

Historic Natchez Foundation
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Natchez, Mississippi 39121

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**Historic Natchez Foundation
Annual Meeting**

Friday, January 17, 2020
5:30 p.m.—7:30 p.m.

40-Year Celebration
Natchez Institute
108 South Commerce Street

Slave Dwelling Project

April 17-19, 2020
Schedule Forthcoming

Sponsored by
Mississippi Humanities Council
Natchez National Historical Park
Mississippi Department of Archives and History
Historic Natchez Foundation

Mississippi Heritage Trust

Annual Conference
June 4-5, 2020
Natchez, Mississippi

Historic Natchez Foundation Awards

Mimi and Ron Miller Visionary Award
Neil Varnell, Posthumously

Lifetime Member Recognition
David Waldrop

George and Ethel Kelly Restoration Award
John Norris and Tate Taylor
Wyolah and Church Hill

Dr. Frederick Martin
207 Linton Avenue

Mary Postlethwaite History Award
Robert Pernell
Darryl Grennell and City of Natchez
Proud to Take a Stand Monument

Special Merit Awards
First Presbyterian Church
117 South Pearl Street

Goldring/Woldenberg Institute
of Southern Jewish Life
Temple B'nai Israel
213 South Commerce Street

Kevin Miers
100 Block of North Commerce Street

Eric West and Charlotte Brent
401 North Commerce Street

Historic Natchez Foundation Officers & Directors

2019 Officers & Directors

President Stratton Bull
President Elect Mac Hazlip
Past President Glenn Green
Secretary Ethel Truly
Treasurer Pat Biglane

2020 Officers & Directors

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Secretary Becky Jex
Treasurer Chuck Caldwell

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Larry Holder
Cheryl Rinehart
Andy Sartin
Brittney West



Volume I

December 2019

HNF hosts annual meeting on January 17

The Historic Natchez Foundation will hold its annual meeting on Friday, January 17, 2020, from 5:30 to 7:30 p.m. at the Natchez Institute, 108 South Commerce Street. The meeting is free and open to the public, and the foundation encourages everyone to come and bring a friend.

The annual meeting will begin with a cocktail reception and conclude with a short business meeting at 7:00 to elect new board members and present the 2019 awards.

2019 was an anniversary year for HNF, which opened its first office and hired its first professional staff forty years ago in February 1979. Founded in 1974, HNF largely existed on paper until Ron Miller, an architectural historian with the Mississippi Dept. of Archives and History (MDAH), became the first executive director.

Ann and Bazile Lanneau donated space for the first office in the second story of 423 Main Street. HNF next moved to a larger office at 109 N. Commerce St., donated by Butch



Ron Miller sits at his desk and drawing board in 1979.

Brown. HNF briefly rented space in the City Bank and Trust Building on Franklin St. before moving in 1990 to the abandoned Natchez Institute, which it subsequently acquired in 1992.

Ron served as executive director for just short of 30 years and resigned in 2008 to head up a Gulf Coast office of MDAH in the aftermath of Hurricane Katrina.

Mimi Miller, who like her husband had worked for both MDAH and HNF, became executive director in 2008 and

held the position for a decade.

The combined tenures of Ron and Mimi spanned almost 40 years, and this year's annual meeting will honor their contributions in creating one of the most successful historic preservation organizations in the country. A continually looping PowerPoint program will highlight the successes of the past 40 years and many of the HNF members who made it happen.



Ron and Mimi Miller sign books at historic Bontura in 1985.

JOIN TODAY TO PRESERVE THE PAST FOR A BETTER TOMORROW

Membership expiration dates are printed above your address on every mail-out from the foundation. Each membership and donation is very important to us.

Name _____
Address _____

Phones _____
E-mail _____

Suggested Membership

Student	20.00
Senior Citizen	35.00
Individual	50.00
Family	100.00

**Special Donor Levels
Pillars of Support**

Tuscan Order	500.00
Doric Order	1,000.00
Ionic Order	2,500.00
Corinthian Order	5,000.00
Portico	10,000.00

The Historic Natchez Foundation is a 501(c)(3) charitable organization.

