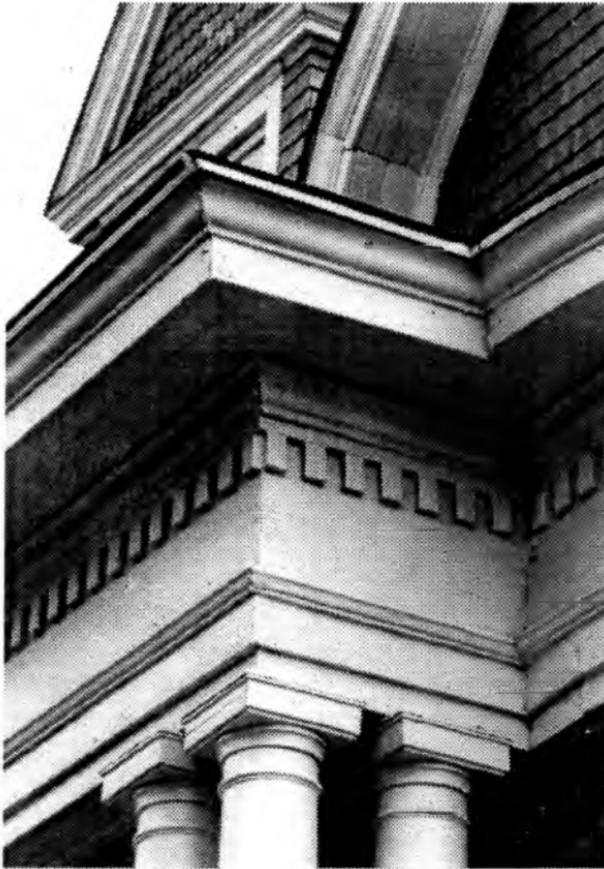


THREE DOLLARS

VOLUME XXVI, No. 3
FALL 2000

THE HISTORIC HUNTSVILLE QUARTERLY OF LOCAL ARCHITECTURE AND PRESERVATION



**THE HUNDLEY LEGACY:
THE ARCHITECTURAL AND URBAN IMPACT**

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Cover: Front porch detail of Oscar Hundley House showing classical elements of entablature and porch columns. Courtesy Harvie Jones Photo Collection.

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THE HUNDLEY LEGACY: THE ARCHITECTURAL AND URBAN IMPACT

Table of Contents

From the Editor: Heather A. Cross	1
<i>Property and Prestige: Oscar Hundley's Huntsville</i> Heather A. Cross	3
<i>The Hundleys of Alabama</i> Jacquelyn Procter Gray	5
<i>Staying Power: 128 South Side Square Withstands the Tests of Time</i> Diane Ellis	10
<i>The Hundley House</i> Patricia H. Ryan	19
<i>Transformations: 401 Madison (1976-2000)</i> Jacquelyn Procter Gray	23
<i>The Hundley Rental Properties</i> Heather A. Cross	27

Editorial Note: The format for documentation and citation in this issue follows the most recent updates of the Modern Language Association (MLA) style. Any publishing issues follow The Chicago Manual of Style.

From the Editor

I revere learning because it is a fundamental inspiration. It isn't just something which has to do with duty; it is born into us. The will to learn, the desire to learn, is one of the greatest inspirations.

— Louis I. Kahn



The Oscar Hundley House — Attic vent flanked by original brick chimney and 1930s elevator tower. Newer vent pipe intersects history and welcomes pigeons. Courtesy Harvie Jones Photo Collection.

You are reading this *Quarterly* because you have a desire to learn about Architecture and its preservation. It's my belief that to truly learn, you must experience Architecture with your entire body. The feel of hewn stone and polished oak. The smell of new pine. The deep echoes of old stone places and vaulted ceilings. The sight of a precisely sloped roofline meeting the sky.

Ours is a sensual experience, one that is most deeply appreciated when we nurture a basis of knowledge that allows us to describe, to define, to shape what we see, hear, feel, smell, and taste—and thereby to share the experience with others.

To cultivate an appreciation of Architecture, each of us must return to it again and again, adding to our impressions and interpretations.

And to foster this appreciation over time—over a lifetime, over *many* lifetimes—Architecture must be preserved.

The only way you can build, the only way you can get the building into being, is through the measurable. You must follow the laws of nature and use quantities of brick, methods of construction, and engineering. But in the end, when the building becomes part of living, it evokes unmeasurable qualities, and the spirit of its existence takes over.

— Louis I. Kahn

This *Quarterly* is intended to offer assistance to those who desire to learn and preserve our connections to the unmeasurable. The necessary tools include a knowledge of the measurable—the brick, the methods of construction, the terms for the units that create the whole—and an understanding of the arbitrary ways in which we differentiate and divide these so they are knowable. The way we divide our world, in order to relate it to our physical bodies and to our consciousness, appears in the size of a doorway, the rise of a stair, and the design of a façade.

In your own experience—and through the lens of the *Quarterly*—look at, listen to, smell, and touch the buildings around you.

If we let Architecture live, we will find knowledge in the spirit of its existence.

— Heather A. Cross

Heather Cross is a graduate student of English at the University of Alabama in Huntsville, where she also serves as student director of the UAH Writing Center. She has attended Xavier University in Cincinnati and holds an Art History degree from the University of Cincinnati in Ohio, where she minored in Architecture. Heather welcomes e-mail from Quarterly readers at HHQEditor@aol.com.

