FINDING HUNTSVILLE

1 Harrison Brothers

Date: Late 19th century
Architect: Unknown

124 Southside Square

19th Century Commercial Architecture

During the 19th century commercial buildings had stores on the first floor and office space or apartments on the second and third floors. Most of these buildings were constructed from brick, in part to resist fires, which could destroy downtowns. These building may look simple, but they had lots of design details to help the businesses inside. One the first floor, large glass windows lined up against the sidewalk, so anyone walking down the street could see what the store was selling. Doors were often recessed, providing even more display area. Electric lighting was uncommon, or even non-existent, so transom windows above the front display windows allowed daylight into the buildings. Brick corbels project beyond the wall to provide decorative accents at the very top of the building and sometimes between floors as well.

CAN YOU DRAW A LINE TO THESE FEATURES?

1. Large glass **display windows**, with a recessed front door
2. Long rows of narrow vertical **transom** windows above the display windows
3. Brick **corbels** are made from bricks that project beyond the wall

transom windows

A Huntsville Institution

Harrison Brothers Hardware started as a family business in 1897, owned by brothers James B. and Daniel T. Harrison. The last family member to own the business was John Harrison. The Historic Huntsville Foundation purchased the store in 1984 and continues to operate it. The store retains its original appearance – the counters, display shelves, floors, and fixtures are intact. Vintage advertising posters, receipts, and ledgers are displayed throughout the store. They even use a cash register from 1907 to ring up purchases!

What is your favorite store?

_____

How is it similar to Harrison Brothers?

_____

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_____

How is it different? _____

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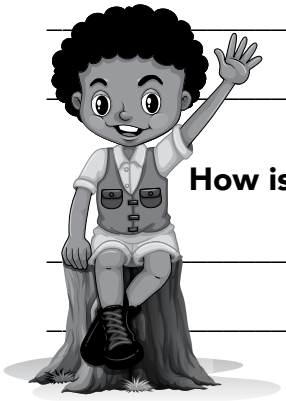

Where is the Harrison Brothers name located on this building?

_____

What is the oldest item your family owns?

_____

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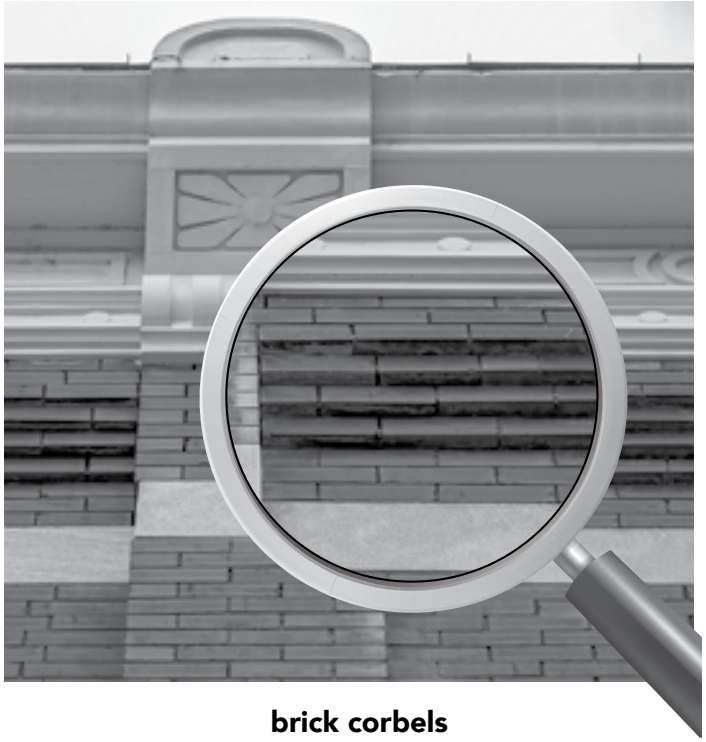


brick corbels

How many other buildings on this block have corbels?

_____

_____

How many different corbel designs can you find?

