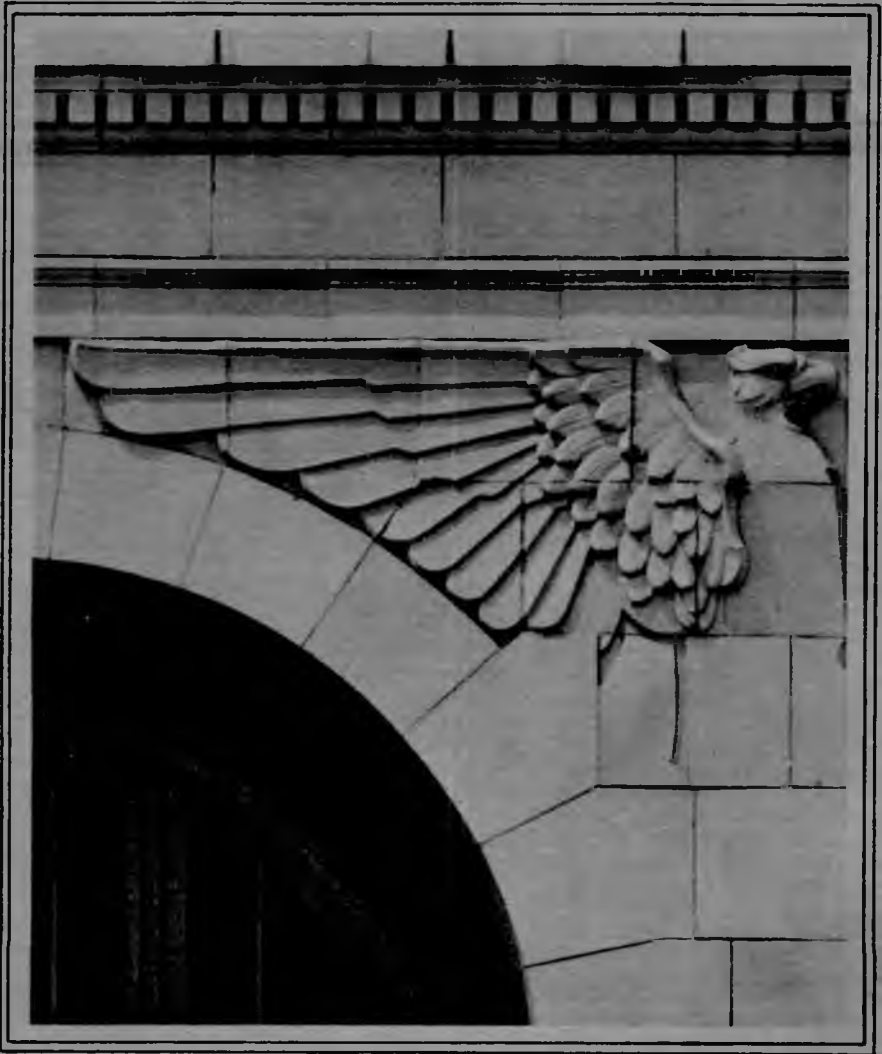


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Winter

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THE HISTORIC HUNTSVILLE
QUARTERLY

Of Local Architecture & Preservation

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from the Editor

This year's Decorators' Show House will be held at Oak Place, the George Steele home that is currently being renovated by the East Huntsville Baptist Church. This second annual Show House, which is a project of the Women's Guild of the Huntsville Museum of Art, Inc., will feature thirteen rooms in Oak Place decorated by local firms. Proceeds from the Show House will be used by the East Huntsville Baptist Church to continue restoration of Oak Place and by the Women's Guild to purchase art works for the permanent collection of the Huntsville Museum of Art.

Festivities will begin on the evening of March 31 with a tour of Oak Place, to be followed by a champagne reception at the Huntsville Museum of Art in honor of the participating decorators. This reception will be by invitation and tickets will be \$10 each.

The Show House will be open daily from April 1 through April 19 and individual tickets will be \$4. The April first opening will celebrate the anniversary of George Steele's birthday with a Birthday Party Open House and free refreshments. Hours for the Show House will be from 10 a.m. to 4 p.m. Mondays through Saturdays, 10 a.m. to 8 p.m. on Thursdays, and 1 to 5 p.m. on Sundays.

