

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES
REGISTRATION FORM

1. Name of Property

historic name Fowler's Department Store

other names/site number Belk-Hudson's Department Store

2. Location

street & number 116 Washington and 214 Holmes Streets not for publication N/A
city or town Huntsville vicinity N/A
state Alabama code AL county Madison code 089 zip code 35801

3. State/Federal Agency Certification

As the designated authority under the National Historic Preservation Act of 1966, as amended, I hereby certify that this X nomination request for determination of eligibility meets the documentation standards for registering properties in the National Register of Historic Places and meets the procedural and professional requirements set forth in 36 CFR Part 60. In my opinion, the property X meets does not meet the National Register Criteria. I recommend that this property be considered significant nationally statewide X locally. (See continuation sheet for additional comments.)

[Signature] April 18, 1996
Signature of certifying official Date

Alabama Historical Commission (State Historic Preservation Office)
State or Federal agency and bureau

In my opinion, the property meets does not meet the National Register criteria. (See continuation sheet for additional comments.)

Signature of commenting or other official Date

State or Federal agency and bureau

4. National Park Service Certification

I, hereby certify that this property is:
 entered in the National Register
 See continuation sheet.
 determined eligible for the National Register
 See continuation sheet.
 determined not eligible for the National Register
 removed from the National Register
 other (explain):

Edson H. Beall

[Signature] 5/30/96
Signature of Keeper Date of Action

Property Name Fowler's Department Store

County and State Madison Co., AL

7. Description

Architectural Classification (Enter categories from instructions)

Commercial Style

Materials (Enter categories from instructions)

foundation BRICK

roof ASPHALT

walls BRICK

other _____

Narrative Description (Describe the historic and current condition on continuation sheets.)

8. Statement of Significance

Applicable National Register Criteria (Mark "x" in one or more boxes for the criteria qualifying the property for National Register listing)

- A Property is associated with events that have made a significant contribution to the broad patterns of our history.
- B Property is associated with the lives of persons significant in our past.
- C Property embodies the distinctive characteristics of a type, period, or method of construction or represents the work of a master, or possesses high artistic values, or represents a significant and distinguishable entity whose components lack individual distinction.
- D Property has yielded, or is likely to yield information important in prehistory or history.

Criteria Considerations (Mark "X" in all the boxes that apply.)

- A owned by a religious institution or used for religious purposes.
- B removed from its original location.
- C a birthplace or a grave.
- D a cemetery.
- E a reconstructed building, object, or structure.
- F a commemorative property.
- G less than 50 years of age or achieved significance within the past 50 years.

Areas of Significance (Enter categories from instructions)

Architecture _____

Commerce/Trade _____

Period of Significance 1930-1946 _____

Significant Dates 1930 1936 _____

Significant Person (Complete if Criterion B is marked above) N/A

Cultural Affiliation N/A

Architect/Builder Unknown

Narrative Statement of Significance (Explain significance on continuation sheet/s.)

Property Name Fowler's Department Store
County and State Madison Co., AL

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9. Major Bibliographical References
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(Cite the books, articles, and other sources used in preparing this form on one or more continuation sheets.)

Previous documentation on file (NPS)

- preliminary determination of individual listing (36 CFR 67) has been requested.
- previously listed in the National Register
- previously determined eligible by the National Register
- designated a National Historic Landmark
- recorded by Historic American Buildings Survey # _____
- recorded by Historic American Engineering Record # _____

Primary Location of Additional Data

- State Historic Preservation Office
- Other State agency
- Federal agency
- Local government
- University
- Other

Name of repository: City of Huntsville Planning Department

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10. Geographical Data
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Acreeage of Property less than one acre

UTM References (Place additional UTM references on a continuation sheet)

	Zone	Easting	Northing	Zone	Easting	Northing
1	16	537840	3843200	3	_____	_____
2	_____	_____	_____	4	_____	_____
	___ See continuation sheet.					

Verbal Boundary Description (Describe the boundaries of the property on a continuation sheet.)

Boundary Justification (Explain why the boundaries were selected on a continuation sheet.)

