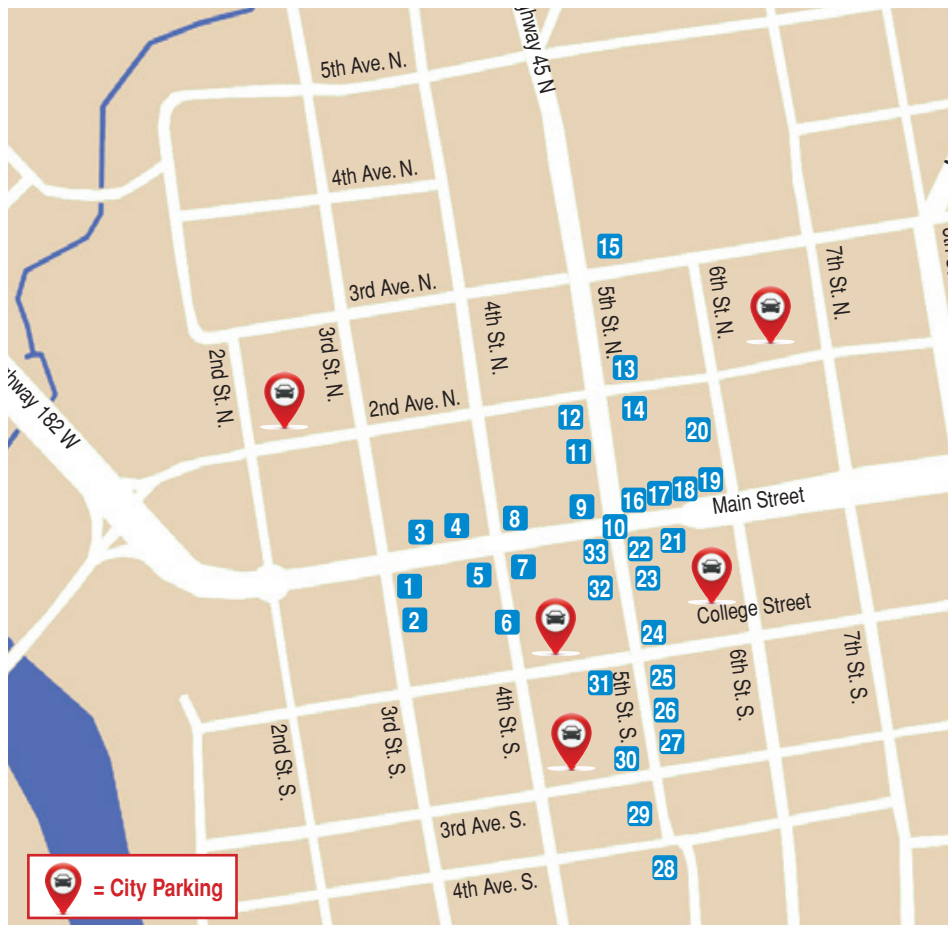


# Downtown Columbus Self-Guided Historic Walking Tour

Every town has a story .... come stroll through ours.

Welcome to historic downtown Columbus, Mississippi, 200 years old in the year 2021. Columbus is known as the “Friendly City”, rich in history and beauty. As you roam through our charming downtown, please note that there are over 180 second-floor apartments in the downtown business district. Much of downtown Columbus was destroyed by two devastating fires in 1854, thus you will find that most buildings were built between the mid-1850s and 1910. The downtown historic district has held a Central Commercial Historic District designation since April 23, 1980, thus all buildings on this tour are listed on the National Register of Historic Places. On April 25, 1866, four Columbus ladies decorated the graves of both the Union and Confederate soldiers in the City’s Friendship Cemetery with flowers. While many cities claim to be the birthplace of Memorial Day, President Obama in his 2010 Memorial Day address, stated that the first official Memorial Day was at Waterloo, New York, but it had been inspired by the act of the ladies in Columbus. During your downtown tour, be sure to enjoy a meal at one of our excellent restaurants after shopping in some of our spectacular specialty shops. We hope you enjoy this self-guided walking tour through Columbus’ celebrated past. We appreciate the time you have taken to explore historic downtown Columbus. Please invite your family and friends to do the same.



## 1. TENNESSEE WILLIAMS HOME

Built in 1875, this was the first home of renowned playwright Tennessee Williams and has been designated as a National Literary Landmark. It was the home of the Rector of St. Paul’s Episcopal Church, but when the church needed to expand and to keep the home from being torn

down, it was moved from its original location and restored for use as a Mississippi Welcome Center. It is filled with beautiful antiques, exhibits and a gift shop.