In the past the Historic Huntsville Foundation has actively encouraged the preservation of this important architectural landmark, which is listed on the National Register of Historic Places. The Foundation has provided architectural plans and technical assistance and donated the proceeds from its Tour of George Steele Houses to the restoration fund. More recently the Foundation has agreed to pay the cost of having reproductions of the original front doors and window architraves fabricated, and on Sundays the Foundation will provide room guides for the Show House. Any members who would like to serve as a guide should contact Freda Darnell (837-2925) or Nancy Van Valkenburgh (534-2887) to volunteer.

The conservation and restoration of Oak Place has been a continuing concern of the Historic Huntsville Foundation: Let's all do our part to ensure that the Oak Place Decorators' Show House is a huge success.



COVER: This stylized terra cotta eagle is one of four that reside above the arched main entrances of the Times Building, one of the downtown properties recently listed on the National Register of Historic Places.

NEW NATIONAL REGISTER PROPERTIES IN DOWNTOWN HUNTSVILLE

by Linda Bayer

The Historical Background

Twenty-seven properties in Huntsville's central business district were added to the National Register of Historic Places on September 22, 1980. This makes a total of thirty-two structures so designated in the downtown; those previously listed are the First Alabama Bank on West Side Square, the Memphis & Charleston Depot, the Hundley House on Madison, and the Clemens House and Humphreys House, both on Clinton.

The significance of downtown Huntsville derives from its age, scale, extent, architecture, and layout, all of which are typical of rural town development in the 19th and early 20th century. With few exceptions, the streets maintain a low cornice line composed of two and three story brick buildings; only six structures now disrupt the skyline, three from the 1920s and three from the 1960s. The buildings of the downtown are concentrated in an area six blocks by four blocks. The new

construction now taking place within this area retains the small scale of the existing buildings. The structures themselves represent the various styles that were popular for retail and religious buildings, but they are, as a rule, interpreted in a restrained manner that reflects local materials, needs, and talents.

John Hunt, the first white man to settle near the Big Spring, arrived in 1805, and in 1809, the first government land sale took place at which LeRoy Pope purchased the sixty acres that became downtown Huntsville. This area was laid out on a grid pattern of six streets by five streets. These were surveyed at an angle of 34 degrees west of north so that the Big Spring would lie wholly within one block, and the north-south streets would run parallel to the top of the Spring bluff. This created twenty squares of two acres each which were then divided

into four lots except for the Courthouse and Spring squares. The lots facing the courthouse were always the prime commercial sites and were those first developed.

Settlers began arriving mainly from Tennessee, Georgia, the Carolinas, and Virginia. Many of these were cotton planters attracted to Huntsville by the presence of the fertile soil of the Tennessee Valley which was suited to cotton culture. The area south and east of the Square was chosen as the site for many of the elegant Federal and Greek Revival style brick homes of the wealthy planters; this area is now Twickenham Historic District.

The town prospered until the Civil War as a regional center for retail trade, cotton production, and county government. A canal was built from the Big Spring to the Tennessee River in order to ship the cotton bales along the river system to New Orleans.

Serious development of Huntsville began about 1810 with the erection of a small, brick courthouse and of frame and brick stores on the four sides of the Square. During this first period of growth, development was a combination of commercial and residential structures with the merchant often living above his shop or office. By 1861, the Square was almost filled, but the other streets had only scattered development. The 1871 map illustrates much the same pattern, solid development on the Square and along one block of Washington Street.

Fires and rebuilding have taken their toll of the earliest downtown structures; however, several are still extant

such as the excellent Greek Revival First Alabama Bank, the Schiffman building on East Side Square (now remodeled in the Romanesque Revival style), the Mercury building of 1841 in Twickenham, and 108 and 110 South Side Square. In addition, there are several buildings on the Square that retain antebellum foundations and party walls so that the scale is maintained although the facade has been extensively remodeled or rebuilt.

In 1859 the Memphis & Charleston Railroad entered Huntsville connecting it with Memphis on the west and Chattanooga on the east and through the latter with the port cities of the eastern seaboard. This gave the cotton planters greatly improved facilities for marketing their crop. However, the Civil War ended most activity, and for three years Huntsville concentrated on survival while under Federal occupation. Construction came to a standstill, and even after the war ended, there was little money to resume building, a situation that lasted into the 1880s. By then the city was mounting a campaign to attract new residents and industry.

In 1881 a spinning mill was opened in Huntsville to produce cotton thread; it met with immediate success, and by 1892 the town had secured its first large cotton weaving mill which located just north of the city limits. This began a second period of growth and prosperity for Huntsville as six more mills opened around the city during the next ten years, and Huntsville became one of the major cotton textile towns of Alabama. Each firm erected a village around its mill to house the operatives who flocked to Huntsville to find employment. The town itself began to expand and

construction was underway everywhere. The downtown was practically rebuilt at the turn of the century with new retail buildings appearing along all the major streets. The area around the Square was no longer sufficient for the increased population and the commercial area expanded quickly.

