

United States Department of the Interior  
National Park Service

## National Register of Historic Places Registration Form

This form is for use in nominating or requesting determinations for individual properties and districts. See instructions in National Register Bulletin, *How to Complete the National Register of Historic Places Registration Form*. If any item does not apply to the property being documented, enter "N/A" for "not applicable." For functions, architectural classification, materials, and areas of significance enter only categories and subcategories from the instructions.

### 1. Name of Property

Historic Name: Simpson's Florist  
Other names/ site number: n/a  
Name of related multiple property listing: n/a  
(Enter N/A if property is not part of a multiple property listing)

### 2. Location

Street & number: 902 6<sup>th</sup> Avenue SE  
City/Town: Decatur State: AL County: 35601  
Not for Publication: n/a Vicinity: n/a

### 3. State/Federal Agency Certification

As the designated authority under the National Historic Preservation Act, as amended, I hereby certify that this X nomination request    determination of eligibility meets the documentation standards for registering properties in the National Register of Historic Places and meets the procedural and professional requirements set forth in 36 CFR Part 60. In my opinion, the property X meets    does not meet the National Register criteria.

I recommend this property be considered significant at the following level(s) of significance:

   National    Statewide X Local

Applicable National Register Criteria: X A    B X C    D

Lee Anne Hewett /Deputy State Historic Preservation Officer October 3, 2023  
Signature of certifying official/Title Date  
Alabama Historical Commission  
State or Federal agency/bureau or Tribal Government

In my opinion, the property    meets    does not meet the National Register criteria.

Signature of commenting official Date  
Title State or Federal agency/bureau or Tribal Government

### 4. National Park Service Certification

I hereby certify that this property is:

X entered in the National Register  
   determined eligible for the National Register  
   determined not eligible for the National Register  
   removed from the National Register  
   other (explain):   

[Signature]  
Signature of the Keeper

11/06/2023  
Date of Action

Morgan, AL  
County and State

<u>X</u>	Private
<u>  </u>	Public-Local
<u>  </u>	Public-State
<u>  </u>	Public-Federal

<u>X</u>	Building(s)
<u>  </u>	District
<u>  </u>	Site
<u>  </u>	Structure
<u>  </u>	Object

Contributing		Non-Contributing		
1				Buildings
				Sites
				Structures
1				Objects
2				<b>TOTAL</b>

COMMERCE/TRADE specialty store

COMMERCE/TRADE specialty store

MODERN MOVEMENT

BRICK, CONCRETE BLOCK, and GLASS

Simpson's Florist

Name of Property

Morgan, AL

County and State

### Narrative Description

(Describe the historic and current physical appearance and condition of the property. Describe contributing and noncontributing resources if applicable. Begin with a **summary paragraph** that briefly describes the general characteristics of the property, such as its location, type, style, method of construction, setting, size, and significant features. Indicate whether the property has historic integrity.)

---

### Summary Paragraph

Simpson's Florist, constructed in 1957, is a one-story Mid-Century brick commercial building in Decatur, Alabama. The building is located on 6<sup>th</sup> Avenue SE, where 6<sup>th</sup> Avenue began to transition from a residential district to commercial district in the 1950s. A large free-standing pink and green neon sign anchors the front yard with the iconic Simpson's script and pink rose. The building and sign both retain remarkable integrity of design, materials, workmanship, feeling, and association. The setting of the property has changed in recent decades as consumer retail trends have fluxed, impacting the use and styles of adjacent buildings.

---

### Narrative Description

**Site:** Simpson's Florist is located in Decatur, Alabama which serves as the county seat for Morgan County, which was organized in 1818. The building is located on the east side of 6<sup>th</sup> Avenue SE, at the southeast corner of 6<sup>th</sup> Avenue SE and 5<sup>th</sup> Street SE. 6<sup>th</sup> Avenue SE is U. S. Route 31, and a main commercial road in Decatur. (Figure 1) Before Interstate 65 was constructed, U. S. Route 31 was the major north-south road in the state with its southern terminus at Spanish Fort (near Mobile), and its northern terminus at the Tennessee state line. 6<sup>th</sup> Avenue SE is primarily commercial along each side of the highway. 7<sup>th</sup> Avenue SE to the east remains primarily residential, with single family Craftsman and Minimal Traditional homes. West of 6<sup>th</sup> Avenue SE the neighborhood becomes light industrial/commercial. An occasional Folk Victorian or Craftsman house (sometimes heavily remodeled for business use) showcases the neighborhood's earlier residential nature. Several independent businesses line both sides of 6<sup>th</sup> Avenue SE. The businesses nearest to Delano Park are a mix of purpose-built new construction from the mid-to late 20<sup>th</sup> century mixed in with a handful of late 19<sup>th</sup> to early 20<sup>th</sup> century buildings that were originally constructed for residential use, and transitioned into commercial use in the post-WWII years.

