

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES REGISTRATION FORM

1. Name of Property

historic name Belcher – Nixon Building
other names/site number Tuxedo Junction

2. Location

street & number 1728 29th Street Ensley not for publication N/A
city or town Birmingham vicinity N/A
state Alabama code AL county Jefferson code 07 zip code 35218

3. State/Federal Agency Certification

As the designated authority under the National Historic Preservation Act of 1986, as amended, I hereby certify that this 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 meets does not meet the National Register Criteria. I recommend that this property be considered significant nationally statewide locally. (See continuation sheet for additional comments.)

Signature of certifying official/Title _____ 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): _____

Signature of Keeper _____ Date of Action _____

5. Classification

Ownership of Property (Check as many boxes as apply)	Category of Property (Check only one box)	Number of Resources within Property	
		Contributing	Noncontributing
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> private	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> building(s)	<u>1</u>	<u>0</u> buildings
<input type="checkbox"/> public-local	<input type="checkbox"/> district	<u>0</u>	<u>0</u> sites
<input type="checkbox"/> public-State	<input type="checkbox"/> site	<u>0</u>	<u>0</u> structures
<input type="checkbox"/> public-Federal	<input type="checkbox"/> structure	<u>0</u>	<u>0</u> objects
	<input type="checkbox"/> object	<u>1</u>	<u>0</u> Total

Name of related multiple property listing
(Enter "N/A" if property is not part of a multiple property listing.)
N/A

Number of contributing resources previously listed in the National Register:
N/A

6. Function or Use

Historic Functions (Enter categories from instructions)

Cat: COMMERCE/TRADE Sub: professional
COMMERCE/TRADE specialty store

Current Functions (Enter categories from instructions)

Cat: COMMERCE/TRADE Sub: business

7. Description

Architectural Classification (Enter categories from instructions)

NO STYLE

Materials (Enter categories from instructions)

foundation: BRICK
roof: SYNTHETICS
walls: BRICK
other: _____

Narrative Description (Describe the historic and current condition of the property on one or more 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)

<u>Commerce</u>	_____
<u>Ethnic Heritage</u>	<u>Black</u>
_____	_____
_____	_____

Period of Significance circa 1922-1968

Significant Dates circa 1922

Significant Person (Complete if Criterion B is marked above) Nixon, Dr. John W.

Cultural Affiliation _____

Architect/Builder _____

Narrative Statement of Significance (Explain the significance of the property on one or more continuation sheets.)

9. Major Bibliographical References

(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: _____

10. Geographical Data

Acreage of Property <1 acre

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

	Zone	Easting	Northing	Zone	Easting	Northing
1	<u>16</u>	<u>510564</u>	<u>3707596</u>	4	<u> </u>	<u> </u>
2	<u> </u>	<u> </u>	<u> </u>	5	<u> </u>	<u> </u>
3	<u> </u>	<u> </u>	<u> </u>	6	<u> </u>	<u> </u>

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.)

11. Form Prepared By

name/title David B. Schneider (reviewed by Susan Enzweiler, AHC NR Coordinator)

organization Schneider Historic Preservation, LLC/Alabama Historical Commission date 03/17/2008

street & number 411 E. 6th Street telephone 256-310-3620

city or town Anniston state AL zip code 36207

Additional Documentation

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)

Property Owner

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

name John W. and Margaret A. Nixon, Jr.

street & number 1728 20th St. W telephone 205-586-5085

city or town Birmingham state AL zip code 35218

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7. Narrative Description

The Belcher-Nixon Building is a two-story brick commercial building with a flat built-up roof concealed by low parapets. The building is shaped to fit an irregular lot with its north and south elevations running parallel to 20th Street, its west elevation running perpendicular to the north and south elevations, its east elevation angled along Ensley Avenue to the northwest, and a narrow corner bay angled at the southeast corner. The building sits at zero lot lines to the south, west, and east and abuts the city sidewalks along 20th Street and Ensley Avenue. A narrow yard to the north is paved for use as a parking lot.

The principal south façade has a series of altered storefront openings at its first floor. A modern aluminum-framed double-leaf entrance door with transom is set within the westernmost bay. An entrance, located immediately west of the midline of the building, is flanked by single windows separated by thin brick piers. The entrance has a single modern aluminum-framed door with transom and sidelights set within a historic wood casing. The western window in the grouping has a historic wood casing with a later wood single-light fixed window. The eastern window is similar but with a modern aluminum frame within a historic wood casing. A historic entrance opening located immediately east of the midline of the building has been partially blocked in with a frame enclosure and has a modern wood door and a modern shed canopy. The easternmost bay has a similar entrance with no canopy. The upper level has ten rectangular wooden six-over-six light double-hung sash windows set within segmental arched openings with simple brick sills. Six of the windows are evenly spaced to the west of the midline of the building, three are off-center to the east of the midline, and one is located at the far eastern end. The exterior wall is brick set in common bond that has been painted. The flat parapet has a simple brick parapet cap.

The intersection of the corner bay and the south and east elevations has interlocked corners. The corner bay is painted brick with a flat parapet. A former rectangular entrance opening is centered at the first floor level and has been infilled with brick. A window similar to those at the facade is centered at the second level. The painted brick east elevation has a stepped parapet and three unequally spaced windows at its upper level. The north elevation is covered with stucco and has no parapet. Seven windows are unequally spaced at its upper level. All but one of the windows, which has been replaced with a modern one-over-one window, are similar to those at the façade. A single pedestrian entrance within a rectangular opening with a modern wooden door is located at the far eastern end of the first floor. A similar entrance in a segmental arched opening is located at the westernmost end. A large rectangular ventilator with a metal hood projects to the west of the eastern entrance and a small window opening to the west supports a through-wall HVAC unit. The west elevation is painted brick with a stepped parapet. Three unequally spaced windows are located at its upper level and there are no openings at its lower level.

The interior of the first floor is divided into three retail spaces that correspond to the two exterior entrances to the west and the entrance to the east. The fourth off-center entrance opens into a narrow stairhall that leads to the second floor level. The retail spaces typically have modern sheetrock or plywood ceiling and wall finishes that have been applied over historic smooth plaster walls and beaded board ceilings. Floors are exposed concrete or have been covered with modern composite or vinyl tile. The stair hall is finished with plywood paneling with a dropped acoustical ceiling and carpeted floors. A single flight stair extends northward to a second floor hallway. A series of modern offices are partitioned off around the hallway at the upper level. The offices are typically finished with plywood paneling, dropped acoustical ceilings, and carpeted floors. Remnants

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of the original plaster wall finishes are visible in a service room at the west end of the building and historic beaded board ceilings are visible underneath the dropped ceilings and a layer of sheetrock. The eastern end of the building was historically used as a dentist's office, first for Dr. Belcher and later for Dr. Nixon, and is partitioned into a reception area, examination rooms, and an office.

