

13. STRUVE-HAY BUILDING

117-123 North Jefferson Street

117-121:

Robert S. Moorman
3311 Lookout Drive
Huntsville, Alabama 35801

123:

J. C. and William R. Hay
505 Williams Avenue
Huntsville, Alabama 35801

Lot 1 and part of Lot 2, Block 2, Old Town; 77.5' (Jefferson) X 150'
16 537790 3843190

1900: Herbert Cowell, Huntsville, architect
J. M. Kerr, Huntsville, contractor

DESCRIPTION

The Struve-Hay building was originally a two-story brick commercial structure with a three-story tower on the north corner. The Jefferson Street facade has three stores, but the second floors of the two southern ones have been removed since 1955. The entrances have been altered, the center one being reworked with glass bricks and black glass. Cast iron pilasters with capitals originally defined the first floor facade but they have been mostly removed or covered. The second floor was divided into bays by shallow brick pilasters which are joined at the top by a stepped brick frieze. There are two double-hung windows per bay separated by a brick mullion but joined by a single, flush, ashlar lintel. A matching sill runs unbroken across the building to visually separate the two floors. A pressed metal cornice of simple brackets terminates the walls. The tower has a single window on each side at the second story and paired round-topped windows at the cornice level. A pyramidal roof with ball finial completes the tower.

The side wall is unfenestrated on the first floor while the second floor is treated identically to the front. The back third of the building is slightly lower and is joined to the main structure by a bay containing a large, arched, stone entrance of Romanesque inspiration which has been closed. Above it is a bay window.

SIGNIFICANCE

The Struve-Hay is one of several commercial structures in Huntsville that combines Victorian and Commercial Brick features. It was erected in 1900, which in Huntsville was a transitional period for commercial styles: the excesses and variety of the Victorian era were gradually being shed in favor of the more restrained and integrated designs of the Commercial Brick style.

The most obvious Victorian feature here is the corner tower, a popular picturesque device much favored in the late 19th century. Several towered structures were built in Huntsville, but the Struve-Hay is the only one still extant. Other 19th century features include the applied metal cornice and the Romanesque-derived side entrance with bay

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Continuation:

window above.

Influences of the Commercial Brick style are most noticeable in the flush lintels, which span each bay, and the contrasting string-course, which serves as a continuous window sill running unbroken across the entire facade. Although the building displays several Victorian treatments, the regularity of its composition, the strong horizontals, and the overall restraint exhibited by the wall surface are indicative of the general direction that local commercial architecture would pursue in the first quarter of this century.

The Struve-Hay building represents a specific time and phase in the continuing evolution of commercial architecture in Huntsville and illustrates how new styles gradually emerged from older ones. Its status as the lone remaining corner-tower building makes it additionally significant as the last example of this distinctive building form in Huntsville. It is also the only extant commercial design by architect Herbert Cowell, who came to Huntsville from Joliet, Illinois. He had a successful practice here for several years at the turn of the century and executed numerous residential commissions, two of which are still considered among the finest in the city.

Although considerably altered, this building retains those features and qualities that establish its integrity and that locate it in time and place. Recognition of its historical and architectural value to the community is imperative for its continued preservation and eventual rehabilitation.