

The nineteen buildings which comprise the Downtown Columbia Historic District represent the historic portion of the only commercial center within the rural parish of Caldwell. The district consists of one and two story mainly brick commercial buildings located within a roughly two block area east of U.S. Highway 165 and immediately south of the Ouachita River. Because of a high levee built for the purposes of flood control, the river cannot be viewed unless one is standing on the second floor of nearby buildings. Contributing elements range in date from c. 1909 through the 1930s. Boundaries were drawn to include all structures within the central business district which retain sufficient historic character while excluding other buildings which have lost their integrity or are less than fifty years old. The district has a low non-contributing rate of only sixteen percent.

All of the district's buildings stand flush to adjacent sidewalks, and approximately three-fourths are connected by party walls. As a result, most mass closely together along the streets, with only a few gaps between structures. With the exception of the highly ornamented Schepis Building and the parish courthouse, the majority of the buildings in the district are fairly simple, flat-roofed structures. Some, however, feature decorative brickwork, as detailed below. Canopies are also prominent features.

#### Contributing Elements

All 50+ year old buildings which retain sufficient integrity are considered contributing elements for the purposes of this submission. Although the parish courthouse does not relate to the district's commercial significance, it is being counted as a contributing element because it is individually eligible for the National Register. It is a rare example of the Modernistic style within Caldwell Parish (most likely the only example). In addition, it is one of the most highly ornamented buildings in the community.

#### Non-Contributing Elements

There are three non-contributing elements in the district. One is a seriously compromised historic building (#6). Another is a 1960s bank which has been recently remodeled so that its appearance will better harmonize with nearby historic structures (#10). The third is a brick building currently under construction as infill between two of the district's historic structures (#8).

#### Breakdown of Buildings by Date

Downtown Columbia was all but destroyed by fires in 1876, 1900, and 1909. The only Sanborn Fire Insurance Map detailing the town is dated 1919. It shows a small CBD not much larger than the one being nominated. Whenever possible, buildings were dated by using architectural evidence in combination with this information. A breakdown by date follows.

1909- 1919	9
1920- 1930s	7
non-contributing	3

#### INVENTORY OF BUILDINGS IN DOWNTOWN COLUMBIA HISTORIC DISTRICT

1) Contributing Element. This two-story 1920s brick building features a second floor balcony with a cast iron balustrade, a second level canopy, and ornamental brickwork on the facade and one side elevation. This brickwork consists of pilasters dividing the second floor level into bays, a coping atop a parapet, and, on the facade, a decorative band of bricks laid with the comers facing outward. The storefront appears to be original.

2) Contributing Element. Schepis Building, 107 Main Street, National Register. This c. 1916 building consists of a two-story main block flanked by small one story wings. Its facade is constructed of concrete blocks cast to resemble rusticated stone. An example of the Italian Renaissance style, it features a piano nobile elaborately articulated by Ionic pilasters, a molded doorway, double arched windows, quatrefoils, a parapet with a central tablet, and statues and urns along the roofline. The first floor storefront contains a conventional period shopfront.

3) Contributing Element. Built between 1909 and 1919, this fairly plain one story brick building features a heavy pier at each corner. Up until the last few months, the building had been very badly altered and would have been a non-contributing element (mansard-like projection

and plywood shopfront). It has just been rehabilitated. Work included the removal of the mansard-like projection and the addition of a shopfront which is more in keeping with the building (three-part division, transoms and large display windows).

4) Contributing Element. Built between 1909 and 1919, this one story building also has a facade featuring concrete blocks cast to look like rusticated stone. The structure features heavy corner pilasters with simple capitals. Blocks suggesting modillions form a band immediately below a prominent entablature. The shopfront appears to be largely original.

