

21. SCHIFFMAN BUILDING
231 East Side Square

Lawrence B. Goldsmith, Jr.
206 Gates Avenue
Huntsville, Alabama 35801

Lot 5, Block 37, Old Town; 25' (East Side Square) X 85' (Eustis)
16 538060 3843000

Built between 1835 and 1861: Architect/Builder unknown
1895: George W. Thompson, Nashville, architect for remodeling
D. E. Dinnedy, Nashville, contractor

DESCRIPTION

The Schiffman Building is all that remains of an antebellum, brick structure. The original building was three stories high and divided into three bays by massive flat pilasters with capitals and topped by a plain entablature. In 1895 the south third of the building was extensively remodeled in the Romanesque Revival style. It is this remodeling that remains today; the other two bays of the building have been demolished within the last ten years.

The facade is of quarry-faced limestone while the side wall is plastered and scored to resemble masonry. The entrance was shifted to the north side of the facade, and a large window opens into the president's office. Above the entrance is a dressed stone slab bearing the name "I. Schiffman," and above the window is a heavy keystone carved with a foliate design. The second floor has two narrow windows over the entrance topped by a smooth stone lintel and a small scale replica of the cornice. A bowed bay containing two larger windows protrudes over the president's office. On the third floor two windows are grouped above the bay while the third is centered over the entrance. A dressed stone lintel extends across the facade and forms the base for stone arches which spring over each window. Each corner is accented by an attenuated turret that extends above the heavy stone cornice. The cornice continues along the side wall of the building which is divided into five recessed bays by plain pilasters and an entablature that were features of the antebellum structure. The windows were enlarged during the 1895 remodeling and an entrance added in the last bay.

The interior of the first floor is unaltered except for carpeting and fluorescent fixtures. The ceiling is of pressed tin painted white, and the walls are painted plaster above paneled cherry wainscot. The space is divided into four offices by half walls topped by glass partitions and panels of open metalwork above which the floor is completely open. All of the woodwork is cherry; the frames of windows and doorways are fluted. The two front offices each have a corner fireplace with an over mantel mirror. The original walk-in safe with scrolled



Schiffman Building, 231 East Side Square, Huntsville, Alabama
Continuation:

pediment remains in the back.

SIGNIFICANCE

The Schiffman Building is one of the few extant antebellum commercial buildings and the only Richardsonian Romanesque building in the city. Its facade and interior have not been altered since 1895. In this year the Southern Building and Loan Association remodeled it in the Romanesque Revival style, both inside and out, at a cost of \$18,000. Issac Schiffman purchased the structure in 1905 and established a loan office there the following year; the building has remained in his family since then. Mr. Schiffman came from Germany when he was a teenager and went to work for his uncles who ran a mercantile business in Huntsville. He eventually took over the business, selling it a few years before his death. He was reputed to be a millionaire when he died.

A minor historical note is that Tallulah Bankhead was born in the second floor apartment in 1902 when her father, William Bankhead, was a lawyer in Huntsville. He had served as city attorney, 1900-01, and later was an Alabama representative to the 65th and 66th U. S. Congresses.