

*Six Dollars*

*Summer — Fall*

*1991*

*THE HISTORIC HUNTSVILLE*  
**QUARTERLY**

*Of Land Architecture Preservation*



**Huntsville on the Move**

**HISTORIC HUNTSVILLE FOUNDATION**  
**Founded 1974**

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THE HISTORIC HUNTSVILLE

QUARTERLY

of Local Architecture and Preservation

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## From the Editor...

“Huntsville on the Move” is the theme for this *Quarterly*. We begin with the historic move here of the Germans in 1950, given personal dimension by Elfriede Richter-Haaser’s autobiographical account. Then, we follow the excitement and challenge of moving into and renovating a home in the Old Town district as we read Cecil Jenkins’ account.

Fortunately, we can sometimes save a building or home by moving it, as was the case of the Humphrey-Rogers home which had outlived its usefulness as a Coca Cola house. Harvie Jones helped save the house and writes a dramatic account of the “save” and the move.

Lastly, the *Quarterly* looks to the future, to see Huntsville on the move into the year 2000. Johnny Johnston, Director of the Huntsville Redevelopment Authority presents an overview of plans for downtown. As brilliant as our past has been, the future appears equally bright — if we strive to make it so. A new, dynamic group has organized, calling itself either the FRIENDS OF DOWNTOWN or the HEART OF HUNTSVILLE ASSOCIATION (HOHA). All citizens and businesses are invited to join and add their talents and “two cents worth.” For further details, call Johnny Johnston or Head HOHA, President, Bubba Conner.

## Letters to the Editor...

Dear Elise,

You are sure fun to ask for help. You've never said "no." Yet.

Anyway, this is the area of concern, please word it better, befitting a professional-type publication.

— Friends of Oak Place —

In 1883 the Steele family sold the estate to George Washington Lane. (This is not the Judge George Washington Lane who flew the United States flag from his porch here in Huntsville during the War between the States.) A daughter of the Lanes later married Michael J. O'Shaughnessy and lived at Kildare Place. A young man in Canada, descendent of these folks, has in his possession pictures, not shown in Huntsville, of these houses which he is willing to share with us. All he asks in return is information about the O'Shaughnessy family and more particularly about the Lanes. Anyone with information please contact Nancy Rohr at 881-1933. Help us get pictures of these historic homes and add to Huntsville history.

Not too concise, fix it if you can. And thanks ...

*Nancy Rohr*

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Dear Elise,

Just wanted to comment on the Winter/Spring Quarterly by saying what a wonderful nostalgia trip for me — knowing that I didn't just imagine the yellow, blue, and red people I saw on the streets as a child. Here's definite proof from Mr. McDaniel. And "Miss Susie" Moorman, what a delight she was. Wonderful and inspiring stories of our "own," from the Town I love the best! Thanks!

*Lee Harless*

From the HHF Board Chairman,

Dear Fellow Foundation Members:

It was with much reluctance that I accepted the position of your HHF Chairman. Reflecting on the caliber of those individuals who had succeeded me in the job was very intimidating. I finally overcame my hesitation by realizing what a marvelous resource pool of knowledge and ability they would be for me. And believe me ... I have tapped into the pool continuously. The months since May 1991 have been filled with activity.

Work toward "Old-Fashioned Trade Day on the Square" filled most of the summer. All the hard work of our HHF volunteers, under the skilled guidance of Wanda Carlen, resulted in this year's edition (the third) being the biggest and best to date! "History Day" took place for the first time as part of the "Trade Day" activities and received an enthusiastic endorsement from the public. As a part of this effort, HHF presented its first "Honored Citizen Award" to Mr. Cecil Fain for a lifetime of enhancing the history of life in our community.

By the publication date of this *Quarterly*, HHF will have co-hosted the "Autumn Feast" with Constitution Hall Village. Proceeds from this fundraiser go toward costs of moving the Humphreys-Rodgers House to its new home in the Village.

Continuing our preservation efforts, HHF actively participated in negotiations to save the Norfolk-Southern Freight Depot, the oldest continuously-operating railroad freight depot in the United States. It now appears that the depot will indeed be saved.

Late spring 1992 will be the time for our biennial fundraiser, the "Movable Feast." There will be many opportunities for hard-working volunteers. Increasing participation

from more of our membership is a personal goal of my chairmanship. Memberships in HHF stand at approximately 800, with individual members reaching approximately 1,300. If you have the time and the desire to actively participate in your organization, please don't be shy. Make yourself and your talents known! Whether it's at Harrison Bros. Hardware or in the myriad of activities that always seem to be going on, your time and talents are invaluable.

My other primary goal is seeing our school education program actively reestablished. In the past, we have taken our slide presentation and program into the public schools to acquaint our youth with the value of preserving our past. Required fundraising activities and preservation efforts of recent years have necessitated that the program take a back seat. Now is the time to change that. New Board member Hope Kirkpatrick has volunteered to chair this project for HHF and 1992 should see work well underway.

As I think you can see, my term thus far has been exciting and BUSY — never dull, I can assure you. You never know what the next letter or phone call will bring — whether it's for advice on a wedding in an antebellum mansion or a call from the BBC in London! Again, thank heavens for that resource pool!

With your continued support, all signs point to another great year for Historic Huntsville Foundation.

*Gerald W. Patterson*

# **Huntsville, Alabama: Home for the German Rocket Team and Their Families**

[An Extract from the Autobiography of  
Elfriede Richter-Haaser]

## **Introduction**

Even though Huntsville was considered a small town it had been **FIRST** in many ways:

1811 first town incorporated in Alabama  
1812 first Mason Lodge chartered  
1816 first bank incorporated  
1819 first State constitution drafted  
1819 first Governor inaugurated  
1819 first Session of the Legislator held  
1824 first cotton mill erected

and now, after 1950, we were first in more ways than one.

The population of the city had grown from approximately 16,437 with annexation of the 5 wards, to 21,765 and later to a metropolitan population of more than 38,000 by 1955.

The arrival of the 120 German scientists with all their families, under the sponsorship of the US Army, to work at Redstone Arsenal, marked the start of the tremendous growth we have today.

I remember the first time a meeting was held and Dr. von Braun spoke about his dream, building rockets large enough to fly to the moon and explore the universe — people did not comprehend the enormous task ahead of the nation. Looking around in the room, I saw all kinds of expressions on the listeners' faces. At that time few gave any special thought or attention to a dreamer from Germany. But today, his work has changed our life completely in so many ways that it is impossible to list all of them.



Since my family was among the German contingent that made Huntsville home and helped it become Rocket City U.S.A., perhaps our story will shed light on the larger story.



### **At Home In Huntsville, Alabama**

On April 1, 1950, we left El Paso, Texas by train at night, the thermometer reading 110°. It took us until the 3rd of April to arrive in Huntsville, where the temperature was 30°.

A friend, Dr. Hans Grune, who had been here before us, picked us up with his car from the train-station, the one we still have today as a museum. We drove through town on Madison Street and noticed the old courthouse on the square, the cotton row, and all the stores. The sign on Terry's store, "Great is the power of cash," greeted us at the

south side of the square. We passed the Huntsville Hospital and found our apartment in the "College Hill Apartment Complex" which had just been built to house the incoming Germans. The housing shortage at that time was a big problem. There were the Longwood apartments, some at Colonial Hill on Meridian Street and, some houses were being built on Holmes Avenue. The Noojin housing project was also under construction. What we mostly noticed that day were the black people on Franklin Street. The families were sitting on their front porches in rocking chairs, smoking pipes. The black community started south of Lowe Drive, and we observed that the white people were very aloof about them. We quickly learned that on busses, we could sit in the front; they had to ride in the back. Washrooms had signs, "White only." All this seemed strange to us and we were often not sure how to handle the situation. In Germany the only black people we ever saw before were in a circus or black soldiers after the war. And, at that time, we talked to them as equals if we needed their help or assistance. Nobody had prepared us for this strange situation in Huntsville. The Kiwanis club presented their annual "Kiwanis Capers." It was a parody of the lives of black people. Local businessmen would participate. It stopped in later years.

As soon as we moved into our apartment, we stored the luggage and boxes, including warmer clothes. But to our dismay, it had turned cold in Huntsville. Water pipes were frozen and water was running out of the apartment next door, which belonged to some friends of ours coming by car, who had not yet arrived from El Paso. In this mess, while we were frantic to get everything under control, we received our first visitor, a Mrs. Wilson, who came from the Welcome Wagon Club to welcome us to Huntsville.

Mrs. Wilson introduced herself to us and said she wanted to make us feel at home. With a stack of cards in her hand, she named all the merchants in town who were welcoming us to Huntsville and had a small gift for us when we would visit their store. My husband tried several times to interrupt her and ask her to come back at a more opportune time. My son

was ill from a cold, I felt miserable, the water was running out of next door, we had all our hands full, but she insisted that this was just the right time for her to see us. Later, at a party, my husband demonstrated this event to our friends and we almost died laughing.

Fortunate for us, there was a motel, "Heart of Huntsville," within walking distance, so that we could spend the first two nights there until the apartments had been made ready and repaired. Our first purchases in Huntsville were raincoats and warm clothes and an umbrella. Texas had very little rain, so we had never needed one. Being used to walking long distances, it was no hardship for us to walk to town. The Huntsville people were not accustomed to people walking; most of them drove their cars everywhere and would stop to give us a lift. They could not understand our reluctance to hitch a ride.

