

The Historic Huntsville
QUARTERLY
Of Local Architecture and Preservation



HARRISON BROTHERS

Celebrating 100 Years on the Square

HISTORIC HUNTSVILLE FOUNDATION

Founded 1974

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THE HISTORIC HUNTSVILLE QUARTERLY
of Local Architecture and Preservation

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From the Chair...Ben Walker

All of our lives we have heard "the older you get, the faster time flies." I have found this to be especially true since assuming responsibilities as your chairman a few months back. We have so many wonderful things going on, so many additional things we need to be doing, and so precious little time it seems to get these things done. Thankfully we have some very industrious and energetic people who are dedicated to accomplishing the objectives of our foundation. Time may be moving rapidly, but so are out people as well.

I know we all concur in a genuine "thank you" to Susan O'Connor and Stephanie Sherman for chairing the 1997 Trade Day. By all reports it was one of our most successful. I know many of you worked long hours in preparing for this event to say nothing of a long day on the square and we do sincerely appreciate your efforts. The foundation has many dreams and aspirations aimed at carrying out our stated mission; however, none of these are possible without funding. Through your efforts these things become possible.

I am very encouraged by our activities in several areas, among these the action committee for downtown Huntsville. Margaret Ann Hanaw, acting as our committee chairman, has been instrumental in forming the "Downtown Think Tank" composed of foundation members as well as selected individuals having an interest, and hopefully some influence, in the old downtown area. Several meetings have been held with city officials, business leaders, and out-of-town consultants such as the Main Street representatives in an effort to take in all available information for analysis. I feel certain that very good things will come from this effort.

I would be remiss if I didn't also acknowledge the continued outstanding efforts of Diane Ellis in the formation of the Mill Village action group. In conjunction with Lauren Martinson they have begun to organize this effort and state its objectives. Under the research grant received as a result of Lauren's efforts we have now hired a highly qualified, part-time employee to carry out the necessary "leg work." I also think we will see very good things result from this activity.

I know it saddens us all to hear that Elise Stephens will be moving to Galveston, Texas, in the near future. For my part, it is hard to imagine the Historic Huntsville Foundation without Elise. I wish her the very best and will try to make the most of the days she has left in Huntsville.

I hope all will be able to come to our next covered dish supper on Thursday, November 6th at 6:30 p.m. at the First Presbyterian Church. We have an exciting program planned. Our guests will be the group from Galveston, Texas, responsible for the revitalization of their downtown area, a very successful endeavor as I understand it.

From the Editor...Elise Stephens

The *Quarterly* adds its congratulations to Harrison Brothers for its 100 years on the Square. This is a preservation success story that matches our feats in space and missilery. Tenacity, teamwork, guardianship and salesmanship have proven that the decision made by the Foundation to purchase the store and preserve it was indeed as wise as it was brave. The future success of the store and of the Foundation's preservation mission in Huntsville and Madison County will depend on these same characteristics.

This issue has a dual focus: Harrison Brothers on the Square and Downtown Huntsville. The health of one promotes the longevity of the other. Initiatives are underway to revitalize downtown. The lead-in photo-essay by John De Meo sets a nostalgic mood by a young man who wants to see the downtown come alive with art and music, antiques and fine food, and vigorous personalities—some of whom actually will live down there.

Linda Allen, stalwart of the Foundation, and urban planner for the city presents a plea and a plan for loft-living downtown. Eleanor Hutchens' evocative essay about growing up in a not-so sleepy Huntsville suggests that the values of yesteryear would sustain our spirits, much as John's photographs of Harrison Brothers subtly intimate the same. Lauren B. Martinson's informative study of the Public Inn shows how one of our earlier structures has been saved and converted to apartment/office use.

One cannot celebrate an anniversary without looking back; hence the issue concludes with various links to the Square and downtown Huntsville. Albert Lane's early 1940s photographs of downtown were graciously developed by Southerland's Photo.



Ms. Elise Stephens
Historic Huntsville *Quarterly*

Mr. John and Mr. Dan Harrison were the epitome of Southern Gentlemen. I purchased most of my furniture from them. In the early 1950's they did not have what I wanted in a bedroom suite, so Mr. Dan said he was pretty confident that Oxford Galleries in Birmingham would have just what I wanted. He said to tell the owner to add 10% to his costs (imagine that!) and that would be my purchase price. I chose a brown cherry suite and I still have it and it is as pretty as ever.

I am happy that they are remembered and honored. They richly deserve all the praise we can give them.

Sincerely,

Edna M O'Keefe

Solomon I. Miller
407 Echols Avenue
Huntsville, Alabama 35801

November 29, 1996

Elise Stephens, Editor
historic Huntsville Foundation
P.O. Box 786
Huntsville, AL 35804

Dear Elise:

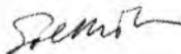
I thought you might be interested to see this picture of one of Huntsville's lost gems. It shows the post office and federal court house that was located across from the YMCA on Green Street. I think it was torn down sometime around 1954. By that time the building was no longer being used for its original purpose. I am told it was used as a meeting place for clubs.

The original lithograph, which I have, came from the *Annual Report of the Supervising Architect*, published in Washington, DC in 1889. I sent Harvie Jones a copy, and he may be able to tell you how the actual building differed from the architect's rendering. My father thinks that the front stairs were different from the drawing.

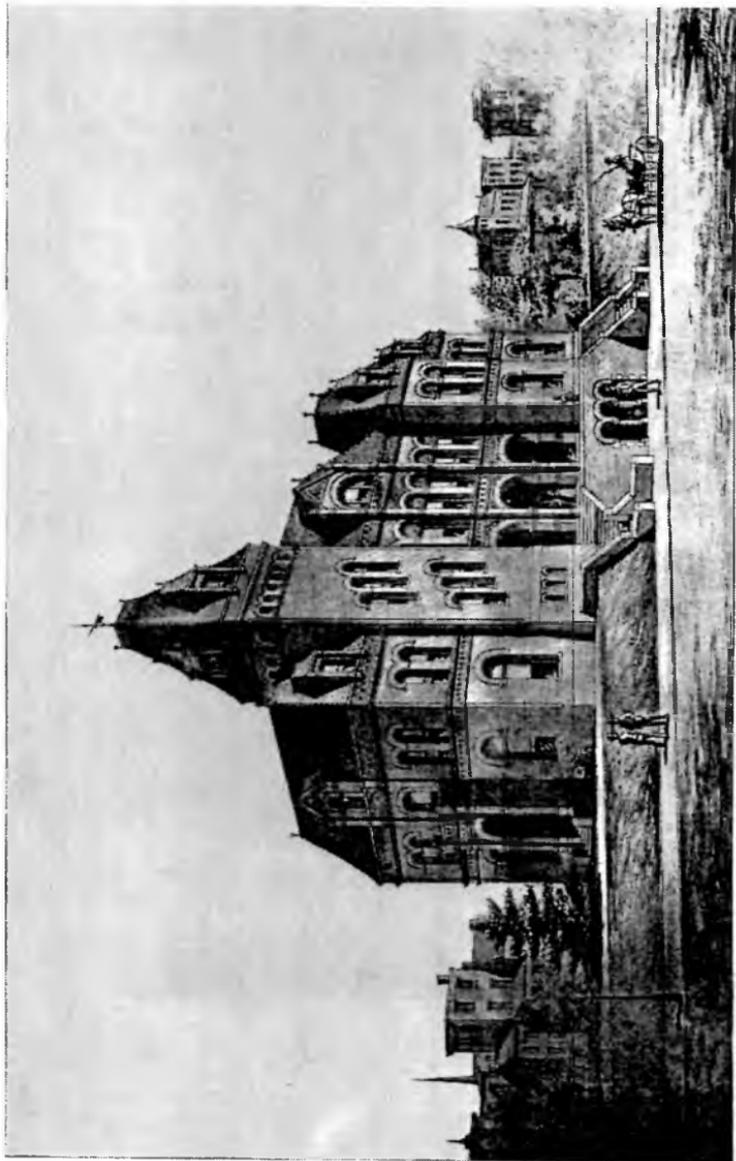
Although the *Quarterly* is dedicated to preservation and not to mourning that which has been destroyed, maybe an issue devoted to our fine lost buildings would be of interest to the subscribers, and would promote preservation.