The building is in generally good condition. Exterior and interior alterations are consistent with the evolutionary nature of the building's changes in tenants and uses over time. A 1937 photo indicates that most of the first floor exterior walls at the eastern retail space were removed to accommodate a coal dealer. These openings were infilled with storefronts and brick by 1947 and those storefronts were subsequently replaced by the current fenestration in the 1970s or 1980s. Despite these changes, the building continues to reflect its overall historic appearance.

Archaeology

While no formal archaeological survey has been made, potential subsurface remains could provide additional information about the historical development of the site.

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The Belcher-Nixon Building is significant under criterion A and B in the area of ethnic heritage for its role as an African-American professional and commercial building in the early twentieth century; as the only surviving historic commercial building at Tuxedo Junction, a predominantly African-American commercial center that also has significance in American musical history; and its association with prominent local African-American dentist and civil rights leader Dr. John W. Nixon. Tuxedo Junction is located in the Birmingham suburb of Ensley, historically the site of one of U.S. Steel's largest industrial facilities in the Birmingham District. Constructed circa 1922, the building served as the offices for several black dentists and physicians, primarily Dr. Andrew F. Belcher who practiced there from circa 1922 to 1951 and Dr. Nixon, who practiced there from 1951 until 1988. Tuxedo Junction was immortalized in a 1939 song of the same name that was written by jazz musician Erskine Ramsay Hawkins' band and became a long-running national bestseller after it was recorded by the Glen Miller Orchestra in the 1940s. The Belcher-Nixon Building is the only tangible built reminder of the Tuxedo Junction commercial area. The period of significance for the building is between circa 1922 and 1968, the years of its construction through the end of Dr. Nixon's most active participation in Birmingham's civil rights movement. The resource meets the requirements of criteria consideration G due to its associations with Dr. Nixon, who was a prominent leader in the Birmingham civil rights movement and who used his office in the Belcher-Nixon Building as his primary base of operations for these activities through circa 1968.

Narrative History

The Belcher-Nixon Building was constructed circa 1922 and originally housed the offices of Dr. Andrew F. Belcher, an African-American dentist, on the second floor and three commercial shop spaces on the first floor, numbered 1726, 1728, and 1730 20th Street. The building was traditionally occupied by African-American businesses, although its first retail tenant as indicated by the 1923 city directory was Adolph Rathman, a white grocer, operating out 1730. The other two retail spaces were vacant in 1923. The 1925 directory records that J.E. Stevens, a barber and tailor, had moved into 1726. 1730 is listed as being occupied by G.W. Thornton's billiard parlor and J.H. Smith's restaurant. Edward J. Allen replaced Stevens by 1928 and the two other spaces were again vacant, Rathman having died in 1927.¹ About 1930, Dr. G.N. Adamson, an African-American physician, and the American Woodmen Union Relief Benevolent Society Camp #65 relocated from a building across the street and joined Dr. Belcher upstairs in this building. The American Woodmen was established as a semi-fraternal benevolent and insurance society and was the African-American counterpart to the Woodmen of the World.

James K. Robertson was operating a drug store at 1728 by 1931 and remained a tenant until about 1960. Also by that year, 1730 was converted for use by a white coal dealer named Jacob Cantavespre, the son of an Italian immigrant bricklayer.² Photos of the building taken in 1937 show that much of the north, east and south walls of the first floor of the building were removed at 1730 to accommodate this use. A shed canopy was added along the east elevation, as were a series of bollards along the sidewalk.³ By 1937, Peter Sims, an African-American, had taken over the coal shop, although a painted sign shown on the building in a 1937 tax assessment photo reads "Robbins Coal."⁴ The following year Thomas Dotson was operating a shoe repair shop within the space and a photo of the building dated 1947 shows that the large openings in the walls had been infilled with storefronts. The 1939 tax assessor's card indicates that the building had two rooms on the second floor used as a dentist's office, one room as a doctor's office, two extra rooms as anterooms, and one

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“large hall” for the Woodmen. Mamie Pickett began operating a clothes cleaning shop at 1726 circa 1935 and was replaced as a tenant by the Tuxedo Beauty Parlor by 1947. The Tuxedo Variety Store moved into the latter space about 1953 and remained there into the 1980s. After Roberston’s drug store moved out in the early 1960s, 1728 saw a variety of tenants including the Help One Another Club, the Christ Temple AFM Church, and later United Service Associates, Inc. Booker T. Washington insurance company moved into 1730 in the 1960s and remained there until the 1980s.

Other African-American professionals who had offices upstairs included physicians Marque L. Jackson and later Andrew P. Robertson. Dentists Isaac Graves and Ramsey G. Cole had offices there in the 1940s. In 1951, Dr. Belcher recruited Dr. John W. Nixon to join his practice. Dr. Nixon later assumed the practice after Belcher’s death and continued to practice in the building until his death in 1988. Pauline Nzeribe, also a dentist, practiced there in the 1990s.

The upstairs of the building currently houses the offices of United Service Associates, Inc. The first floor is vacant.

Dr. Andrew F. Belcher

Andrew F. Belcher was born in Centerville, Alabama circa 1896 and was the son of Felix Belcher, a barber. A World War I veteran, he attended college at Tuskegee Institute and, after teaching school for a short time, enrolled in the dental program at Meharry Medical School in Nashville. At the time of the 1920 census, he was still living in Nashville and his occupation was listed as a dentist. By 1922 he had relocated to Ensley and established his practice. Dr. Belcher also participated in numerous other business and social activities. He was a charter member of the Birmingham Chapter of Kappa Alpha Psi Fraternity, a member of the Jefferson County Dental Association, the Knights of Pythians, and the American Woodmen; and was chairman of the board of directors of the Jones Valley Finance Company. While visiting Michigan in 1951 to convalesce, Dr. Belcher died unexpectedly. His obituary in the Birmingham World stated that “over a thirty-year period, he built a terrific practice – young Drs. Isaac Graves, B.M. Jefferson and Nixon were encouraged and assisted by him.”⁵

Dr. John W. Nixon

Dr. John W. Nixon was born in Bartow, Florida in 1922 and was the son of Willie Nixon, a phosphate mine worker. He attended college prior to entering the Army during World War II. After the war, he completed his education, which included attending Bethune-Cookman College and Fisk University. He received his D.D.S. degree in 1951 from the dental school at Meharry Medical College in Nashville. Upon graduation, Dr. Nixon, like many blacks at the time, seriously considered relocating to the North where opportunities were thought to be greater. He was offered a practice in Boston with the opportunity to pursue graduate work at Tufts University. About the same time Birmingham dentist, Dr. Andrew J. Belcher, offered him a position. At first convinced that he should accept the Boston position, Nixon sought the advice of his mentor, Dr. Harold D. West, who convinced him to accept Belcher’s offer to visit Birmingham. During his visit, Dr. Belcher passed away and Nixon stayed on to help with his patients. He later wrote: “Birmingham became my temporary domicile. Each year I thought I would move away the following year, but somehow I just stayed on and on.”⁶

