



Downtown
DISCOVERY
TOUR
with
History Hunts

Third Edition in honour of Patricia Hough Camp & Marjorie Lee White

With the financial support of the
Susan Mott Webb Charitable Trust, Alabama Power Foundation
Community Foundation of Greater Birmingham
City of Birmingham, Alabama Historical Commission
Birmingham Realty Company in honor of its 125th Anniversary

Acknowledgements

The third edition of the Downtown Discovery Tour is dedicated to Pat Camp and to Marjorie Lee White whose commitment to community service got and keeps this tour, and the Society, going.

The creation and publishing of this book has been assisted by a very large number of individuals. Principal helpers include current and former Downtown Discovery Tours guides, volunteers who decided we should expand and reprint the volume, filling it with everything they wanted to tell students on their tours! Russell Cunningham at Birmingham Realty Company gave the lead gift in honor of that company's 125th anniversary. The volume has been a long time coming.

Marjorie Lee White recruited and inspired the reprint and the extraordinary volunteer participation that fills its pages. She and Regan Huff later helped conceptualize the new heritage hikes. Providing research, drawing, and photography were volunteers Kyle D'Agostino, Kyle Kirkwood, Edgar Marx, Jr., Kelly McLaughlin, Beverly Miller, Cheryl Morgan, Michelle Morgan, Kris Nikolich, Carole Sanders, and Peggy Scott. Katherine Parker Shepherd illustrated the time line; Michelle Morgan and Kelly McLaughlin the glossary. Rick Sprague photographed for the original book; Bill and Sloan Dixon, Kyle Kirkwood, John O'Hagan, Bode Morin and Marjorie White for this edition.

Elizabeth Webb Collier, Alicia McGiveran, and especially Peggy Balch did yeoman duty researching and fact-checking data. Proof readers included: Regina Almon, Peggy Balch, Rhonda Covington, Sloan Dixon, Nick Patterson, Kay Henkell Smith and Joe Strickland.

The 25th Anniversary of the tours coincides with the 25th anniversary of the establishment of the Birmingham Public Library Department of Archives & Manuscripts.

Hats off to the City of Birmingham and library administrators and staff who created and expanded this fine institution. Yolanda Valentin, Don Veasey, and Jim Baggett deserve A+++ for endless searches for the best images for this volume. Yvonne Crumpler and the staff at Southern History also cheerfully helped us. All historic photographs in this volume are Archives' photographs unless otherwise identified.

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Last and best, artist and graphic designer Scott Fuller made the project possible.

Marjorie L. White

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White, Marjorie L.
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One Sloss Quarters
Birmingham, Alabama 35222
Telephone 205-251-1880
www.bhistorical.org

THIRD EDITION

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About the Discovery Tour Book

This book is a guide for DISCOVERING the architecture and history of Birmingham's city center. It contains background information, maps, a time line, a glossary and visuals to encourage looking at and thinking about buildings and urban change.

The guide is intended for school groups, families and the general public.

The self-guided explorations begin at city center cultural institutions and the Birmingham Realty Company, the real estate firm that founded our city in 1871.

These tours, information and lesson plans for teachers also appear on the Birmingham Historical Society web-site at www.bhistorical.org.

Tours

The Downtown Discovery Tour, the central business district

Linn Park History Hunt, the 20th Street park & governmental center

Going Downtown History Hunt, the historic retail & theater district

Fourth Avenue History Hunt, the historic black business district

A Walk to Freedom, retracing the children's marches of 1963

Starting Points

Birmingham Realty Company

Birmingham Museum of Art
Birmingham Public Library

McWane Center
The Alabama Theater

Jazz Hall of Fame
Fourth Avenue Visitor Center

Birmingham Civil Rights Institute
16th Street Baptist Church

GOALS

Discovery

Participation

Visual awakening

Creating architectural understanding

Creating historical understanding

Personalities

Making & remaking buildings & cities

Creating appreciation

Fine quality buildings

Taking care of them

LESSONS

Learning to look at buildings . . .

To visually explore buildings by focusing on architectural details & construction materials: brick, terra cotta & cast iron.

Experiencing architecture . . .

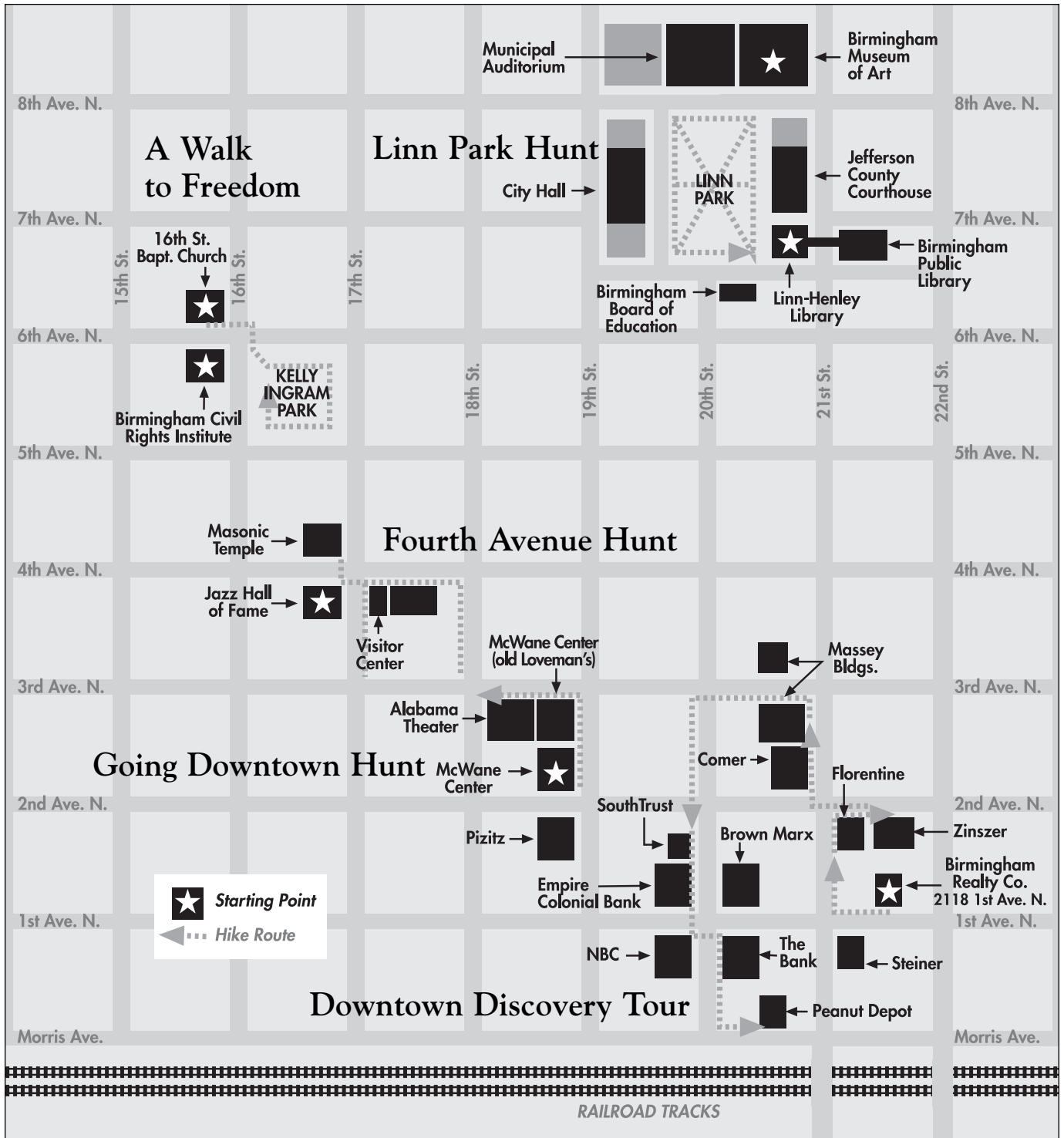
Touching, feeling, going inside & enjoying buildings.

Learning to read buildings & the stories they have to tell . . .

Stories of the people who built them, the stylistic choices they made for their decoration & use, and of how a building's looks change.

THE DOWNTOWN DISCOVERY TOURS

Where They Start & Go



Volunteers Make the Tours Possible

This edition of the tour provides information to encourage school and family groups to make self-guided explorations. Over the past 25 years volunteers have made materials and guided tours possible.

For a decade, the Junior League of Birmingham provided start-up funding and volunteers. **Junior League volunteer guides** (*=chairman): Cathy Adams, Mims Adams, Laurie Alverson, Nancy Bagby, *Juju Beale, Pam Beckman, Judy Bewley, Elna Brendel, Betsy Brown, Ann Camp, ^{1st}*Pat Camp, Lucy Carey, Marie Carlisle, Joan Clark, Nancy Cox, Mary Todd Davis, Pat Day, Anna Donald, Isabelle Dreher, *Patsy Dreher, Betts Drennen, Geny Duffee, Terry Estes, Wendy Field, Nancy Gillespy, Judy Gohlson, Tandy Graves, *Kit Hamilton, Terry Hamilton, Pat Harris, *Betsy Blair Hunter, Annette Johnston, Dru Jones,*Lavonda Keel, Brenda Knapp, Gordon Lanier, Connie Lankford, Anna Lee,*Anne Liles, *Mary Evelyn McKee, Louise McPhillips, Koko Mackin, Brucie Mancuso, Nancy Mason, Katherine Shannon Owens, ^{2nd}*Diana Plosser, Anne Proctor, Milner Noel, Ellen Patterson, Ann Proctor, Betsy Rackley, Carolyn Ray, Susie Stockham, Laura Susan Roberts, *Catherine Schiesz, Missy Scott, Katherine Parker Shepherd, Ellen Slaughter, Betsy Smith, *Betty Boyd Sullivan, Libby Tarpley, Lee Van Tassel, Carlyn Turner, *Susan Warnock, Rose Ann Waters, Marjorie White, Jenny Whitmire, Kim Wilcox, Ellen Williams, *Susan Williams, Kim Yarborough, Valentine Yarborough and Peggy Shook Zeiger.

For years, **Birmingham Chapter of the American Institute of Architects volunteers** led tours, illustrated the tour take-home map (Marzette Fischer) and conducted follow-up activities in area classrooms, helping organize and staff the Buddy Up for Building Architectural Awareness program. Architect volunteers: Kyle D'Agostina, Jeff Barton, Paul Bates, Nolanda Bearden, Bob Burns, Paul Callan, Jamie Collins, Donald Cosby, Don Cosper, Marzette Fischer, Jason Fondren, Roman Gary, Eddie Griffith, Wayne Hester, Marina Hobbs, Jeff Johnston, David Jones, Jack Jolley, Kyle Kirkwood, Bruce Lanier, Kelly McLaughlin, Louise McPhillips, Willie Oliver, Ken Ownes, Kris Nikolich, Lawrence Partridge, Charles Penuel, Dean Robinson, Katherine Shannon, Doug Shaddix, Jerry Shadix, Allen Tichansky, and Wayne Williams. Auburn University Center for Architecture and Urban Studies faculty and students also supported Buddy Up Program.

Community volunteers and BHS staff have coordinated the program with the schools and also served as guides: Camille Agricola, Ann Allen-Harper, Susan Atkinson, Lauren Bishop, Alice M. Bowsher, Laura Brown, Karen Brown, Alice M. Bowsher, Brenda Burrell, Carla Caldwell, Ehney Camp IV, Elizabeth Webb Collier, Kathy Courtland, Michelle Crunk, Claire-Louise Datnow, Julie and Christopher Dennis, Karyn Emison, Michelle Falls, Mary-Bester Grant, Joey Hester, Brenda Howell, Bill Jones, Leigh King, Jamie Lipsy, Edgar Marx, Jr., Norma Mauter, Gary McConnell, Beverly Miller, Cathy Muir, Barbara Pierce, Julie Roach, Nigel Roberts, Carole Sanders, Peggy Scott, Carol Slaughter, Marilyn Smith, Patricia Sprague, Barbara White, Marjorie White and Marjorie Lee White.

Ray Martin donated photography and production for *The Downtown Discovery Tour* video. Bettye Lee Hansen lent her marvelous voice. This video serves as pre-tour preparation.

In the late 1970s, curriculum specialist and volunteer Claire-Louise Datnow developed *DOWNTOWN-AN OUTDOOR CLASSROOM*, the background materials for teachers that accompany this tour are now found at www.bhistorical.com.

City of Birmingham school specialists, Lillie M. H. Fincher, Sadie Denson, and Donette Sparks, coordinated the Discovery Tour program with city schools, identifying special teachers to participate. Avondale, Bluff Park, Central Park, Cherokee Bend and Mountain Brook elementary and Advent Day schools have been long term supporters, especially teachers Prudie Felton, Janet Flakes, Louise McClery, Beverly Miller, Pat O'Donoghue, Peggy Scott and Mary Spain.

To our friends—the Birmingham Police and those who have welcomed student groups to Birmingham Realty Co., the Zinszer Bldg.—Spain & Gillon, L.L.C., the Peanut Depot, the Watts Bldg., and the banks AmSouth, Colonial, National Bank of Commerce, SouthTrust, and The Bank—multitudinous thanks for fixing up and sharing your special places.

*To all those who have helped others
discover downtown, we express deep gratitude.*

R e d i s c o v e r i n g
Birmingham's Downtown
A H i s t o r y o f t h e T o u r

What glorious buildings Birmingham's city center had retained by the 1960s and 1970s. Such as they were: dirty, tired, old, dilapidated, and empty. One had to see them with eyes of love. They told the entire story of our city.

In 1976, the Birmingham Historical Society—with grants from the National Trust for Historic Preservation, the Junior League of Birmingham and the Linn-Henley Charitable Trust—formulated its DOWNTOWN DISCOVERY TOUR for school children. The program included a guided tour, a slide show (now a video), and teachers' handbooks and workshops. (Teacher materials are now on the web at www.bhistorical.org.)

In the 1970s, adults were not interested in GOING DOWNTOWN to look at old, rundown places. But children could see the beauty and the possibilities.

In the years that followed, enthusiastic volunteers led equally enthused students—principally third and fourth graders, but also occasionally adults—encouraging them to DISCOVER DOWNTOWN.

By the mid 1980s, the adults began buying up the old, tired buildings and fixing them up for new uses. The children cheered and wrote thank you letters as building after building was revived.

Today, local owners have restored and rehabbed hundreds of buildings. Entire districts within the city center thrive with new businesses. Cultural institutions have grown too. And many people live and work once again in the city center.

Bankers and lawyers, utility and insurance company employees, merchants, small business owners and government employees head to work here.

Now people who say they're going DOWNTOWN are probably headed to a museum or a festival, or to take a DOWNTOWN DISCOVERY TOUR to learn to look, to see and to appreciate the buildings and from whence they came . . . and the stories they have to tell.

It's a new century. Children who discovered DOWNTOWN as students now lead the tours and teach the children who take them, encouraging all to LOOK and SEE, ENJOY and CARE for our city's heritage.

The Birmingham Historical Society program, a pioneering effort in heritage education, has received national press and awards and continues to serve as a national model for efforts across America. The Discovery Tour begins its 25th year in 2002.

Defining Downtown

To generations, *downtown* was a magical place. . . full of bright lights and traffic . . . the place to linger a while, to shop or take in a movie.

Petula Clark's hit tune summed up the experience of *going downtown* in the 1960s, a time when downtowns across America were changing.

In the years following World War II, rapid construction of new suburban communities—accessed by new federally funded roads—expanded

the limits of our nation's cities. New shopping centers and malls, and later office parks nearer the new homes, provided new shopping and entertainment. To get there, suburbanites drove cars, lots and lots and lots of them.

No longer did one have to go *downtown* to work, to shop or to be entertained.

No longer did streetcars, buses and trains provide superb public transit to and from the city center, as they had for nearly 100 years.

Downtown

Lyrics by Tony Hatch, as recorded by Petula Clark in 1964

When you're alone and life is making you lonely
you can always go—downtown.

When you got worries, all the noise and the hurry
Seems to help, I know—downtown.

Just listen to the music of the traffic in the city.
Linger on the sidewalks where the neon signs are pretty.
How can you lose?

The lights are much brighter there.
You can forget all your troubles, forget all your cares.
So go downtown, things'll be great when you're
Downtown—no finer place, for sure
Downtown—everything's waiting for you.

Don't hang around and let your problems surround you,
There are movie shows—downtown.
Maybe you know some little places to go to
where they never close—downtown.
Just listen to the rhythm of a gentle bossa nova.
You'll be dancing with him too before the night is over,
Happy again.

The lights are much brighter there.
You can forget all your troubles, forget all your cares.

So go downtown where all the lights are bright.
Downtown—waiting for you tonight.
Downtown—you're gonna be all right now.

And you may find somebody kind to help
and understand you.
Someone who is just like you and needs a gentle hand to
guide them along.

So maybe I'll see you there.
We can forget all our troubles, forget all our cares.
So go downtown, things'll be great when you're
Downtown—don't wait a minute more
Downtown—everything's waiting for you.

Downtown, downtown, downtown, downtown. . . .

British singer Petula Clark's Grammy-winning performance of *Downtown* helped her become the first English woman to hit the top of the American music charts. The Welbeck Music Ltd. Of London, England recording of this 1964 song has been re-released on CD as *Downtown: The Greatest Hits of Petula Clark*, BMG Distribution, Buddha Records 74446559671 2. Tony Hatch's 1964 lyrics are reprinted with the permission of MCA Music Publishing, a division of MCA, Inc., NY, NY.

Brief History of *Birmingham's Downtown*

Just a little more than 125 years ago, Downtown Birmingham was a cornfield, surrounded by forests. In nearby hills lay rich deposits of coal, iron ore and limestone—the materials for making iron and steel.

In 1870, the track for two railroads was headed our way. At the point the lines crossed, someone would build a city at the center of the mineral region.

Southerners bought up the farmlands and planned a “magic little industrial city.” They named it Birmingham, after the thriving English industrial center.

By the late 1880s, iron ores poured forth from Red Mountain mines and coal was mined from the Warrior and Cahaba fields. Sloss and many other furnaces made these minerals into pig iron. Foundries poured the iron to make pipe and stoves.

People flocked to the booming city from all over the Southern and Northern industrial centers of the United States and from foreign nations. Brick buildings—trimmed with “fancy details”—lined downtown streets. Birmingham was one of the largest cities in the South. Everyone called it “The Magic City.”

At the turn of the 20th century, another boom began. Ten railroads laid track to the city center. Mines and mills continued to produce iron and steel. The skies were filled with soot, a welcome sign of prosperity.

Downtown emerged as the financial and service center for the industrial city. The barons of iron and steel, doctors, lawyers, bankers, businessmen, public officials, merchants and shopkeepers all had offices and stores downtown.

This was a Southern city, a city in black and white. Jim Crow laws maintained the separation of races into separate geographic districts. In the 1910s, Fourth Avenue developed as the black business district, with stores, services and theaters here catering to captive consumers.

Taking advantage of newly invented steel-frame construction, tall and elaborate “skyscrapers” rose on downtown street corners, drastically changing the skyline and providing work space for thousands of workers. Streetcars—a superb system of mass transit—got them here and back home. The city enjoyed the second (to Los Angeles) longest trackage in the nation.

The construction boom continued throughout the 1920s, with buildings becoming more and more elaborate. With the depression of the 1930s, “hard times came to Birmingham and stayed longest,” as the local saying goes. There was little new construction for a long time.

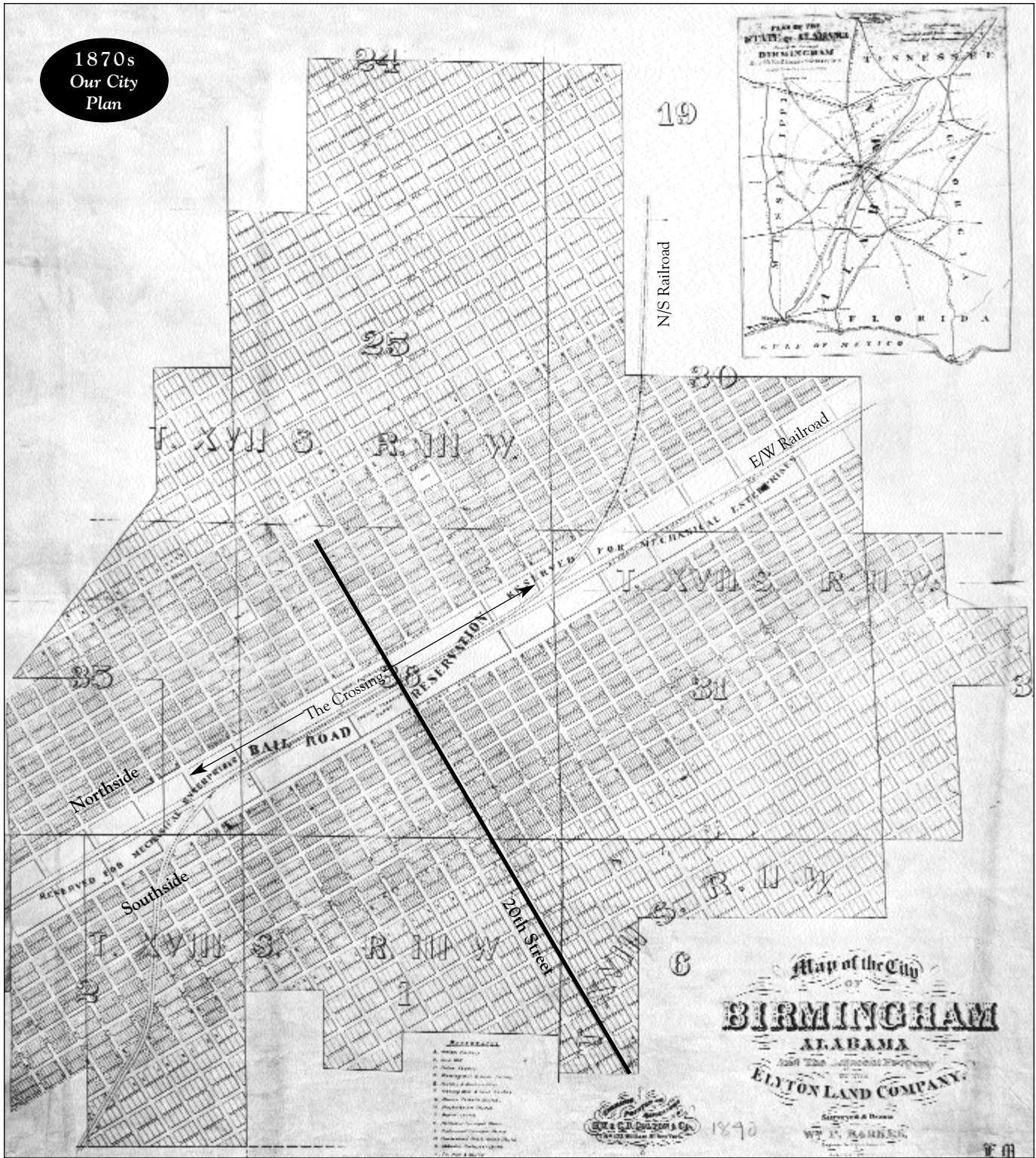
During the 1960s, civil rights organizers staged boycotts and marches to downtown stores and City Hall protesting local segregation laws. In May of 1963, thousands of children joined the nonviolent marches, forcing the federal government to enact legislation guaranteeing freedom in public accommodations to all Americans. The national battle for civil rights was won on downtown Birmingham streets.

