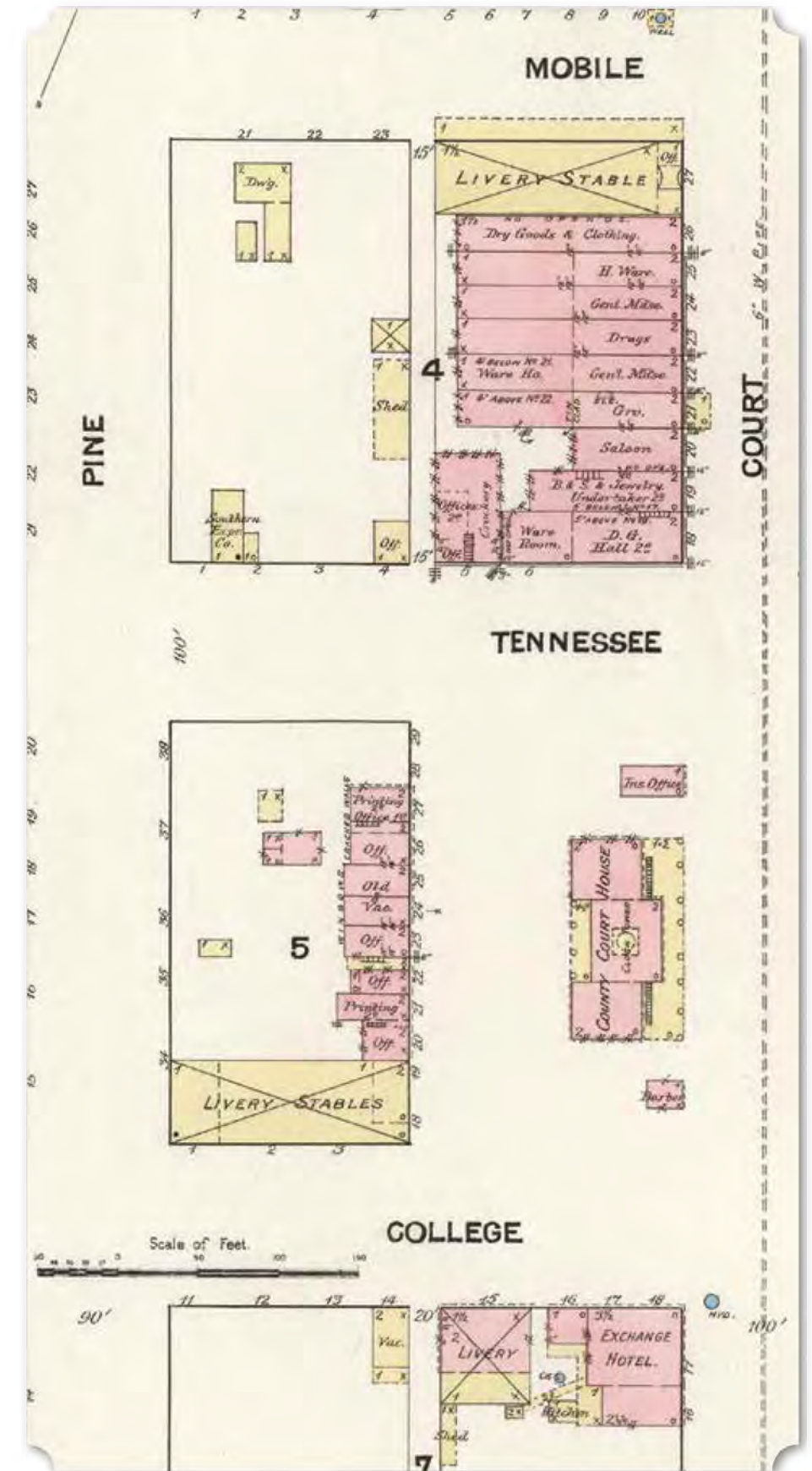
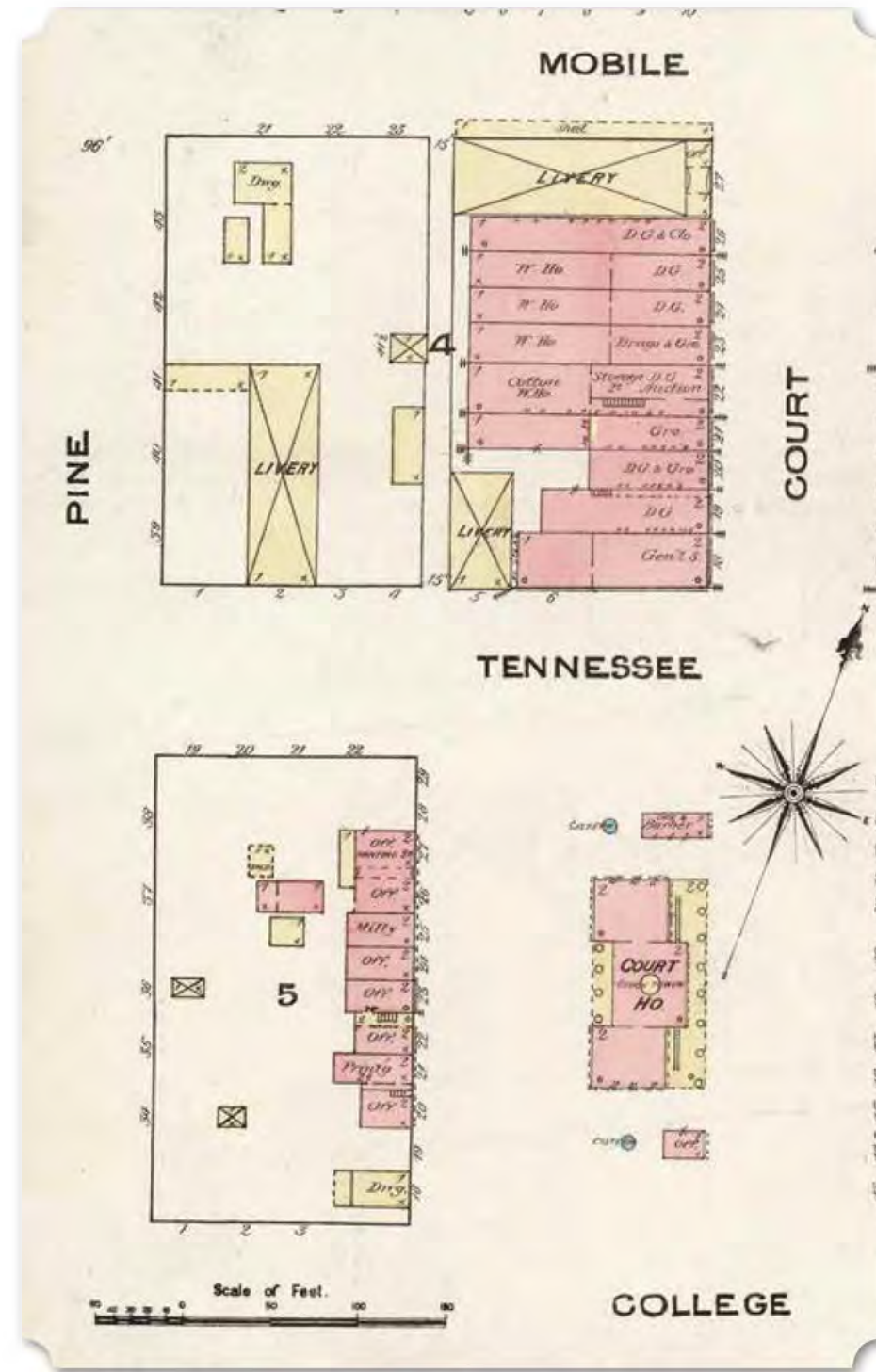