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11. Form Prepared By
=====

name/title Harvie P. Jones, F.A.I.A., and AHC Reviewer

organization Jones & Herrin Architectural/Interior Design date 2/12/96

street & number 104 Jefferson Street telephone (205) 539-0764

city or town Huntsville state AL zip code 35801

USDI/NPS Registration Form

Property Name Fowler's Department Store

County and State Madison Co., AL

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Additional Documentation
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Submit the following items with the completed form:

Continuation Sheets

Maps

- A USGS map (7.5 or 15 minute series) indicating the property's location.
- A sketch map for historic districts and properties having large acreage or numerous resources.

Photographs

Representative black and white photographs of the property.

Additional items (Check with the SHPO or FPO for any additional items)

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Property Owner
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(Complete this item at the request of the SHPO or FPO.)

name John C. Lowe Jr.

street & number 427 Echols Avenue telephone (205) 534-0174

city or town Huntsville state AL zip code 35801

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Fowler's Department Store
Madison County, Alabama

Narrative Description:

This red brick Commercial-style building has the simplified forms typical of many such structures of the early 20th century. The 1930 northwest corner store building located at 116 Washington Street is almost square in plan and consists of two stories and a full basement. There are four bays on each facade, marked by four-foot wide shallow brick pilasters which are capped with a simple limestone rectangular capital. The approximately five-foot high entablature above the pilasters is a simple corbeled brick architrave and cornice with a limestone bed mold under the architrave (photo 3). The architrave is punctuated by small rectangular metal roof-space vents.

The fenestration of the northwest 1930 building consists of three levels on the two above-ground floors. The ground-floor shop windows extend the full width of each bay between the pilasters. In 1984 the spandrels under the shop windows were raised to about three feet high when the building was converted in a makeshift way to offices. The second level of fenestration is bands of three wooden fixed six-light clerestory sashes which once threw daylight deep into the interior of the store by bouncing it off the top of the low display window ceilings (which formed a narrow mezzanine) in the typical manner before cheap electricity and effective electric lights. These clerestory sashes extend almost the full width of each bay-spandrel. They have continuous limestone sills and eight-inch high soldier-course brick lintels (supported by concealed steel). Below the clerestory bands is a two-layer band of sixteen-inch high basket-weave brick as a decorative device that was just above the now-gone awnings at the display windows.

The third layer of fenestration (the second-floor sashes) consists of pairs of large wooden double-hung one-over-one windows, a pair being in each bay-spandrel. The sills are individual limestone lugged-end types of a similar design to the clerestory sills (photo 3). The window lintels are eight-inch high brick soldier-courses like those at the clerestory.

The asphalt roof is nearly flat, and slopes slightly to the east rear.

The structure of the 1930 northwest corner building is solid-brick bearing walls, and per Mr. John Lowe, the son of the original owner, reinforced concrete main floor, with the second floor and roof consisting of steel main beams at each bay-line with wood joists spanning between. (Lowe Interview) The 1930 oak flooring remains at the second floor. The main floor surface is now concrete but probably was wood (on sleepers) originally as were the other nearby early 20th-century stores. The basement floor is concrete and this may have been the 1930 finish.

The east building located at 214 Holmes Street was built in 1936 after a fire destroyed the livery stable that occupied the site. (1913 Sanborn) The 1936 building, per Mr. John Lowe, originally served as a store for farm implements (Huntsville Implement Co.). Therefore, this building's floor is a concrete slab on grade, for strength. The roof structure consists of steel columns and steel trusses with wood joists between, per Mr. Lowe. The roof is nearly-flat. The walls are 12-inch thick solid brick, salvaged from the burned livery stable (1936 brick at the exposed north wall). The masonry contractor was Dan Brandon. (Lowe Interview)

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The facade of the 1936 east building, as would be expected for a Depression-period implement store, is a simple four-bay brick wall with narrow brick piers topped by a plane of brick capped with a simple limestone coping. The large display windows and wide entry bay were boarded up in the 1980s office remodeling. The brick piers are corbeled at the top to suggest capitals. The flat plane of brick above the piers has a large rectangle of basket-weave pattern bricks similar to the 1930 building, framed by an eight-inch soldier-course band of bricks.