At the city’s centennial in 1971, several office towers and the Civic Center complex rose. The landscaping of 20th Street reestablished 20th as the main axis and traditional heart of the city center. Later, trees lined all city center streets.

In the 1980s, historic preservation returned many buildings to new uses. Attractive new buildings complemented the old. Banks, utilities, cultural institutions and city-wide festivals grew. By the 1990s, enthusiastic urbanites also filled “lofty” living spaces.

Today, buildings of every period of our city’s history line our streets. Unseen and unnoticed by the average person, they offer a fabulous record of Birmingham’s growth.

*With an alert eye, you can DISCOVER
the stories they have to tell.*



As this 1870s map shows, 20th Street—leading from Red Mountain across Southside (the south side of the tracks) and early industrial, business and residential districts to a central park—forms

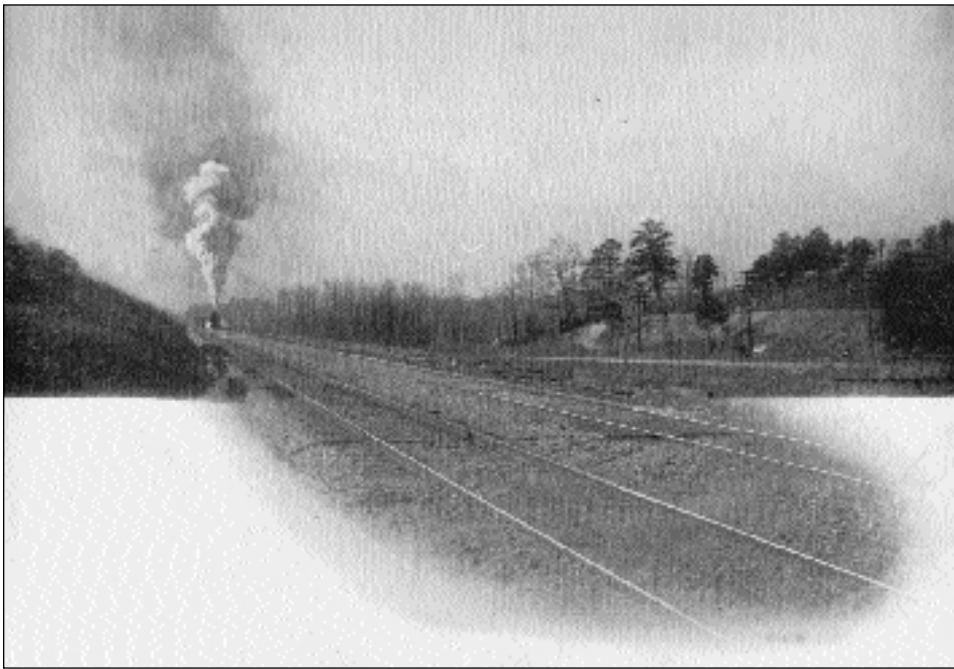
the spine of the city. At the core of the orderly streets and avenues are the reservations for railroads and industrial enterprises.

Founding the City

Our Historic Heart

Most cities have a place where it all began.

Birmingham began at the crossing of two railroads. For a distance of 14 blocks, their tracks run parallel to one another. On either side of the tracks, railroad engineers laid out the lots and blocks, streets and avenues of our city on both the north and the south sides of the tracks.



City fathers had bought up the farmlands and forests. On these 4,150 acres, they planned Birmingham. At the core of their plan were the wide reservations for railroad and mechanical enterprises. To these reservations, they sought to attract industry to grow their speculative venture. They incorporated Birmingham on December 19, 1871.

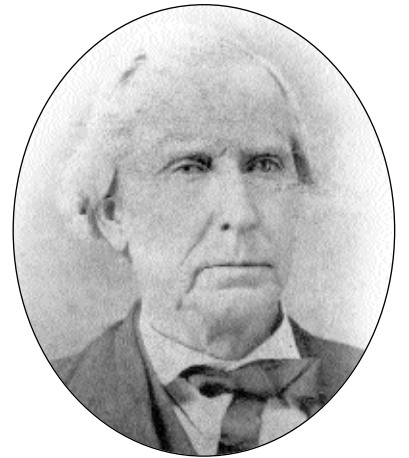
Col. James R. Powell ran the company that founded Birmingham and also served as Mayor. A successful stagecoach operator, Powell had traveled extensively across Europe and visited British industrial centers. In his vision, Alabama's Birmingham centered within a great mineral region would become an industrial giant unlike other cities in the rural, agrarian South.



John T. Milner
Railroad engineer
(1826-1898)

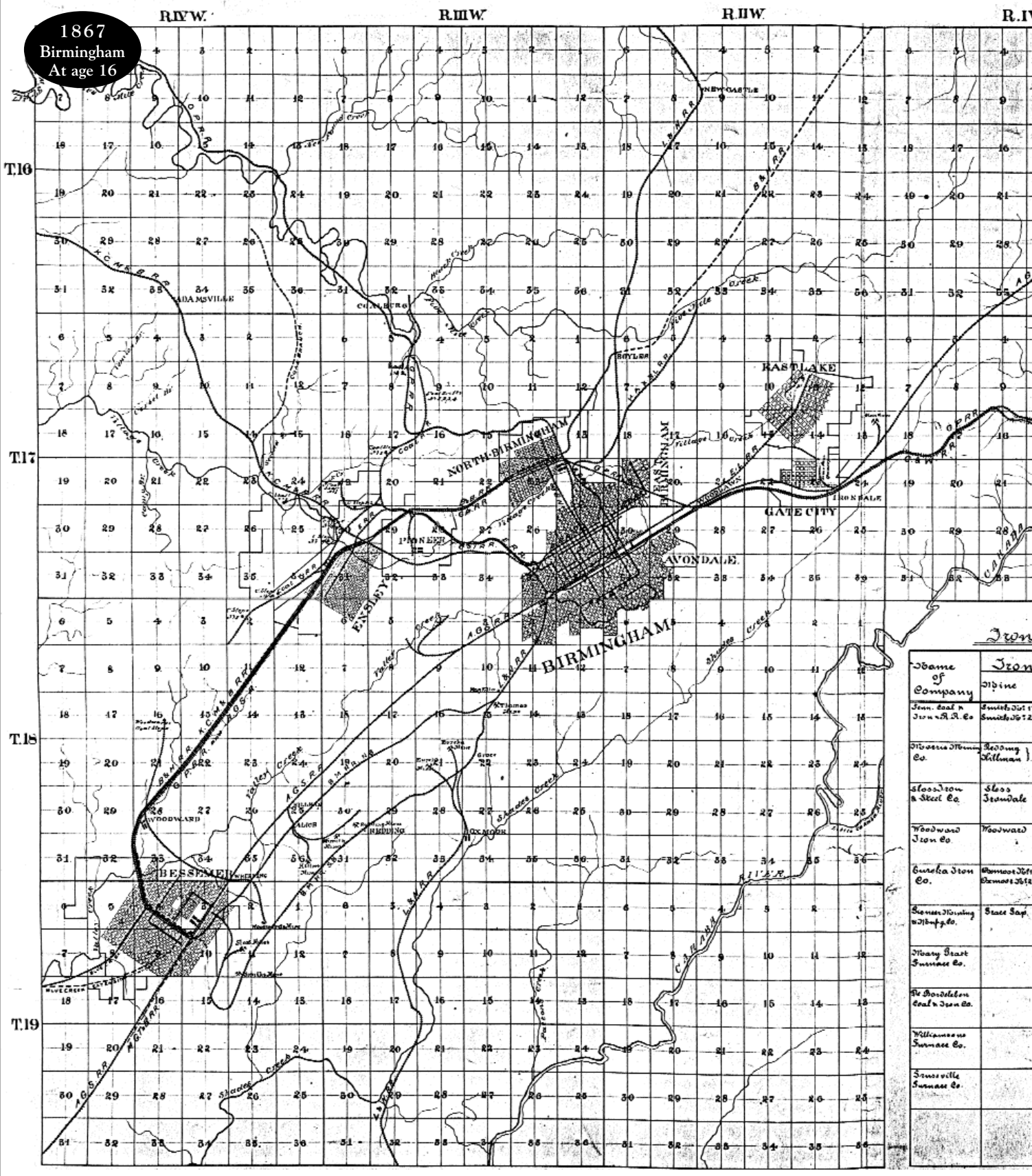


Josiah Morris
Montgomery banker
(1818-1891)



Col. James R. Powell
Planter/stagecoach operator
(1814-1876)

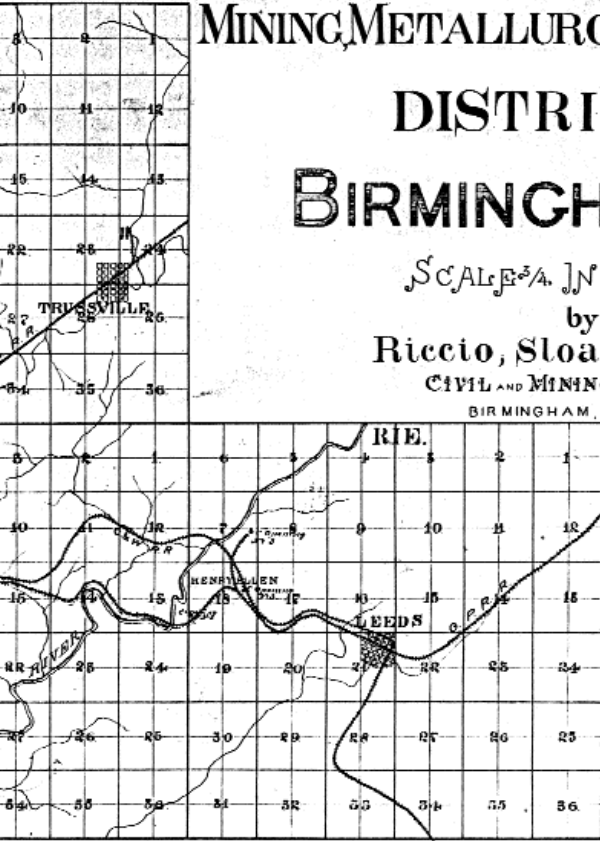
1867
Birmingham
At age 16



Name of Company	Iron Mine
Jenn. Coal & Iron Co.	Smiths Out 17 Smiths 26 27
Divisive Iron Co.	Bedding Millman
Good Iron & Steel Co.	Shoo Standale
Woodward Iron Co.	Woodward
Garfield Iron Co.	Womans 26 27 Dumars 26 27
Boyer Mining Co.	State Sap
Henry Best Furnace Co.	
St. Rosellen Coal & Iron Co.	
Williamson Furnace Co.	
Stovessville Furnace Co.	

THE MINING, METALLURGIC & INDUSTRIAL DISTRICT OF BIRMINGHAM, ALA.

SCALE 2 1/4 INCH = 1 MILE
by
Riccio, Sloan & Vedeler
CIVIL AND MINING ENGRS. ARCHTS.
BIRMINGHAM, ALA. P.O.B. 514-



Note:
 ——— Constructed Railways
 - - - Proposed Railways
 i Furnace
 * Iron Ore Mine
 • Coal Mine

Magic Minerals

The rapid building of railroads, mines, and mills made Birmingham a city that grew like magic. During the 1880s, on sites superbly located with respect to minerals and transportation, 10 furnace companies began making iron.

Messrs. Riccio, Sloan and Vedeler made this map documenting the mineral region's amazing growth. They sited railroads, furnaces, and iron ore and coal mines, noting their names and production.

Birmingham—the city at the center of the region—is the grid of streets and avenues at the hub of the surrounding industrial centers: Bessemer, Ensley, North Birmingham, East Birmingham, Avondale, East Lake, Gate City, Trussville and Leeds.

Production.

Ore		Pig Metal	
Daily Output Tons	Wkly Output Tons	Days in Year	Annual Output Tons
1500		2	600
250	500		
265		2	175
135		2	200
330		2	185
325		2	150
		2	180
		4	45
		2	250
		1	50
		2	200

Coal & Coke Production.

Name of Company	Locality	Coal		Coke		
		Daily Output Tons	Wkly Output Tons	Daily Output Tons	Wkly Output Tons	Days in Year
Jenn Coal & Iron Co.	Sherrill Mines Alice Furnace	11	2900	4000	1250	575
Sherrill Coal & Iron Co.	Sherrill Coals	3	250	500		
Sloss Iron & Steel Co.	Coalington Jones Furnace Sloss Furnace	3	800	1000	227	90
Woodward Iron Co.	Woodward Mines	2	50	500	500	205
Jenny Allen Coal Co.	Jenny Allen	3	300	500	125	100
Jenn Coal & Iron Co.	Sherrill Mines	2	100			
	Sherrill	1	75	125		
	Jefferson	1	75	125		
Truett Mining Co.	Warrior	1	100			
Water Coal & Iron Co.	Warrior	1	100			
Sloss Furnace Coal & Coke Co.	Walden Old Shaft	1	200			
	Old Shaft	1	100			
Alabama Coal & Mining Co.	Blackton		700	2000	375	300
De Barre Coal & Iron Co.	Bessemer				375	250
						50

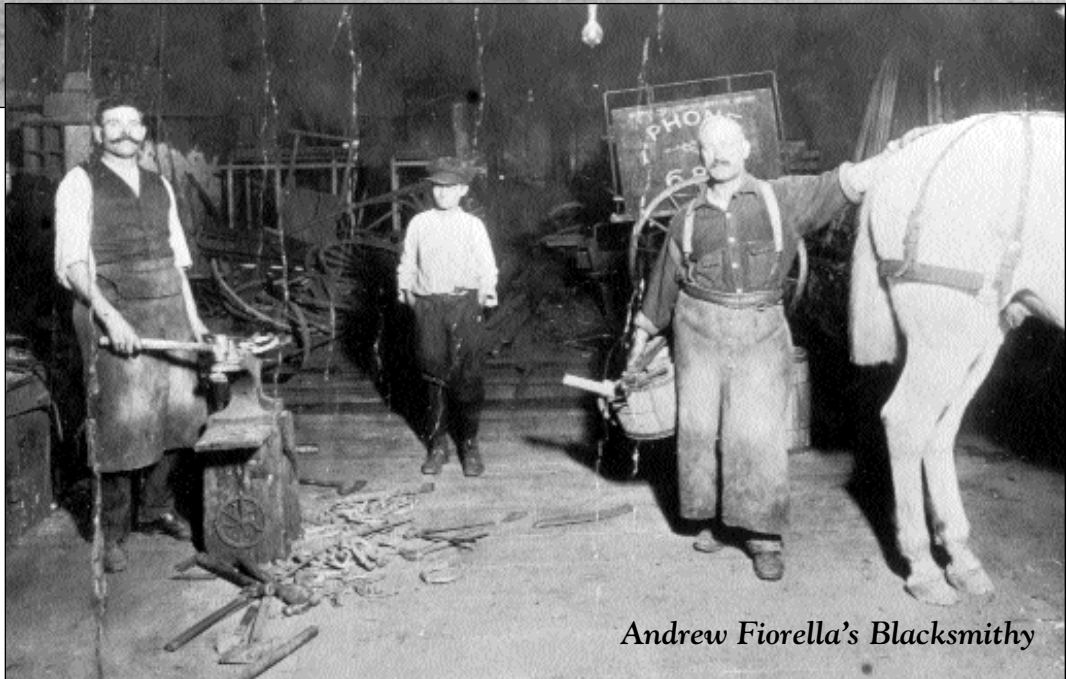
1899
20th Street

L&N Shed

L&N
Station

Elyton
Land
Co.

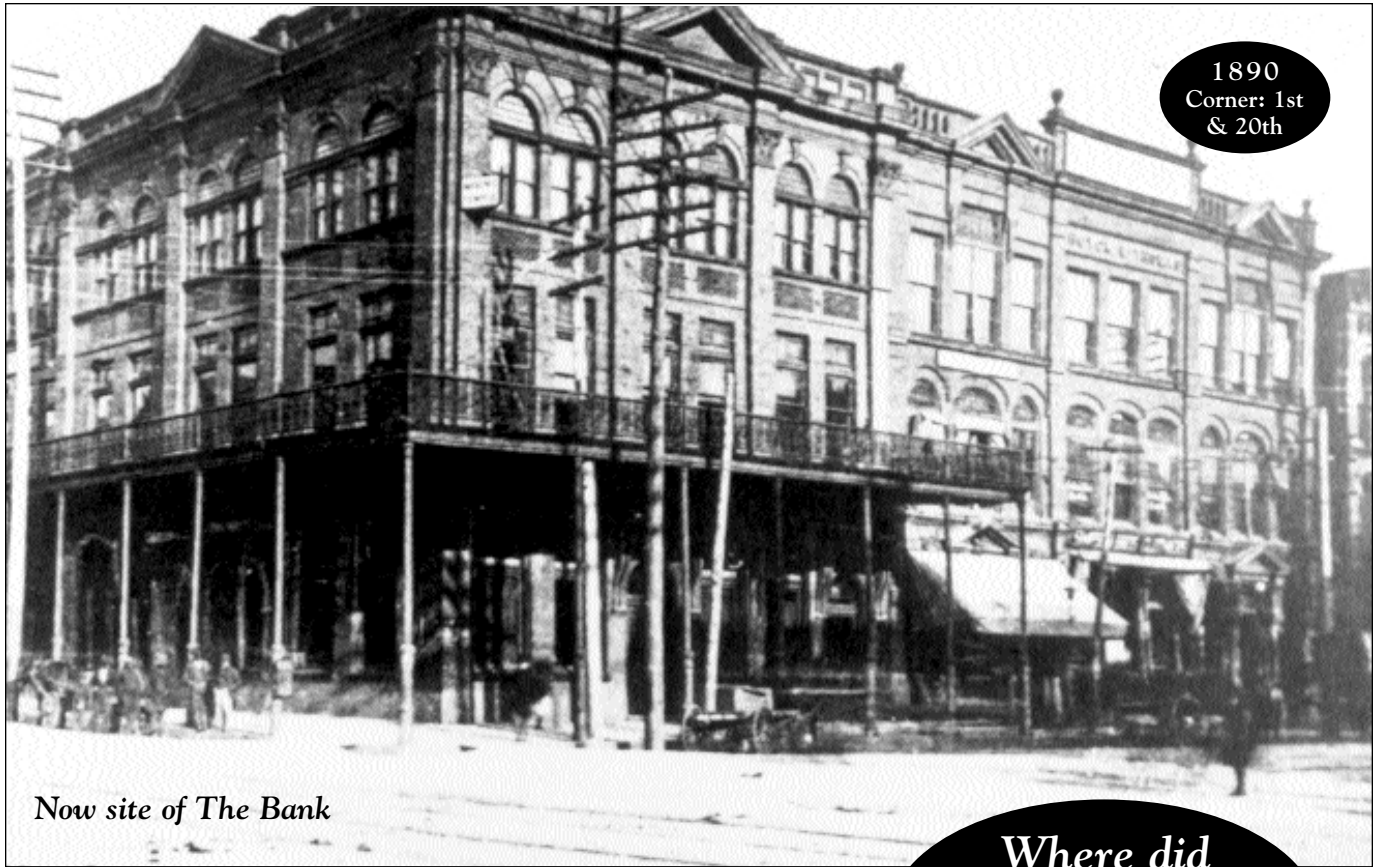
*Looking north
on 20th Street*



Andrew Fiorella's Blacksmithy

Twenty years after its founding, Birmingham was the main city of the Alabama mineral region. Its commercial core of offices and stores extended from the railroad tracks north to Third Avenue.

