

**United States Department of the Interior  
Heritage Conservation and Recreation Service**

**National Register of Historic Places  
Inventory—Nomination Form**

For HCRS use only  
received JAN 12 1982  
date entered FEB 11 1982

See instructions in *How to Complete National Register Forms*  
Type all entries—complete applicable sections

**1. Name**

historic Fourth Avenue Historic District

and/or common

**2. Location**

4th Ave, 17th and 18th Sts.

street & number 1600-1800 blocks of 4th Avenue North and part of the  
300 blocks of 17th and 18th Streets North  not for publication

city, town Birmingham  vicinity of \_\_\_\_\_ congressional district 6

state Alabama code 01 county Jefferson code 073

**3. Classification**

<b>Category</b>	<b>Ownership</b>	<b>Status</b>	<b>Present Use</b>	
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> district	<input type="checkbox"/> public	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> occupied	<input type="checkbox"/> agriculture	<input type="checkbox"/> museum
<input type="checkbox"/> building(s)	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> private	<input type="checkbox"/> unoccupied	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> commercial	<input type="checkbox"/> park
<input type="checkbox"/> structure	<input type="checkbox"/> both	<input type="checkbox"/> work in progress	<input type="checkbox"/> educational	<input type="checkbox"/> private residence
<input type="checkbox"/> site	<b>Public Acquisition</b>	<b>Accessible</b>	<input type="checkbox"/> entertainment	<input type="checkbox"/> religious
<input type="checkbox"/> object	<input type="checkbox"/> in process	<input type="checkbox"/> yes: restricted	<input type="checkbox"/> government	<input type="checkbox"/> scientific
	<input type="checkbox"/> being considered	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> yes: unrestricted	<input type="checkbox"/> industrial	<input type="checkbox"/> transportation
		<input type="checkbox"/> no	<input type="checkbox"/> military	<input type="checkbox"/> other:

**4. Owner of Property**

name See attached list of property owners

street & number

city, town \_\_\_\_\_ vicinity of \_\_\_\_\_ state \_\_\_\_\_

**5. Location of Legal Description**

courthouse, registry of deeds, etc. Jefferson County Courthouse

street & number 716 21st Street North

city, town Birmingham state Alabama

**6. Representation in Existing Surveys**

title Downtown Birmingham 1977; Jefferson Co. Historical Sites Survey 1976 and 1972; NRHP 1980  
(Alabama Penny Savings) has this property been determined eligible?  yes  no

date 1972, 1976, 1977 and 1980  federal  state  county  local

depository for survey records Birmingham Historical Society & Jefferson County  
Historical Commission

city, town Birmingham state Alabama

## 7. Description

<b>Condition</b>		<b>Check one</b>	<b>Check one</b>
<input type="checkbox"/> excellent	<input type="checkbox"/> deteriorated	<input type="checkbox"/> unaltered	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> original site
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> good	<input type="checkbox"/> ruins	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> altered	<input type="checkbox"/> moved date _____
<input type="checkbox"/> fair	<input type="checkbox"/> unexposed		

### Describe the present and original (if known) physical appearance

The Fourth Avenue Historic District is that segment of downtown Birmingham which was once the center of black social and commercial activity and professional achievement from 1908 to 1941. Located just north and west of Birmingham's central business district, it includes a three block stretch of 4th Avenue North and the adjacent half-blocks south of 4th along 17th and 18th Streets. The district contains buildings of varying scale, materials, and design quality which were built to serve the needs of the black community living under the restrictive confines of segregation. The backbone of the district is the modest one and two-story brick storefront buildings lining 4th Avenue which housed black service establishments. They link the two important centers of professional and social activity--the seven-story Renaissance Revival style Colored Masonic Temple (1922; Inv. #8) Photo 1 and the six-story Chicago style Alabama Penny Savings Bank Building (c. 1913; Inv. #20) Photo 2. Adding distinction to the 4th Avenue storefronts are two movie theaters: the Renaissance Revival style Famous Theatre (1928; Inv. #14) Photo #3 and the Carver Cinema (1941; Inv. # 4) Photo #4, one of the best Art Moderne buildings in the city. At the eastern end of the district is a half-block of handsome three-story brick Commercial style buildings; (Photo 5) particularly noteworthy is 1805-07 4th Avenue (Inv. #23) Photo 6, with its distinctive Craftsman style details.