The original stamped-metal ceilings of all three floors of the northwest building and of the east building remain. The 1980s acoustical suspended tile conceals most of the first and second floor metal ceilings at the northwest building, but this is easily removed without significant damage to the 1930 metal ceilings.

The 1930 elevator, glassed elevator doors, and brass call-button plates remain at the northwest building (photos 9 and 10). The 1930 wooden stair is present to all three floors of the northwest building as well. The northwest stair of the northwest building was added in the 1950s, as was a stair connecting the basement and the east main floor.

The ceilings of the main floors of both buildings are about sixteen feet high. The second floor ceiling is about twelve feet high. The basement ceiling is about ten feet high.

The only significant removal of original material is the display windows. The owner intends to remove the 1980s aluminum frames and high brick spandrels and replace them with recognizably modern but harmonious wood frames and low spandrels of the general scale and proportion of the originals. The brick exterior has suffered minor surface disfiguration due to the 1950s installation of metal anchors for a porcelain-covered metal curtain-wall covering in a post-World War II modernization by the Belk-Hudson Department Store. This covering was removed in 1994 upon its extensive rusting and deterioration.

The owner, Mr. John C. Lowe Jr., recalls that his father had an architect and a contractor from Florence, Alabama, for the 1930 building, but has no recollection of the names. Mr. Lowe states that his father designed the 1936 building and that Dan Brandon was the mason. Since the Brandons were well-known builders here in that period, it is likely that Dan Brandon participated in the design. (Rentz Interview)

Archaeological Component:

While no formal archaeological survey has been made on this property, the potential for subsurface remains is probably minimal.

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Fowler's Department Store
Madison County, Alabama

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STATEMENT OF SIGNIFICANCE

Criterion A:

Fowler's Department Store in Huntsville, Alabama, is eligible for the National Register of Historic Places under Criterion A for its association with the early twentieth-century commercial history of Huntsville. Located at the corner of Washington and Holmes, the 1930 and 1936 buildings which housed the Fowler and Belk-Hudson department stores survive as Depression-era remnants of Huntsville's historic commercial district.

Criterion C:

Fowler's Department Store in Huntsville is also eligible for the National Register of Historic Places under Criterion C as an example of Depression-era Commercial style department store design. Two of the last major buildings to be constructed in the downtown shopping district until after World War II, the design of these Commercial style buildings was centered around a block form with symmetrical details. Less elaborate than the other department stores built along Washington Street prior to the Depression, the Fowler/Belk-Hudson buildings survived the 1950s downtown modern building boom and 1970s urban renewal efforts.

The long-joined 1930 northwest building and the 1936 east building constitute an extremely rare and intact building type: commercial buildings built or completed in the deep economic depression of 1929-1940. The 1930 northwest building has moderate elaboration in its simple Commercial style facade of brick pilasters, corbeled brick cornice, limestone sills and bed mold, and brick basket-weave and soldier-course decorative course. The east 1936 building was built in the depths of the economic Depression after the livery stable on the site burned, to serve as a store for farm implements. (Lowe Interview) As might be expected, the 1936 Depression implement store is large and plain in design. All floors of both buildings retain their original stamped-metal ceilings (some presently covered by easily removed 1980s dropped acoustical tile). The original three-stop elevator and stair are also present, as is the one floor at the second story.

