

SOUTH ALBANY HISTORIC DISTRICT
Bounded by South Jefferson Street, Highland Avenue & Whitney
Avenue
Albany
Dougherty County
Georgia

HABS GA-50
GA-50

HABS
GA-50

PHOTOGRAPHS

WRITTEN HISTORICAL AND DESCRIPTIVE DATA

FIELD RECORDS

HISTORIC AMERICAN BUILDINGS SURVEY
SOUTHEAST REGIONAL OFFICE
National Park Service
U.S. Department of the Interior
100 Alabama St. NW
Atlanta, GA 30303

HISTORIC AMERICAN BUILDINGS SURVEY

SOUTH ALBANY HISTORIC DISTRICT

HABS No. GA-50

The South Albany Historic District is significant as the oldest intact area in Albany, Georgia which reflects the history of the Black population in that city. It contains commercial, institutional, and residential buildings within its bounds which relate to the prominence of religious and social institutions in the Black community as well as prominent individuals. It was determined to be eligible for the National Register of Historic Places on February 17, 1981.

The South Albany Historic District is a part of an area known geographically as the South Central Albany Neighborhood. The South Central Neighborhood differs from adjacent neighborhoods in that it was historically home to the Black population of Albany and was not originally a white residential area which was later absorbed into the Black community. It also is more cohesive and intact from an architectural standpoint, exhibiting fewer intrusions than most of the surrounding area. The South Albany Historic District includes the Harlem Business District, located on the east side of South Jackson Street, and buildings located along Highland and Whitney Avenues and Jefferson Street. The district is a geographically definable area possessing a continuity of sites and buildings which are united by past events and/or aesthetically by physical development. Although some buildings predate the turn of the century, most of the structures within its bounds date from the early 1900's to WWII.

At the time the district was determined to be eligible for the Register, 71 buildings were located within its boundary. Of those, 50 were historically significant, 15 were non-historic, and 6 were non-contributing. Since that time some demolition has taken place, but not to an extent which would affect the overall integrity of the district or its eligible status.

The heart of the district is located at Whitney Street between South Jefferson Street and South Jackson Streets. On this street are located the Mt. Zion Baptist Church and Shiloh Baptist Church. Mt. Zion, located at the intersection of South Jefferson and Whitney Avenue, was formed in the 1880's as the first Black church in Albany. Martin Luther King, Jr. was a frequent speaker there in the 1960's and began several civil rights marches from the site.

Also located on Whitney Street are some of the more architecturally distinctive houses contained within the district. Many of the families who built these houses were skilled tradesmen and considered influential and prominent within the Black community and the city in general. Residential housing throughout the remainder of the district

tends to consist of one story frame dwellings which are identical within the context of their immediate environment.

The Harlem Business District, located predominately on South Jackson Street, came into existence around 1920. Prior to that time the area was primarily residential, although two businesses were located in the area. Most buildings still in existence in the area date between 1930 and 1950. They are constructed of brick or block in one or two stories and are attached to each other. Most are in various stages of deterioration. This area played a prominent role in the life of the Black community of the 30's, 40's and 50's since it was the location of the first motion picture theater for Blacks in the city (The Ritz), lodges and fraternal organizations (Knights of Pythias, Independent Fraternal Union, Masons). Also popular was a dance hall called the Alcazar which was established in the early 1900's. The name remains in the district, but the building itself was demolished in the 1950's to allow construction of a series of commercial establishments.

Landscaping within the district consists of plant materials used on private property. However, because of repetitive use of trees, shrubs, and flowering vegetation traditionally used in the region, the plant materials lend a certain cohesiveness to the area in the district. It does not appear that there was any organized effort to plant unified streetscapes, although the exclusive use of live oaks intermittently along South Jefferson Street somewhat gives that appearance. There are no paved sidewalks along the streets which remain residential, although bare paths on either side of the streets attest to regular pedestrian use.

The South Albany Historic District is generally in poor condition. As segregation has ended, the resources of the Black community which were originally concentrated in the area have been diluted as businesses and consumers no longer restrict themselves along racial lines. Lack of maintenance within the district has resulted in a generally unattractive appearance and substandard buildings which do not meet city code. This has resulted in demolition and the loss of valuable buildings, particularly in the Harlem Business District. The district has a rich heritage as the nucleus of Black society of Albany. Unfortunately, at this time its future does not carry the promise of its past.