The most common building material is brick. Some of the buildings incorporate newer materials--Carrara glass and neon--adding interest and evidencing the district's design evolution. One building (c. 1925; Inv. #1) photo #7 has been refaced with a surprisingly sensitive application of permastone with decorative patterns using keystones and diamond inlays typical of 1910s and 20s. Limestone, used in both the Penny Savings Bank and Masonic Temple buildings, adds variety to the district's building materials.

There are 21 buildings in the Fourth Avenue Historic District; 18 (86%) are contributing, 2 (10%) are conditionally contributing and 1 (4%) is non-contributing. The buildings were built between 1908 and 1941; 15 were built between 1913 and 1928. The styles represented are commercial storefront (some with Beaux Arts and Craftsman influence), Chicago School, Renaissance Revival, and Art Moderne.

All 21 of the buildings in the district are used commercially although currently 3 (14%) of the buildings are vacant. There are also 3 vacant lots in the district. Thirteen (62%) of the buildings are in good condition; 6 (28%) are in fair condition; 2 (10%) are in poor condition. The only building which does not contribute in a c. 1950s one-story brick structure attached to the Fraternal Hotel (Inv. #6). The two buildings which are conditionally contributing (Inv. #13 & 21) could, if their insensitive refacing were removed, become contributing structures.

The boundaries of the Fourth Avenue Historic District were drawn to include the most significant and intact concentration of buildings associated with the social and commercial activity of the city's black community during the Jim Crow years (1908-1941).

# 8. Significance

Period	Areas of Significance—Check and justify below			
<input type="checkbox"/> prehistoric	<input type="checkbox"/> archeology-prehistoric	<input type="checkbox"/> community planning	<input type="checkbox"/> landscape architecture	<input type="checkbox"/> religion
<input type="checkbox"/> 1400-1499	<input type="checkbox"/> archeology-historic	<input type="checkbox"/> conservation	<input type="checkbox"/> law	<input type="checkbox"/> science
<input type="checkbox"/> 1500-1599	<input type="checkbox"/> agriculture	<input type="checkbox"/> economics	<input type="checkbox"/> literature	<input type="checkbox"/> sculpture
<input type="checkbox"/> 1600-1699	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> architecture	<input type="checkbox"/> education	<input type="checkbox"/> military	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> social/
<input type="checkbox"/> 1700-1799	<input type="checkbox"/> art	<input type="checkbox"/> engineering	<input type="checkbox"/> music	<input type="checkbox"/> humanitarian
<input type="checkbox"/> 1800-1899	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> commerce	<input type="checkbox"/> exploration/settlement	<input type="checkbox"/> philosophy	<input type="checkbox"/> theater
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> 1900-1941	<input type="checkbox"/> communications	<input type="checkbox"/> industry	<input type="checkbox"/> politics/government	<input type="checkbox"/> transportation
		<input type="checkbox"/> invention		<input type="checkbox"/> other (specify)

**Specific dates** 1908-1928; 1941

**Builder/Architect**

**Statement of Significance (in one paragraph)**

SOCIAL:

The Fourth Avenue Historic District is significant because it is the only surviving remnant of what was once the heart of black Birmingham's social and cultural life (1908-1941). Its buildings evidence the primary force which shaped the district's character: the black community's attempt to fulfill social and cultural needs within the restrictive confines of racial segregation and discrimination. Although some significant structures have burned or been demolished, the major landmarks remain: the Colored Masonic Temple (Inv. #8), where black service clubs met and debutante balls and black-tie events were held; the Famous Theatre (Inv. #14) and the Carver Cinema (Inv. #4), two distinctive motion picture theaters built for the black patron; and the Alabama Penny Savings Bank (now the Pythian Temple, 1913; NRHP 1980; Inv. #20) which was a political and professional center and housed offices of The Birmingham Reporter, the leading black newspaper of the era.

The social significance of the district was not confined to its landmark buildings. The street, and the shops, bars, and poolrooms that were oriented to it, provided another forum for black social life. Novelist Octavus Roy Cohen used this streetlife as the setting for his colorful caricatures of Birmingham's black life that gained nationwide recognition in the 1920s.