I always look forward to reading the *Quarterly*.

Yours very truly,



Sol Miller



WILLIAM WRETT,
SUPERVISING ARCHITECT.

U. S. G. HO. & P. O.
JUNTSVILLE, ALA.



Hardware Is The Essence Of Constructive Living



Essences...



Lights Upon The Past...



Nostalgia. . .



Reflections. . .



Gifts Of The Spirit



...and More



Outdoor Living

Harrison Brothers

A Photographic Essay by Gianni De Meo

Essence. History. Tradition in continuity. This to me is Harrison Brothers' spirit and what I tried to capture in images. The cluttered walls and seasoned floors speak softly of times past, of genteel and elaborate expressions of originality in a time when television was not the medium.

It was a place, I'm sure, where you would be known by your name, and seen as part of an integral life which today we so much yearn for. It speaks of belonging, of memorabilia that now has almost a transcendental essence, which brings you, me, anyone, to a time past when recognition is to know and be known.

In a time of insecurity, incohesion and separation from a stable past, Harrison Brothers provides a welcome point of reference and immersion into a past which seems so distant but which is reachable.



Born near Rome, Italy, John moved to New York in 1974 at the age of 14 with his immediate family. Among the many experiences that the city provides, the best to him were related to studies. He graduated from Brooklyn College with a B.A. in Political Science and later on in life, after having attended Università "La Sapienza," he completed a Master's Degree in Italian International Studies at New York University in 1989. John is now employed at Intergraph as a translator, having resided in Huntsville for the past five years. Of Huntsville, he has written, "I found an old part of myself in this town, which links me to the special Italian Renaissance spirit. I write poetry, create art, play percussion, capture essences in photography and exercise my most delectable of hobbies, that of a person involved in an aesthetic love of life.



D. T. Harrison

R. S. Harrison

HARRISON BROTHERS

Established 1879



On the South Side of the Courthouse Square
HUNTSVILLE, ALABAMA

A BRIEF HISTORY



A century-old Huntsville tradition; Owned by a non-profit group; Staffed by volunteers; Repository of 20th century retailing memorabilia; Oldest operating hardware in Alabama; Listed on the National Register of Historic Places; A favorite haunt of both natives and visitors; Scene of numerous retellings of past Huntsville happenings; and Focus of wonderful stories recounted by loyal customers. Harrison Brothers is all of these and more.

The first set of Harrison brothers began business on Jefferson Street in 1879 as tobacco wholesalers but moved in 1897 to a building on South Side Square, then known as #3 Commercial Row, where they introduced a line of cream-colored crockery called Queen's Ware.

Four years later a fire began in a nearby feed store and quickly spread to the adjoining buildings before being contained. A contemporary newspaper account stated that Harrison Brothers suffered about \$4,500 damage to its building and stock, while the business next door at #2 Commercial Row experienced even larger losses although both buildings remained standing. Shortly after the fire, Harrison Brothers bought #2 Commercial Row and hired a local contractor to repair the two buildings, construct a unifying facade for them, and build an addition to the rear of their original building at #3.

When Harrison Brothers reopened for business, #2 had become a furniture store while #3 continued to offer a selection of Queen's Ware. By 1913 the brothers had replaced the Queen's Ware with hardware stock, and although Harrison Brothers occasionally experimented with the retail sale of clocks, jewelry, appliances and various other types of merchandise during the next seventy years, hardware and furniture remained the basis of the business.

James B. and Daniel T. Harrison, the first pair of Harrison brothers, had come to Huntsville during the late 19th century from Tennessee where they had run a tobacco shop. A third brother, Robert S. Harrison, joined Daniel T. in the purchase of their first building on Commercial Row. Robert's two sons Daniel S. and John began working in the store part time while still young boys, and after Daniel T.'s death in 1940 and Robert's in 1952, the second generation of brothers assumed management and ownership of the store.

Either brother could extract just the right bolt or the precise garden tool requested, an amazing feat of memory considering that nothing was ever discarded. The purchase was carefully wrapped in a piece of brown paper ripped from a large roll and then tied with string from a nearby cone. Prices were reasonable, sales tax was never added, and few deliveries were made.

The Harrisons did not believe in advertising either. A story is related that Robert Harrison, when approached by a foolhardy ad salesman, replied: "Look young fellow, we have a nice business here. You can see we have a good inventory on hand. If I started advertising with you, we'd probably sell out of a lot of this merchandise, and I'd just have to turn right around and order some more. Thank you, but no!"

Daniel Harrison died in 1981, and when John became ill in October of 1983, the store was closed. John died that December, and when none of the heirs expressed an interest in running the business, it appeared that this unique Huntsville tradition would die with him. Although the Harrison heirs were unwilling to assume management of the store, they were equally reluctant to have the stock dispersed, the buildings gutted, and the Harrison Brothers name and tradition relegated to an historical footnote.

Faced with the imminent demise of the city's most historic store, the Historic Huntsville Foundation undertook to save both the building and the business. The directors of the non-profit, preservation organization became convinced that keeping the store in operation was the only viable way to preserve this most tangible piece of Huntsville's history. Negotiations between the heirs and the Foundation produced an agreement whereby the Foundation would purchase the buildings, the name, the fixtures and the inventory. Although the Foundation had always considered its role as one of preserving buildings, the membership unanimously voted to save the Harrison Brothers' structures and the hardware business as well.

On July 31, 1984, the Foundation officially became the new owner of Harrison Brothers and immediately began planning for the store's grand reopening. Twenty-two Foundation members spent the next Saturday conducting an exhaustive inventory of the contents, which was followed by an extended but inconclusive cleaning of the premises. A full-time manager was hired to direct the day-to-day operations. The opening of Harrison Brothers under its new management took place in October preceded by a spectacular street party on the Courthouse Square.

Harrison Brothers is special to Huntsville because it has maintained its turn-of-the-century appearance, inventory, fixtures, and merchandising techniques into the 1990s. Although the firm was judged to be very progressive in its early years, the store apparently had not changed significantly since it became a hardware and furniture store in the teens, and the brothers successfully resisted any urge to update the business or embrace new fashions in retailing. The Foundation's ongoing inventory of the store's contents has revealed ledgers dating to the 1880s, buggy whip holders, hundreds of horseshoes, several saddles, and a wealth of old advertising signs.