The Simpson's building is located within the fourth plat (1907) Decatur Land Improvement and Furnace Company (DLI&F), which was founded by Southerners Eugene C. Gordon, C. C. Harris, and W. W. Littlejohn in partnership with northerners Hiram Bond and William E. Forest, M.D. The investors raised 7.5 million dollars towards the purchase and development of 5,600 acres of land southeast of the City of Decatur, calling the new municipality "New Decatur." Although the large tract of land meant that development occurred in stages, Decaturites have traditionally not had nuanced names to describe the various neighborhoods that were built within New Decatur. Historically they have all been referred to as Southeast Decatur, even though the built environment varies from the turn of the century houses within the Albany National Register District to the Post-WWII suburban development just north of 11<sup>th</sup> Street SE. Simpson's Florist is located in the 4<sup>th</sup> addition to the DLI&F which was platted in 1907.

The building occupies most of the lot, with small areas of grassy lawn on the north and east sides. The grassy lawn in front of a custom-built commercial building is an anomaly today, and clearly shows the transitional nature of the site in the 1950s, when the building was constructed in a block of predominately single family homes. Two additional lots to the south are under ownership of the same family, with all three lots purchased at the same time for use by Simpson's. The lot directly adjacent to Simpson's serves as a parking lot for the store and the building located at 906 6<sup>th</sup> Avenue SE.

Simpson's Florist  
Name of Property

Morgan, AL  
County and State

A concrete municipal sidewalk runs along the north and east property boundaries, separated from the street by a planting strip. Small concrete sidewalks connect the municipal sidewalks with the front entrance.

**Sign:** A large free-standing two sided metal sign with neon lettering is anchored in a brick planter box south of the municipal sidewalk intersection with the store sidewalk. This is the original sign - an iconic presence on 6th Avenue. The tapered green post has a knee bracket supporting the pink, green, and white sign, sitting under a pink rose. The period sign spells out "Simpson's Florist" and is taller than the building. (Photos 0002 and 0007)

**Exterior:** Built 1957, this one-story commercial building has a shallow hip roof with a cross hip on the rear. The front door is on the north end of the façade, and is predominately glass with a metal outer frame. The south end of the façade has a large floor to ceiling bay filled with four ganged panes of glass, all canted outwards at the top. A low stone planting bed runs along the front façade and continues to the west end of the north elevation. (Photo 0001) The north elevation and west façade are clad with running bond brick, while the remaining elevations are clad with concrete block. Roof is clad with composition shingle, with the exception of the south facing attached carport roof, which has metal panels. Foundation is concrete slab.

The north façade has a large bay with three ganged sheets of glass that cant outwards at the top, on the west end of the building. (Photo 0003) The building juts out several feet at the cross hip towards the east. A seventy light glass block window (5 blocks high by 15 blocks long), followed by a three horizontal light metal awning window completes the north elevation. The rear of the building has a matching metal awning window on the north end, while the south end of the elevation has a recessed carport, supported by two metal poles. (Photo 0004) The south elevation has a newer, extended roof carport on the far-east end, supported by three wood posts. (photos 0005 and 0006) The west end of the south elevation has a narrow, horizontal glass block window, fifteen blocks wide by three blocks high, and a small opening on the far west end, high in the wall, has been filled (may have originally housed an air conditioning unit).

