

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

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

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

1. Name

historic Whilldin Building

and/or common

2. Location

street & number 513-517 21st Street North _____ not for publication

city, town Birmingham _____ vicinity of congressional district 6

state Alabama code 01 county Jefferson code 073

3. Classification

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

4. Owner of Property

name Whilldin Building Partnership

street & number 15 21st Street North

city, town Birmingham _____ vicinity of state Alabama

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 Alabama Inventory has this property been determined eligible? _____ yes no

date 1970-present _____ federal state _____ county _____ local

depository for survey records Alabama Historical Commission

city, town Montgomery _____ state Alabama

7. Description

Condition		Check one	Check one
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> excellent	<input type="checkbox"/> deteriorated	<input type="checkbox"/> unaltered	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> original site
<input 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 Whilldin Building, at 513-17 21st Street North is stylistically eclectic, comprised of two quite unique sections, both of which were designed by architect D. O. Whilldin and built during the period 1923-24. The two halves of the building shared some internal circulation and also a courtyard at the rear, which has since been enclosed. The northern half, number 517, which served as the entry to Mr. Whilldin's architectural office, contained a reception room, secretarial spaces, a drafting room, Whilldin's private office, a library, a print room and other support spaces. The southern half, numbers 513-515, contained some leasable office space on two floors and Whilldin's "consultation room" which opened directly onto the courtyard. The drawings in the Birmingham Public Library Department of Archives and existing evidence seem to indicate that the southern half was an existing one story building and that Whilldin added a second story and new facade when he acquired the property and built the northern half in 1923-24. The drawings also suggest his intention of adding a third floor of apartments which was never executed.

Along 21st Street, the massing of the building creates a disparate rather than a unified composition. The southern half which directly fronts the street and the northern half which sets back from it, exhibit further distinctions both in style and use of materials. The northern section with its veneer of dark clinker brick, red mission tile roof, hammer-finish wrought iron and terra cotta ornament, has a boldly scaled, somewhat eccentric appearance. The terra cotta lunette at the entrance was designed by Whilldin and is finely detailed. Supported by heavy brackets, it features a beribboned wreath of acanthus leaves framing a cartouche in blue, green and light ochre terra cotta with a stippled surface. The southern section of the building is more classically and elegantly proportioned, having a smooth limestone facade and ornamented only by panels of draped festoons over the doors, pilasters between the windows, and a simple cornice. Unfortunately, the original first floor windows have been altered by an infill of brick and glass block. In addition, with the enclosure of the courtyard, its exterior walls were either changed or removed entirely.

The interior has been altered considerably in some areas, particularly by the enclosure of the courtyard. However, the reception room and consultation rooms are notable for their original and exuberant detail, most of which remains. The reception room floor is patterned with a circular motif in terrazzo and granite, and the ceiling is coffered with rosette-filled hexagons. The consultation room has hardwood floors, trowel-finished plaster walls and a beamed ceiling with purlins bearing on heavy decorative brackets. The French doors which originally opened onto the courtyard are of cypress. The other heavy panelled doors, with their rope moulded frames, utilize oak. The fireplace has a chiselled stone hearth and oak bolection mould surround. The built-in credenza is panelled and decorated with bosses. Flanking these elements are hammered wrought iron wall sconces.

The remainder of the interior was converted to offices and few noteworthy details exist.

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 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 type="checkbox"/> commerce	<input type="checkbox"/> exploration/settlement	<input type="checkbox"/> philosophy	<input type="checkbox"/> theater
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> 1900-	<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 1923-24

Builder/Architect

D. O. Whilldin

Statement of Significance (in one paragraph)

The Whilldin Building is significant primarily because it was the office of one of Birmingham's most prominent early architects. It was at the height of his career, in 1923-24, that D. O. Whilldin designed the building at 513-517 21st Street for his own architectural office. For though he first opened his own office in 1905 and practiced architecture in Birmingham until he retired in 1962, it was during the period of the 1920's and 1930's that Whilldin designed some of the city's most significant structures. He was also instrumental in fostering the architectural profession in the state, as founder and early president of the Alabama Chapter of the American Institute of Architects. In addition, many of the next generation of Birmingham architects passed through his office at this time.

* * * *

The interior of the Whilldin Building can be considered significant despite such changes as the enclosure of the courtyard. The floor plan remains much the same, especially the entry sequence, circulation pattern and placement of major rooms at the front of the building. Several partitions have been added to form additional offices and a low glass partition has been removed between Whilldin's office and the files room (see plan). At the rear, three of the courtyard walls remain intact, as well as part of the fourth, and have been used to support the one story roof. Above this roof, at the second floor, the courtyard walls retain their original fenestration and are topped by a terra cotta tile roof. The French doors from the consultation room are still in place and several of the original first floor windows looking into the court remain.