## 2. FIRST BUILDING IN COLUMBUS

Behind the Tennessee Williams Home was the site of the 1817 cabin that was the first building in Columbus. Around 1819, it was occupied by Spirus Roach as his Trading Store. Because of his pointed facial features, the Choctaw Indians who traded there called Roach “Possum” and referred to Columbus as “Possum Town.” This story is most likely the source of the local legend that Columbus was originally called “Possum Town” and later renamed “Columbus”.



## 3. ELKS LODGE

This historic, two-story brick building with the circular front porch was built in 1901. The building contains a lodge room and ornate hallway below and a magnificent parlor on the second floor. The Columbus Elks Club was organized in 1899

during the height of what is known as the Golden Age of Fraternalism, a term referring to a period when membership in the fraternal societies in the United States grew at a very rapid pace. At its peak, it was suggested that as much as 40% of the adult male population held membership in at least one fraternal order.



## 4. FORMER GILMER INN

The vacant lot, which awaits the new home of Financial Concepts, A Planning Firm, was first the site of Barry’s Hotel which by 1822 was a two-story frame building which later became the Eagle Hotel. In 1860, construction began on the four-story brick Gilmer Hotel. During the

Civil War, it served as one of three Confederate military hospitals in Columbus. Although it was a 450-bed hospital, it housed about 800 soldiers after the battle of Shiloh. At that time, over 3,500 sick and wounded soldiers poured into Columbus and overflowed from the hospitals into churches and private homes. The huge hotel was still under construction at that time and an eyewitness later recounted that “the wounded were laid out on straw pallets row upon row through great unfinished spaces within the building.” During the 20<sup>th</sup> century, celebrities such as Clark Gable, Bob Hope, Jack Dempsey, Doris Day and Will Rogers were all guests of the hotel. It was torn down in 1963 and in its place the Gilmer Inn Motel was built. Later called the Gilmer Inn, that structure was torn down in 2016.



## 5. MASONIC TEMPLE

The massive Victorian Romanesque building on the corner was built as two adjacent two-story buildings before 1880. In 1902, it was remodeled to be used as the Masonic Temple under the leadership of former Confederate General Stephen D. Lee who headed the lodge. The first floor housed various businesses while the second and third floors were rooms for boarders and

ceremonial Masonic Lodge chambers. The third floor consisted of the “Blue Lodge” and the “Red Lodge” and consisted of approximately 20,000 square feet of space and 15-foot pressed metal ceilings. The Masons met in this structure for over 80 years until the roof was damaged in a fire in 1982. The ghost sign on the side of the building represents Joseph and Selma Hanna’s general store which was located on the first floor of this building from 1917 until it closed in the early 1960’s. A wide range of merchandise from overalls and gingham cloth to hoop cheese, deli meats (bologna) and candy was sold here.

## 6. CATFISH ALLEY



This one-block strip of Fourth Street between Main and College Streets occupies a distinct place in Columbus history. As early as 1891 and throughout most of the 20th century, "The Alley," as it was known, was one of two commercial districts where African-Americans shopped, dined, socialized and sold their wares. A unique feature of The Alley was the blending of races, a practice rare in the segregated South. In its heyday, its sidewalks and alleyways teemed with life. Music drifted from the jukeboxes of the cafes and the aroma of frying Tombigbee River catfish wafted from the kitchens. In addition to cafes, there were juke joints, pool halls and a dry goods store. In The Alley one could get a tooth pulled, a haircut, a pair of shoes resoled and even arrange a funeral. The late E.J. Stringer, the influential chairman of the Mississippi chapter of the NAACP during the civil rights era, conducted his dentist practice in an upstairs office in The Alley. In 2007, the historical importance of Catfish Alley was confirmed by the Mississippi Blues Trail marker erected at the College Street end of The Alley.

## 7. CATFISH ALLEY MURAL



The corner building which houses the Catfish Alley Mural dates to 1830 and is the oldest identified commercial building in the downtown business district. From around the late 1800's to the mid-1900's, it was a boarding house for African-Americans, last known as the "Paradise".

The mural depicting store owners along Catfish Alley was painted in 2013 by a group of art students and their professor from Mississippi University for Women. The mural is a reflection of The Alley's history as a lively, social and commercial center in downtown Columbus.