As soon as possible after we arrived in Huntsville, we walked to the library in downtown and acquired a library card so we could check out books for reading. We were very well known there pretty soon. The old library at that time was located just one block to the south from the First Alabama Bank.

Huntsville had a population of approximately 15,000 in 1950 when we came to make this town our home. It's square, with the courthouse in the middle, was the stage for all happenings. There was a flavor of small town life, as you would still find in the surrounding areas such as Scottsboro or Guntersville. The First Alabama Bank on the west side of the square, with its white marble columns, is a landmark of Greek revival architecture built in 1835-40 and designed by architect George Steele. It is the oldest, still existing bank in Alabama. Slaves were once held as collateral in the basement of the building. We were told a legend that Jessie James robbed the bank and made his escape by jumping off the cliff into the spring below. That, of course, is not true.

Going into a store was a strange thing for us, because the salespeople would ask us, "What will it be for you, Honey?" In Germany we were brought up very formal and only with dear friends would we exchange the familiar, "du" (you in German). Dr. von Braun was most of the time still Dr. von Braun, while the American people would just call him Wernher.

When we were leaving the store, they would call to us, "You come back, hear!" and we would turn back from the door and want to know what they still wanted from us. It was difficult for us to speak and understand the English language. Even though we had English in German schools, it was more the 'high' English. Also, to understand the southern drawl was a problem for many of us.

Harrison Brothers Hardware store was visited frequently by us, especially our husbands, looking for special tools or other needed gadgets. The brothers found great delight in chatting with the German people. They mentioned to us that somewhere in their heritage was a German immigrant, which pleased us to talk to them about our homeland.

Dunnivant's was another great store. We felt immediately at home when we saw Mr. Dunnivant at the door greeting all his customers in a personal manner, calling a salesperson to assist us and find the items we were looking for. We also liked to shop at Belk & Hudson just a block from Dunnivant on the other corner. Mr. I. Wind would sit in his rocking chair outside his store when the weather permitted and chat with us. He helped us with any special wishes we had; so did all the other stores. Mr. Mahoney served our men folks for their needs and dressed them accordingly. After a while, we all became friends with these people on a first name basis. My favorite store was Harold's on the north side of the square. I always felt dressed like a queen when wearing a garment from Harold's. How we missed this merchant and other when the square was redesigned and many moved to other places on the newly built Parkway after 1955.

There were movie theaters in Huntsville, the Grand and the Lyric, only some blocks away from our apartment. We would see as many films as possible to improve our language, so we could make ourselves understood.

Industry in Huntsville was mostly related to cotton, because at that time, cotton was still king and reigned in this region. The west side of the square housed the Cotton Row where all the cotton merchants had their offices. Looking down from there was the Big Spring, where John Hunt had settled in 1805. It is a delightful place to relax and feed the ducks, which are considered very important inhabitants of the town, having their own legal right-of-way when crossing the street.

We had been living in the apartment for 3 months when the opportunity came to move to a house at 1409 Ward Avenue. Our landlord and landlady, Mr. and Mrs. Couch, were an older, charming couple whom we adopted immediately as our 'grandmother and grandfather.' Our son Juergen would chat with them in his broken English, but usually made himself understood. The house needed a lot of improvements to make it livable for us. My husband, being handy in all phases of work, delighted in fixing the house up. When we moved later on, it was in much better shape than it had been before. Not far from us, other German families had also rented houses. We would visit each other, giving help when needed.





The backyard made a wonderful playground for Juergen and our dog, Falco, that we had acquired from some friends. Juergen had a sandbox and, in the hot days, would cool himself off with the waterhose and later on in a small swimming pool. The other children were puzzled about his speech, half German — half English. One girl ran to her mother and said, “That boy talks so funny.” But, they got along fine.



We shopped for groceries at Five Points, at the Star Market, owned by Mr. C. Russell. We would walk with the baby stroller and Falco to buy food. Mr. Russell would try to help us in getting certain types of spices or food, bread, etc., especially sweet butter, so that we would not miss too much being far from home. I am still today a faithful customer of that store, now run by his son, Wade.

In 1951, while living on Ward Avenue, our second son was born. Hein was the best bargain we ever had in life. The Hospital, doctor, and everything cost us only \$25.00!

We had our first telephone installed when we began to feel like paupers because our American friends would ask us to call them and we had to reply that we didn't have a telephone! The only connection we could get was a four-party line and it proved to be a problem when the phone was needed for emergencies. The teenagers on our line loved to use it. So one day, when I needed the phone for calling the doctor and could not use the line, I called the telephone company and gave them an ultimatum: either I get a private line or they could come and take the phone out. Needless to say, I succeeded.

At our arrival in Huntsville, the ministers of the different churches gave each other the doorknob in hand, coming and going as they did, in their effort to entice us to become members of their congregation. Not knowing how the church system was in America, we became puzzled and kind of annoyed. In Germany only two different religions were known, Catholic and Lutheran. Here we could not find out what was the difference about their services and why their beliefs were not the same as we had been taught. But, the need for a Lutheran church was eminent, and in 1951, a wonderful pastor, George Hart, took over the lost sheep from Germany and formed a congregation from scratch.

In March of 1951, the property of Chambers Funeral Home (very appropriate), on Franklin and Longwood Drive, was purchased and converted into something like a church. Mr.

William Angele, a pillar of our new church, built the steeple in his garage in two hours and then it was erected on the church. On October 31, 1951, Reformation Sunday, St. Marks Lutheran Church was formally organized into a congregation with 119 baptized members and 73 confirmed ones. Later, a permanent church was built just across from the old one at the corner of Longwood and Franklin. It is still a very active church. It became the scene of many weddings and baptisms, but now unfortunately, also funerals — more than we like.

It was a great day when we bought our first car from Herbert Ray, who gave us a good deal. It was a brand new Ford, gray, four door. We were so happy and naturally very fussy about it. While anticipating a trip to Florida, I had the car checked out since there was a terrible rattle, but nothing was found. I went home and still the rattle did not disappear. Again I went to complain about this situation. While Mr. Ray was leaning with his back toward the trunk and telling me that there was really nothing they could do about this situation, he looked down and retrieved a little glass baby bottle out of the back bumper. This was the culprit! My son must have placed it there. Needless to say, blushing, I apologized and drove out of the place.

With our new car we could discover the beautiful area around us. There was Monte Sano for picnics and hiking. Farther out we discovered the Gunterville lakes. Here we could swim and fish and have a wonderful day outdoors. My husband had already, while at Ft. Bliss, started to like going fishing in the irrigation ditches and here was the fisherman's paradise. While Hein and I would relax and enjoy the peace and quiet, daddy and Juergen would go off fishing. Juergen, escorted by his dog Falco, would go from one fisherman to another, always with the question, "Did you catch fish? Big fish?" The men then would show him their catch and inquire about his dog, its name, etc. They always teased him, saying they would like to buy the dog from him. But, he was quick to give a definite 'NO!'



In the fall, a fishing rodeo would be held at the Big Spring Lagoon and my two sons proved to be good sports. One day, while they had a big one on the hook and were trying to bring it ashore, one son fell in the water, which fortunately was not too deep. So, I had to catch both fish and boy out of the lagoon.



While exploring the countryside, we would drive up to Monte Sano, and take a left turn up to the place where Dr. Burritt lived. He was delighted to let us come to his house, show us around, and make friends with us. He had the most magnificent view of the city from his place. When he passed away he gave this place to the city and now visitors from all over the world have the opportunity to see the growing town, thanks to Dr. Burritt's generous gift.

At the Big Spring Park, a big swimming pool for "Whites Only" gave us relief in the hot summer weather, and the tennis court was at our disposal to keep slim and trim. To play tennis in Germany was mostly available for the wealthier people, so was horseback riding. Here you could do all this for very little money, and we took advantage of it. At the Fairgrounds we would display baked goods; my speciality was the gingerbread house and German bread, which was well liked. At the Colosseum we were entertained with a wandering circus to the delight of young and old.

In the years 1951 and 1952, not much in the way of entertainment was available. We discovered a nightclub, 'Cambron' down south on Whitesburg Drive where the Faith Presbyterian Church now stands. We would team up with friends and enjoy a night out dancing. There were no alcoholic beverages served, but you could bring your own bottle. Since we were a group of young people, we would celebrate christenings, weddings, and later on, graduations. It always gave us an excuse to come together.

An organization, "Community Concerts," brought out-of-town entertainment to the Huntsville High School. We went to such productions as The Trapp Family Singers and the Vienna Boys Choir. Mr. and Mrs. Benno Wilcoxon would invite all the entertainers to their home on Franklin Street afterwards for refreshments and would invite some of the German people, so that we could meet our countrymen and chat with them.