In addition, the most public rooms and spaces which were elaborately detailed by D. O. Whilldin have not been altered. Of primary consideration are the reception room and the consultation room where Whilldin would have received and met with his clients. These rooms featured the fine materials and quality of detail for which Whilldin was best known. The rest of the building could be considered more utilitarian in nature and as such was simply and functionally detailed.

The loss of the courtyard is regrettable, yet since the Whilldin building was not organized around the court, this does not diminish plan relationships, particularly at the front of the building. Similarly, since particularly all of the alterations have taken place at the rear, the most notable spaces and features remain in excellent condition. Accordingly, plans for the building's renovation call for careful restoration of those significant elements and simple treatment of areas that have been changed or which contain few if any noteworthy details.

9. Major Bibliographical References

UTM NOT VERIFIED

Downtown Birmingham Marjorie White, Ed. Birmingham Historical Society 1977

Plans, Ferguson papers; Birmingham Public Library Department of Archives & Manuscripts Interviews

10. Geographical Data

ACREAGE NOT VERIFIED

Acreeage of nominated property .1 acres

Quadrangle name Birmingham North

Quadrangle scale 1:24000

UMT References

A	<u>1</u> <u>6</u>	<u>5</u> <u>1</u> <u>7</u>	<u>9</u> <u>4</u> <u>10</u>	<u>3</u> <u>17</u> <u>0</u> <u>18</u>	<u>6</u> <u>18</u> <u>10</u>
	Zone	Easting	Northing		

B					
	Zone	Easting	Northing		

C					
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D					
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E					
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F					
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G					
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H					
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Verbal boundary description and justification

Block 49, lots 11 and 12, 45' x 100'

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

state	code	county	code

11. Form Prepared By

name/title	Louise McPhillips, Intern Architect		
organization	Kidd, Wheeler & Plosser, Inc.	date	11-4-81
street & number	2101 1st Avenue North	telephone	251-0125
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 2/11/82

For HCRS use only	
I hereby certify that this property is included in the National Register entered in the National Register	
<i>[Signature]</i> Keeper of the National Register	date <u>3/25/82</u>
Attest:	date
Chief of Registration	

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

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FEB 23 1982

DATE ENTERED

CONTINUATION SHEET

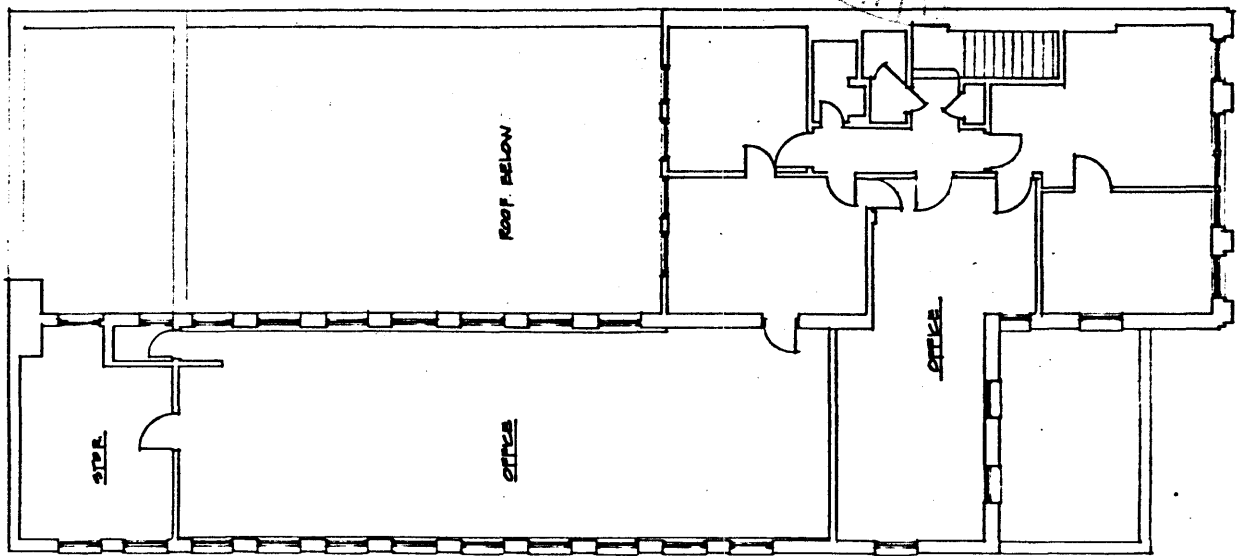
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A native of Philadelphia, Whilldin was educated at the Drexel Institute of Technology and the University of Pennsylvania. Following his graduation at 19, he joined Windham & Sons, one of the leading Philadelphia firms at the turn of the century, then spent 2 years in New York at Ford, Bacon & Davis, Engineers. While working for this firm, he was sent in 1902 to Birmingham to redesign the street railway operations for the Railway Light & Power Company. Whilldin stayed on in Birmingham and 3 years later opened his own office.

