

Tapp's Department Store

1644 Main Street



▲ Through adaptive reuse, Tapp's Department Store was renovated into downtown residential space.
Image courtesy of Capitol Places.



The former Tapp's Department Store is a dominant figure on Main Street, standing as the only example of "Depression Modern" architecture on the street. The street level of the building is decorated in dark shades of tremolite, 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 store 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 1938 the store was temporarily relocated. The original building was razed and a three-story structure was built on the same site. The new department store served as a beacon of economic hope during the Great Depression and became one of the largest private buildings constructed during that decade. In 1940 the Tapp's Department Store moved into the new building and opened a restaurant in the basement of the structure. At the time, Tapp's was the only department store east of the Mississippi River to offer its customers an air conditioned shopping experience. In 1952 two additional stories were added to the building.

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, Woodhill Mall, and Trenholm 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 fifty year age minimum was waived due to its architectural significance.

By the 1990s downtown shopping had become practically obsolete. The closure of two other major retail centers, Belk and Macy's, greatly declined the steadily decreasing business of Tapp's. 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 began managing the property.

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 structure. 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, now as Main Street Lofts.



▲ The original James L. Tapp Company Store stood on the corner of Main and Blanding from 1903 until 1938.
Photograph by James W. Kitchen.



▲ Tapp's was renovated in 1952 with the addition of two stories to the building.
Photograph by Russell Maxey.



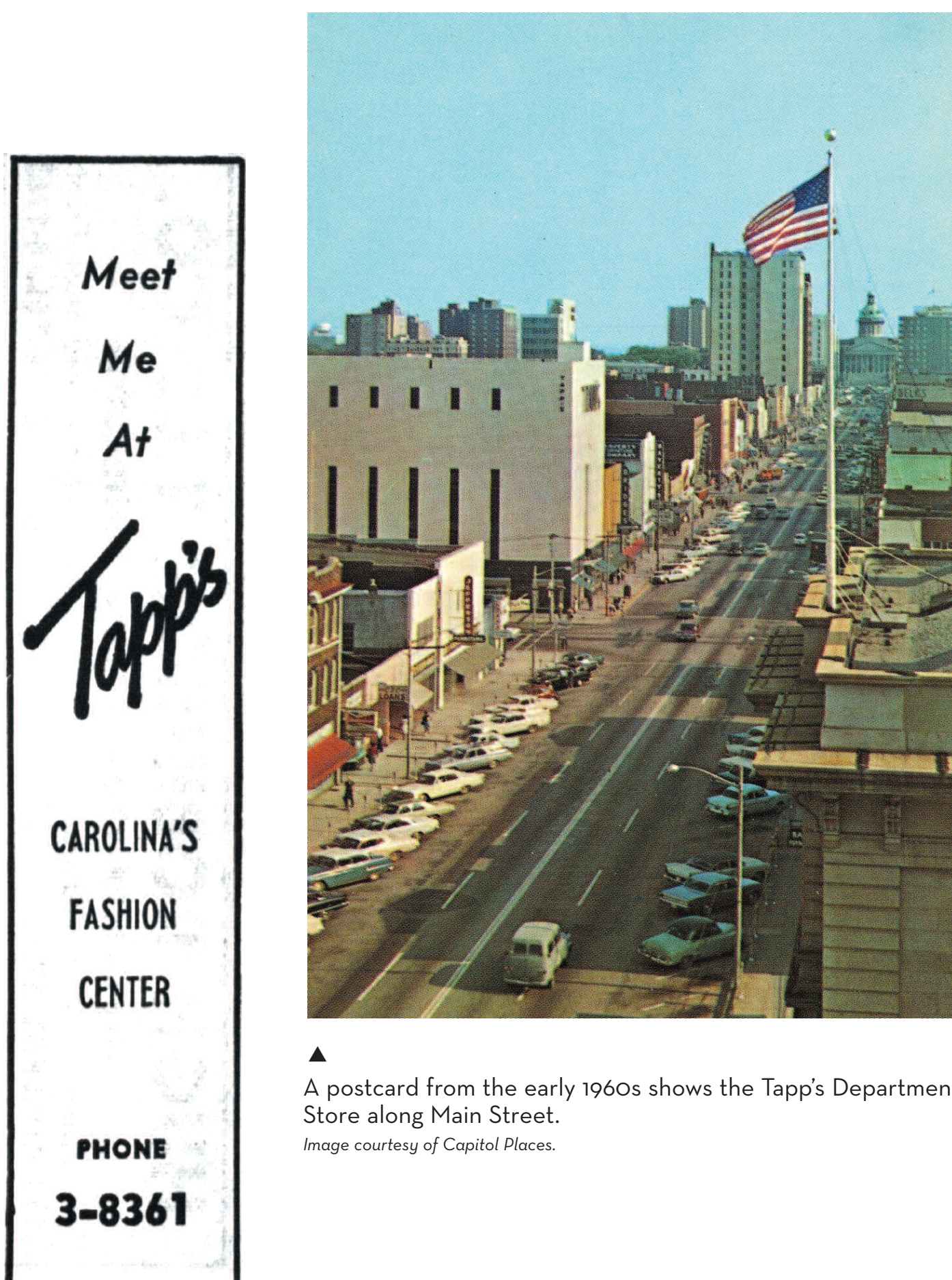
▲ In 1940 a new Tapp's Department Store opened.
Photograph by Russell Maxey.



