, fell in love at first sight. We had always wanted to live in an old home and knew they didn't come on the market very frequently. The faults and quirks (Is there a single wall or floor that is level in our home?) only add

to the character and charm. Someday the endless updates may get old, but for a serial decorator and an agreeable husband, it is a perfect match.

Not only do we love our home, but we enjoy living in the little Madison Historic District as well. Our two-year-old son can't get enough of the trains rumbling by down the street, and much of our summer is spent on the front porch swing watching the people and cars go by and listening to the church bells. Some days we dream of grand foyers, mudrooms, and basement media rooms, but then look around at the creaky wood floors and crumbling fireplaces and know that we made a good trade.

MARK AND JANELL ZESINGER



## **Cain - Steadman**



### **Cain - Steadman Home. Early 1880's. 18 Arnett Street**

Originally a "dog trot" style home built by Mr. Flavin Humphrey in the 1880's. Mr. Humphrey was born in 1852. Mr. Jim Cain purchased the property in 1905. He significantly enlarged the home and added a second story around the turn-of-the-century thus making the style of the home a two-story Colonial Revival. The front porch has the original Tuscan columns and banisters. The fifteen-room home has original flooring, doors, molding and staircase. It also has pocket doors between the front and back parlors with an oak mantle in the front parlor.

The home is said to have had the first indoor bathroom in Madison and the original claw foot tub remains. It is now used in the yard as a planter for flowers. Several out buildings are on the property including the original well house.

## Living with History

Who knew a leisurely Sunday afternoon ride could turn into a years long restoration/renovation project. My husband and I were killing time when we stopped to look at a sad, neglected old house for sale in Madison's historic district- I had been warned not to even think about another house as we had restored two historic homes in Huntsville, spending literally eleven years in the process. My husband being a native of Huntsville was not too keen on moving



*Cain - Steadman Home. 18 Arnett Street*

and certainly not keen on renovating another house but as I stepped into the backyard and saw the dilapidated out buildings- roofs caved in, supports sagging- my heart was captured- I knew if we did not buy this house and save those outbuildings someone would tear them down and that I could not bear. Out building are so very rare to find as most were torn down long ago after their useful life was over. What a lot of fuss, money, time and effort four little outbuildings can cause but I love them so and would do it all over again.

JEANNE STEADMAN



## Kyser-Sensenberger



**Kyser-Sensenberger House. 1910. 17 Front St.**

The Kyser-Jones House has a veranda with Tuscan columns that curve to the right side of the house. This curved portion serves to cover a side entrance to the house. The multi-gabled roof is high pitched with a central peak. In front of the house is one of three similar iron fences in Madison made in Cincinnati by the Stewart Iron Works Co. The iron fence is in the Gothic Revival style with arched top gate posts, diamond points, and fleur-de-lis finials. Note also, the leaded glass window to the side of the entrance of the house. Windows of this type were extremely popular in the late 19th century. Mr. Harvey Anderson built the Kyser-Jones House in 1910. Mr. Anderson was a farmer and co-owner of a hardware store on Main St. with Mr. Frank Hertzler. In 1926, Dr. Kyser purchased the house.

Dr. Kyser, one of Madison's leading doctors, came to the area in 1915. His work was recognized by the U.S. Government for helping to bring a flu epidemic under control in North Alabama in 1818. The house was in the Kyser family for nearly fifty years.

## Living with History



*Kyser-Sensenberger House. 17 Front St.*

We bought our house in 1997 at an estate auction. The house was dilapidated, the roof was falling in, and there were holes in the floors and buckets on the back staircase catching water. My husband saw the potential

for this to be a grand home again. We spent one year on the renovations and with the help of Harvie Jones brought life back to the home and gardens. We love living in our home and the historical district of Madison. It has a quaint and charming feeling. I think the former owners would appreciate what we have done. We have committed ourselves to our home and the neighborhood to keep it as it once was.