Source:

"The South Central Albany Neighborhood Strategy Area Historic Study". Albany Metropolitan Planning Study, Albany, Georgia. 1980 (unpublished).

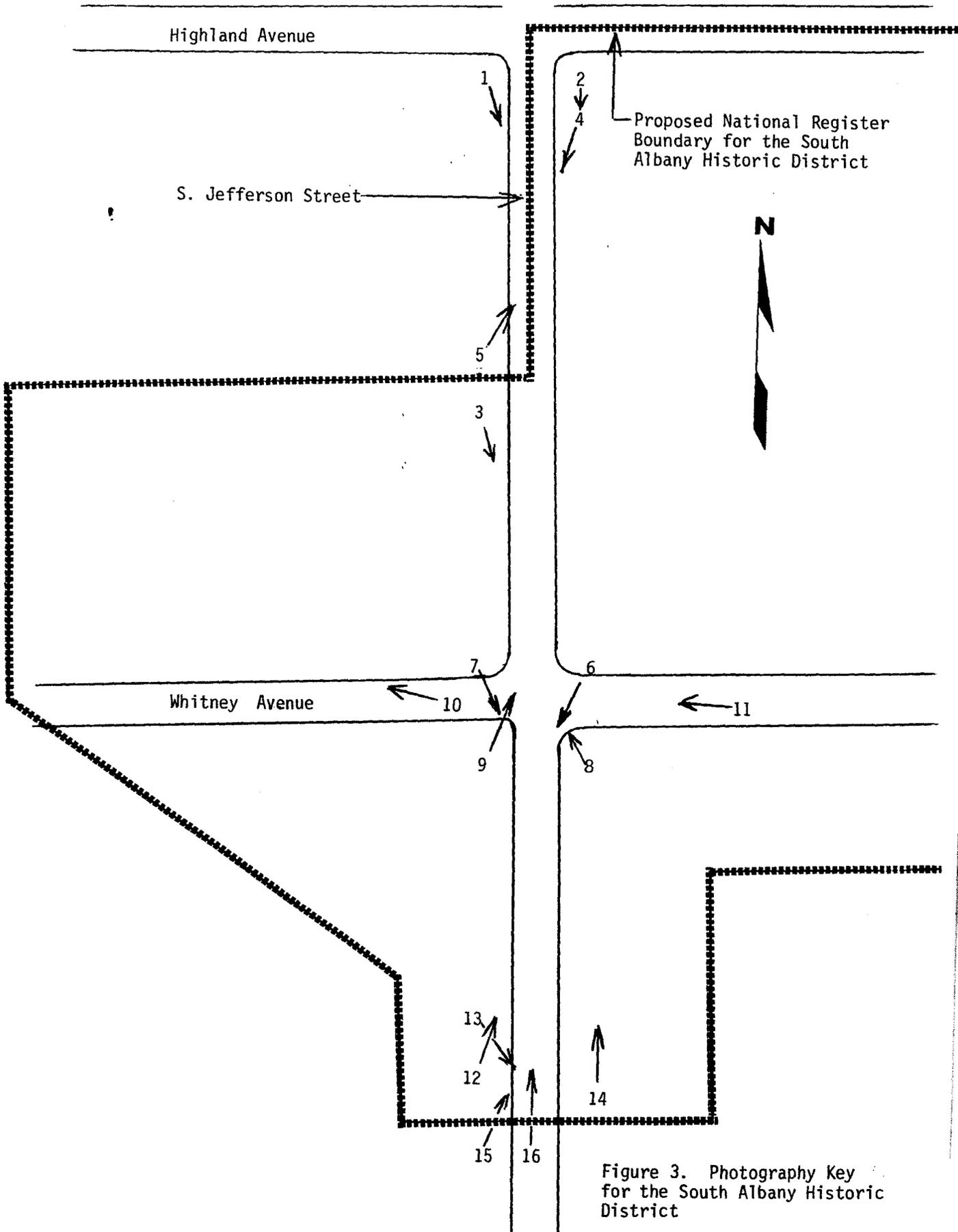


Figure 3. Photography Key
for the South Albany Historic
District