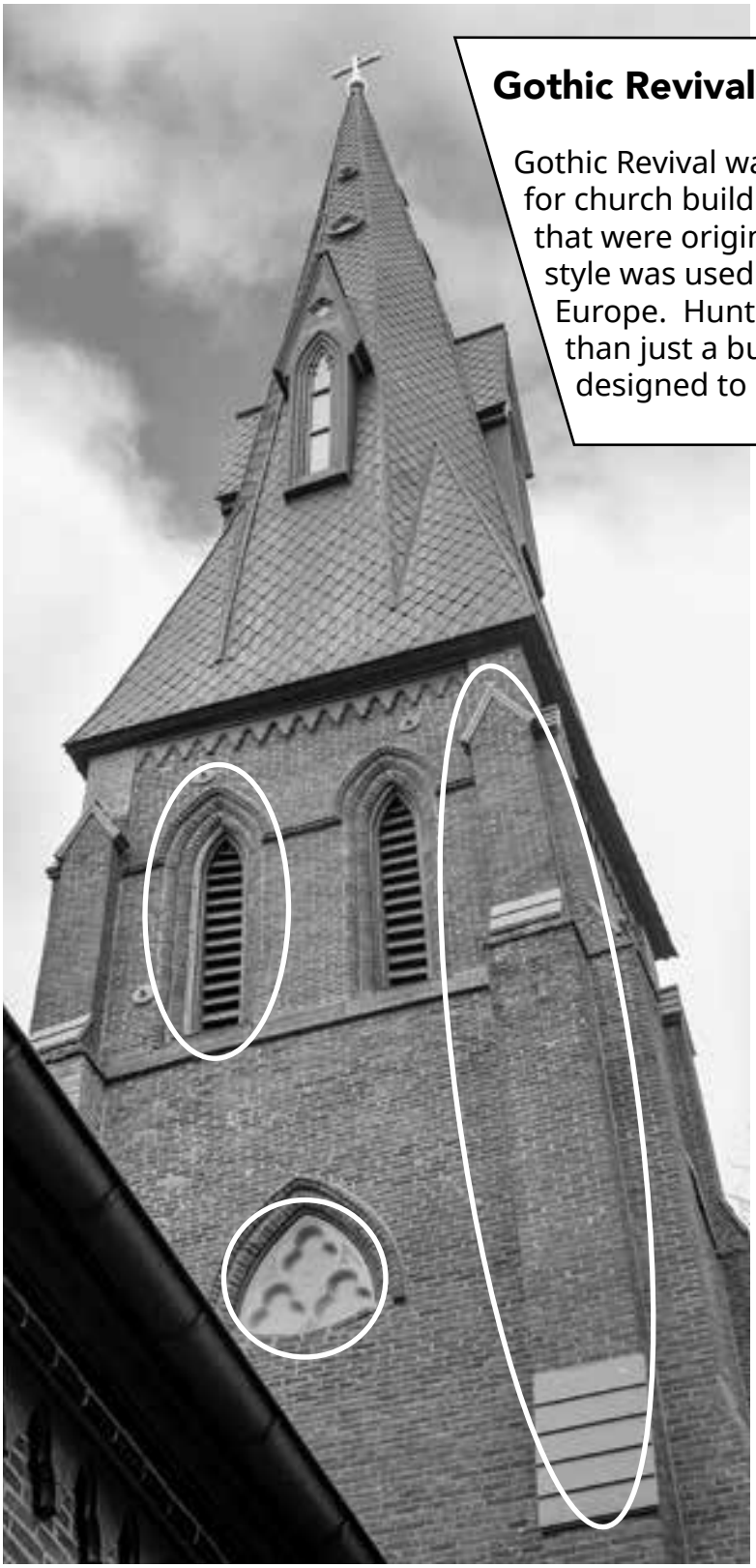
_____

2

Church of Nativity

Date: 1859
Architect: Wills & Dudley

208 Eustis Avenue



Gothic Revival Style

Gothic Revival was popular in the 19th century, especially for church buildings. Revival styles are copies of styles that were originally much older. The original Gothic style was used for many of the great cathedrals in Europe. Huntsville's Church of the Nativity is more than just a building, it provides an important space designed to support religious services.

CAN YOU DRAW A LINE TO THESE FEATURES?

1. **Lancet arches** are used for both window and door openings *(sometimes called pointed arches)*.

2. **Tracery** are the slender stonework parts of a window that divide the stained glass into smaller sections.

3. **Engaged buttress** add strength to exterior walls that are made weak when lots of holes are cut for stained glass windows.

Most of the design details for this building *(lancet arches, buttresses, towers, steep roof)* point up towards the sky. Why is that important for a church?