CINDY SENSENBERGER



## Finney-Vaughn



**Finney-Vaughn. Ca. 1900. 25 Front St.**

The Finney-Robbins House, typical of turn-of-the-century houses, has a steeply pitched roof with an irregular contour. On the left side of the house is a bay window. Bay windows which project out into the environment reflect a change in taste away from the rigid rules of the classical revival. As with the Kyser-Jones House (Photo 7), the Finney-Robbins House has a porch that curves to the side of the house to cover a side entrance. This house is another of the three houses in Madison that has a Gothic Revival iron fence with fleur-de-lys accents, all made by the same company. The use of these similar fences attests to the fact that early Madisonians must have had a strong consensus of taste or at least a sense of keeping up with the Jones! The Finney-Robbins House was built by Mr. Frank Hertzler, co-owner of a hardware store on Main St. with his neighbor, Mr. Harvey Anderson.

## Living with History

In 1983 my wife Joyce and I, empty nesters in SE Huntsville, were interested in historical property. After spending several years in historic Boston, we wanted more space than subdivisions typically provide and a small town atmosphere. While visiting a downtown Madison dress shop in July of that year, Joyce first saw the historical home for sale at 25 Front Street. She immediately loved it.

On our way home from the airport to our Huntsville residence, we drove by the property (which at that time had two horses and a pony in the back yard) for a more detailed look. A month later we were moving into the circa 1905 two story Queen Anne with bay windows and fireplaces in almost every room and a large front porch overlooking downtown Madison and the village green. In addition to the main house the property includes many large shade and pecan trees, a wrought iron front fence and a circa 1850's two room maids' quarters located on a two acre lot.

When we purchased it, the Front Street house was very sound structurally but needed some tender loving care. Neither of us fully understood or appreciated the time, effort or financial requirements associated with living in and maintaining older historical structures. The first year we personally applied more than



*Finney-Vaughn. 25 Front St.*

55 gallons of paint. Since that time we have added new wiring, plumbing and a den/ recreation room and deck on the rear; upgraded and/or built three bathrooms; opened entrances into attics to

create closet space and built a separate combination three car garage, pool house/porch/ bath, grandchildren play room and shop.

When we moved to Madison (then with a population of less than 4000) it really was moving to small town America. Today Madison is the tenth largest town in Alabama, but the downtown historical district still maintains that small-town appearance and atmosphere. The character, charm, convenience, and friendliness created by former and current residents of the small town remains. We describe it as the perfect place to live and entertain friends, family and our ten grandchildren. We can sit or swing on the large front porch overlooking the downtown, listen or visit the summer weekly concerts and many other events in the village green, frequent the two local restaurants, walk to church and the many downtown shops, services and businesses and swim or ride trail bikes, dune buggies and electric scooters in the back lot. All ten of our grandchildren and many of their friends have learned to love 25 Front Street.

We have now lived on Madison's Front Street for almost 25 years. During this period the house has exceeded its 100 year birthday and we have celebrated our fiftieth wedding anniversary. When we first moved into the house, we observed some of the strange occurrences and haunted stories that most older and historical homes provide. Now, however, the strange sounds, flickering of lights, nightly ding (muted single ring) on the telephone and other indications of former residents have now been totally accepted by all those who have inhabited 25 Front Street, Madison, Alabama.

DENNIS VAUGHN



## Blending Old with New

JIM NORTON, ARCHITECT

After designing many new residences, an architect will decide on the particular style for the house he will build. For me, the homes Sears and Roebuck sold, which populate downtown areas across the nation, have always been appealing. Typically referred to as “Bungalows” or “Craftsman” these designs are the epitome of what many consider “home.”

Two obstacles I faced in designing my mine was marriage and location. When I began the design work on my Craftsman style home I was a single man. Thankfully, my then future wife loved the design and only offered input as to how the house could be a little more “baby friendly!”

