Too Many Walton Buildings: Early GSU History Revisited

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Too Many Walton Buildings: Early GSU History Revisited

By Laurel Bowen | March 1, 2021

Georgia State University traces its origins to day and evening commerce classes that began on the Georgia Tech campus in 1913. In 1914 some of the evening classes moved to downtown Atlanta, so older students who worked full-time in the business district could more easily attend. These classes eventually became Georgia State. They grew rapidly, admitted women early, and moved from one downtown location to another to meet the educational needs of so many young people enhancing their careers. Because of the rapid relocations, a renovation that transformed one building, and occupying two different buildings on the same street at different times, a clear understanding of this part of the university’s early history has been challenging.

The first move downtown from the Georgia Tech campus in 1914 was to a rented room in the large office building at the corner of Walton Street NW and Cone (1914-1916). This building is still in use [Fig. 1]. Rapidly increasing enrollments resulted in several successive moves to ever larger quarters: Peachtree Arcade at Five Points (occupied 1917-1921), the Murphy Building at the corner of Auburn Ave. and Pryor Street (1921-1926), and 106 Forsyth St. NW (1926-1931).
The overcrowded and dingy rooms at Forsyth Street led director George Sparks and Robert R. Johnson, an Atlanta business executive, and Evening School supporter, to search for a better building. In spring 1930, they found the Sheltering Arms, a solidly constructed former foundling home located at 223 Walton Street NW [Fig. 2]. The location of this Walton Street building was farther away from the downtown Atlanta business district than the first Walton Street building. Still, buying and then renovating a building specifically to meet the Evening School’s needs was an opportunity that could not be missed.
Johnson was an active advocate and a generous donor. Despite challenging circumstances during the Great Depression, he raised funds to buy and then fully renovate the building.² His own contributions were substantial. The "attractive school home for modern business training"³ was dedicated in May 1931.⁴ Johnson personally paid off the mortgage on the building in 1936.

In its early life as the downtown Evening School, Georgia State had three Walton Buildings:

1. the Walton Building at the corner of Walton St. NW and Cone Street—the school’s first location in the downtown business district;

2. the Sheltering Arms building at 223 Walton St. NW—the first building the school owned;

3. the renovated home for modern business training at 223 Walton St. NW [Fig. 3].
Today, the western edge of Centennial Park has displaced the section of Walton Street NW where the Evening School’s renovated home was located.

Footnotes


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**Archives and Library Sources:**

1. Georgia State University Timeline (https://research.library.gsu.edu/GSUhistory)


3. Georgia State University Library Digital Collections: Georgia State University Archives, Georgia State University Signal, Lane Brothers Photographs, Tracy O'Neal Photographs.
4. **Digital Sanborn Maps**


1911 Maps

[https://www.loc.gov/collections/sanborn-maps/?dates=1911&fa=location:fulton+county%7Clocation:georgia](https://www.loc.gov/collections/sanborn-maps/?dates=1911&fa=location:fulton+county%7Clocation:georgia)