_____

_____

_____

The Power of Numbers

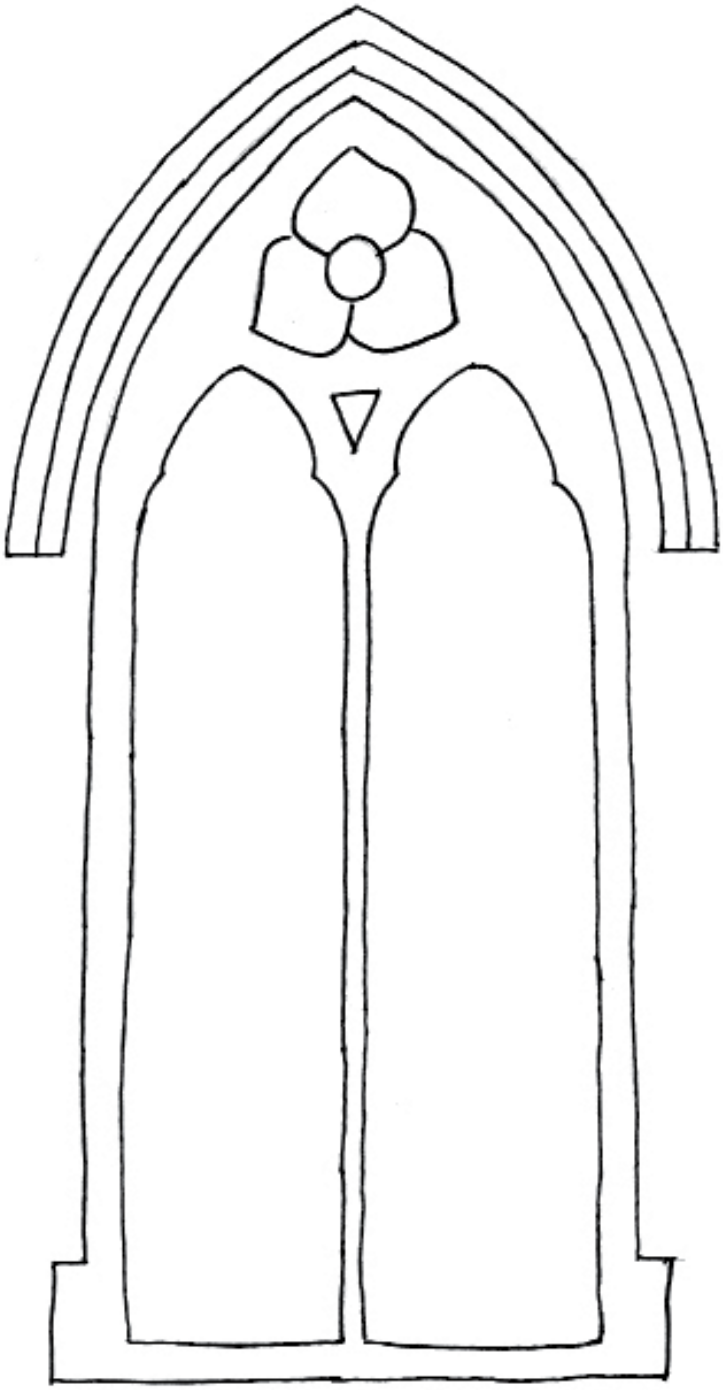
Gothic architecture uses symbols to teach Christianity. Two important symbols that look like clovers: a **trefoil** (three leaf) and a **quatrefoil** (four leaf). The trefoil represents the Trinity (God, Jesus Christ, and the Holy Spirit). The quatrefoil represents the four Evangelists (Matthew, Mark, Luke and John), who wrote parts of the Bible. These symbols can be seen all over Church of the Nativity, outside and inside, large and small.

How many of these can you find on the building?

Engaged buttress

Lancet arch

Color the stained glass window



Bonus Building!

Huntsville has a second Gothic Revival church not far from Church of the Nativity - First Presbyterian Church, at 307 Gates Avenue SE.

What details are similar to those at Church of the Nativity?

_____

What details are different?

_____

3

I. Schiffman Building

Date: circa 1845, major remodel in 1895 231 East Side Square
Architect: Unknown, remodel by George W. Thompson

Romanesque Revival Style

This style was popular from the 1870s until 1900. Only a few examples of Romanesque Revival are still standing in Alabama. Romanesque Revival copied pieces of buildings from France, Italy, and Spain, built in the 11th and 12th centuries. Those original buildings are now a thousand years old!

CAN YOU DRAW A LINE TO THESE FEATURES?

1. Rough (**rusticated**) stone
2. **Carvings** with leaves or flowers
3. **Bow** windows (These project from the building with a curved shape.)
4. Recessed front entry, usually under an **arch**

What makes this building impressive?