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Dr. Nixon was an important participant in the struggle for civil rights in Birmingham in the 1950s and 1960s. He served as the president of the local chapter of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP), two terms as president of the Alabama Conference of NAACP Branches, and one term as the chairman of the Southern Regional Conference of NAACP Branches. During the pivotal confrontations in 1963, led by Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. and the Rev. Fred Shuttlesworth, leader of the Birmingham-based Alabama Christian Movement for Human Rights (ACMHR), Dr. Nixon was among a group of black business leaders who called for moderation rather than confrontation. While the work of King and Shuttlesworth was the precursor to The March on Washington in August 1963, and ultimately the passage of more effective civil rights legislation, the established relationships moderate black professionals like Dr. Nixon had with their white counterparts paved the way for the successful implementation of many of the local reforms that the protests had initiated.

While the movement for equal rights for all races began in America as early as the seventeenth century, “for most Americans the civil rights movement began on May 17, 1954, when the Supreme Court handed down the Brown vs. Board of Education of Topeka decision outlawing segregation in public schools.”⁷ The decision met with decidedly mixed results in Birmingham, with some predicting that the decision would be implemented in an orderly fashion and others warning that the change would be violent. A week after the decision arsonists attempted to burn Dr. Nixon’s house.⁸

In 1956, Alabama Attorney General John Patterson effectively outlawed the NAACP and the organization was unable to operate in the state again until 1964. It was at this juncture that Rev. Shuttlesworth, frustrated with the pace of reform in the city and with what he perceived as a lack of effectiveness among local black business and religious leaders, formed the ACMHR. Dr. Nixon was among a large number of these leaders who aligned with the Jefferson County Betterment Association “to counter the ACMHR, which they viewed as ‘too militant for its own good.’”⁹ Shuttlesworth countered that “Many of the upper class people who worked in the NAACP are professional people who seem to feel it is almost taboo to align actively with us.”¹⁰

Arguably, it was the work of the more moderate black leaders like Nixon and prominent black millionaire businessman A.G. Gaston, that helped push forward a change in Birmingham’s structure of government in 1962. The city had previously been run by three city commissioners, all of whom were segregationists and one of whom was the infamous white supremacist Bull Connor. In November 1962, voters approved changing to a new form of government that would include a mayor and nine councilmen. In the ensuing election for mayor, moderate segregationist Albert Boutwell defeated Connor but Connor refused to relinquish power and filed suit to allow the commissioners to complete their terms of office. While Connor’s challenge was ultimately unsuccessful, the uncertainty of the election results undermined the position of the conservative black leaders who wanted to delay confrontation until the new leadership had a chance to take office. Dr. King, who was looking to Birmingham as a critical next step, and Rev. Shuttlesworth developed a strategy they called Project “C,” reflecting their confrontational plan to attack segregation in Birmingham. During a national tour leading up to the implementation of Project “C,” Dr. King emphatically stated that “As Birmingham goes, so goes the South.”¹¹

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Protests began in April 1963 with Shuttlesworth leading a group of thirty to city hall on April 3rd, all of whom were arrested. Tensions continued to mount after Dr. King led a march on Good Friday and was also arrested. On April 12, 1963, Dr. Nixon joined other leading black business and community leaders, including Gaston, in signing an advertisement in The Birmingham News entitled "A Statement by Some of the Negro Leaders of Metropolitan Birmingham" that called upon the Birmingham City Council to "immediately create a bi-racial committee which will be charged with the responsibility of looking objectively at the problems in this community where race is involved."¹² Their calls for moderation were unsuccessful, the protests continued, and the violence against the protesters by local and state police escalated. On May 2nd, a protest by black youngsters resulted in the arrest of 959 children. The following day, more than one thousand young protestors took to the streets and the police retaliated with police dogs and fire hoses. Moderates like Gaston, who up until that point saw King as a troublemaker who "was messing up things just when we were getting a new start," were as horrified as was the national audience watching the events on television. After white supremacists bombed the home of King's brother and A.G. Gaston's motel, President Kennedy sent troops to nearby Fort McClellan. The threat of military action and the upholding of Boutwell's election by the state Supreme Court ended the conflict.¹³

The events in Birmingham led directly to President Kennedy's announcement of a new civil rights act during a speech on June 11, 1963 and Dr. King's leadership of the March on Washington that August. Title VII of the Civil Rights Act of 1964 created the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission (EEOC) to enforce the sections of the law prohibiting discrimination in the workplace. While the EEOC was initially envisioned to have regulatory authority in its enforcement activities, including the use of cease and desist orders, the final legislation creating the Commission left it with only the power to investigate individual complaints of discrimination and to attempt to mediate a settlement between the parties involved. Still, as Robert C. Lieberman of Columbia University writes in "The EEOC and Civil Rights Enforcement," "Title VII soon became the basis for a strong, arguably effective state initiated program of antidiscrimination enforcement—the cluster of mandates and practices known collectively as affirmative action."¹⁴ Because the EEOC had limited powers, it effectively began to work with a variety of private entities, including the NAACP, to carry out its mission. Birmingham was chosen in 1965 by Alfred Blumrosen, the EEOC's chief of conciliations as the site of EEOC's first conciliation initiative "because as a highly visible focal point for the civil rights movement and a major industrial center, Birmingham was 'symbolic of all the problems of discrimination in the South.'"¹⁵ The EEOC worked closely with Birmingham's branch of the NAACP, of which Dr. Nixon was then president, on a series of cases involving job discrimination in the area, notably those relating to U.S. Steel, the city's largest employer.

