



BIRMINGHAM HISTORICAL SOCIETY

Fourth Avenue
HISTORY HUNT

THE HISTORIC BLACK BUSINESS DISTRICT



Northside

Homes and churches crowd the area just west of the main business district along the 20th Street spine. Here blacks lived, worshipped, and did business. Many others from across the city gathered here for social and business events.

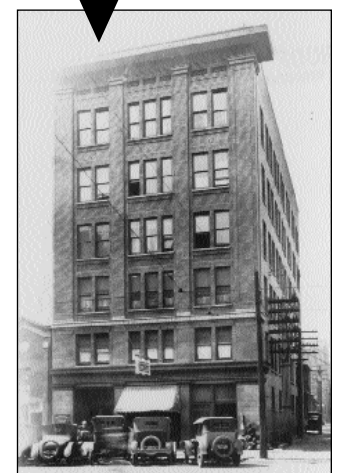


Sixth Avenue leads past homes and churches to Kelly Ingram Park and 20th Street. The emerging Fourth Avenue district is to the top right. It's wash day. Clotheslines are fully hung.

1930s



The Knights of Pythias posed for this photograph at the Lyric Theater, across the street from their headquarters.

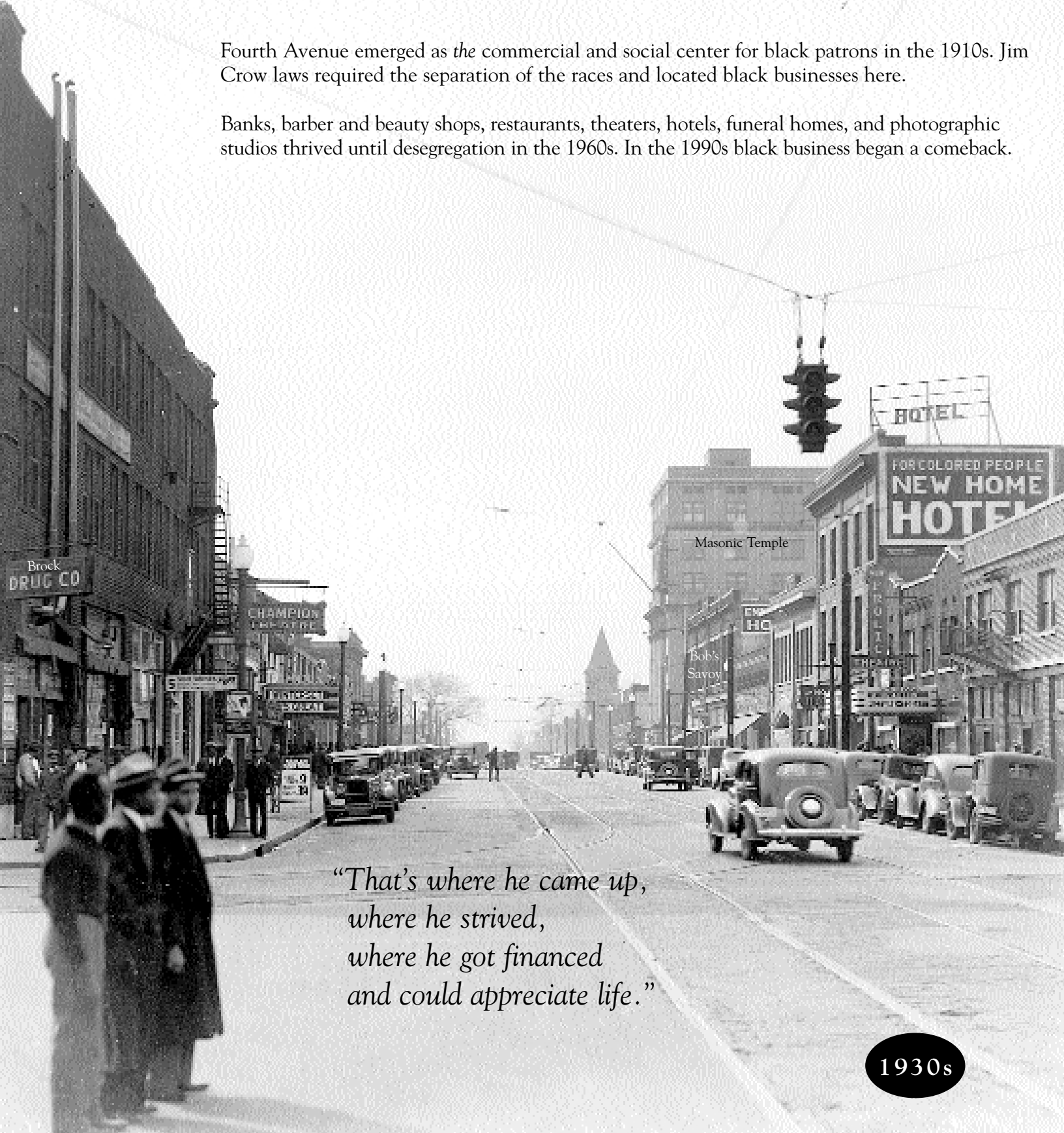


Sorority women meet at Sixteenth Street Baptist Church to discuss community service projects. Ruth L. Jackson presides.

The Business District