The store front remains essentially as remodeled in 1902, but the buildings themselves are considerably older. Historical research and physical evidence both indicate that the front third of the two buildings dates to the 1830s. The brick party walls, huge hand-hewn beams, and gabled roofs hidden behind the 1902 parapet are all remnants typical of the antebellum structures that once lined Commercial Row. Both buildings were extended to the rear sometime before 1884, and the final addition occurred during the 1902 remodeling. The buildings were listed on the National Register of Historic Places in 1980.

But the interior of Harrison Brothers is its real glory! The long narrow stores, joined near the rear, retain their wooden floors marked with a row of brass numbers to facilitate the measurement of rope, chain, and screen from large rolls. The walls are lined floor to ceiling with old wooden display cabinets fitted with bins, drawers, shelves, and storage niches fronted with shallow glass cases to display the interior contents. Tables hold a selection of canning equipment, heavy kitchen crockery, cast iron skillets,

cornstick pans, and muffin tins. Barrels are filled with a multi-colored array of long handled garden implements and walking canes. Huge galvanized wash tubs and wooden nail kegs line the floor below a display of birdhouses while a six-foot-long, crosscut saw blade hangs from the beaded board ceiling.

A bare minimum of milk-glass globes illuminates the center aisle of the store, supplemented by a few bare bulbs hanging above the side counter. The natural light pouring through the glass front is complemented near the rear by a flood of light filtering down from a skylight above the open shaft of the hand-operated freight lift.

Tall angled ladders attached to ceiling tracks roll the length of the store providing access to the upper levels of shelves. An imposing four-drawer cash register, with rows of colored buttons to activate the dollar and cent flags, sits near the front of the store across the aisle from an ancient scale used to weigh nails and other bulk goods. At the rear, where the two halves of the store connect, stands a huge desk piled high with papers, invoices, catalogs, and decades old calendars, while a massive floor safe, its design of painted flowers faded nearly to obscurity, rests against the opposite wall.

The Foundation has endeavored to continue the appearance and feel of the hardware side much as the Harrisons left it. At the time of purchase, the west side of the store was filled with a variety of tall, wooden rockers flanked by fireplace equipment and mountains of clay flower pots. Today this side of the store is stocked with an eclectic mix where one can still purchase porch rockers, marbles in bulk, terra cotta garden ornaments, handmade whirligigs, crockery, rugs, woven coverlets, and hard candy displayed in 19th

century biscuit jars as well as make selections from a vast array of contemporary merchandise that arrives daily.

Since 1984 the store has operated with the assistance of some eighty volunteers who double as clerks and tour guides. The Historic Huntsville Foundation has received both local and national recognition for this unique and important preservation project, and Harrison Brothers has become one of Huntsville's most popular destinations for residents and tourists alike. □

THE HISTORIC HUNTSVILLE FOUNDATION

The Historic Huntsville Foundation is a non-profit organization established in 1974 to encourage the preservation of historically or architecturally significant sites and structures throughout Huntsville and Madison County and to increase public awareness of their value to the community. Membership is open to all interested persons and entitles them to receive the Historic Huntsville Quarterly, to attend lectures on preservation topics, to go on field trips to nearby historic sites and cities, to assist with Trade Day, and to receive invitations to all Foundation activities.

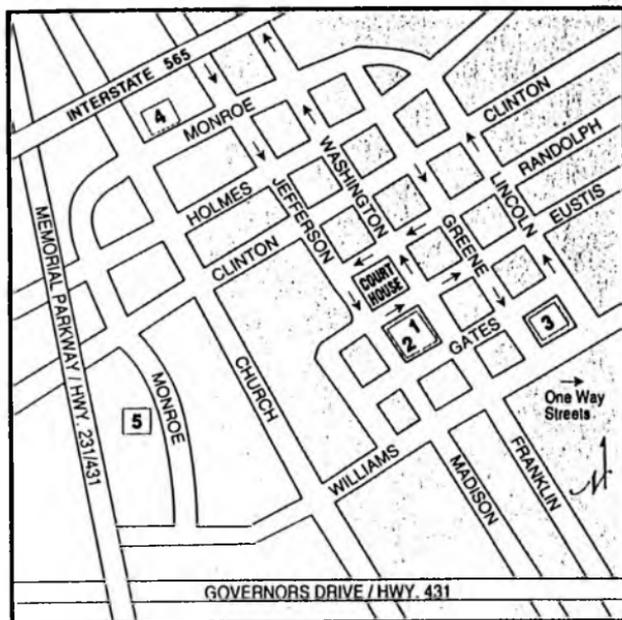
To become a member of the Historic Huntsville Foundation, send your name, address and telephone number with a check to

**Historic Huntsville Foundation
P. O. Box 786
Huntsville, AL 35804.**

Membership dues are \$15 for an individual or family; \$25 for an organization; \$25 to \$99 for a patron; and \$100 and above for a benefactor.

HARRISON BROTHERS HARDWARE

OPEN WEEKDAYS 9 TO 5 & SATURDAYS 10 TO 2



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Downtown;
Go south 5
blocks; Turn
left at South
Side Square.

#1 Harrison Brothers Hardware #2 Alabama's Constitution Village
#3 Weeden House Museum #4 Huntsville Depot Museum
#5 Tourism Information, Von Braun Civic Center & Huntsville Museum of Art

Harrison Brothers Hardware

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THE HISTORIC HUNTSVILLE FOUNDATION
Since 1984

APARTMENT LIVING DOWNTOWN

Linda Bayer Allen

Downtown living has attracted quite a following among the residents of the Twickenham and Old Town neighborhoods who enjoy gracious front porches, a diversified range of historic architecture, and a sense of community with their neighbors. But living above the store in the heart of commercial downtown still has not caught on in Huntsville. Although residential apartments on the upper floors of commercial buildings previously were not permitted by the Zoning Ordinance, such is no longer the case. In November 1979, the City Council approved an amendment to the Zoning Ordinance that would allow the renovation of upper floors for apartments in downtown Huntsville.

It has long been recognized that combining residential and nonresidential uses in the same structure can create a potential hazard for the occupants. It is unwise to allow persons to reside above businesses that utilize certain volatile or explosive processes or materials that produce noxious fumes or offensive odors. Living above a dry cleaners, for example, could be most unpleasant, and presumably there are persons who do not care for the aroma of garlic wafting through the vents from the little bistro below. For this reason, several precautions have been built into the zoning regulations to ensure that when upper floors are redeveloped for apartments, they are suitable for habitation.

Before an apartment over a business or office can be occupied it must have been granted a special exception by the Board of Adjustment. A special exception is a zoning technique to allow a use in a district when it is important for the details of the specific proposal to be studied prior to approval. The Board of Adjustment reviews the request for a downtown apartment to

verify that the conditions required by the Zoning Ordinance have been met and that there are no other circumstances that would render the request unreasonable. It is not necessary to prove hardship when applying for a special exception. In the case of a downtown apartment, the applicant is required to have the development plan approved by the inspection department to ensure that it will meet the building codes for residential use, by the fire prevention bureau to ensure that it will be safe and adequately protected from incompatible first floor uses, and by the city traffic engineer to verify that there will be reasonable parking and unloading space available for the occupants. When a city fails to provide adequate oversight, the quality of the rental units frequently declines until an upper floor slum evolves in the downtown, which is precisely the situation that led to the prohibition on downtown apartments earlier in this century.