Livery and Groomsmen

A particularly 19th century occupation was manning livery stables – stables that kept horses for hire as needed. This industry spilled over into the 20th century, but was suddenly replaced by the automobile in the late 1910s to 1920s. The prominent grooms of Florence from the end of the Civil War to the end of the era of horse-drawn carriages were a father-son team: Rush Patton, Sr. (c. 1837-1907) and Rush Patton, Jr. (1864-after 1930). Patton, Sr. was a free person of color before the war. His father was a white man from Ireland, possibly William Patton, a slave owner who came to Florence in the 1840s. Patton, Sr. opened a livery, feed, and sale stable in October 1865 and became one of Florence's most successful businessmen of color. By the 1880s his business was awarded contracts such as carrying the U.S. mail from Florence across the river to South Florence in present-day Colbert County, and stabling horses for the Florence Land, Mining & Manufacturing Company. In the last decades of the 19th century, there was a boom in industry in Florence and, subsequently, in the livery stable business. While Patton's stables move from one block to the other and back again, as of 1889, his large, brick stables were located opposite the Exchange Hotel in downtown Florence. His was one of six livery stables in the center of the city.

Patton, Sr.'s success allowed him to purchase property. By 1888, he is known to have built several rental houses, although their locations are uncertain. He passed away in 1907 at 70 years old during the downturn of the stable business. His wife, Mahala, died within three years. They had one son, Rush Patton, Jr., who worked with his father in the livery business until 1896. Afterwards, Rush, Jr. became a carpenter and house painter as well as a business manager for his close friend, Jesse Patton, another prominent businessman of color and stable owner. Rush and Jesse were so close they each named a son after the other. Rush, Jr. married a woman named Pocahontas Cluff (1870-after 1930) in late 1890 in Florence. By 1900, the couple had moved to New Jersey, where Rush, Jr. continued to be a painter and later a brick mason.



(Above) Excerpt of Sanborn Fire Insurance Map of Florence, Lauderdale County, Alabama, 1884. Showing Patton's Livery Stables at the Intersection of Pine and Tennessee Streets (University of Alabama, Historical Map Collection, Online) (Right) Excerpt of Sanborn Fire Insurance Map of Florence, Lauderdale County, Alabama, 1889. Showing Patton's Livery Stables at the Intersection of Pine and College Streets, across from the Exchange Hotel (University of Alabama, Historical Map Collection, Online)