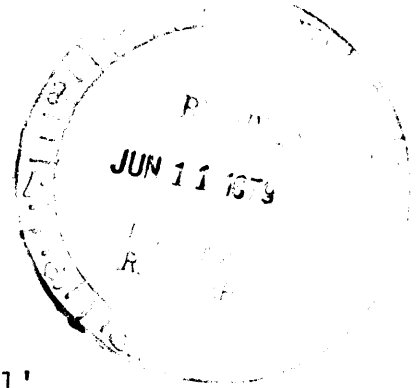


3. MASON BUILDING
115 East Clinton Avenue

Mason Properties, Inc.
Ted Gulas
P. O. Box 122
Huntsville, Alabama 35804



Lot 2, Block 12, Old Town; 74' (Clinton) X 161'
16 537910 3843175

- 1927: Edgar Love, Huntsville, architect
Charles E. Baxter, Huntsville, contractor
- 1929: Edgar Love, architect; small mezzanine, all interior finishing
G. A. Rogers, contractor
- 1931: Edgar Love, architect; mezzanine enlarged to present size
- 1939: Paul M. Speake, Huntsville, architect for rear addition
C. E. Baxter, contractor

DESCRIPTION

Mason's is a masonry building with a terra cotta facade; it measures 52 feet by 161 feet. Built in 1927, the structure has two floors, a 6,000 square foot mezzanine, and a full basement. The corner piers of the front extend unbroken the full height of the building. The ground floor is plate glass with a recessed central entrance and is terminated by a band of decorative terra cotta in a wave pattern which is now obscured by a metal canopy. The two bottom levels were visually separated from the top floor by four bands of ornament: a scalloped molding decorated with a bell design; a row of small dentils; a row of large, widely spaced dentils; and a slightly projecting cornice. The windows of the mezzanine floor are now covered by a solid panel of small ceramic tiles with "Mason's" inlaid in the middle. The scalloped band has been removed and this space also filled with tile. The second floor is defined by two decorative piers which rise from the mezzanine cornice and are identical to the corner piers. There were two small casement windows in each side section and three larger ones in the middle, but these have also been tiled over. The building is terminated by a simple cap although the piers break the cornice and extend slightly above it. The building has just been sold and will be renovated by the new owner.

SIGNIFICANCE

This is one of the few terra cotta commercial buildings in Huntsville and was designed by local architect Edgar Love. If restored to its original appearance, it would be one of the most attractive and distinctive structures in the downtown.

Mason's was a local furniture store established in 1908 by James Mason and John Manning; however, Manning died the same year and Mason became the sole owner. The firm began with 300 square feet of floor space and expanded through the years until in 1926

MASON BUILDING
115 East Clinton Avenue
Huntsville, Alabama

Continuation:

they were leasing 42,000 square feet. The following year they began construction of this building for which there were five construction bids ranging from \$50,000 to \$65,000. It was to be a two-story brick building and basement with the foundation strong enough to support five stories. The building was designed as a five-story structure with beautiful cascading floral ornament in polychromed terra cotta decorating the top. The existing building is merely the first phase of construction and accounts for the clean, un-emphasized skyline. Apparently Mason had planned to lease this structure, but it was not until 1929 that Sears Roebuck signed a contract for it. The building was remodeled to Sears' specifications which included building a small mezzanine, installing an elevator, altering the front, and doing all the interior finishing work which had not been completed when the building was originally erected. Sears opened their store in March, 1929; however, they withdrew from Huntsville during 1931 as a result of the Depression, and Mason's found it necessary to move into the building themselves. Further changes were made at this time such as enlarging the show windows and erecting the present 6,000 square foot mezzanine. In 1939, a rear addition of one story was added to the structure. James Mason died in 1948, and the firm was then taken over by his brother, Oscar Mason. Mason's Furniture occupied the building until February, 1977, when they went out of business.

James Mason also built a Prairie style home for himself in 1919. Located at 709 Randolph Avenue in the Old Town Historic District, it is the only true example of a Prairie style house in Huntsville although it was not designed by Frank Lloyd Wright. It is possible, however, that Mason became aware of Wright's work during his frequent buying trips to the furniture mart in Chicago during the second decade of this century.

Mason's is a beautifully conceived building that breaks with local building tradition and reflects the presence of a sophisticated client aware of architectural trends beyond Huntsville. The building as designed combined the modern concept of identical intermediate floors with the use of exquisitely drawn stylized ornament for the base and attic. This is Love's most refined design and illustrates his potential under favorable conditions.