The development of downtown apartments could spur revitalization of the area and provide an additional income for building owners. Apartments are an untapped resource because most upper floors are currently vacant. Downtown businesses are primarily located on the street level, even professional offices, which do not rely on impulse customers, because there is insufficient demand for retail space to force these firms upstairs. Consequently the building owner is receiving only a partial return from his property. Commercial uses might provide a greater financial return than residential, but when there is little or no commercial demand for this space, conversion to residential use could be an alternative.

If it were possible to create a stable residential population in the business district, several advantages could accrue. Currently the downtown empties at five o'clock each evening leaving the area mostly deserted. If enough apartments were created, a second group of people, the residents, would enter the area as the

employers left. In time, a resident population could create a neighborhood market for small specialty shops and restaurants, especially when combined with the already settled populations of Old Town, Twickenham, and the neighborhoods to the north and east in the Five Points area and Blossomwood.

While downtown apartment living does not appeal to everyone, there are those who would be attracted to such an environment. Presumably they would be predominantly single people, young couples without children, and the retired—part of the growing segment of the population that consists of one and two-person families.

Undoubtedly the greatest deterrent to development of apartments is the considerable expense necessary to convert raw space to residential use. Most upper floors in the downtown have no plumbing, and electricity consists of a bare light bulb hanging from the ceiling; access for habitation does not meet the building code because these spaces were not conceived as living areas. Most were never finished for any use but storage. In the past simple economics has made conversions impractical; the range of rental rates simply has not provided sufficient return to make renovation an attractive alternative for the building owner.

For Huntsville's downtown to become truly revitalized, it must develop a variety of attractions and functions. If a resident population could be added to the pool of government and professional employees, and the tourist potential of the Depot Museum, Weeden House, and Alabama Constitution Village could be realized, then the downtown would develop a life of its own capable of supporting shops, restaurants, and entertainment facilities. The simple truth is that people like to be where people already are.



BEING BROUGHT UP IN HUNTSVILLE

by Eleanor Hutchens

Southern childhood has been written so thoroughly, by so many writers, that I sometimes think I have lived a script. Even my specific early experiences in Huntsville, or a good many of them, have been written or told by my contemporaries who shared them, from climbing on the back of Hogjaw's ice wagon on hot summer days to standing in the East Clinton schoolyard to watch Lindbergh fly over in *The Spirit of St. Louis* as one of our teachers said, "Yes, NX211! that's his plane all right!"

I take strong exception to the description of my old Huntsville as "a sleepy little cotton town." For us whose first and deepest impressions were formed here, it was the world itself. Its adult citizens moved as large mystic figures, saying and doing

amazing things. All was new, all was exciting; nothing was sleepy to us whose elders struggled to make us take afternoon naps. And our elders were not sleepy; the people who built the Russel Erskine Hotel, the old Times building, and the Terry-Hutchens building almost simultaneously in the 1920's were not sleepy people. Nor were the homeowners who built the houses we can see today, showing the up-to-date styles of their times. Nor were the store owners, who ran their businesses personally six full days a week and whom I remember as cheerful bright-eyed men with short haircuts, rather like Ross Perot.

It was not a quiet town. Train whistles, church and courthouse clock bells, mill whistles, clattering automobiles, street cars, barking unlicensed dogs, and roving free bands of shouting and skating children made noisy the streets of residential neighborhoods that are now silent and sedate. The blocks around the courthouse square were full of cars and farm wagons and pedestrian shoppers and lawyers and—yes a few drowsy loafers.

In those few blocks you could buy anything you needed in life, from a John Deere tractor to a hundred shares of General Electric to a length of satin ribbon. Today I don't think you can buy a quart of milk or a pair of socks within half a mile of the courthouse. I'm not complaining—much. It's just that such a concentration of people and activity made for liveliness.

So much for the sleepy little cotton town. But I've decided to talk today, not on the intrinsic excitements of a youth in Huntsville but on the steady efforts our elders made, both for themselves and for us, to be in touch with the larger worlds of Washington and New York and London and Paris and with the great things of all time, the books and the art and the great individual lives that had been lived. Sometimes these small-town efforts have been noted in fiction and recollection, but usually with a

patronizing smirk, as if they were affectations or were hopelessly touched with ignorance and futility. But what would small towns have been without them? They would have been ingrown patches of ignorance and futility—possibly even sleepy little cotton towns.

In the first place, there were the songs, tales, and books that our parents and grandparents bestowed on us from birth. The first lullaby I remember was a poem by Tennyson set to music. The next was a Gilbert and Sullivan song my grandmother sang to me, “Tit Willow,” a song I now think a work of comic genius. But as a toddler I was grief-stricken at the suicide of the little bird. I could not understand my grandmother’s amusement as she sang it. Then there was what my grandmother called grand opera, which she loved and played on the Victrola. Trying to form my taste, she used to pay me a nickel to give her a concert—that was, to climb on a stool to wind the Victrola and to place the needle carefully on the rim of the record. Once at the end of an aria by Caruso she said, “Isn’t it wonderful that we can hear him sing after he is dead? “DEAD!” I squawked, and did not want to go near the machine again for some time. A dead man singing! But by the time I started school I knew the stories and some of the music of a few great operas and of the Gilbert and Sullivan operettas, which my grandfather also quoted fondly.

There were books in plenty. Our elders read them, both current ones and classics; and talked about them in our presence. Among living writers, my mother especially liked F. Scott Fitzgerald and John Galsworthy. I eventually inherited four full sets of Dickens, all thoroughly read, from different older members of the family. Murray’s bookstore on the west side of the Square, and the public library just off the Square, kept a supply of books moving into and through the house. Many people subscribed to the *Memphis Commercial Appeal* and *The Chattanooga Times* in addition to *The Huntsville Daily Times*. My Grand-

father took these and *The Wall Street Journal*. For breaking news, he relied on the stock market ticker at a downtown brokerage office. I remember the day he telephoned my grandmother to tell her that Lindbergh had taken off for Paris.

Magazines were publishing good fiction and nonfiction. *The National Geographic* kept my grandfather informed of new developments in archeology and earth sciences. He had a special interest in astronomy and used to talk at the table about the expanding universe and the possibility of space travel. He very much wanted to live until man landed on the moon, and he died in 1956 confident that Huntsville would send man there. But he had been talking of space and its wonders thirty years before. He himself was not a scientist but a cotton merchant.

In the meantime, there was earth travel. Huntsville had two trains a day to New York, and Huntsvillians actually went up there for a week or two of theater, shopping, and business. Of the four or five million residents of New York, I doubt that more than one in a thousand went to the theater in a given season. Of the eight thousand souls who lived in Huntsville proper during the 1920's, I could easily have named more than eight who saw plays in New York each year. So, if big-city play going is one measure of being awake, Huntsville was no sleeper than New York. And there was travel abroad. My grandmother had taken the grand tour in 1890 and enjoyed its memories to the end of her life. Most of her old friends had been to Europe at one time or another. I remember that when she told me a family friend was going around the world, I thought that meant to visit every town on the map. So she knew it was time to give me a globe, and she did.