5) Contributing Element, Pendola Building, 119 Main Street. Like building No. 1 described above, this two story brick structure has a cast iron balcony and a second floor canopy. Cast iron pilasters on the storefront are painted in contrasting colors in order to emphasize their decorative motifs. A double door with an arched transom enlivens the facade's second story. Immediately below the cornice with stone coping is a band of brickwork laid in an ornamental pattern. The building was constructed between 1909 and 1919.

6) Non-Contributing Element, corner of Pearl and Main streets. This one-story fairly plain historic corner commercial building was significantly modified within the last 10 or 15 years. The only original fabric is at the very top.

7) Contributing Element, East Pearl Street. This c. 1930 one-story brick structure houses three businesses. Its only decorative features are brick lozenges above each entrance. The shopfront appears to be largely historic except where the easternmost shop is located. Here it has been partially filled in with speckled brick.

8) Non-Contributing Element, East Pearl Street. This two-story brick building is currently under construction. Its style will be compatible with the historic structures in the district.

9) Contributing Element, 100-104 East Pearl Street. This c. 1930 one-story brick building lacks ornamentation. Its storefront appears to be largely original.

10) Non-Contributing Element, corner Main and East Pearl streets. This 1960s one story bank building was recently sheathed in brick and generally remodeled to give it a more historic appearance.

11) Contributing Element. This plain one-story 1920s brick building was recently rehabilitated according to the Secretary of the Interior's Standards. The shopfront had been lost except for slender decorative cast-iron pilasters. A period looking shopfront was installed.

12) Contributing Element. This simple 1920s two story brick structure features molded brick panels above original one-over-one windows. Like No. 10, the shopfront had been lost except for slender decorative pilasters. A period looking shopfront was inserted following the Secretary of the Interior's Standards.

13) Contributing Element, Citizens' Progressive Bank. This two-story brick building was constructed between 1909 and 1919. It features brick bands outlining its transoms and its original second story windows with decorative brick panels. The transoms have been filled. The storefront appears to be largely historic.

14) Contributing Element. This c. 1930 plain commercial building has a covered transom and a reworked storefront, although it is not glaringly inappropriate. Portions of the original slender decorative cast iron pilasters survive.

15) Contributing Element, Caldwell Parish Courthouse. This 1937 Modernistic style courthouse was designed by J. W. Smith and Associates of Monroe and built by Nile E. Yearwood. It is one of the most highly ornamented buildings in the historic district. Composed of a three story central block flanked by two story wings, it features pilasters inscribed with multiple narrow vertical bands of brick, windows which appear to be framed by double brick bands, teas relief chevrons and human figures, and entrances enhanced by egg and dart molding and stylized dentil bands. A two-story unsympathetic modern addition is appended to one side.

16) Contributing Element, Masonic Lodge, 140 Main Street. This c. 1909 two story brick structure contains retail space on the first level and a lodge hall on the second floor. Its most

distinctive decorative feature is a shaped parapet suggestive of the Spanish Mission style. Arched and Baroque quatrefoil shaped panels enhance the facade, which has received a stucco covering. The side of the building which faces a cross street features a molded brick cornice and a molded belt course between the floors. The building's shopfront with decorative cast iron pilasters is completely original. However, the present canopy supported on slender posts is of recent vintage.

17) Contributing Element. 128 Main Street. This two story brick structure, built between 1909 and 1919, is enhanced by elaborate brickwork in the form of a belt course beneath the second floor windows, a shaped parapet featuring brick molding, and two bands composed of bricks laid with their corners pointing outward. Although the second story windows are modern, the shopfront is largely original.

18) Contributing Element. This one-story plain brick building lacks ornament except for a simply molded parapet. It was built between 1909 and 1919.

19) Contributing Element. This simple metal clad building has a gable front roof, filled transoms, and what appears to be a largely historic shopfront. It also dates to the years between 1909 and 1919.

### Assessment of Integrity

A few buildings in Columbia's central business district are being excluded from this National Register submission due to loss of integrity. For example, there are three considerably altered historic buildings immediately beyond #14. Here the boundary is a party wall. Also, it should be noted that the Columbia CBD has always been very small. The commercial buildings being nominated are the vast majority of those present during the historic period.

