

One Dollar



Spring

1980

**THE HISTORIC HUNTSVILLE
QUARTERLY**
Of Local Architecture & Preservation



THE HISTORIC HUNTSVILLE QUARTERLY

of Local Architecture and Preservation

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from the Editor

Oak Place, the magnificent Greek Revival home of George Steele on Maysville Road, is currently being restored by its present owner the East Huntsville Baptist Church. The church has received a matching grant of \$50,000 from the Alabama Historical Commission toward the estimated total restoration cost of \$300,000; however this amount, when added to the \$100,000 the church can borrow, still falls \$150,000 short of the sum needed.

The congregation is appealing to the community for contributions to assist them in this major restoration project. The church is to be commended for its determination to preserve this significant local building, and it deserves to be supported by the community. Oak Place is important to Huntsville for both its historical associations and its architecture. George Steele, more than any other single individual, was directly responsible for shaping the appearance of antebellum Huntsville and for setting the architectural tastes of its residents. Oak Place, which Steele designed for his own family, is the most notable of all the homes he designed, for it reflects his own tastes unencumbered by the wishes of a client. He was free to design and experiment following his own inclinations: the result is an unique interpretation of the Greek Revival--a mansion of extraordinary power and presence, unmatched by any other structure in town.

The East Huntsville Baptist Church should not be expected to bear the full cost of this restoration alone because Oak Place is of inestimable value to all of us who care about Huntsville's past, and therefore its future. A building of the stature of Oak Place belongs not just to its legal owner, but to the city and the state as part of their irreplaceable heritage.

Contributions will go directly to the restoration of Oak Place and will not be used in any other way; they are tax deductible. Checks should be made payable to East Huntsville Baptist Church and mailed to the church at 808 Maysville Road, Huntsville, Alabama 35801.

A little help from each of us would go a long way.

DOWNTOWN APARTMENTS:

A Report from Franklin



by Rudy Jordan

From World War II until the late 1960s, most Americans pursued a suburban dream. Little thought was given to the past and such quaint notions as heritage. As a result, older neighborhoods were abandoned and entire downtown areas were wiped out in the name of urban renewal or left absently behind while people poured into the new shopping centers of the suburbs. The American love affair with the automobile, of course, made this migration possible.

Many of the people who stayed behind on Main Street imitated their more "progressive"

neighbors. They covered their 19th century Victorian buildings in a new suit of clothes of aluminum siding or some other modern building material so that they at least gave the appearance of keeping up with the times.

Franklin, Tennessee, was no exception. The antebellum town of 13,000 just eighteen miles

RUDY JORDAN, Executive Director of the Heritage Foundation of Franklin and Williamson County, graciously agreed to share that foundation's experience in creating downtown apartments for Franklin with the QUARTERLY readers.

south of Nashville covered its past as rapidly as the aluminum siding could be put in place and signs from national distributors could be bolted onto the building's facades.

Some buildings on Franklin's Main Street sought to carry out a decor theme. The town's theater went Polynesian. The arched windows of the town's old carriage house accommodated huge plate glass windows that displayed the shiny new cars inside. One of the local businesses completely gutted the interior of its building and tore down its lovely old Victorian brick exterior, replacing it with shiny mirror-like panels, bought at the local lumberyard, that came in prefabricated sheets and fit neatly between structural supports of the latest yellow brick material. Rectangular windows encased in chrome replaced the old brick-arched windows.

When urban renewal was defeated in Franklin in the early 1960s, the Chamber of Commerce showed that it at least sensed the need to do something progressive. And so aluminum canopies supported by steel legs were anchored to the fronts of the buildings to provide some of the comforts of the downtown malls.

These efforts were sincere. They represented the thinking of the day. But, today, that thinking has changed. People in Franklin, like people in hundreds of towns across the country, have rediscovered their past. The "modern" materials can come down just as easily as they went up.

The Heritage Foundation of Franklin and Williamson County, a preservation organization with 1,700 members, became con-

cerned about these buildings on Main Street that had fallen on hard times.

Two years ago, to reverse the "modernization" of Franklin's historic downtown, which is on the National Register of Historic Places, the Foundation became involved in a Main Street Project to try to breathe new economic life into the buildings in the context of historic preservation.

The Foundation organized three professional advisory groups to work with merchants and store owners, as well as with other segments of the general public with requests for advice on renovating old buildings, both residential and commercial. The advisory groups provide professional advice free of charge in the areas of technical and structural problems, design advice, and sign advice.

The Heritage Foundation has sponsored educational programs with the merchants, sometimes bringing in businessmen from other towns who have had success in revitalizing their central business district areas.

Last spring the Foundation hosted an overnight bus trip to Madison, Indiana, which is one of the three towns selected by the National Trust to serve as a demonstration project to determine if renovating buildings affects merchants' pocket books. Government officials, merchants, and other businessmen, as well as Heritage Foundation volunteers, made the trip to Madison where the Foundation hosted a cocktail party and brought together hardware store owner from Franklin with hardware store owner in Madison, banker with banker, etc.