Return this form with your donation to:

Historic Natchez Foundation, P. O. Box 1761, Natchez, MS 39121 601-442-2500 and hnf@natchez.org

HNF and universities focus on preservation and revitalization

In 2019, HNF hosted and enlisted the participation of two universities in downtown historic preservation and revitalization projects.

University of Texas at San Antonio

In early March, students from the Department of Architecture at the University of Texas at San Antonio (UTSA) presented schematic designs for future uses of the fire-damaged historic Prentiss Club that included luxury condos, co-op working spaces, and a combination of retail space, bar, and café.

In producing the schematic plans, the students initially worked only from architectural plans drawn by late Natchez architect Charles Moroney, who donated to HNF all the plans



UTSA students pose for a picture as they introduce their schematic plans for the Prentiss Club to HNF staff.

produced during the 45-year life of his architectural firm.

After visiting Natchez and studying the actual building, the students revised their schematics to produce their final presentation drawings.

UTSA faculty member Diane Hays directed the project. Her family lived briefly in the Natchez area, and she was introduced to HNF staff by president elect Mac Hazlip.

According to UTSA Today, the vision and persistence of Diane Hays is “in large measure” why UTSA “is now the fastest growing architecture and interior design program in the country.” Diane and HNF look forward to collaborating on future projects.

Tulane University (New Orleans)

In late March, HNF hosted graduate students from Tulane University’s Master of Preservation Studies Program directed by John Stubbs. Assisting in Natchez were Tulane adjunct lecturer Toni DiMaggio and retired program director Gene Cizek, who maintains homes in both New Orleans and Natchez.

Tulane students toured Natchez, learned about its history and architecture, as well as its historic preservation successes and current challenges. The students chose to focus their attention on the revitalization of the 100 block of N. Commerce St. and its potential to

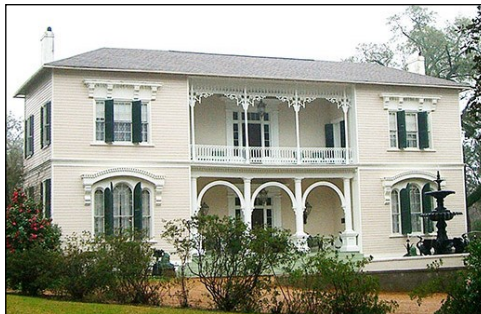


Tulane students gather at the front of the Natchez Institute with HNF staff, program director John Stubbs (far left), and Chesney Doyle (seated center) who led the development of the 2018 Downtown Master Plan.

become an arts district, as outlined in the Downtown Master Plan.

Students presented their final plans in a video conference on April 12 and focused particular attention on possible uses for The Ritz Theatre, the Kress Building (most recently occupied by National Furniture), and the vacant lot (most recently occupied by Stephen’s Dept. Store).

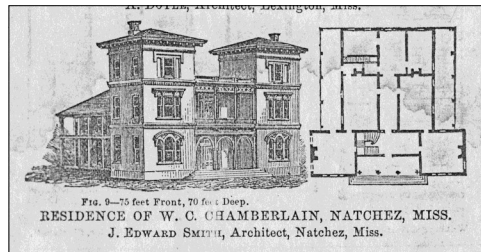
Hylands restore the towers, missing since 1927, to The Towers



Almost a century ago in 1927, a fire lessened the grandeur and architectural significance of The Towers and destroyed the inspiration for its name.

In 2019, owner Ginger Hyland and husband James restored the house to its rightful position as one of the city’s most imposing mansions by engaging

local builder James Germany to reconstruct the missing towers. Built in 1859 for W. C. Chamberlain and designed by J. Edwards Smith, the Italianate front was a grand addition to an existing cottage. (Photographic evolution credit: Ben Hillyer, Natchez Democrat)



HNF & partners to survey Natchez area pre-Civil War outbuildings

HNF is partnering with the Mississippi Department of Archives and History (MDAH), the Natchez National Historical Park, and Texas A&M University to identify, photograph, and create measured drawings of every pre-Civil War outbuilding in Natchez and Adams County.

Dr. Brent Fortenberry, who teaches courses in architectural history and historic preservation at Texas A&M, brings special expertise and technology in mapping and recording historic buildings. He is also Associate Director of the university’s Center for Heritage Conservation. His students will participate in creating the drawings that will be prepared to the standards of the Historic American Building Survey (HABS) and will be made available digitally by the Library of Congress.