Many of the city's early black leaders had strong ties to the district, such as Dr. W. R. Pettiford, one of the founders of the Alabama Penny Savings Bank (the state's first black-owned bank) and pastor of the Sixteenth Street Baptist Church, an important center of black life just beyond the district; Oscar W. Adams, Sr., editor of the The Birmingham Reporter and president of the Colored Citizen's League of Birmingham, both of which were located in the Penny Savings Bank Building; and E. A. Brown, the first black attorney to practice in Birmingham whose offices were also in the building. The Windham Brothers Construction Company, a local black firm in operation close to 75 years (in 1925 it had branch offices in Nashville, Chicago, Indianapolis and Detroit) built the Colored Masonic Temple and the Penny Savings Bank, where they had their offices in the 1910s.

The district also includes a half-block of buildings originally occupied by immigrant shopkeepers. Although the block served primarily as a social and physical buffer between the black district and the downtown core, it was also a place where the immigrant and black communities shared in the exchange of goods and services. Its inclusion thus solidifies the social and historical context of the Fourth Avenue Historic District.

COMMERCE:

The Fourth Avenue Historic District is the only place left in the city which tells the story of the Jim Crow years in Birmingham (1908-1941). Prohibited from patronizing white restaurants, movie theaters, and personal service establishments, blacks developed businesses in those areas to serve their community. They also offered professional services (medical and legal) to the black community. Although now somewhat diminished by the demolition of some structures and the dispersal of black life that has come with integration and suburban expansion, important structures remain which document what was once the center of commercial activity in black Birmingham.

# 9. Major Bibliographical References

See attached Bibliography



# 10. Geographical Data

Acreeage of nominated property Approx. 4.2 acres

Quadrangle name Birmingham, North

Quadrangle scale 1:24000

UMT References

A 

1	6	5	1	7	7	0	0	3	7	0	18	3	14	10
Zone		Easting				Northing								

B 

1	6	5	1	7	7	4	10	3	7	0	18	2	18	10
Zone		Easting				Northing								

C 

1	6	5	1	7	4	4	10	3	7	0	18	1	12	10
Zone		Easting				Northing								

D 

1	6	5	1	7	3	8	10	3	7	0	18	2	14	10
Zone		Easting				Northing								

E 

1	6	5	1	7	4	4	10	3	7	0	18	2	6	10
Zone		Easting				Northing								

F 

Zone		Easting				Northing								

G 

Zone		Easting				Northing								

H 

Zone		Easting				Northing								

Verbal boundary description and justification

See yellow line on map.

List all states and counties for properties overlapping state or county boundaries

state code county code

state code county code

# 11. Form Prepared By

name/title Ann M. Burkhardt/Research Coordinator

organization Birmingham Historical Society

date August 1981

street & number 1425 22nd Street South

telephone (205) 254-2138

city or town Birmingham

state Alabama

# 12. State Historic Preservation Officer Certification

The evaluated significance of this property within the state is:

national  state  local

As the designated State Historic Preservation Officer for the National Historic Preservation Act of 1966 (Public Law 89-665), I hereby nominate this property for inclusion in the National Register and certify that it has been evaluated according to the criteria and procedures set forth by the Heritage Conservation and Recreation Service.

State Historic Preservation Officer signature [Signature]

title State Historic Preservation Officer

date 1-4-82

For HCERS use only

I hereby certify that this property is included in the National Register

[Signature]  
Keeper of the National Register

Entered in the  
National Register

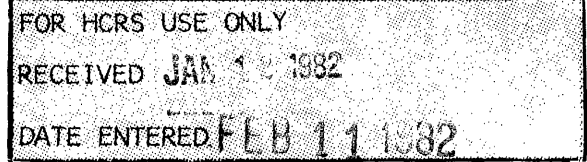
date 2/11/82

Attest:

