Tapp’s Department Store

1644 Main Street

The former Tapp’s Department Store is a dominant figure on Main Street, standing as the only example of “Depression Modern” architecture in the state. The street level of the building is decorated in dark shades of turquoise, while the upper floors are made of white stucco. Additional modern features such as aluminum lettering and a large clock accent the building.

James L. Tapp established the James L. Tapp Company on March 17th, 1903 on the corner of Main and Blanding Streets. Quickly the department store became a fashion center in the city known for carrying an extensive array of expensive fabrics.

In 1952 Tapp’s continued to serve downtown Columbia, but as more residents relocated to the suburbs, the department store followed suit and opened additional branches. By the 1970s Tapp’s had expanded to include four store locations: the original downtown location, Dutch Square “Mall” and Town Hall Plaza. A furniture store was also added on Blanding Street. In 1979 the building was added to the National Register of Historic Places and the building was renovated in 1952 with the addition of two stories to the building.

In 1993 the department store celebrated its 90th anniversary and stood as the largest retailer still operating on Main Street. Two years later the Tapp family decided to permanently close the doors to the store. The closure of Tapp’s Department Store provoked a large emotional reaction from the citizens of Columbia who had come to depend on this family run institution for decades.

The building remained vacant for nearly a decade until it was purchased by a real estate developer and converted into downtown residential space. In 2005 Capitol Places formed a partnership with the original developer and restored the space.

The exterior of the department store is virtually unchanged except for the addition of windows to the south elevation, which were found to not alter the historical significance of the store. All of the original department store signage has been preserved and can still be seen from Main Street, as well as near the residential entrance to the building. The first floor, now commercial space, is identical to when Tapp’s was in operation, with high ceilings, columns and other details. Throughout the building, the original concrete floors, windows and columns have been incorporated into the residential design of the space.

The Tapp’s Department Store still stands over downtown Columbia, known for its rich history and as a Columbia landmark since 1903.

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Tapp’s
CAROLINA’S FASHION CENTER

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A postcard from the early 1960s shows the Tapp’s Department Store along Main Street. Image courtesy of Capitol Places.

The menu from Tapp’s popular Fountain Room. Image courtesy of Capitol Places.

The Fountain Room’s specialty was its corn sticks, a guarded family recipe. Image courtesy of Capitol Places.

The original James L. Tapp Company Store stood on the corner of Main and Blanding from 1903 and 1952. Photographed by James W. Kitchen.

A view of the James L. Tapp Company Store from the 1930’s Block of Main Street. Photograph courtesy of Richland County Public Library. Photograph by Walter Blanchard.

Four Important Words

- A 1929 advertisement for Tapp’s. Image courtesy of South Carolina’s Library.
- A 1940 advertisement for Tapp’s. Image courtesy of South Carolina’s Library.
- A 1954 advertisement for Tapp’s. Image courtesy of South Carolina’s Library.
- A 1956 advertisement for Tapp’s. Image courtesy of South Carolina’s Library.

Photograph by Russell Maxey.

The intersection of Main and Blanding Streets building with downtown shoppers during the late 1950s. Image courtesy of South Carolina’s Library.

The Stapp’s Department Store opened. Image courtesy of Capitol Places.