_____

_____

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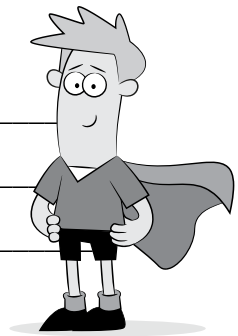


Prominent Huntsville Family

This building was purchased by Isaac Shiffman in 1905, for his banking and business investments. Mr. Shiffman immigrated to Huntsville from Germany in 1875. When he arrived, he worked for his uncle, Solomon Schiffman, who owned a dry goods store. When Solomon died, Isaac named the family business I. Schiffman & Company. The family still owns the building. They have owned it for more than a hundred years now!

Do you know a building that a family has owned or lived in for a long time? How long? _____

What would be interesting about a single family owning a building for so long?_____

What kind of plant decorations can you create?

Remodeling

This building has seen many changes during its life. Originally the front of the building had three parts. This was the last of the three sections. It was remodeled in 1895 to keep up with the most modern style of that era, Romanesque Revival. Remodeling the building was not an easy task. They added the new limestone front, cut the archway, and redesigned the interior. The other two parts of the building's front remained a simple commercial style. In the 1960's the other sections of the building were torn down.

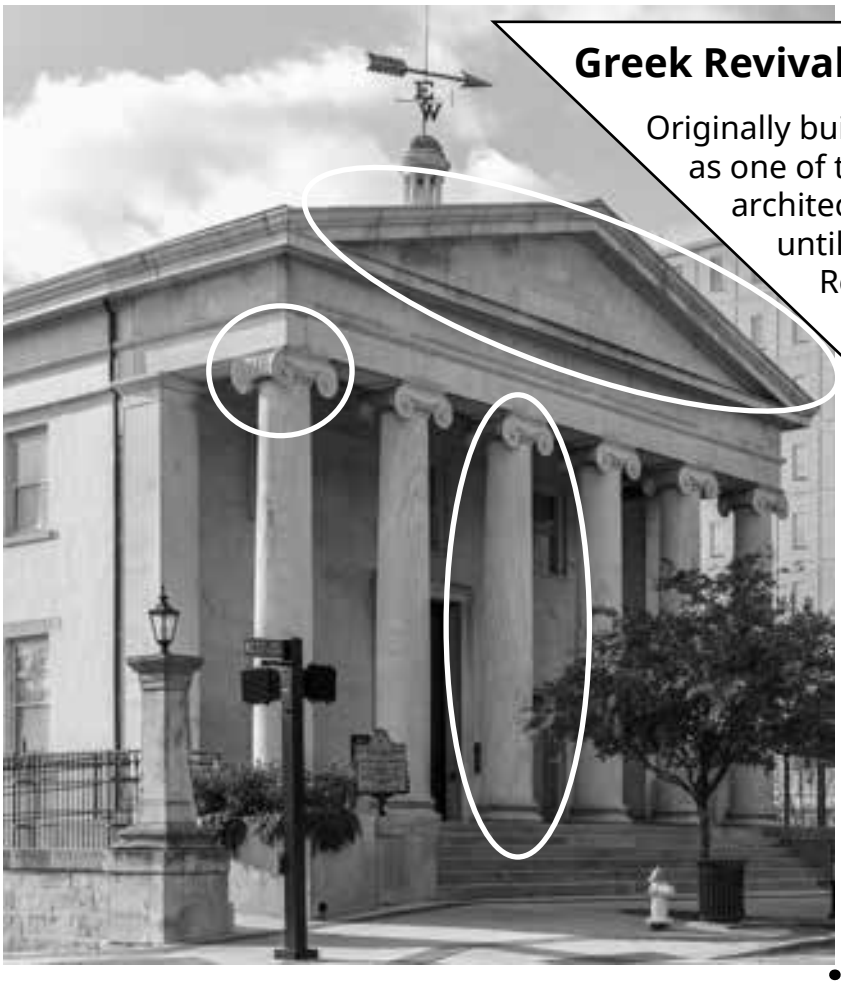
Romanesque buildings are often decorated with plant designs, like these details from the Shiffman building.

4

First National Bank of Huntsville

Date: circa 1837-1840
Architect: George Steele

300 Westside Square



Greek Revival Style

Originally built as a bank, this building is known as one of the best examples of Greek Revival architecture in the United States. From 1820 until 1860, Americans loved the Greek Revival style. Lots of buildings *(churches, government, even private homes)* were designed using this style.