**Interior:** The area of the building is 2,978 square feet. The space is almost evenly divided between public spaces (the showroom and conference area) and the back of the shop, with the flower cutting and preparing tables, storage rooms (Photo 0018), cold storage, and bathroom. The front showroom is the largest of the rooms, and is the main entry point for the building. To the rear of the showroom one accesses the conference room (north end) or near the center of the rear showroom wall is access to the workroom and the additional auxiliary spaces (storage rooms, cold storage, etc.). The front showroom has contemporary tile floor with the original wood plank ceiling. Lighting is a combination of recessed can units and track lighting. (Photos 0008, 0009, 0010, and 0011) Towards the northeast corner of the main building is a conference room, accessed by a pair of French doors. (Photo 0012) There is an interior multi-light glass block window that provides light and privacy to the workroom to the south. The conference room space was originally outside the building and served as a delivery parking area until it was enclosed in 1973. The workroom is accessed by a historic door with two ganged horizontal lights in the upper portion. Wall cladding in this room is applied horizontal plank. A contemporary sales counter is located on the east side of the showroom. Behind it is the workroom, the floral coolers, and storage spaces. The large workroom has the original flower arranging tables, complete with the commercial grade stem cutter, still bolted onto the counter (and still used). (Photos 0013, 0014, 0015, and 0016) Walk-in cooling rooms at the rear of this space (built-in) had floor to ceiling shelving and tables, designed to hold flowers and greenery. (Photo 0017)

**Integrity:** The building and sign are a rare example of Decatur's early Post-WWII era expansion. The bright pink and green sign have been a consistent presence within the city for more than six decades. Other than the enclosure of the north elevation carport in 1973 (to create more storage) and an added rear carport, the exterior of the building and site

Simpson's Florist  
Name of Property

Morgan, AL  
County and State

remain unchanged.<sup>1</sup> The interior changes have been minimal with the addition of the French doors to the conference area, new flooring, and the contemporary cash counter. The interior layout, original wood ceiling in the public portion of the storefront, interior divisions in the workroom, and indeed even the original workroom tables complete with large blade flower stem cutters remain. The front window glazing is currently plexi-glass due to repeated breakage from vandalism during the 1990s.<sup>2</sup>

## 8. Statement of Significance

**Applicable National Register Criteria:** (Mark "x" in one or more boxes for the criteria qualifying the property for National Register listing)

- ☒ A. Property is associated with events that have made a significant contribution to the broad patterns of our history.
- ☐ B. Property is associated with the lives of persons significant in our past.
- ☒ C. Property embodies the distinctive characteristics of a type, period, or method of construction or represents the work of a master, or possesses high artistic values, or represents a significant and distinguishable entity whose components lack individual distinction.
- ☐ D. Property has yielded, or is likely to yield, information important in prehistory or history.

**Criteria Considerations:** (mark "x" in all the boxes that apply)

- ☐ A. Owned by a religious institution or used for religious purposes
- ☐ B. Removed from its original location
- ☐ C. A birthplace or grave
- ☐ D. A cemetery
- ☐ E. A reconstructed building, object, or structure
- ☐ F. A commemorative property
- ☐ G. Less than 50 years old or achieving significance within the past 50 years

**Areas of Significance:** (enter categories from instructions)

COMMERCE

ARCHITECTURE

**Period of Significance:**

1957-1973

**Significant Dates:**

1973, delivery bay enclosed

<sup>1</sup> The same brick used on the exterior of the main building was used to enclose the carport. The only sign that the wall is not original is the large joint connecting the original wall to the new exterior wall. The date of the rear carport addition is unknown. Current owners thinks 1960s, but construction (wood posts in metal base caps) are contemporary construction. It is possible that the original carport supports were replaced at a later date.

<sup>2</sup> Building is currently being rehabilitated with a federal tax credit and the plexi-glass is due to be replaced with regular glass.

Simpson's Florist  
Name of Property

Morgan, AL  
County and State

**Significant Person:** (complete only if Criterion B is marked above)

\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

**Cultural Affiliation:**

n/a  
\_\_\_\_\_

**Architect / Builder:**

Dietz Brothers (builder)  
\_\_\_\_\_

**Statement of Significance Summary Paragraph:** (Provide a summary paragraph that includes level of significance, applicable criteria, justification for the period of significance, and any applicable criteria considerations.)