The trip paid off. Once home a Downtown Franklin Association was formed, although admittedly at a slow start. But more importantly, for the short run, the Foundation delegation saw apartments created on the second floors of buildings on Madison's Main Street.

Once home, Foundation members created a model apartment on the second story of a commercial Victorian building on Franklin's Main Street for last year's Spring Tour. A variance was permitted by the Franklin Planning Commission, and the city planner informed Foundation officials that the Commission would look favorably on reuse of space above commercial businesses as long as fire codes were met and the building inspector had inspected the premises.

Soon after the tour last year, the first apartment was rented at \$300 a month. The floor space of 1,800 square feet was creatively laid out at angles by its owner to give the illusion of more space and to create privacy. One mistake, according to the present renter, is that the apartment is noisy and hard to heat. The owner opted to leave the rafters exposed for effect and had installed heating and air conditioning ducts above the rafters. But the space above the rafters goes up to roof level, with almost as much space above the rafters as below, creating a real heating problem.

The owner says he spent more money than he had anticipated on the project because the work was done by a contractor and had to be done quickly to meet the deadline of the tour. Also he selected expensive materials to create a luxurious apartment.

Since last year's model loft apartment was created, plans for at least three others have been laid. The Foundation is again creating a model apartment above a building on Main Street for this year's tour. This project also involves the renovation of the two storefronts with the business involved expanding to both stores.

The Foundation called on the town's O'More School of Design to help with the design challenges of the storefront and the apartment.

According to Bob Schaffer, owner and business operator of the store in question, Batey's Office Supply Company, the cost of the work on the building so far runs about \$15 a square foot. His two buildings also have 1,800 square feet on each floor, and he says he plans to rent the apartments in the \$300 to \$400 range a month.

Schaffer says that the reaction to his renovation work has been "unbelievable. Since I'm doing a lot of the work myself with one other workman, who can do anything, everybody lets me know that they think I am doing something special. The hardware store man gave me about thirty percent off on every gallon of paint because, he says, it's going to Main Street. The Mayor blew his horn so hard to cheer me on that I almost fell off the scaffolding the other day just to wave. And my neighbors across the street say they are watching me closely because something is going to be done at their building too."

Learning from the experience of the building down the street from him, Schaffer says he is lowering the ceilings in his apartment to twelve feet.

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Dual Occupancy in Huntsville

Dual occupancy is now permitted in the central business district of Huntsville as a special exception. An amendment to the Zoning Ordinance was approved by the City Council in November that allows the owner of a downtown building to renovate the upper floors for residential use. Previously the Zoning Ordinance prohibited combining commercial and residential uses in the same structure when the building's primary use was office or other non-residential.

This change makes available an alternative for redevelopment of downtown buildings. Today, most upper floors are vacant because businesses apparently prefer to locate on the street level. Consequently the owner of the building is receiving only a partial return on his property. It is true that commercial uses would provide a better financial return than residential, but when there is no commercial demand for this space, conversion to residential use might be better than no return at all.

Another consideration is that the downtown currently empties at five o'clock each evening leaving the area deserted. If apartments were available there, a second group of people--residents--would come into the area at night. A resident population, in time, could create a neighborhood market for small specialty shops and restaurants, especially when combined with the already stabilized populations of Old Town

and Twickenham. Furthermore, the constantly escalating cost of gasoline will, before long, make living near work a serious consideration for many people, while the demand for apartments continues to increase because of the growth of one and two person families. While downtown apartments do not appeal to everyone, there are many who would be attracted to such an environment. Presumably they would be predominantly single people, young couples without children, and the retired. This does not mean a return to the days when the downtown had shabby apartments and similar tenants: this problem can be avoided by developing quality apartments offered for standard rents. Because this residential option is available as a special exception to the zoning, the plans for such projects must be reviewed by the Board of Zoning Adjustment prior to approval to determine that the structure meets all building and safety codes of the city.

For Huntsville's downtown to be truly revitalized, it must develop a variety of attractions and functions. If a resident population can be added to the government and professional workers, and the tourist potential of the Space Center and Civic Center can be tapped by the Transportation Museum and Constitution Hall Park, then the downtown will develop a life of its own that can support shops, restaurants, and entertainment facilities. The simple truth is--people go where people are. *

Preservation Education

by Lynn Jones

Introducing historic preservation to young people has been a continuing goal for the Historic Huntsville Foundation. In 1977 and 1978 an essay contest was sponsored in the local high schools, with a cash prize being awarded for the best essay on a significant historic building. Beginning in 1978 "Downtown Summer Tours for Kids" were organized with the assistance of the Central City Association. Presently a committee is working on a twenty-five minute slide production on Huntsville history as seen through its architecture, which will be available to third grade teachers to use as enrichment material in the teaching of Huntsville history. Volunteers from the Foundation will show the slides, and it is hoped that the program will be followed by a tour of historic Huntsville by many of the classes.

The National Trust encourages preservation programs for school children as part of its larger educational mandate. Children who understand how their neighborhoods have evolved and the styles and materials of the buildings will be more apt to have a continuing respect for these areas and a concern for their upkeep. Today's children thus become tomorrow's preservationists.