Surviving outbuildings include slave quarters, dairies, carriage houses, barns, smoke houses, kitchen buildings, billiard halls, a ten-pin alley,

school houses, a plantation chapel, privies, latticed cistern houses, poultry houses, garden gazebos, a latticed summer house, and probably the finest antebellum greenhouse in the South at Dunleith.

Natchez and Adams County probably have the greatest concentration and variety of pre-Civil War outbuildings in the country. In the South, these are the buildings most likely to yield information about the daily lives of enslaved African Americans who lived and worked in dependency buildings.

These outbuildings are among our most threatened historic resources, and many have survived because they were adaptively reused for other purposes.

The project will also include outbuildings that no longer survive but are documented by historic photographs, drawings, maps, letters, diaries, and other resources.

Executive director Carter Burns estimates that HNF has now identified 235 pre-Civil War outbuildings.



Brent Fortenberry of Texas A&M uses a combination of modern technology (drone photography and 3-D laser scanner) and centuries-old technology (pencil, paper, and measuring tape) to record the privy at Longwood. (Photo credit: Ben Hillyer, Natchez Democrat)

“Slave Dwelling Project” comes to Natchez

HNF, Mississippi Department of Archives and History, and Natchez National Historical Park have invited Joe McGill to bring his award-winning “Slave Dwelling Project” to Natchez the weekend of April 17-19, 2020.

McGill schedules overnight visits to slave dwellings and presents programming to highlight the need to preserve them. McGill initiated the project while working for the National Trust for Historic Preservation. Now an independent organization, the Slave Dwelling Project is nationally influential in recognizing, preserving, and interpreting buildings and artifacts related to enslavement and in inspiring inclusive interpretations of history.

The Natchez National Historical Park will host a discussion with McGill and an overnight stay in a Melrose slave cabin coupled with a visit to the Forks of the Road, the second largest slave market in the Deep South. The National Park Service is currently in the process of acquiring public and private land associated with the site.

Other events include a reception and exhibit of outbuilding images at



Joe McGill created the “Slave Dwelling Project” to call attention to the need to preserve slave dwellings.

HNF’s headquarters; an African American history tour; and a lecture by Rice University professor Caleb McDaniel who authored the book, *Sweet Taste of Liberty: a True Story of Slavery and Restitution in America*, an account of the story of Henrietta Wood, a woman who was once free, was kidnapped, and re-enslaved. She was owned by the Brandon family at Brandon Hall. She later successfully sued her kidnapper for reparations.

The “Slave Dwelling Project” weekend is funded by a grant from the Mississippi Humanities Council.

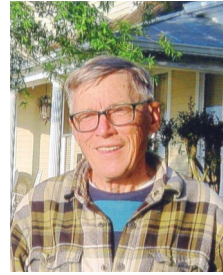
Archival Collections

HNF’s archival collections continue to grow and the research library has an outstanding collection of Natchez and Mississippi history resources. Dr. Donald Hopkins of Gulfport donated nearly 600 books in 2019 on Southern and Civil War history.

HNF has one of the state’s finest collections of books on fine arts, decorative arts, architecture, and historic preservation. This collection was significantly enhanced by donations in 2018 and 2019 from the late John and Mimi Bornman of Selma Plantation and Gregory Free of Austin, Texas, who once worked for the Department of Archives and History.

Charlie and Webbie Eidt donated one of the most exciting collections—the 20th-century notes, letters, articles, and photographs of Jeanerette Harlow (1906-1980), who was Charlie’s mother and a prolific writer of well researched newspaper articles in local and out of town newspapers. While transferring the collection, HNF also discovered that Webbie Eidt is an incredible country artist with an amazing output of art in multiple media

Preservationist Neil Varnell leaves remarkable community legacy



Dr. J. Neil Varnell, strong supporter of HNF and passionate preservationist, died on March 6, 2019, after a short illness. Born and reared in Cleveland, TN, Neil moved to

Natchez in the mid-1970s to direct the Southwest Mississippi Mental Health Complex. He bought a deteriorated historic house on the bluff overlooking the Mississippi River and restored it.