Simpson's Florist, which is located at 902 6th Avenue SE, at the intersection of 6th Avenue SE and 5th Street SE, has a period of significance from its date of construction, 1957, through 1973. Simpson's, as one of the earliest Post-World War II era commercial establishments on 6th Avenue SE, would be eligible under Criteria A for Commerce. The building and sign represent a pattern of commerce as the city's once vibrant downtown vacated when residents and eventually business owners moved south of Delano Park, outside of Decatur's early 20<sup>th</sup> century boundaries. The property is also eligible under Criteria C - representing distinctive characteristics of a period of construction. The Googie influenced building, with its large canted glass display windows and its high visibility pink and green neon sign is the only remaining building of this automobile era style in Decatur. The highly recognizable sign is one of only three vintage neon signs in the city.<sup>3</sup> The building and sign are in existence because both are iconic emblems of a business that has been a constant fixture of the city's history for over half a century. Still in use by the original floral business, the emblematic building, sign, and vintage delivery car on the site, are marketable commodities evocative of a distinct era in Decatur's history.

The site's significance is at the local level.

---

**Narrative Statement of Significance** (Provide at least **one** paragraph for each area of significance.)

**Narrative Statement of Significance Criterion A - Decatur's Commerce Post-World War II Era:** Decatur's main commercial and residential development was historically centered around Bank Street in the northwest and the Albany (New Decatur) development was established around 2nd Avenue in the southeast portion of the city. Decatur's population in 1940 was 16,604. The population marginally grew to 19,974 by 1950. By 1960 the population jumped to 29,217. The city's industrial base remained strong due to its proximity to the Tennessee River, and the municipality was in communing distance to Redstone Arsenal. In the 1950s 6th Avenue SE, State Highway 31, which cuts through the Albany District and continues south, was widened to four lanes. The residential landscape south of Delano Park along 6th Avenue began to transform as the residential street started to see commercial development. While development was hemmed in to the north and most of the east by the Tennessee River and Wheeler National Wildlife Refuge (established in 1938), development in the northeast was primarily industrial, along the riverfront. Directly to the west was a mixed-race neighborhood, and to the immediate southwest was another municipality, Austinville.<sup>4</sup> As a result, the city primarily grew to the south and the southwest, beyond Austinville in the immediate post-War era. The

---

<sup>3</sup> The other two existing period neon signs in the city is the marquee for the Princess Theatre (1941) and the free-standing sign for Big Bob Gibson's BBQ (early 1950s).

<sup>4</sup> Austinville was annexed into Decatur in 1956.

Simpson's Florist

Name of Property

Morgan, AL

County and State

placement of Simpson's Florist at the gateway between the historic turn of the century neighborhoods and the path towards contemporary developments in the SE was a strategic move that helped ensure the business's longevity.

"Urban Flight," common in many Post World War II era communities occurred in Decatur with an added push in growth from Redstone Arsenal in neighboring Huntsville and the Army Ballistic Missile Agency (ABMA), which was created there in 1956.<sup>5</sup> Decatur building permits from 1957 show a sharp increase over those the prior year, with more than a million dollars more in permits for the first quarter of 1957. 6th Avenue SE in particular was well represented with construction of the Decatur Refrigeration Company and expansion of the Tourist Court Motel planned. A new Southern Bell Telephone and Telegraph Building was constructed on Grant Street, which bisects 6th Avenue SE a few blocks north of Simpson's, just as the street leaves the historic downtown area. Most new residential growth in Decatur centered on parcels south of downtown. Sanborn Maps for Decatur were created sporadically after the 1920s, providing limited data on commercial growth until 1957. The 1957 map shows single-family homes and a single church on the 700 block of 6<sup>th</sup> Avenue, and only a single commercial building on the 800 block of 6<sup>th</sup> Avenue. The 900 block of 6<sup>th</sup> (where Simpson's is located) has only four commercial buildings shown, and of those, only two appear to be constructed as commercial buildings. By 1963 the development in the 700 and 800 blocks had not changed substantially, but the 900 block had nine buildings used for commercial purposes, almost 40% of the block. Most were listed as offices, one upholstery shop is marked. Further south along 6<sup>th</sup> Avenue SE more commercial buildings appeared.