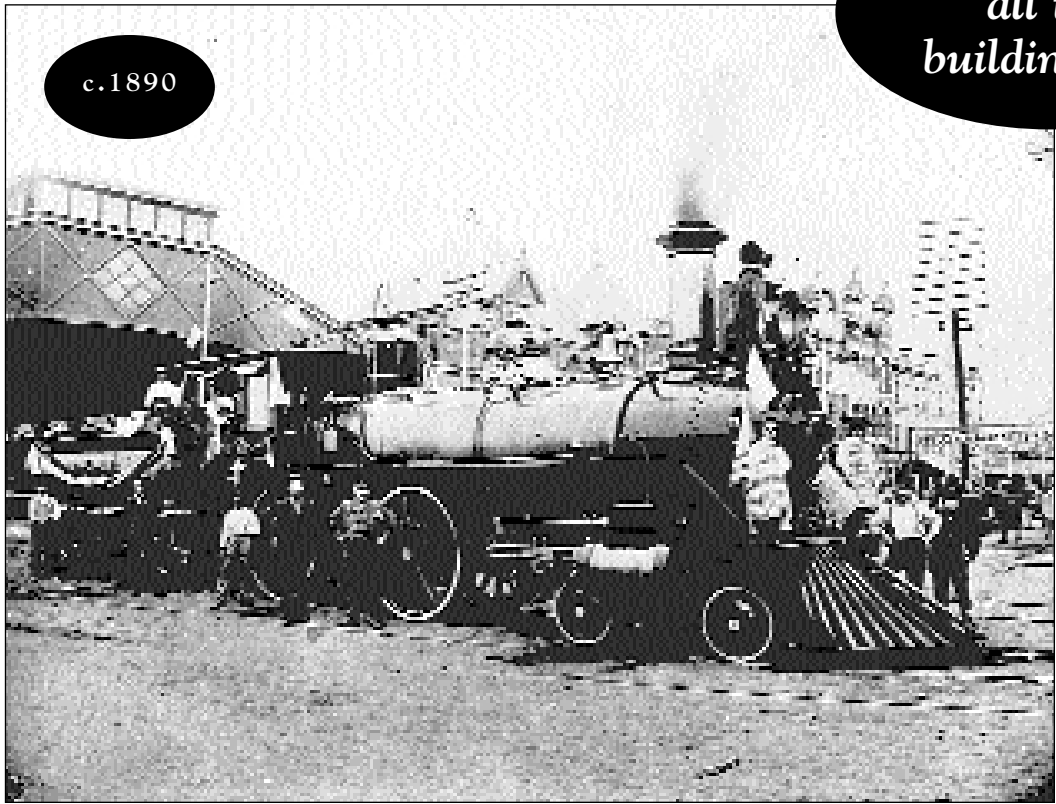
Horse-drawn wagons and streetcars transported people and goods through the early city's wide, dirt streets, keeping many a blacksmith busy shoeing horses.



1890
Corner: 1st
& 20th

Now site of The Bank

Where did
all the
buildings go?



c.1890

Incoming trains brought new arrivals to the booming industrial city.

1898

L&N
Station

L&N Shed



*Look carefully.
The streetcar
is electric!*

City life at the turn of the century centered upon the comings and goings at L&N Station. In this photograph well-wishers fill the train shed and 20th Street as they bid goodbye to volunteers leaving to fight in the Spanish-American War. At this time, trains pulled straight into the shed to load and unload passengers.

1908
20th Street



Looking north from Second Avenue

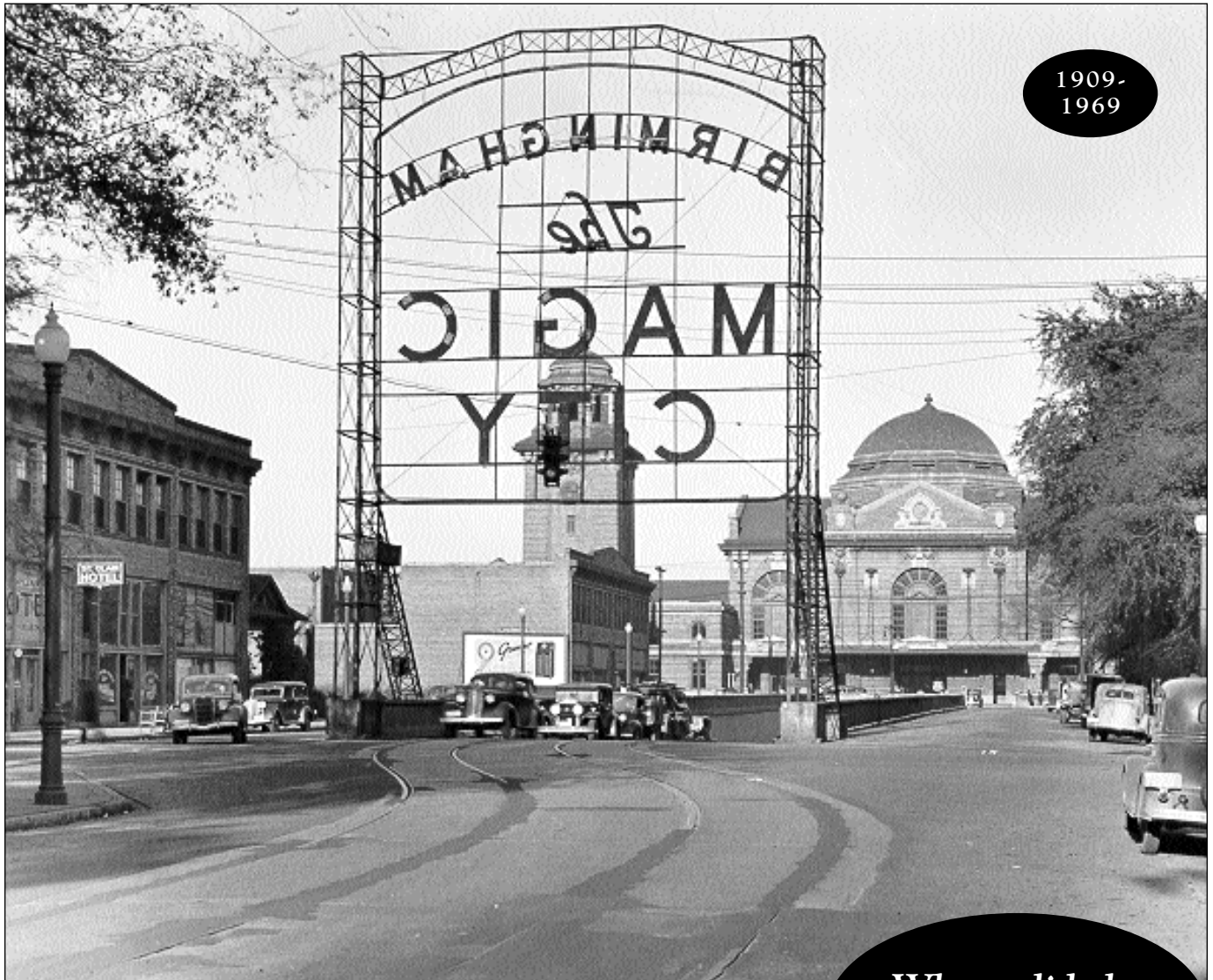
By 1900, our out-of-nowhere Magic City had become Alabama's largest with a population of more than 38,000. In 1910, through consolidation with surrounding industrial suburbs, the City's

population rose to 132,685. A proven producer of iron, cast iron pipe, and steel rail, Birmingham was the South's largest industrial workplace.



Skyscrapers, streetcars, power poles, and electric lights in this view of Birmingham’s main street reflect the amenities of the fast growing, up-to-date urban center. City boosters called the intersection

where four skyscrapers—including the Brown Marx and Empire buildings shown in this photograph—rose at the “Heaviest Corner on Earth.”



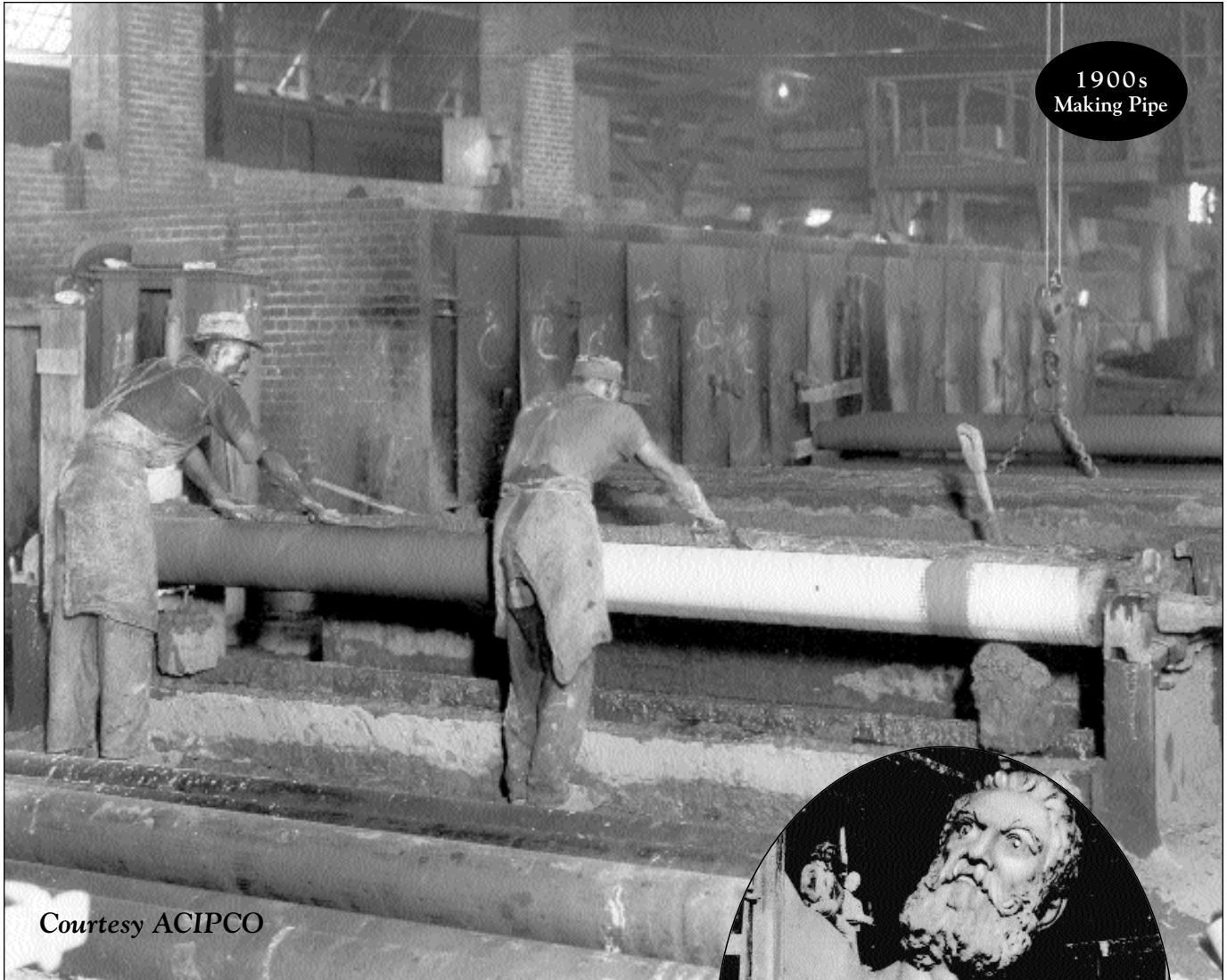
1909-
1969

*Where did the
station go?*

Accompanying Birmingham's population surge were increases in every other indicator of prosperity: jobs, income, personal spending, home and office construction. The Birmingham city center became a commercial, financial, and transportation center for the region.

By 1910, nine railroads served Birmingham. Railroads carried everything from thumb tacks to industrial equipment. In 1909, the Southern Railroad built the buff brick Terminal Station with its massive dome and towers. At the time this photograph was made, 98 passenger trains arrived and departed daily. The station served as Birmingham's gateway to the world.

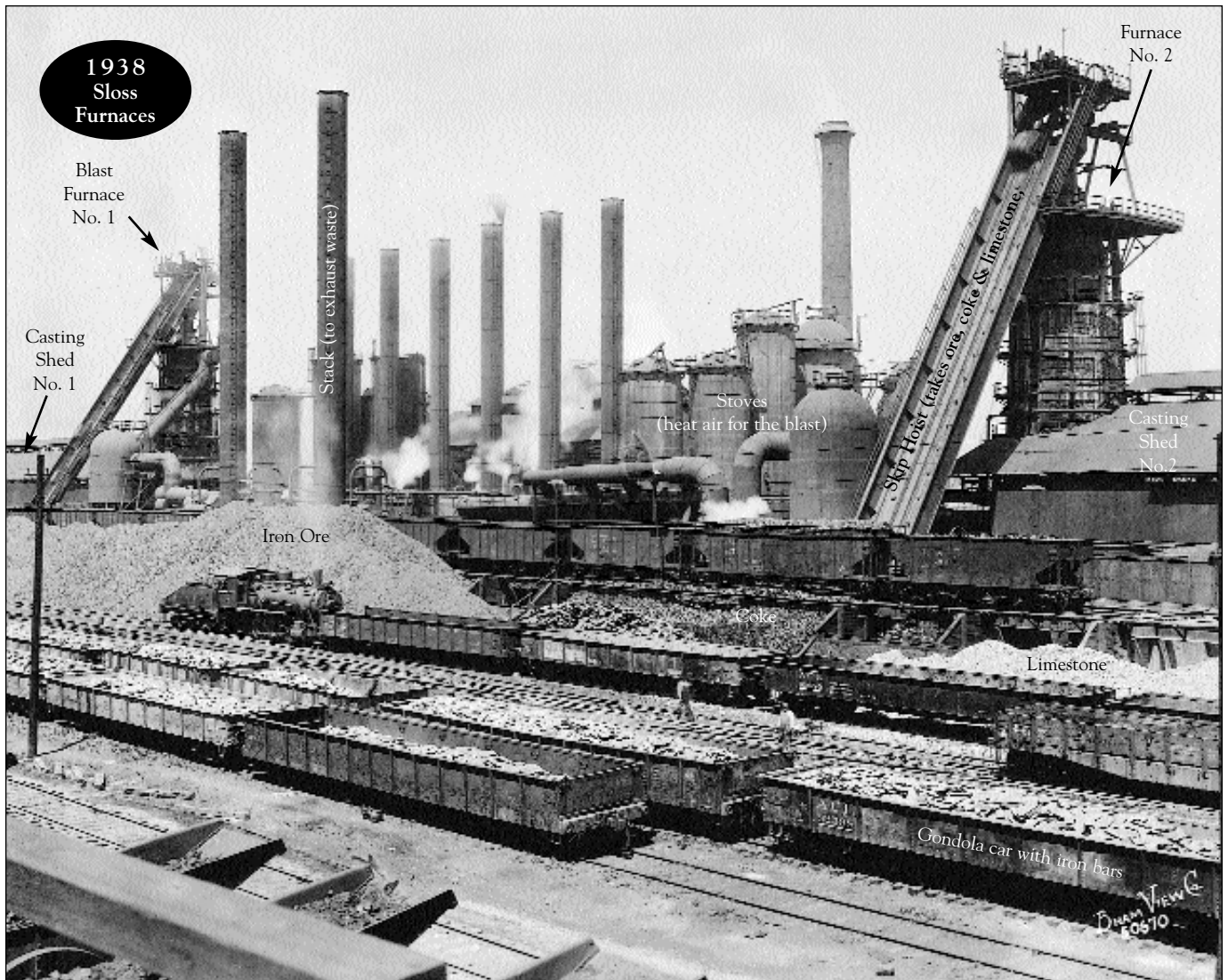
1900s
Making Pipe



Courtesy ACIPCO

Blast furnace companies sold iron to foundries. The foundries remelted and poured it into molds to produce castings, including pipe, stoves and engines. With a steady supply of low-cost iron, Birmingham established itself as the center of cast-iron pipe manufacture in America.

Vulcan, Roman god of iron and smithing and Birmingham's symbol of its emerging iron and steel industry, was the state's exhibit at the St. Louis World's Fair in 1904.



The Sloss Company built these furnaces to make iron, and money. Iron ore, coke and limestone delivered via rail are being loaded onto conveyors and transported via skip hoists into the two blast furnaces. Using these locally mined minerals, the

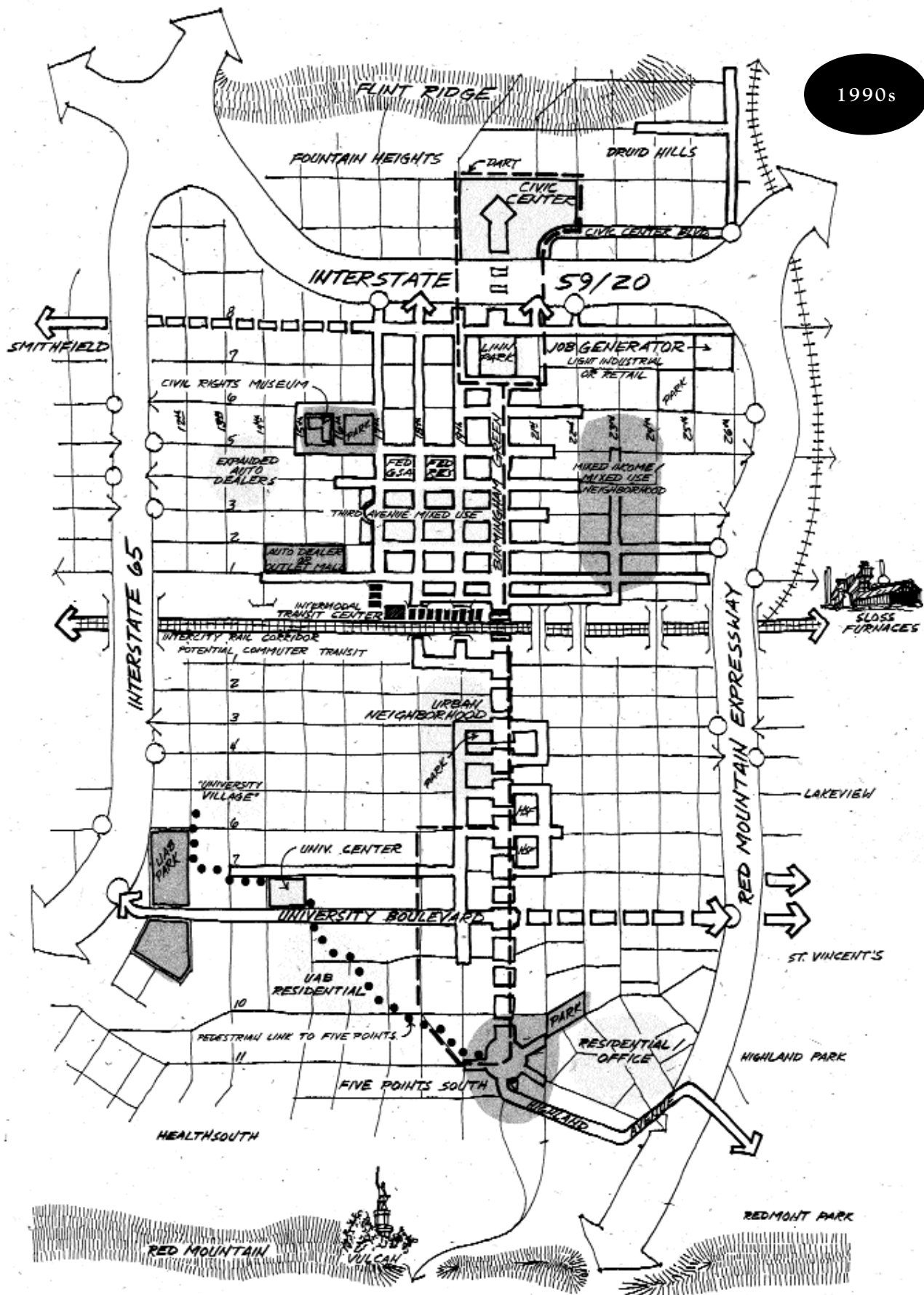
furnaces produced iron bars used to make cast iron stoves, cotton gins, steel, and especially cast iron pipe. Sloss became America's largest producer of iron. Today, these furnaces, silent since 1970, are open to visitors, metal workers and festivals.



By the 1930s, solid blocks of brick structures lined downtown streets that flanked the railroad tracks and the L & N Station. Proud locals called 20th Street's office towers Birmingham's "Grand Canyon." Movies, entertainment and anything for sale could be found in Birmingham's Theater and Retail and Fourth Avenue Districts. In the 1950s, new construction would complete Linn Park's municipal complex, not shown in this photograph. New office buildings would rise in the final quarter of the 20th century, and historic preservation would bring new uses to the city's fine "old buildings."

This sketch of the city center, and of that same farmland purchased by the company that founded Birmingham in 1871, shows northside and southside (of the railroads), surrounding highways, and proposed new uses.