## 8. THE VARSITY THEATER



The original location of the Columbus Opera House, which was three stories high, was built in 1897. It featured plays, operas, vaudeville shows, minstrels, movies and talkies. The newspaper, Columbus Commercial, as well as other businesses had offices there. In the 1920's, the building was converted to a "Moving Picture Theater" which remained in operation until it was destroyed by a fire in the 1970's. In 1821, the site was the location of a two-story frame building housing Doctors Barry and Hand on the first floor and the Masonic Lodge on the second. In 1821, the doctors made national news when they successfully operated on a Chickasaw Indian Chief for kidney or gall stones. It is currently owned and under renovation by Hope Community Church.

## 9. MCGAHEY BUILDING



The Bank of Commerce building was built in 1908 as the site of First State Bank. The lobby was shared with Columbus Drug Store and a newsstand in later years. The corner was once known as Blair's Corner, after Blair's Drug Store that stood there for many years during the mid-1800's. The drug store was named for two brothers, David and Jim Blair, each of whom was

a power in local politics. Many political questions were argued there by the old-time planters and politicians of Lowndes County. The clock hanging from the bank originally hung one block south at the former National Bank of Commerce. The bank has a vault which has never been disturbed, having been built "for all time". It is eight inches thick, double-lined with rails from the Mobile & Ohio Railroad, encased in four-foot walls and built of chilled steel. The building underwent a restoration in 1985, for which it won a preservation award from Mississippi Department of Archives and History. The first floor is now a bank with upper floors comprising offices and suites.

## 10. FIFTH AND MAIN STREETS



Slightly to the east of the intersection of Fifth and Main, the city built a "Market House" in the 1830's as a place for farmers and traveling salesmen to sell their goods. The broad street provided plenty of space for horses and wagons to park, and later for the streetcar line to lay its track. Streetcars came to Columbus on May 22, 1906, under ownership of the Columbus Railway Streetcar Company. A single ride cost roughly 5 cents. Streetcars began operating in 1911 but were replaced in popularity by automobiles in 1922. The streetcar company purchased the right-of-way in the center of Main Street for its track and when it ceased operation, title was given back to the city.

## 11. TROTTER CONVENTION CENTER



Today's Convention Center was predated by the City Auditorium, located on the corner of Second Avenue and Fourth Street North. The Auditorium was built in 1942 as a collaboration between the City and the Works Progress Administration. The ground floor was the National Guard Armory with the second floor becoming the City Auditorium. The City replaced the Auditorium with the Trotter Convention Center in 1987. Trotter is named after one of Columbus' most well-respected Mayors, James Trotter, who served as Mayor for 16 years. Trotter Convention Center was completely refurbished in 2014 and provides an up-to-date venue for locals and visitors.



## 12. GLEED'S CORNER

After the Civil War, the corner of Fifth Street and Second Avenue North was known as Glead's Corner. Robert Glead, a former slave, owned a store there. During Reconstruction, he was a state senator for Lowndes County and is buried in the historic Sandfield Cemetery. Upstairs was the "Colored Masonic Temple". The first African-American Bank, called "PennySavers", was also located here. According to the cornerstone (located on the north side of the building), it was rebuilt in April 1940 after a massive fire had burned most of the north half of the city block.

## 13. LOWNDES COUNTY COURT HOUSE



The original Court House was built in 1832 and replaced by the current structure in 1847 by Columbus architect James S. Lull. In 1863, the state capital was moved to Columbus for several months and the new Governor, Charles Clark, was inaugurated on the front steps of the Court House. The Senate met in the Court House and the House of Representatives met in the Christian Church next door, which has been torn down. The state government again moved to Columbus in 1864 and operated out of the Court House. The Court House was remodeled and enlarged in 1901 and the clock was installed. The Court House was renovated and enlarged again in 1976.

#### 14. LAWYER'S ROW



The three-story building across from the Court House, referred to as "Lawyer's Row", was constructed in a simplified Greek Revival style between 1857 and 1859. For many years, it was the Woodmen of the World Building with the lodge hall on the third floor and offices on the first two floors. The building is one of the largest antebellum office buildings surviving in Mississippi. The building was renovated in 2010 and currently has three luxury apartments on the second and third floors and the first floor contains a law firm. The small free-standing Greek Revival building on the west end was probably built around 1850 as a law office by William L. Harris and James T. Harrison. Harrison was a member of the Confederate cabinet and later selected to represent Jefferson Davis in his trial for treason, although the trial never took place and Davis was released on \$100,000 bail (over \$1 million today).