Mr. Alvin Dreger, known as "Mr. Music," who played the cello made himself acquainted with our German group and found out who played an instrument. Even Dr. von Braun played the violin and the cello. The musicians met in different homes and at special functions to play quartets and other pieces. By and by, an orchestra was formed and a conductor, Dr. Arthur M. Fraser, from Montevallo in Alabama commuted for years to help organize and conduct it. The moment came, in March 1954, when, at the old Butler High

School, the first concert was presented. It was a huge success and from then on, Huntsville had its own symphony orchestra. Over the years it grew and when the new Huntsville High School was built, we had bigger facilities with better acoustics. I attended the first concert and most all others, having missed only a few in all the years I have lived in Huntsville.

Since my husband had a good job and we had two children, we decided to buy our own home. A group of our German friends had teamed together to buy some property on top of the Monte Sano and had divided it into lots, some of them overlooking Huntsville. This proved an excellent investment later on for everybody concerned. But, we were more concerned then to have our children close to a good school and not have to have them bussed from the mountain. So, we looked for a home in the Blossomwood area. A school had not been built in 1953, but there was all this empty space for one. Only a few houses had been built, and we loved the view of the mountain. This lasted only a few more years, and houses were built up to the mountain. Huntsville had become the fastest growing city around. The building boom had hit. We found a very well-built home on Woodmont Avenue where I am still living today. The Fifth Avenue School was not far from us. Juergen went there for one year and then to the brand new Blossomwood School, even closer to home.

We moved into our house on the 1st of April, 1953, and settled down to make a home for us and our two sons. In the back, dividing the other property was a natural creek, the water coming from the mountain, which proved to be a wonderful play place for the children. They would build their own little swimming hole. And, once in a while, even catch a little fish. They always found something useful to them floating in the water.

The Blossomwood area would grow by leaps and bounds after 1953. Juergen was ready to attend kindergarten, and Mrs. Luther had one on the corner of California and

McClung Streets. Juergen's English became quiet good, and he had learned it mostly through playing with his friends. The families in the Blossomwood area were mostly young families with children about the same age as our two. The children joined the Cub Scouts and we mothers became Den Mothers. It was a challenge for me and I enjoyed it very much. We did handicraft things, sports, etc.

A Garden Club had been formed in 1952 and I became a member. Meetings were held taking turns in each member's home. We would hold contests in flower arranging or competitions in growing flowers. Then, at shows each year, the best prizes were awarded. I was lucky to win several blue and red ribbons for outstanding specimens and once won a silver bowl for the best arrangement. These are treasures to remember by. This also gave me a chance to meet many wonderful families, and the children had friends to play with.

In the Garden Club I met several ladies who were very much involved in the Music Study Club. Since I always loved music, I joined them in 1953 and have been a member of this organization til today. We would meet once a month on a Wednesday morning and would find great talent in our membership performing for each other. Each year we would have a District Meeting in another town and every two years, the National Music Convention. I had the opportunity to go to several such gatherings, and it was a great learning experience and enjoyment for me.

Since our son, Juergen, was born on October 9th, he could not begin the public school the year he was six. The cut-off date being September 30th, he would have to wait another year. But, since we felt he was ready to go to school, we checked around and found Mrs. Freemann on Green Street who had a private school and would take him. He then had to pass a test to attend the Fifth Avenue School on Governors Drive (now all hospital complex). He had learned more in Mrs. Freemann's private school than he needed to take the exam.

On the weekends, we continued to explore the surrounding areas. Decatur was a good place to fish, but we still liked the Guntersville area best. "Otha-Win-Tha" was on the Scottsboro Highway situated among tall pine trees, directly on the lake. It was a camping ground with cabins to stay overnight or for the weekend. Here we met with many of our friends, having a good time swimming, picnicking, and boating. The water at that time, was very clear and beautiful, without the millfoil it has had in recent years. The owner made us all welcome at her charming place and still today we are friends. We had also bought a small aluminum boat and would ride out in the lake to fish. As a small boy, Juergen was a great fisherman already and kept his daddy busy putting bait on his hook and helping him to reel in the fish.



In 1955, friends of ours had explored the surrounding lake area and found that a Mr. Whitaker was selling his property on the lake for very reasonable prices. "Otha-Win-Tha" was some 40 miles away, and this place was only 28 miles from our house. It was a dead end valley, just the spot we had been looking for. An acre of waterfront property cost \$1,000 at this time. We were happy to invest the money. And, we are still enjoying the wonderful recreation in swimming and boating the lake has given us to this day.

Unfortunately, during our building project on the lake I hurt myself and was laid up for quite some time. My oldest son was taken care of as he was already in the second grade at Blossomwood. Little Hein was really no problem, or so I thought. He usually occupied himself playing in the backyard with our dog Falco, who would not let any harm come to him. One day, when I thought all was well and a friend was visiting with me, the doorbell rang. It was the Postmaster bringing a complaint about my little boy. Somebody in the neighborhood had watched him following the postman who was placing the mail in the mailboxes, and Hein, with a little paper sack, was taking the mail out again! When we checked on him, he was happily playing in our backyard in his tent sorting the mail! He felt great and was very surprised to be scolded about his actions! Fortunately, when the Postmaster saw him, he forgave him and all was well.

Another day, while I prepared our family dinner, I was keeping an eye on Hein in the backyard playing with his tricycle. Daddy would be home soon from his work. As he drove in and parked the car in the driveway, I heard a crying sound from my son. I ran out to see what had happened. I was told the following story: Hein had ventured out with his little tricycle into California Street at the busiest time, when the fathers came home from work. Not knowing what kept the traffic at a snarl, his father looked out of his car window and saw Falco going from one side of the street to another, blocking traffic. Coming closer, my husband discovered his youngest son as a happy driver of the tricycle in the middle of the road, unperturbed by the traffic, feeling like a big man himself. Needless to say what happened at home! This adventure was never repeated!



When you are young, you try many things. One day during a coffee, we women talked about the harvest of the cotton, a new adventure for us Germans. My neighbor, an American lady, told me that she had picked cotton once and what an experience it was for her. Mostly the black people were doing it, but we wanted to find out what it was like. One morning we went to a farm and asked to pick some of the "white gold" as it was called. The farm hands were very delighted and we were handed a big canvas sack. The work was hard for us. But what was enchanting was watching the black folks picking cotton, and the sound of their beautiful voices chanting songs all day long. They were very friendly to us and gave us good instruction to avoid hurt fingers. Since my youngest son was born in Alabama, we always affectionately called him our little "cotton picker." Juergen, being a Texan, we called "Cowboy."

The year 1955 was a turning point for many in the German community of Huntsville. Our future was not secure at that time. Rumors were going around, and nobody could say for sure what was to become of the entire German group. Some of our friends had moved to the west coast to seek better jobs. When Dr. von Braun would speak on the matter of

going to the moon, the audience thought him a dreamer and that this would be impossible. We were still waiting for our papers to become American citizens. But, then that day arrived, April 14, 1955. The Huntsville High School auditorium was the place where 66 Germans received their American citizenship. The Rotary Club had made it a festive affair and had invited us all to a banquet at the Russel Erskine Hotel. Each new American family had been assigned to a family from the Rotary Club. It was a day for us to remember always. Lasting friendships had been formed on this day. Now we could go to the courthouse and become voters. Huntsville was indeed, home.

I never will forget the first time we could vote. The place was the Courthouse. You had to stand in line for your turn; then enter a booth with a curtain around you. Here, in privacy, you had to give your vote. One day while standing in line to give our vote, a parade was going on outside. The daughter of our friends had disappeared to see it, when her parents suddenly missed her. Very excited, they just walked away from the booth to look for the girl until they found her. We all had to stand in line and wait for their return. At that time I wondered, how private was our voting system?

A most important person for us Germans was Judge Thomas W. Jones. In his capacity as Probate Judge, he would grant us a drivers' license. Many of our friends had taken their drivers test in El Paso, Texas. Some, having driven already in Germany, found it was more difficult to pass in the U.S. While others who never had any lessons before, passed the driving test with flying colors. After we became citizens we had the opportunity to vote, but we had to pay a poll tax which later was abolished. Also, hunting and fishing licenses had to be obtained and Judge Jones would marry couples at the Courthouse in a civil ceremony. Every year we paid him our car tax and property tax. While in later years, new offices would handle these things, Judge Jones was for us the "Man for all Seasons" and the best friend we Germans could have found in a strange land, and the best bureau for our newcomers.





The year 1955, not only saw us become American citizens, but Huntsville celebrated the Sesquicentennial (somebody's tongue slipped to "Sexy-centennial"). Through the clubs we belonged to we participated in the celebration. We wore old-fashioned costumes and baked goodies which were sold later on. The American people liked our cakes and cookies; they were different and very tasty. I had baked some gingerbread houses which is a tradition in Germany during Christmas time, and I won a prize for it. My children from then on begged me to bake some for their teachers at Christmas. We also made some unfortunate children in the hospital happy with these Gingerbread houses. At that time no restrictions by the Health Department were placed on us in this undertaking as in later years.

Life in America became increasingly exciting for us. We had to undergo a transformation in our daily routine, in our friendship to the American people, and in our handling of finances. In Germany, the husband is the head of the household; what he says is law. Here in America we found a different, more flexible standard. For many of our families it meant changing our thoughts and actions, often not without difficulties. We went to the movies to learn better English, but we had to hire a babysitter to be able to do this. And when we women had time, we went to do babysitting for American families. It was so American, making a little extra money. Fortunately we found out that in this country it is no shame to work in whatever you like to do or can do.