Business connections with cities outside of Huntsville went well beyond cotton. My grandfather had his suits made by a

tailor in New Orleans, his shoes by a firm in Atlanta who kept his individual last, and his shirts by a New England company whose representative visited him twice a year. There was a perfectly good clothing store for men on Clinton Street, just a block and a half from his office on West Side Square, but old cosmopolitan habits prevailed with him.

He thought Prohibition an outrage. Having friends in Canada whom he visited every year or so, he brought back good Scotch whiskey in triumphant defiance. Once he raised his glass to my grandmother and said something completely unintelligible. She explained to me: "That's what French people say when they mean to your health." "Don't French people know how to talk?" I asked. My grandmother, who never missed an opportunity to enlarge one's mind, said, "The French people might think we didn't know how to talk"—thus creating an internationalist on the spot.

One private school and the Catholic school survived here in the 1920's, but nearly all children went to the public schools. I believe I was the first of my family, on my mother's or my father's side, to go to a public school. Parents and grandparents had gone from private schools in Huntsville to boarding schools in other states where they had made friends from different places whom they visited and corresponded with for the rest of their lives. In the 1920's, boys and girls were still sent away to school; but, by the 30's, when I reached my teens, the Depression had changed this so that one was lucky to go to college when the time came. However, of the shouting and skating children on Locust Street when I was a small child there, three within the space of a block became university professors, two rose to national success in art, two became engineers, and one worked all his adult life as a scientist at Oak Ridge.

If you have seen **Driving Miss Daisy**, you have had a glimpse into one aspect of private life in 1920's Huntsville. Its order and its style were made possible by many highly skilled household employees. Both of my grandmothers were driven by chauffeurs in large black cars, as were many of their friends, both men and women. This was not a matter of display; people their age had learned to drive late, if at all, and this was the most convenient way of getting around. The chauffeur wore a dark suit and a visored cap; on getting back to the house he put on his white coat and served dinner. Early the next morning he might be cutting the grass or firing the furnace. Cooks and nurses, both very good at their jobs, kept houses and children in order. I have been told that in 1900, the largest single occupational category in this country was domestic work. Our cook was with us for 52 years, our houseman for 56. They taught us children respect for all our elders, especially themselves. It was they who made possible a Huntsville with leisure enough not to be a sleepy little cotton town, and I honor the memory of them with profound love and admiration.

I had the great good fortune to sit, for three meals a day, at the table with a father who was a determined Republican and a grandfather who was an equally adamant Democrat. The first Presidential election I remember was in 1928, when the merits of Al Smith and Herbert Hoover were debated by these two. I felt that I knew the two candidates well. Distance meant nothing: I felt that in fact I could run the government if given the chance. I was not a small child in a sleepy little cotton town but an American fully involved in history. Huntsville had always made me feel this way.



Photo by Albert Lane, taken in early 1940's
Courtesy of Southerland's Photo.



A recent walking tour of downtown. Looking at the Bibb-Newman House
from across Williams. Tour sponsored by HHF, courtesy of
Harvie Jones and Hall Bryant.



**THE PUBLIC INN:
205 Williams Avenue**

by Lauren B. Martinson

On October 29, 1819, the Huntsville Newspaper, *The Alabama Republican*, announced as follows:

ENTERTAINMENT—William E. Phillips informs the public that he has opened a public house in the south part of Huntsville, a few doors below the printing office, where he will accommodate travelers and a few boarders in the best manner and on the most reasonable terms.

Such was the birth of The Public Inn.

The Public Inn was built during Huntsville's brightest and most prosperous times. The first census from Madison County, taken in 1816, showed a population of 14,200 people. A short four years later in 1820, the second census was taken, revealing

an increase in the population of the County of over 5,000 people to a total of 19,565 inhabitants. The aggregate population of Madison County was three times that of any other county in the State.

At the time the Public Inn was built, Huntsville was crowded with people, and hotels were taxed to their utmost limit to lodge the throngs of transients. *Early History of Huntsville, Alabama* states that around the time the Public Inn was built, "So general was the recognition of the merited yet over weaning mastery and domination by Huntsville of the commercial and political life of the whole state, that in spite of its geographic location, the economic necessity and advantage of making Huntsville the capital of the state was boldly contended for by her prominent men, and freely admitted by other leaders of thought from all parts of the state." Because of this domination by Huntsville, the Constitutional Convention for Alabama was held in Huntsville at the current location of Constitution Hall Village.

The great increase in population of the entire Alabama Territory by 1819 warranted the admission of Alabama into the Union. On March 2, 1819, the U.S. Congress passed an act authorizing the people of the Alabama Territory to hold a convention in Huntsville for the purpose of drafting a State Constitution. The meetings were held in an assembly hall (which has long been removed) at the northwest corner and the intersection of Franklin and Gates Streets. Because of its close proximity, it is generally assumed by local historians that some of the delegates to the Constitutional Convention stayed at the Public Inn.

The original site of the Public Inn was on the northeast corner of Williams Avenue and Madison Street where SouthTrust Bank is presently located. The front of the house faced

Madison Street and Big Spring Park. The house was built by John Adams and was operated as an inn from 1819 until 1821 by William E. Phillips. Phillips later went on to operate and own the Bell Tavern on the public square until the mid 1830's, when he became so deeply mired in debt that he left for Mississippi.

The Inn was built in two stages. The east side of the house was built first in 1818 and the west side was probably added in 1832 since the metal downspouts which were located on each front corner of the house were embossed with this date. These downspouts remained on the house until the 1980's, but are unlocatable now.

The house displays several early federal characteristics such as a symmetrical 5-bay facade, gabled roof with exterior end chimneys, rigidly rectangular shaped, tall proportions, delicate dentil molding and medallions decorating the box cornice, and central stair-hall with 20 foot square rooms. Underneath, in the basement of the house, can be seen the hand-hewn framing. In the attic, it is interesting to note that the eaves on the original section of the house have hand-carved wooden pegs at the intersection of the eaves. The 1832 addition does not contain the pegged eaves.

The Public Inn is one of the few framed buildings to survive from the federal period. Its age, construction and stylistic features all make it a significant structure contributing to the historical and architectural character of the Twickenham Historic District. The vernacular architecture of the Public Inn is similar to the buildings in Constitution Hall Village which contain examples of the federal style that date from 1780 to the mid 1830's. The term "Federal Period" means the architecture of the early years of the American Federation. A more accurate stylistic label would be "Neo-Classical" with influences from the English

architect, Robert Adam, who in turn was influenced by newly-uncovered (in the mid 18th century) Roman houses that were buried in Pompeii and other archeological sites. These characteristics melded with holdover influences from Georgian architecture of the 19th century, which was inspired by both 16th-century Baroque architecture and the Italian architect, Palladio, who had made a study of ancient Roman public buildings.