Dr. Nixon was one of the organizers of an NAACP-sponsored October 1968 rally to protest police brutality in the city and to call for local black policemen. Rev. H. L. Whelcher and Rev. Calvin Woods also helped organize the event that included 185 people.¹⁶

Dr. Nixon used the Belcher-Nixon Building as his primary base of operations for much of his civil rights-related activities throughout the 1950s and 1960s. He maintained a small office in the building where he would plan his activities, communicate with other leaders by phone, and hold small meetings. The building served as the local NAACP headquarters during Dr. Nixon's term as the organization's president.¹⁷

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In addition to his dental practice and civil rights work, Dr. Nixon was active in a wide variety of other pursuits. He served for a time on the faculty of the University of Alabama-Birmingham Dental School and was appointed to the National Advisory Dental Research Council of the National Institute of Health in 1976. In addition, Dr. Nixon served on the state Board of Pensions and Security and was a member of the President's Cabinet at the University of Alabama. His business pursuits included helping to organize the Citizens Federal Savings and Loan Association and he was a founding member of Operation New Birmingham, a partnership between Birmingham and Jefferson County to promote economic development and racial harmony. An accomplished actor and storyteller, Dr. Nixon appeared in both local productions and as a bit player in major films and was a member of the Screen Actors Guild. He participated in an annual Black History Month oral history program and became "a much sought after dramatist of poetry because of his acting skills and melodious voice."¹⁸ He later joined with Birmingham actor and writer Thom Gossom, Jr. to create an oral history program called "Speak of Me As I Am" that was very popular in Birmingham schools and churches until Dr. Nixon's death. Dr. Nixon was also an associate Minister at the Sixth Avenue Baptist Church. In 1971, Dr. Nixon joined with prominent Birmingham business leaders A.G. Gaston and Arthur Shores to establish United Service Associates, Inc. (USAI), a facilities maintenance company. Headquartered in the Belcher-Nixon Building, USAI has provided cleaning services to such clients as Marshall Space Flight Center, Stennis Space Center, Kennedy Space Center, NASA, Holiday Inn, and the U. S. Air Force.¹⁹

Dr. Nixon died at age sixty-six on December 20, 1988 after a short illness. An editorial in The Birmingham News the following day stated: "Few people have so totally involved themselves in all aspects of a city's life as John W. Nixon did after coming to Birmingham in 1951...With his family and many friends, we mourn the passing of a truly remarkable Renaissance man."²⁰ The city's major African-American newspaper, the Birmingham World, noted Nixon "was a former president of the Birmingham chapter of the NAACP and had a long history as a civil rights activist."²¹

In 1963, Dr. Nixon wrote: "If not living together, at least living side by side for one hundred fifty years has made a fertile background in the South for an intimate human understanding unsurpassed by any other section of the nation. Very soon we will lead the nation, not only in economic, political, and industrial development, but in real progress for all people."²²

Tuxedo Junction

The Tuxedo Park suburb of Ensley, was platted in 1899 and developed primarily as a residential area for African-Americans employed at the U.S. Steel Ensley Works. The Birmingham Railway, Light and Power Company trolley lines split at the intersection of 20th Street and Ensley Avenue, with one line heading west along 20th Street and the other arching to the northwest and continuing down 19th Street. This split is what created the irregular-shaped lot on which the Belcher-Nixon Building was later built. A small but vibrant African-American commercial district grew around the intersection and came to be known by the locals as Tuxedo Junction. The 1925 Sanborn map shows store buildings on all four corners of the intersection, a hotel to the west of the Belcher-Nixon Building, a store with a lodge hall across the street to the southwest, and other stores and a bottling works in the block of Ensley Avenue south of 20th Street. Similar conditions are shown on the 1951 update to the map.

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The area became a major center for African-American music in the 1920s and was “the only place negroes could go to dance then” according to a long time resident.²³ Music venues included Tuxedo Park, an American Woodmen hall on the second floor of a commercial building across 20th Street from the Belcher-Nixon Building that relocated to the Belcher-Nixon Building about 1930, and probably other restaurants and gathering spots in the area. A caption to a photograph of the Belcher-Nixon Building in a 1940 Birmingham Post article noted that “over the coal yard is a Negro fraternal hall where on Saturday nights Negro feet shuffle and swing to ‘Tuxedo Junction,’ the corner’s theme song.”²⁴

Tuxedo Park, located in the block bounded by Avenues T and U and 13th and 16th Streets, several blocks away from the Belcher-Nixon Building, historically served as “a Park for Negroes and called Tuxedo Park” or a “Negro Amusement Park.”²⁵ The 1928 Sanborn map depicts the park with a pool and bathhouse, a skating rink, an office, a shooting gallery, and a dancing pavilion. A 1939 entry in the Board of Equalization record indicates that the site then had a dance hall, two concession stands, and two sheds, all in poor condition. All but the dressing rooms, the dance pavilion, and a transformer station had been demolished by 1950.

Erskine Ramsey Hawkins, a Birmingham jazz trumpeter who had apprenticed under noted jazzman John Whatley, began playing at the dance pavilion at Tuxedo Park in 1926 when he was twelve years old and was soon playing in local nightclubs and halls with the George Earl Band.²⁶ The 1940 article indicates that Hawkins played in the American Woodmen hall in this building and, since the hall relocated to this building by 1930, the timing is consistent with his appearances at Tuxedo Junction. A neighbor, Mrs. Napoleon Williams, recalls having seen Hawkins play in the hall in the early 1940s.²⁷ Hawkins began touring New York in 1934 with the Bama State Collegians, a college band he had joined while attending the Alabama State Teachers College and that would form the nucleus of the Erskine Hawkins Band. When Hawkins and his composer/arranger Sammy Lowe were approached by RCA to record one of Hawkins songs in 1939, they chose a tune they had been using to sign off their shows at New York’s Savoy Ballroom. A member of the band’s staff suggested the name “Tuxedo Junction” for the tune, in honor of Hawkins’ early career. The song was a success, but it became a major hit when the Glenn Miller Band recorded it in the early 1940s. The recording sold more than three and a half million copies and topped the record charts for almost a decade.²⁸ In the years during and immediately following the popularity of the song, the crossroads it was named after became something of a local tourist attraction and at one time “there were 15 music boxes playing ‘Tuxedo Junction’ there.”²⁹

Then Birmingham Mayor James Morgan is quoted as having said about Tuxedo Junction: “It’s the filthiest thing I’ve ever seen. Crime and illness are bound to come from nasty holes like that.” A major urban renewal slum clearance project was completed in the 1950s followed in 1961 by the construction of the 484-unit Tuxedo Court low-income housing project.³⁰ In discussing plans for the Tuxedo housing project, a chamber of commerce official was quoted as saying: “Our plans are to completely remodel and clean up the whole Ensley district, into what we think would be a model community.”³¹ The Belcher-Nixon Building is the last remaining historic commercial building at the Tuxedo Junction intersection.

Largely due to its historical associations as the last surviving historic commercial building in Tuxedo Junction and with Erskine Hawkins’ song of the same name, the Belcher-Nixon Building was designated a historic

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resource by the Jefferson County Historical Society and an Alabama Historical Commission historical marker was placed there in 1980.

Notes

¹ Alabama Deaths, 1908-59, (Provo, UT, USA: The Generations Network, Inc., 2000).

² 1930 Census.

³ These bollards were later cut off flush with the sidewalk and they remain visible today.

⁴ Jefferson County Board of Equalization Records, Parcel #22-31-4-037-029.000.

⁵ "Impressive Rites Held For Dr. A. F. Belcher," Birmingham World, November 2, 1951, p. 1.