#### 15. FRANKLIN ACADEMY



Established in 1821, Franklin Academy was the first public school in the state of Mississippi. The first school building was a frame building about 20 x 30 feet in dimensions, one story high, with unsealed glass windows in front and long open windows with shutters in the rear, covered first with boards and afterwards with shingles. The current structure is the school's fourth incarnation and was built as a project through the Public Works Administration under President Franklin D. Roosevelt's New Deal in 1939. The school remained racially segregated until 1965, one year following the Civil Rights Act of 1964 and ten years after the landmark Supreme Court case Brown v. Board of Education. Franklin Academy celebrated its 200th anniversary in February 2021, dedicating the marble monument to commemorate its beginning. Currently, it is a magnet school for Medical Sciences and Wellness.

#### 16. COLUMBUS ARTS COUNCIL



The Rosenzweig Arts Center was built in the 1930's as McLellan's, a favorite variety store. The back part of the building, on Fifth Street, was the location of the Dixie Theater which was opened as early as 1940 and operated until the early 1950's. The original buildings, known as Hatch's

Corner, burned in 1919. McLellan's, later called McCorry's, closed in 1993 and, in 1999, the Rosenzweig family gave the building to the Columbus Arts Council for use as an Arts Center. Today, it is one of the premier Arts Centers in the state and has a stage theater as well as a sales and exhibit gallery.

#### 17. FORMER FIRST COLUMBUS NATIONAL BANK



The building (now a restaurant on the first floor and apartments above), located at 509 Main Street, originally stood six stories tall. In 1905, the building housed the Cumberland Telephone and Telegraph Company, employed about twenty people and handled both telephone calls and commercial telegrams. The machine which

handled telephone calls was a multiple switchboard containing a double-metallic wire system. The women who operated the switchboard were known as "hello girls". In 1919, the building to the left (current Rosenzweig Arts Center location) caught fire and much of the top floors of the bank building were destroyed. It was rebuilt, but only up to four stories. The First Columbus Bank building was retrofitted in the 60's to have the first drive-through teller in Columbus, therefore the gated drive-through.

#### 18. INDEPENDENT ORDER OF ODD FELLOWS



The Odd Fellows building was originally two buildings remodeled into a three-story late Renaissance Revival style structure where the Odd Fellow Lodge originally met. In 1905, the building also housed the Southern Express Company which operated as a freight and transport company. In 1849, the Odd Fellows started Friendship Cemetery where, during the American Civil War, over 2,000 Confederate soldiers and at least 40 Union soldiers were buried. In 1867, 30 of the Union Soldiers were moved to Corinth National Cemetery. Following the war, the Cemetery was given to the City of Columbus.

#### 19. CITY HALL



The original City Hall, located on the corner of Main Street and Sixth Street South, burned in 1854. Today's Georgia Revival style City Hall was built in 1903. In order to preserve Columbus' rich heritage and history, City Hall underwent a complete restoration in 2017, for which it received

a rehabilitation award from the Mississippi Heritage Trust in 2018. Note the smaller building extending from the left - this was, at one time, used as a jail but currently houses a conference room used by the Mayor and City Council.

#### 20. FIREHOUSE COMMONS CONDOS



The north section of the building behind City Hall was originally built as the Columbus Light Artillery Armory and was constructed before 1885. The south part of the building was constructed in 1903 as the City Fire Station. After a new fire department headquarters and station were built, the Fire

House served as the Police Department. It is the oldest and only known surviving 19th century example of a city militia armory in the state of Mississippi and one of very few in the entire southern U.S. and has been designated a Mississippi Historic Landmark. Two side-by-side buildings are currently the home of five condos, three of which are on the first floor making them the only apartments in downtown Columbus that can be found on the ground level. The openings for the stable doors are still visible making it easy to picture the horse-drawn fire engines rushing out towards a fire. One of the old horse-drawn fire engines is displayed in front of Columbus Fire & Rescue, Station 1, on the corner of Seventh Street and College Street.

#### 21. THE COMMERCIAL DISPATCH



Built in the 1880's, this building was once the place to buy farm equipment, then later automobiles. Birney Imes, Sr. bought the building for his newspaper in the 1930's. Upstairs was the telegraph office, a dentist, a hairdresser and WCBI Radio AM 55. The family still owns the newspaper and Peter Imes is the current editor. The Dispatch is the only family-owned daily newspaper in the state of Mississippi.