A special section in the July 1979 PRESERVATION NEWS, "Preservation Made Elementary," details educational programs currently being developed in Salt Lake City, Savannah, and San Francisco. The Birmingham Historical Society has also developed curriculum materials

designed for grades six through twelve focusing on downtown Birmingham as a living museum of architecture and history.

In January while visiting in Savannah I was fortunate to be invited to see Savannah's Heritage Classroom Program in action. Massie School, built in 1855 and located in the heart of Savannah's National Historic Landmark District, is headquarters for the program. Sarah Parsons, aided by her friend Mrs. Lee Adler, is the secret to its success. The stated purpose of the program is "to sharpen visual awareness of Savannah's outstanding 'built environment' and city plan, to teach local history and to motivate students to responsible citizenship."

A large upstairs assembly room in Massie School has been furnished like an early one-room school, with old fashioned desks, slates, McGuffey readers, quill pens and inkwells. Elementary classes from schools all over the city come to learn at first hand what school was like in the old days, as Mrs. Parsons, dressed in a long dress, directs them in doings on the slate boards, writing with the quill pens, and then serves their lunch in individual tin pails.

Other classes are taken on walking tours through the historic district; view a slide program on Savannah's architectural development; study Savannah's famous city plan designed by General Oglethorpe, with its gridiron streets punctuated by generous open spaces called squares; or study the

construction of Massie School itself.

The day I visited Massie, Mrs. Parsons had a small class of gifted high school students who came prepared to explore the dark, musty, and very dirty basement of the school building. A photographer came along to take pictures, and we all descended through a trap door, climbing down a wobbly ladder. Once down there, with the darkness pierced only by our three flashlights and a string of Christmas tree lights mounted on a board and plugged into an extension cord from upstairs, we first turned our attention to the ancient furnace, surrounded on three sides by a brick wall about five feet tall. The school was originally built with this central heating system--very advanced for 1855! The furnace obviously had not been used for many years, and a great deal of "trash" had been thrown into the area over the years. The kids climbed right over the brick wall and began scavaging, and soon there were squeals of "Look what I found, Mrs. Parsons." Old slates, inkwells, a battered music book, spelling papers written in beautiful old script, a flag with forty-five stars, a half disintegrated 1895 wall map, marbles, a small toy car, and many other exciting treasures were carefully handed out. The photographer finally threw down his camera and climbed in there with them.

Finally it was lunch time, and I think only the acute pangs of hunger enticed us to quit searching and climb out into the sunshine. No gold miners having struck a rich vein of ore could have been more excited. We washed up as best we could in the school's two small bathrooms located out

in the schoolyard (just like *my* old elementary school in Louisville), while Mrs. Adler went out to buy a bucket of fried chicken and some cokes for lunch.

As we sat outside on the steps in the warm sunshine eating our lunch, the students told me more about their program and about how they were working on a proposal to take to the National Trust meeting next fall to have Massie School renovated. They had learned so much about history and architecture--about their city, and how it had evolved and was still evolving with a pleasing design mixture of the old and the new. I watched their animated faces as they talked, and thought, "This is the way education should be." I also felt envious, and wished that students in Huntsville could experience a program similar to this.

I invited Sarah Parsons to visit Huntsville, and she and her husband came in early March. Unfortunately she gave me so little advance notice that I was unable to let all our members know she was here. However she did talk to a small group on March 6 about her Heritage Classroom Program. Linda Bayer and I took her on a tour of historic Huntsville, including the Dallas Mill and mill village, the George Steele house, and the McCormick house, as well as the two historic districts. She was fascinated with our town.

It is my hope that our slide program for third graders is just the beginning of a Huntsville Heritage Classroom Program. Our town has a story to tell that is more significant than Savannah's--because our story is about us. *

The National Register

The following discussion of the National Register of Historic Places is presented to clear up some commonly voiced misconceptions about what the National Register actually is and the effect of listing a property on it.

The National Register is simply a listing of historic properties in the United States and its territories. Today this list includes approximately 15,000 properties of which about 13,500 are individual items while the remaining 1,500 are historic districts. An individual listing may consist of a building, such as the First Alabama Bank on the Square; a structure, such as the Redstone Test Stand; an object, such as the Saturn V Space Vehicle; or an archeological site.

Historic districts are a combination of buildings, spaces or archeological sites that are important in their totality although the components themselves may not qualify. Historic districts are most often neighborhoods containing a high concentration of historic buildings, often dating from approximately the same period, that taken as a group convey a sense of the period and society that erected them. The buildings constitute the most obvious resource in a district, but there are other elements that are just as important and that contribute to the ambiance of the neighborhood. These can include the kind of terrain and the way it was developed, the size of the building lots and the placement of the houses on them, the relationship of the houses to each other and to

the street, the landscaping, the presence of parks and other public spaces, the layout of the streets, and the relationship of the district to the surrounding areas. These considerations describe those qualities that can give a neighborhood cohesiveness and a historical identity worth preserving. For this reason, it is not enough just to preserve the buildings in a district; the historic setting must also be respected, because that is what gives meaning to the structures. For the same reason the small modest houses are as important as the large mansions: together they convey a sense of the past that cannot be read from one without the other.