During the 1980s, Neil was a driving force in many of HNF's preservation battles. He directed the battle to prevent Deposit Guaranty National Bank's efforts to demolish the Middleton House at 306 Jefferson St. to create additional surface parking. He then participated in a partnership that bought the house to preserve it. That partnership was followed up by another partnership to buy and restore two condemned Queen Anne houses at 206 and 208

Washington St.

Neil was also involved in HNF's 1986 acquisition and restoration of the Linton House at 304 N. Commerce St. after it was nearly destroyed by fire (see photos below). He did much of the physical labor in cleaning out the fire-damaged house, which had been converted into multiple apartments. He was also one of the co-signers on HNF's loan to restore the house.

Neil successfully battled the Adams County Board of Supervisors in their effort to demolish the historic 1890 Old Jail, now a source of pride to the county. One of his tactics was to delay, delay, and delay, a strategy particularly successful in preserving the Old Jail, because a county election solved the problem. Newly elected supervisors Sammy Cauthen and David Huber spearheaded the jail's restoration for county offices.

Among Neil's most important contributions to historic preservation in Natchez was his leadership in securing

funding from the National Park Service's Historic Preservation Fund for a million-dollar study on the erosion of the Natchez Bluffs. This study paved the way for the Bluff Stabilization Project during Butch Brown's mayoral administration. Neil's efforts to stabilize the bluff made him HNF's first recipient of the Charlie Compton Preservation Award.

Neil fought his last major battle to prevent construction of a multi-story condominium on the Natchez Bluff, which he felt should be a public park for all citizens to enjoy the view he had from his house on Clifton Ave.

Neil Varnell loved Natchez and his influence will be felt for years to come. He bequeathed his house to HNF and over \$2 million to be divided among 15 other charities. HNF and the charities that benefitted from Neil's estate joined together on April 14th to host a celebration of his life at his home on the bluff. Special guests were 26 out-of-town members of Neil's family.



The Prentiss Club is not HNF's first effort to preserve a fire-damaged building. In 1986, HNF fought in court to halt demolition of the Linton House, considered by its neighbors to be an unrestorable eyesore.



Neil Varnell (below arrow) stands on the front porch of the Linton House as HNF president Charles Catchings prepares to toss a bottle of champagne to celebrate HNF's acquisition of the house and to launch its restoration.



The Linton House restoration bolstered the credibility of HNF, which finished the exterior of the house before selling it to Spike and Ginger Newman, who completed an exemplary restoration of the interior and rear gallery.

Temple B'nai Israel is now accessible to all

Temple B'nai Israel and the Goldring/Woldenberg Institute of Southern Jewish Life have recently completed a major step in their goal of expanding the mission of the temple to encompass new uses as a facility for special programming, performances, conferences, and as a museum of Natchez Jewish history by installing an ADA accessible ramp. The ramp was partially funded by a grant from the Mississippi Department of Archives

and History. HNF assisted with the grant application.

Work was completed in early 2019 on the installation of the ramp that leads from the sidewalk to an existing side door that opens into the rabbi's study. Eventually an elevator will be installed in the study to provide access to both floors of the building. Landscaping along the sidewalk fence line and along the northern side of the ramp will minimize its visual impact.



Natchez Institute and Temple B'nai Israel receive grant awards

The Board of Trustees of the Mississippi Department of Archives and History (MDAH) awarded nearly \$3 million in Community Heritage Preservation grants at a special meeting on December 6.

Two of the 17 recipients are in Natchez and include Temple B'nai Israel and the Natchez Institute, headquarters of the Historic Natchez Foundation. All Community Heritage Preservation Grants require at least a



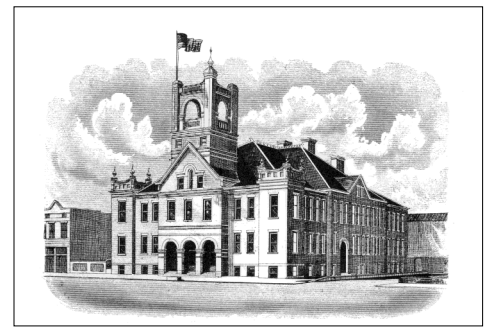
The interior of Temple B'nai Israel is remarkably well preserved and retains even the original 1905 lighting fixtures.