date

Chief of Registration

**NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES  
INVENTORY -- NOMINATION FORM**



**CONTINUATION SHEET**

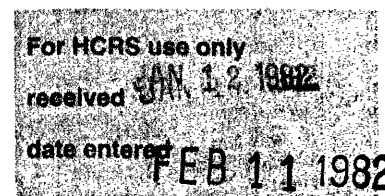
**ITEM NUMBER**

**PAGE**

- |  |   |   |
|--|---|---|
| 1. Five Star Corp.<br>1617 No. 4th Avenue<br>Birmingham, Alabama   | 12. P. & S. Hornbuckle<br>1509 SW Matt Leonard Drive<br>Birmingham, Alabama | 21. Sophie Matz Slotnick<br>2008 No. 3rd Avenue<br>Birmingham, Alabama                  |
| 2. H. & G. Mitchell<br>P. O. Box 2621<br>Birmingham, Alabama   | 13. Wylie Farm & Mercantile Co.<br>Riverside, Alabama 35135                 | 22. Sam & Nellie Koplun<br>833 Conroy Road<br>Birmingham, Alabama                       |
| 3. D. L. & Mary Nelson<br>220 So. 5th Avenue<br>Birmingham, Alabama                                      | 14. Fred H. Mohns & Co.<br>P. O. Box 2621<br>Birmingham, Alabama            | 23. Juliet Sellers Webster<br>1641 E. Fairview Avenue<br>Apt. A1<br>Montgomery, Alabama |
| * 4. Kenco Inc.<br>P. O. Box 7406<br>Birmingham, Alabama   | 15. Booker T. Washington Inc. Co.<br>P. O. Box 2621<br>Birmingham, Alabama  | 24. Lida I. Hill TR<br>P. O. Box 6001<br>c/o J. Inscoe Agency<br>Montgomery, Alabama    |
| 5. Dr. Neal Berte, Pres.<br>Birmingham-Southern College<br>800 8th Avenue W<br>Birmingham, Alabama       | * 16. First National Bank of<br>P. O. Box 2534<br>Birmingham, Alabama       | 24. Laura Hill Wylie<br>Hill Building<br>Montgomery, Alabama                            |
| * 6. K of P Grand Lodge<br>310 No. 18th Street<br>Birmingham, Alabama                                    | 18. Rose Owen M. Munger<br>2603 Montevallo Road<br>Birmingham, Alabama      |   |
| * 7. Endowment Dept. AF & AM<br>of Alabama<br>P. O. Box 10504-<br>c/o S. J Bennet<br>Birmingham, Alabama | 19. Realty Rental Co. Inc.<br>1031 So. 20th Street<br>Birmingham, Alabama   |   |
| 9. Rose Hood Johnston<br>P. O. Box 58065<br>Birmingham, Alabama  | 19. Bankhead Dev. Co. Inc.<br>P. O. Box 2385<br>Jasper, Alabama             |   |
|  | 21. Anna S. Randman<br>2008 No. 3rd Avenue<br>Birmingham, Alabama           |   |

\* 4 & 5 , 6 & 20, 7 & 8, 9, 10 & 11 and 16 & 17

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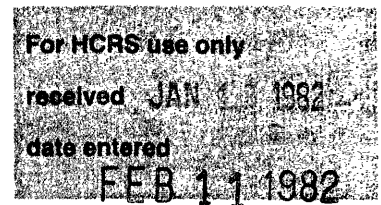
Page 1

CONTRIBUTING PROPERTIES

1. Commercial building (Chico's Hot Dogs & Lounge, et.al.), 1617 4th Avenue North: c. 1925; Commercial style; 1 story; brick; 3 bays; keystone and diamond inlays in permastone.
2. Commercial building (Wheaton Printing Company), 1621 4th Avenue North: c. 1925; Commercial style; 1 story; brick.
3. Commercial building (Patton's Beauty Shop), 1623 4th Avenue North: c. 1914; Commercial style; 2 stories; brick; pressed metal cornice above 1st floor, segmental arch windows with keystones.
4. Carver Cinema, SW corner 4th Avenue & 17th Street North: c. 1941; Art Moderne style; 2 stories; brick; brick banding, Carrara glass, marble, glass brick and neon on the marquee, stainless steel letters; one of the three best examples of the Art Moderne style in the city.
5. Commercial building (Willie's House of Style, et.al.), 312-320 17th Street North: c. 1925; Commercial storefront style; 1 story; brick; 5 bays; stone lintels and roof cap.
6. Fraternal Hotel (Alabama Christian Movement for Human Right, et.al.), 1616-18-20-22 4th Avenue North: c. 1926; Commercial style; 2 stories; brick; brick panels, marble inset and stone roof caps.
8. Colored Masonic Temple (Masonic Temple), NW corner 4th Avenue & 17th Street North: 1922; Taylor E. Persley and Walter T. Woods; Renaissance Revival style; 7 stories; brick and limestone; rusticated limestone base, fine brickwork, gigantic Corinthian columns and pilasters, classical cornice and pediment, graduated pilasters & cornices, Roman grills at attic story; designed by black architects and built by a black-owned construction firm, it served as the principal social and cultural center for the black community during segregation and housed the state headquarters for the Masons and the Order of the Eastern Star.
9. Commercial building (Help One Another Club, Inc.), 1701 4th Avenue North: c. 1917; Commercial style; 2 stories; brick; brick and pressed metal cornice.
10. Davenport-Harris Building (Brothers Shoe Repair/Help One Another Club), 1703 4th Avenue North: c. 1913; Commercial style; 1 story; brick; 2 bays; pressed metal cornice, dentilled brickwork; Davenport-Harris Funeral Home, the city's oldest black mortuary, was the first tenant.