The National Register was established by federal law in 1966 with the stipulation that it include properties of local and state significance as well as those of national importance. This reflected a growing recognition that many historic properties that were important principally to their own communities were being cleared for urban renewal. People were losing those buildings and neighborhoods that provided their own personal, daily identity and sense of history. Buildings that have significance for the nation as a whole, such as Mount Vernon, are eli-

gible for the special designation of National Historic Landmark.

For a property to be eligible for the Register, it must meet at least one of the following four criteria:

1. Be associated with events or developments--these are properties that contributed to the broad patterns of history, such as industrial, educational and transportation facilities.

2. Be associated with historically significant persons--these properties are often the homes of people who had a lasting impact on local, state or national history.

3. Be of architectural significance--this category covers buildings that represent a specific building type, date from a specific stylistic period, are good examples of a type of construction, or illustrate the work of a prominent architect, builder, or craftsman.

4. Be potential sources of information--these properties are usually archeological sites but may also include structures possessing information on building technology..

Additional considerations are the building's age and its physical condition. As a rule, a property must be fifty years old before it is considered eligible for the National Register; however, if it is obviously of exceptional significance, it can be listed much earlier. A notable local example is the Saturn V Space Vehicle: its place in history is unquestioned.

Evaluating a property's condition is more difficult; for a building to survive unaltered until its significance is recognized can be a tricky matter. Many buildings undergo repeated alterations to keep them useful

and occupied; without alterations, they are often considered obsolete and then razed. However, to qualify for the Register, a property should not have lost those features that locate it in time and place. Its association with the period of its significance should still be readily apparent. Properties that have been moved from their original site will only be considered if their importance derives from some distinction that was not destroyed by the move.

There are two other types of National Register nominations, besides the individual property and the historic district, that should be mentioned. One is the thematic group nomination, which is a finite group of resources related to one another in a clearly definable way--an example of this might be a nomination for all the extant buildings designed by a prominent architect. The second type is a multiple resource nomination. This is a method of nominating at one time all the individual properties, sites, and historic districts within a specific area. (A multiple resource nomination for the commercial properties of downtown Huntsville is now under review in Washington.) This does not create an historic district; it merely provides for many individual properties and historic districts to be listed with one application.

Listing on the National Register provides formal recognition that the property is of significance and has historic and/or architectural value to the community, and possibly the state and nation. Such listing does not protect it from alterations or from demolition by a private owner. The only direct protection the National Regis-

ter provides is from FEDERALLY funded, licensed or assisted projects. If a property is threatened by such a project, the federal agency involved must allow the Advisory Council on Historic Preservation to comment before the project proceeds. This has proved to be a successful deterrent in many cases.

However, there are several tax incentives available to owners who preserve and rehabilitate National Register properties. The Tax Reform Act of 1976 and the Revenue Act of 1978 provide tax advantages for approved rehabilitations of depreciable properties, and the former contains a tax penalty for demolition and new construction. The State of Alabama has created an additional incentive for preservation by providing a property tax reduction of 50% for depreciable properties listed on the Register.

In addition, Register listing makes properties eligible for matching grants-in-aid from the Department of the Interior. These grants are allocated by the states--in Alabama by the Alabama Historical Commission. However several states including Alabama award these grants only to public agencies and non-profit groups, not to individuals.

Listing on the Register implies no federal controls on owners other than those just discussed. However many historic districts do have design controls imposed on them at the local level. These design review boards can be established by city ordinance for the purpose of maintaining the historic character of the neighborhood, but they operate independently of the National Register.

The National Register Office is a part of the newly organized Heritage Conservation and Recreation Service (HCERS) of the Department of the Interior. Its programs are administered in each state by a State Historic Preservation Officer (SHPO) appointed by the governor. In Alabama the state agency charged with overseeing the National Register and other preservation programs is the Alabama Historical Commission in Montgomery. The Huntsville Planning Department works closely with the state Historical Commission staff and can often handle preservation and National Register requests at the local level.

National Register nominations may be initiated by any interested citizen. The completed form is reviewed by the SHPO's staff and by the Historical Commission before it is signed by the SHPO and forwarded to the National Register Office in Washington for final review and listing. *

DESIGN REVIEW/ *continued*

toric and architectural character of the area will be permitted. This encourages people to invest in improving their property in a manner appropriate to a common purpose and plan. In effect, it safeguards the property owner who restores his property because he knows that his neighbor must also meet the same guidelines. Design review protects and enhances a neighborhood by halting construction plans and practices that would prove detrimental to its value. The result is that design review gradually raises the aesthetic and historic qualities of the district--as well as the property values. *

The Huntsville Housing Authority commissioned designer Steve Kling of Memphis to recommend a redevelopment plan for a block of older structures downtown on Washington Street. Kling's proposals, presented in April, call for the buildings to be remodeled on the ground floor facade and for the interior to be divided into two levels of small shops connected by stairs, alleys, and elevators. The property is located on the west side of Washington (across from Dunnivant's) and extends from Clinton Street north to the old Yarbrough Hotel, and also includes the rear parking lot facing Jefferson Street. The design below depicts the Everett building, now painted yellow, in the middle of the block. The designs opposite illustrate the front (bottom) and side (top) views of the building on the Clinton Street corner. On the cover is a drawing of how the back side of these buildings might be redeveloped. This parcel, which contains 31,000 square feet of usable space, is for sale by the Housing Authority. A redevelopment such as this would provide a tremendous impetus to downtown revitalization.