This bank was one of four state banks created in Alabama, during the early 1800s. George Steele, a local builder/architect drew up the plans for the building. He may have seen pictures of a similar building, the Bank of Pennsylvania, in a pattern book. Architects and builders used pattern books, which were filled with drawings, to help design houses and other buildings.

Lots of Greek Revival buildings are designed to look like Greek temples. The building fronts are symmetrical. This means if you draw a line down the middle of the building, from top to bottom, both halves look identical.

CAN YOU DRAW A LINE TO THESE FEATURES?

1. A low-pitched roof with a **pediment** front
   (A pediment is a triangle)

2. A front porch supported by **columns**

3. A Classical column is normally made up from three major pieces: a base, a shaft, and a capital. The capital can have different designs. The design on the capital for this building is called Ionic. **Ionic capitals** have these wonderful curved pieces, called volutes.

How did the designer make this building look very important?

_____

_____

Remodeling

Buildings change over time-things can be added or removed, sometimes because the building design doesn't work well, sometimes because the building is used for a different purpose. During the early 1900s two more doors were added to the front of this building. At the same time, the balcony and second floor windows were added.

Why do you think these changes were made?

_____

_____

_____

Bonus Building!

A few blocks away from the First National Bank is a stately Greek Revival home, the Bibb-Bradley house, at 300 Williams Avenue SE.

What design details on the house are similar to those First National Bank?

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What details are different?

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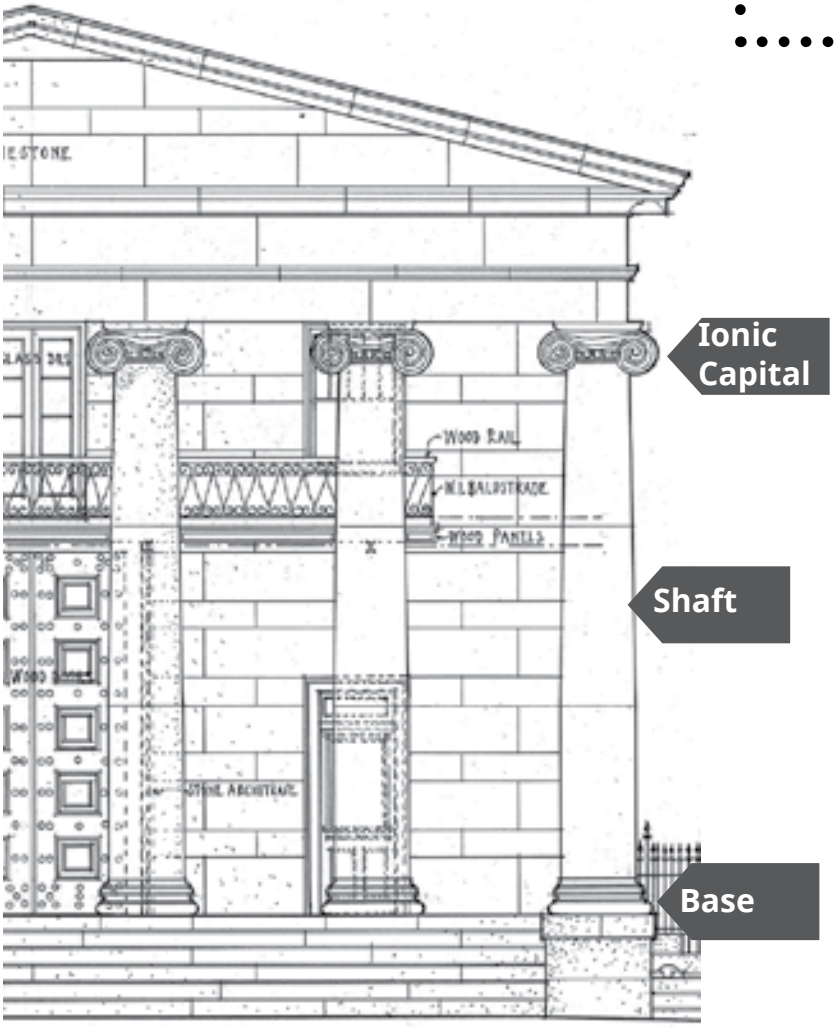


Home.... in a bank?!

To keep the deposits safe in the bank, the main cashier was required to live in the building. He lived with his family on the second floor.

What do you think it was like living above the bank?