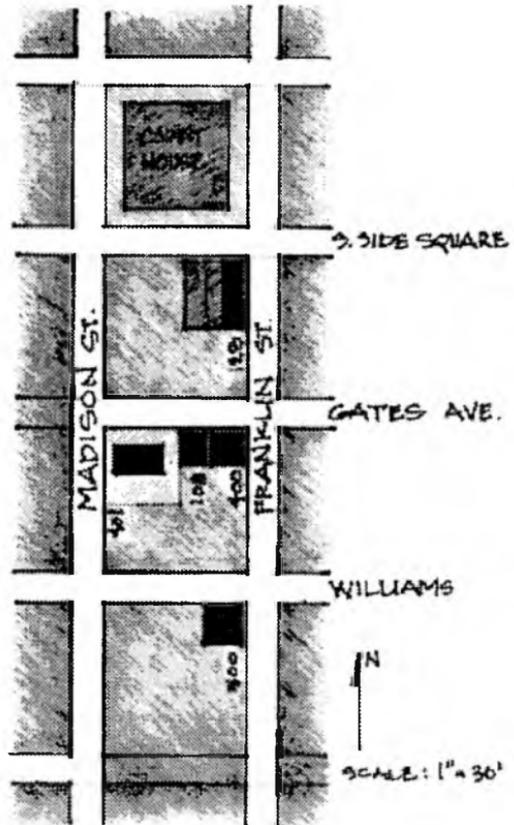
Property and Prestige: Oscar Hundley's Huntsville

Heather A. Cross

In a period when a new building project changes little more than traffic patterns during construction—even in the largest metropolitan areas—it is difficult to imagine the impact one person's building projects could have on a town. And in an era when a single corporation manufactures products as dissimilar as mascara, aerosol cheese, and laundry detergent, the concept of diversified investment hardly raises an eyebrow.

Consider, however, the impact Oscar Hundley made on Huntsville in the late 19th century, when he erected a variety of unique buildings—including commercial, residential, and rental properties—on three downtown city blocks. The local paper ran regular updates on his construction efforts. The city could not help but take notice.

Hundley's was a period of living and working in the same small sphere: homes above storefronts, neighborhoods springing up around centers of commerce. There were no commuters, no bypasses or parkways, no industrial parks. Downtown was still the hub, the nexus—the seat of government, commerce, communication, and power.



Map of downtown Huntsville showing properties owned by Oscar Hundley.

The center of downtown Huntsville was the courthouse.

As a lawyer, Oscar Hundley knew the literal and symbolic power of that traditional structure; as a connected society man, he knew the prestige embodied by Huntsville's Courthouse Square. The corner lot he purchased at 128 South Side Square not only guaranteed a side frontage half a block long, but it gave Hundley a front on the square, a tie to the power base—whether he personally occupied the property or not. He never did, but his place on Commerce Row was assured, and thus his place in Huntsville.

When Hundley decided to build his own home he moved a block south, where the residential properties began. He bought approximately 50 percent of the land between Madison and Franklin Streets—the Gates Street half of the block. He built three homes on this land: his own and two rental properties. To claim a place in the next block south, Hundley purchased 500 Franklin Street, a corner lot that also allowed frontage on Williams.

A glance at the placement of these properties on a map of Huntsville illustrates Hundley's investment savvy: he owned property fronting no fewer than five major downtown streets.

Anyone approaching from the south or east of Courthouse Square would have seen one—if not more—of Hundley's real estate investments. Merchants, bankers and other affluent Huntsvillians would have recognized a new player in their midst. Rural cotton farmers, bringing their bales to buyers on the Square, would have taken measure of the new buildings and commented—some positively, others less so—on the march of progress.

Though the social and economic status implied by the sole, private ownership of these properties might escape a casual modern observer, everyone in Huntsville at the turn of the century was familiar with the man who held the deeds: Oscar Hundley... landlord, resident, and civic leader.

This issue of *Historic Huntsville Quarterly* is intended to explore the Hundley properties, then and now, and provide a glimpse into one enterprising individual's social—and architectural—impact on a burgeoning community.

The Hundleys of Alabama

Jacquelyn Procter Gray

Oscar Hundley—outspoken, and unafraid of controversy—probably didn't lose any sleep worrying about what other people thought of him. After marrying his second wife, he converted to Catholicism. He later made a controversial decision that ended his impressive political career.



Oscar Hundley

Oscar lived his life very publicly; his friends adored him and his enemies hated him. But no one could ever accuse him of being a bore.

Oscar's grandparents came to Alabama from Virginia. One source reports that Dr. John Henderson Hundley purchased 160 acres in Madison County in 1815 (Coward 152). Another says the Hundleys arrived in 1818 (Owen 869). Yet a third claims they came to Limestone County around 1834 (Edwards and Axford 196).

Dr. Hundley and his wife Melinda Robinson Hundley

built a 12-room, plantation-style home near Mooresville, in which to raise their family. Now owned by Bubba Richardson, a prominent Mooresville resident, the property is situated on the south side of I-565, near the Greenbrier exit.

While most descendants refer to the site as Hundley Hall, others know it as Hundley Hill. Perhaps the disagreement stems from where their recollections linger—the old home place itself or the grounds, which include the nearby family cemetery. Buttercups emerge here and there amid the bricks and rubble of the home's foundation. Among the graveyard's toppled and decaying headstones, a glorious ground-cover of periwinkle still blooms each spring. Both sites retain a quiet beauty.

The sweeping view from the vantage point of the old homeplace probably hasn't changed significantly in the years since the Hundleys celebrated their lives and mourned their tragedies in this pastoral setting—though now it is mostly enjoyed by the cows that graze the land, oblivious to the echoes of the past.

Accounts of the family's years on Hundley Hill at times seem written in tears. John and Melinda's oldest son, Oscar—for whom his nephew, the subject of this story, would later be named—died of unspecified causes in 1852. At the age of 25, he became the first Hundley to be buried in the cemetery near the big house.

The Hundleys did enjoy prosperity during their early years on Hundley Hill, but the start of the Civil War brought it to a crashing halt. Three sons—William, Daniel, and Orville—went to Mooresville to enlist.