#### 22. FORMER RUTH'S BUILDING



The business on the corner of Main & Fifth Streets, was known as one of the finest ladies' stores for over 60 years. A hotel during the mid-1800's, the building was restored as a large department store in 1935. Archie Bernstein came to Columbus as a young man and in

1940 opened Ruth's a few doors down at 115 Fifth Street South. In the 1950's, Mr. Bernstein purchased the brick-front, corner building and moved Ruth's into it. The modern façade was added in the 1960's along with a second building to enlarge the space. In 2003, Ruth's Department Store closed but now has upstairs apartments and houses a restaurant and shopping opportunities.

### 23. MERCHANTS AND FARMERS BANK

This bank building was designed and built in 1903 by John Stinson, owner/operator of Columbus Marble Works, and is noted for its significant architecture. In 1932, Machine Gun Kelley robbed a bank in Tupelo. Out of fear of a robbery in Columbus, Capt Sam Kaye was asked to loan a German machine gun he had brought home after WWI to the bank. It was placed on the bank's mezzanine pointing down aimed at the front entrance. The bank hired WWI veteran, John Perry, to stand guard with the gun. Later the gun was returned to Kaye but Perry remained as a bank guard armed with a shotgun. The structure continued to serve as the main office until 1972 when growth of banking operations forced its relocation to a larger facility. In 1981, as a gesture of community goodwill and to honor an exceptional employee, the Merchants and Farmers Bank gave the building to the City of Columbus through the Columbus Civic Arts Council to be used as a Visual Arts Museum. When the Museum was relocated to Mississippi University for Women, the City returned the ownership.



### 24. SHOP & SAVE GALLERY

Once the site of Cady's Livery Stable, this building was called "The Horse Mansion". A few months after the Civil War ended, Columbus was placed under martial law enforced by Union Soldiers. Former Confederate General William B. Wade and a Union soldier got into an argument at the stable. Wade killed the soldier in the shoot-out and was later murdered by one of the soldier's



friends. The current building was built around 1900 and was at one time home of Woolworth's Five and Dime and Gunter and Brothers Funeral Home. The building is said to have many spirits from the past.

### 25. WCBI-TV

Built in 1915, this building replaced a building that had burned. Loeb's Department Store once stood here and later Eggers Department Store. Mr. Eggers did not have cash registers in the store. Instead, a system of tubes (like the ones seen at banks now) carried the money to a



central office where one or two cashiers handled all the money. The downtown department store closed around 1985. WCBI-TV, which has been operating in Columbus since 1956 and was the first television station in North Mississippi, purchased and restored the building for their studio in 1993. The station is currently owned by Morris Multimedia, Inc., one of the largest, privately-owned media companies in the United States, and services over 721,000 viewers.

### 26. THE PRINCESS THEATER

The theater was built in 1924 by Ed Kuykendall, who was president of both the Mississippi Theater Owners Association and the National Motion Picture Theater Owners of America, and opened as a vaudeville house. The Princess showed both the first "talkie" movie and the first "in-color" movie in the state of Mississippi and has been featured



in several books and documentaries dealing with ghosts and other paranormal activities. It is said to be one of the most haunted buildings in Columbus. At one time, the northern end was Steve's Café, which was a popular spot to slide onto a stool, order a cup of coffee and chat with the "good ole' boys" at the counter. An interior restoration began in June of 2020 and today The Princess serves as social venue and evening gathering spot.

### 27. THE BRIDGE GROUP

The Columbus Marble Works building was built in 1903 as offices and showroom for the marble works business, which went on to become one of the premier marble works companies in the nation. Columbus Marble Works completed work on both the Merchants and Farmers Bank and the current City Hall buildings in downtown Columbus. The marble company moved in 1905 and shortly thereafter the Laws family opened Law's Drug Store, where medicines, toiletries and gardening supplies could be found. The family operated in this location until 1997 (92 years). The building has remained in the Laws family.



### 28. COLUMBUS LIGHT & WATER

Columbus' original Post Office was originally built in 1910 and moved to its current location on Main Street in 1938. Why, you might ask, is the building put in the middle of the street? There is actually a simple explanation to that dog-leg. When Columbus was organized as a town in



Mississippi, that dog-leg marked the southern limits of the town. The block at the south end of Market Street downtown was outside of the original town limits and was in the later Barry's Addition. The survey for Barry's Addition did not line up with the existing street grid resulting in the dog-leg we find today at the end of Market Street.