One family organized a group to learn square dancing which we never had seen or heard about. The first time we watched a square dance, we were puzzled and could not understand a word which was said that made the people follow the leader. But after we had several lessons, we were as eager to dance as the others. We even joined other groups in other towns. In all our doings, we never found any Americans who would have objected to our getting involved with something like this and mingling with them. Quite the opposite, everybody was happy that we took such an interest in their life and joined them in their pursuits.

Meeting different kinds of people is a rewarding experience. I heard that the Huntsville Hospital was looking for volunteers to help run the gift-shop and help in other areas too, such as patient care. Since my children were at school I had free time and devoted some hours for this worthwhile cause as a Pink Lady. Also later, I became a driver for older people who needed a ride to the doctor's office. Through all this activity, I met a lot of wonderful people. Communication was often difficult with my German accent and their Alabama drawl, but a smile speaks in every language. And I was at home in Huntsville, Alabama.



*My Story: Elfriede Richter-Haaser*

I was born in eastern Germany, Bautzen/Saxonia. My father was the organist of the Petro-Dome Church, a church which housed both denominations, Lutheran and Catholic. The church was divided only by an iron gate, and as children we would stay after Sunday School to watch the procession of the Catholic Church, when we were not engaged to treat the bellows for my father. Our world was filled with music, plays, and outdoor activities. Weekends were spent in the woods, on tours, or with sports activities. I still remember the boat rides on the Pleisse with our paddleboat.

In Germany everybody attended the public school. Then, according to one's grades and means to pay for it, one would attend a higher learning institute. I attended Gymnasium for girls, and later was enrolled in the "Hoeheren Maedchen Schule." One would call it a "finishing school for young ladies" to give them the know-how for a life in the public eye.

During the war I was called back to work in Leipzig to take care of my ailing mother. After Graduation I had held a wonderful job on a big farm with an old castle owned by a Baron. I enjoyed what I was doing, especially the freedom I had to be outside, checking on the labor of the planters, farmers, etc.

In 1944, during the third bomb attack of Leipzig, we lost our home, and my mother and I moved to a small town in Saxonia where my aunt lived. I found work on a farm near Goerlitz until we were forced to fall back to avoid the Russian soldiers and occupation. Many cruel stories preceded their arrival. But when they finally entered our small town, it was done in a most orderly manner, no rape or stealing was allowed. The officer in charge held his troops in good control, but we still felt uneasy. When a letter from my sister arrived saying that they were living in Landshut before eventually going to American. I was encouraged to come and join her there, which I did.

In December, 1945, I crossed the border from East to West Germany, not without trepidation. In Landshut I had the chance to become a kindergarten teacher to the young children from the German scientist group which was waiting to be shipped to America to join their husbands, who had been over there already for a couple of years and were waiting to have their families sent overseas too.

In the spring of 1947, Dr. von Braun and a Mr. Robert Paetz came from America; the first one to marry, the second one to divorce his wife who did not want to leave her parents and go to a strange country. In his visiting the families of his comrades, Mr. Paetz also came to my sister's house to bring greetings from her husband and instructions on what should be done to make the journey to the USA pleasant. While I was taking care of my sister's youngest son, he came to our house, met me and seemed very interested to get better acquainted. Needless to say, he proposed marriage and I accepted. A few months later I followed him to America, El Paso, Texas and Fort Bliss, where we lived until our move to Huntsville, Alabama in 1950.

Huntsville became our home immediately, the area reminded me so much of our Germany: the mountains, the green trees, the rivers and lakes. And, until this day, I love to live here. The cultural life was different from what I was used to, but I adapted myself to it very fast, becoming involved with the Symphony Guild as a charter member. Also, we helped organize the Huntsville Youth Orchestra. When Mr. Gerhard was conductor, my son Hein took violin lessons from him and also played in the Youth and big orchestra.

When Dr. Pales became conductor, he usually gave me the job to pick up the guest artists. This was the case when the opening of the VBCC was celebrated in March, 1975. To honor the German families, Dr. Pales had especially engaged the world renown German concert pianist, HANS RICHTER-HAASER, to come to Huntsville. It was my job to pick him up at the airport and be his hostess during his

stay. Cupid played a big role and we got married. I moved back with him to Germany to live until his sudden death in 1980.

To further my American education, I attended the North Alabama College of Commerce. I also became a member of the ToastMasters Club which helped me very much in my jobs as a real estate and insurance agent. For a while I became a member of the "Flying Pettycoats" and loved to take flying lessons, but did not make the pilot license.

Around 1984, I entertained the idea to put together a book about our wonderful town, Huntsville, with the Space Center for the many out of town visitors coming to see this once forgotten village which was now making world news. Sightseeing Huntsville was very well received.



**FALCO, beloved pet of both Juergen and Hein**





**FUN TIMES at Big Spring Park**





**Exploring the countryside and Monte Sano**





## The Moore House

Cecil Jenkins

Patrick H. and Agatha Moore purchased a lot on Walker Street in 1893 and began construction of a home which was the family residence for many years. The January 10, 1894 Mercury states that, "the new ten room brick house being built on Walker Street by Mr. P. H. Moore is now being covered."

The exterior and interior walls are of brick and range in thickness from ten to eighteen inches. Tongue and groove heart of pine flooring is used throughout the house. Indications are that the interior woodwork was originally stained and varnished. The 1913 Sanborn map shows a small two bay carriage house at the rear of the lot. The house style is Italianate Victoria.

The front entry is into a foyer with an entrance to each side of the house. The receiving room and two bedrooms are on one side and the parlor, dining room, and kitchen are on the other. The woodwork in the foyer, parlor, receiving room, and dining room is more elaborate. The doorway between the parlor and dining room is eight feet by eight feet with four folding doors having four panels each. There are four fireplaces downstairs and two upstairs. The stairway is located in the receiving room. The ceilings are eleven feet in height; the walls and ceilings are plastered. All doorways include a transom. The upstairs has three large rooms.





The 1900 census listed Agatha Moore as a widowed head of household residing in the house with her seven children who ranged in age from eight to twenty-one. The oldest son was a typesetter and five of the children in the eight to sixteen year age range were in school. The 1910 census also listed Agatha as the head of household. Four of her children, a son-in-law, and two grandchildren lived with her. The son-in-law was a pharmacist and one single daughter was a bookkeeper at the courthouse.

Owners between 1914 and 1954 were Paul Speake, John C. and James H. McAnelly, and the McAnelly heirs. Niles A. Prestage, Sr. purchased the property in July 1954. A 1968 appraisal described the house as three apartments. The carriage house had been converted into a garage, which the appraisal described as a substandard duplex apartment.



The house was altered significantly. The original period Victorian porch was replaced with a large unusual wrap around porch. A portion of the porch was later converted into two additional rooms of rental space and resulted in an unusual frontal appearance. Also, the red exterior brick walls were painted white. Major interior alterations were made throughout the house. Most ceilings were lowered and many walls were added. One ceiling was even converted into a chalet type ceiling.

Space in the large kitchen was converted into two narrow baths for the two downstairs apartments. The woodwork was painted many times over the years. However, most of the ornate trim and woodwork was saved because it was covered and protected by the added walls.

The property was sold again in 1989 and restoration began. A pre-purchase professional inspection accurately identified the major problem areas. The first priority was removal of the added walls and lowered ceilings which revealed extensive damage to plastered ceilings and some plastered walls.



The electrical and plumbing systems were completely replaced. High efficiency heating and cooling systems were installed. All walls and ceilings have been repaired and painted white until decorating beings. The kitchen has been restored to its original size and equipped with new cabinets and appliances. Two new downstairs baths have been located elsewhere.

The upstairs has been converted into a master suite consisting of a sitting room, bedroom, walk-in closet, dressing room, and bath. Carpet that was glued to the wood floors has been removed, revealing floors that are attractive after cleaning and touch up. The garage apartment has been converted back into a two car garage. Future plans include interior decorating, painting the exterior and restoring the porch to its original configuration.





Behind the scene support is an important factor in what has been accomplished on the house the past two years. Harvie Jones has provided advice and guidance. Linda Bayer Allen of the City Planning Commission provided the initial information and guidance critical to collecting historical information on the Moore family and the house. Finally, the continuous enthusiasm and encouragement of the residents of Old Town have been a source of motivation and enjoyment.

*Cecil Jenkins is a native of Florence, Alabama which was his residence, except for military service, until moving to Huntsville in 1967. He has a Bachelor's Degree in Mathematics and Masters Degrees in Engineering and Business Administration. He is manager of Software Quality Assurance at Chrysler's Pentastor Electronics where he has been employed for twenty years. His primary leisure activities are genealogy, flying, and running.*

## The Double-Jeopardy of the Circa 1848 Humphreys-Rodgers House

Harvie P. Jones, F.A.I.A.

The citizens of Huntsville, with initiative and effort, have saved a considerable number of historic buildings from the bulldozer in the past 20 years. Few if any buildings have had to be saved twice in that time period, however. The circa 1848 Humphreys-Rodgers House has that distinction. This is a brief outline of its story, which compares favorably with the old silent-movie thriller series, "The Perils of Pauline." Instead of Pauline tied to the railroad tracks, the Humphreys-Rodgers House has been in the path of the bulldozer twice since 1971 and only narrowly escaped each time, the last in a most dramatic fashion.