⁶ John W. Nixon, "Home-To Live and Die in Dixie," in Robert H. McKenzie, ed., The Rising South, Vol. 2, Southern Universities and the South (Tuscaloosa, AL: University of Alabama Press, 1976), n.p.

⁷ Juan Williams, Eyes on the Prize: America's Civil Rights Years, 1954 -1965 (New York: Penguin Books, 1987), p. xi.

⁸ William Warren Rogers, et al Alabama: the History of a Deep South State (Tuscaloosa, AL: University of Alabama Press, 1994), p. 547.

⁹ Glenn T. Eskew, But for Birmingham (Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press, 1997), p. 127.

¹⁰ Ibid.

¹¹ Ibid., p. 182.

¹² "A Statement by Some of the Negro Leaders of Metropolitan Birmingham," The Birmingham News, April 12, 1963, p. 16.

¹³ Eskew, p. 194.

¹⁴ Robert C. Lieberman, "The EEOC and Civil Rights Enforcement," New York, Columbia University Department of Political Science, March 2007.

¹⁵ Ibid.; Lieberman quotes Alfred Blumrosen in "Administrative Creativity: The First Years of the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission," George Washington Law Review, #378, p. 741.

¹⁶ "185 protest 'brutality' in Ensley," Birmingham News, October 11, 1968.

¹⁷ 1967 city directory; Interview with John C. Nixon, Birmingham, AL, August 22, 2008; Interview with John Nixon, Jr., Montgomery, AL, October 1, 2008.

¹⁸ "Speak of Me As I Am, A Play Written by Thom Gossom, Jr.," website, <http://www.speakofmeasiam.com>; After Dr. Nixon's death, Gossom expanded and re-wrote the oral historic program as a play.

¹⁹ United Services Associates, Inc. Cleans Up When it Comes to Accolades," press release, United Services Associates, Inc., January 12, 2005.

²⁰ "Dr. John W. Nixon," The Birmingham News, December 21, 1988, p. 10A.

²¹ "Final Rites Held for Dr. Nixon," Birmingham World, December 24, 1988, p. 1.

²² Dr. John W. Nixon, D.D.S. "God Smiles on a Troubled City," Address by John W. Nixon, D.D.S. to the Columbus Club of Frontiers International, June 25, 1963.

²³ Barbara Thomas, "Tuxedo Junction nicer than swing era town," The Birmingham News, July 1, 1968; The article quotes Mrs. F. A. Simpson who had lived in the area neighborhood since 1914.

²⁴ Bill Bennett, "Tuxedo Junction, Ensley's Corner With Theme Song," Birmingham Post, July 27, 1940; No other documentary sources clearly indicate that Hawkins performed in this building and this article was written more than a decade after the American Woodmen hall moved from across the street. Still, the Belcher-Nixon Building would have been known to Hawkins and it remains the only standing resource in the neighborhood for which there is any evidence of his performance there.

²⁵ Jefferson County Board of Equalization Records, Parcel #22-32-3-007-001.000.

²⁶ Hawkins was named after noted Birmingham industrialist and philanthropist Erskine Ramsay who at one time paid parents to name their children after him.

²⁷ Interview with Mrs. Napoleon Williams, Birmingham, AL, October 3, 2008

²⁸ Larry Ragan, "Tux Turns Fifty," Birmingham Magazine, July 1989; Carl Sanders, Jr., "The song that made an intersection famous," The Birmingham News, July 25, 1980.

²⁹ "From Where I Stand," Birmingham-Post-Herald, July 27, 1955.

³⁰ Joe Campbell, "Expanded slum clearance in Ensley area studied," Birmingham News, August 22, 1956.

³¹ "Ensley C. of C. Busy With Civic Projects," Birmingham Post-Herald, December 7, 1956.

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10. Geographic Data

Verbal Boundary Description

The nominated boundary includes the entire parcel recorded in the Assessor's Office for Jefferson County, Alabama as parcel number 22-31-4-037-029.000.

Boundary Justification

The boundary includes the entire current parcel only, which represents the total remaining acreage historically associated with the resource.

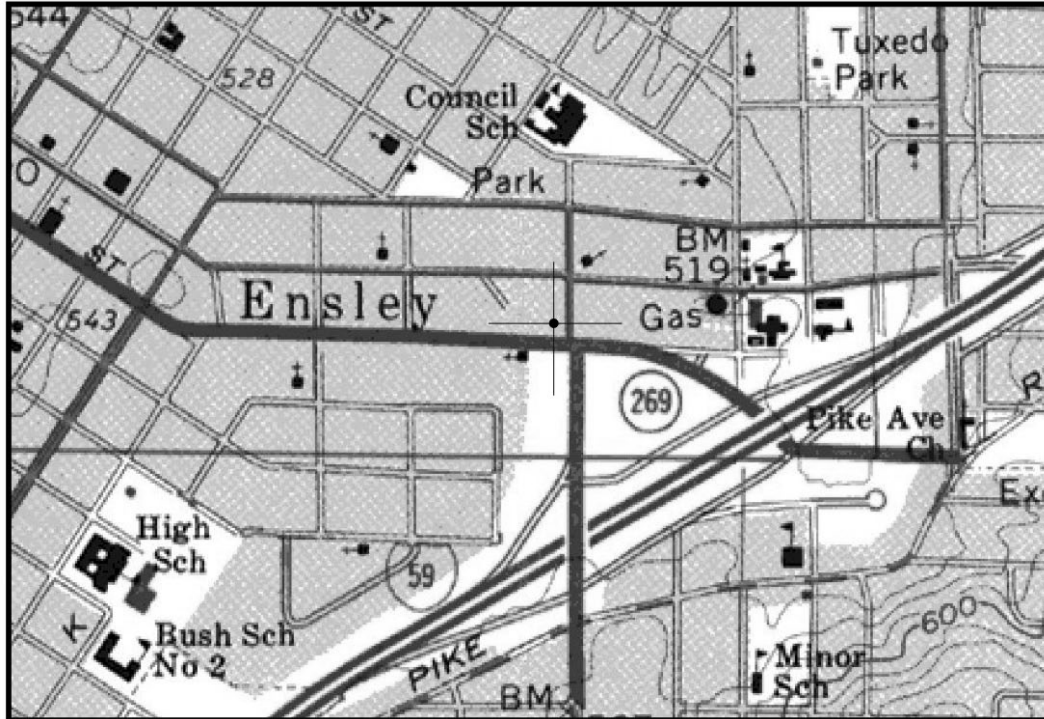
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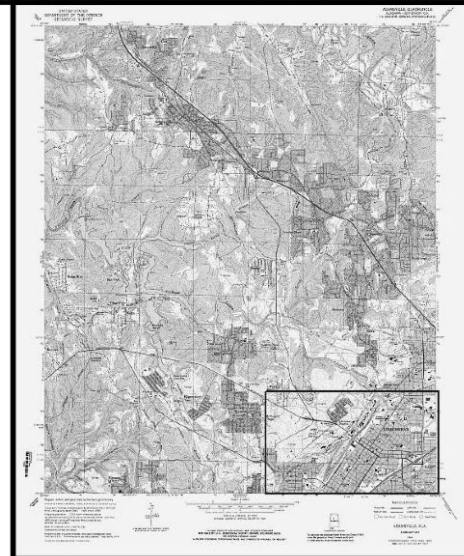
name of property: Belcher-Nixon Building
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U.S.G.S. Topographic Map