Fourth Avenue emerged as *the* commercial and social center for black patrons in the 1910s. Jim Crow laws required the separation of the races and located black businesses here.

Banks, barber and beauty shops, restaurants, theaters, hotels, funeral homes, and photographic studios thrived until desegregation in the 1960s. In the 1990s black business began a comeback.



*“That’s where he came up,
where he strived,
where he got financed
and could appreciate life.”*

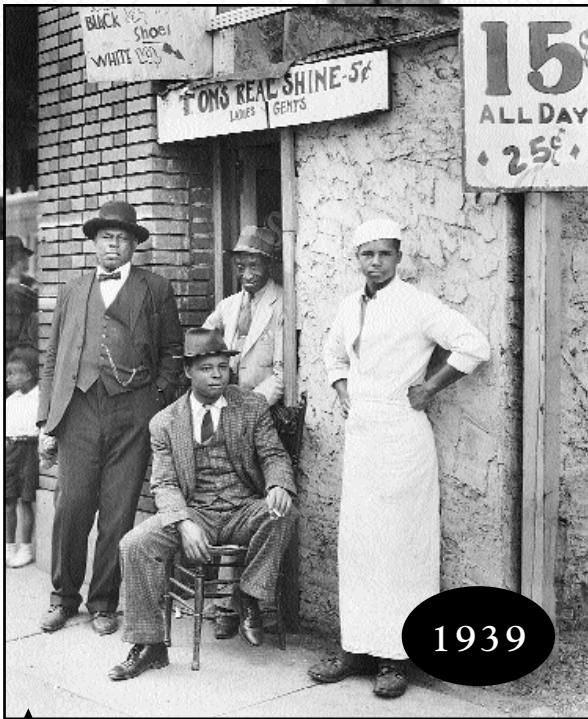
1930s

Fourth Avenue, looking west from 19th Street. ▲



1913

▲ The Penny Savings Bank, one of four black-owned banks in the city, encouraged savings and provided money for buying homes and businesses.



1939

▲ Tom's Real Shine, though tiny, was well located at a bus stop, where people waited. Tom is dressed in white.

▶ Elsie Bradford operated the Bradford Funeral Home here from 1908 until 1941. Her hearse is a Cadillac equipped with a full-length flower tray.