### The First Peril:

In 1971 plans were under way to construct the Von Braun Civic Center directly across the street from the Humphreys-Rodgers House, then empty and occupied by vagrants, who had built a fire in the middle of the floor of one room among other depredations. Weeds stood waist-high around the house. A tall chicken-wire fence had been erected in an unsuccessful effort to exclude the vagrants. The empty house and site of about 1.4 acres were for sale at a commercial valuation that would exclude residential use. The impending presence of the Von Braun Civic Center across the street made it highly likely that the historic structure would be demolished and a fast-food establishment erected on the site to cater to the thousands of visitors who would be coming to the Civic Center upon its completion.

Rather than sit back and mutter "too bad, that's progress I suppose," several citizens had learned by then (1971) that **preservation requires taking the initiative and making an**

**effort.** It was clear that the house could only be saved by finding a compatible commercial use for it and its sizable site near the planned Civic Center that would enable the house to earn its keep and be a commercial asset rather than a hindrance.

A feasible plan seemed to be to use the house as a centerpiece for a low-rise 100 room motel which would wrap around the back edge of the site, with parking tucked beneath the rooms. The historic building would thus continue to visually dominate the site and could serve as the motel entry, office, restaurant and meeting rooms (with a low kitchen addition at the rear). A sketch plan and an aerial perspective were prepared. Hall Bryant, Jr. contacted various people who might be interested in the adaptive-use preservation plan (a term not yet invented). Among those contacted were Jack Chambers and Bob Wilkinson of the Huntsville Coca Cola Bottling Company, whose plant was a short distance to the west. A meeting was arranged and the preservation plan was presented. Mr. Chambers graciously let it be known that he was not interested in developing any motels or restaurants, leaving the preservationists disappointed and without other good prospects for saving the house.

It was soon learned that the Huntsville Coca Cola Bottling Company had bought the building and its site not for the purpose of demolition but of preserving it for company receptions, staff training and similar compatible uses that were much more desirable than being the centerpiece for a motel. Bob Wilkinson became intensely interested in the house, its history and its possible compatible uses for Coca Cola. The house was nicely restored and became "The House for Coca Cola." Hundreds of items of Coca Cola memorabilia were displayed. In 1977 the structure was entered on the National Register of Historic Places. In 1989, an extensive amount of additional restoration was accomplished. The house seemed safe.



## The Second Peril:

In 1990, the Huntsville Coca Cola Bottling Co. needed to add a bottling line. They examined expanding the west bottling line by moving the front of the building forward toward the street. They examined adding to the west side of the plant. Every avenue of expansion, except disturbing the house, was examined. To the consternation of Bob Wilkinson the only workable expansion plan was into the historic structure. The house was therefore regretfully offered in mid December 1990 to the Historic Huntsville Foundation "in pieces," with the requirement that the site be cleared on a short timetable of three months (March 1991). A firm commitment was required by January 14, 1991. This tight timetable did not allow the luxury of exploring in a methodical way various possibilities, looking for sites, funding and possible purchasers of the reassembled house on another site. Fast action was the order of the day, and several Foundation members devoted many hours of their December and January "holiday" workweeks, evenings, and weekends seeking a solution.

The consensus of the Foundation Committee was that it would be most desirable, and probably most feasible financially to disassemble and reassemble the house on an empty lot in one of the historic districts with an expanded rear wing that would provide modern bathrooms, kitchen, etc., thus enabling the house to once again become a private home, in a protected historic district. Efforts were thus launched to find a suitable and available site, and an interested contractor who might execute the project on speculation of selling the reassembled historic structure at a profit.

Charles Caldwell Jr. of Caldwell Home Builders expressed such an interest on December 20, 1990, and an intensive search for a site began. Since the house was 57 feet 6 inches wide, a site of at least 81 feet 6 inches wide would be required to avoid the need to obtain a zoning variance.

The Foundation decided, due to the extremely tight time-frame, to explore "all possibilities at once" in the hope that if one failed, another would succeed. To that end, Constitution Hall Village had been contacted on January 3, to see if they might be able and willing to accept the house. They were interested, and a location just behind Constitution Hall on Gates Avenue was discussed. The Foundation provided a site plan to confirm the "fit" of the house.

Up to this point (early January 1991), there was no serious consideration given to moving all or part of the structure intact, since a rough estimate of the weight of just the front part was 350 - 400 tons. It was felt that while that size of "intact move" technically had been done and could be done, the cost would be prohibitive. This assumption was a mistake, for on the evening of January 7, a call was received from Hollis Kennedy of Hollis Kennedy House Movers. Hollis had looked at the house, was concerned about its impending loss, and felt that "it could be moved." The response was "at what cost do you think it (the front and oldest part) could be moved?" He quoted a figure that was much less than our previous guess. Possible time-tables, routes and insurance questions were discussed. Since we knew that Hollis had successfully moved the 1860's Jackson County Courthouse (a smaller but solid brick building) we felt comfortable with exploring this "intact move" in more detail. Mr. Caldwell and Mr. Kennedy were asked to do so.

Meanwhile the site search, much aided by Nancy Van Valkenburgh, had turned up at least four empty and suitable locations in historic districts. One was easily reached by an "intact" move. The other three involved more difficulty. None of this mattered, for none of the sites were, upon inquiry, for sale. It was quite a blow to have a willing contractor (who would finance the work on speculation), a good housemover at an affordable price, and no place to move the house.

In 1989 - 1990, the City had engaged the planning firm of LDR International to update the downtown master plan. This firm recommended that the city-owned block bounded

by Williams, Gates, Madison and Fountain Circle be devoted to a site for endangered and moved historic structures to complement Constitution Hall Village and perhaps provide specialty shops, restaurants, etc.

The Constitution Hall Village Board and staff were meanwhile working diligently to find a way to move and preserve the house. Their solution was to implement the LDR downtown plan and to place the house at the N.W. corner of Gates Avenue and Fountain Circle, facing north, where it would be visible from Constitution Hall Village and only a half-block away.

Thus one possibility of saving the house failed and another worked. On January 10, 1991, representatives of the Historic Huntsville Foundation, Constitution Hall Village and the Huntsville Coca Cola Bottling Co. met in Bob Wilkinson's office to discuss final details. Bob Wilkinson approved the arrangements and the second "save" of the Humphreys-Rodgers House was under way, all accomplished in record-breaking time (about 3-1/2 weeks) over the busy holiday season by many volunteers who were determined not to lose this beautiful, irreplaceable historic house.

The preparation work began quickly. The Huntsville Coca Cola Bottling Co. had in late 1990, at the Foundation's request, made careful measurements of the house to document it and to aid in its possible reconstruction at another site. The Foundation also made about 150 annotated documentary photographs and notes for the same purpose. The rear wing (built between 1901 and 1913 per the historic "Sanborn" maps) was carefully dismantled by J. T. Schrimsher Construction Co., the components stored, the bricks removed and cleaned one-by-one, all for the hoped-for reerection of the rear wing. The front and oldest part of the house, built in two sections in the c. 1848 - 1861 Greek Revival period, was prepared for moving by Hollis Kennedy House Movers. The house and chimney-stacks were thoroughly strapped with steel angles, cables, and braces. Kennedy decided to move the large front upper porch intact

with the house "because it makes better pictures." Steel beams, called "pins," were inserted at close intervals through the foundation walls under the first floor. The house was slowly jacked up, via the "pins," to several feet above grade. The pins were supported on two 60-foot heavy transfer beams that rested on numerous hydraulically-leveled "dollies" which enabled the weight to be evenly distributed on each dolly while the house passed over curbs and uneven soil.

Early on March 27, 1991, the move began, and was completed with only minor difficulties. There remains the task of restoring the house and reconstructing the rear wing with some adaptations for modern use by Constitution Hall Village. Firm plans for the type of use have not been announced, other than it will be used in the Village's interpretive program and not as a shop or restaurant, which is to be applauded. Various fund-raising events are planned, and public contributions are needed to complete the task. After the Herculean efforts to get this far, this is no time to drop the ball.

#### Some Lessons From All This:

1. Once a building has been "saved" (as many have been in Madison County in the past 20 years) you cannot relax. There are now several important historic Madison County buildings previously saved that are again on the endangered list. Still others are now endangered for the first time.
2. Don't assume that a building "can't be restored," or in this case "can't be moved." Check it out and get the facts. Many buildings are now beautifully restored that were regarded by many, particularly in the 1945 - 1970 "Urban Renewal" destruction, as "not worth saving." One sample comment from a contractor in 1984, "This thing ought to be 'renovated' with a bulldozer." This particular house, c. 1828, is now in its original state of beauty, restored by a contractor and craftsmen

who had eyes to see the beauty and basic soundness behind decades of neglect and vandalism.