During these years the increase in commercial activity gradually forced residential structures out of the downtown area to be replaced by stores, offices and warehouses. The location of the railroad depot on the north side of town encouraged commercial development to expand in that direction. During the first part of the twentieth century, the area along Jefferson Street south of the depot was filled with brick warehouses, many for the wholesale grocery business. Simultaneously the Square was filled with substantial brick commercial structures, and the area north of the Square along Jefferson, Washington and Greene Streets was also built up.

In the 1920s, chain stores began opening in Huntsville which further increased the mercantile activity. Although the mills provided sporadic employment depending on the price and availability of cotton, the town continued to grow until 1930 when the effects of the Depression reached Huntsville. The 1930s began a period of stagnation for the town that was intensified by the belated arrival of labor union activity in the local mills, which, when combined with the Depression, effectively brought to an end Huntsville's career as a textile town.

Construction ceased with the Depression, and the city remain-

ed in a state of limbo until the third period of growth that occurred when the Redstone and Huntsville Arsenals and later NASA were located near Huntsville. Starting in the 1950s, the city quickly outgrew the limits of the nineteenth century town, while suburban shopping malls deprived the downtown of its retail function. Many older buildings were destroyed, and new construction has only partially filled the voids; too many of the extant buildings are still empty and unrenovated.

The antebellum commercial structures usually were narrow, of three stories, built of brick, and had post and lintel construction on the first floor. Those buildings erected after the Civil War are similar except they have segmental-headed windows on the upper floors decorated with metal hood molds and are capped by an ornate, bracketed metal cornice. These buildings are often only two stories high. There is some use of locally fabricated cast iron columns on the street level. After the turn of the century, there was a slight increase in scale with two buildings reaching twelve stories. Terra cotta cladding was used on several structures and a more decorative use of brickwork became common.

The downtown buildings reflected most of the various styles that became fashionable in the United States; but as a rule, they were rather more restrained than those in a large city. The decorative elements were normally confined to the window treatment and cornice; the ground floors of most of these buildings have been modernized past recognition. The styles also exhibited a certain time lag in reaching

Huntsville; the Italianate influence continued into the twentieth century while the last Art Moderne building was not erected until 1948. The area contains Greek Revival, Italianate, Romanesque Revival, Gothic Revival, Commercial Brick, and Art Deco styles.

Particularly common in the downtown are structures in the Commercial Brick style, which flourished during the first thirty years of this century. These buildings share common stylistic and structural traits and are found throughout the country. Although they are stylistically distinct, they apparently have never been specifically identified nor defined--hence the introduction here of the name "Commercial Brick" style to facilitate discussion of this group of buildings.

Briefly, these buildings are constructed of brick and are fewer than five stories high. The overall proportions are low and the principal orientation is horizontal. The facade tends to be flat, symmetrical, and regular in design. The cornice is usually cleanly cut or consists of a stepped parapet wall with slight corbelling. Windows are double-hung and arranged to create horizontal patterns across the facade, but the proportion of glass to brick remains small. Decoration is restrained and consists primarily of brickwork laid to produce flush patterns on the wall surface or of accents of the structural elements created by a second, contrasting material, usually masonry or terra cotta.

In short, the Commercial Brick style achieves its effect from the disposition of its mass, proportion, and fenestration, rather than from the introduction of applied decorative elements. It is a simple, functional method of building, incorporating a minimum of ornament, which is always handled as an integral part of the structure's basic form. These buildings in the Commercial Brick style are important locally as they typify commercial architecture in Huntsville during the early part of the 20th century. Although there exist examples in the downtown of the formally recognized high styles, they are not representative of the bulk of Huntsville's architecture and were designed by imported architects. The Commercial Brick buildings illustrate the mercantile style that predominated during this period for the majority of small, local building projects designed by local architects.

However, Commercial Brick was not purely a Huntsville development, for buildings in this style can still be seen in communities all across the country wherever modest commercial construction occurred. Commercial Brick style buildings form the connecting link between Victorian and later "modern" styles, and they prepared the way for the success of the latter by their emphasis on the subordination of decoration to structure.