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

5

Madison County Courthouse

Date: 1966

100 North Side Square

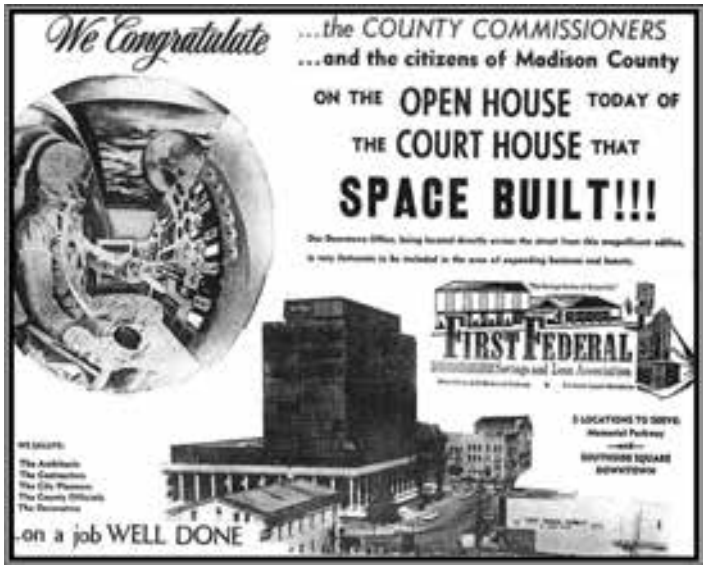
Architect: Northington, Smith, Kranert & Associates

International Style

The International Style developed in Europe. It focused on three main things – function, new building materials, and keeping building costs low with mass production. The buildings have simple forms - flat roofs and no attached decoration. The main building materials are often glass, steel, and concrete - ultra modern at the time. Architects thought they had found one style that could work anywhere. Technology could heat and cool the inside of the building, so the same building could work in Canada just as well as South Africa, or at least in theory.

After World War II building designs changed. Although some people still preferred traditional styles, most people wanted buildings that were new and used technology to create better spaces to live and work.

By the 1960s Huntsville wanted its downtown buildings to reflect the city's identity as a modern space age capital. To support progress the 1914 Madison County Courthouse was torn down, and a new ultra-modern, ten story high International Style courthouse was built in its place. Huntsville was thrilled with their new high-tech building, and advertised it as "The Courthouse that Space Built!"

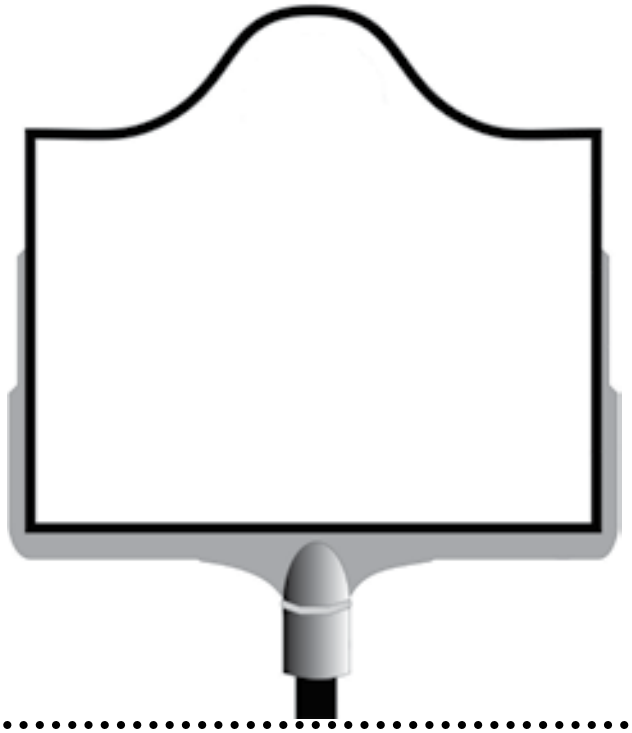


Some building elements change design drastically based on the building's style. Both the First National Bank and the Madison County Courthouse have tall columns supporting large porches, but those on the bank are copies of Greek columns, while those on the courthouse are sleek and modern. There are lots of different types of column capitals- the Egyptians used floral designs and Persians used animals - like bulls.

What type of column can you create?

Built a few years before the United States sent men to the moon, the Madison County Courthouse is now old enough for its own historic marker.

If you could write the marker text, what would you say about this iconic building?



Great Job!

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COLUMN
CAPITAL
BASE
PEDIMENT

CORBEL
TRANSOM
ROMANESQUE
BUTTRESS
LANCET

GOTHIC
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