All in all, the district's contributing elements are well-preserved. The most serious alteration is that of the unsympathetic addition which has been appended to the 1930s courthouse. However, the Modernistic styling of the structure's large original portion is so distinctive and rare within the context of Columbia that it easily stands forth as the most visually impressive part of the building.

Of special note in downtown Columbia is the number of original or largely original shopfronts which survive. Period storefronts were usually the first element of a structure to be changed when owners of what were once considered outdated buildings attempted to update their businesses' facades. Where original shopfronts have been lost, most have been replaced with appropriate period looking storefronts, some according to the Secretary of the Interior's Standards. In summary, the buildings of the Downtown Columbia Historic District still easily convey the historic role of the CBD as a commercial center for the rural parish of Caldwell (see part 8).

The Downtown Columbia Historic District is locally significant in the area of commerce because of its important role as the trading center for the large agricultural parish of Caldwell. The period of significance spans from c. 1909, the date of the oldest commercial building, to 1946, the fifty year cutoff. Downtown Columbia continued to be a major provider of goods and services to the surrounding area until well past World War II, when the general availability of the automobile and paved highways made shopping trips to larger communities such as Monroe desirable.

Columbia quite naturally emerged as a commercial center for not only its citizens but those living in nearby hamlets and on farms. Caldwell Parish was and is a decidedly rural parish, with the parish seat of Columbia being the only town of any size. Columbia is also one of North Louisiana's oldest communities. Because of its location at a ford of the Ouachita River, the area began developing as a center of trade as early as 1823. The first residence was constructed in 1827. A post office opened in 1837. When Caldwell Parish was founded in 1838, Columbia was designated as the parish seat and a log courthouse and jail were built. The town was incorporated in 1847. Growth was steady but slow, and for many years the community remained very small. For example, after a devastating yellow fever outbreak in 1856, only three stores, five saloons, and six families were located there in the fall of 1857.

Although early Columbia had stage connections with Monroe and Alexandria via one of the earliest roads constructed in the parish, the town's role as a commercial center during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries was based largely upon its status as a river port. In fact, the

river trade was so important that a major steamboat company, owned by the Blanks family, operated with Columbia as its home base. Farmers from as far as forty miles away brought cotton, timber and other products to the town, either selling the crops there or shipping them via steamboat to outside markets. Before returning home, they purchased goods which the boats had carried northward from New Orleans. In addition to housing facilities for all this trade, the town also had a thriving stave-production business. The prosperity created by all this business caused the town to grow. A second governmental charter was issued in 1874, and by 1880, the first year for which figures are available, 219 persons claimed residency in the town. Although the river's importance was challenged by the arrival of the Missouri Pacific Railroad in the 1890s, river traffic continued to be important to the town's economy until the mid- 1920s. After that, the construction of a bridge across the Ouachita River at Columbia in the mid- 1930s ensured that the town would continue in its role as commercial leader of the parish for the foreseeable future. By 1944 the town's population was 1,000.

Despite its long history, Columbia's central business district consists only of early twentieth century buildings. This is because the CBD suffered major fires in 1876, 1900, and 1909. The 1919 Sanborn Fire Insurance map mentioned in part 7 clearly illustrates how the nominated buildings contributed to the community's role as a trading center. In that year, the following businesses, some of which were owned by Italian immigrants, could be found within these buildings: a wagon shop, an insurance office, a drug store with offices on its second floor, a general store sharing a building with a Masonic lodge, a bank which also had offices on its second floor, and six general merchandise stores. The latter provided everything from clothing, to furniture, to patent medicines, to buggy harnesses. With its river, railroad, and automobile connections to the outside world, Columbia was able to provide the goods and services needed by its residents and parish farmers throughout the historic period and beyond.

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