The New Listings



SOUTH SIDE SQUARE

*104-128 South Side Square
1835-1912: Architects unknown*

South Side Square is important as an entity for several reasons. It has served as the prime commercial property in Huntsville since the second decade of the 19th century and actually was called "Commercial Row" until the 20th century. It was built up with small retail "houses" prior to the Civil War and although the appearance of the block has changed through the years, the size and number of the build-

ings have remained constant because the party walls and foundations were usually retained during rebuilding or remodeling. Within this decade, the character of the block is changing from retail stores to professional offices as is the remainder of the downtown.

These buildings are significant for their age, consistency of materials, historical associations, and role in the development of commercial architectural styles as they evolved in a small town.

DONEGAN BLOCK

105-109 North Side Square
1870: Architect unknown

RAND BUILDING

113 North Side Square
1883: Architect unknown

These two buildings illustrate the Italianate Revival style as applied to commercial buildings in a small town, where clients and builders tended to interpret the high styles in a simplified manner. Huntsville in the 1870s and 1880s had a population of not quite 5,000 people; it had no trained architects and most building designs were in all likelihood the product of local contractors. The result was that the high styles were considerably modified in practice and that commercial architecture in Huntsville during the second half of the last century was predominantly Italianate.

The Italianate commercial building in Huntsville was constructed of brick and displayed a vertical emphasis on the facade that was repeated by the second story windows, although this tendency gradually decreased as the century progressed. The wall surface was unadorned except for pilasters which divided the facade into bays, three windows wide. The double-hung windows were treated as individual elements, each of which sharply pierced the wall plane, while the window tops were either rounded or segmental and ornamented with a projecting cast iron hood, usually with a keystone. Most Italianate stores were of two floors, although Donegan's was an exception--being one of the first buildings erected following the Civil War, its design



probably was influenced by a lingering taste for the exceedingly tall, narrow proportions of antebellum buildings. The attic in this case has been supplied with segmental vents which further enhance the picturesque quality of the facade. A bracketed metal projection tops each structure.



SCHIFFMAN BUILDING

*231 East Side Square
 Before 1861: Remodeled 1895 by
 George W. Thompson, Architect,
 Nashville*



The Schiffman Building is one of the few extant antebellum commercial buildings and the only Richardsonian Romanesque building in the city. Its facade and interior have not been significantly altered since 1895 when the Southern Building and Loan Association remodeled it at a cost of \$18,000. Issac Schiffman purchased the structure in 1905 and established a loan office there the following year; the building has remained in the family since then.

A minor historical note is that Tallulah Bankhead was born in the second floor apartment in 1902 when her father William Bankhead was a lawyer in Huntsville.

MILLIGAN BLOCK

201-203 East Side Square
1900: Architect unknown

In Huntsville, the Italianate, or a variation thereof, remained the basic commercial style throughout the second half of the 19th century for the vast majority of small, locally owned businesses. The more elaborate Queen Anne and other high Victorian revival styles were for the most part too expensive for small merchants and probably required the services of an architect. By the end of the century, the Italianate was nearly exhausted, although its basic form persisted to be transformed into the Commercial Brick style--an adaptation that the Milligan Block illustrates admirably.

The Victorian influence can be seen in the basic composition of the structure, the arched windows, and the applied metal cornice. However the strong horizontal elements and the use of both the structural features and the structural materials to provide the ornamental treatment are characteristic of the Commercial Brick style, as is the introduction of masonry to provide a textural and color contrast with the brick.

The Milligan Block is significant because it illustrates the transition period from the vertical complexity of 19th century architecture to the horizontal restraint of early 20th century buildings.





EVERETT BUILDING

115-123 North Washington
1899: Architect unknown

This is a beautiful design executed entirely in brick except for the ashlar lintels and sills. The facade is divided into bays by corbelled pilasters which set up a repetitive pattern across the wall that is reinforced by the identical, closely spaced windows. Flush masonry lintels span each bay; the building has been painted yellow so that the masonry creates a textural rather than a color contrast. The store is terminated by a brick parapet that alternates courses of stepped brick with a band of brick dentils. The center bay repeats the end bays while its increased height provides a

focal point for the design. The northern bay continues the design features of the facade, but slight variations indicate that it may have been built at a separate time or resulted from a remodeling.

The Everett Building is an elegant example of the early Commercial Brick style before it became devoid of ornamentation. It has discarded Victorian applied decorative elements and instead relies on an imaginative use of the structural material and the pattern of fenestration for its effect. The lightness of its design would have been increased by the original street facade of slender cast iron columns between large expanses of plate glass.