A Renovation Proposal





for Washington Street



Local Design Review

The Huntsville Historic Preservation Commission is the local design review board for Huntsville's historic districts. It was created by city ordinance in 1972 when Twickenham Historic District was established, although its authority now extends to Old Town as well. By law, the Commission reviews all proposed building, sign, and demolition plans within the historic districts for appropriateness. Applications for building or demolition permits within the districts are automatically referred to the Commission for review before the permit can be issued. When a certificate of appropriateness has been issued, the owner may get his building or demolition permit.

The Commission is composed of nine members, including one member of the City Council, the Director of the Planning Commission, the city Building Inspector, and six members appointed by the mayor with the approval of the City Council. The Commission meets at 4:30 on the second Monday of each month in the Inspection Department offices at 300 Madison St.

The stated duties of the Commission are to pass upon the appropriateness of exterior architectural features of buildings to be erected, altered, enlarged, restored, or demolished within the historic districts. When evaluating a plan, the Commission considers the historical or architectural value of the building and its relationship with the historic district as a whole and with the adjacent buildings. They

also take into consideration the exterior design, materials and colors proposed, as well as the type of windows, exterior doors, lights, signs, and other fixtures that will be visible from any public area. The Commission does not consider the interior arrangement or features. A certificate of appropriateness is not required for repainting, repair or maintenance that makes no material alteration in the exterior architectural features.

Design review boards have been established in more than 500 cities across the country because they represent the most practical method of maintaining the historic character of a district. The combination of historic district designation with design review board control has proved an effective means of upgrading and stabilizing a neighborhood. When an area becomes a historic district, outside interest in the area is stimulated, while the residents experience a new sense of pride in their environment. A neighborhood that was previously seen only as run-down or a slum is suddenly perceived in a new light when district status is achieved because it places a recognized value on the buildings and their surroundings.

But, the design review is a necessary component in starting and maintaining a district on the road to rehabilitation. Because design review oversees changes in the district, it assures that only those alterations consistent with the his-

continued on page 11

News...

THE FIRST ANNUAL O'MORE DESIGN Forum will be held on May 30 and 31 in Franklin, Tennessee. The Forum will present a series of lectures focusing on the local heritage of design during the Jacksonian era. The programs to be offered on Friday include Wendell Garrett, editor of ANTIQUES, speaking on "The 19th Century Design Heritage;" Roy Graham, resident architect of the Colonial Williamsburg Foundation, discussing "The Greek Revival;" a tour of Rattle and Snap; and "The Food and Tables of Our Ancestors" presented by Louise Belden of the Winterthur Museum.

Scheduled for Saturday are Marlin Phythyon, consultant to the Cottage Garden, talking on "Bouquets from the Past" and Jean Weeks of the Scalamandre Museum of Textiles explaining "Historic American Textiles." Admission to the Merry Month of May Table Setting Exhibition is part of the Forum.

Registration for the Design Forum is limited to 100 participants and must be made prior to May 10, 1980. The fee is \$90 and includes admission to all programs as well as several meals. A limited number of registration forms are available from Linda Bayer at 532-7353.



THE HISTORIC HUNTSVILLE Foundation is pleased to recognize the following individuals and businesses for their generous support of the Foundation's goals and activities and to welcome them as special members:

BUSINESS MEMBERSHIPS

Bragg Furniture Company
Bryson Construction Company
Decatur, Alabama
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BENEFACTOR

Frank and Stevenson Realty, Inc.



OLD TOWN HISTORIC DISTRICT may lose another house to demolition. The owner of 111 Steele Street has applied to the Huntsville Historic Preservation Commission for permission to demolish the structure. At a March 24 meeting, the Commission denied the demolition permit for ninety days to allow the owner and other interested parties time to find an alternative to demolition. At the end of this waiting period, the demolition permit must be granted if the owner still requests it. One possible solution would be to move the house, but this choice becomes acceptable only when demolition is the sole alternative.

The problem in this case is that the house has been allowed to deteriorate over a period of several years until it now can not meet the minimum housing codes. Unfortunately this is not an isolated problem but afflicts several Steele Street houses. If this becomes a trend (one house has already

disappeared), the northern end of Steele will soon be vacant land and eventually all new construction will take the place of the 19th century houses that once populated it. The Steele Street houses date from the late 19th century and are modest frame buildings representative of the vernacular Victorian cottage. They are of tremendous importance to Old Town in presenting a balanced picture of a late 19th century neighborhood and its architectural styles. Such neighborhoods commonly mixed economic classes in a rather casual way, which was probably one reason for their great vitality. Unfortunately these smaller, less decorative cottages are always the first to go, leaving the district with an uncharacteristic proportion of more expensive structures.