Historical Summary:

Fowler's Department Store is nominated under the registration requirements set forth in the Huntsville Multiple Resource Nomination (NRHP 9/22/80). When the locally owned Fowler's Department Store opened in 1930, it was one of the largest upscale department stores in Huntsville. Located at 116 Washington Street in the heart of Huntsville's premier shopping district, Fowler's opened directly after the city's commercial 1890 to 1929 building boom period. North Washington Street contained five department stores: Kress (NR 9/22/80), Woolworths, J.C. Penney, Dunnavant (NR 9/22/80), and Fowler's, as well as many smaller shops, restaurants, and two hotels. The area flagship store, Dunnavant's, was located on the same block as Fowler's, but the chain department stores (McClellans, Kress, Woolworths, and J.C. Penneys) were concentrated two blocks south. Fowler's Department Store went bankrupt in 1938 but later resumed business nearby until the late 1970s or early 1980s. In 1940 the northwest building became a Belk-Hudson Department Store, one of a large national

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chain of stores. In 1944, Belk-Hudson also leased the 1936 east building. This union, joined to serve the space needs of Belk-Hudson, made it one of the largest department stores in Huntsville at the end of World War II. From the mid-1950s to the mid-1960s, Huntsville's department stores gradually moved out of the downtown shopping district. As in nearly all cities, the stores, shops, restaurants, and hotels are now on the peripheral auto-strips. The best hope for historic downtown buildings like Fowler's Department Store is adaptive reuse as offices, specialty restaurants, and specialty shops. This has been the trend in Huntsville as elsewhere and it is the plan of the owner to "respectfully rehabilitate" the building for such an adaptive use with the aid of the "Tax Act."

BIBLIOGRAPHY

Lowe, John. Interview by Mrs. Patsy Rentz. September 1995.

Sanborn Map of Huntsville, Alabama. Pelham, New York: Sanborn Map Co. Inc., 1913 and 1963.

Rentz, Patsy. Interview by Harvie P. Jones. September 1995.

VERBAL BOUNDARY DESCRIPTION

Fowler's Department Store is located at 116 Washington Street in Huntsville, Madison County, Alabama, as represented as lot 1, block 5, except the south 52'3" of west 80' of Quigley Map on parcel 3-1W-36.00-M44-20.

BOUNDARY JUSTIFICATION

The nominated boundaries contain all the extant historic property associated with Fowler's Department Store.

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Section PHOTOS Page 10

Fowler's Department Store
Madison County, Alabama

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Fowler's Department Store
Madison Co., AL

Photographer: Harvie P. Jones, F.A.I.A.

Date: September 1995

Negative Location: Alabama Historical Commission, 468 South Perry, Montgomery, AL 36130