HUNDLEY-CLARK HOUSE

400 Franklin

ca. 1904: *Architect unknown*

HUNDLEY-VAN VALKENBURG HOUSE

108 Gates

ca. 1904: *Architect unknown*

400 Franklin and 108 Gates were built by Oscar Hundley as rental properties behind the large house that he erected for himself in 1900. (His own residence, the Oscar Hundley House, was listed on the National Register in 1978.) In 1902 he purchased the piece of land abutting his backyard, and the next year tore down the existing stable and a two-story structure which was reputedly built in 1818.

Although no architect has been identified for any of Hundley's buildings, it seems likely that they were all designed by the same person. They are all more or less transitional designs combining Victorian massing with Colonial Revival elements. They all have an abundance of shingled gables, similar if not identical porch elements and doors, and the same window frames and chimneys. All were built within the same five year period for the same client. They illustrate the shift in domestic architectural tastes in Huntsville at the turn of the century from a preoccupation with Victorian to the Colonial Revival--a change that occurred much later in Huntsville than in the Northeast. Both of these houses are basically unaltered and possess integrity of location, design, setting, and materials, and they embody the distinctive features of local residential design at the turn of the century.



CHURCH OF THE VISITATION

222 North Jefferson

1860-1877: *Architect unknown*

Planning for the church began in 1860, but construction was halted the following year by the start of the Civil War. Work resumed in the late 1860s but was slow due to a lack of funds; in 1877 the church was completed and dedicated.

It is a masonry building in the Romanesque Revival style displaying a symmetrical, smooth facade with two towers and semicircular arches over the doors and windows. This is a rare extant example of picturesque, antebellum architecture in Huntsville.

W. L. HALSEY WAREHOUSE

300 North Jefferson

1904: *Architect unknown*

This is one of the finest commercial buildings in Huntsville with its subtle combination of cast iron, glass, brick, and metal cornice. It is one

of only two remaining buildings in the downtown to retain its cast iron elements intact and to utilize them so as to achieve an all glass facade on the street level. The cast iron was manufactured locally by Huntsville Foundry and Machine Works.

HALSEY GROCERY WAREHOUSE

301 North Jefferson

1923: *Architect unknown*

The Halsey Warehouse is typical of the many small, commercial structures erected during the expansion years of the mid-1920s. Both retail stores and warehouses were built of brick with a flat facade terminated by a stepped parapet. It was a simple, inexpensive method of building yet not totally devoid of picturesque elements. Here they include brick arches, corbels, and a broken cornice. This warehouse illustrates the stylistic changes that occurred between 1904, when the first Halsey building was erected across the street, and 1923, when this warehouse was constructed by the same company.





DUNNAVANTS

100 North Washington

1905: Edgar Love, Architect

Dunnavants was erected by Terry Brothers and Rogers, a local dry goods company, in 1905 from a design by Huntsville architect Edgar Love. It was originally of brick and milled construction according to the *Weekly Mercury* which reported that "carpenters are now placing the heavy timbers for the second floor." (May 10) The building was extensively remodeled in 1927 by contractor Charles E. Baxter who had a "force of men at work building an entire new front, besides the rearrangement of the interior." (*Weekly Times*, January 13) However, photographs and drawings of the building indicate that the only exterior changes ever made to the building were confined to the entrance and display windows on Washington Street. In 1940 a fire started

in the paint department on the third floor and did considerable damage to this floor and the roof. At that time the roof was replaced and repairs were made throughout the structure.

Dunnavants was probably the first major commission Love received after his mentor and partner Herbert Cowell returned to Illinois. It is a well organized composition executed in brick and having a strong horizontal orientation. The window arrangement is identical on the two upper floors providing a continuity to the facade while the scale and treatment of the windows are varied. The cornice is composed of decorative brickwork.

This is one of the major structures of the downtown, and its renovation will greatly enhance the streetscape.

STRUVE-HAY BUILDING

117-123 North Jefferson

1900: Herbert Cowell, Architect

The Struve-Hay is one of several commercial structures in Huntsville that combines Victorian and Commercial Brick features. It was erected in 1900, which in Huntsville was a transitional period for commercial styles: the excesses and variety of the Victorian era were gradually being shed in favor of the more restrained and integrated designs of the Commercial Brick style.

The most obvious Victorian feature here is the corner tower, a popular picturesque device much favored in the late 19th century. Several towered structures were built in Huntsville, but the Struve-Hay is the only one still extant. Other 19th century features include the applied metal cornice and the Romanesque-derived side entrance with bay window above.