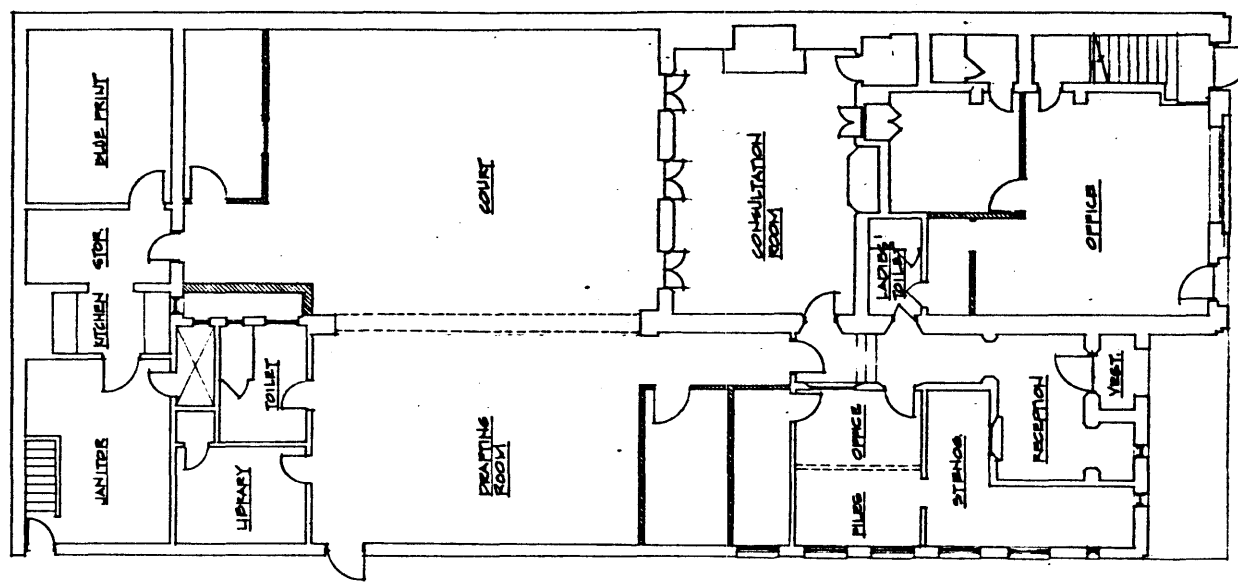
Some of the most important buildings in Birmingham which Whilldin designed were the Phillips High School (1923-25), the Florentine Building (1927), Standard Furniture Building (originally Alands 1928-29), Calder's (originally Henley Department Store 1928), Cabana Hotel (originally Thomas Jefferson Hotel 1929), Woolworth's Store (1939) and the original Legion Field (1927-28). He also designed several public housing projects for the WPA such as the Elyton Village (mid 1930's) and the Smithfield Court Housing Project (1935-36). Among his credits at this time are numerous private residences and apartment buildings. All of his design were characterized by love of exquisite decoration, concern with surface materials and attention to detail.

D. O. Whilldin helped found the original Alabama Chapter of the American Institute of Architects in 1916 and served a term as President. As architect for the Birmingham Board of Education and designer of the Jefferson City school system, he had a significant impact on public school architecture. He served as chairman of the Birmingham Building Code Committee, and was presented a plaque by Birmingham Mayor Seibels "for contributing more time than any citizen in the interest of the city's development." A perfectionist and exacting employer, Whilldin trained many young architects in his office during the 1920's and 30's. Some of those influenced by Whilldin included Fred Renneker, Jack Smith, Charles Snook and Lawrence Whitten.

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SECOND FLOOR PLAN



FIRST FLOOR PLAN
 1/8" = 1'-0"

LEGEND

- ORIGINAL ROOM DESIGNATIONS
- ORIGINAL WALLS
- ADDED PARTITIONS
- REMOVED PARTITIONS