1937

Let Me Entertain You

1938



LITTLE SAVOY CAFE

The South's Finest; the City's Largest

CHICKEN—STEAKS—DINNERS—SHORT ORDERS—DRINKS—SMOKES

411 N. 17th Street, Birmingham, Alabama

BOB WILLIAMS, Proprietor, Phone 7-8883

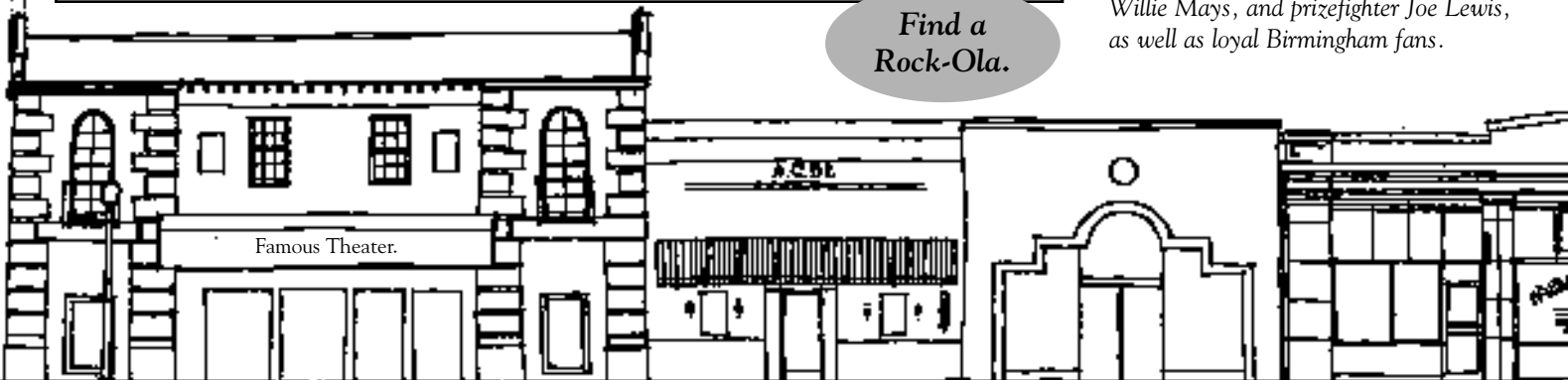
Phone Us At 7-8883—Booths—Tables—Open All Night

During the entertainment boom of the 1920s, the Famous, Frolic, Lincoln, Champion, Dixie and Savoy theaters opened.

In the 1960s, beginning at 3:00 p.m. Fridays and all day Saturdays, this was a swinging place. The streets were filled with crowds. Rock-Olas were playing in every joint. Everyone was out strolling.

Open 24 hours, Bob's Savoy was the glamorous heart of the district. Patrons included baseball greats Jackie Robinson, Willie Mays, and prizefighter Joe Lewis, as well as loyal Birmingham fans.

Find a
Rock-Ola.