▲ The intersection of Main and Blanding Streets bustling with downtown shoppers during the late 1950s.
Image courtesy of South Caroliniana Library.



▲ A Tapp's advertisement boasts of its quality pajamas.
Image courtesy of Capitol Places.

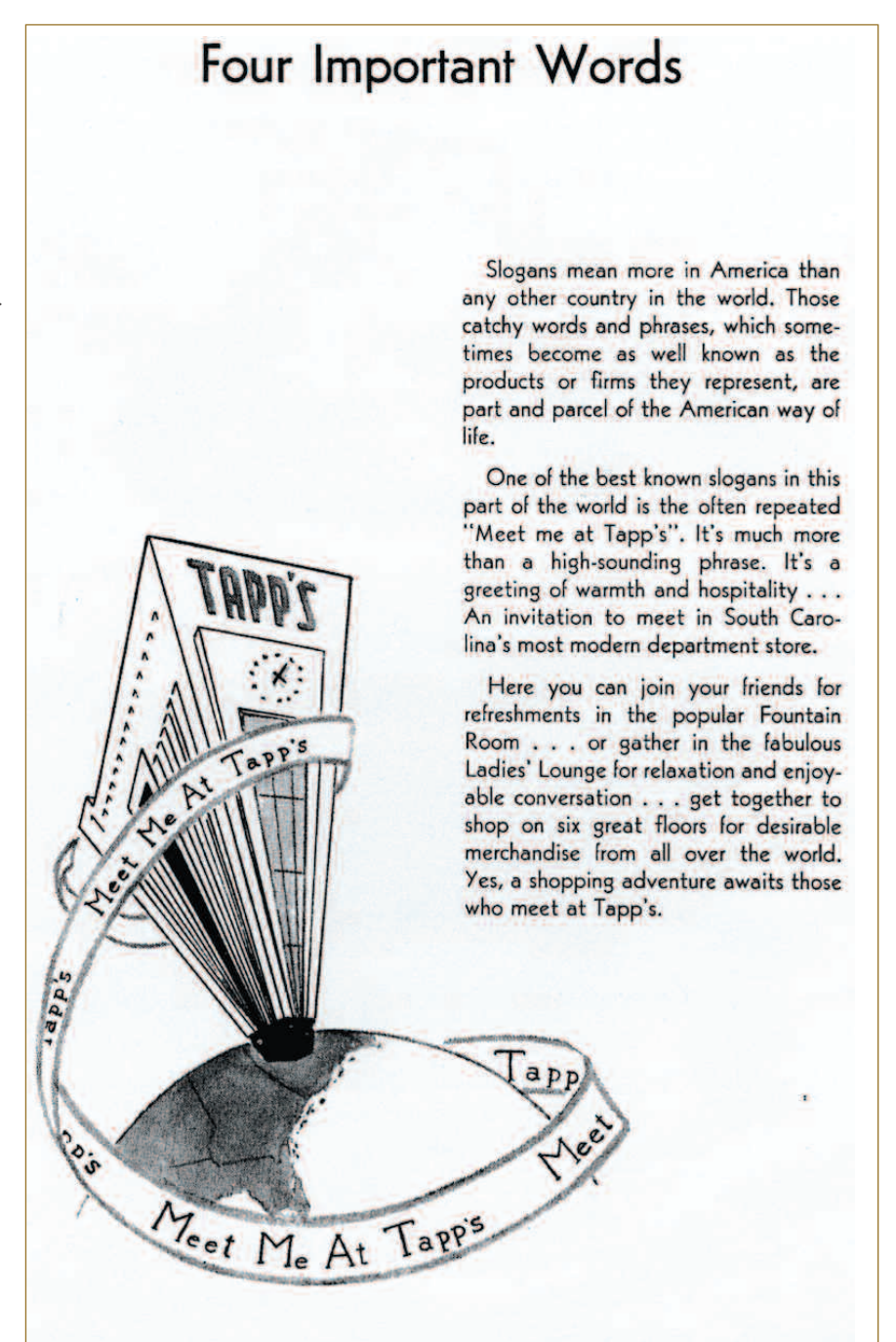


▲ An advertisement from 1956 emblazoned with the slogan of the department store.
Image courtesy of South Caroliniana Library.



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

► A 1954 advertisement for Tapp's.
Image courtesy of South Caroliniana Library.



▲ A view of the James L. Tapp Company Store from the 1700 Block of Main Street. Photograph courtesy of Richland County Public Library.
Photograph by Walter Blanchard.