Influences of the Commercial Brick style are most noticeable in the flush lintels, which span each bay, and the contrasting stringcourse, which serves as a continuous window sill running unbroken across the entire facade. Although the building displays several Victorian treatments, the regularity of its composition, the strong horizontals, and the overall restraint exhibited by the wall surface are indicative of the general direction that local commercial architecture would pursue in the first quarter of this century.

It is also the only extant commercial design by architect Herbert Cowell, who came to Huntsville from Joliet, Illinois. He had a successful practice here for several years at the turn of the century and executed numerous residential commissions.





RANDOLPH CHURCH OF CHRIST

210 Randolph

1887: Architect unknown

Built as the Christian Church, this small structure is a late example of early Gothic Revival design with its simple wood tracery in pointed arch windows, centered frontal entrance tower, symbolic buttresses, and gables supporting a small spire. The dark brown brick with pencilled joints reinforces the solidity of the church. It is typical of the box-like church with lancet windows and frontal tower that became popular in rural areas throughout the country. Although these churches of the later 19th century were often board and batten, the native and traditional brick was substituted in this instance.

TIMES BUILDING

228 East Holmes

1926-28: R. H. Hunt and Company,
Architect

The Times Building was the second of three skyscrapers erected in Huntsville during the building boom that began at the turn of the century and lasted until the Depression. It was designed by the Chattanooga architectural firm of R. H. Hunt which also did the Terry Hutchens Building. It is a beautifully subtle design with its unbroken piers terminating in an elegant Art Deco inspired terra cotta cornice. The building is now owned by Madison County and houses both county and private offices.





PARSONS LAW LIBRARY

*205 East Side Square
1913: Edgar Love, Architect*

May and Cooney was a locally owned dry goods firm that had lost its building during a fire in 1911. In April 1913 the owners signed a lease with Mrs. Milligan to erect a new building on East Side Square to cost \$30,000. May and Cooney occupied this structure until 1931 when they went bankrupt as a result of the Depression. In 1934 the J. C. Penney Company moved into the vacant building and remained there until 1965. In 1973 Madison County purchased the structure and renovated it for use as the county

law library.

It is one of the few extant, glazed terra cotta, commercial buildings in Huntsville, two of which were designed by local architect Edgar Love. The construction was supervised by Mrs. Milligan's son who died before it was completed. The initials "KM" (for Kate Milligan) appear at each end of the facade arch. Only the ground level was altered during conversion to a library, and this remodeling was done in a manner sensitive to the original lines of the building. The interior is notable for the use of exposed steel trusses to support each floor.

HOTEL RUSSEL ERSKINE

123 West Clinton

1928-30: Joe Holman of Marr and Holman, Architect, Nashville

The Russel Erskine was considered a most magnificent structure in its day, which began in the middle of the Depression. It was the tallest hotel and had the most rooms in the Tennessee Valley; it was "the" place to stay when one had business in North Alabama. At its opening in January 1930, the management threw a formal ball attended by all the prominent families of the area. For 30 years most of the civic clubs used its meeting rooms and many important social functions occurred within its walls.

The money for its construction was put up by a group of Huntsville businessmen who incorporated in February 1928, and construction began late that year. Although the architect and general contractor were from outside Huntsville, the directors were proud that many local firms had subcontracts, including the Huntsville Transfer and Building Material Company which supplied sand, gravel and brick, and Mason's Furniture store which supplied three carloads of furniture. However, the tile, marble, and terrazzo work went to an Atlanta firm, and a Birmingham company did the painting. It had Otis elevators. The total cost of the hotel was over half a million dollars.

The hotel was named for a local man, Russel Erskine, who had left Huntsville at an early age and made a great success of himself by becoming president of the Studebaker Corporation.



The Meyer Hotel Company managed the business until 1935. The hotel survived the Depression years, and by the 1940s was turning a profit. The sudden growth of the city during the 1960s created a rash of motel building that drew customers away from the, by then, old building. During the 1970s an attempt was made to revive the hotel, but it failed and the structure is now vacant.

LOMBARDO BUILDING

315 North Jefferson

1922: Architect unknown

The Lombardo Building is a three-story brick warehouse built in 1922. Four wide piers separate the facade into three bays; the ground level openings have been bricked in except for one doorway. The two upper floors each have three connected windows per bay, while the top of each bay is decorated with three corresponding corbels. The name "Lombardo" and the date "1922" appear at the top of the building. The fenestration along the side of the building is composed of segmental headed windows.