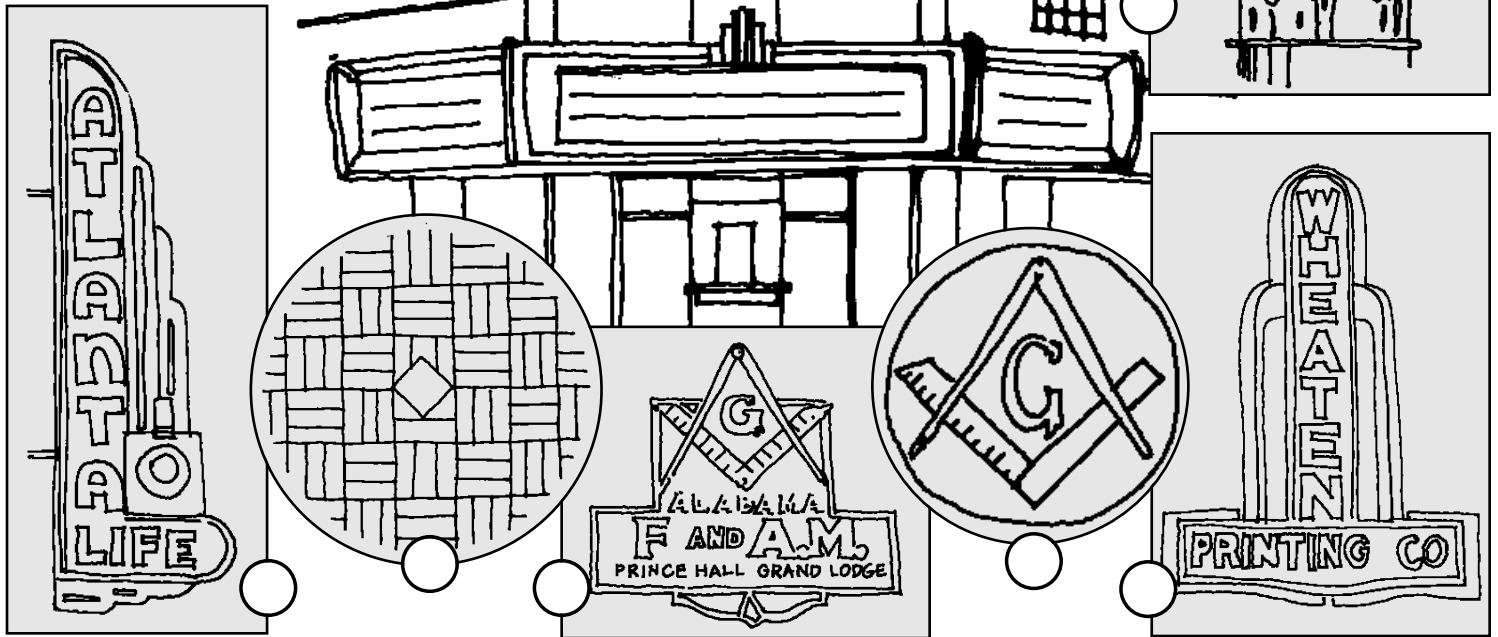
Business As Usual

Built to show movies, the Carver Theater is now the place to learn about jazz. The Alabama Jazz Hall of Fame presents exhibits and live performances.

OPEN TO THE PUBLIC.

Find these signs and details.

cm



Fourth Avenue's one- and two-story buildings provide a lively place for doing business and for gathering.

Possible types of businesses on Fourth Avenue & in the 300 blocks of 17th & 18th Streets:

Count the businesses.

___ banks ___ barbers ___ food ___ offices ___ entertainment ___ insurance
 ___ lawyers ___ other _____



cm

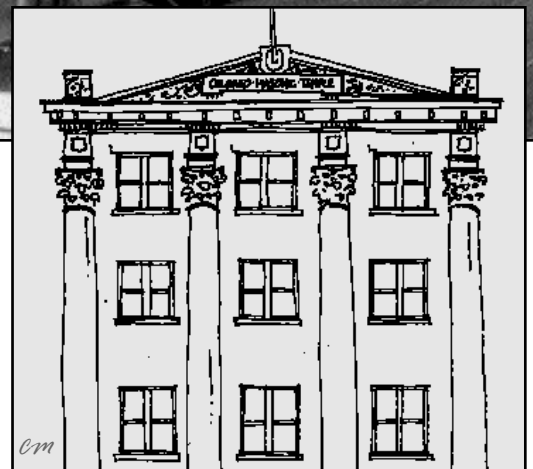
The Masonic Temple

History
Happened Here
May 26, 1956.



The Masonic Temple dominates the skyline of the district and its business and cultural life. Here were housed masonic groups, offices for many black firms and professionals, and a branch of the library. The grand ballroom featured social and athletic events.

On May 26, 1956, the padlocking of the doors of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP) offices set the fire that started the Birmingham Civil Rights Movement of the 1950s and 1960s. ▲



1930s



Jazz Alive

In the Masonic Temple's dance hall, big bands and big name performers played to packed houses.

▲ *Duke Ellington and his band performed here regularly.*

Count Basie's recordings and endless travel reinforced his international fame. He played the Masonic Temple annually. ►



Which musicians play Birmingham today?

Where do they play?



1940s



The chimes of a vibraphone contributed to the mellow sound of Birmingham musician Fess Whatley and his Vibra Cathedral Band.

John T. ("Fess") Whatley, band instructor at Parker High School, was a nationally known musician and teacher. His students played with America's best big bands.

Big Bands

▼ Birmingham native Erskine Hawkins ► performs in a playful style with his Alabama State Collegians as they record, live and on stage, for a radio audience.