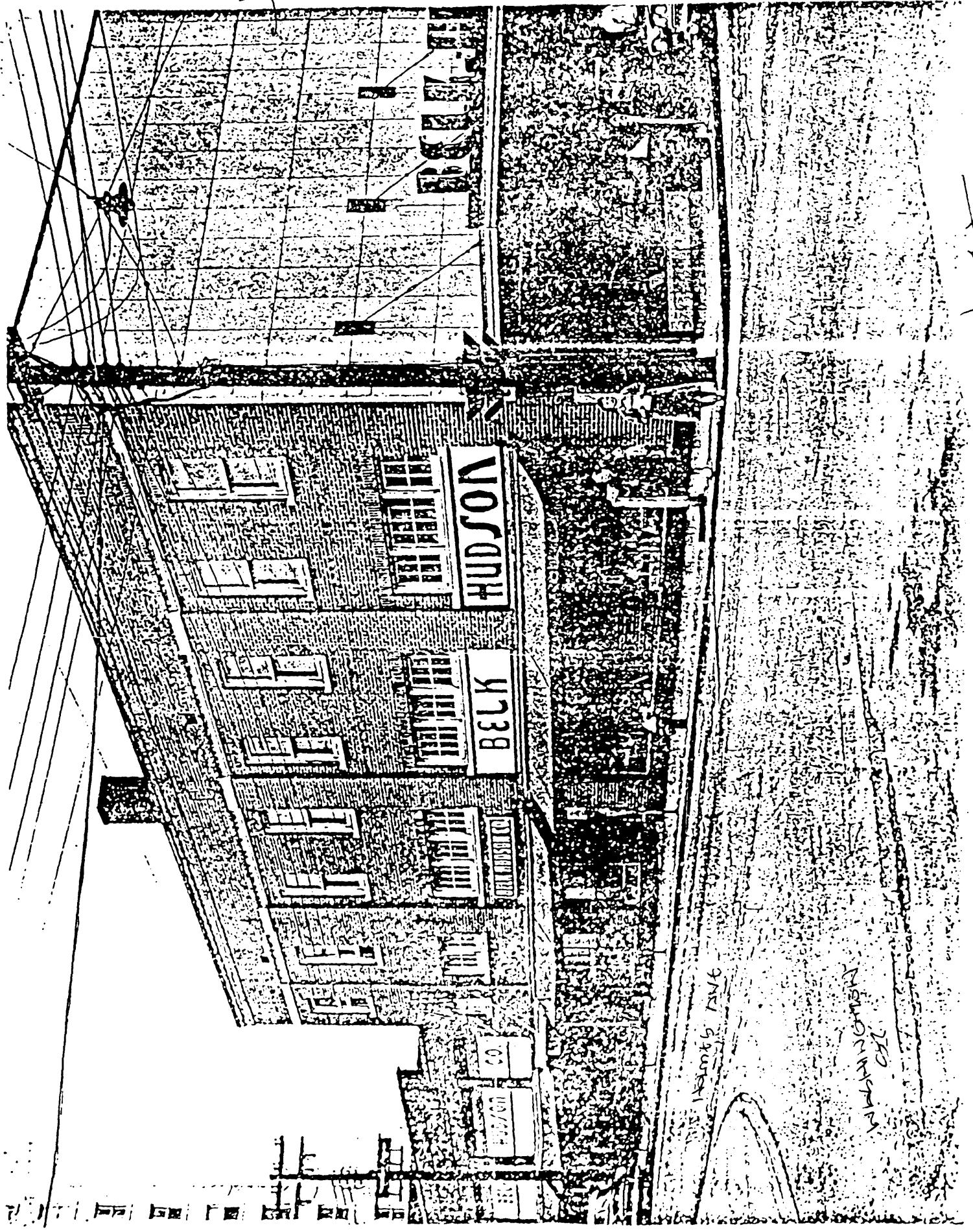
Photograph Descriptions:

1. Looking southeast at intersection of Washington Street and Holmes Avenue.
2. Looking northeast at intersection of Washington Street and Holmes Avenue.
3. Detail of northwest upper corner showing clerestory windows, second floor windows and roof entablature.
4. Main floor of northwest building, looking west to Washington Street. Original stamped metal ceiling is intact above the c.1980 dropped acoustical tile ceiling. See photos 5 & 6.
5. 1930 stamped metal ceiling at northwest building main floor.
6. 1930 stamped metal ceiling and cornice at northwest building main floor.
7. Floor 2, northwest building, looking west to Washington Street. The 1930 stamped metal ceiling is intact above the c.1980 dropped acoustical tile ceiling. See photos 5 and 6. The 1930 wood floor is intact under the c.1980 carpet underlayment. See photo 8.
8. 1930 oak floor at Floor 2, 2-3/8" tongue and groove.
9. 1930 Elevator doors at northwest building, Floor 2 (same at all three floors).
10. 1930 Elevator call button and brass plate at northwest building, Floor 2 (same at all three floors). Wall fabric is 1980s.
11. 1930 stair at southeast corner of northwest building, looking southwest.
12. 1930 stamped metal ceiling at basement of northwest building, looking west.
13. 1930 stamped metal ceiling at basement of northwest building, looking north.
14. 1936 stamped metal ceiling at main floor of east building looking north.
15. 1936 stamped metal ceiling at main floor of east building looking north.
16. 1936 implement store (East building), north facade. Windows were boarded up in 1980s office remodeling, and 1950s canopy removed, with stubs of its retrofit steel beams visible. Note the corbeled capitals of the brick pier and the basket-weave brick rectangle that is similar to the 1930 building.
17. Circa 1950 historic photograph looking southeast.

PHOTO, BELK-HUDSON'S DEPT. STORE, HUNTSVILLE, AL.