While chasing Yankees along the Tennessee River at the height of the war, Major William Hundley was knocked from his horse by a low-hanging branch. Suffering from a skull fracture, William was taken to Hundley Hill to spend his final hours in the comfort of his family. But rather than succumbing, he recovered sufficiently to travel to Atlanta to resume fighting.

On March 31, 1864, a Confederate soldier entered William's tent to call him to breakfast—and found Hundley dead, the victim of a blood clot in his brain. The major had one boot on, and had been in the midst of pulling on the other. He was 29.

William's brother Daniel detailed the event and his extreme sorrow in his diary. William Hundley was posthumously promoted to the rank of lieutenant colonel and taken home to be buried at Hundley Hill.

Col. Daniel Hundley was captured in Georgia and sent to Johnson's Island near Sandusky, Ohio. During his journey to the Union prison, Daniel implored his captors to treat him with respect, announcing to them, "I trust I am among gentlemen" (R.L.Hundley).

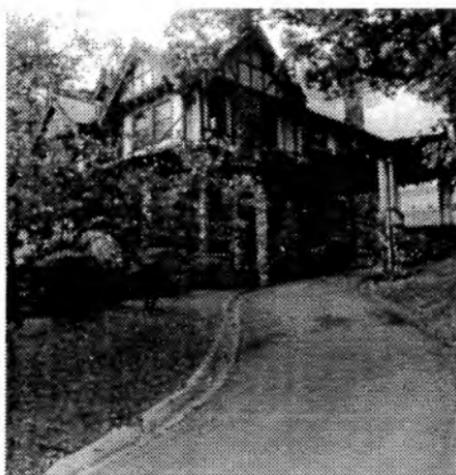
In his diary, published after the war as *Prison Echoes of the Great Rebellion*, he described the horrible conditions of the prison, the suffering of starving prisoners, and his own dramatic escape from Johnson's Island and subsequent recapture.

Daniel was surprised one day to see his brother—probably Orville, but the diary doesn't identify him by name—arrive in the camp ("The Mooresville Militia" 32; Owen 870). Daniel's brother told him about a Yankee raid on their parents' home near Mooresville, and the Union soldiers' threat to shoot their father. Their mother, Melinda, stood in front of her husband and told the soldiers, "Then kill me too. For the ball that kills my husband must first pass through my body." Though the home was ransacked, the lives of their parents were spared (Col. Hundley; Edwards and Axford 197). The surviving brothers came back from the war to find much of the family's wealth depleted.

Judge Richard Hundley, retired presiding circuit judge of Morgan County and a direct descendant of Col. William Hundley, recounts several interesting family anecdotes from this period. Following the war, Daniel bought a new carriage and horses—apparently in the belief that his status still called for some luxury and semblance of class distinction, despite the family's misfortune. Orville was the only Hundley to come out of the war with some fortune intact; in a local who's who publication, he submitted his occupation as "Capitalist."

Despite the efforts of John's sons to rebuild their fortune, the Hundleys either sold or lost Hundley Hill during the post-war Reconstruction Period. Some of the family graves were moved to Maple Hill Cemetery in Huntsville. Others remained where they were, under the protection of the old cedars that surround the site to this day.

The second Oscar Hundley—the subject of this *Quarterly*—was born in Limestone County in 1854, most likely at Hundley Hill. He was named for his father Orville's late brother, who had died just two years earlier.



Oscar Hundley Home, Birmingham — 2811 Niazuma Avenue was also once home of the Vice-president of the now defunct Tennessee Coal, Iron & Railway Co. Courtesy Birmingham Public Library, Catalog Collection 39.18.

As the country mended its wounds, Oscar went “up north” to attend college, but returned to the South fairly quickly, according to a family story, because “the Yankee climate didn’t suit him” (Owen 869). He was educated at Phillips Exeter Academy in Exeter, New Hampshire; Marietta College in Marietta, Ohio; and Vanderbilt University in Nashville before returning to Alabama in 1878 to practice law (Owen 869).

While serving as city attorney from 1882 to 1884, Hundley wrote the Code of Ordinances of the City of Huntsville. In addition to serving 11 years in the state legislature, Hundley was the division counsel for the Nashville, Chattanooga, and St. Louis Railway for nearly 20 years. He was defeated in his bid for the Eighth Alabama District’s Congressional seat by Gen. Joseph Wheeler (Owen 870).

After the death of Oscar’s first wife, Annie, in 1893, he married Bossie O’Brien, a Catholic girl significantly younger than himself in 1897 (Owen 870). Not long after that, Oscar converted to Catholicism, despite being descended from generations of devout Disciples of Christ.

It wasn’t Oscar’s opinionated personality or religious conversion, however, that caused his first cousin, William Hundley, to insist that Oscar’s name never again be spoken in his household. In 1896, Oscar did something so scandalous that it cost him a Federal district judgeship for North Alabama and ultimately ruined his political career.

Democrat Oscar Hundley had become a Republican.

In her book *Changing Huntsville 1890-1899*, Elizabeth Humes Chapman described Oscar’s party switch and the subsequent public reaction: “To be born a Democrat and become a Republican was treachery. It was almost as disgraceful as being divorced in the nineties” (38).

The reaction of Charles Lane, editor of *The Evening Tribune* and *Weekly Tribune*, is particularly noteworthy. Chapman wrote: “After Mr. Hundley’s change of parties he was awarded a foreign appointment.” In an editorial commentary, Lane added, “[...] the foreigner it is the better we’ll like it” (39).

After the Senate twice refused to confirm Hundley's nomination, he resigned as district judge in 1909. He sold his Huntsville home the same year, and moved to Birmingham to practice law.