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11. O.K. French Dry Cleaning Building, 1705 4th Avenue North: c. 1916; possibly by Wallace A. Rayfield; Commercial style; 1 story; brick; octagonal windows, pressed metal cornice, brick corbelling; original location of major black drycleaning firm.
12. Commercial building (Majic City Barber Shop et.al.), 1707-11 4th Avenue North: c. 1913; Commercial style; 1 story; brick; 2 bay; pressed metal cornice and pedimented roofline.
14. Famous Theatre, 1717 4th Avenue North: c. 1928; Renaissance Revival style; 2 stories; brick; polychromed Carrara glass, stone quoining, terra cotta tile roof, neon marquis, glass brick, octagonal ticket booth; the oldest movie house remaining in the district built for the black patron and a successful interpretation of the Renaissance Revival style.
18. Champion-Savoy Theatres Building (Mark's Dry Goods), 316-18 18th Street North c. 1910; Commercial style; 2 stories; brick; brackets above door, pressed metal cornices; only building remaining in the district which offered live entertainment for the black patron.
19. Commercial building (Birmingham Hardware), 312 18th Street North: c. 1908; Commercial style; 2 stories; brick; quoining, pressed metal cornices and brackets, keystone above 2nd story windows.
20. Alabama Penny Savings Bank (Pythian Temple), 310 18th Street North; 1913; possibly Wallace A. Rayfield; Commercial style; 6 stories; brick; skillful handling of proportions, brickwork and architectural details; represents significant black financial, professional, architectural, and cultural achievements; housed the state's first black-owned bank and offices for the black press, business and professionals in the city.
22. Suburban Hotel (Koplon's Korner), SE corner 4th Avenue & 18th Street North: c. 1910; Beaux Arts Commercial style; 3 stories; brick; cast iron column at corner and ground floor transoms, fine brickwork, pressed metal cornices.
23. Commercial building (Famous Harlem Shoe Shop, et. al.), 1805-07 4th Avenue North: c. 1913; Commercial style; 3 stories; brick; fine brickwork, limestone insets, pressed metal brackets and cornice; unique example of craftsman-influenced commercial building.
24. Commercial building (Uncle Sam's Pawn Shop & Adult Theatres), 1809-15 4th Avenue North: c. 1910; Commercial style; 3 stories; brick pressed metal cornice over 1st floor, brick corbelling, activated roofline with stone caps.

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CONDITIONAL CONTRIBUTING PROPERTIES

13. Commercial building (New Breed Barber Shop), 1715 4th Avenue North: c. 1913; Commercial style; 1 story; brick; 2 bay; substantially altered, refaced with Carrara glass.
21. Commercial building (Jay-Cee Men's Store/Mr. Style), 313 18th Street North: c. 1915; Commercial style; 1 story; brick; 3 bay; brick corbelling and pedimented roof line; substantially altered, two-thirds of facade refaced with aluminum siding; removal of aluminum siding would make this a contributing property.

NON-CONTRIBUTING PROPERTIES

7. Zenith Cab Company and vacant lot, 1600 block 4th Avenue North.
15. Vacant Lot, 1700 block of 4th Avenue North.
16. Vacant Lot, 1700 block of 4th Avenue North.
17. Vacant Lot, SW corner 4th Avenue & 18th Street North.



UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR  
NATIONAL PARK SERVICE

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The Alabama Penny Savings Bank (1913; NRHP 1980; Inv. #20), the first black-owned bank in the state and the second largest black bank in the country in 1907, is the most important symbol of black enterprise in the city. The bank financed the construction of homes and churches for thousands of local black citizens and probably helped finance the construction of some of the buildings in the district in the early 1910s. It was also a center for black professional activity in the city, as was the Colored Masonic Temple (Inv. #8).