1990s



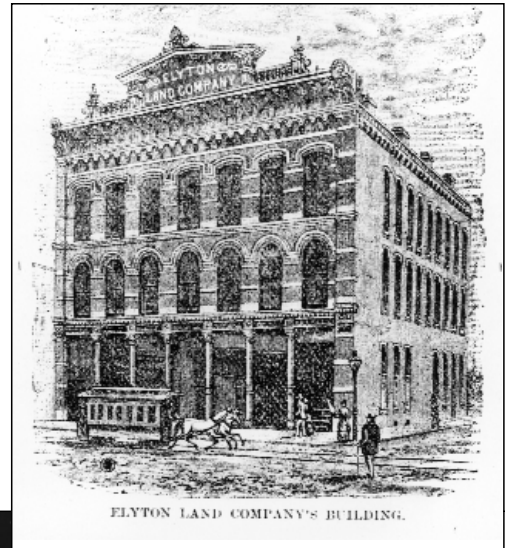
Courtesy Operation New Birmingham

Birmingham Realty Company

Speculators & Their Magic Industrial City

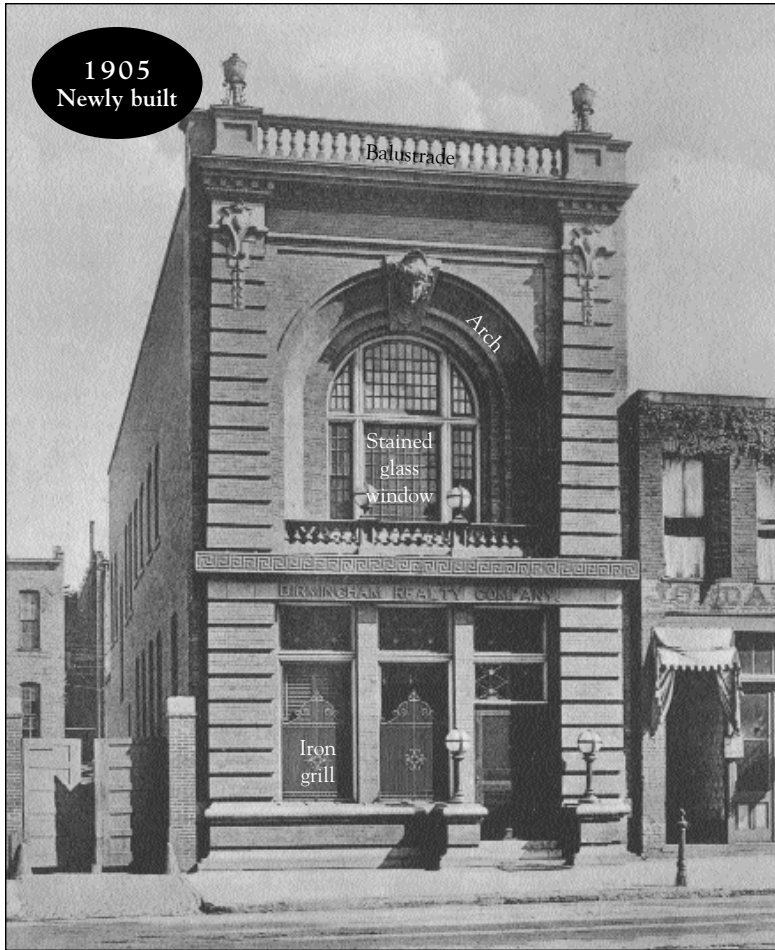
In December 1870, ten men formed the Elyton Land Company. Their intent was to buy land and build a city at the center of the Alabama mineral region. They bought 4,150 acres and named the future city Birmingham after the world's largest industrial center: Birmingham, England.

James R. Powell became company president, as well as mayor and promoter of his dream for this "magic little industrial city." Birmingham would grow to become the South's largest industrial center.



Photographed in front of the Elyton Land Company's 20th Street offices are the men who bought the land, laid out the streets and avenues, brought in industries, and got the city rolling.

Both the name "Elyton" and the company remain today. Elyton is the residential neighborhood surrounding the Arlington Antebellum Home & Gardens.



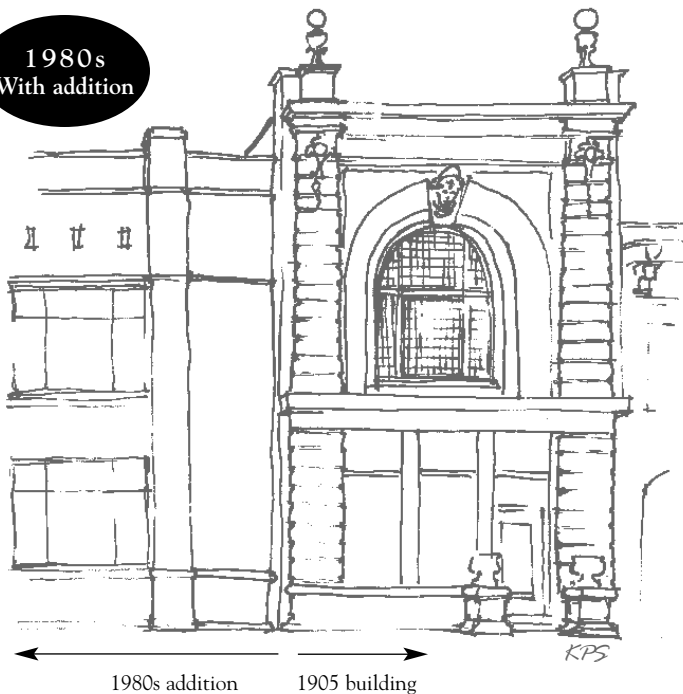
1905
Newly built



2000
Well preserved

The Elyton Land Company changed its name to Birmingham Realty Company and built these offices that remain today. It also took good care of its building.

1980s
With addition



← 1980s addition 1905 building →

I S P Y

Awake Visual Awareness

History is where you find it. An important record lines our streets. Unseen and unnoticed, buildings offer fascinating visual records.

Find things that remain the same.

Camera Close Up

Focus On Details



Most people see little of their immediate environment. Whether out of habit or preoccupation, we see only a fraction of

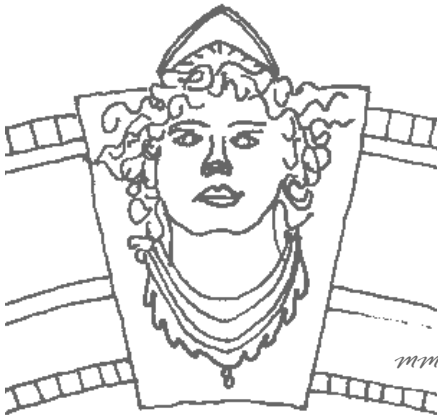
that at which we look. By training our eyes to see in detail, our world grows in interest and quality.

A Borrowed Air of Authority

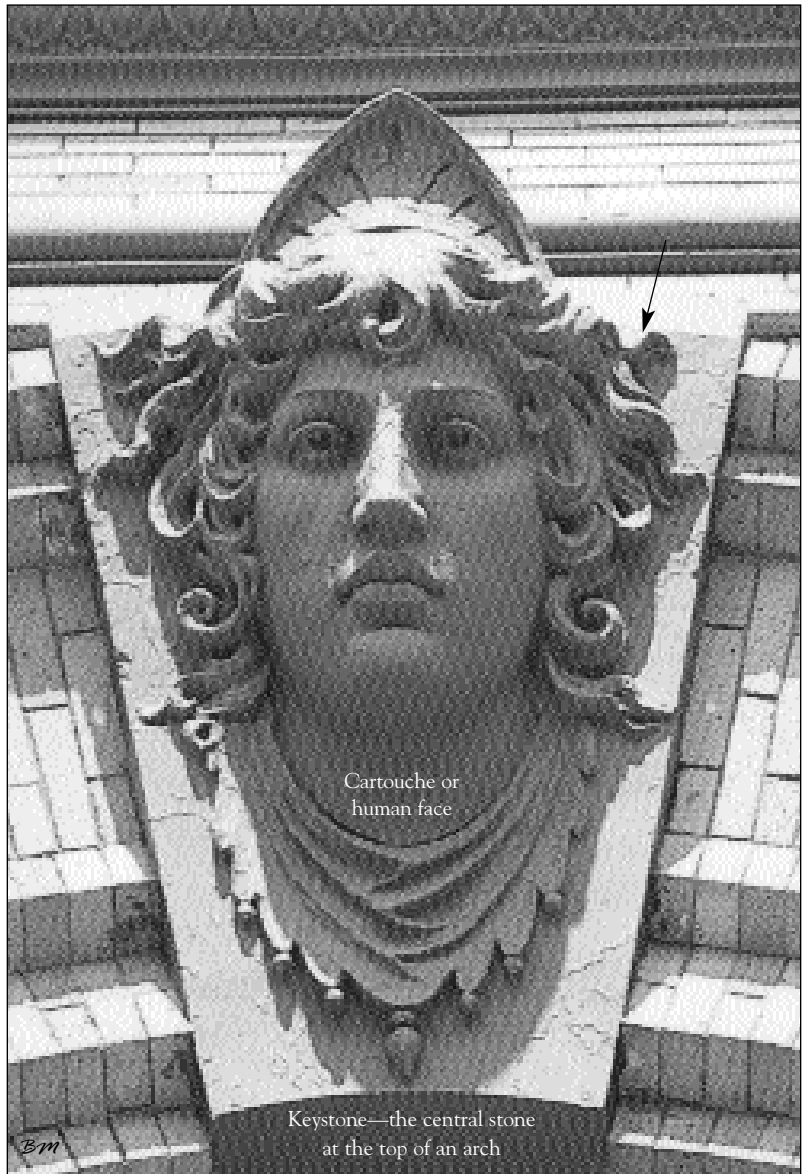
A Classical Details Hunt

Art historians describe the style of the Birmingham Realty Building as *Classical Revival*. Its designer found inspiration in the buildings of the Greeks and Romans. In 1905, all things *classical* were popular. So was a certain Roman smith who could make everything, as could area industries in this era.

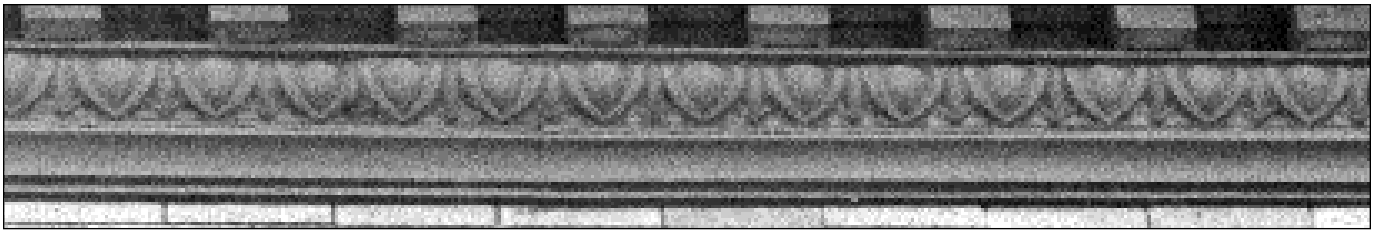
Why build
a Roman
“look-alike”?



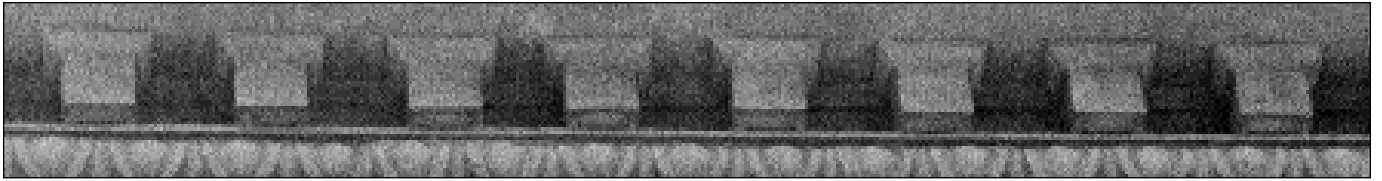
Cartouche representing a Roman messenger set in a keystone



Keystone—the central stone at the top of an arch



Egg-and-dart molding—an egg-shaped ornament alternating with a dart-like ornament



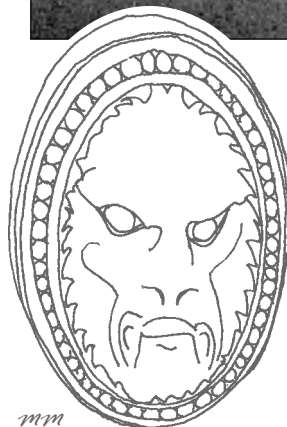
Dentils—a series of closely shaped ornamental blocks resembling teeth



Greek key molding—which must resemble ancient keys



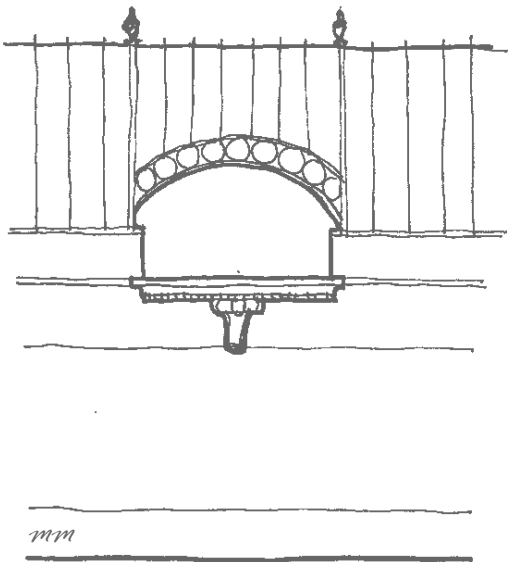
Brass lion, the king of beasts!



Acanthus—a common plant of the Mediterranean region whose leaves often appear in ornament

**Find these
classical
details.**

Selling the City-Block By Block

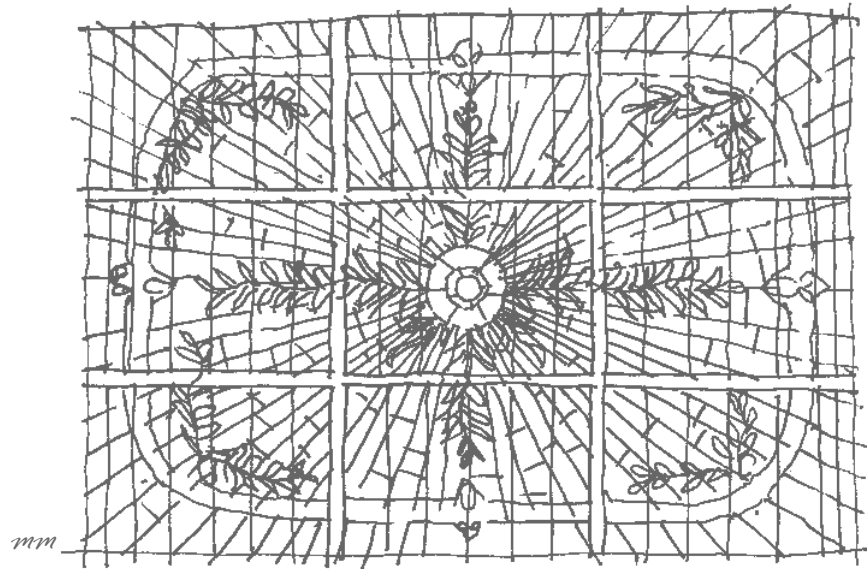


Teller cage with decorative ironwork.

Inside, the company offices looks much like they did at the opening in 1905. A dramatic sky-lit chamber welcomes and impresses visitors. Then, patrons walked up to the teller windows and purchased land upon which they built homes and offices and industrial plants.

Along the walls hang the maps showing the land that the company divided into building lots and sold: the Birmingham city center, Highland Avenue, Norwood Boulevard, Chestnut Hills and Forest Park.

**A REALTY company
deals with REALTY. It buys,
sells and develops land,
buildings, and our city.**



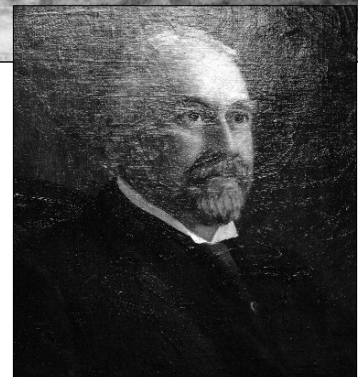
A golden light enters the interior through the open, second-story gallery. Stained glass found extensive use in office and church windows in the early 20th century.

Steiner Building

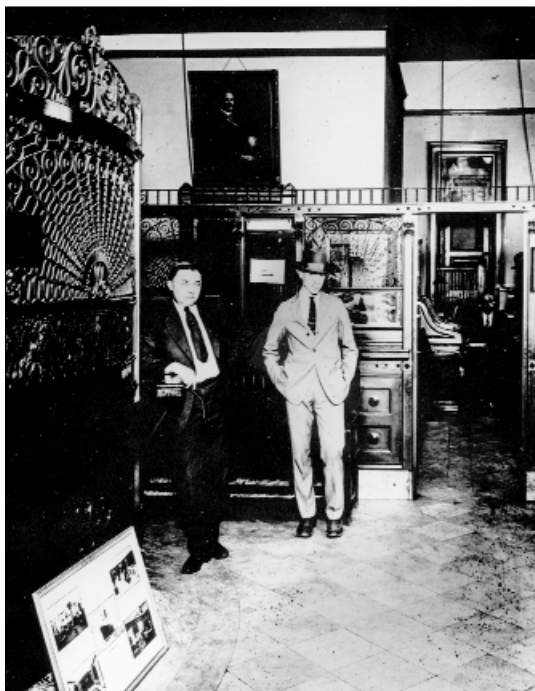
Banking on Birmingham-Steiner Brothers & Their Building



Burghard Steiner (1857-1923)



Sigfried Steiner (1859-1902)



Carl Steiner, left, receiving customers in the Steiner Brothers Banking Chambers, 2101 First Avenue North. Courtesy Arnold Steiner.

Three generations of Steiner brothers ran Steiner Bank. Burghard and Siegfried Steiner came to Alabama from Bohemia, now part of the Czech Republic. In 1888, they opened an investment bank, convincing people worldwide to invest in and help Birmingham and Alabama grow. The brothers later moved their international banking business to New York City.

Their cousins Carl and Leo Steiner—and later Carl and Leo's grandsons Arnold and Bernard Steiner—ran Steiner Bank as a commercial bank, offering customers savings and checking accounts, loans and friendly, personal service.



Banking House & Gentlemen's Office

OLD BUILDINGS

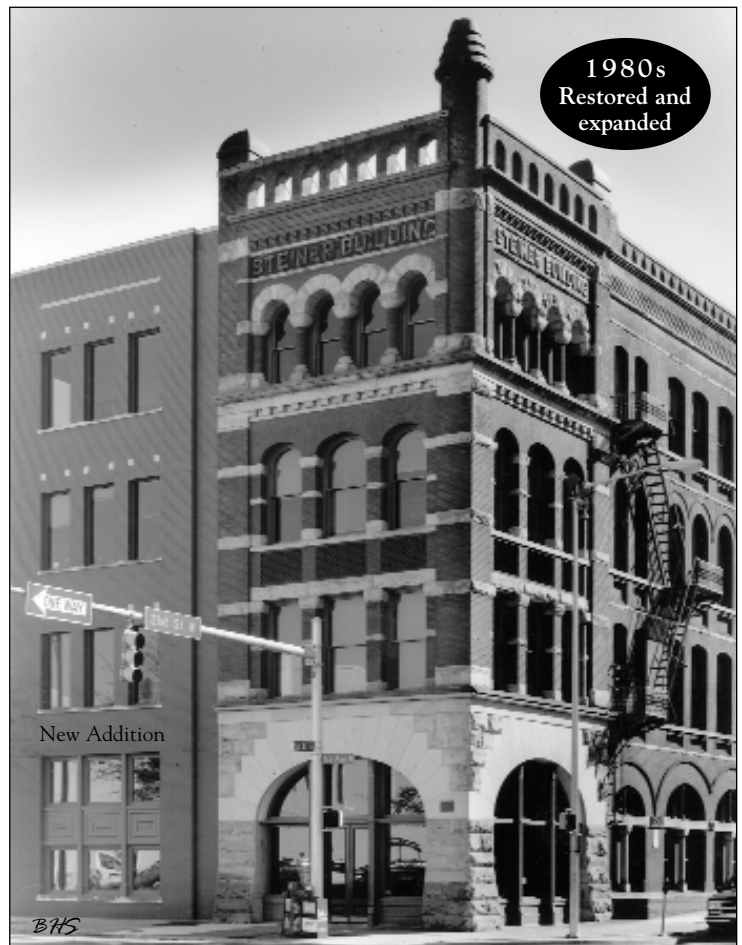
Our city's oldest office buildings are
2 to 4-STORIES TALL
BUILT OF BRICK with
LOTS OF FANCY DETAIL.

In 1890, Steiner Brothers built
this robust brick and stone bank.

*Are these the
same building?*



Commercial Bank



Offices for architects and investment bankers

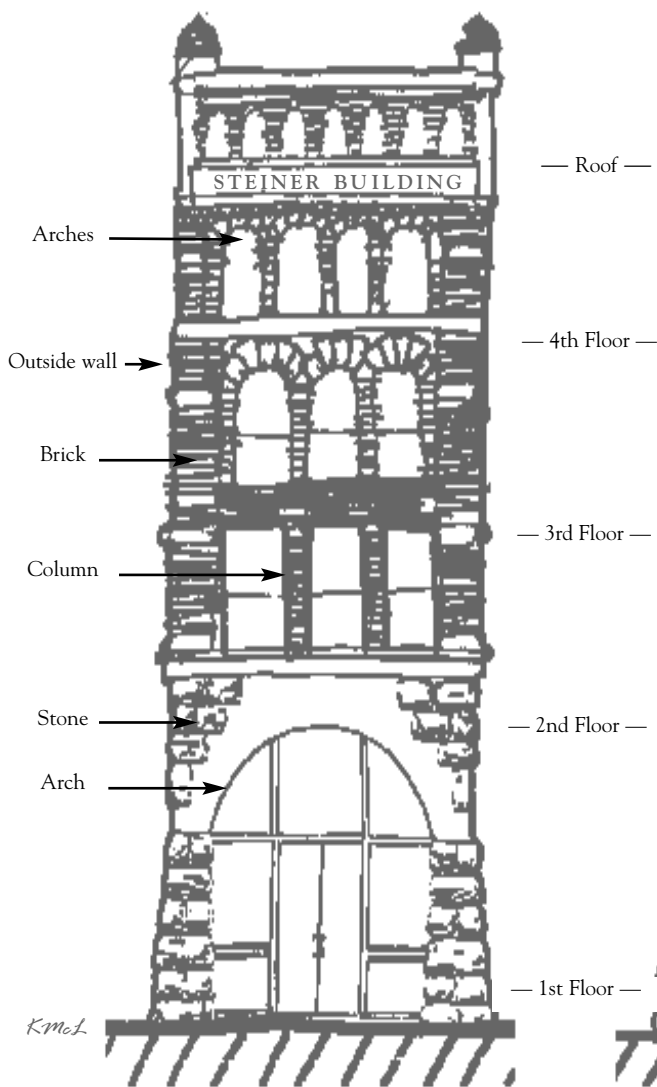
HOW OLD BUILDINGS STAND UP

Old buildings have strong outside walls. The walls carry the floors. The people inside the building stand on the floors. This weight goes back into the wall. (A weight is also called a load.)