BUT--Old Town also has some good news. On March 27 the City Council approved a zoning change for part of the district

111 Steele Street



from 2-A to 1-B. The southern portion of the district was already zoned 1-B so that this change brings all of the district--with the exception of a strip along Lincoln Street--under the same zone. The effect of 1-B zoning is to prevent the new construction of duplexes and apartments in Old Town and to prevent the conversion of existing structures to two-family or apartment use if they are not already so functioning. The buildings that are currently operating as apartments and duplexes may continue to do so; however, if this non-conforming use ceases for a period of six months, the property must then conform to uses allowed by the existing zoning.

Old Town was originally developed and achieves its significance as a neighborhood of single family dwellings. To allow it to now develop with other than single family uses would be to defeat the purpose of designating it a historic district.

Old Town has demonstrated the value of historic districts in stabilizing and upgrading a neighborhood through private initiative and money. Since 1974 when the district was established, forty-six of 250 structures have improved in use. This includes twenty-four properties that have changed from rental to homeowner, nineteen that have been converted from apartments to single family, and three businesses that have been returned to residential use. Within the rezoned area, twenty-two properties have been upgraded while three have deteriorated. For this encouraging trend to continue, owners need to be assured that they are investing their effort and money in a neighborhood that

will continue to improve and that will be legally protected from the future development of non-conforming intrusions. The zoning change accomplishes this.

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NEED A PAIR OF OLD SLIDING panel doors or a Victorian box lock? The Historic Huntsville Foundation's warehouse has these and many other old house parts that may be just what you need for your restoration project. The items are reasonably priced, well below normal.

Do you have an old mantle or newel post that is gathering dust in the basement? It may be just what someone else needs, and you can get a tax write-off by donating it to the Foundation. For more information, contact Ralph Allen at 539-0764.

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THE HISTORIC HUNTSVILLE Foundation held its annual election at the April 14 meeting. Elected to the Board of Directors for the 1980-83 term were Billie Grosser, Lee B. James, Lynn Jones, Helen Middleton, Sarah Warren, and Laura Jo Wilbourn.

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AS EDITOR, I am deliriously happy to announce that with the summer issue, Lynn Jones will become the associate editor of the QUARTERLY. She will be contacting members to contribute articles and ideas for future issues of the publication. If you wish to volunteer or have suggestions, please contact either Lynn or myself.

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PRESERVATION: Reusing America's Energy



Preservation Week
May 11-17, 1980

NATIONAL TRUST FOR HISTORIC PRESERVATION

FRANKLIN/ *continued*

Meanwhile a Nashville bank that holds two buildings in trust across the street from Batey's has contacted the Foundation and the O'More School of Design and forged ahead to create two apartments upstairs in those buildings. And another key property at the corner of one street is being renovated by its owner with plans in the works to redo the upper stories for apartments or office space.

There are words of caution to be taken before Main Street renovations of commercial buildings are undertaken.

Groups undertaking apartment renovations should first determine if there is a market for them. In Franklin's case there is a real need for housing and especially for apartments downtown.

Also, the work should progress slowly and cautiously. Unless all the architectural elements of the building are digested, preservationists risk hokeying up the building. There are design guidelines for Victorian commercial storefronts available from the Na-

tional Trust.

Another reminder is that apartment spaces should be kept large. When more than one apartment is squeezed into an 1,800 square foot space, problems arise.

Also, to take advantage of the Tax Reform Act of 1976, which allows tax breaks to owners who wish to renovate income producing property, buildings should not be altered unless a preservation consultant is called in. Owners become ineligible for tax breaks if they sandblast a building, alter the structural and design features, or in anyway interfere with the integrity of an old building.

And those who would undertake the revitalization of upper stories of downtown buildings should not lose sight of the importance of working even harder for the retail redevelopment on the lower level. Main Street is the heart of our communities. It would be sad to create lovely apartments on the upper stories only to come downstairs to a ghost town. *

Reviews...

WILLIAM NICHOLS, ARCHITECT, by C. Ford Peatross and Robert O. Mellown. *Exhibition Catalogue, The University of Alabama Art Gallery, Tuscaloosa, 1979. 50 pages, illustrated, exhibition panels, catalogue entries, paper.*

The exhibition upon which this catalogue is based is a past-due first step in recognition of the work of the architect William Nichols, who played an important part in the architectural development of North Carolina, Alabama, Louisiana and Mississippi during the first half of the 19th century. Nichols served successively as the principal architect for each of these state governments. He designed the capitols of Alabama (at Tuscaloosa) and Mississippi, remodeled the North Carolina Capitol, and remodeled a hospital by Latrobe in New Orleans for the needs of a temporary Louisiana State Capitol. In addition he performed planning and architectural work on the state university campuses in three of these states, including the University of Alabama where he designed the campus and most of its original buildings. Numerous private houses and some known churches, a bank, a Masonic Hall, and other structures are included in his half-century of architectural practice.