COPY 1995

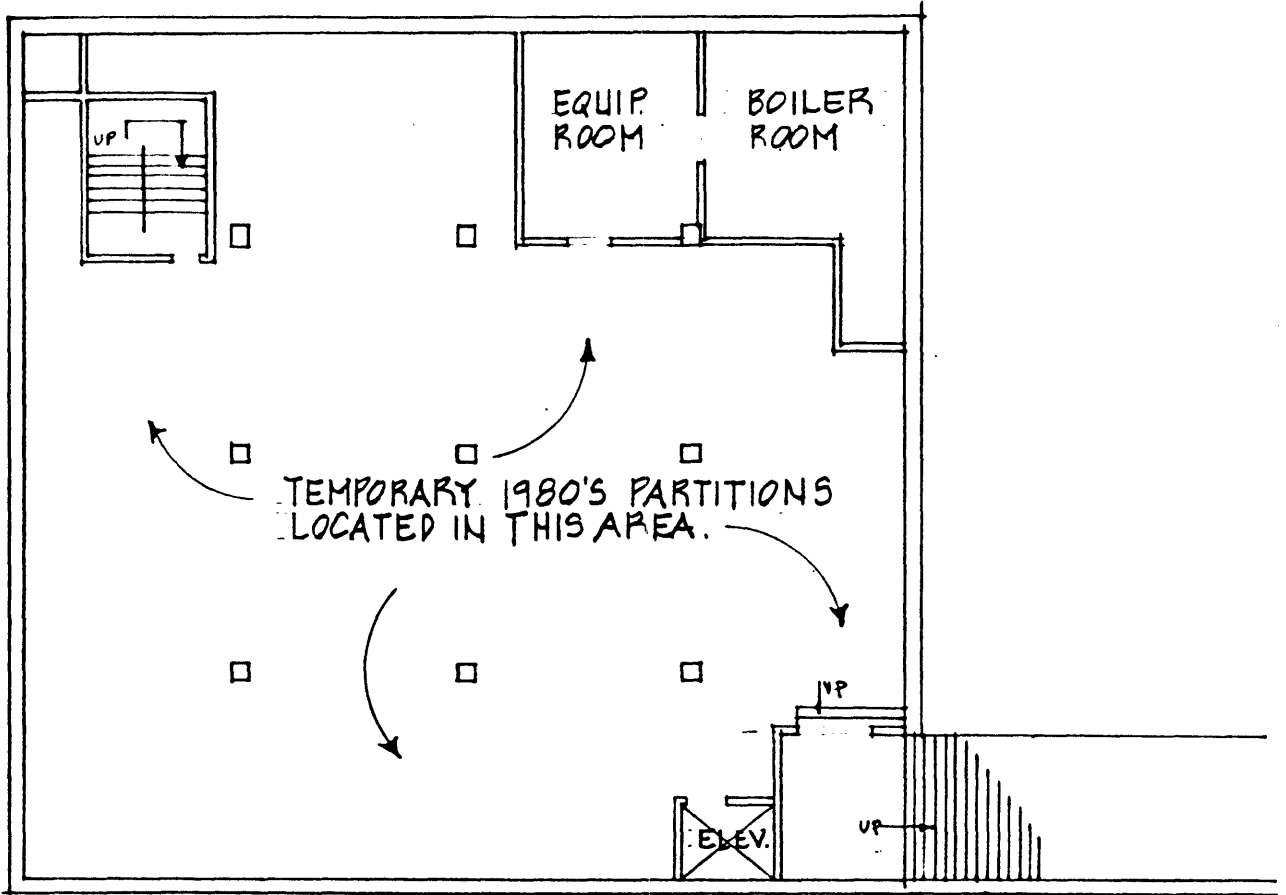
C. 1950
M 5761
PALS



WALTON'S TANK

WALTON'S TANK
202