The Lombardo is a fine example of the fully developed Commercial Brick style as applied to a larger than average structure. It displays the characteristic regular, symmetrical brick facade, grouped windows, stepped parapet, and reliance on fenestration and structural materials to create its distinctive style rather than on applied ornament. While the height and width of the pilasters convey a vertical feeling, this is neutralized by the horizontal handling of the windows and the repeated horizontals of the elaborate parapet. The ground floor alteration does not obscure the original design.





DOWNTOWN CHEVRON STATION

300 East Clinton

1919: Architect unknown

The Downtown Chevron is the oldest filling station extant in downtown Huntsville and has been in continuous use as such since its construction. It was one of the first structures built specifically to serve the automobile and is the only such structure of this vintage to survive. It predates the era of standard designs sent out by the oil companies for their stations.

Its diagonal placement on a corner lot with the hipped roof extended to shelter the pumps makes it a prototype of the drive-in building form which developed in response to the era of the automobile--a concept that has in the years since become ubiquitous with fast food franchises, motels, and all the other structures that now line our highways.

The original portion of the

station was designed to function merely as a filling station for the sale of gasoline, but as the filling station evolved during the 1920s into a full service center for the repair and maintenance of the automobile, the addition of enclosed service bays became necessary. The two additions of the Downtown Chevron reflect this expanding role of the station.

The service station as a building type is particularly vulnerable to demolition by virtue of its small size, the vagaries of the motor oil business, and the general attitude that gas stations are undeserving of serious consideration. On the contrary, the early filling stations pioneered a new building type and function that forms the very heart of our modern, automobile-dependent society. The filling station, probably more than any other structure, is representative of 20th century American life.



YARBROUGH HOTEL

127-129 North Washington
 1922-24: D. Anderson Dickey, Archi-
 tect, Huntsville

The Yarbrough Hotel is a brick and concrete structure of approximately eighty rooms. Excavation for the foundations began in late 1922. Mr. Brogan of Fayetteville, Tennessee, had the contract for the footings and J. H. Goodwin was the concrete contractor. The *Community Builder* reported on March 29, 1923, that "Yarbrough brothers on last Friday let the contract for the erection of a four-story hotel building...to be at a cost of \$150,000. The building will be of brick and reinforced concrete and will contain 75 rooms with baths. The basement will contain a large pool room

and lavatories."

Baxter Brothers received the contract for the general construction of the hotel. By May the paper reported that "the concrete of the superstructure has been showing good progress," (*Community Builder*, May 10, 1923) and the brick side walls reached above the level of the second floor in June. The hotel opened in early 1925.

On Washington Street the facade is broken into three bays by flat brick pilasters which visually extend the brick piers of the street level; these pilasters are divided into horizontal bands by repeated rows of recessed brick. There is one store to each bay having a centered entrance and large dis-

KELLY BROTHERS & ROWE

307 North Jefferson

1928: Architect unknown

This building is locally significant for its part in portraying the evolution of commercial architectural styles in the years immediately preceding the Depression. Kelly Brothers & Rowe displays a late phase of the Commercial Brick style, when it had been refined and simplified to the point that functional considerations essentially replaced aesthetic

concerns. The facade is perfectly flat--even the use of a contrasting material has been eliminated; the only decorative touches are the central raised wall portion with the name plaque and the use of darker brick to outline the openings and the building's perimeter. The left side has been slightly altered by exchanging a door and a window, but this modification has not greatly affected the basic design or appearance of the structure.



play windows under a multipaned panel of opaque glass, which is now covered with signs. The three floors of rooms above are identical; the windows are rectangular and topped by a row of vertical brick with a light-colored stone block at each corner. A massive pressed metal cornice with double brackets at the top of each pier and a

continuous row of dentils caps the building.

The Yarbrough Hotel is significant for its history as one of Huntsville's premier hotels during the 1920s and as being a major structure designed in the popular Commercial Brick style.



MASON BUILDING

115 East Clinton
1927: *Edgar Love, Architect*

This is one of the few terra cotta commercial buildings in Huntsville and was designed by local architect Edgar Love. If restored to its original appearance, it would be one of the most attractive and distinctive structures in the downtown.