A disheartening proportion of these buildings are now lost. A few of his houses remain in central Alabama, but all of his structures at the University of Alabama except the Gorgas House (built as Steward's Hall) were burned in the Civil War.

(While the University of Alabama's President's House has frequently been attributed to Nichols, the authors present documentary evidence that it is by Michael Barry.) Another well-known example "designed or inspired by" Nichols, which survives with alterations, is the Capt. James H. Dearing House in Tuscaloosa, now the University Club.

by Harvie Jones

Nichols' fifty years of work begins with the strong influence of the Palladian Classical Revival, lightened with delicate Adamesque elements. The Greek Revival, Gothic and Italianate appear later. Nichols grew up in Bath, England, and perhaps the architecture of Bath had a strong influence on him; the Italianate and Gothic Revival examples of his work retain the axial symmetry of his early classical work.

This catalogue is recommended to all who are interested in our region's rich architectural heritage. It is hoped that this scholarly research will be followed by still more work on this and other architects and builders from Alabama's past. Mr. Peatross states that "It is only beginning to be recognized that the South was at the center, rather than the

periphery, of new developments in both building types and architectural styles...." Perhaps we will even be inspired to look into the work of our more recent architects such as Huntsville's Edgar Love, who has several fine early 20th century known examples. How many of Love's works are unrecognized? What is known about his practice and his life? The best time to get the answers is before the information is lost. An exhibition and publication on the work of George Steele, architect and builder in Huntsville during the second quarter

of the 19th century, is also in order. Steele's work compares very favorably in quality with that of Nichols, and much of the research is in hand.

It would be desirable to reprint this catalogue in book form, with more information and with much larger illustrations. Some of the more detailed drawings are indecipherable even with a reading glass, as are the microscopic captions on most of the panels. Many pages are under-inked and pale. A better job of presentation is justified and needed.

C. FORD PEATROSS is the Curator of the Architecture, Design and Engineering Collections of the Library of Congress. DR. ROBERT O. MELLOWN is an assistant professor of art history at the University of Alabama.

HARVIE P. JONES, A.I.A., is a Huntsville architect active in historic preservation and is currently chairman of the American Institute of Architects Committee on Historic Resources.

TRAVELING SCHEDULE: WILLIAM NICHOLS EXHIBITION

University of Mississippi, Oxford
 Mississippi State History Museum, Jackson
 University of North Carolina, Chapel Hill
 University of Alabama Regional Office, Selma
 North Carolina Museum of History, Raleigh

April 20 - May 20
 June 1 - July 14
 August 1 - August 30
 September 15 - October 15
 November 1 - December 15

PALMER HALL/ *continued*

became an apartment building for married teachers and during the next decade, it was remodeled for use as a women's dormitory. It was finally closed in the early 1970s and has stood vacant until this March when it was razed.

Palmer was historically significant because of its great age and because it was the sole surviving building dating from the university's first decade at that site. In the early days of the college, Palmer Hall was the college. Students lived, studied, and congregated within

its walls. Architecturally, the hall was of value because it was the only structure of Victorian design, and its presence made concrete the fact of A&M's 19th century origins. Without Palmer Hall, the campus becomes a 20th century institution, lacking visual reminders of its much greater age and traditions. Palmer, with its Victorian vitality and picturesque qualities, added variety and contrast. The university, as well as the town, is poorer for having lost one more remnant of our architectural and educational heritage. *

And Old Views

Palmer Hall on the Alabama A&M University campus was demolished in March to be replaced by a new women's dormitory. At the time, Palmer was the oldest structure at A&M and the only one dating from the 1890s when the college moved to its present site north of town.

A&M began operation as a normal school in 1875 with a state appropriation of \$1,000. During the 1880s the school added industrial training to its curriculum, and its enrollment grew to 300 students. Its president and founder was an ex-slave William H. Council, who succeeded in having his school selected as the colored land grant college for Alabama after passage of the Second Morrill Act in 1890. To qualify as a land grant institution, the school had to provide agricultural education, so in the sum-

mer of 1891 the school moved outside of town and began construction of the present campus. The first two buildings, Palmer and Seay, were constructed that summer, and several structures already on the land were converted for college use. The old Green Bottom Inn was renovated for the president's home, while his office was in an old slave cabin.

Palmer Hall, named in honor of Solomon Palmer, state superintendent of education, was a three-story, frame structure erected by local contractor J.M. Hutchens at a cost of \$6,500. It housed recitation rooms, the library and office on the first floor, the chapel on the second, and women's dorm rooms on the third.

In June 1896 Palmer Hall caught fire and was completely destroyed by the blaze; President Council vowed it would be

Palmer Hall



rebuilt immediately. The new Palmer Hall, dedicated the following October, apparently was rebuilt on the same site and to much the same plan, except this time it was constructed of brick. It served the same functions on each floor as had the previous building.