20% match of the total project cost.

Temple B'nai Israel, which is owned by the Goldring/Woldenberg Institute of Southern Jewish Life (ISJL), received a grant of \$286,384 toward its ongoing efforts to broaden the mission of the temple to encompass new uses as a community facility for hosting special programming, performances, and conferences, as well as a museum of Natchez Jewish history in the basement. HNF has enjoyed a close relationship with the ISJL for about 30 years.

The grant will be used to install a fire suppression system and to completely rewire the building, which still retains all original knob and tube wiring.

The Historic Natchez Foundation received a grant of \$243,375, which will install a new roof; restore the cornice and replace missing cornice ornaments (damaged in 1998 straight-line winds); and repair (replace to match if necessary) and paint approximately 157 window sash, sills, and jambs.



Note the missing ornament in the photo above and behold in the drawing below the missing tower that HNF dreams of reconstructing.

Historic Natchez Foundation acquires and revives Prentiss Club

On September 2, 2018, fire almost destroyed the Prentiss Club at 211 N. Pearl St. Considered a total loss by its owners and insurers, HNF acquired the building by donation from owners Fred and Melinda Kent in December 2018.

Built in 1905, the Prentiss Club is one of the city's most architecturally and historically significant buildings. It was built for the city's most prestigious men's club with its founding members being almost equally divided between Jewish and gentile. The architect for the

building was Francis J. MacDonnell of the New Orleans firm of Soule and MacDonnell.

HNF's interest in preserving the Prentiss Club was not only based on its architectural and historical significance. Had the fire-damaged building been demolished, the historic character of downtown would have suffered an irreparable loss. The Prentiss Club serves as a corner anchor and visual screen for a city block with about 50% of its property occupied by unsightly

surface parking lots. It is the only building fronting the 200 block of N. Pearl St. and the only building on the south side of the 400 block of Jefferson St., which has experienced substantial erosion of its historic character since World War II.

HNF has now invested roughly \$375,000 in the restoration of the Prentiss Club, which has outwardly been restored to its original appearance. HNF is optimistic about its future interior restoration by new owners.



Flames erupt from the roof of the Prentiss Club on the morning of September 2, 2018. No one was inside the building when the fire broke out.

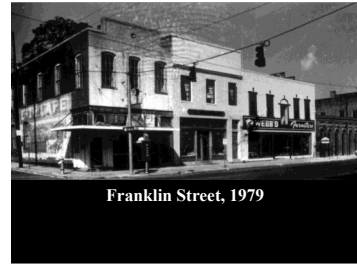


Looking southeasterly toward St. Mary Basilica, the roofless 2nd-story ballroom after cleanup but before reconstruction of the roof framing.

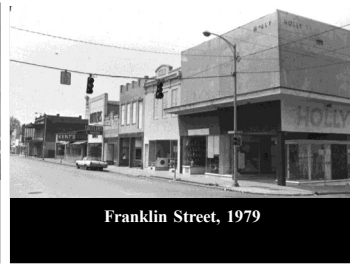


The Prentiss Club after restoration of the roof, cornice, windows, side entrance canopy,