Eventually 6<sup>th</sup> Avenue SE led to the new Gateway Shopping Center (2019 6<sup>th</sup> Avenue SE, 1964) at the intersection of 6th and 14th. This shopping center encouraged retail establishments located in the historic downtown cores to follow residents as they moved into the rapidly developing suburbs. Residential growth for working class families occurred in South East Decatur, in areas that had originally been platted by the Decatur Land Improvement and Furnace Company in 1907. Blocks of Minimal Traditional, Transitional Ranch, and Ranch houses are located to the southeast of Delano Park, stretching from 6<sup>th</sup> Avenue to Point Mallard (a neighborhood that was predominately developed later, in the 1970s). Residents speeding along 6th Avenue SE en route to new suburban homes and shopping malls would have passed Simpson's daily.

**Simpson's and the Florist Industry in Decatur:** At the national level, the florist industry expanded considerably after WWII. Advances in cool storage and transport, and technology that allowed transmitting and processing floral orders between municipalities, states, and even countries. Decatur followed national trends with the development of their florist industry. In 1952 there was only one florist in town, City Park Flowers, located on 2<sup>nd</sup> Avenue, the commercial heart of New Decatur-Albany.<sup>6</sup> In 1955 two additional florists operated in the city, American Beauty (with greenhouses) located at the corner of 6<sup>th</sup> Avenue SE and Moulton Street SE, and Blackwell Florist, located next to Decatur Morgan Hospital.<sup>7</sup> Simpson's opened in 1957. In 1958 three more florists joined the city, Matthews Raymond at Norman Tubbs Flowers at 708 Bank Street NE, Tennessee Valley Florist at 106 Wilson Street NW, and Matthews Raymond Florist at 809 Carridale Street SW.<sup>8</sup>

Billed as Decatur's newest florist in 1957, Simpson's was founded by Mary and Woodrow Simpson. (Figure 5) The *Decatur Daily* wrote that Ms. Simpson had seven years experience working with a local florist. Family tell a more nuanced story, Ms. Simpson had worked for Cooper Wells Hosiery Mill at the corner of 6<sup>th</sup> Avenue SE and 11<sup>th</sup> Street SE

<sup>5</sup> ABMA was eventually absorbed into NASA and became the Marshall Space Flight Center in 1960.

<sup>6</sup> City Park was located at 110 2<sup>nd</sup> Avenue SE, in a building that no longer exists. Their greenhouses were advertised as being located on Danville Road.

<sup>7</sup> Building no longer exists.

<sup>8</sup> None of these buildings, or florists, currently exist.

Simpson's Florist

Name of Property

Morgan, AL

County and State

before it closed its doors during the war years.<sup>9</sup> Mrs. Simpson worked for American Beauty Greenhouse for several years after the hosiery mill closed, and then worked briefly as a switch operator for the telephone company. She quickly decided that was not the line of work she wanted to pursue, and instead decided to open her own floral shop. Mr. Simpson, a painter by trade, was friends with George Dietz, of the Dietz Brothers, a local building firm. The Deitz Brothers constructed a number of commercial and residential buildings in the city, including the Simpson's private residence in 1953. Located at 1415 11<sup>th</sup> Avenue SE the house is about a mile away from Simpson's. When the Simpson's decided to open their own florist, the Deitz Brothers were an obvious choice for the contractors.

The business opened in 1957. The *Decatur Daily* ran a full page advertisement highlighting the building's construction and the role that local business played two days before the soft opening. (Figure 4) The paper also announced there would be a soft opening on Sunday, May 7 from 2 until 6 pm, with houseplants given to all attendees and special door prizes for the community. There was also discussion regarding future plans for a greenhouse on the property to support the florist, but that never occurred.<sup>10</sup> The first official day of business was Monday, April 8<sup>th</sup>. Simpson's was not the only florist in Decatur at that time. Newspaper and phone book advertisements list several competitors:

Norman-Tubbs Flowers (located at 602 West Moulton Street, a part of the American Beauty Greenhouse Company, now known as Mary Burke Florist)

City Park Flower Shop on Second Avenue (no longer operating, turn of 20<sup>th</sup> c. building)

Matthews Raymond Plants and Flowers on Carridale Street (no longer operating, demolished)

Blackwell Florist (1207 Locust Avenue, no longer operating, demolished)