The strong outside walls are called **LOAD BEARING WALLS**. Load bearing walls are made of materials like stone and brick.

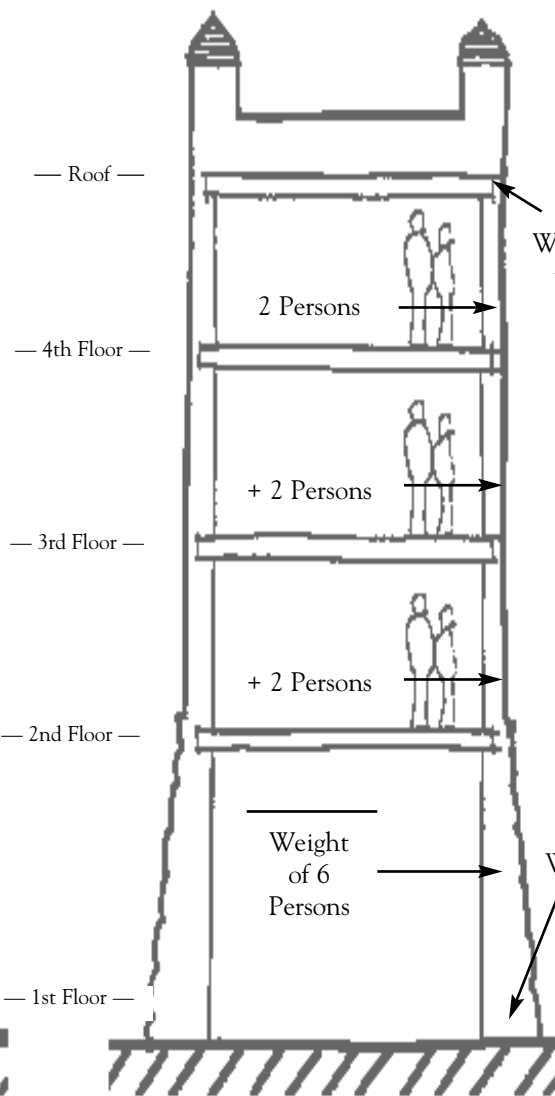
Outside

Looking at the building face

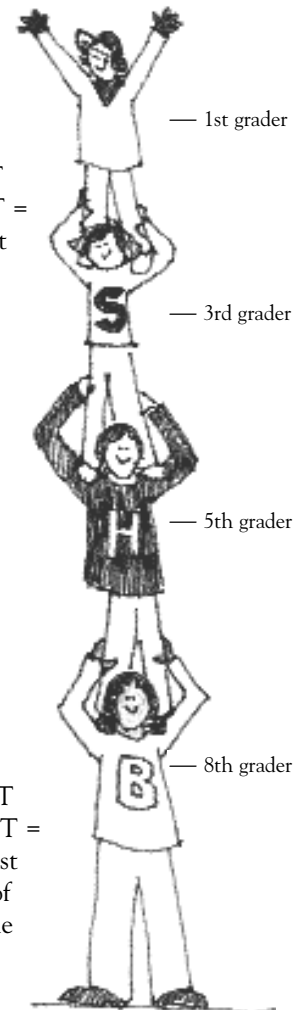


Inside

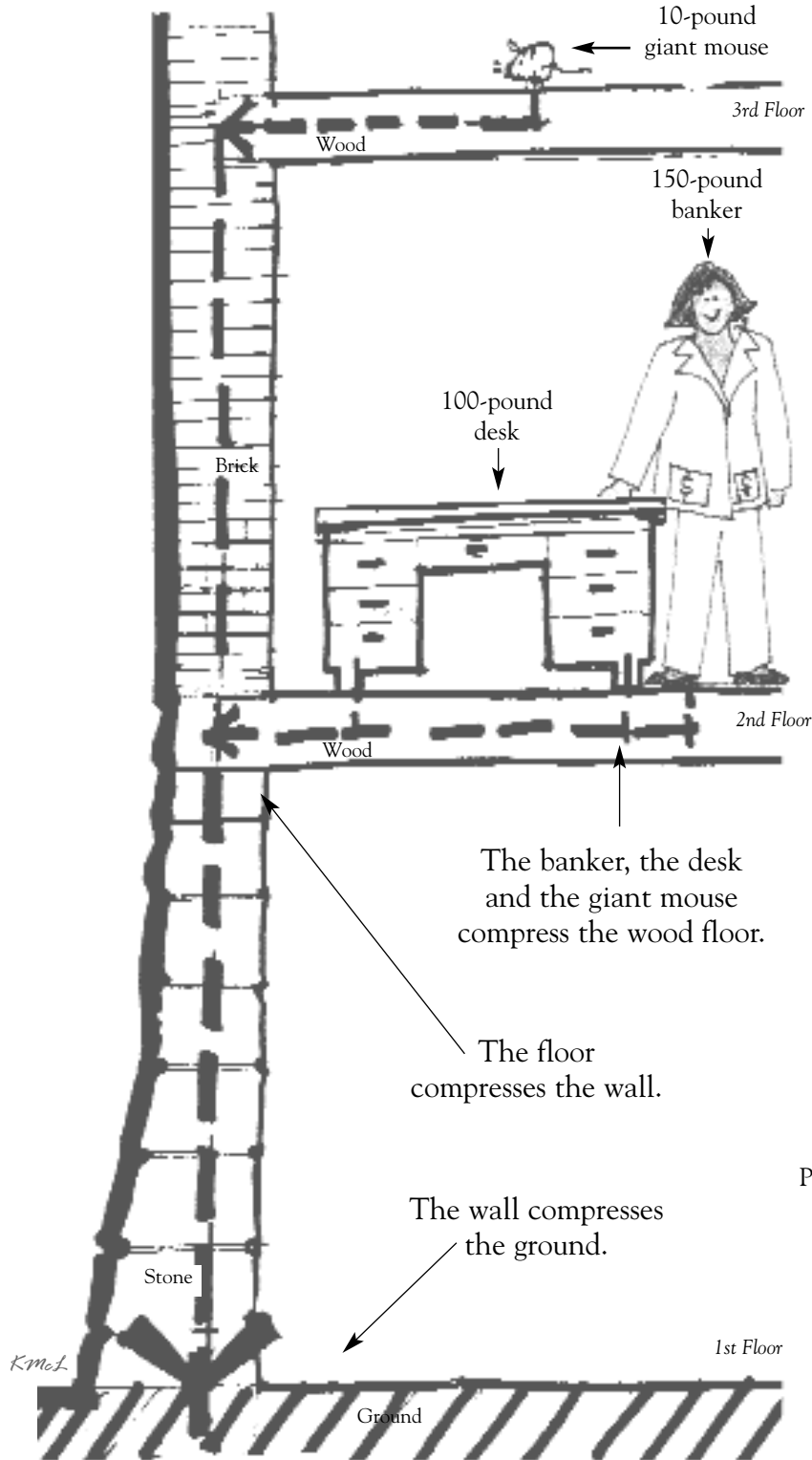
Taking off the building face



What it feels like!



STANDING UP



The banker, the desk and the giant mouse compress the wood floor.

The floor compresses the wall.

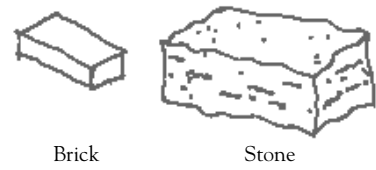
The wall compresses the ground.

Gravity pulls the wall and keeps it on the ground. The ground is strong enough to hold up the wall.

Buildings use two types of force to stand up.

COMPRESSION

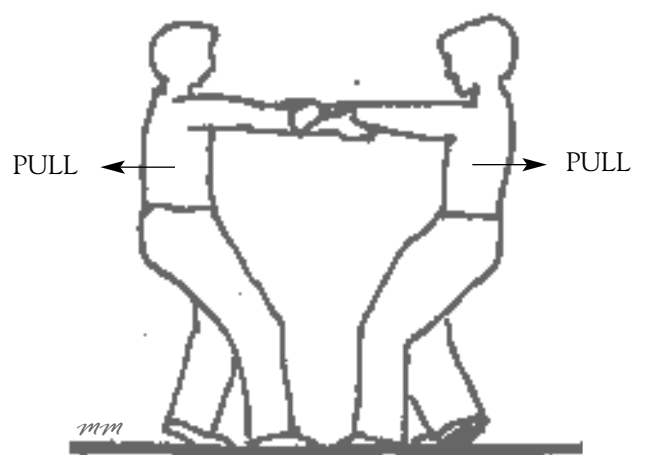
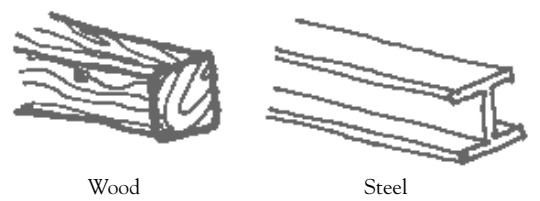
In a building, walls, columns and arches are in compression. Brick and stone are strong when compressed.



Compression feels like putting a stack of books on your head.

TENSION

In a building, floors and beams are in tension. Wood and steel are strong in tension.



Tension feels like you and a friend pulling in opposite directions.

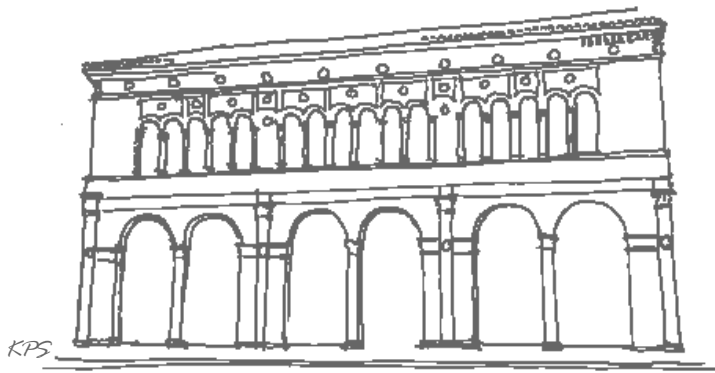
Florentine Building

In Love with His Teacher—Mr. Sims & Miss Hannah

A prominent lawyer is said to have built the Florentine Building to impress his art teacher, Miss Hannah Elliott. He wanted to marry her. The building's ornament recalls Italian palaces he and Miss Hannah's other students had visited on their grand European study tours and suggests a life they might enjoy together!



Miss Hannah Elliott (1876-1951), artist, teacher and spinster, worked unceasingly to establish an art museum for our city.



*Did she
marry him?*



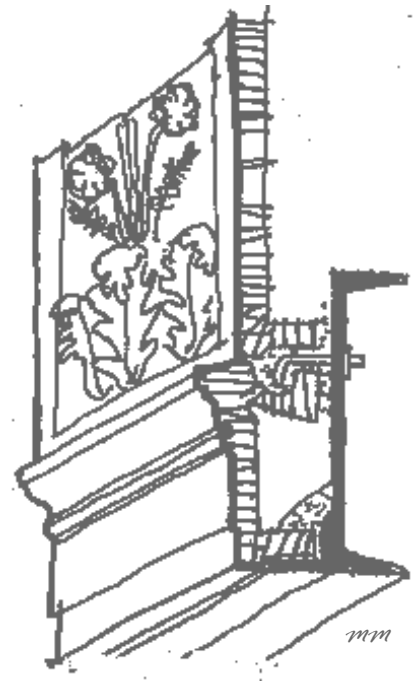


A Gift to the Street

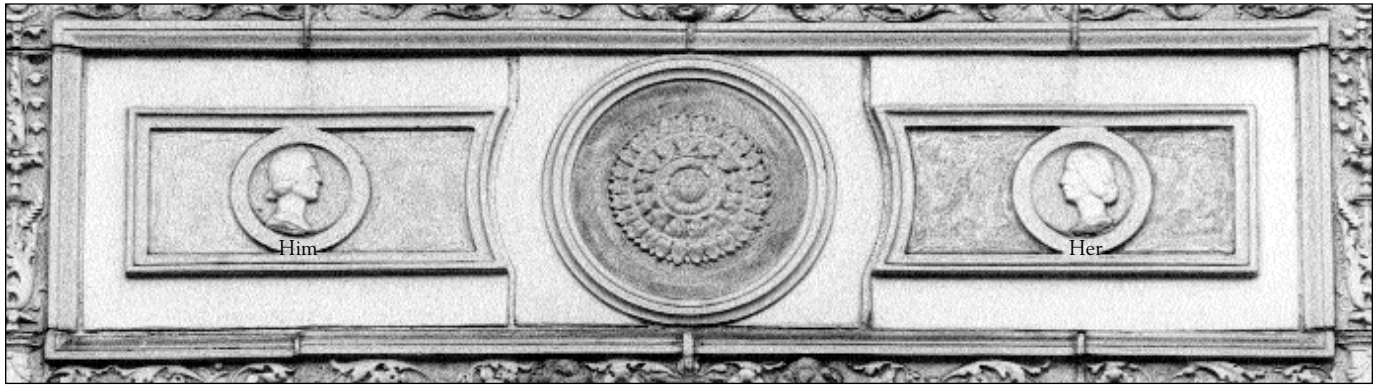
Terra Cotta Treasure Hunt

Terra cotta—literally defined as *cooked earth*—is a fine-grained, brown-red clay that is most often fired to make flower pots and roof tiles. Pre-cast in blocks, *glazed* terra cotta becomes a *decorative* skin for buildings. This cladding provides sumptuous ornament and fireproofing.

Birmingham architects of the early 20th century specified glazed terra cotta for dozens of city center buildings. The Florentine Building is a spectacular showcase.



Here acanthus, potted in an urn, grows like a giant bean stalk up the building forming swirls just below the roof.



Him

Her

His & her cameos



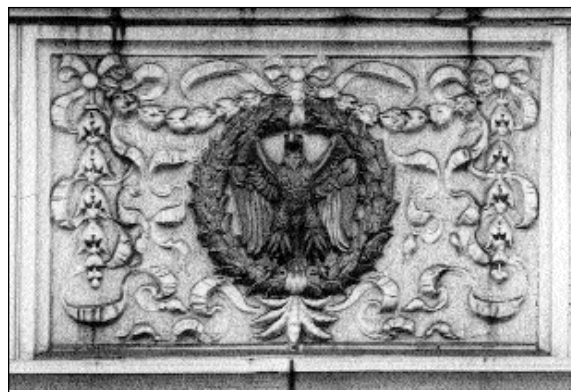
Cherub

Cherub in acanthus swirls



Shield

Cherubs with shield



SD

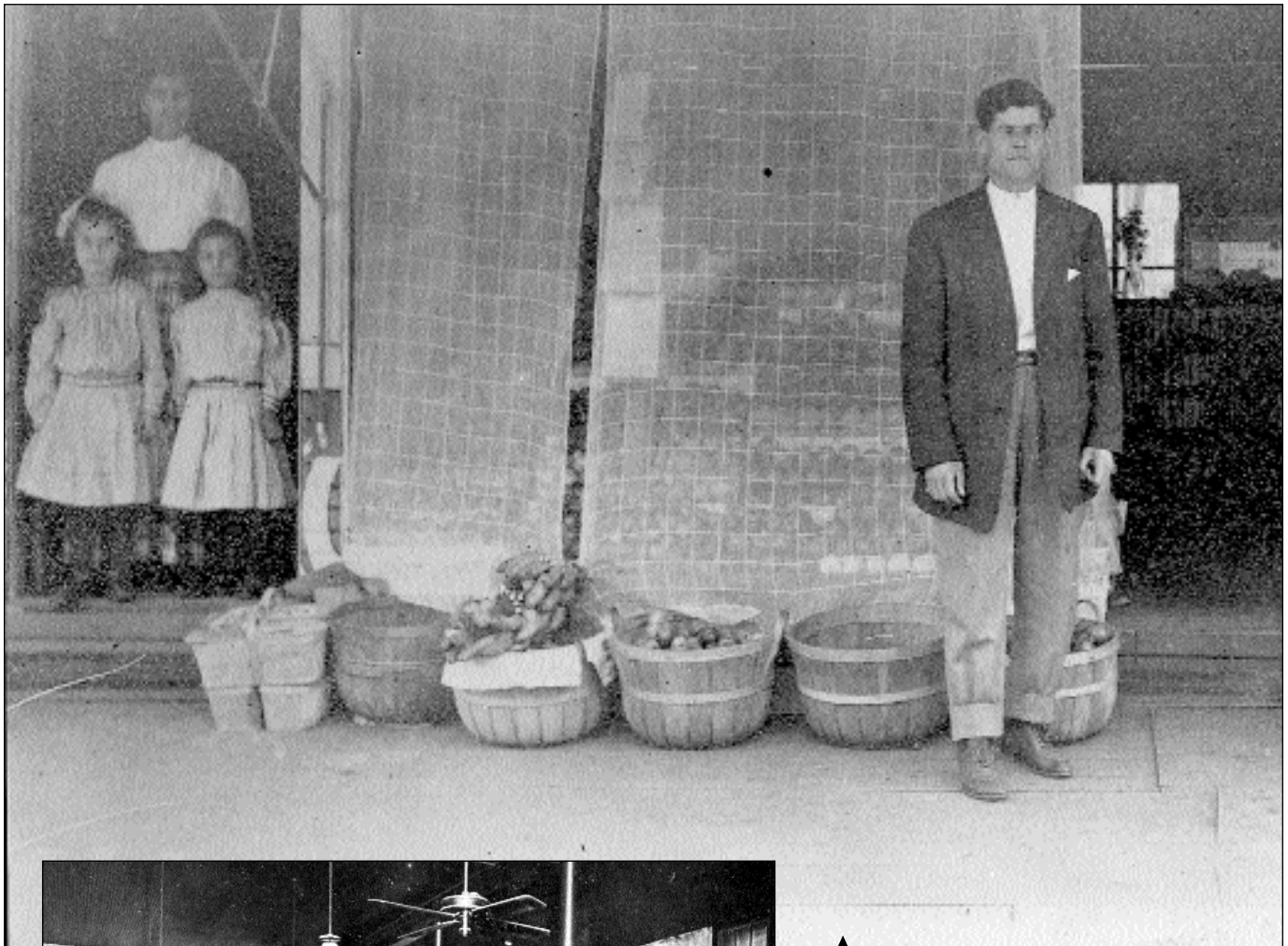
Eagle within laurel wreath



Column capital with acanthus leaves & flower

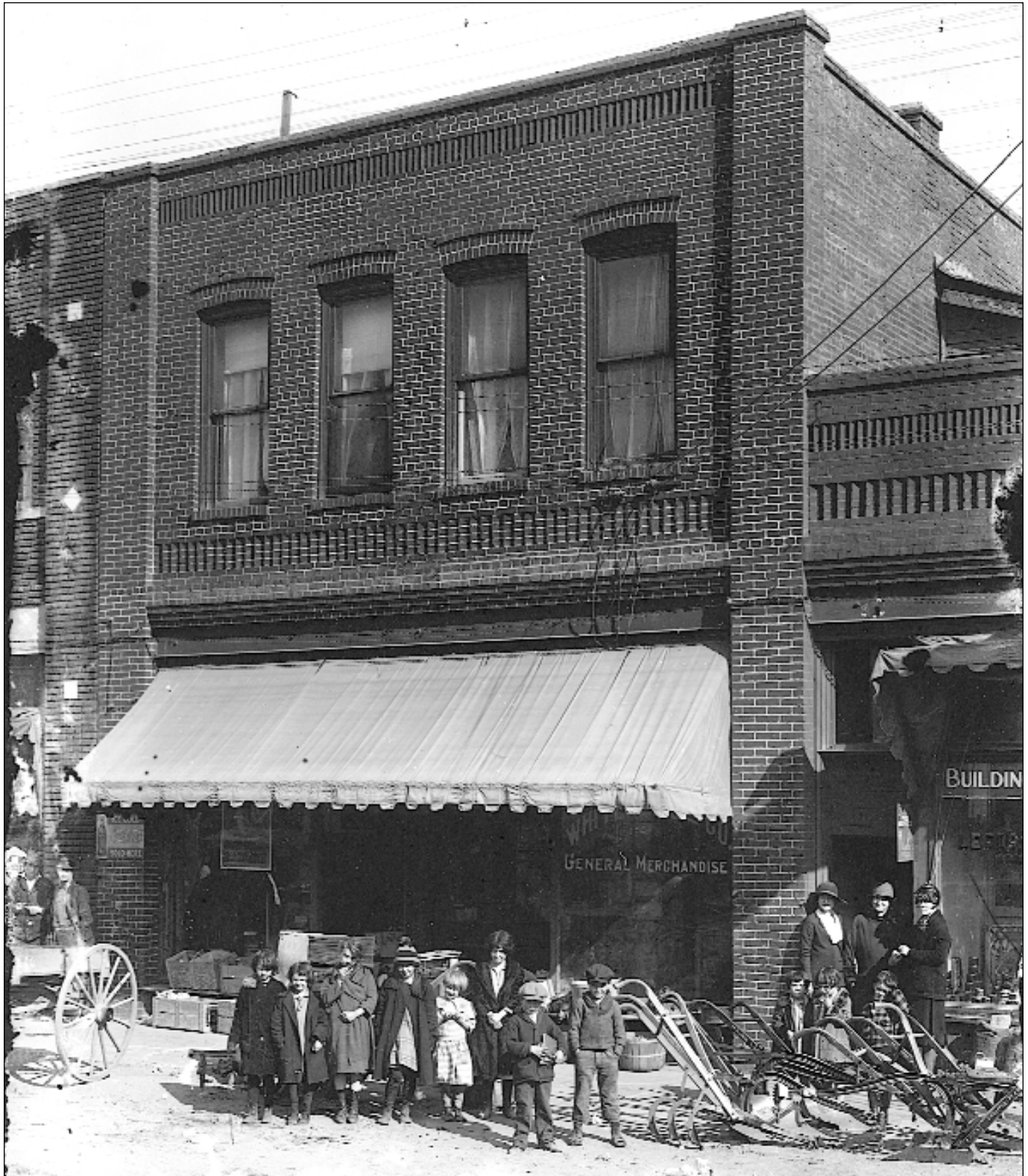
Mom and Pop Stores

F a m i l y E n t e r p r i s e s



▲ *Wehby's fruit stand, Khattlar Wehby, proprietor*

◀ *Sharbel's Arabic Market*



Across from the Zinszer Building are two *Old Buildings*—both two-stories tall, built of brick with lots of fancy details. Their walls are load-bearing. These buildings are typical of 18th and 19th century small-town stores.