The basically intact 1600 and 1700 blocks of 4th Avenue North housed the many small personal service establishments--the barber and beauty shops, dry cleaners, tailors, shoe shops and taxicab companies--and the restaurants, clubs, and hotels which catered almost exclusively to the black patron. The Davenport-Harris Funeral Home (c.1913; Inv. #10), the city's oldest black mortuary, was located on this corridor in the 1910s. In addition to the two movie houses--the Famous and the Carver--several live entertainment theaters contributed to the commercial vitality of the district. The Champion and Savoy Theatres Building (1913; 316-18 18th Street North; Inv. #18) is the only such building left in the district.

ARCHITECTURE:

The Fourth Avenue Historic District contains the best concentration of secular architecture created by Birmingham's black community during the Jim Crow era (1908-1941). The Colored Masonic Temple (1922; Inv. #8), a major work by black architects R. Taylor & L. Persley and Walter T. Woods, is an inventive Mannerist-influenced Renaissance Revival style structure which served as the social and cultural center for the black community during segregation. It was constructed by the Windham Brothers Construction Company, a local black firm which was possibly of regional significance. The Alabama Penny Savings Bank (now the Pythian Temple; c.1913; Inv. #20) was probably designed by Wallace A. Rayfield, the black architect who designed the Sixteenth Street Baptist Church (1911; nominated NRHP 1980) only a few blocks away, and it was also built by the Windham Brothers Construction Company. Its fine brickwork and skillful handling of proportions and architectural details make it a distinctive local interpretation of the Chicago style office building. During the 1910s, Rayfield and the Windham firm had offices in the Penny Savings Bank.

Other structures contribute to the architectural distinction of the Fourth Avenue Historic District. The Famous Theatre (1928; Inv. #14) is a Renaissance Revival style building which successfully combines elements of a later renovation--Carrara glass and neon--with its original features. The Carver Cinema (1941; Inv. #4) is one of the best examples of the Art Moderne style in the city. The O.K. French Dry Cleaning Building (c.1916; Inv. #11), distinguished by its pressed metal cornice and brick corbelling, was possibly designed by Wallace A. Rayfield. The three-story buildings along the 1800 block of 4th Avenue North, the district's "ethnic corridor," also contribute architecturally to the district. Particularly notable is 1805-7 4th Avenue North (c.1913; Inv. #23). It is the only example in the city of a large commercial building whose architectural details fully express the Craftsman style. The Suburban Hotel (c.1910; Inv. #22) is a good example of a Beaux Arts-influenced Commercial style building with handsome lion heads on the cornice frieze.

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CONTINUATION SHEET

ITEM NUMBER 9 PAGE 1

Baist, G. W. Baist's Property Atlas of the City of Birmingham and its Suburbs.  
Philadelphia, 1902.

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The Birmingham Reporter, 1918, 1925 and 1930.

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Birmingham: Gray Printing Company, 1972.

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& Co., 1883-1941.

Cohen, Octavus Roy. Polished Ebony. Freeport, NY: Books for Libraries Press,  
1919.

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Alabama, 1947-1963." Ph.D. dissertation, University of Virginia, 1975.

Sanborn Fire Insurance Maps, 1902 and 1911.

White, Marjorie L. Downtown Birmingham Architectural and Historical Walking  
Tour Guide. Birmingham, Alabama: Birmingham Historical Society, 1977.

Wilson, Franklin D. "The Ecology of a Black Business District." The Review  
of Black Political Economy 5: 353-75.

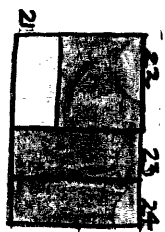
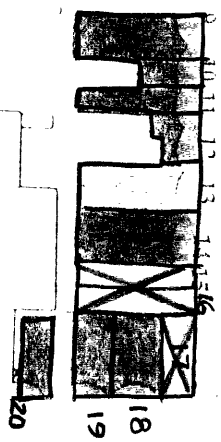
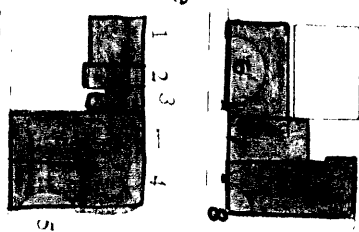
Woodward, C. Van. The Strange Career of Jim Crow. New York: Oxford University  
Press, 1966.

2nd Avenue

3rd Avenue

4th Avenue

5th Avenue



Contributing Properties

Conditional Contributing Properties

Non-Contributing Properties

4th Ave. Historic District  
Birmingham, AL.