

Oliver-French Company  
Sixth building from the east on the block  
between Bond and Hudson streets  
Plains  
Sumter County  
Georgia

HABS No. GA-2219

HABS  
GA,  
131-PLAIN,  
10-

PHOTOGRAPHS  
WRITTEN HISTORICAL AND DESCRIPTIVE DATA

Historic American Buildings Survey  
National Park Service  
Department of the Interior  
Washington, DC 20013-7127

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HISTORIC AMERICAN BUILDINGS SURVEY

OLIVER-FRENCH COMPANY

HABS No. GA-2219

Location: Sixth building from the east end of the commercial block on Main Street between Bond and Hudson streets, Plains, Sumter County, Georgia.

USGS Plains Georgia Quadrangle, Universal Transverse Mercator Coordinates, Zone 16, E 746200 N 3546900.

Present Owner: C.L. Walters, Jr.

Present Occupant: Simply Southern Gift Store.

Present Use: First floor is used as a gift store; the second floor is vacant.

Significance: The buildings in this business block were erected between 1896-1916 as brick was used to gradually replace the original wood-frame structures. Situated southwest of the Plains Depot, this block was the business hub for the region before the Depression.

PART I. HISTORICAL INFORMATION

A. Physical History:

1. Date of erection: ca. 1902.
2. Original and subsequent owners: The following is a chain of title to the property on which the building stands. Deeds are from the Clerk's Office, Sumter County Courthouse, Americus, Georgia.
  - 1902 Deed July 30 1902, recorded June 5, 1913, Deed Book LL, page 555. M.L. Hudson to the Oliver-French Company a 31' x 100' vacant lot between the brick building of the Oliver-French Company and the Plains Bank.
  - 1931 Deed September 29, 1931, Deed Book 13, page 242. The Oliver-McDonald Company to J.W. Oliver and Effie Oliver (executors of the Oliver estate) a 31'-8" x 100' brick building occupied by the Oliver-McDonald Company bounded on the east by the Plains Mercantile Company (old Plains Bank Building) and on the west by the property of Ross Dean.
  - 1937 Deed September 21, 1937, recorded September 21, 1937, Deed Book 20, page 339. Estate of R.S. Oliver to Mrs. J.W. Oliver for \$1,100. Since the probaton of the will, John Oliver, the original executor, was found mentally incompetent.

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1943 Deed April 21, 1943, recorded April 29, 1943, Deed Book 27, page 488. Mrs. J.W. Oliver to C.L. Walters for \$1,300 a brick building occupied by the Oliver Company.

3. Alterations and additions: An additional stairway leading to the second floor was added in the center of the store.

B. Historical Context: This building was built in 1902 to house the expanding Oliver-French Company (see HABS No. GA-2220). Soon after it was built, however, French left the partnership to join Timmerman and Lunsford, who constructed the Lunsford-Timmerman-French Store down the street the same year (see HABS No. GA-2217). J.A. McDonald joined Rudolphus Silas Oliver and the Oliver-McDonald Company was formed, and occupied this building and the adjacent one on the west (formerly the Oliver-French-Shields General Store). In addition to general merchandise, the Oliver-McDonald Company manufactured furniture, with McDonald as the main carpenter. As was typical of the period, this cabinet-making firm worked closely with the local mortician, Ross Dean, constructing caskets. In 1913 another annex was constructed west of the two stores with the mortuary located on the second floor (see HABS No. GA-2221).

During the 1910-20s, the second floor was used as a meeting hall for the Furlow Lodge No. 124, F.A.M of the Masonic Order.<sup>1</sup> After the lodge moved out, the second floor was rented to Plain's first telephone company, operated by Almir C. Murray.<sup>2</sup> Woodmen of the World rented the upstairs space for meeting in the 1960s.<sup>3</sup>

Rudolphus Silas Oliver died in 1928 and the store was sold by the estate to his wife, Effie, and son, John. He and his wife, Katie ran opened a grocery store in the building then called the Oliver Company. When John became mentally ill and was sent to an asylum, Katie Oliver continued to run the business with the help of Claude Leonard Walters. Walters purchased the store from Oliver in 1940s and renamed it the Walters Grocery Company. In 1972, Walter's son, C.L. III, took over the business and remodeled it into a self-service store (formerly the customer would place an order and the items would be retrieved by an employee). With the influx of tourists during Jimmy Carter's 1975 presidential campaign, the store was converted to the Sandcraft Gift Shop. As tourism waned, a papered sheetrock distributor worked out of the back of the building and the gift store, now called Simply Southern, is only opened seasonally.<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Beth Walters, History of Plains, Georgia 1885-1985, 1985, p. 55.

<sup>2</sup> History of Plains, p. 40.

<sup>3</sup> History of Plains, p. 39.

<sup>4</sup> Walters, 1985, p. 67.

PART II. ARCHITECTURAL INFORMATION

A. General Statement:

1. Architectural character: This two-story vernacular building has a first-floor commercial area and a second floor partitioned for residential or office space which is accessed by a separate entrance east of the storefront. Narrow and deep, the structure has modest, turn-of-the-century detailing.
2. Condition of fabric: Very good.