Instead of living a life of shameful exile, however, Oscar became a scion of Birmingham society, taking up residence with his wife in a spacious Niazuma Avenue mansion and earning quite the reputation—as a dancer (R..L. Hundley).

Oscar Hundley died in 1921. He was 67. Though his actions were considered scandalous at the time, they would hardly make the news in today's papers. Oscar truly was a man ahead of his time.

*Jacque Gray is a descendant of William Hundley, who died during the Civil War. She has won several writing awards and currently writes for **Old Morgan County**, the **Cumberland Presbyterian VISION**, and other publications. Gray also has been a contributing writer to various books.*

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Staying Power

128 South Side Square Withstands the Tests of Time

Diane Ellis

“Hon. O.R. Hundley is having brick hauled to #1 Commercial Row, preparatory to erecting a handsome two-story edifice.”

— *The Weekly Mercury*, April 29, 1896

“The work of razing the walls of the old dilapidated brick building on the corner of the Square and Franklin Street goes barely on, and pretty soon the work of raising the walls of a new and modern building will begin.”

— *The Argus*, May 7, 1896

“The lumber for the new store house of Mr. Hundley on the corner of the Square has arrived and the construction will now proceed.”

— *The Weekly Mercury*, Aug. 12, 1896

- I -

Location, location, location.

The realtor’s mantra is nowhere more to the point than when it refers to a property occupying a prime spot in the middle of a community’s economic and public life. For well over a century, the spot of ground at 128 South Side Square—also known as 15 South Side Square, 101 South Side Square, and #1 Commercial Row—has been just such a place, its buildings and occupants positioned to participate fully in the dynamics of a growing community. A list of the property’s tenants is almost a nursery rhyme of occupations that have met the changing needs of the city’s residents over time: printers and cobblers, photographers, hat-makers, bankers, insurers, realtors, restaurateurs, building designers and sewing-machine sellers.

Our focus on 128 South Side Square begins with the 1884, 1888, and 1894 Sanborn Fire Insurance Maps, which show structures on the site occupied by a printer and cobbler—essential trades in a growing 19th century community. In 1896, Oscar R. Hundley bought the property at 128 South Side Square from A.J. Bentley, Administrator for the Estate of Mary F. Robinson, for \$2,101. Hundley proceeded to demolish

existing structures on the site in order to build a new commercial building. As the 19th century drew to a close, Hundley undertook an ambitious building program, erecting the commercial structure at 128 South Side Square, a new home for himself and his wife at 401 Madison Street, and three rental houses at 108 Gates Avenue, and 400 and 500 Franklin Street. All the Hundley properties were sold after the family moved to Birmingham in 1909 (Planning Dept.).

In 1979, eight decades after Hundley completed the commercial structure on South Side Square, the city included the property in its submission of sites for the National Register's Downtown Multiple Resources Area status. The nomination described the property as "a two-story, brick structure on a corner lot. Although it has been remodeled several times, it retains the pressed metal cornice of sunburst patterns, the carved lintels, and a small iron balcony on the side street. The first floor facade has been remodeled with a large multi-paned window and a Colonial Revival doorway. It now serves as a bank" (fig. 1).

As to its architectural significance, the planners noted that the building was "typical of the many commercial structures built about the turn of the century; it is of small scale and narrow proportions, constructed of brick, has an applied metal cornice, and decorated windows. [. . .]



Figure 1 — Oscar Hundley's 1896 Italianate commercial building with a 1966 "Williamsburg" treatment. Photo circa 1979, courtesy City of Huntsville Planning Department.

Its design owes more to the Italianate vogue than to the Commercial Brick style which was only just beginning to appear in Huntsville. The cornice is identical to that of the 1904 W. L. Halsey Warehouse" [W.L. Halsey Grocery Company, 300 Jefferson Street]. The nomination listed two remodelings, in 1922 and 1963, the latter being the Colonial Revival alteration mentioned above. The designer and builder are unknown (Planning Dept.).

In March 1899, Oscar Hundley sold one-half interest in the building at 128 South Side Square to his father, Orville M. Hundley, for half the original purchase price plus half of the construction costs. When Orville died in 1903, Oscar inherited his father's interest in the property. In 1919, Oscar sold the building to Farmer's State Bank for \$16,500. In January 1928, Farmer's Bank sold the building to Thomas T. Terry (Ryan). In 1941, Tyler Terry inherited the property from her grandfather's trust (Wood). Historic Huntsville Foundation purchased the building from Terry in January 1998.

In the summer of 2000, the organization named the building after its founding chairman, renowned architect and preservationist Harvie P. Jones, who had researched the building and drafted preliminary plans for its restoration before his death in December 1998.

The 1898, 1901, 1908, and 1913 Sanborn maps and contemporary photographs reveal a millinery shop and photo gallery occupying the premises. Visible in a photograph from the 1904 *Morning Mercury* (Jones) are a device for sun-printing photographs attached to a second floor window of the building, an apparent glass-encased photographic studio atop a lowered roof in the rear, and extended ledges on windows in the second floor front of the building (fig. 2).

Historian Frances Robb has determined the photo gallery to be that of S.W. Judd, "one of Huntsville's most renowned photographers." Born in Tennessee in 1880, Searcy Judd had moved to Huntsville by 1903. Records place him on the southeast corner of the square from about this time until 1920 or so, when he moved to a studio at 208 Eustis Street, where he remained until his death in 1960 (Robb).

"Interestingly," writes Robb, "the notation 'se cor square' was used by photographers in the 1850s and later 1860s-early 1870s in the earlier building on the lot. [. . .] Until modern times, photographers are very



Figure 2 — Photo from the Morning Mercury, December 15, 1904 showing photograph gallery and hat shop in the building. Courtesy Harvie Jones Photo Collection.

much inclined to use former photographers' premises and/or addresses, where the light was okay for taking and sun-printing photographs."