U.S.G.S. Topographic Map
Adamsville Quadrangle

Zone Easting Northing
16 510564 3707596



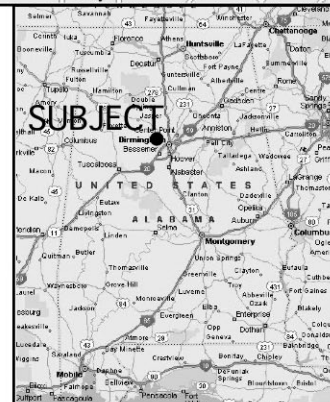
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Location Map



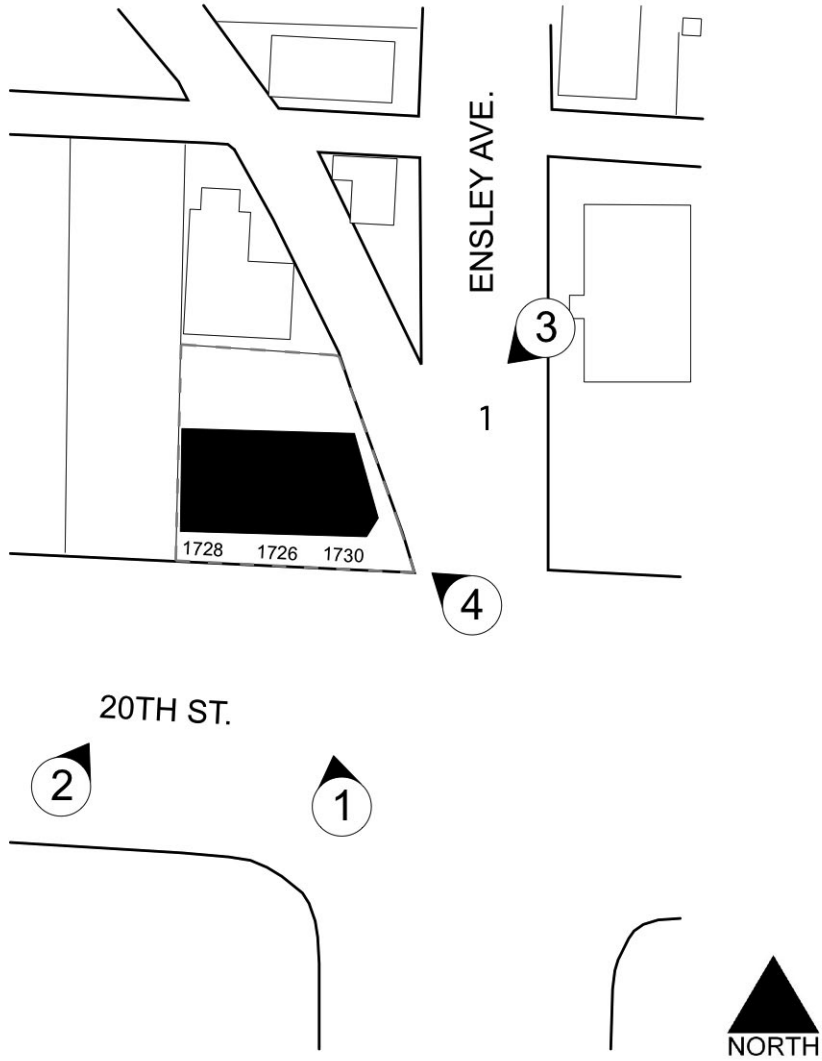
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name of property: Belcher-Nixon Building
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Site Plan (with Photograph Locations Indicated)



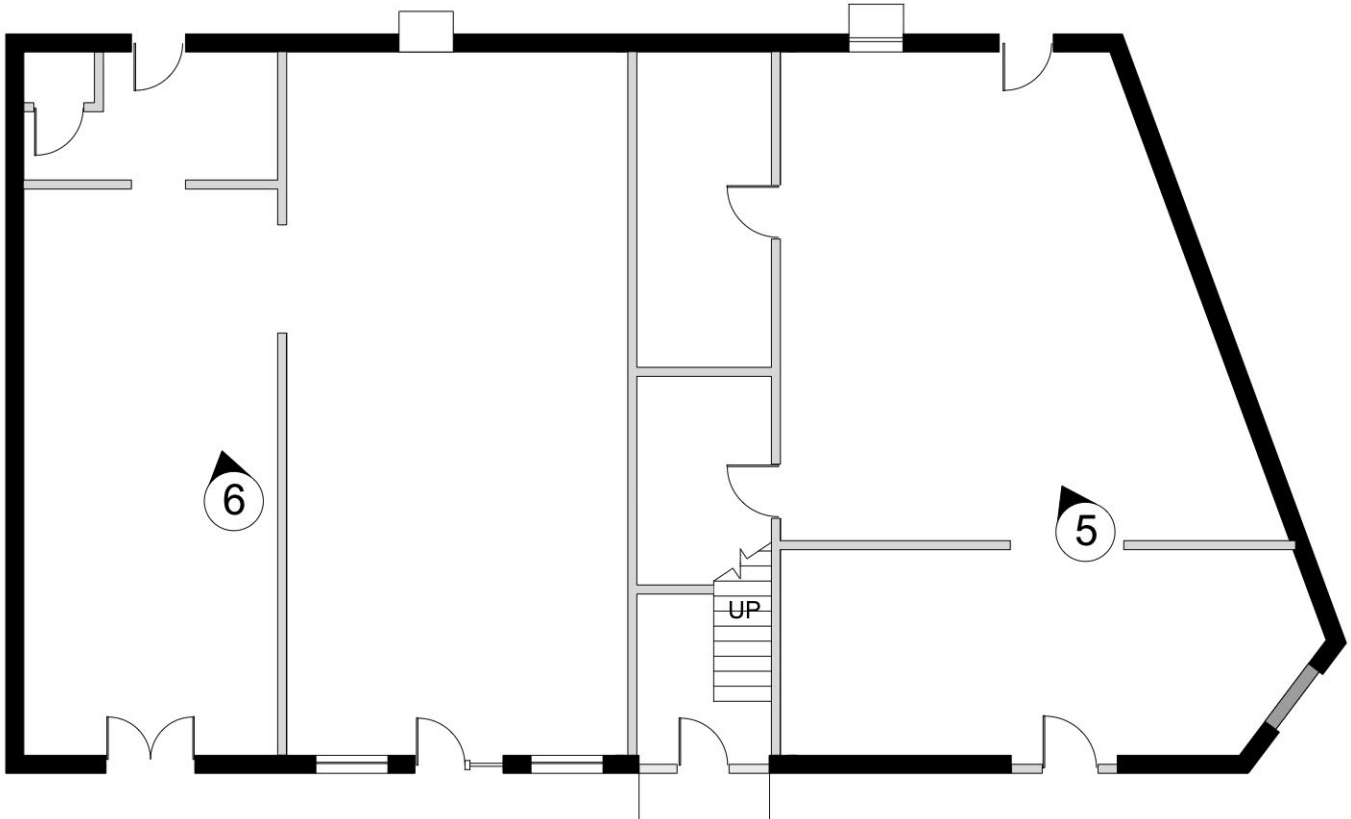
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First Floor Plan (with Photograph Locations Indicated)