Typically, they housed mom-and-pop businesses on the street level. The store owners and their families resided upstairs. All family members worked together in the store.

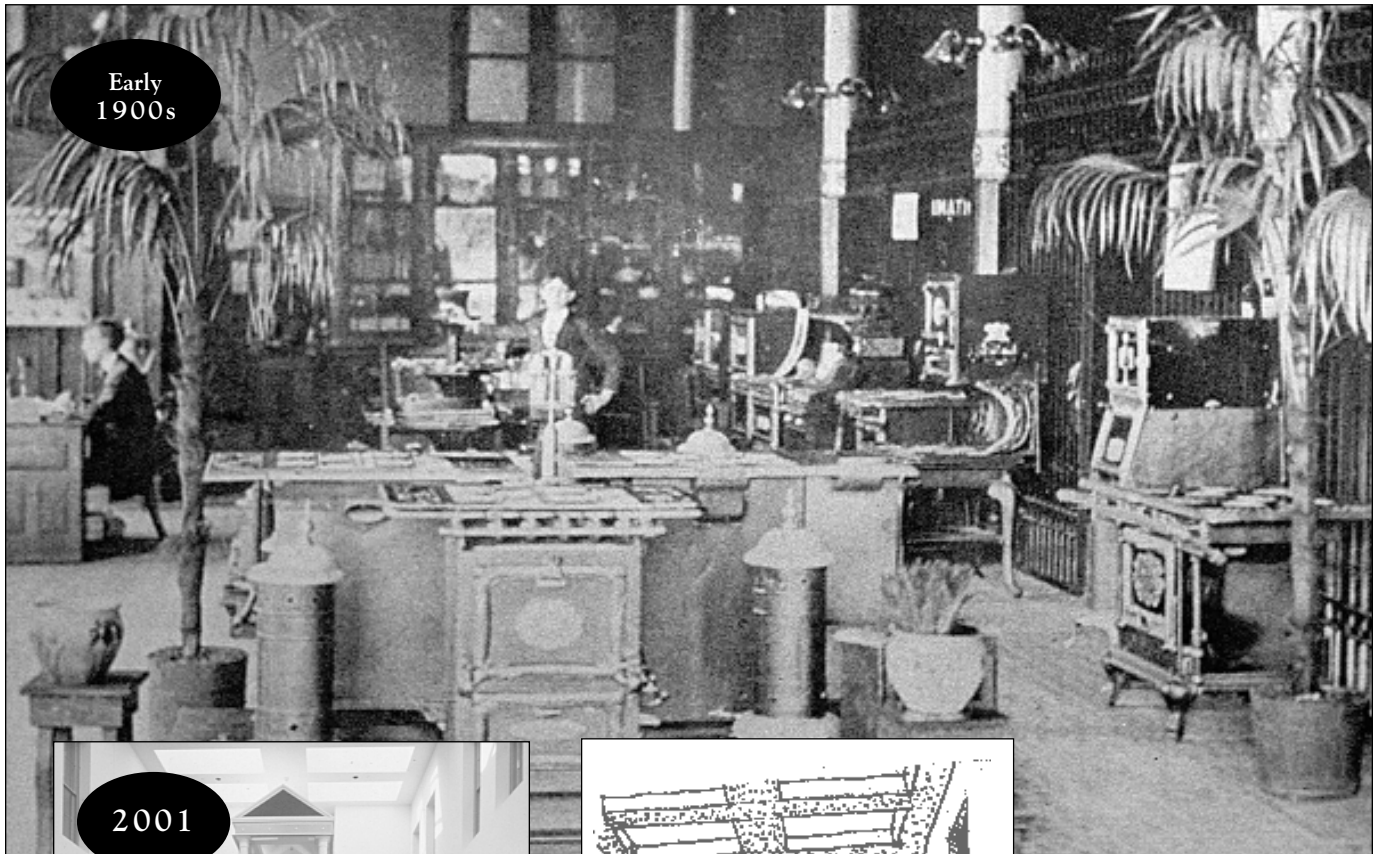
Zinszer Building

Peter & Rosa's Palace—Recycled & Reused

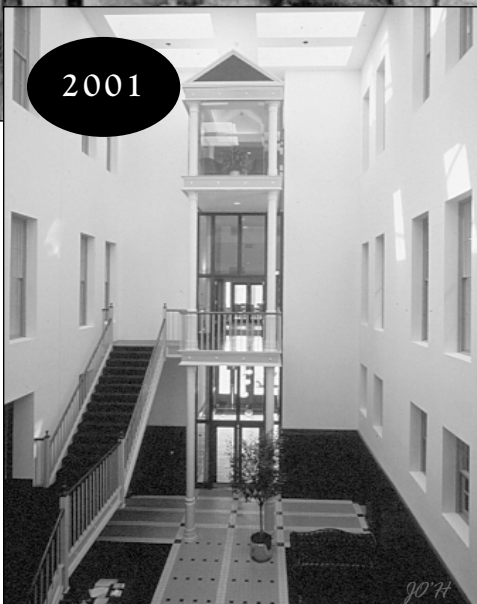
Peter and Rosa Zinszer moved to Birmingham in 1884. The young couple opened a store which offered every possible home furnishing and several new services: “easy payment,” an early version of credit, and home delivery. Zinszer’s Mammoth Furniture House also advertised in the city’s English and German language newspapers. Five years later, the highly successful store occupied this immense (for the era) cast-iron front store.



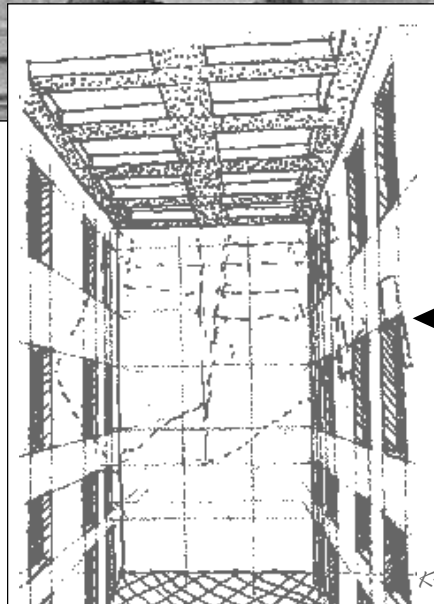
Rosa Zinszer (1858-1930)



Early
1900s



2001



Today, Zinszer's home furnishing store serves as offices for lawyers. The central atrium space is skylit and surrounded by interior windows which permit entry of natural light to offices within.



1978

**Zinszer Building
Then & Now
*A Cinderella Story***

When this photograph was made, the Zinszer store's cast-iron front was corroded, its paint peeled and the roof leaked. A new owner restored the cast iron—molding new pieces from remaining ones—and converting the store to offices.

**Before:
Tired old building**



1985

**After:
Landmark
once again**

Mass-produced Strength & Glitz

THE CAST IRON HUNT

As urban areas expanded following the Civil War, businessmen chose cast-iron fronted premises, offering their services from buildings clothed in the architectural style of Italian merchant princes. In some American cities, whole districts of cast-iron buildings were built.

Iron fronts could be mass-produced cheaply and prefabricated in hundreds of separate pieces as large as a column or as small as a flower. The pieces were molded, polished and tested for fit before final assembly. At the site, craftsmen bolted the iron pieces together, attaching them to the building that had been constructed to receive them.

The prefabricated fronts could be molded to a variety of forms and richly decorated in a style known as *Italianate*, an exuberant American version of Italian Renaissance palaces.

The ornate fronts were practical for another reason. The strength of a metal-supported facade provides a structural solution impossible with traditional brick construction supporting the weight of walls and roof. Such a front also allows for larger expanses of glass, permitting light to pour into interior spaces.



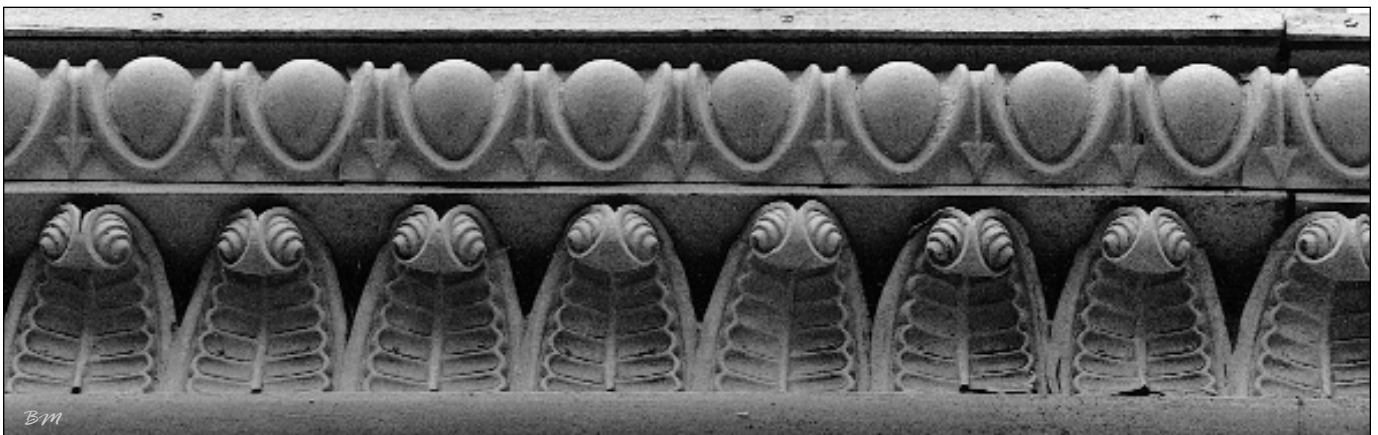


Column columns

*Find these
cast-iron
details.*



Column capitals with acanthus leaves and rosettes (the flowers)



Egg-and-dart and
acanthus moldings

1913
Under
construction



Steel frame

Terra cotta cladding

1st Methodist



Residential district

ING
Co.
MENT
IT -

The Tutwiler

First
Presbyterian

21st Street

1652
Hunt

JEFFERSON COUNTY SAVINGS BANK BLDG
BIRMINGHAM ALA - JULY 25 1913

AM ALABAMA

Second Avenue North

Jefferson County Savings Bank-Comer Building

Immigrant Makes It Big Time—Mr. Enslin & His Bank



Construction crew at the old Tutwiler Hotel on 20th Street

Christian Enslin immigrated from Germany in 1845 and learned the blacksmith trade. While his son Eugene was a child, he served the Confederacy by turning out thousands of horseshoes for the calvary. Father and son came to early Birmingham and opened a store. It prospered and, by 1885,

provided funds to start a bank. The family bank also prospered. Christian served as president and Eugene as cashier. By 1913, with Eugene Enslin as president, the bank built this distinguished office tower known for years as the Jefferson County Savings Bank, Comer Building, and later City Federal.

Flushing commodes invented in 1870, sewage systems in the 1880s.

15th Floor

Elevators made possible by Otis's safety latch in 1889, replaced stairways.

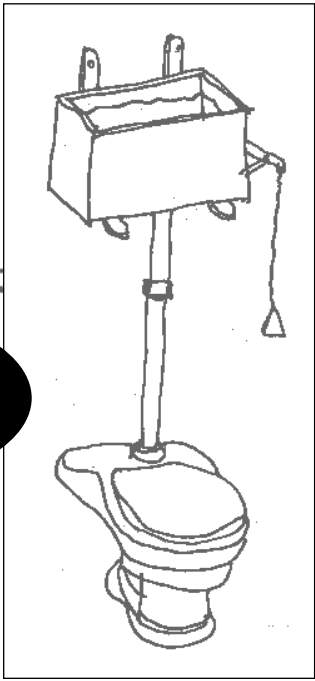
14th Floor

Thomas Edison invented the electric light in 1880.

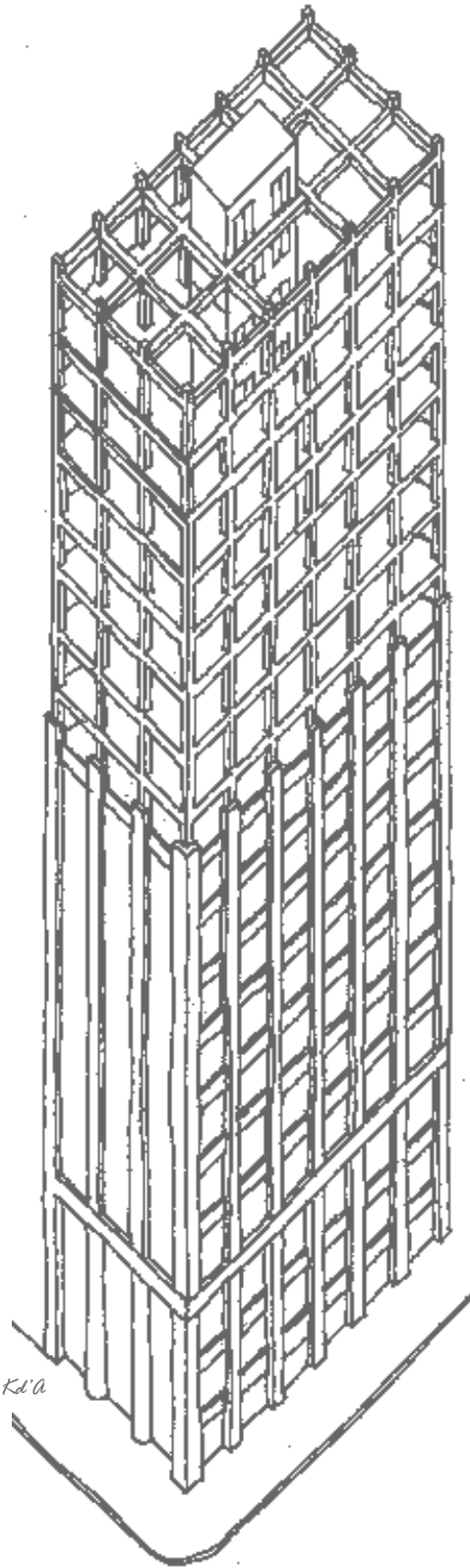
12th Floor

Alexander Graham Bell in 1876 created a telephone system.

Central heating replaced wood & coal stoves & fireplaces.



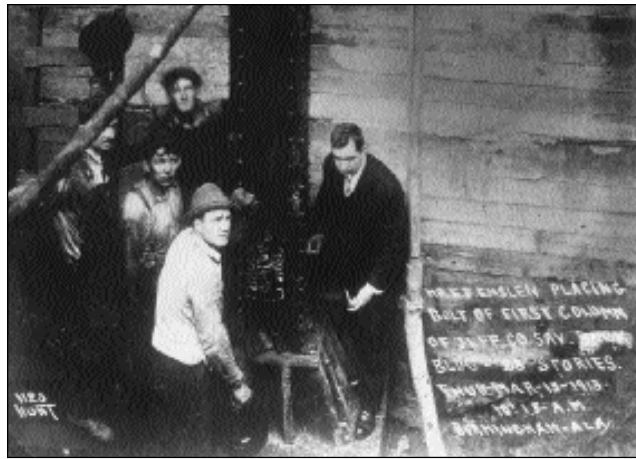
Scraping The Sky—The Office Tower



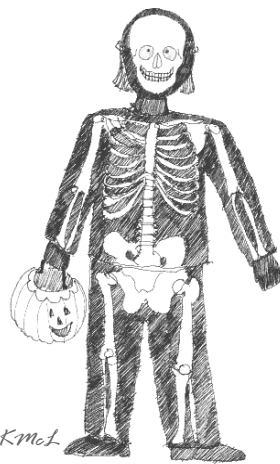
A building's bones,
its steel frame, hold the building up.

Birmingham's first skyscraper rose in 1901 and was quickly followed by 12 more high-rises before World War I. An efficient system of mass transportation—a streetcar network linking the city center to other industrial centers and the suburbs—carried large numbers of workers downtown to their jobs in these giant towers.

New technologies permitted the rise of *skyscraper office buildings* in the late 19th century. Steel columns and beams carried the weight of the giant buildings, and allowed for larger windows and open arrangements of space. Walls no longer needed to be load bearing.

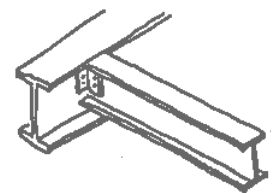
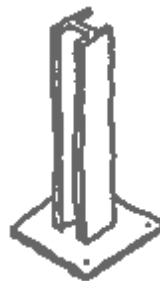


Bank president Eugene Enslin places the bolt of the first steel column, April 13, 1913.



My bones,
a skeleton costume

Steel is a very strong building material. Architects use it to make up the skeleton of skyscrapers. Steel columns and steel beams support floors and ceilings.



Steel columns and beams

Educating Farmers

Professor Massey's School & Building



Richard Massey arrived in Birmingham in 1887 with little more than his lunch and a letter of introduction. He rented a typewriter and a room, enrolled students and began teaching them business skills. People from rural areas were pouring into the city. They needed new skills to take advantage of new job opportunities.



Massey developed a network of business colleges throughout the southeast. His Birmingham college served as their architectural model. Across the street from it, he built the Massey Building, a 10-story office tower.

Terra cotta flourishes on the Massey Building include Massey's coat of arms, showing a knight's armor with shield, feathered helmet and the initial "M."



Professor Massey's business school taught by doing. Students learned business skills by participating in real life activities. To learn typing, they typed. Graduates achieved positions as bookkeepers, secretaries and managers.

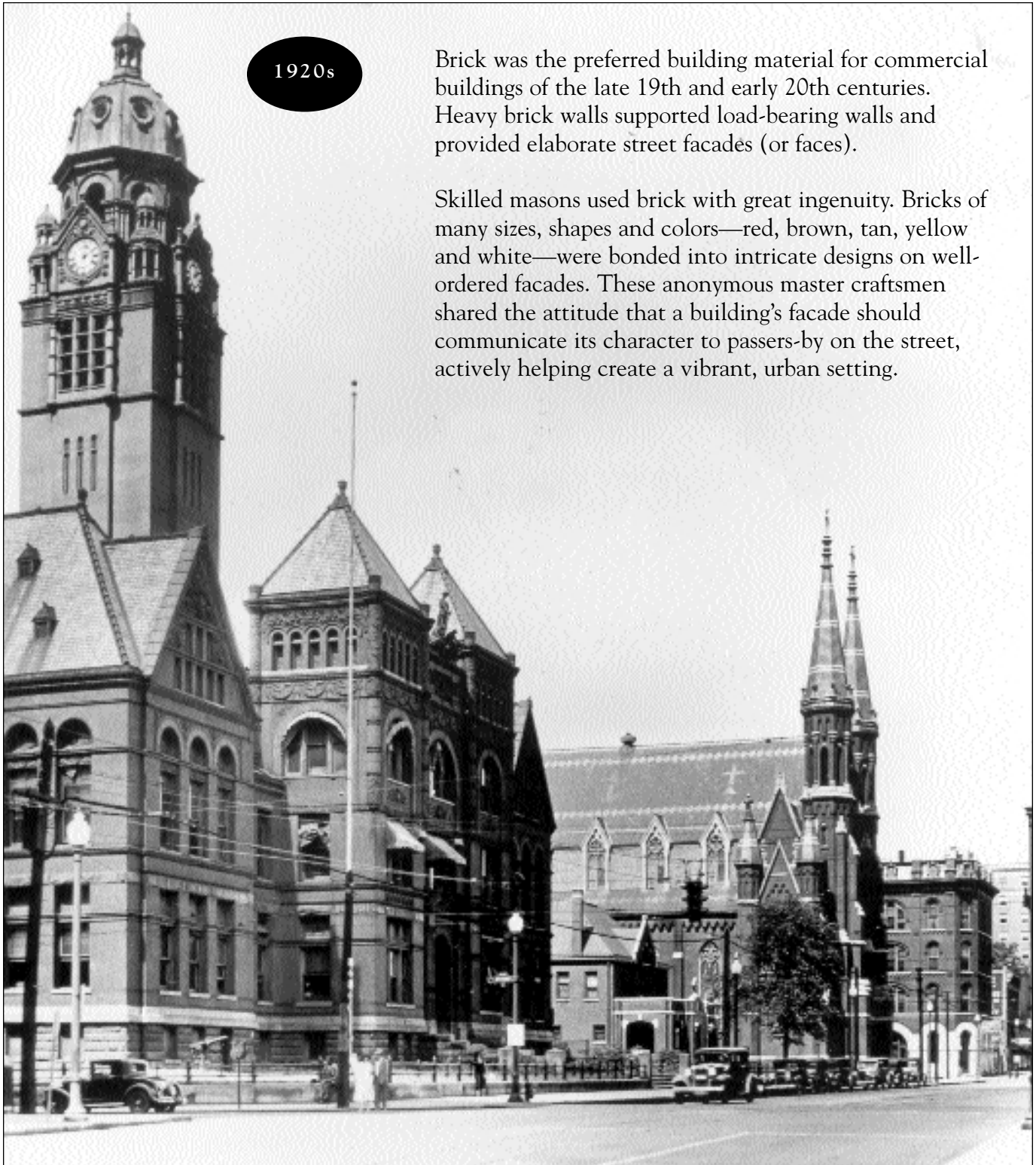
THE FANCY BRICKWORK HUNT

2000 Block Third Avenue North

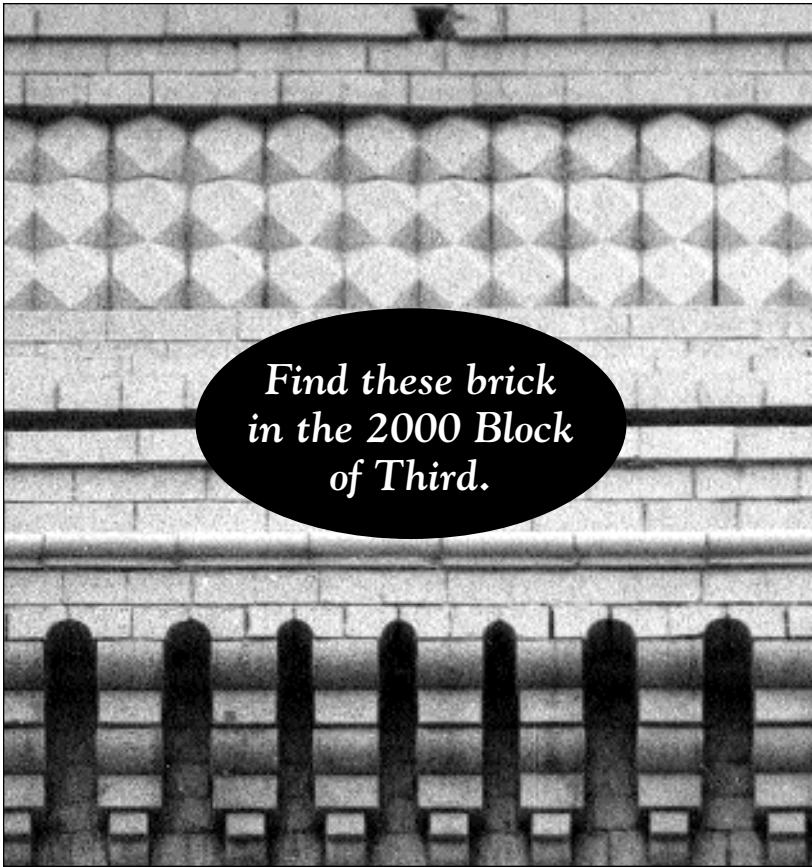
1920s

Brick was the preferred building material for commercial buildings of the late 19th and early 20th centuries. Heavy brick walls supported load-bearing walls and provided elaborate street facades (or faces).