The 1911-12 and 1916-17 city directories list Miss Hattie McClendon & Co., milliners, at 101 South Side Square (Harrison Brothers Hardware Store occupied numbers 103-105). As the 1920s began, photographer and milliner were replaced by the dominant symbol of the era, bankers (Sanborn map). Farmers State Bank occupied the building until 1925 (city directories).

By 1928, the building was home to the Singer Sewing Machine Company, which remained there until 1931 (city directories). The 1936 city directory has Tony and Lena Lanza's Lanza Fruit Company doing business at 128 South Side Square. The 1940 directory lists Fleming & Thornton Real Estate and Insurance and the Equitable Life Assurance Society on the site—which at this point was numbered 15 South Side Square (Harrison Brothers occupied numbers 13-14).

Fleming & Thornton were still in business as of 1947. Four years later, the firm had been renamed Thornton & Thornton, and it continued to

share the building with Equitable Life. Directories place Thornton & Thornton in the building until 1963.

By 1964, American National Bank had arrived, and in 1966 it brought about what Harvie Jones called the “colonialization” of the facade. American National became AmSouth Bank in 1983 (Stephens 189), then vacated the building, which remained unoccupied until 1990, when the Village Inn on the Square restaurant opened. The Village Inn closed in 1994 and Spring City Cyclery briefly set up shop. In 1996, the bikes were gone. The building briefly accommodated a series of enterprises that never quite got off the ground, including a gift shop and Hair on the Square barbers (city directories).

Currently, Bird and Kamback Architects are located in the second floor front of the Jones Building. During renovations of the suite, faded images of oval cameo silhouettes and graffiti in the form of notes relating to the photography business—customer orders, appointments, addresses, prices of supplies—were discovered on one wall. Darryl Bird and Greg Kamback have preserved the graffiti, which Frances Robb believes date from S.W. Judd’s occupancy. On the ground floor, Jennifer Britt manages The Huntsville Inn, a restaurant featuring menus based on historical recipes. In the future, Historic Huntsville Foundation plans to renovate space in the rear of the ground floor for its office.

- II -

“Commercial buildings are forever metamorphic,” notes Stewart Brand in his *How Buildings Learn* (5). In its continuing metamorphosis, the 1896 commercial building at 128 South Side Square has influenced and been influenced by the variety of trades, professions, goods, and services that have come and gone—and sometimes returned—to this prime piece of real estate on the square.

Changing tenancy can in part be considered a reflection of changing economic and social trends in downtown Huntsville. The cobblers and fruit sellers are gone, but a restaurant and a professional firm are back. Physical changes to the building reflect users’ needs and, occasionally, the fashions of the time.

Fortunately, despite changing needs and fashions—and some inappropriate treatment here and there—the architectural integrity of this useful and comely building remains intact.

What we know or speculate about the building's alterations include changes to the exterior and interior. On the exterior, the rear photography studio, sun-printing apparatus, extended ledges, and entry steps

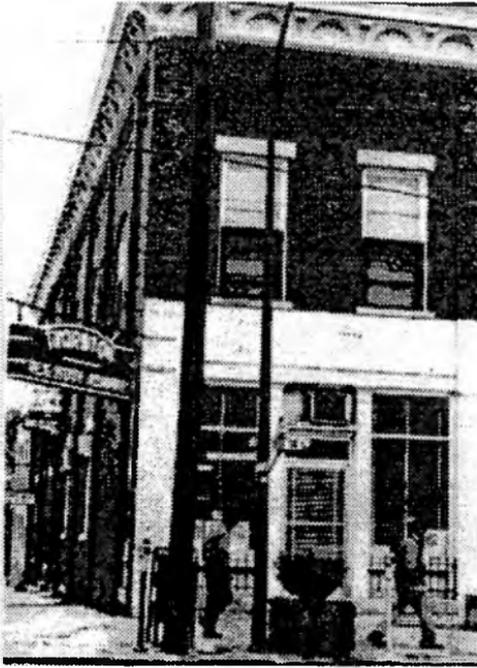


Figure 3 — Storefront as it appeared prior to the 1966 remodeling. Photo courtesy Harvie Jones Photo Collection.

Despite extensive research by architects, remodelers, and other interested parties before and during the 1999-2000 restoration, a clear, unobstructed photograph detailing the front of the building during that period has never turned up. What few photos are known to exist are shot from an angle; obscured by foliage, awnings, or shadows; or are too small to be helpful. Consequently, dates and details of the pre-1966 facade and front entry remain somewhat speculative.

During the 1966 remodeling, the building's main floor was lowered and the two steps to the front entry removed, permitting bank patrons to enter at sidewalk level (Jones). A photograph from the period shows a customer drive-thru in operation at the south end of the building. Some interior remodeling was also done to accommodate the bank's business

seen in the 1904 photograph (fig. 2) were later removed and the rear first floor roofline adroitly raised to the rest of the building's two-story level.

It seems likely these changes occurred in the 1920s, when Searcy Judd moved to Eustis Street; an apartment was created where part of his studio had been and where Bird and Kamback's offices are now. Renovators reconfiguring the space in 1999 encountered 1920s-era bead-board, wallpaper, plumbing and appliance hook-ups, as well as remnants of an early version of Sheetrock.

At some point between 1904 and 1963, the building's facade was altered (fig. 3).

needs. With the arrival of the Village Inn in 1990, the first floor was again remodeled to meet the requirements of a restaurant operation.

Historic Huntsville Foundation's purchase of the building initiated another metamorphosis. The second-floor apartment was remodeled for the architects. The first floor restaurant's kitchen arrangement required a major overhaul to meet building codes and to accommodate new equipment. A huge steel bank vault left over from the building's years as a financial center was cut out and removed.