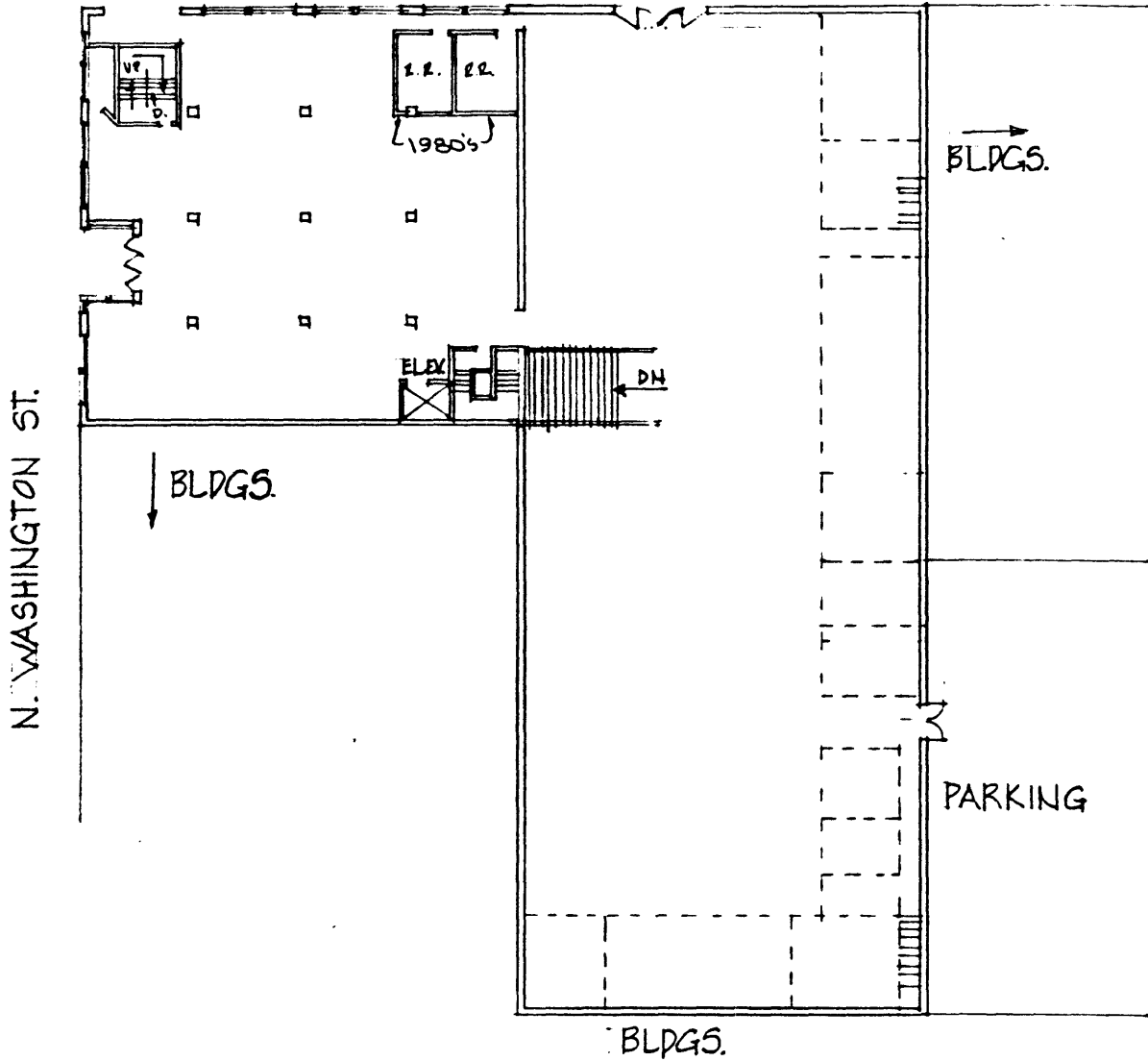




BASEMENT \ SCALE = 1/16" = 1'-0"
 BELK-HUDSON DEPT. STORE BLDG.
 HUNTSVILLE, AL.