Sometime around 1927, a two story framed Victorian addition was made to the rear of the house, doubling its original size. A colonial revival bungalow style porch of one story was added across the front where the parking for the house is located today. This porch was composed of a low brick wall, paired wood columns and a low hipped roof. The front and second story windows were altered at this time as well.

The interior of the original portion of the building features a central stair-hall with a single room to each side on each floor. The staircase has a half-turn with landing, scalloped brackets on the stair ends, and rectangular balusters. The interior trim was probably installed during the 1927 renovation. The house still contains the original heart-of-pine floors in the front section and oak floors in the Victorian addition. It is also interesting to note that the oak floors were installed over the heart-of-pine floors in the front west side apartment. This was the popular thing to do in the 1920s to cover the pine sub-floor. In 1992, the oak floors were removed to expose the original heart-of-pine floors in the front section of the house.

The rear addition and most of the outlying alterations date from 1927 when the house was moved to its present site and renovated for apartments. In 1981, Suzanne Roberson divided the house into two apartments. Her renovations and restoration

were completed by the present owners of the house with the guidance of local architect, Harvie P. Jones, FAIA. It currently has two apartments: one three bedroom, two and one-half bath apartment, which is being used as an attorney's office; and one two bedroom, with one-half bath apartment. Both sides have an outdoor courtyard and separate entrances.

In 1980, then owner Pizitz applied for and obtained certified historic structure status for the property, and the house was listed on the National Register of Historic Places.

Ownership records of the house show a multitude of owners and uses, and the deeds of record of sale prices fluctuated widely during the ante-bellum period, which is probably more indicative of local economic conditions than of the true value of the property.

The property was originally deeded on September 1, 1815 as a part of a 30 acre tract from Leroy and Judith Pope to John Brahan, Peter Perkins, David Moore, Lewis Winston, as commissioners for \$750.

On August 21, 1820, John Brahan, David Moore, Jesse Searcy, Henry Stokes and John Read, commissioners, sold the property to Steven Neal for \$212. The next day, Steven and Fannie Neal sold the property to William Phillips for \$200.

On February 1, 1821, William E. Phillips and Eliza Phillips sold the property to Henry Cook for \$2,200. This deed stated the property was formerly owned by John Adams, Esq.

On April 1, 1828, the property was sold by Henry Cook to William Patton for \$1,400. This deed stated, "Whereon the said Cook has and does yet reside, his family dwelling formerly owned by John Adams, then by William E. Phillips, together with the buildings of every description, fences and c."

On November 7, 1836, the property was deeded by William and Martha L. Patton to William McDowell for \$3,500. The deed stated, "The same occupied by Joseph D. Bradford as a dwelling house."

On December 28, 1837, the property was sold by William and Priscilla W. McDowell to Eleazer L. Andrews for \$3,888.65. The deed stated, "Occupied by Joseph B. Bradford as a dwelling in the year 1836 by said McDowell and wife in the year 1837."

On November 9 1843, the property was deeded to John F. Mills for the sum of \$1,010 and the deed stated, "Now occupied by Edwin R. Wallace, Esq. as a family residence."

On December 19, 1843, the property was deeded from John F. and Caledonia R. Mills to William J. Mastin, Frank Mastin, James H. Mastin and Gustavus L. Mastin for \$1,055 and the deed stated, "Now in the occupancy of Edwin R. Wallace, Esq. "

On December 28, 1843, the property was deeded to Edwin R. Wallace for the sum of \$1,400 with the deed stating, "On which the aforesaid Edwin R, Wallace now resides." On the same day, Wallace mortgaged the property to Samuel Peete, James W. McClung, Thomas Brandon and Silas Parsons for \$1,400. The mortgage was satisfied four years later on September 6, 1847.

On December 6, 1849, Edwin R. Wallace sold the property to George Beirne for \$4,000 plus interest. Included in the deed were the dwelling house and ground lot, a slave and the law library of Wallace consisting of 750 volumes. Beirne sold the property to Sarah Lipscomb on December 6, 1852 at auction for \$2,505.

On August 31, 1860, Sarah Lipscomb sold the property to Ferdinand L. Hammond for \$3,000 and the deed stated, "Now occupied by John H. Coleman as a dwelling house."

Ferdinand Hammond sold the property to John J. Coleman on September 7, 1861, for an undisclosed amount of money with the deed stating, "And whereas the said Coleman has purchased (and fully paid for) from Mrs. Sarah Lipscomb the house and lot in the said city (which is now occupied by one William J. Stoddart as a family residence)."

After the Civil War, the property was sold on September 36, 1881 by John J. Coleman as administrator for Mary K. Cooper for \$3,700 at auction with the deed stating, "House and lot now occupied by James L. Cooper as a family residence."

On March 30, 1897, Mary K. Cooper sold the property to Luke Matthews at auction for \$1,525. Luke and Myrtle V. Matthews sold the property by quitclaim deed on March 23, 1899, to Mary Cooper for the sum of \$1,971.87.

On May 30, 1910, Mary May Cooper sold the property to John W. Johnson for \$1,250 at auction.

On June 5, 1912, John W. and Carrie Belle Johnson sold the property to Robert C. Allen for \$1,200.

In the mid-1920s, the Gulf Refining Company expressed interest to placing a gas station on the property, and on November 1, 1926, Robert C. and Nannie L. Allen sold the property to Gulf Refining Company for \$9,500, the largest amount ever paid for the property to date. The deed provided however that the grantor Robert C. Allen “hereby reserves the buildings on said lot and agrees to remove the same from said lot, at his own expense, within 30 days from the date thereof.”

On November 17, 1926, Robert C. Allen bought the lot where the house currently stands at 205 Williams Avenue from Laura M. Powell for \$1,339.80. The lot measured 62 feet by 58-1/2 feet which was considerably smaller than the prior lot of 73 feet by 100 feet. Sometime in late 1926, the house was jacked up and rolled on logs the one block from its original site. Several Huntsvillians, including the late Lawrence Goldsmith, remember watching the house being moved on logs and pulled by either mules or trucks to the lot adjoining the Goldsmith’s property. After the house was moved to its present location on Lot 4, Block 69, a Victorian addition was added in the back, doubling the size of the house. It was sometime shortly after this that the house was divided into apartments and rented. It has been related to the current owners that the occupants included some of Huntsville’s “ladies of the night.”

On December 14, 1946, Robert C. and Nannie L. Allen deeded the property to J. H. Williams, superintendent of banks of the State of Alabama for \$5,000 at auction.

On May 19, 1937, the property was deeded to Harry J. Coons for \$5,240. On July 3, 1939, Harry J. and Sue Chase Coons deeded the property to Walter J. Price for \$4,000. On May 19,

1944, the property was deeded by Walter J. and Myra M. Price to Lillian Zion Pizitz.