Skilled masons used brick with great ingenuity. Bricks of many sizes, shapes and colors—red, brown, tan, yellow and white—were bonded into intricate designs on well-ordered facades. These anonymous master craftsmen shared the attitude that a building's facade should communicate its character to passers-by on the street, actively helping create a vibrant, urban setting.

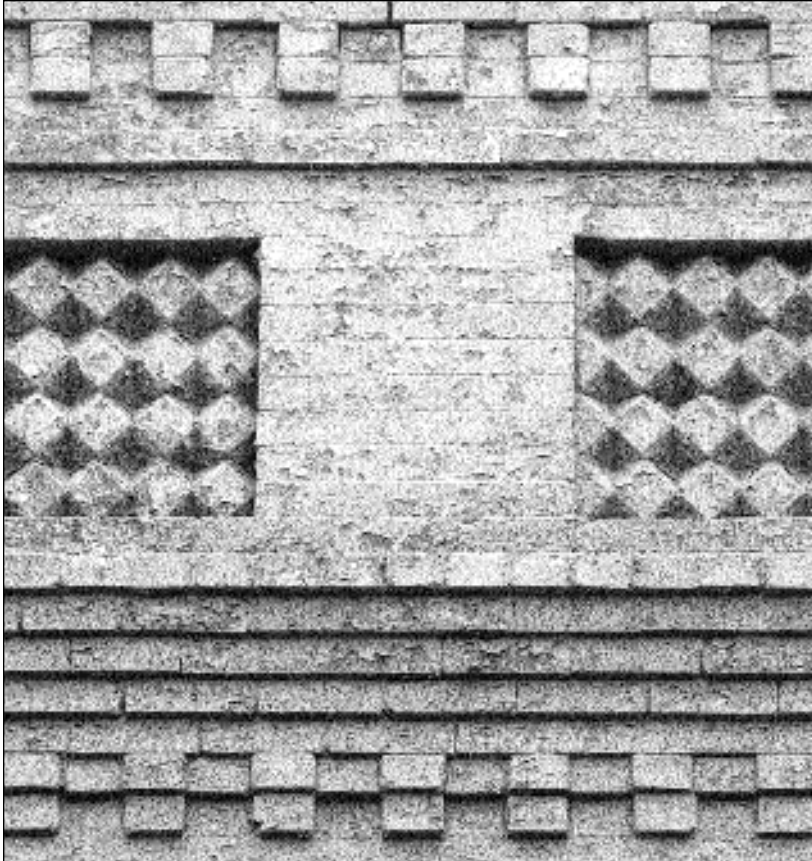


*Jefferson County's 19th century Courthouse (site of today's Concord Center)
& St. Paul's Catholic Cathedral boast some of the city's finest brickwork.*

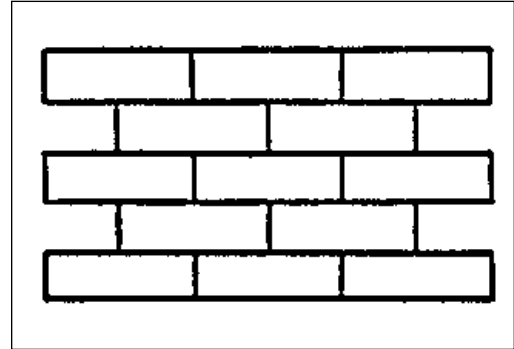


*Find these brick
in the 2000 Block
of Third.*

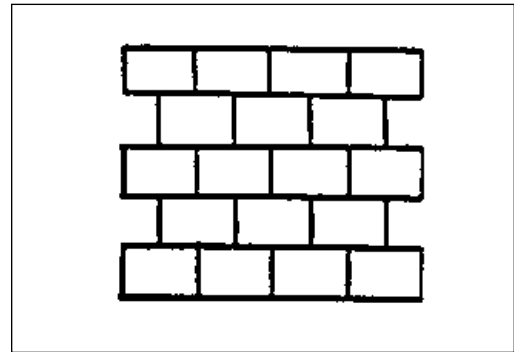
25



In the 19th century, masons used many shapes and patterns of brick to enliven their designs.



Stretcher Bond



Header Bond



A header is the end of a brick.

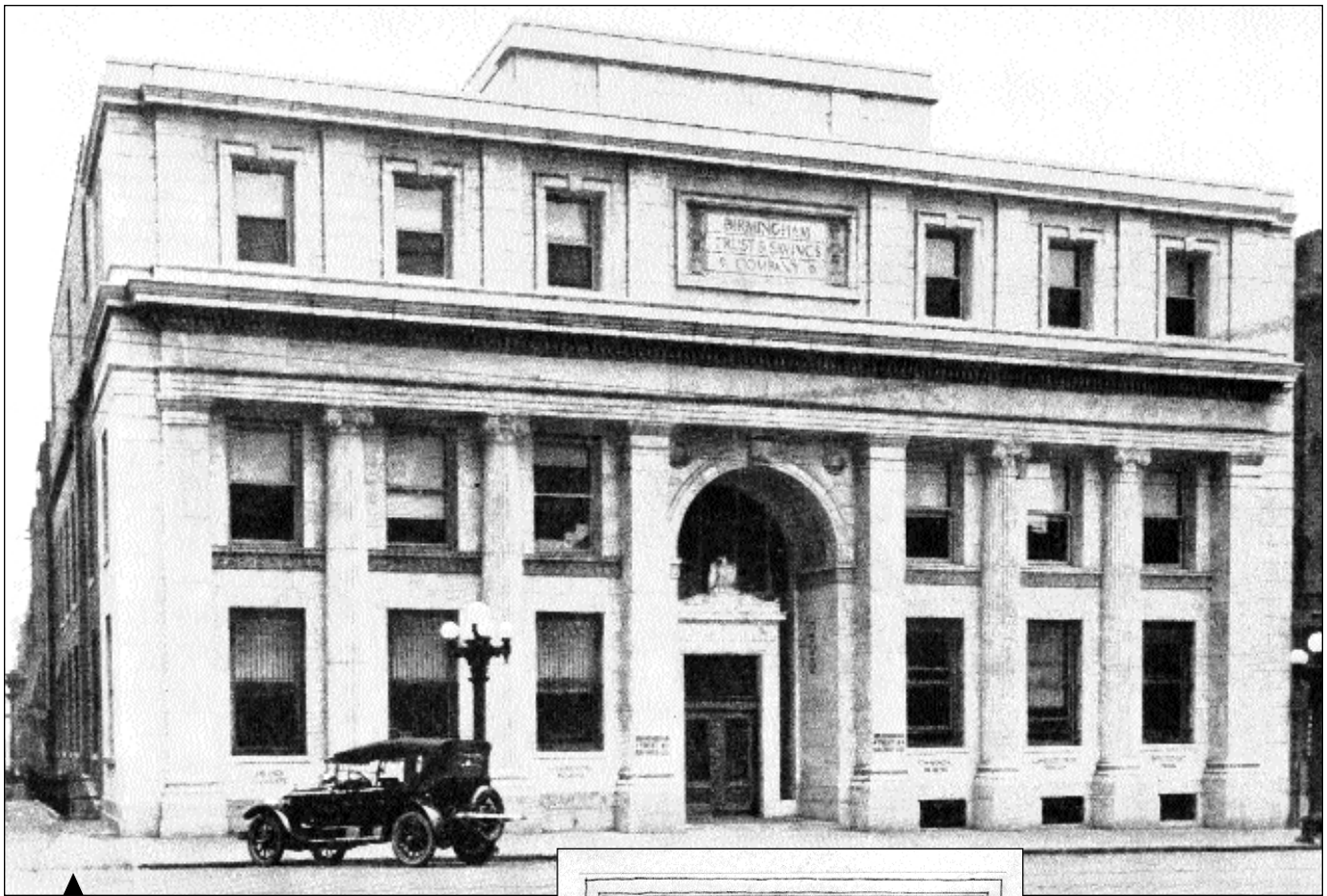


A stretcher is the long side of a brick.

Bonding patterns are achieved by alternating stretchers and headers. This is done for strength and durability.

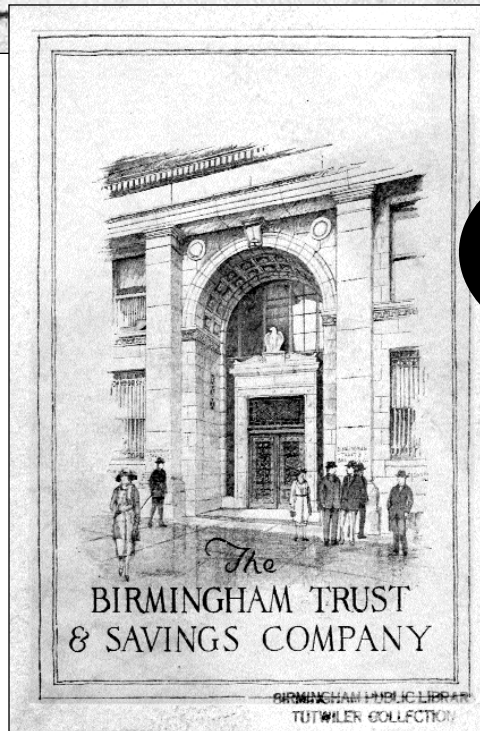
South Trust Building

A Place to be Trusted



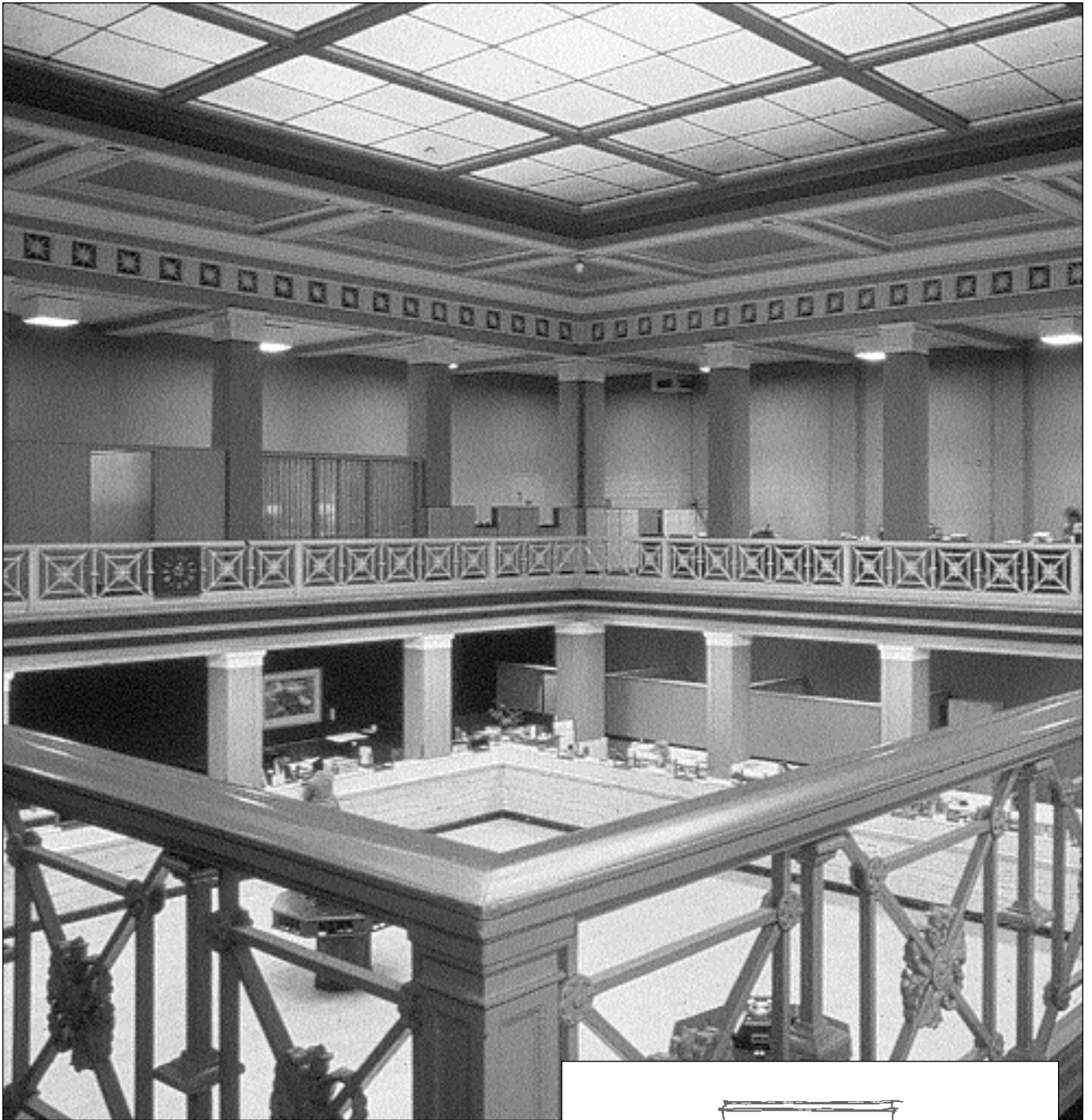
When this marble palace opened in 1922, the bankers who built it considered the bank building “a symbol and a sign that the place and the men who handle its money are something more than a mere business. That within its walls, honor and fidelity and a high sense of the sacredness and dignity of being trusted, have an abiding place.”

The bank looks like a Roman temple, outside and within. Its 20th Street front features white marble from a newly opened vein at Gantt’s Quarry in Sylacauga, Alabama. This vein would also supply many public buildings in Washington D. C.

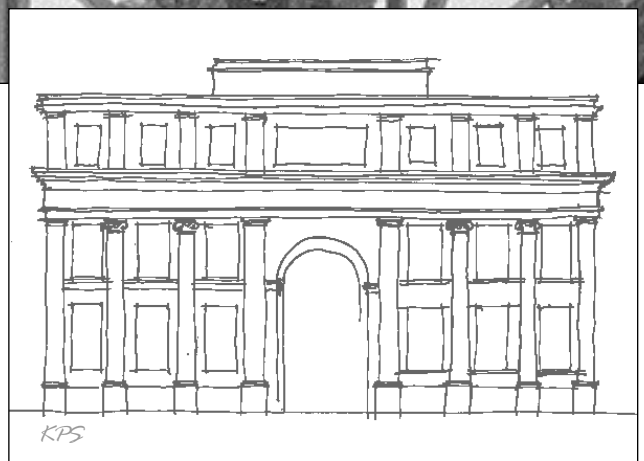


Wouldn't you
TRUST
this bank?

Originally, an eagle crowned great bronze doors at the 20th Street entrance, helping create the impression that this bank is a well defended place.



This 33-foot high skylight showers daylight on the banking floor below. Designers intended the space to impress those entering the bank that this is the place to trust with their money.



Heaviest Corner on Earth

Headquarters for the Industrial Giants

1913



In an amazingly short time, Birmingham's urban look changed from outpost town to that of a booming city. By 1912, all four corners of the First Avenue and 20th Street intersection were

occupied by office towers. Proud citizens touted the intersection as the "Heaviest Corner on Earth." The skies were filled with soot, a welcome sign of prosperity.

1920s

Empire-
Colonial
Bank

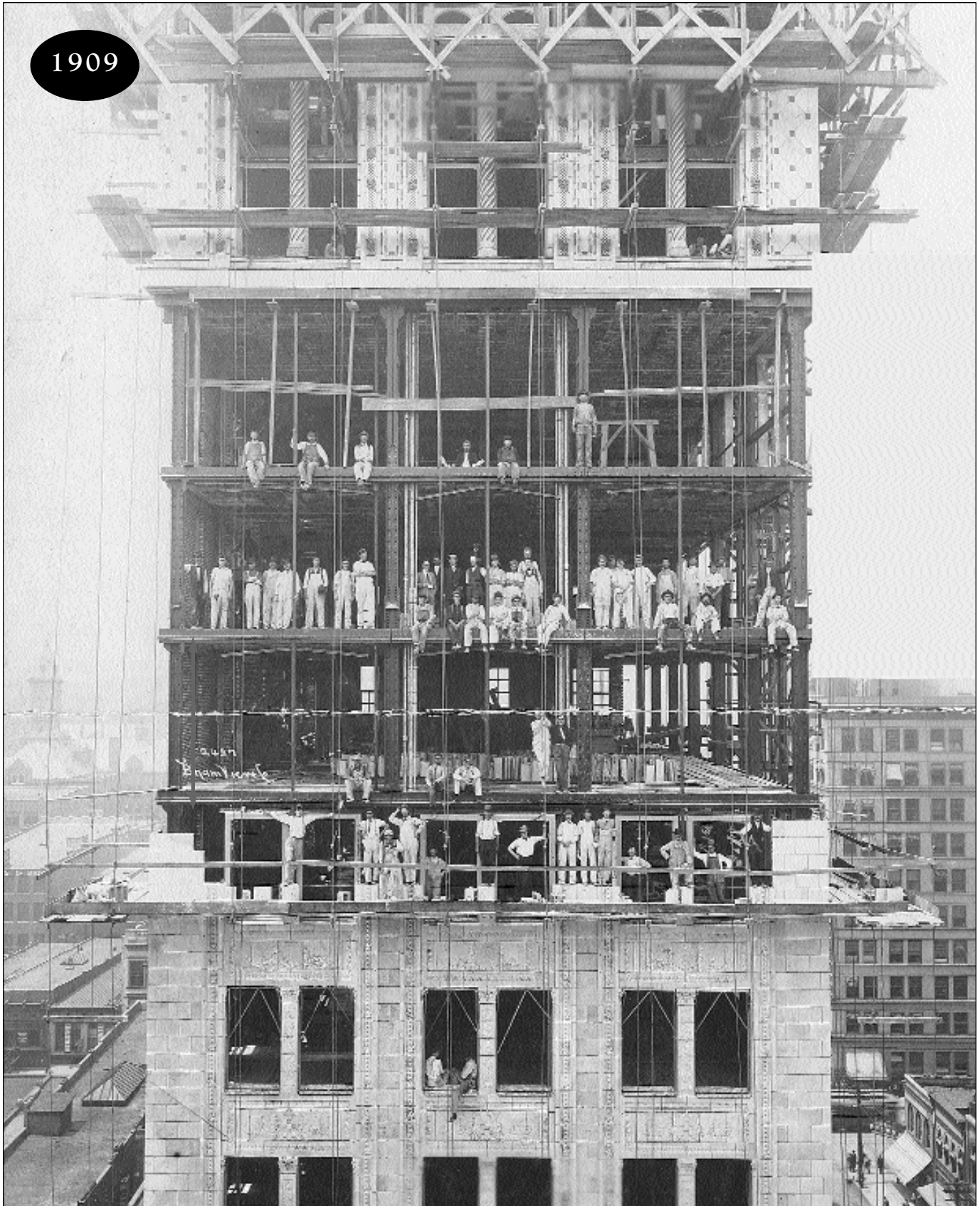
Brown
May

The
Bank

Woodward-
NBC

By the early 1920s, when this photograph of First Avenue looking east was made, streetcars were vying for space with an ever-expanding number of automobiles. First Avenue North was a major east-west thoroughfare.

1909



Birmingham's skyline climbs to 16 stories as this office tower rises. Posing for this photograph are teams of expert craftsmen,

who mortar and anchor the exterior terra cotta block to form the building face.