3. Don't assume that it would cost too much to restore a neglected building. Rarely does the cost of renovation/restoration even equal the cost of new modern construction, much less exceed it. Huntsville has many examples to bear this out.
4. If rescue time is tight, try every plan you can think of simultaneously. You don't have the privilege of trying one plan at a time.
5. A lesson learned by the time of "The First Peril" in 1971 is to work on saving a structure when you think it may become endangered, rather than waiting for the bulldozer to arrive and then getting excited. Lying down in front of the bulldozer is dramatic, but only results in quicker demolition and an "us and them" mentality on the part of the owners and preservationists. Much better results are obtained by taking a helpful attitude and trying to help an owner make economical and practical sense out of preserving the building. Several Huntsville buildings have been rescued from scheduled demolition this way. There are more cases than not where the economic and practical sense lies on the side of preservation rather than demolition, even disregarding the historic, cultural and esthetic factors.

While Madison County has had many preservation "saves," we have had many losses as well. To our knowledge, at least 14 early 19th century Federal Period houses have been deliberately demolished or burned since 1970. At this rate, it is ironic that someone in 2020 may have to look at a 1977 replication in Constitution Hall Village to try to get an idea of what a Federal Period building looked like.

A more extreme irony is that the pre-1819 Sheriff Neal house existed until c. 1964, only 6 years before a replication of it was planned for Constitution Hall Village. It had been

moved in the 1920's across Madison Street from its original site, expanded, and served in the early 1960's as offices for the Huntsville Planning Commission. Several aerial photos exist that show it. It was mid-block between Madison Street and Fountain Circle on the north side of Gates Avenue. One definition of a historic building is one that is torn down about ten years before a copy of it is built. The Neal House case fits this to a tee.

A final lesson is to try to save every historic building you can, for you are going to lose some now, and lose some more in every coming decade. The Humphreys-Rodgers House shows us that if you save it once it may again be lost in a decade or so. Eventually you end up with complete gaps in historic building types and periods. Huntsville lost its last intact Federal Period commercial building in the 1960's, for example.

An elitist approach of saving "just the best" or "just the oldest" is also invalid. A true sense of history is gained by seeing a complete picture, not "just the best" or "just the oldest." Ideas of "the best" also change. In the 1920 - 1960 period, Victorian architecture was reviled and demolished or remodeled indiscriminately. The same was true of Federal Period houses in 1850 - 1890, which we now consider to be almost priceless.

The moving and preservation of the c. 1848 Humphreys-Rodgers House is one small partial success in an unending effort. It was a partial success because a historic building has deep roots in its soil just as does a tree, and should therefore not be moved. There is always a sense of something not right about a building that has been moved. To illustrate the importance of this factor, the National Register of Historic Places will not accept moved buildings. However, if the choice is lose it or move it, moving it should be preferred. At least four other historic buildings in Madison County have been moved in the last 20 years to save them from certain demolition: The Greek Revival clapboard church moved to the UAH campus (Student Art Gallery), a

Gothic Revival house on Madison Street moved to the City of Madison, The "Steamboat Gothic" Van Valkenburgh house moved from Franklin Street to Lowe Avenue, and a Federal Period house moved from Redstone Arsenal to Rainbow Mountain in Madison.

The Historic Huntsville Foundation has not relaxed and is currently working on two other historic structures that appear to be endangered. The Foundation saved Alabama's oldest hardware store (Harrison's) by the extreme measure of buying it and opening it. There is no lack of determination in its constant efforts.

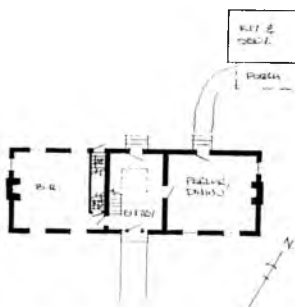
Why work to save all these "old buildings" anyhow? The answer goes much deeper than "they are attractive and we can't afford that kind of design, workmanship, and material anymore." To find the answer, all you have to do is go to a recently-built subdivision of houses, of whatever price range — \$80,000 - \$300,000 — it doesn't matter. The new houses may all be very nice, but "there is no there there," as Gertrude Stein once said of vapid Oakland, California. **Old buildings and old streets are part of our moorings, our roots in life.** They help us to understand who we are, how we got here, and where we may go from here. Historic architecture (and history in general) is therefore important even to those who proclaim no interest in it, for everyone is concerned with who he is and where he might go in life. The Historic Huntsville Foundation's goal is to assist in answering those concerns.



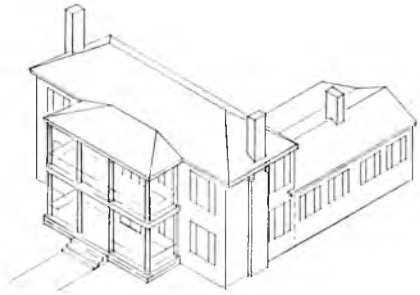
Circa 1848 configuration, based on the architectural evidence (a joint in the wall and floors at the left side of the entry). Gable roof is shown on the 1871 "View of Huntsville." The present hipped roof is not original and apparently dates from a c. 1890's remodeling.

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Configuration shown on the 1861 maps and the 1871 Bird's Eye view of Huntsville.



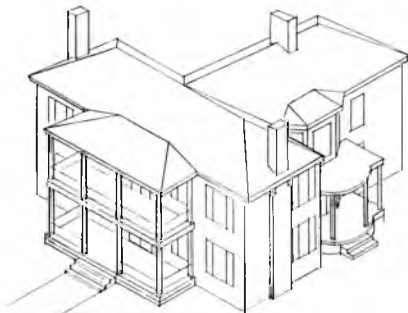




Configuration shown on the 1896 Sanborn Co. Map. Note that the rear wing is not like the one that is shown on the 1913 map (illustration 4), and is not present on the 1871 Bird's Eye View or the 1861 map. It was probably built in the 1870's when attached kitchens became the rule and torn down in the early 20th century remodeling. A front porch of the 1913 (present) size is shown on the 1896 map. Therefore it seems likely that the present porch and hipped roof were in place in 1896. Their design and materials are appropriate for that period.

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Configuration shown on the 1913 Sanborn Co. map, which is the 1991 configuration.

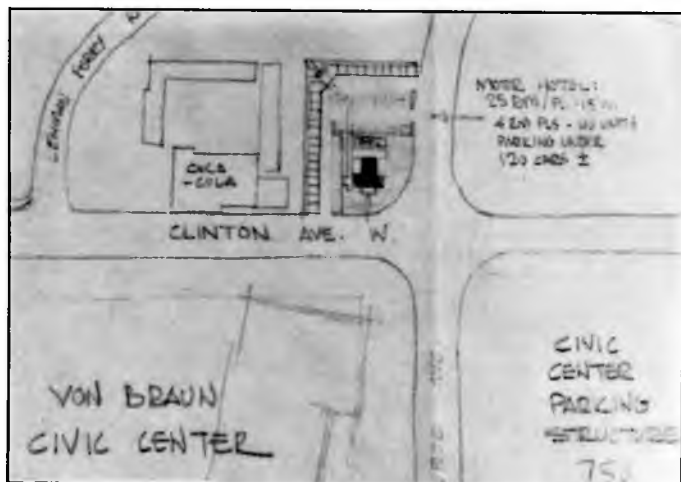


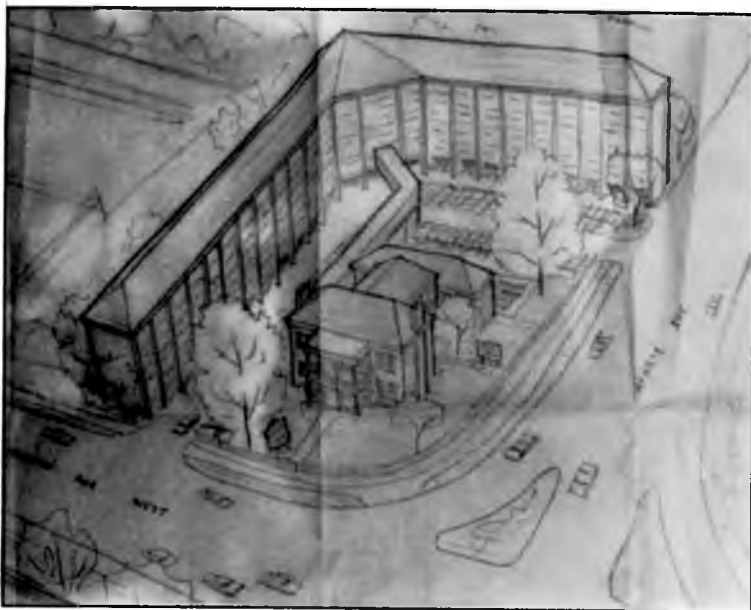


Sept. 1971 photo, when the house was empty and weed-grown, occupied by vagrants and for sale at a high commercial valuation for the land, with planning for the Von Braun Civic Center under way, to be directly across the street (Peril One).

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1971 plan sketch showing the proposed Civic Center and a possible way of saving the house by having it be the prominent centerpiece for a low-rise "background design" motel at the back of the site (Peril One).





1971 perspective view of the possible adaptive-use plans shown in illustration No. 2.

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1990 photo of the house as restored and landscaped by Coca-Cola in the early 1970's (the resolution of Peril One).