Only Mary Burke Florist still exists, and it occupies a heavily modified building. Simpson's is highly unusual because it is still family owned and the business is located in the original building. How did the Simpson's brand stay relevant and in the forefront of consumer's minds? Ms. Simpson was aggressive in advertising Simpson's from the start, and carefully branded the business with the store and the free-standing sign. The building and sign were featured prominently in many of Simpson's newspaper advertisements in the 1950s, in both photographic and drawn renditions. (Figures 8 and 9) Simpson's is the only florist shop in the city that advertised its building along with the merchandise. Another key advertising point was promoting "plenty of free parking" and "plenty of parking space" in several print ads.<sup>11</sup> The building, and sign, were designed to capitalize on the automobile culture in terms of location and design. The business continued cementing their brand by using a custom painted 1963 Chevrolet C10 Panel truck for deliveries. This model of truck was predominately used by electricians and painters. Mr. Simpson was likely familiar with it through his job as a painter. Simpson's used the vehicle to deliver flowers for weddings, funerals, and other deliveries. The truck, last driven in 1987, has sat under a carport on the back of the building for more than three and a half decades. David Bentley, who can just remember riding in it a handful of times. He had dreamed of restoring it since he was a child. The truck, still visible from driving down 6<sup>th</sup> Avenue, even when not in use, caught the attention of a local teenager, James Stafford. Years later as an adult, the engineer reached out to Bentley to discuss restoring the truck in 2022. Much like the

<sup>9</sup> Cooper Wells Hosiery Mills was located in the Albany Commercial District, at the intersection of Gordon Drive near 2<sup>nd</sup> and 1<sup>st</sup> Avenues. The building is no longer there.

<sup>10</sup> Ms. Simpson owned three lots, the lot with the florist shop, and two additional lots with small houses on them, 904 and 906 6<sup>th</sup> Avenue SE. They rented out the two houses, but the long-term plan was to eventually build greenhouses. By the time the business had funds to expand the American florist industry shifted substantially with increasing importation of South American grown flowers for cut flowers and big box stores (Walmart and Lowes/Home Depot) for bedding plants. U.S. producers were unable to compete with either encroachment. Most American cut-flower growers went out of business in the 1990s, and urban greenhouses for florists were no longer used. When the florist industry changed, the Simpsons decided against building a greenhouse, and kept the two houses as rental properties. Only the lot associated with Simpson's, 902 SE 6<sup>th</sup> Avenue, is the nomination property.

<sup>11</sup> The parking was actually located behind the rental house owned by the Simpson's next door at 904 6<sup>th</sup> Avenue SE (house was demolished in 1994).



Simpson's Florist

Name of Property

Morgan, AL

County and State

business, restoring the truck became a community project, with multiple companies providing machine and radiator work, building the alternator, and replicating the exhaust system. The green paint job, with the stylized Simpson's logo, matching the lettering on the neon sign, proudly connects the truck to the retail store. (Figure 14) The trifecta of the building, sign, and delivery truck was a constant presence in the city's commercial core for decades.

Ms. Simpson ran the business with her husband assisting until they retired in 1979, at which point it passed to her twin sister, Martha Bentley. From there the business was purchased by Martha's son Jim, and his wife Ann Bentley in the early 1980s. Jim Bentley had been working in the store since he was ten, during the late 1950s. Jim and Anne were both certified floral designers, and both served as presidents, individually, of the Alabama State Florists Association, about a decade apart. They are the only husband and wife owners to have both served as presidents of the association. The family legacy has continued, with Jim and Ann's son, David Bentley, and his wife, Kristen purchasing the store in 2008. David started working in the store as a child, eventually serving as the delivery driver, and later becoming a certified floral designer. Marketing challenges for the industry at the national level were already apparent by the late 20<sup>th</sup> century, and David Bentley, who at that time was in his late teens vocally called out the vice-president of the FTD at one of their last regional conventions, expressing his concerns. The American grown floral industry had almost collapsed at this point. Small local greenhouses (which were often part of larger floral operations) that grew bedding plants were following suit, with the rapid expansion of big box stores and large home-improvement stores. The owners have continued to be creative in their advertising, in 2015 and again in 2017 they had a contest for local elementary school students to design advertisements for Simpson's. Several of the crayon drawn pictures included the building and the sign, a clear indication that the brand is strongly associated with the built environment. (Figures 11, 12, and 13) The stabilizing mix of continued family ownership, coupled with a multi-generational knowledge of their customers means that a patron ordering flowers is likely to be told which flowers the recipient likes most, and possibly even what time they will be delivered to ensure the recipient will be at work. Simpson's Florist continues to be an iconic presence, both architecturally and as a family business, for more than half a century.