The Empire Building



Busts of Roman and British emperors, rendered in terra cotta blocks, crown arches at the top of the Empire-Colonial Bank Building.

Locals call these arches the hall of fame, identifying the busts as those who designed and built the splendid building.



William Welton, the young architect pictured in his library with his draftsman (a helper who draws plans and sketches), designed the tower, including each terra cotta block.

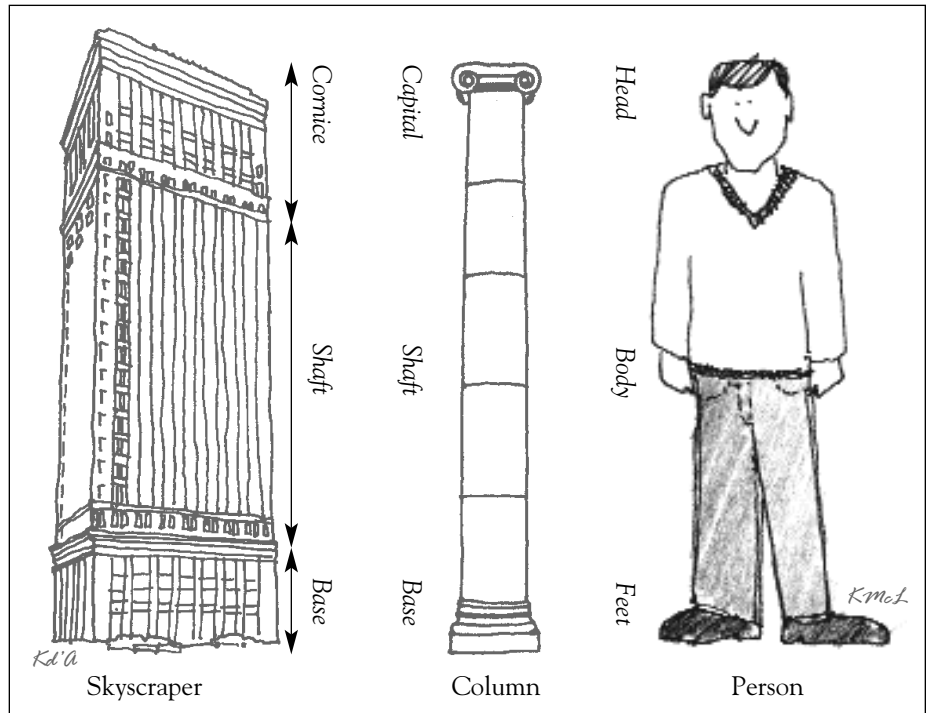
Welton had studied architecture at M. I. T. and in Paris, and interned with the New York-based McKim, Meade & White, one of America's finest firms.

THE CORNICE HUNT

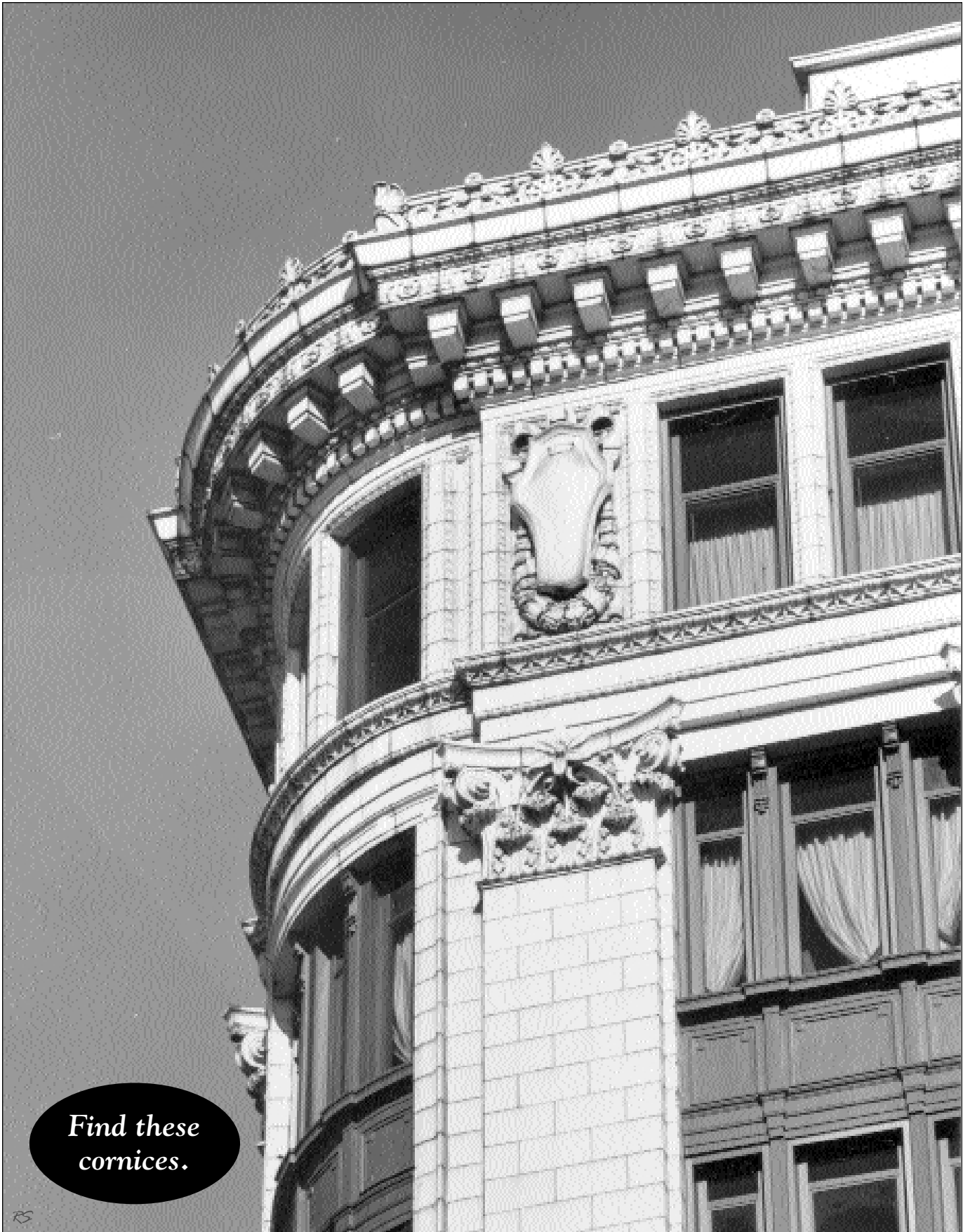
1st & 20th—The Crowning Glory

Early 20th century skyscrapers resemble large columns. Columns have a base, shaft and capital. So do these skyscrapers. However, the skyscraper base is 2 to 3 stories, its shaft is 10 to 12 stories and its CORNICE 2 to 3 stories.

A cornice is the projecting, ornament molding along the top of a building. Carved of stone or molded of copper or terra cotta, a building cornice is like an old-fashioned lady's bonnet, visually the crown.



Cornice, Empire-Colonial Bank Building



*Find these
cornices.*

RS

Cornice, The Bank

Morris Avenue

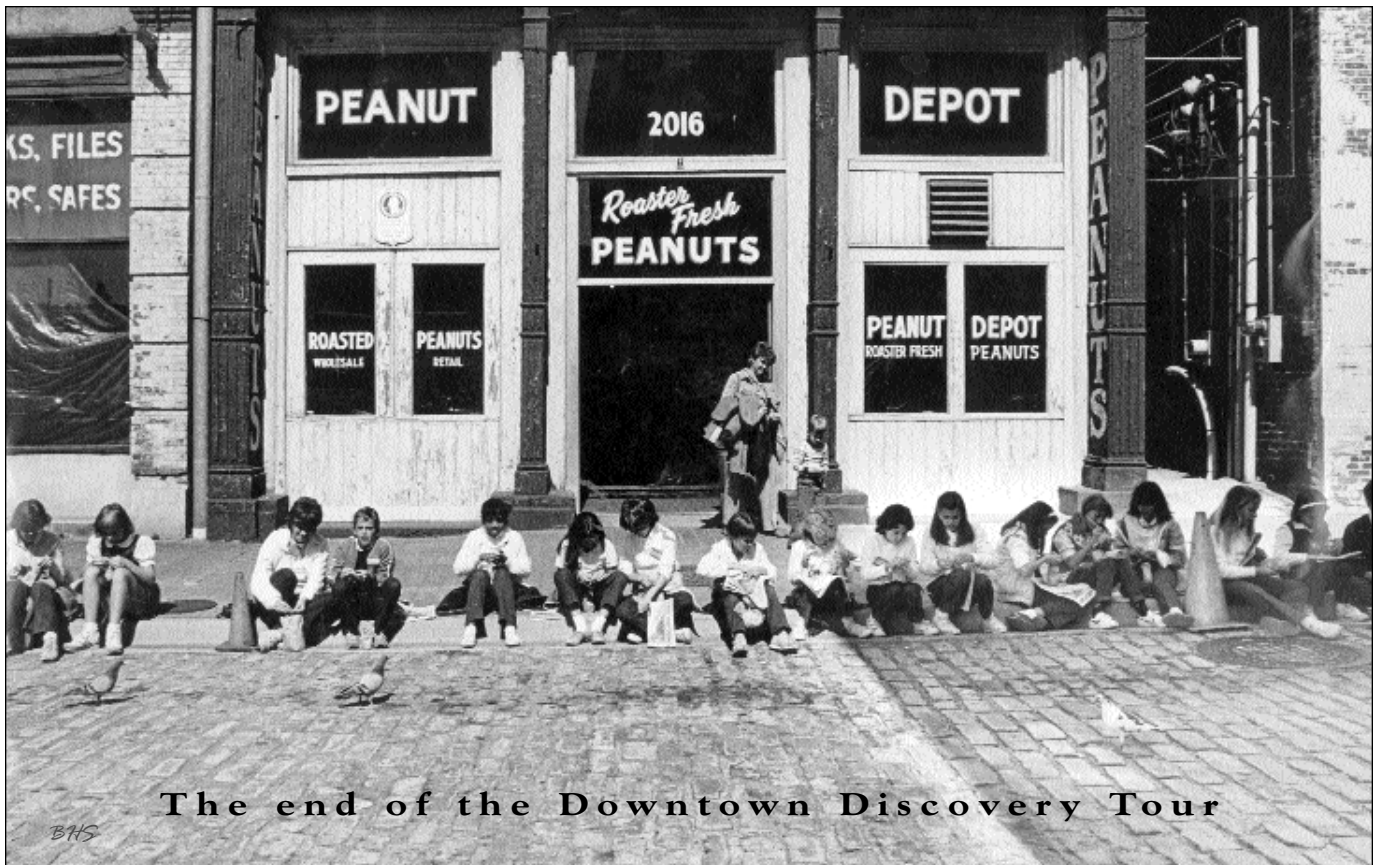
Getting the Goods In & Out





Trains brought goods to Morris Avenue where they were sold in bulk. With horse-and-buggies and later trucks and vans, merchants picked up the goods and resold them in stores across the city.

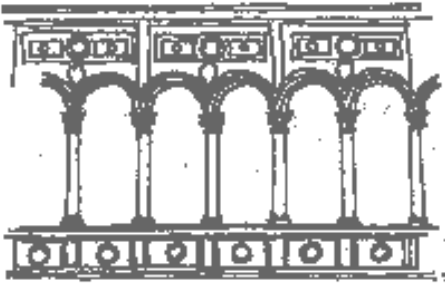
Brick warehouses held the bulk goods during processing and refining. Refining included roasting, as in peanuts and coffee. Peanut Depot roasters have been operating continuously since 1917.



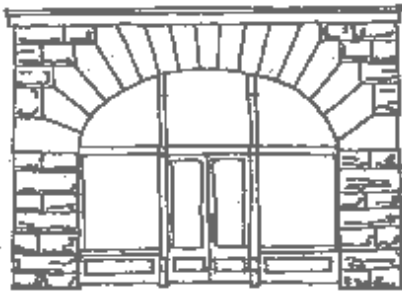
The end of the Downtown Discovery Tour

DOWNTOWN DISCOVERY TOUR

Glossary



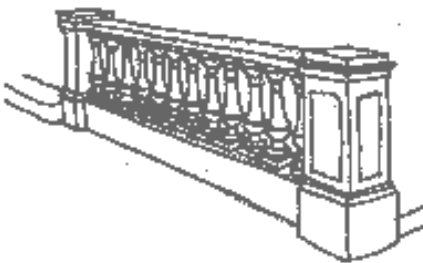
Arcade: a range of arches carried on piers or columns



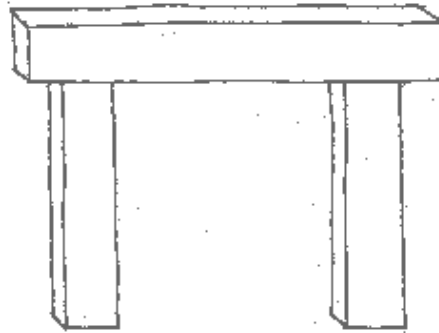
Arch: a curved structure over an open space

Architect: a person who designs and oversees the construction of buildings

Architecture: the profession of designing buildings and other structures



Balustrade: a series of short posts or pillars that support a rail



Beam: a horizontal structural member carrying a load

Brass: metal alloy (resembling gold when polished) consisting of copper and zinc

Brick: a block of clay dried in sun or kiln; a building material

Cast Iron: molten iron molded to a desired shape



Cherub: an angel represented as a winged child, often with a chubby innocent face

Column: a rounded support that holds up a building or structure; composed of base, shaft and capital.



Concrete: a man-made stone-like building material



Cornice: the exterior trim at the very top of a building; the Greek work for crown

Demolish: to tear down or destroy

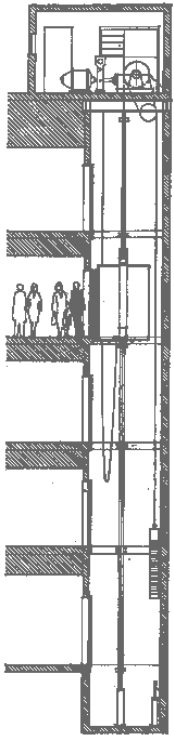


Dentils: a series of rectangular blocks arranged like teeth

Department Store: a large store divided into different departments of merchandise



Egg-and-Dart: an oval molding made up of alternating egg-shaped and dart-shaped elements



Elevator: a moving platform or cage for carrying people from one level to another in a building; invented by Elisha Otis in 1853

Elyton Land Company: Birmingham's first real estate company, the company that acquired the land where Birmingham's city center is located today

Facade: the front of a building



Flushing Commode: old-fashioned toilet, into which a lever releases water stored above the toilet to flush the toilet bowl

Furnace: a structure for generating heat to warm homes and buildings; a structure to smelt coal, iron ore and limestone into iron

Garden: a piece of land used to grow flowers and shrubs to decorate land

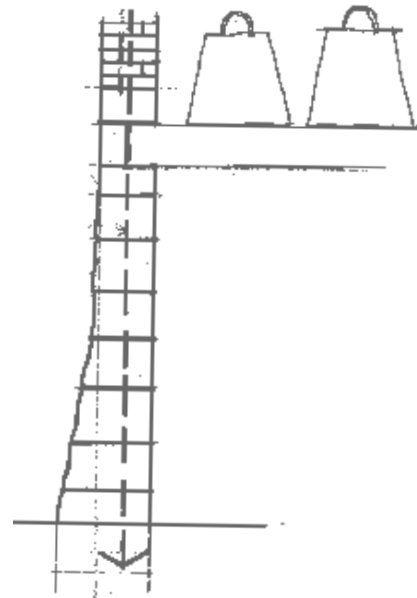


Greek Key: an ornament consisting of repeated angular figures formed by interlocking vertical and horizontal bands

Grid Plan: a system of reference lines intersecting at right angles, used to map an area



Keystone: the central stone of an arch



Load Bearing: walls that hold up the weight of floors

Magic City: nickname given to Birmingham, during the late 19th century to attest to its rapid growth as the South's largest industrial center

Modillion: a scroll shaped bracket used in a series, often under a cornice

Mom & Pop Store: a small, family owned and run business

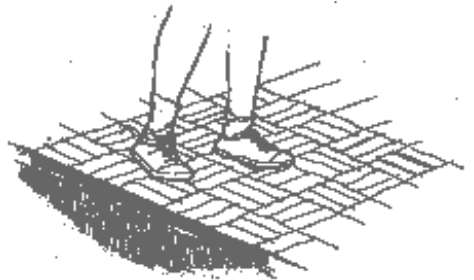
Municipal Building: city government building or office

Museum: a building where works of art are displayed and stored



Old Building: building constructed before the invention of structural-steel and indoor plumbing; typically 2-4 stories tall, made of brick and lots of fancy detail

Pediment: a triangular or round shape used over a door or window for decoration



Paver: brick, stone or flat concrete slab used to make roads and sidewalks

Pig Iron: iron tapped from a blast furnace

Preservation: to keep in existence; to make lasting; to preserve

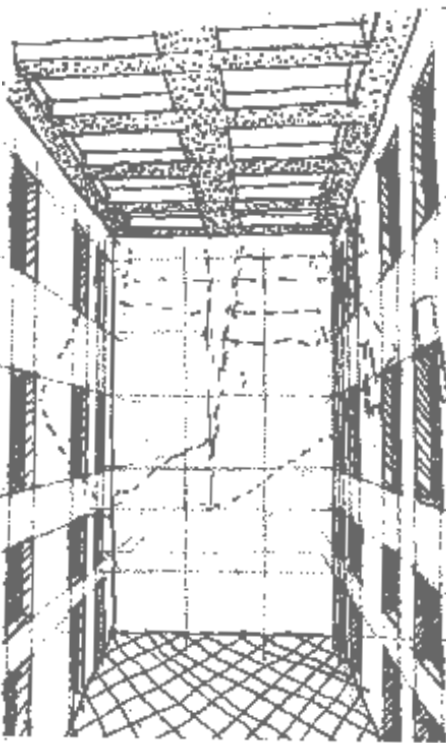
Recycle: to adapt for reuse; to use again in original form with minimal alteration

Restoration: to return a building to the way it was, usually to the time of its construction

Renovation: to fix up a building

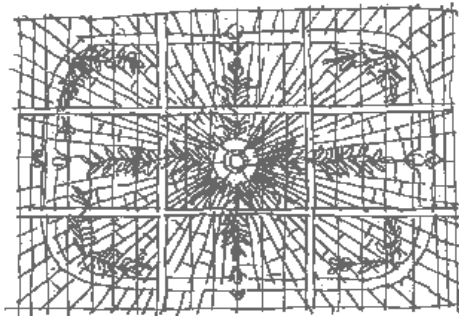
Roaster: an oven used to heat and cook by exposure to dry heat

Saloon: a bar



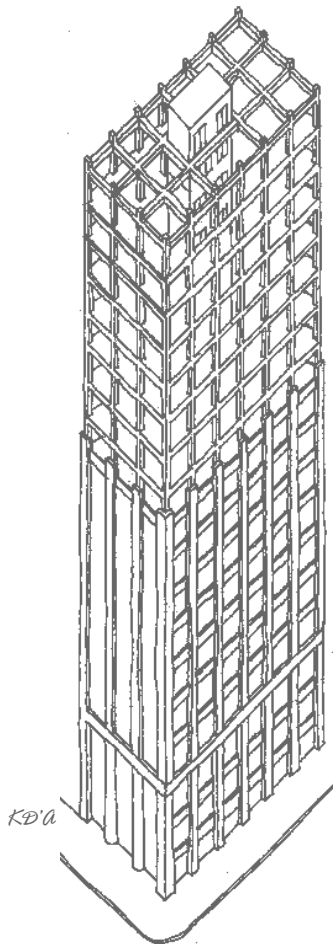
Skylight: glass window in the ceiling of a building

Skyscraper: a building of at least 10 stories built only after the invention of elevators, steel framing and flushing commodes



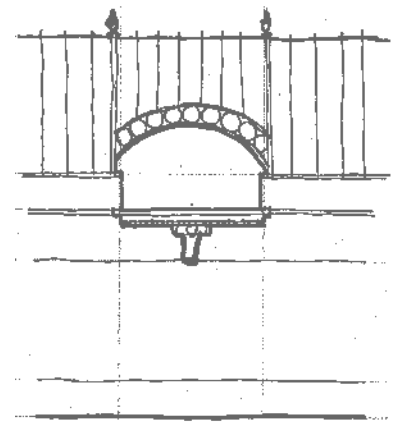
Stained Glass: small glass panes of many colors arranged into decorative patterns or pictures

Steel: refined pig iron, possessing qualities of strength

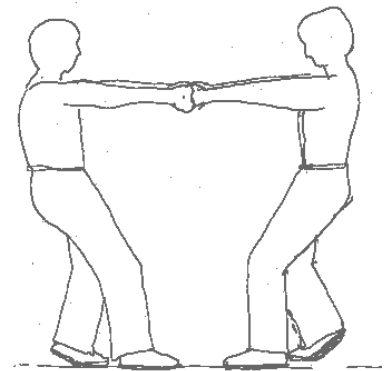


Steel Frame: the steel skeleton of a building

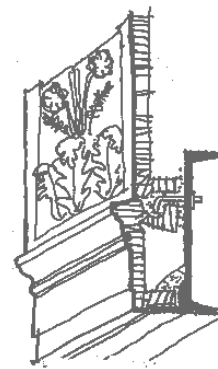
Stone: hard substance formed of mineral matter or rock



Teller Cage: bars behind which a bank teller stands



Tension: the act of straining; a device for maintaining stress



Terra Cotta: clay baked to use as exterior building decoration

Warehouse: a building to store goods

*Glossary Drawings by Michelle Morgan,
unless otherwise noted, text by Edgar Marx, Jr.*