But the question begged, where in today’s housing developments could one locate such a unique design as the Craftsman? Context is a key theme taught in architectural school and my Craftsman design must be contextual. Surrounding this style of house with today’s “brick boxes” would not be appealing.

By accident, I found the perfect location of downtown Madison. Here were older homes which reflected the character and detail of the design I desired to build. Also, the downtown area offered an appealing feature not in great quantity in other downtown areas. This being the many undeveloped pieces of land perfect to build a new downtown historic residence.

The lure of downtown Madison is strong. The afternoon I visited the location of our future home was particularly memorable. The timely ringing of church bells from the Methodist Church was appealing. Also, just a block away, the passage of a Norfolk Southern freight was music to my ears as the engineer linked the downtown crossings with one continuous tune on the horn. I felt like I was home.

Downtown Madison possess qualities that today's planned communities strive for. It is a true neighborhood with the underlying theme of historic homes, a small retail area featuring dining and shops, a school and churches all within walking distance. But what is most appealing about the downtown area is the vast potential for growth of this unique neighborhood.

## GLOSSARY OF ARCHITECTURAL TERMS

**Baluster:** A small, upright support carrying a balustrade rail. Usually vase-shaped.

**Bargeboard:** The carved ornamental board attached to the underside of the roof projection at the gable end in 16th century Elizabethan architecture. This ornamental detail was revived during the Gothic Revival and late Victorian periods in the 19th Century.

**Bay Window:** The window area that projects from the wall usually with sides that slant back to the wall, or in a half octagon form. Some of the projecting bays in Madison use this form for an end wall.

**Bungalow:** A low house with wide eaves and a wide deep veranda. Originally developed in Bengal, India, a version of the bungalow became popular in America in the early decades of the 20th century. It was one-story with a gable roof which projected over a deep veranda that was supported by tapered, boxed-in posts placed on brick bases. Several variations exist in Madison.

**Chamfer:** The surface formed when the sharp edge at the intersection of two corners is cut off diagonally or bevelled.

**Dormer:** An upright window projecting from the main roof used to light the space in a roof.

**Federal:** The name given to the style of architecture which reflected the English Adam style that developed in America in the late 18th century until ca. 1825. Houses in this period have a projecting portico with Tuscan columns and an entrance with an oval fan lighted transom over the side lights.

**Finial:** The ornament which terminated a post. In Madison pointed diamond or fleur-de-lys finials are used in the iron fences in front of some houses.

**Gable:** The triangular upper part of a wall under the end of a ridged roof, or a wall rising above the end of a ridged roof.

**Gingerbread:** Pierced curvilinear ornament, executed with the jig saw or scroll saw, under the eaves of roofs. So called after the sugar frosting on German gingerbread houses.

**Gothic Revival:** In America, Gothic Revival tendencies in architecture and furniture began before the mid 19th century and continued into the latter part of the century. Quatrefoil and trefoil decorations were frequently used.

**Hip Roof:** A roof which slopes to a peak from all four sides.

**Pitch:** The degree of the slope of a roof.

**Stringcourse:** A projecting row of stones or bricks which forms a narrow horizontal strip across the wall of a building.

**Transom:** The framed glass panels over a door. Its shape varied from period to period. In turn-of-the-20<sup>th</sup> century houses the transoms were horizontal.

**Trefoil:** A three-leaf opening used in Gothic Revival, especially as decoration in triangular areas or in the spandrel of an arch. An angular version of this is in the upper corner brackets of the United Methodist Church belfry in Madison.

**Tuscan Columns:** A form of column developed by the Romans, most readily distinguishable by its simplicity. The columns are smooth, never fluted, and the flat, saucer-like capitals are unornamented. A thin abacus block and a molding are placed below the capital.

**Veranda:** A deep, wide exterior porch as used in the Bungalow style houses in the early decades of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. Also used to mean a porch in general.

**Victorian:** Technically the period of Queen Victoria (1837 - 1901). In American architecture the term applies to the melange of details from various styles used in the later 19th century.