Other changes were undertaken for aesthetic reasons and to improve the building's long-term usefulness. Both existing staircases were removed; a new one was constructed on the east side to establish a separate entrance to the second floor, through a re-opened entry on Franklin Street. New bathrooms were installed. Finally, the facade was restored to echo the building's original storefront (fig.5).

At the time of Historic Huntsville's purchase of the building, the Franklin Street exterior remained largely unchanged. At some point, a window—now bricked-in—had been added (compare figs. 2 and 4) and other openings had been closed. Not long after the 1979 National Register nomination, the metal cornice on the east side blew off the building during a storm and was replaced by a wooden one (Jones).



Figure 4 — Franklin Street side of Harvie P. Jones Building showing bricked-in opening added after 1904. Courtesy Historic Huntsville Foundation files.

The Historic Huntsville Foundation unbricked three openings on the building's east side, in addition to the one opened for the second-floor entry. Two openings at the rear of the building were also unbricked.

- III -

A Huntsvillian from 1900 strolling down Franklin Street today would have no trouble recognizing the building he or she knew a hundred years ago. Oscar Hundley had a nose for shrewd property acquisitions



Figure 5 — The **Harvie P. Jones Building** at 128 South Side Square, as it appears today. The second-story windows of the offices of Bird and Kamback Architects look out on the Square. Photo courtesy of Diane Ellis.

and an eye for good design. He bought land in the right places and erected buildings with staying power.

The “handsome two-story edifice” Hundley built on Huntsville’s courthouse square in 1896 has served the city for more than a century. Now, restored and reinvigorated, 128 South Side Square is set to participate in the city’s life for the next hundred years.

Diane Ellis is the former executive director of Historic Huntsville Foundation (January 1998 to July 1999). She spent part of that time working out of a makeshift office on the first floor of the Jones Building, before and during the remodeling. Ellis would like to acknowledge the assistance of Linda Allen, Mike Holbrook, and Lynn Jones.

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The Hundley House

Patricia H. Ryan

The Oscar Hundley House at 401 Madison Street is a mixture of architectural styles—not uncommon for domestic architecture at the turn of the last century.

The massing is typical of Queen Anne styling while the trim and gambrel gables are representative of the Dutch Colonial Revival style. The two-story frame home, while basically rectangular in shape, includes a round, one-story bay on the facade and an angular bay on each side.

The foundation and the front bay are rock-faced, random limestone ashlar, which was painted red in the 1960s. The first floor is clapboard; the second is covered with square-cut shingles associated with the Shingle style. The roof is covered with stamped, galvanized metal shingles installed in 1980 with the encouragement of the Historic Huntsville Foundation and funds from an Alabama Historical Commission grant.



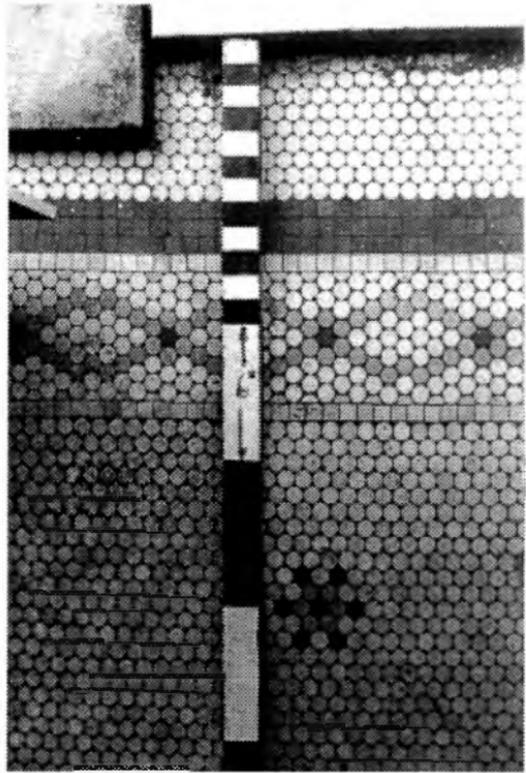
Oscar Hundley House, circa 1900. Notice Judd Studio mark in lower left corner. Courtesy Huntsville Public Library

Four simple brick chimneys rise above the peak of the central hipped roof. Most of the exterior detailing is classically inspired and concentrated around the eaves, the porch columns, and the entablature.

The fenestration consists of double hung wood windows with a large single pane in each sash. This includes the large rounded panes found in the two windows in the front bay. The upper-story windows contain upper sashes of leaded, beveled glass. The front entry is recessed from the porch and contains polished stone wainscoting, a tiled floor and a wood door with a single large pane of glass bordered by an applied garland design.

The interior contains stained glass windows, ornately paneled pocket doors, and hardwood parquet floors in various, intricate patterns (Huntsville Planning Dept.). The original walls are plaster on lath in most of the home. The doors throughout are topped with transoms and are framed with heavy classical details. The public rooms on the first floor are arranged in a Shingle style plan and decorated with a combination of Queen Anne and classical detailing in dark wood.

The entry hall contains a large fireplace, dark wood wainscoting, a paneled ceiling, and an open stairway. The stairway includes a newel post that once held an electric light fixture, a full half turn with a



Detail of the floor of the front porch of the Hundley House. Circular tiles form a border and the field of the porch. The stone in the upper left corner is part of the surrounding edge and base for the stairs down to Madison St. and the columns that support the porch roof. Courtesy Harvie Jones Photo Collection

landing window seat, and a large stained glass portrayal of a reclining, semi-nude female. A seating area in the round bay contains original plaster trim on the walls and ceiling. The parlor to the left of the entry hall is entered through an opening framed by fluted Ionic columns directly across from a wall filled by another fireplace and two flanking window seats, also framed by Ionic columns.