Historic Natchez Foundation practices progressive preservation for 40 years



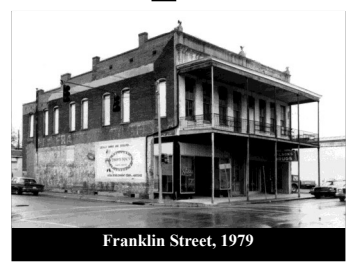
Franklin Street, 1979



Franklin Street, 1979



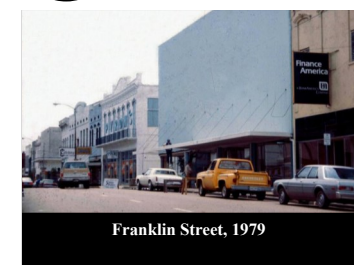
Franklin Street, 1979



Franklin Street, 1979



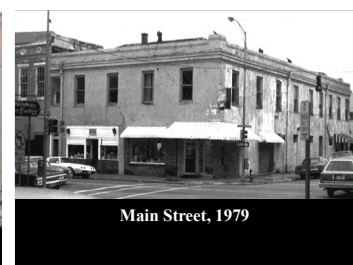
Natchez Streetscapes 1979



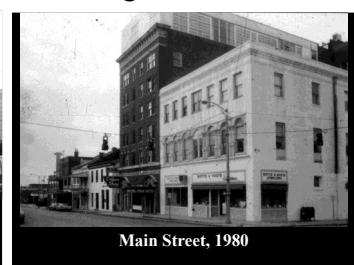
Franklin Street, 1979



Main Street, 1979



Main Street, 1979



Main Street, 1980



Franklin Street
HNF Storefront Program



Franklin Street
HNF Storefront Program



Franklin Street
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Franklin Street
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Franklin Street
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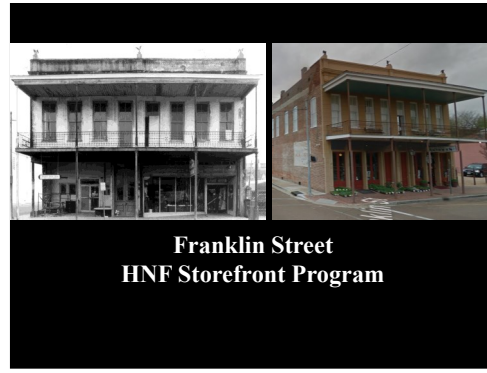
Franklin Street
HNF Storefront Program



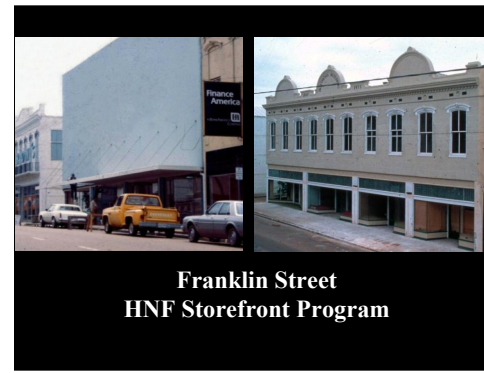
Franklin Street



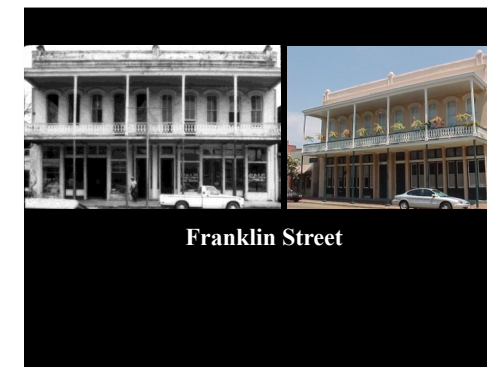
Franklin Street



Franklin Street
HNF Storefront Program



Franklin Street
HNF Storefront Program



Franklin Street



Franklin Street
HNF advised and directed paint removal
Jack Pool restored



Main Street
HNF Storefront Program



Main Street
HNF Storefront Program



Main Street
HNF Storefront Program



Main Street
HNF Storefront Program



South Commerce Street
HNF Storefront Program



Memorial Hall--United States Courthouse
HNF acquired in 1987 and stabilized



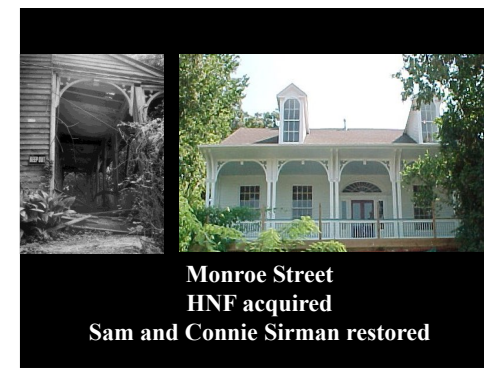
High Street
HNF acquired and restored the exterior
Interior restored by Dr. J. R. Todd



North Rankin Street
HNF acquired
Barry and Teri Tillman restored



South Martin Luther King Street
HNF acquired
Wendell Weeden and Steve Cook restored



Monroe Street
HNF acquired
Sam and Connie Sirman restored



North Martin Luther King Street
HNF acquired
Darryl Grennell restored