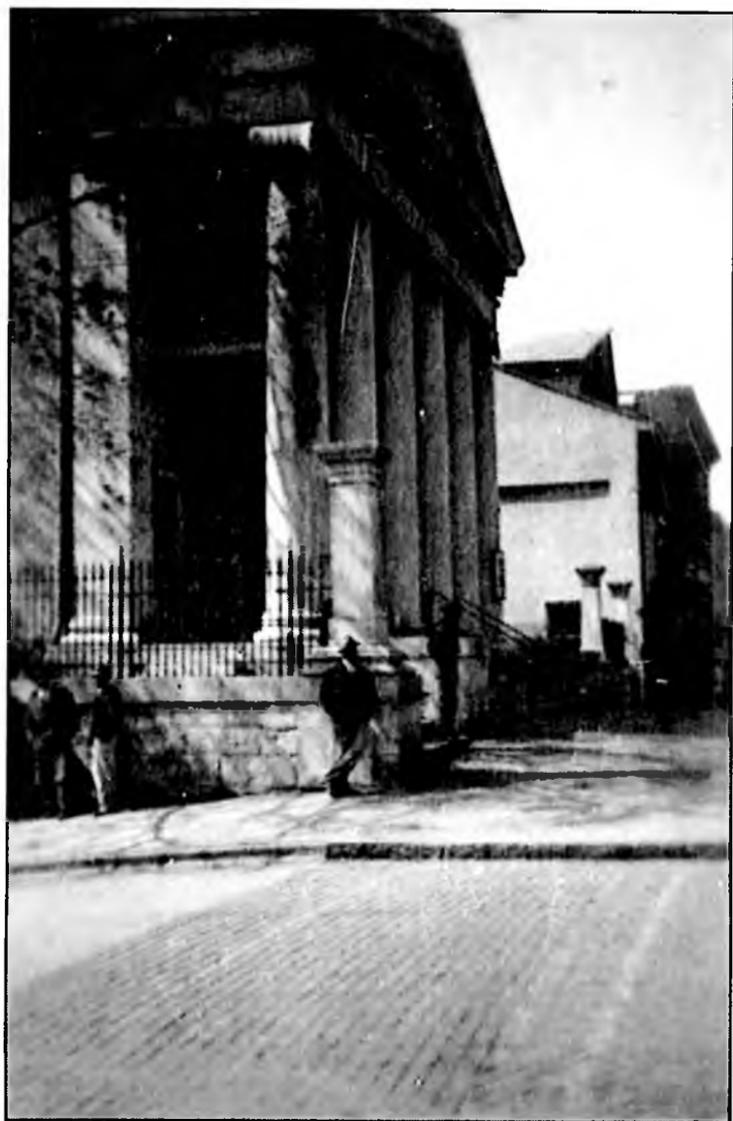
Despite the Public Inn's significance as an example of federal style architecture, the house was almost lost in 1973. In the October 28, 1973 edition of *The Huntsville Times*, the paper alerted its readers with the headline: "Historic Huntsville House in Danger of Demolition." The article stated, "Another historic Huntsville house, one that dates back almost to the foundation of the City, is in immediate danger of demolition." Fortunately, the efforts of local historian Martha Sims Rambo and architect Harvie P. Jones saved the house from demolition. At the time, the only prospective buyer for the property let it be known that he would demolish the house to make room for a parking lot for his nearby property.

The Pizitzs held the property until the 1980s, until they conveyed it to Suzanne Roberson, who with the aid of Floyd Rutledge, set about restoring the house. Before the renovation was completed, however, the property was conveyed back to the Pizitzs. Doug and Kathryn Martinson and Doug Martinson, II purchased the house from the Pizitz estate in 1991, and completed the renovations. It is currently used as residential and commercial rental property. ■

Albert Lane's Downtown Photos











Happenings in Huntsville One Hundred Years Ago

Huntsville Democrat

Jan. 20, 1897

Miss Susie Harrison paid a business visit of several days to High Jackson last week.

C. H. Halsey's Stock For Sale (He's moving out to the Humes Place on Meridian.)

Feb. 10, 1897

The Harrison Bros., the popular Tobacconists, have a charming acquisition in their office in the person of Mrs. Robt. Harrison, who is now the clever bookkeeper of the firm.

The old Easley Hotel will be moved to face Holmes St., to make room for new buildings to be erected by Mr. Bernstein. ... Mr. Bernstein has had the ground prepared for a business block to be erected on the corner of Jefferson and Holmes St.

The headless body of a white girl baby was found under a house on Adams Avenue Monday morning. The body was badly mutilated. It was evidently murdered, but no clue to the murderer has been discovered.

Mar. 3, 1897

Mr. and Mrs. Benjamin Harrison have named their new baby Elizabeth. It is a week old.

Mar. 10, 1897

A Drum with a history was sold at auction in this city on Saturday, for \$1,85 [sic] to Jack Smith. It was a drum used by Jim Dickson, colored, in 1861, when he was drummer boy to the 7th Alabama Infantry, that left this city on March 28, 1861. ... Mr. Wm. Vaught bought the drum from Mr. Smith, and it will be among the sacred Confederate relics at the Tennessee Centennial....

Cedar Lake, the negro colony near Decatur, so graphically described as a flourishing community with a local government and a \$50,000 cotton mill in prospect, is a purely mythical place, emanating from the brain of some slush country writer.

Mrs. Augusta Evans Wilson is advocating strongly the establishment of a home or infirmary in Mobile for outcast women.

April 14, 1897

Mr. and Mrs. K. J. Harrison have returned from a visit to Florida.

Remenyi, the famous Hungarian violinist, who charmed his audience in this city on Wednesday night last, was the honored guest of Captain and Mrs. Humes at their lovely home Abingdon Place, at Thursday morning breakfast.

May 5, 1897

Misses Susie and Beatrice Harrison have been in Nashville for a few days this week.

May 12, 1897

Mr. Wellman and wife have returned from Chattanooga whither they went to select the plan for their handsome home to be erected in East Huntsville, this summer.

May 26, 1897

Hunter P. McDonald, C. E. has been [in] our city several days, in consultation with prospective contractors for the building of the County Jail. He furnished the plans for the building. ... Contract for constructing the jail awarded to Pauly Jail & Manufacturing Co. of St. Louis-for \$15,390. 40 cells. [Subsequent protests arose.]

June 16, 1897

Monte Sano Hotel opened its season for 1897 with a brilliant ball last evening.

European Restaurant East Side of the Pub. Sq.

August 18, 1897

Gen. Joseph Wheeler and Daughters are guests at Monte Sano Hotel.

Mr. Frank Walters and wife, of Chicago, are guests of Mr. & Mrs. Louis A. Goodman, at the home of Miss Susie Harrison. ... Mr. Walters is a staunch silver democrat thinking of settling here.

August 25, 1897

Miss Susanne W. Clay is spending a week at Eastbrook Springs, Tenn.

September 8, 1897

Mr. W. I. Wellman's home in East Huntsville is now begun in earnest, and that part of the city will be adorned by it very soon.

Monte Sano Hotel Closes this week...

September 22, 1897

Mr. W. L. Halsey has moved his family down from the mountain.

September 30, 1897

It has been announced that Miss Susie Harrison and Hon. Ben P. Hunt will be united in marriage tomorrow afternoon at the residence of the bride, East Holmes St.

Oct. 3, 1897

"Everybody in Huntsville and Madison County that had the cents went to the Tennessee Centennial." [Especially it seems on Alabama Day.]

October 6, 1897

Rev. R. M. Dubose officiated [at the above mentioned marriage].