### 29. FREE-HART BUILDING

This corner building, originally built in 1948 in 1920-30's Art Décor style, housed Free-Hart Bakery, owned by Lon Freeman and Richard Englehardt. The building was used exclusively as a bakery until 1960 when Fred's Discount Store moved into a portion of the building.



By the late 1970s, the building was entirely Fred's. However, the Englehardt descendants still owned the building until they sold it to Jim Mauldin in January of 2021. Plans were made for the building to be reminiscent of its previous days. The 1920's black, vintage-style glass that goes around the outside of the window frames had broken and needed to be replaced. Since this glass was no longer available and in keeping with the original design, Mauldin found a company in Italy who makes a porcelain tile that looks like the glass and had the glass replaced. The inside of the building is now a climate-controlled storage facility with a building design that pays homage to downtown's history.

### 30. THE STONE

Known as Merchants Row, the west side of this block contained a row of buildings built in the 1880's. The Stone Hotel, built in 1905, was located on the south end and the Arcade Hotel, appx 1895, on the north end. The hotels were upstairs while the lower



floors contained businesses. A bank was located on the first floor of the Arcade Hotel, had a "drive-through" for carriages and currently boasts a beautiful atrium/colonnade. In 2021, Mr. & Mrs. Bill Lagier of New Orleans and Columbus' Chris Chain teamed up to rehabilitate the 118-year old property. Today it is not only a beautiful building set to required standards, but features 18 apartments, 8,000 square feet of retail space, New Orleans-style courtyards, an elevator and a gym/fitness center.

### 31. LEADERSHIP PLAZA



The property on the southwest corner of College and Fifth Streets originally housed a three-story building established in 1891 by Leopold Loeb as Loeb and McGowan Furniture Store and later became McGowan and Pegues Furniture Store. The building included steam heat, electricity and

a freight elevator. Behind Leadership Plaza in the parking lot was once a hotel built in 1897 by Thomas J. Gunter called the Commercial Hotel. Around 1940, it was remodeled by Gus and Jim Talantis, renamed "The Alexandra" and operated until 1969 when it was torn down to make way for a parking lot. The Plaza currently serves as a beautiful place to relax and enjoy the scenery of downtown Columbus. Note the fabulous ghost sign on the side of the existing Hollyhocks building.

### 32. COGGIN ALLEY



This original alley connects Fifth Street to the City parking lot behind the buildings. Notice the nicely landscaped walkway, which the City dedicated, in 1995, to the memory of Paul Coggin, a visionary in revitalization of the downtown area. He was instrumental in bringing the Main Street program

to Mississippi and was Columbus' first Main Street Director. Today, a state award is named in his honor for revitalization efforts. In 2014, the bright mural was painted by Main Street Columbus and LED lighting and beautiful florals were added throughout the alley to make it a more user-friendly passageway and a destination for many beautiful photos.

The downtown Columbus walking tour was designed and implemented by Main Street Columbus.

It is available online in printed form or can be viewed electronically at [www.columbusmainstreet.com](http://www.columbusmainstreet.com).

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### 33. FORMER FASHION BARN



The building at the corner of Main and Fifth Street South was built in 1935 as an A&P Grocery Store. Later, it became Gardner-Myers Rexall Drug Store, where many remember the soda fountain which

provided a place to "hang out" with friends. In the 1950's, McKellar & Crossley opened next door on 5th Street, but it was destroyed by a devastating fire in 1962. McKellar & Crossley eventually became Crossley's, Inc., and the business expanded to include the two buildings on this downtown corner. Just six years later, in 1968, Crossley's won the National Brand Names Retailer of the Year Award from the Annual National Meetings of Brand Names Foundation in New York City. During Crossley's more than fifty years in business, members of the United States Congress as well as Mississippi Governors and State Legislators visited the business regularly. Crossley's also supplied some of the famous houndstooth hats for University of Alabama Coach Paul "Bear" Bryant. The popular clothing store for men and boys closed in July of 2000 when the owner retired. The Fashion Barn opened one of the city's favorite women's clothing stores on this corner in 2002. This family-owned business had been operating in Columbus for 27 years when the owners retired in February of 2020. Edward Jones Investments – Josh Read revitalized the building in 2022, restoring it to an original look that you see today.