B. Description of Exterior:

1. Overall dimensions: This 31'-0" x 100'-0" rectangular two-story structure has a four-bay facade.
2. Foundations: Brick.
3. Walls: Brick seven-course American bond on the north, east, and south walls; the west wall is shared with the adjacent building. The four-bay front/north facade has brick corner pilasters; the one on the east, belonging to the adjacent building, features three evenly spaced recessed brick panels on the second floor.
4. Structural system, framing: Load-bearing brick. The second floor is supported by eight evenly spaced chamfered piers running the length of the first floor, which carry a center beam.
5. Porches: A shed-roofed canopy of corrugated metal runs the length of the facade and across those of the adjacent building on the east and the two adjacent buildings on the west. It is supported on rectangular wood posts atop battered concrete pedestals.
6. Chimneys: A small brick exterior chimney on the east wall served pot-belly stoves on the first and second floors.
7. Openings:
  - a. Doorways and doors: There are single wood doors with four-light glazing on the first and third bays of the north/front facade. The doors are topped by a three-light fanlights under brick arches with protruding keystones. The entrance in the first bay of the rear/south facade is made up of double four-panel doors topped by a two-light transom and a segmental arch consisting of two

courses of rowlocks beneath a projecting row of headers.

- b. Windows: The first floor of the store front has large two-over-two-light, double-hung sash in the second and fourth bays with fanlights (identical to those over the two doors) and rowlock lug sills. A window on the first floor of the south facade is obscured by metal louvers.

The second story has four windows on the north facade, three on the south facade and two on the south side of the east facade. All are two-over-two-light double-hung sash with slip sills composed of a course of rowlocks. Above the windows are segmental arches consisting of two courses of rowlocks topped by a row of headers.

8. Roof:

- a. Shape, covering: The rectangular, flat roof has parapets and slopes slightly toward the back.
- b. Cornice: A brick cornice ornaments the north facade and the south facade has a projecting parapet topped with concrete coping.

C. Description of Interior:

1. Floor plans:

- a. First floor: The approximately 29' x 98' space is partially blocked off in the front third where the gift store is located. The rear two-thirds used for storage.
- b. Second floor: The second floor is divided symmetrically into six rooms, off a central hall running north to south, with a smaller intersecting hall. Two large rooms occupy the length of the north and south walls with four smaller rooms in between.

- 2. Stairways: A large open stairway runs north to south from the center of the first floor to the back room of the second floor. Another stairway with twenty-five risers leads from the exterior door in the first bay of the facade along the east wall of the building to the east side of the small hall crossing the main hall of the second floor.

- 3. Flooring: Wide boards run diagonally on the first floor; the second floor is tongue-and-groove.

- 4. Wall and ceiling finish: First-floor walls are approximately 1" thick

plaster over brick. The interior walls on the second floor are lath and plaster.

5. Doorways and doors: Doors on the second floor open from the rooms into the hallway and are six-panel with two-light transom windows.
  6. Decorative features and trim: All door and window frames on the second floor are ornamented with corner blocks. Exterior corners on the second floor are protected by turned, wood corner moldings.
  7. Hardware: Doorknobs and hinges are inscribed metal. Transom windows all have metal opening mechanisms
  8. Mechanical equipment:
    - a. Heating, air conditioning, ventilation: Several stove pipe openings along the walls of the first and second floors indicate the use of wood- or coal-burning stoves. One stove is extant in the east wall, back room, on the second floor. It is inscribed "Woodsaver Stove-Columbus Ironworks Co."
    - b. Lighting: A gas fixture is suspended from the center of the hallway on the second floor, indicating the historical method of lighting. Center ceiling fixtures illuminate the second floor and fluorescent, the first.
    - c. Plumbing: There is a small sink on the south wall of the first floor.
- D. Site: This is the sixth commercial building in a row of eight facing north onto Main Street. There is a fire hydrant in front.

### PART III. SOURCES OF INFORMATION

- A. Original architectural drawings: None have been located.
- B. Early Views: A 1910s photograph published in a pamphlet issued by the Industrial Department of the Seaboard Air Rail Line shows this and the adjacent building then known as the Oliver-McDonald Company.
- C. Bibliography:
  1. Primary and unpublished sources: Deed Books are from the Clerk's Office, Sumter County Courthouse, Americus, Georgia.
  2. Secondary and published sources:

History of Plains, (articles submitted by Plains' church members)  
Americus, GA: Gammage Print Shop, 1976.

Pamphlet issued by the Industrial Department of the Seaboard Air Rail  
Line, ca. 1910s.

Walters, Beth, History of Plains, Georgia, 1885-1985, Americus, GA:  
Gammage Print Shop, 1985.

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National Park Service  
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ADDENDUM TO  
OLIVER-FRENCH COMPANY  
Jimmy Carter National Historic Site  
Plains Historic District  
Main Street, Between Bond and Hudson Street  
Plains  
Sumter County  
Georgia

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