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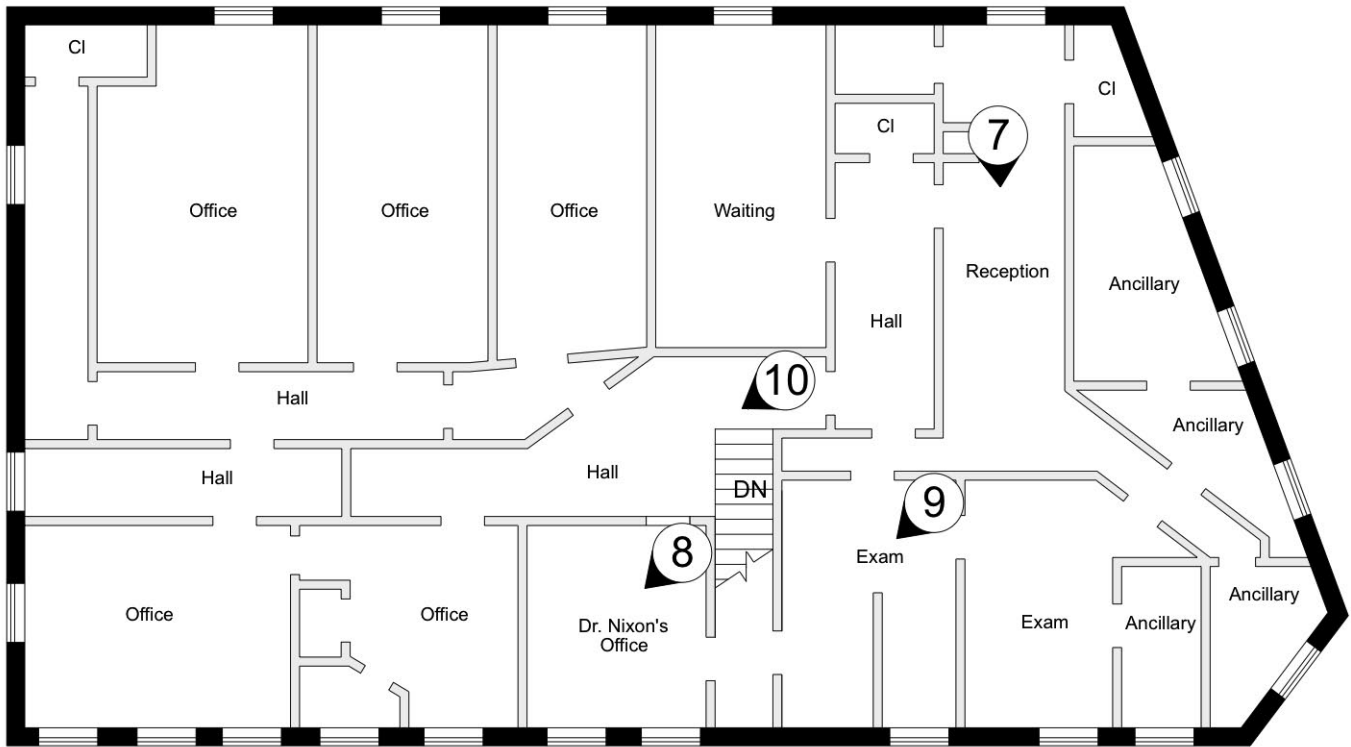
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name of property: Belcher-Nixon Building
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Second Floor Plan (with Photograph Locations Indicated)

Layout Completed by Victor Blackledge



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name of property: Belcher-Nixon Building
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1. Belcher-Nixon Building
2. Ensley (Birmingham), Jefferson County, AL
3. David B. Schneider
4. August 2006
5. 411 E. 6th St., Anniston AL 36207
6. South façade (left) and east elevation (right), camera facing northwest
7. Photo #1 (AL_JeffersonCounty_BelcherNixonBld_0001)

6. South façade (left) and west elevation (right), camera facing northeast
7. Photo #2 (AL_JeffersonCounty_BelcherNixonBld_0002)

6. East (left) and north (right) elevations, camera facing southwest
7. Photo #3 (AL_JeffersonCounty_BelcherNixonBld_0003)

6. East elevation, detail of historical marker, camera facing west
7. Photo #4 (AL_JeffersonCounty_BelcherNixonBld_0004)

6. Interior, first floor, east retail space, camera facing northwest
7. Photo #5 (AL_JeffersonCounty_BelcherNixonBld_0005)

6. Interior, first floor, center retail space, camera facing northwest
7. Photo #6 (AL_JeffersonCounty_BelcherNixonBld_0006)

6. Interior, second floor, Dr. Nixon's receptionist room, camera facing southwest
7. Photo #7 (AL_JeffersonCounty_BelcherNixonBld_0007)

6. Interior, second floor, Dr. Nixon's office, camera facing southwest
7. Photo #8 (AL_JeffersonCounty_BelcherNixonBld_0008)

6. Interior, second floor, Dr. Nixon's exam room, camera facing southwest
7. Photo #9 (AL_JeffersonCounty_BelcherNixonBld_0009)

6. Interior, second floor, hallway, camera facing southwest
7. Photo #10 (AL_JeffersonCounty_BelcherNixonBld_0010)



1. Belcher-Nixon Building
2. Birmingham (Ensley), Jefferson County, AL
3. David B. Schneider
4. August 2008
5. 411 E. 6th St., Anniston AL 36207

6. South façade (left) and east elevation (right), camera facing northwest
7. Photo #1

Image: AL_JeffersonCounty_BelcherNixonBld_0001.tif
Print: Epson Ultrachrome Ink on Premium Glossy Photo Paper