October 7, 1897

Miss Cora Harrison, Mrs. Arthur Harris, Mr., and Mrs. Williams and Mr. Hal Weaver made a pleasant party to the centennial last week.

October 27, 1897

Dr. Charles Mayo of Rochester, Minn, has purchased the valuable farm of the Carver D. King estate, in the Northwestern portion of Madison County. Dr. Mayo is said to be 85 years of age, but vigorous in mind and body. He intends to put the farm in order and high state of cultivation that will make his purchase both a profit and a pleasure.

November 3, 1897

On the North Side of Square in store formerly occupied by Vaught's drugstore, Mr. Wm. Brock has opened a dry goods store, and is now prepared to serve his lady customers with a line of attractive novelties in Dress Goods, etc.

November 10, 1897

K. J. Harrison was up from Greenbrier a few days last week.

Mrs. Beatrice Harrison is visiting a friend in Chicago where she expects to spend a greater part of the Winter season.

November 24, 1897

Miss Beatrice Harrison is at home...

Mrs. W. M. Newman with her bright little girls, Susie Withers and Annie Margaret, have been spending two or three weeks with her father, Mr. J. B. White, at his farm on the Tennessee near Whitesburg.

December 1, 1897

Dr. S. H. Lowry and Dr. Hawk Westmoreland have purchased the residence of Mr. Sidney L. Darwin, on East Randolph St., and will convert it into an infirmary. No better place in this city could be selected for an infirmary. The rooms are large and airy, with accommodations for about twenty-four patients. There are also handsome grounds surrounding the house, that are under cultivation as a flower garden and lawn. Dr. Lowry and Dr. Westmoreland are to be congratulated on the wisdom of their purchase.

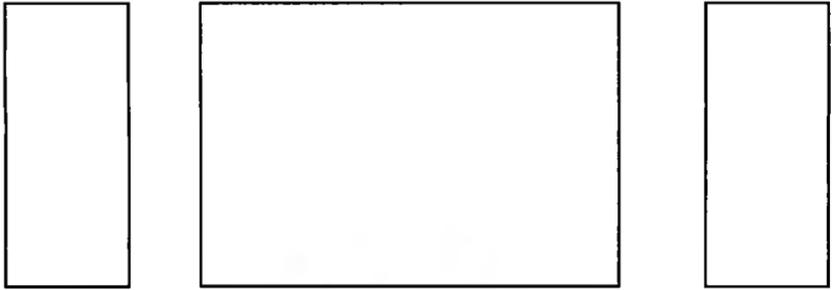
December 15, 1897

Messrs. W. R. Rison, Milton Humes, and J. R. Stevens have gone to New York in the interest of doubling the capacity of the Dallas Cotton Mill. They were accompanied by Mrs. Rison and Mrs. Humes.

Homes for 200 operatives for the increased force of West Huntsville Cotton Mill are to be erected after the first of January.

The output of the West Huntsville Cotton Mill will probably be doubled by running 20 hours a day, on account of accumulating orders and demands for Southern textiles.

The Pratt Cylindrical Bale Cotton Compress, employs twenty men, and doing a fine business.



Exchange Row



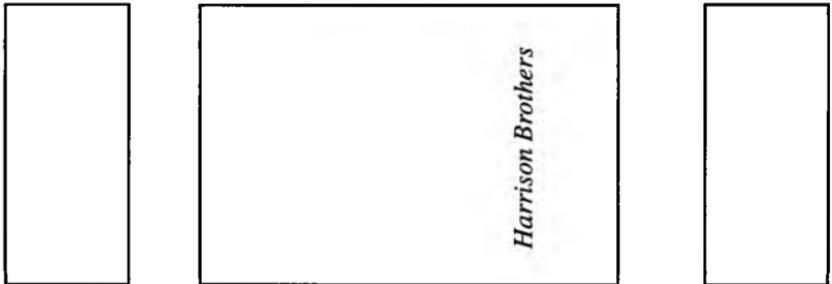
*First
National
Bank*

Bank Row

*Madison County
Courthouse*

Cheap Side Row

Commercial Row



Harrison Brothers

Taken from the 1898 Sanborn Insurance Map
available for your purusal, Huntsville-Madison County Public
Library, Heritage Room.

HARRISON BROTHERS

124 South Side Square
Huntsville, Alabama 536-3631



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100 Years
on the
Square!

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Sat 10 - 4



**Commemorative
Items Now Available:**

- Case Knife • T-Shirts • Tote Bags • Pins •
- Refrigerator Magnets •



HARRISON BROTHERS
Celebrating 100 years on the Square
1897-1997
Huntsville, Alabama

Drawing: Lee Harless

Above: Commemorative
note card available at
Harrison Brothers.

Artist Lee Harless



PUBLICATIONS TO ORDER

NO.		COST
_____	<p>“Photographic Memories: A Scrapbook of Huntsville and Madison County Alabama” Black and white photographs depicting Huntsville and Madison County, 1860’s to the present. Compiled by Elise H. Stephens</p>	10.75
_____	<p>Cease Not To Think Of Me, ed. by Patricia Ryan The Steele Family letters from settlement through Civil War, a rare source of social history spiced with local gossip.</p>	8.50
_____	<p>Changing Huntsville 1890 - 1899 Elizabeth Humes Chapman’s wonderful romp through Huntsville’s last decade of the 19th Century.</p>	14.98
_____	<p>America Restored Contains 319 full color pages with photographs by Carol Highsmith. Published by The Preservation Press of the National Trust for Historic Preservation. (Cost includes Postage and Handling)</p>	53.50
_____	<p>Historic America The National Trust’s Historic America 1995 Engagement Calendar. Full-color images from America Restored representing the gamut of restoration projects.</p>	12.95

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Historic Huntsville Foundation, Inc.
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To become a member, please check desired category. All contributions are tax deductible.

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Yes, I am interested in volunteering for a
Historic Huntsville Project. Please call me.

The HISTORIC HUNTSVILLE FOUNDATION was established in 1974 to encourage the preservation of historically or architecturally significant sites and structures throughout Huntsville and Madison County and to increase public awareness of their value to the community. The FOUNDATION is the only organization in Huntsville concerned exclusively with architectural preservation and history. Membership is open to interested and concerned citizens from across north Alabama and beyond.



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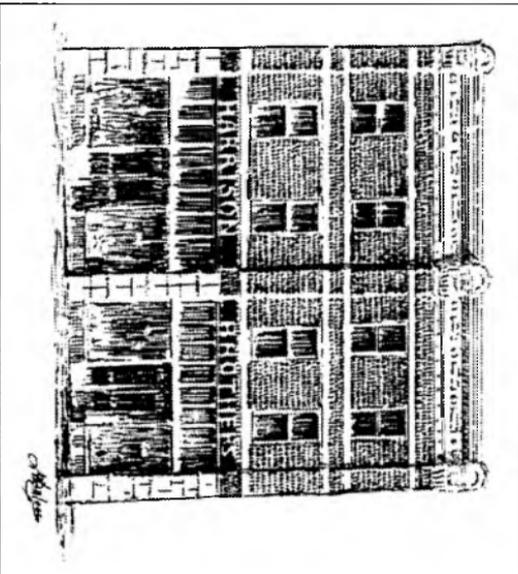
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