March 1991 photo of “moving day” with the front part of the house raised onto steel “pins” (small lateral, closely placed beams) which in turn rest on large transfer beams supported by hydraulically-leveled dollies. The back pre-1913 wing has been carefully dismantled and stored for future re-erection (Peril Two).

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Detail of a dolly, transfer beam and pins.



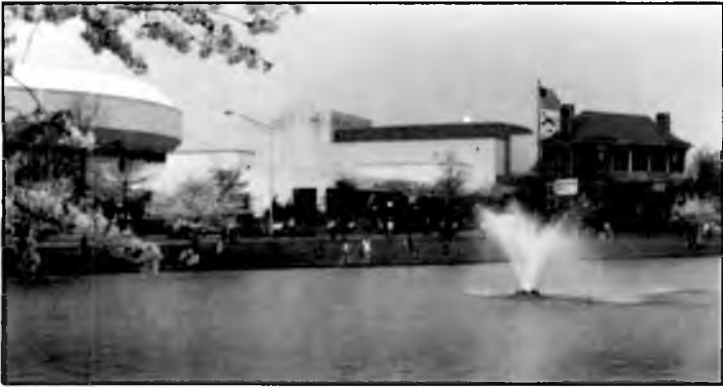


Detail of steel pins and wooden intermediate blocking to support the solid brick walls at close intervals. No cracking occurred due to the move.

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Pulling the house onto Monroe Street from its original site at Monroe Street and Clinton Avenue.





Passing in front of the Von Braun Civic Center and the Lagoon, along Monroe Street.

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Hundreds of people watched the move, here in front of the Civic Center on Monroe Street.





The end of the journey, facing north to Gates Avenue, with the Constitution Hall Village Neal House, and Constitution Hall in the background (resolution of Peril Two).

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*Harvie Jones of Jones & Herrin Architecture/Interior Design is known to all of our readers for his years of dedicated service to architectural preservation throughout the South and especially Huntsville. He and Lynn were recently honored for their sustained volunteer effort in the community. The cause of historical awareness and architectural preservation has been nobly served.*

## **Downtown Master Plan**

**Johnny Johnston**

The City of Huntsville has an impressive track record of recognizing opportunities and taking the initiative to encourage and support new and expanding businesses and industry. Having enjoyed dramatic successes in the development of aerospace and high-technology industries in the past, the City of Huntsville recognizes the importance of diversification to ensure long-term economic viability. Therefore, the City has recently completed a Downtown Master Plan which includes significant public and private initiatives designed to duplicate in the central city the development success stories found in the other portions of the community. Huntsville is now seizing the opportunity to revitalize downtown and make it a focal point in the City's economic development program.

The construction of I-565, and several new office buildings (the AmSouth Building, for example) presented a unique opportunity to combine present strengths with future possibilities. Downtown is a vital link in the economy and can share in the community's growth.





The groups involved in creating the downtown plan were: The City of Huntsville, The Department of City Planning, Downtown Steering Committee, and LDR International. In addition, The Chamber of Commerce and a local advisory committee were involved in the creation of the plan.

Downtown revitalization is a complex process involving many diverse groups and interests. Therefore, we identified several conditions of development which would be important for our master plan and redevelopment program to be successful.

### Study Area — Concentration on Downtown Core

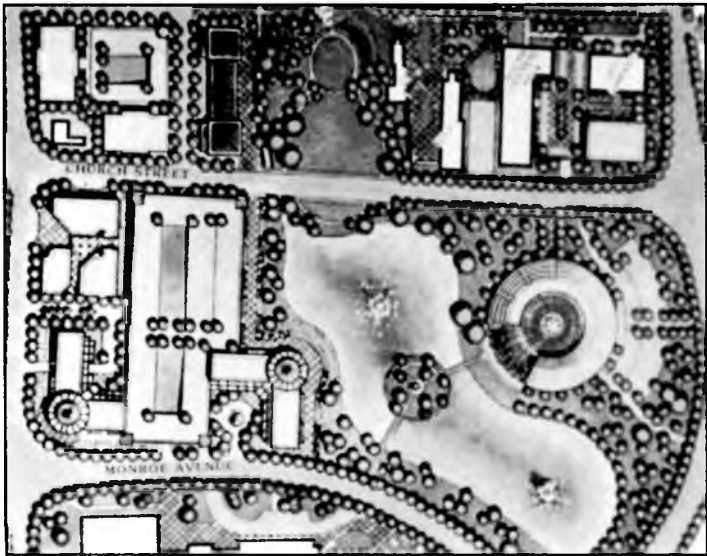
The area you see here is considered the downtown 'Core' and is bounded by Monroe Avenue on the west and the north, Lincoln Street on the east, and Williams Avenue on the south.



At the outset we established these general objectives of the Downtown Plan which are designed to create an active, attractive urban core.

Core Area Plan — Several Key Points To Focus On Within The Core Were Identified

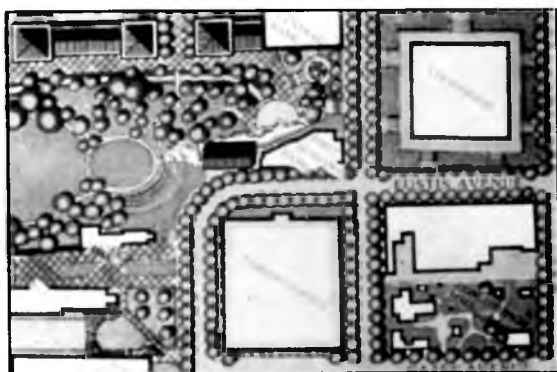
*Big Spring Park Overview* — Big Spring Park is a key downtown asset. This unique feature will be enhanced by the plan and in turn will become even more important as a downtown attraction.





*Big Spring Park Perspective* — One important goal of the plan is to make downtown a people place. Big Spring Park is a good place to start in attracting people to the downtown area.

*Courthouse Square Overview - Linkage to Park* — This shows the eastern side of Big Spring Park and the western side of Courthouse Square. The renovation of Big Spring Park will allow easier access into the park creating a linkage from the Courthouse Square area to Big Spring Park, Big Spring Lagoon, and the VBCC.





*Constitution Hall Village* — The Village is a key downtown attraction that will also benefit from this linkage of the Courthouse Square Area to Big Spring Park, Big Spring Lagoon, and the VBCC. By creating a pedestrian oriented downtown, access to the various attractions will be easier.



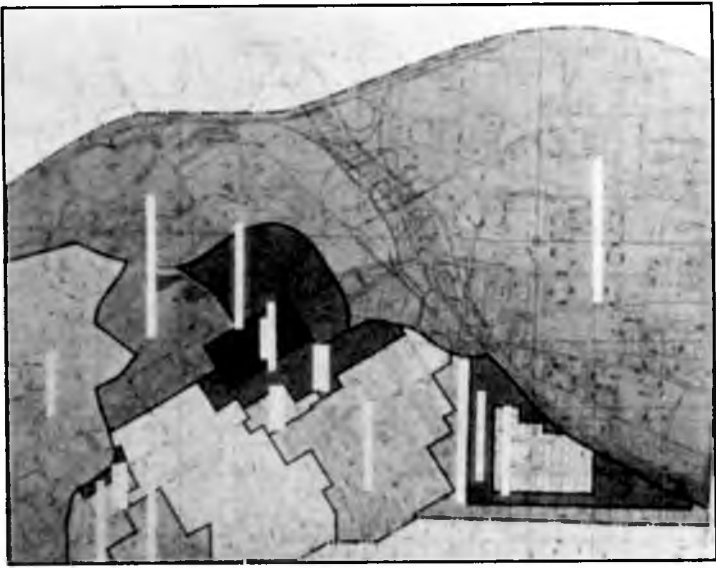
The office/residential development planned for the area east of the Courthouse is a quality development that forms a transitional area from downtown to the Historic Twickenham District.

Land use and zoning are key tools in the downtown plan implementation. The proposed land use for the downtown area emphasizes mixed use, and includes commercial, governmental, and residential uses in the core. This reflects the opportunities and growth potential in this area created by the construction of I-565.

The current zoning for this area is inappropriate for guiding the quality of new growth. The large amount of industrial zoning is not conducive to the type of development desired for this area.

The proposed zoning for this area provides the diversity, guided growth, and the emphasis on the residential and Medical districts required for the downtown plan to be successful.

The land use and zoning changes are essential components needed to create a healthy, vital city center. Another essential element is an emphasis on good urban design.



Our urban design plan includes the following objectives.

The first objective is to create a sense of place. The Big Spring is historic, esthetic, and familiar to the people of Huntsville. The renovation of Big Spring Park is an important step in the downtown plan.





The second objective is to create an environment for people. The Big Spring Park Plan, together with the linkage it will create from the VBCC to the Courthouse Square area, should make downtown Huntsville a “people place.”

The third objective is to create a special shopping place. This opportunity is based on the projected increased employment and housing that will be added to the downtown area. Downtown streetscape improvements will also enhance the potential for new specialty retail ventures downtown.