Mason's was a local furniture store established in 1908 by James Mason and John Manning. In 1927 they began construction of this building for which there were five construction bids ranging from \$50,000 to \$65,000. It was to be a two-story brick building with the foundation strong enough to

support five stories. The building was designed as a five-story structure with beautiful cascading floral ornament in polychromed terra cotta decorating the top. The existing building is merely the first phase of construction and accounts for the clean, unemphasized skyline. Apparently Mason had planned to lease this structure, but it was not until 1929 that Sears Roebuck signed a contract for it. The building was remodeled to Sears' specifications which included building a small mezzanine, installing an elevator, altering the front, and doing all the interior finishing work which had not been completed when the building was erected. Sears opened their store in March 1929; however, they withdrew



BECKERS BLOCK

105-111 North Jefferson
1925: Architect unknown

Beckers is a fully developed example of the Commercial Brick style as evidenced by its strong horizontal orientation, its stepped parapet, its combination of brown brick and cream-colored stone, and its reliance on structural materials and composition to achieve

its decorative effect. This one block illustrates most of the methods employed by the Commercial Brick style to impart a decorative surface to the structure without introducing applied ornamental features; the brick is laid vertically and as headers to create panels, channels, and edgings, which are further emphasized by the contrasting flush stonework.

from Huntsville during 1931 as a result of the Depression, and Mason's found it necessary to move into the building themselves. Further changes were made at this time such as enlarging the show windows and erecting the present mezzanine. Mason Furniture occupied the building until February 1977 when they went out of business.

The Mason Building is a beautifully conceived structure that breaks with local tradition and reflects the presence of a sophisticated client aware of architectural trends beyond Huntsville. This is Love's most refined design and illustrates his potential under favorable conditions.



HENDERSON NATIONAL BANK

118 South Jefferson

1948: Warren, Knight and Davis,
Architects, Birmingham

Although the bank is not yet fifty years old, it is a fine example of the Art Moderne

style and the only one in downtown Huntsville. The exterior demonstrates the smooth, streamlined design, vertical reeding, stylized low reliefs, and polychromatic effects that are characteristic of the style.

TERRY HUTCHENS BUILDING

102 West Clinton

1925: R. H. Hunt and Company, Architects, Chattanooga

The 1920s was a decade of building and expansion for Huntsville; the city felt it was becoming truly a cosmopolitan center with the erection of three "skyscrapers" in the central business district. The Terry Hutchens Building, originally called the Tennessee Valley Bank Building after its major tenant, was the first of these tall buildings. The owners went to Chattanooga to engage the firm of R. H. Hunt and

Company to design the building and then hired a Birmingham company, Earl Cline, as the general contractor. The low construction bid was \$154,750 while the mechanical bid came in at \$28,197.

The Terry Hutchens Building is important as being the first tall office building in Huntsville, the only late Gothic Revival commercial structure, and the first to be constructed without load-bearing walls. This last item was a constant source of wonder to the many "sidewalk superintendents" who eagerly watched its progress.

KRESS BUILDING

107 South Washington

1931: Edward Sibbert, Architect

The Kress Building is the second example of an Art Deco structure built in Huntsville, and although the bottom of the facade has been greatly changed, the upper wall is original. It was designed by Edward Sibbert of New York who also did an Art Deco store and main office for the Kress Company in Manhattan. The Huntsville store was estimated to cost \$100,000 when it was constructed in 1931.

It is a fine Art Deco design displaying the vertical emphasis, polychromed patterns of stylized low relief, angular composition, and use of terra cotta that were characteristic of the style.



BIG SPRING

West Side Square

The presence of the Big Spring was the principal reason that Huntsville developed here. The constant availability of fresh drinking water apparently was considered more important by the 19th century settlers than the improved transportation which they could have had by locating ten miles south on the banks of the Tennessee River. The spring also influenced the physical development of Huntsville; when the streets were laid out, it was thought desirable to contain the spring entirely within one block, which was called Spring Block. Because the bluff ran $33\ 1/2^\circ$ west of north, the street along it was laid out at that angle rather than due north, and all the other streets conform to it.

By 1823 a water system was under construction that would distribute the spring water to the town. A reservoir was built on the Square and pipes

made of hollowed cedar logs were used to carry the water to each house. Because of the presence of the spring, Huntsville probably had the earliest public water system west of the Alleghenies.

During the 1830s, the overflow from the spring was utilized by flatboats to float cotton bales to the Tennessee River. In the late 19th century, the city, which had purchased the spring in 1843 and the waterworks in 1858, could offer textile mills free water as an inducement to locate their plants in Huntsville.

In 1889 the public water system supplied 591 hydrants, 162 water closets, 63 baths, 24 urinals, 87 sprinklers, and 7 soda fountains. From 1920 until 1950, the revenue from the sale of water was the biggest single source of income for the city's general fund. Pumping from the Big Spring stopped in 1957, and by 1964 the city was obtaining all of its water from the Tennessee River.





from

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