Palmer Hall was a long, narrow structure slightly bent at the center point so that it formed a generous obtuse angle. The entrance was located at this exterior angle and was marked by a mansarded tower. The small shed roof over the door was later replaced by a much larger, arched, brick portico which did not relate to the building. The foundation was of quarry-faced stone while the walls were brick, that on the west half being subtly varied by repeated rows of darker brick headers. Segmental brick arches topped the tall narrow windows; the third floor windows were paired and extended above the eaves giving a picturesque appearance to the hall. The steep hipped roof was covered with pressed metal sheeting. The hall was demolished because reports indicated that the foundations were not considered sound enough to justify remodeling.

Subtle variations in the two halves of the building suggest that they were erected at different times. This thesis is supported by the existence of large payments made to local craftsmen in 1899 for work on Palmer Hall, indicating that its size was doubled in 1898-99 by an addition built to the same design. Although the source of the plans remains a mystery, there are two tantalizing possibilities. First, there is more than a casual similarity between Palmer and the Huntsville city hall built in 1892

but designed three years earlier by architect H.D. Breeding. (See Winter, 1980 QUARTERLY) This suggests that Breeding could have been the architect or that his city hall design could have provided at least the inspiration. Which leads to the second possibility--S.J. Mayhew was a trustee of the college, a city alderman, and an engineer/architect. As an alderman, Mayhew would have been familiar with the plans for the city hall, and as a college trustee he was in a position to recommend building proposals. An intriguing, but inconclusive, entry in A&M's records for 1899 reveals that the school owed "S.J. Mayhew - Architect" the sum of \$150.

It is commonly believed that the students and teachers built A&M's earliest structures; however, research indicates that the major buildings were erected by local contractors. The work carried out by the students included making repairs, building minor structures such as a bath house, and laying sewer pipe. When the industrial shop burned in January of 1899, the teachers agreed to construct a new one of brick, which they paid for while the students provided the labor. Many of the students were able to work their way through school in this manner, although they earned between 4¢ and 15¢ per hour. The industrial courses, such as carpentry, cabinet making, and plumbing, provided vocational training by having students learn on campus projects, which helped to maintain and improve the school's facilities at minimum expense.

Palmer Hall remained the principal campus building for many years and served a variety of functions. In the 1930s it

continued on page 20

from the Chairman

My term of office as chairman of the Foundation ends in May, and I take this opportunity to say thanks to all of you for your encouragement and support over the past two years. Together we have built an organization we can all take pride in--an organization with unlimited potential for continued growth and service to the community.

The following is a brief review of some of our activities and accomplishments during the past year:

Proceeds from the George Steele Tour in the amount of \$2,258 were donated to the East Huntsville Baptist Church to be used for restoration of the Steele House on Maysville Road.

Nine volunteers from the Junior League of Huntsville worked as tour guides for our second annual Downtown Summer Tour for Kids. This very successful project was also assisted by the Central City Association and a group of summer youth volunteers. Approximately 325 children participated in the tours.

The Foundation received a grant from the National Trust to fund a summer intern. April Eberly, an architecture graduate from the University of Maryland, spent twelve weeks in Huntsville drawing up rehabilitation plans for three projects in the downtown commercial district. Copies of her drawings were framed and presented to the owners of the buildings.

An alley warehouse sale was held last June. Proceeds from the sale in the amount of \$407.31 were added to the Foundation revolving fund.

Our third annual program series included a showing of the film "Main Street," along with a presentation on the tax benefits of historic preservation; "Outhouses and Barns, Old Houses and Beds," a unique program on historic preservation in Eutaw, Alabama, presented by Roy Swayze, Jim Connor, Roland Monette, Walter and Tricia Griese; and a lecture by Dr. Ralph Hudson on "Period Styles in Architecture, Interiors, and Furnishings, Ancient to Modern."

A very successful fall outing was planned by Freeda Darnell and Margaret Cole with the assistance of Tillman Hill. Approximately ninety-five members and guests enjoyed an old fashioned barbeque picnic at the new Sharon Johnson Park in Madison County, followed by a bus tour of historic structures in the New Market area.

The second Calendar of Historic Huntsville was published, with Lee Harless, Chuck Long, and Richard Pope as contributing artists.

A drive to solicit business memberships in the Foundation resulted in twelve business memberships and one benefactor gift.

A committee chaired by Billie Grosser has prepared a twenty-five minute slide presentation on Huntsville history and architecture which will be available to third grade teachers in Huntsville and Madison County beginning next fall.

I wish to express special thanks and appreciation to Linda Bayer who has singlehandedly edited and published the QUARTERLY since the fall of 1978. This very professional publication has elicited much interest in the Foundation and has enhanced our prestige in the community. Please help Linda by submitting your ideas and suggestions for future topics to be covered in this publication.

I have enjoyed serving as your chairman for the past two years. It has been a pleasure to work with and get to know so many of you. I have come to learn that preservationists are people who care--about the past, about improving the quality of life today, and about insuring that quality of life for the future.

Lynn Jones



LINCOLN MILL

Destroyed by fire - February 19, 1980



from

Historic Huntsville Foundation, Inc.

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