The dining room, entered through heavy eight foot tall paneled pocket doors, has a beamed ceiling and a fireplace fronted with yellow marble and framed by carved monsters. The overmantle mirrors survive on this and all the major fireplaces. The angled bay on the exterior wall of the dining room contains another, though smaller and more abstract, stained glass window (Huntsville Planning Dept.).

Hundley began thinking about his new home as early as 1890 when he purchased the site at auction for \$2,210. He also bought a small tract along Gates in 1898 (*Huntsville Weekly Democrat* 3). The southern portion of the lot was purchased in 1900 and included the Davis House, which was razed and added to the grounds (Madison County Deed Books VVV, 84, 86).

Whether Hundley employed an architect is not known, although there was at least one in Huntsville with the skill to plan such an impressive home. Likewise, the contractor is unknown, but Hundley's father Orville, a successful builder and capitalist, is a possibility. The elder Hundley built the Huntsville Cotton Mill situated near the Memphis and Charleston Depot, the combination City Hall and Opera House, his own imposing Queen Anne home on Jefferson Street, and the Randolph Street Church of Christ (Huntsville Planning Dept.).

Construction began in the fall of 1899 with Hummel & Son doing the stone work (*Weekly Mercury* 2). By June 1900, the house was completed. The editors of the *Huntsville Weekly Democrat*, Virginia and Susanna Clay, ebulliently described it as follows:

On Thursday afternoon, the elegant new home of Mr. and Mrs. O.R. Hundley on Madison St. was thrown open for the first time to the Ladies Afternoon Euchre Club. The home is perfect in its appointments, and the refined and artistic is depicted everywhere, from the rich tints of the walls, delicate carving of the wood-

work, handsome stained glass window, with its figure of fascinating Circe, to the massive furniture and dainty bric-a-brac. The stairway was a mass of ferns and palms, through whose greenery Circe peeped. Flowers in vases and florals were everywhere, and smilax entwined the pillars of the mantles, doorway, and hall. Electric lights in tinted globes made the scene a brilliant one. (Clay 3)

The *Republican* noted that the home had “the most expensive and beautiful bathroom fixtures ever put in the city” (3).

The Hundley’s occupancy was short-lived. For political reasons Mr. Hundley moved to Birmingham in 1909 and sold the house to Martin May for \$11,000. Mr. May, co-owner of May & Cooney’s Dry Goods Store on East Side Square, sold the house in 1930 to Laughlin & Co. for conversion to a funeral parlor (Deed Book 105, 139). The home was added to the National Register of Historic Places in 1978.

Patricia Ryan is the Editor of Cease Not to Think of Me, The Steele Family Letters, author of Northern Dollars for Huntsville Spindles, and the pictorial researcher for Historic Huntsville, A City of New Beginnings. Ryan wishes to thank Linda Allen for her assistance.

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Transformations: 401 Madison (1976-2000)

Jacquelyn Procter Gray

Recently, Huntsville attorney Doug Fees sat in a comfortable leather chair in his office and reflected on the old home that now serves as offices for his growing law firm. When asked if he had any regrets during the lengthy and extensive renovation process of the house that sat vacant for nearly twenty-five years, he laughed.

“Some days I congratulated myself for being a genius,” Fees said. “The next day I wanted to kick myself for being the biggest fool in the world.”

Fees’ law office at 401 Madison Street is the home built by attorney Oscar Hundley. Considered an ugly duckling for a time, it now shines as a swan. Hundley bought the half-acre lot for \$2,200 at an auction in 1890. In 1898 and 1900, he bought two adjoining sections for another \$2,200. The original building on the site was torn down for the construction of his new home near his office building on the square.

While the exterior may not be as ornate as other homes in Huntsville, the inside reveals that Oscar spared no expense in details and craftsmanship. When the house was finished in June 1900, it was described as one of the most elegant homes in Huntsville, with many fixtures and one of the town’s first examples of indoor plumbing. After Oscar failed to receive Senate confirmation as Federal judge, he resigned, sold his home for \$11,000 in December 1909, and moved to Birmingham.

For years, descendants of the Hundley family expected the building to fall victim to the march of progress and the wrecking ball. In fact, over the years there had been several plans to revive the structure, but all were cost-prohibitive. Meetings were held to discuss its usefulness as a visitors’ center, a private club, and even to house the collection of books and items found today in the Huntville Library’s Heritage Room.

From 1930 to 1958, 401 Madison was the funeral home of Laughlin, Wood and Company. John Purdy, president and co-owner of Laughlin Funeral Home, remembers when his father was sent to Huntsville to

manage the business. The embalming room was on the first floor towards the back. The deceased were dressed in pajamas and placed in a bed for the viewings, then dressed again and removed to coffins for the actual funeral service.

Jimmy Blackburn, a teacher at Lee High School, was often hired to play piano at the funeral services. One Christmas, Purdy's father made a generous gesture to the neighborhood and placed loudspeakers out on the front porch while Blackburn played the finest Christmas carols the season had to offer. The neighbors complained.

Purdy's father bought the business in 1948, but eventually needed to relocate to a larger, more modern facility and in 1958 moved the funeral home to Bob Wallace Avenue, where it remains today. Although Purdy doesn't know specifically what happened to the furniture after the relocation, he was surprised when he walked into the Twickenham Station restaurant one day and recognized an antique combination mirror, umbrella stand, and hat rack—the same one that had been in the funeral home on Madison Street.

In 1959, the city of Huntsville bought the house and used the building as a police station and various other municipal offices until 1976. In the late 1970s, scenes from the motion picture *The Ravagers* were filmed there, causing the property to be further defaced.

At some point—likely prior to the ravages of the film crew—the stained glass window on display in what has become Fees' office was removed for safekeeping and replaced with a duplicate of the original, which now is on display at the Huntsville Museum of Art.