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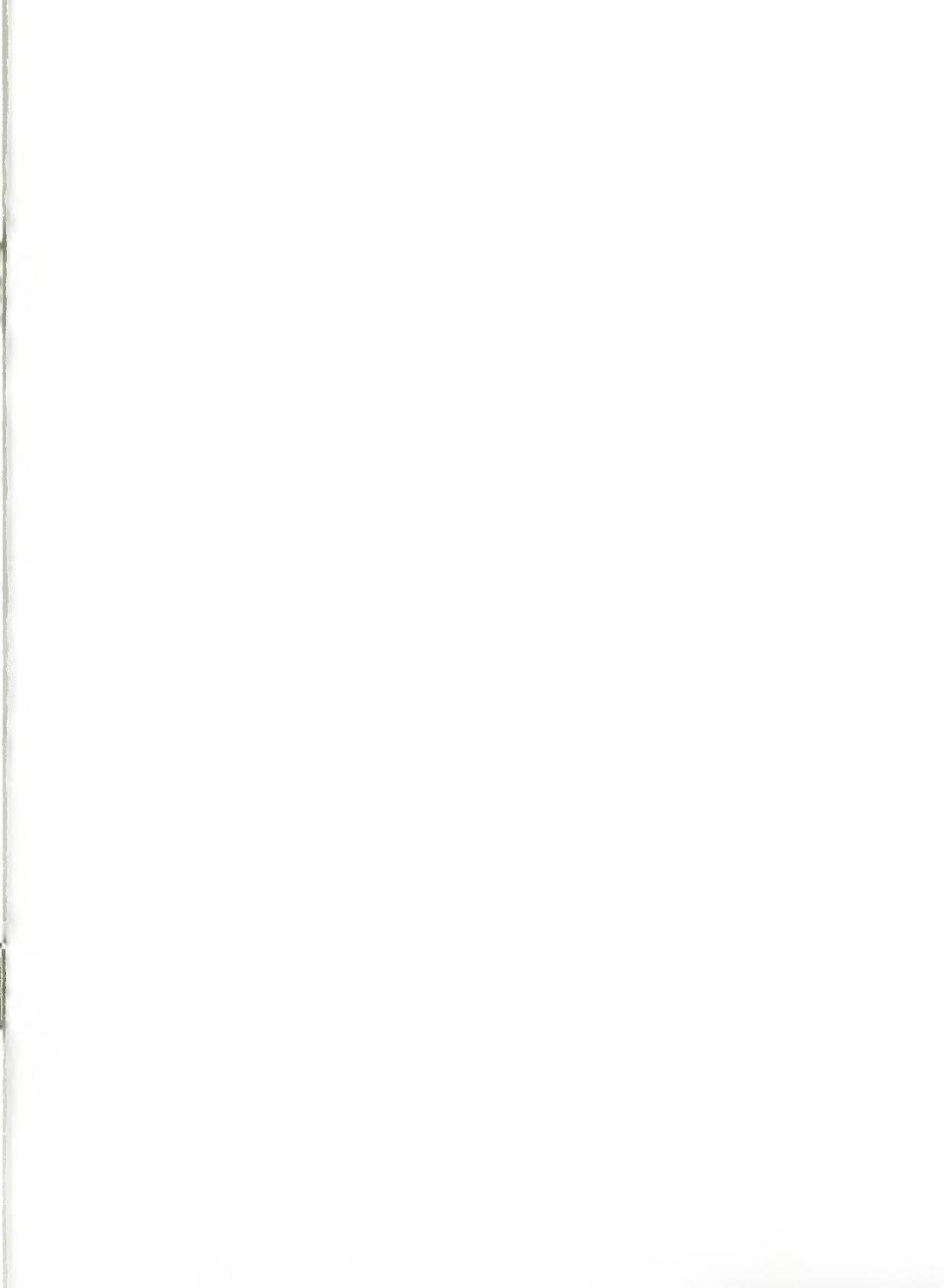
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