1. Belcher-Nixon Building
2. Birmingham (Ensley), Jefferson County, AL
3. David B. Schneider
4. August 2008
5. 411 E. 6th St., Anniston AL 36207

6. South façade (left) and west elevation (right), camera facing northeast
7. Photo #2

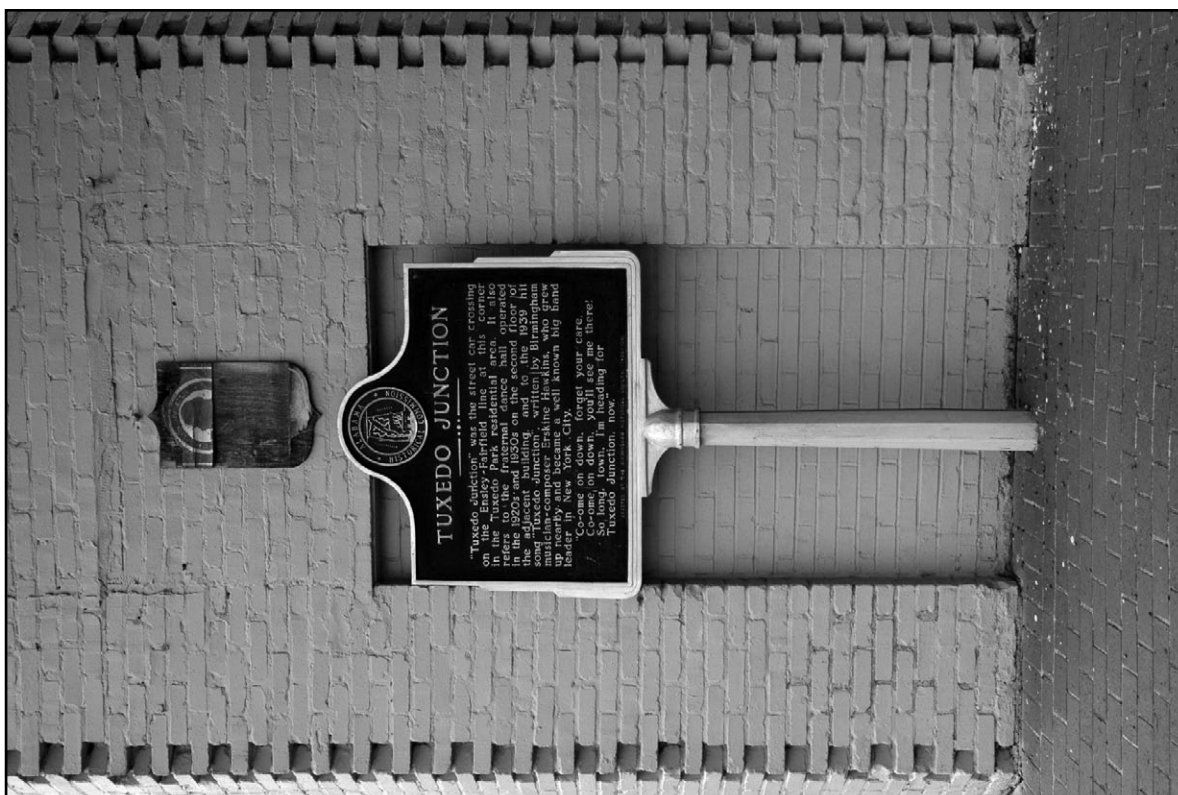
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1. Belcher-Nixon Building
2. Birmingham (Ensley), Jefferson County, AL
3. David B. Schneider
4. August 2008
5. 411 E. 6th St., Anniston AL 36207

6. East (left) and north (right) elevations, camera facing southwest
7. Photo #3

Image: AL_JeffersonCounty_BelcherNixonBld_0003.tif
 Print: Epson Ultrachrome Ink on Premium Glossy Photo Paper



1. Belcher-Nixon Building
2. Birmingham (Ensley), Jefferson County, AL
3. David B. Schneider
4. August 2008
5. 411 E. 6th St., Anniston AL 36207

6. East elevation, detail of historical marker, camera facing west
7. Photo #4

Image: AL_JeffersonCounty_BelcherNixonBld_0004.tif
 Print: Epson Ultrachrome Ink on Premium Glossy Photo Paper



1. Belcher-Nixon Building
2. Birmingham (Ensley), Jefferson County, AL
3. David B. Schneider
4. August 2008
5. 411 E. 6th St., Anniston AL 36207

6. Interior, first floor, east retail space, camera facing northwest
7. Photo #5

Image: AL_JeffersonCounty_BelcherNixonBld_0005.tif
Print: Epson Ultrachrome Ink on Premium Glossy Photo Paper



1. Belcher-Nixon Building
2. Birmingham (Ensley), Jefferson County, AL
3. David B. Schneider
4. August 2008
5. 411 E. 6th St., Anniston AL 36207

6. Interior, first floor, center retail space, camera facing northwest
7. Photo #6

Image: AL_JeffersonCounty_BelcherNixonBld_0006.tif
Print: Epson Ultrachrome Ink on Premium Glossy Photo Paper



1. Belcher-Nixon Building
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3. David B. Schneider
4. August 2008
5. 411 E. 6th St., Anniston AL 36207

6. Interior, second floor, Dr. Nixon's receptionist room, camera facing southwest
7. Photo #7

Image: AL_JeffersonCounty_BelcherNixonBld_0007.tif
Print: Epson Ultrachrome Ink on Premium Glossy Photo Paper



1. Belcher-Nixon Building
2. Birmingham (Ensley), Jefferson County, AL
3. David B. Schneider
4. August 2008
5. 411 E. 6th St., Anniston AL 36207

6. Interior, second floor, Dr. Nixon's office, camera facing southwest
7. Photo #8

Image: AL_JeffersonCounty_BelcherNixonBld_0008.tif
Print: Epson Ultrachrome Ink on Premium Glossy Photo Paper



1. Belcher-Nixon Building
2. Birmingham (Ensley), Jefferson County, AL
3. David B. Schneider
4. August 2008
5. 411 E. 6th St., Anniston AL 36207

6. Interior, second floor, Dr. Nixon's exam room, camera facing southwest
7. Photo #9

Image: AL_JeffersonCounty_BelcherNixonBld_0009.tif
Print: Epson Ultrachrome Ink on Premium Glossy Photo Paper



1. Belcher-Nixon Building
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3. David B. Schneider
4. August 2008
5. 411 E. 6th St., Anniston AL 36207

6. Interior, second floor, hallway, camera facing southwest
7. Photo #10

Image: AL_JeffersonCounty_BelcherNixonBld_0010.tif
Print: Epson Ultrachrome Ink on Premium Glossy Photo Paper