Mr. and Mrs. Jimmy St. Clair bought the house in the early 1980s with the hope of turning it into a bed and breakfast. The couple lived on the third floor while collecting architectural salvage material and beginning to update the home. However, Mr. St. Clair's health soon brought the project to a halt.

In the meantime, Doug Fees passed the house nearly every day on his way to and from his law office on the square.

In 1994, Fees settled a lengthy case in Tennessee and finally had the time and financial stability to establish his own practice. Doug wanted his new law office to meet several criteria: it had to be near the court-

house, have space for parking, be zoned for commercial use, and provide enough room to allow his practice to grow. He felt it was important that the office have a comfortable atmosphere for clients.

With these criteria in mind, Fees looked at several properties near the square, but kept coming back to the Hundley house. He asked an architect, a realtor, and a bank president to tour the house and give him their professional advice. Unanimously, they advised against purchasing the property, which had been on the market for several years.

“You would have to be half crazy to take on a project like this,” Fees acknowledged.

Nevertheless, he felt the house had potential, and with his wife’s encouragement, he bought it.



*401 Madison — Gambrel roof line of west front facing Madison St. before Fees renovation.
Photo courtesy Harvie Jones Photo Collection.*

Luckily, behind the beautifully carved window frames, the hand-blown curved glass, and the stained glass windows, the house proved to be structurally sound. The parquet floors and wood paneling had surprisingly little damage from termites or water.

Souvenir hunters had taken all of the light fixtures and whatever else could be easily removed, but some of the marble and wood mantles remained.

Other surprises waited. During installation of new plumbing and wiring, it was revealed that a smoldering fire had occurred at some point. A hydraulic elevator was installed that required drilling a hole 27 feet below the house. Twenty-six feet down, workers hit solid limestone. It took three weeks and considerable expense to drill the last

foot, but the elevator's installation brought the building up to code and ADA compliance.

Today the first floor contains restored parlors and an entry hall that serve as reception, waiting space, and Fees' office. A restored second-floor family dining room, now used as a meeting room, boasts a fireplace—as do most of the rooms, including bathrooms—rich wood paneling and beams, adding to the refined atmosphere. Other renovated rooms and former bedrooms on the first and second floors hold the offices of the firm's partners, lawyers, and support staff.

The third floor has been sculpted into a series of connected spaces that nestle under the contours of the varied roofline. The library and study area feature original pine wood floors and the exposed structural elements that support the various projections of the house's exterior massing below.

Probably the most memorable item in the house has a rather unusual history of its own. In the 1960s, a local dentist offered to restore the stained glass window in the main staircase's landing, depicting a maiden, mythical Circe. Instead of returning the window, he installed it in his office in Chattanooga. When threatened with a lawsuit, he returned the window, but the artist's signature pane was missing. Some believe the name on the pane was that of Louis Tiffany.

Walking through the restored rooms of the old Hundley home, Fees recalls with some amusement those early years of ownership, when he regretted his decision to buy the property on almost a daily basis.

Fortunately, for our historic city and the people who work so hard to maintain its heritage, that regret is no longer the case.

The author and editor would like to thank Doug Fees for allowing access to his offices and offering tours and interviews to interested parties.

The Hundley Rental Properties

Heather A. Cross

The gambrel rooflines of the property at **400 Franklin St.** (right) most closely resemble those of the 401 Madison home. This, however, is a less complex massing and combination of Queen Anne, Shingle and Dutch Colonial Revival styles. Note that the windows in the front rooms have upper sashes divided into multiple panes.



All three homes, as well as Hundley's own at 401 Madison, combine elements of Victorian, Queen Anne, and Colonial Revival architectural styles. Note other similarities in the shingled gables, doors, porches, bow and bay windows, and chimneys—making it likely they were all designed by the same architect.

This rental home at **500 Franklin** (above) is slightly different—its first-floor exterior is brick and the details lean more toward Colonial Revival. However, the curved porch is a Victorian/Queen Anne trend.

Situated directly behind his own house at 401 Madison, **108 Gates** (right) is the third rental property Oscar Hundley built about 1904.



All photographs courtesy of Huntsville Public Library Photo Collection.

HISTORIC HUNTSVILLE FOUNDATION

P. O. Box 786

Huntsville, AL 35804

The mission of the HISTORIC HUNTSVILLE FOUNDATION is the preservation of historically or architecturally significant sites and structures in Huntsville and Madison County. The Foundation also works to increase public awareness of the value of these sites and structures.

The Historic Huntsville Quarterly of Local Architecture and Preservation, a scholarly journal, and *Foundation Forum*, a quarterly newsletter, are published by the Foundation. The Foundation owns and operates Harrison Brothers Hardware and has partially renovated the Harvie P. Jones Building next door. Tenants occupy the finished space—Bird and Kamback Architects and The Huntsville Inn, a tea room. A warehouse of architectural artifacts and materials for reuse in historic preservation projects within Madison County also is operated by the Foundation.

The Foundation is actively involved in efforts to establish a formal revitalization of downtown Huntsville and sponsors functions to draw attention to businesses that locate in historic properties. In association with the Von Braun Lions Club, the Foundation co-sponsors “Trade Day on The Square” each September. Other events include public briefings, covered-dish suppers, and an annual awards dinner honoring notable contributors to historic preservation.

Foundation membership includes a subscription to the *Quarterly* and the *Forum*, notification of special sales at Harrison Brothers Hardware, invitations to members-only events at historic private homes and buildings, and advance notice and discounts on Foundation-sponsored tours, workshops, lectures and programs. If you would like membership information, please contact the Foundation by telephone at 256-539-0097 or by email at preserve@hiwaav.net.

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