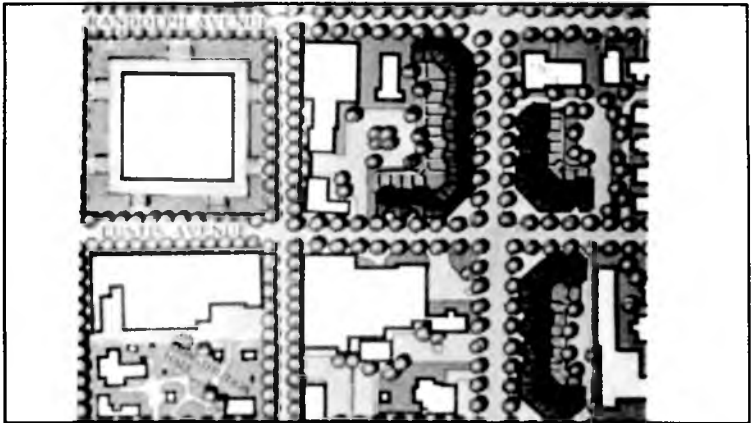






The fourth objective is to provide transit in the downtown area to provide the needed access and linkages to the various attractions. This transit system includes the Huntsville Depot Transportation Museum trolley and the new shuttle system. This system will aid not only the residents of Huntsville, but tourists as well.

The fifth objective is the creation of housing opportunities. Areas of housing are proposed east of Courthouse Square.



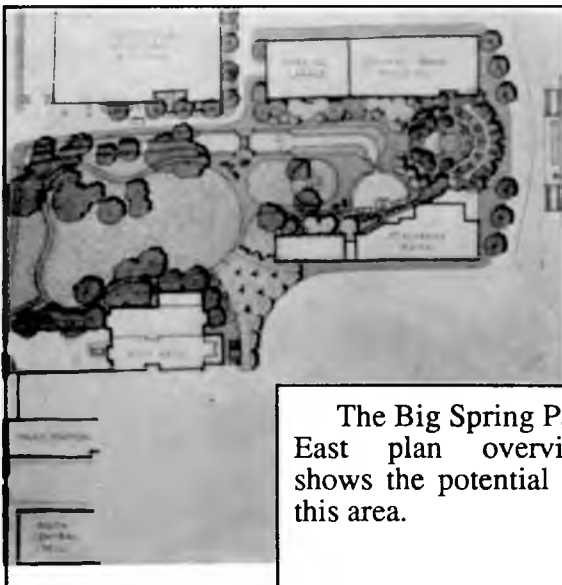


The type of housing you see here is an efficient use of urban space. The housing is of high quality and will be desirable to the growing professional population downtown.

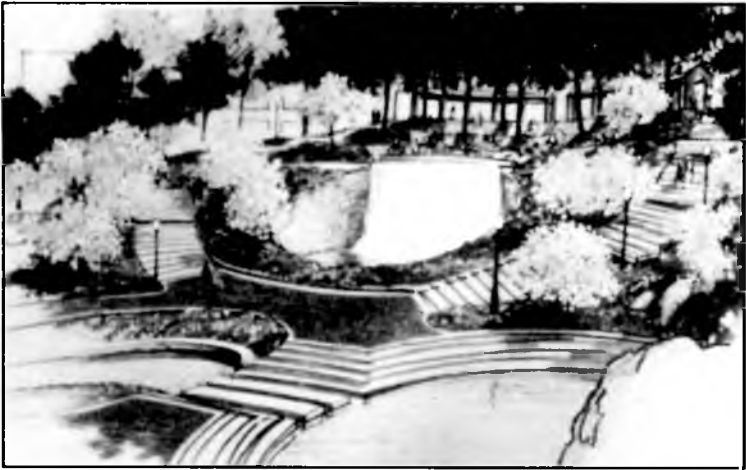




While all of these objectives are attractive, we have to make the transition from what we have now to what we want to be. Efforts such as the closing of the oversized Spragins Street are representative of the steps required to make these ideas reality.



The Big Spring Park East plan overview shows the potential for this area.



*Waterfall - Big Spring Park East* — The dedication of the City of Huntsville to encourage and enhance downtown development is evident in the Big Spring Park renovation project. Shown here is the proposed waterfall for the east side of the park. An amphitheater, which will provide an area for lunch time and weekend events, has been incorporated into the design.

*Potential of Canal - Pedestrian Linkage* — There is great potential for the canals in downtown. The canals can become a valuable asset as attractive waterways that serve as a pedestrian linkage from downtown to the VBCC.





Not only can the canals serve as a pedestrian linkage from downtown to the VBCC, but they can also provide a scenic walkway for shops and cafes that could locate in the opportunity areas along the canal.

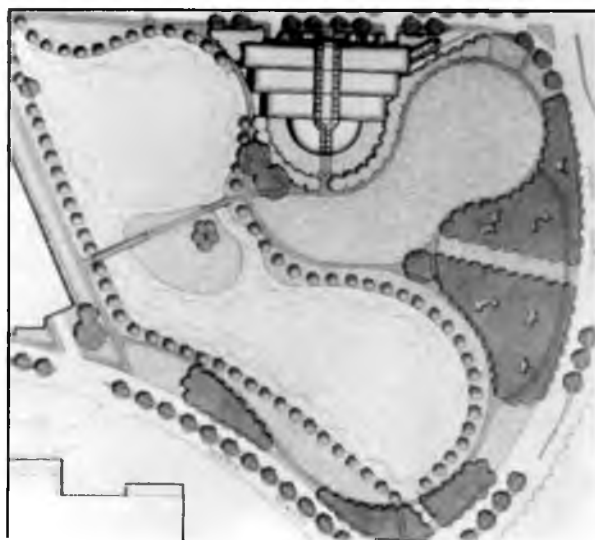
The parking deck located adjacent to Big Spring Park provides an excellent opportunity site. This is the parking deck as it appears now.





This is the potential of the parking deck with the bottom floor converted to attractive retail or public uses.

The plan for improvements to the west side of Big Spring Park includes the opening up of the lagoon by creating an is-



land and adding another bridge improving the visibility of the size of the lagoon from one side of the park to the other. The Huntsville Museum of Art and the Arts Council will each have their facilities located adjacent to the park and will further enhance the park as a people place.

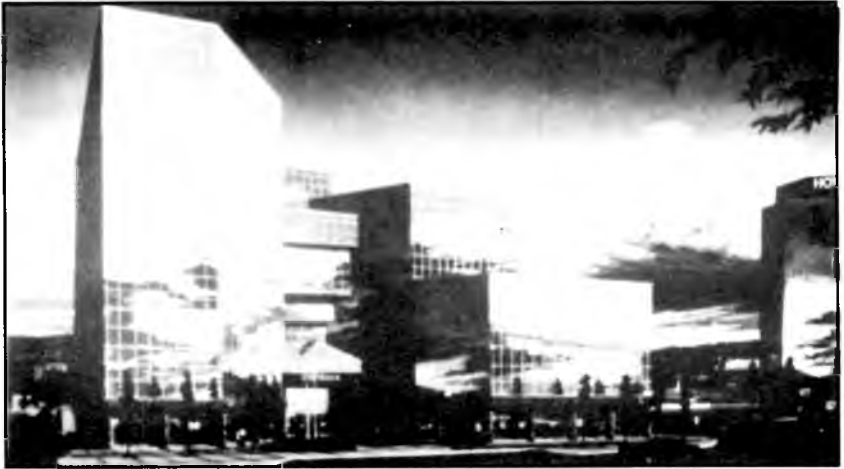
The Von Braun Civic Center is an economic force in the downtown area. The VBCC Master Plan calls for the expansion of the facility. This will allow the VBCC to become a major conference center and will bring even more people to the downtown area. The linkage created from the VBCC to Big Spring Park to the Courthouse Square will benefit all of downtown.



The renovation of the Municipal Building formed the core of a downtown governmental center. Almost all of the departments of the City are housed in this building. This type of use fits in well with the Downtown Master Plan.



The first phase of the Civic Plaza has been completed. The projected complex you see here will include additional office space and a hotel.



*AmSouth Building*  
— The recently completed AmSouth Building, an example of the quality of development desired for downtown, represents the confidence of the private sector in locating downtown.







*Huntsville Hospital* — As the Medical District continues to grow and expand, this element of the downtown area economy becomes increasingly important.

*Humana Hospital* — Recognizing this valuable asset, a master plan for the Medical District is being created that will meet the needs of the Medical District, ensure the quality of future growth, and guide development in a way that complements the downtown area.





*View of Big Spring Park / Skyline* — The view you see here is not unrealistic. The skyline consists of buildings that already exist or that will be constructed soon.

Publicly funded projects such as the arts centers and park improvements help to establish a positive image and market identity for the area. In addition, these improvements serve as a powerful catalyst for new private investment such as the AmSouth Bank and Civic Plaza projects.

With the cooperation of the public and private sectors, downtown Huntsville will become a more successful, inviting, people-oriented place.

*Johnny Johnston came to Huntsville Downtown Redevelopment Authority (HDRA) as its first director in March 1991. He is a native of Huntsville, Alabama, who started his career with the Huntsville Air Service. He was with Eastern Airlines for 32 years, having lived in 8 different cities.*

*During his Huntsville years, Johnny has been a member of the Madison County Tourism Board, Charter President of the Rotary Club of Greater Huntsville, and Vice President of the Redstone Riders Motorcycle Civic Association.*

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