Hawkins' song about an Ensley dance hall (as arranged by Glenn Miller) became an international hit.

Come on down, forget your care.
Come on down, I'll see you there.
Tuxedo Junction, now.



1939





Singing his dreamy 1964 hit "The Way You Do The Things You Do" is Birmingham's Eddie Kendricks. A classy dresser, the tall, handsome tenor sang leads for The Temptations, a male vocal group with 37 Top Ten hits in the 1960s. *The Birmingham News*.

Fourth Avenue

Prior to 1900, a black business district did not exist. In a pattern characteristic of Southern cities founded after the Civil War, blacks developed businesses alongside those of whites in many sections of the city center.

In the early 20th century, Jim Crow laws authorizing the distinct separation of the races and subsequent restrictions forced the growing black businesses into the area in and about Fourth Avenue. Here banks and insurance firms, restaurants, theaters and hotels, barbers and beauty shops, and funeral homes flourished. Jazz, big bands, vaudeville shows, and the movies played to packed houses. Fourth Avenue had it all.

Starting Points:

Alabama Jazz Hall of Fame-Carver Performing Arts Theater, 1631 Fourth Ave. North. Telephone for tours: 254-2731 or 254-2720.

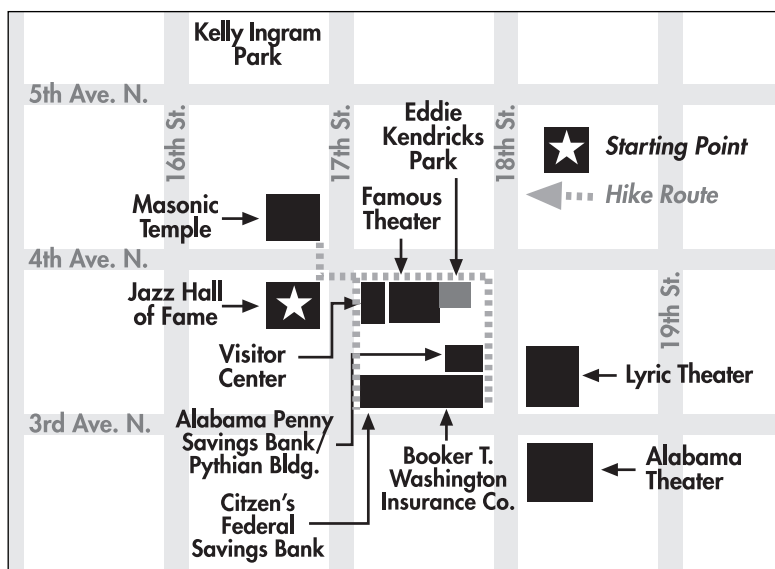
Historical Fourth Avenue Visitor Information Center-Urban Impact, Inc., Fourth & 17th. Telephone for district tours: 328-1850.

Masonic Temple, 1630 Fourth Ave. North. Telephone for permission to visit the ballroom (Access is provided by the elevator operator.) Call the Grand Master's office: 328-9078.

Or continue from the *Going Downtown Hunt* or *A Walk to Freedom*.

Hike Area: 1700 Block Fourth Ave. North, 300 Blocks of 17th & 18th Streets

Needed to begin: pencils, quarters for parking meters or fees, tour arrangements at individual sites, curiosity and at least an hour.



Vocabulary:

Racial zoning-the arranging or dividing into zones by race; division sanctioned by laws

Rock-Ola or jukebox-a coin-operated boom box of the 1950s & 1960s (with built-in tunes)

Segregation-separation or isolation of a race, enforced by laws and other barriers to social interaction

The Temptations-a popular Motown (motor-town=Detroit) singing group of the 1960s

On the cover:

The King Oliver Band, *Vaudeville, California*, 1922.

Dr A. G. Gaston, (1893-1996) *There was nothing Dr. Gaston could not sell. He built a business empire: burial policies, insurance, banking and construction firms, funeral homes and cemeteries, a motel, restaurant, and business college.* Booker T. Washington Insurance Co.