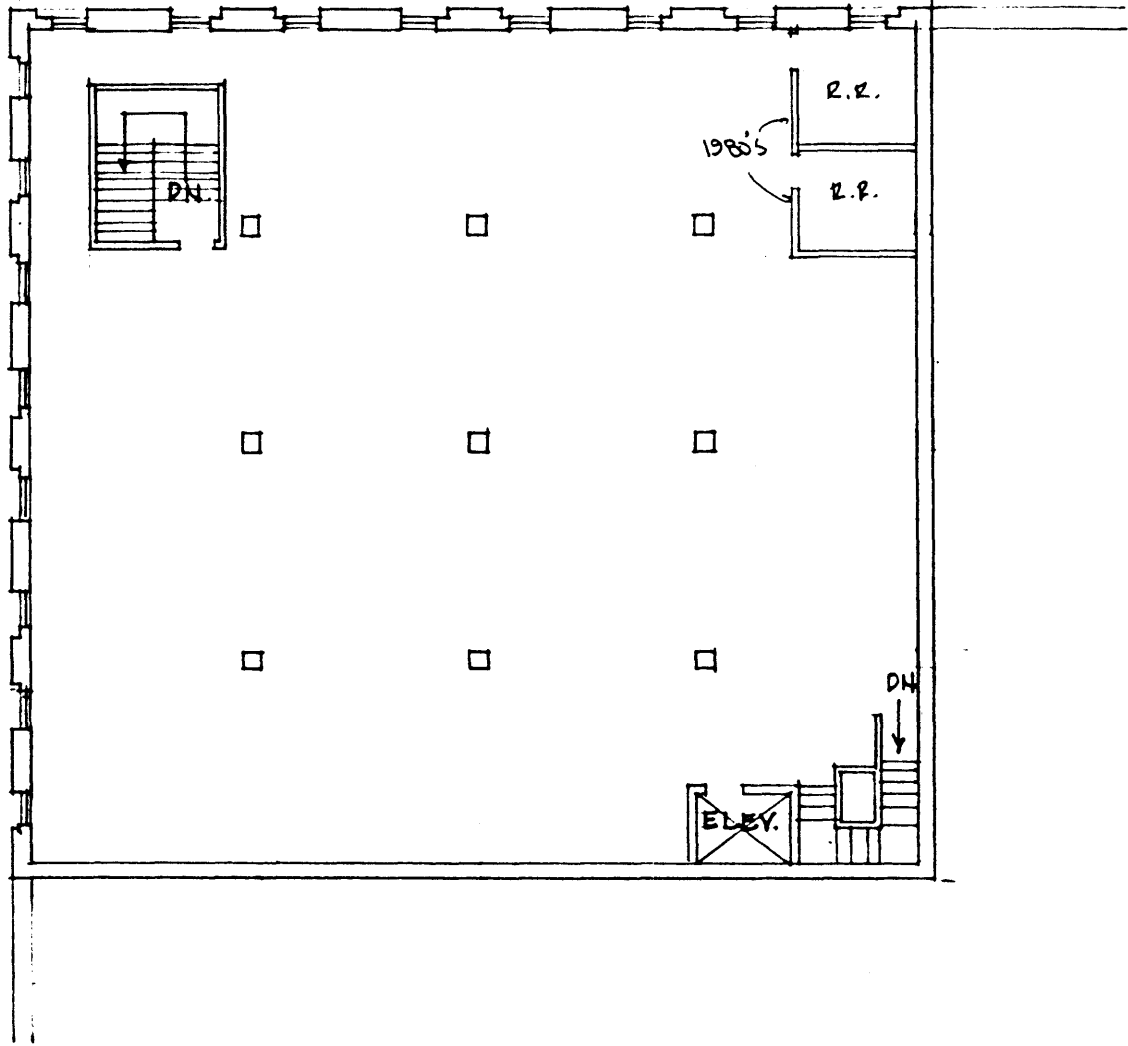
EAST HOLMES AVE.



GROUND FLOOR \ SCALE = 1/32" = 1' = 0"

BELK-HUDSON DEPT. STORE BLDG.
HUNTSVILLE, AL





SECOND FLOOR \ SCALE = 1/16" = 1'-0"

BELK-HUDSON DEPT. STORE BLDG.
HUNTSVILLE, AL



N.