**Narrative Statement of Significance Criterion C: Architecture:** The Simpson's building with its extraordinarily low-pitched hip roof has a Googie design element with the large slanted display windows. This would have been a striking contrast to the turn of the century residential buildings that still predominately lined 6<sup>th</sup> Avenue SE just south of the intersection with Delano Park. Although similar in scale to the one-story houses that surrounded it originally, the modern building would have been a daring addition to the city at the time of its construction. The modernity of the façade was reinforced with the large brightly painted pink and green neon sign would have been a familiar icon as the automobile generation speed by. There is only one other known building within Decatur that has slanted plate glass windows, 1727 6th Avenue SE, located about eight blocks south of Simpson's. This building, also constructed in 1957, has been long abandoned. It also has the remains of a canted brick sign in front of the store. Although the building's design details are far more muted than those found in a high style modernist building the building clearly has foundational elements of the style: a car-oriented setting, the use of new building technologies - including large plate glass windows, and neon. The low building has a tension between the horizontal massing and the vertical, canted windows that is typical in the modern era as designers play with mass and form. The canted windows are also a direct response to the automobile era, their diagonal slant reduces glare from automobile headlights, and would have made the display windows more effective in advertising the store's products. The brightly colored neon sign positioned prominently in front of the building uses the same diagonal lines to emphasize the building (the angles point down and back towards the building at four separate locations) while the bright pink and mint green paint were popular, modern colors in the 1950s. The neon elements of the sign, the bright red rose and pink and green name are engaging with the cursive script and block. The bricks used for the exterior are 2 ¼" by 8", longer than standard bricks which are 2 ¼" x 7

Simpson's Florist

Name of Property

Morgan, AL

County and State

5/8". The low stone planting bed that wraps around the front and along part of 5th Street SE adds a horizontal base of pale stone to continue the horizontal lines of the brick and counters the angled/canted windows and the angles of the low hipped roof.

The neon sign is one of the sole remaining remnants of Decatur's history from this era. Much of the avenue is now filled with late 20th century or early 21st century buildings (new construction or drastic remodels) that have slowly but steadily replaced the earlier car-centric designs. The Simpson's sign is one of three remaining historic neon signs within the municipality. The iconic pink and green sign with its Googie angle to match the building, was designed to catch attention from motorists who were speeding up and down Highway 31. The only other free-standing vintage neon sign that exists in the city is further down the street, at Big Bob Gibson's BBQ, located at 1715 6th Avenue SE.

The iconic pink and green Simpson's sign was created by Columbia Neon Sign, of Sheffield, Alabama. The time in which the sign was created was one of significant consolidations within the local neon sign industry, the successor of Columbia is J&M Signs, which still operates in Decatur. Columbia Neon Sign Company was a conglomerate of roughly seven branch offices, that found themselves somewhat over extended in terms of market capacity about the time that Simpson's was constructed. Columbia reached out to J&M Signs of Decatur about this time and asked if they would purchase the Decatur branch. J&M, which was looking at expanding their business countered - they had tried to purchase Sims Signs (in Decatur) but had been rebuffed by the owner, Mr. Sims. If Columbia Decatur was willing to purchase Sims first, then J&M was willing to then purchase Columbia. The deal proceeded, and J&M Signs absorbed Columbia and Sims into their business. Mr. Sims left the state after signing a five year no-compete agreement. J&M was originally located on historic Bank Street at the time of the merger, while Columbia was located in the Albany district, across from the neon Princess Theatre. With the acquisition of Sims and Columbia, J&M relocated to the industrial suburbs of the city, a prophetic move that highlighted the growing developments to the south and west of the historic downtowns. The exact designer of Simpson's Florist, and the nuanced relationship between the three sign companies, which were in the midst of a corporate merger at the time Simpson's developed has been lost to time. None of the businesses contacted had records of the sign or the design work. J&M Signs is in its third generation. Carl McMasters left the business to his son, Carlton McMasters Sr., who is working with his son, Carlton McMasters Jr. The company still works on neon signs to this day, and have consistently repaired the Simpson Florist sign as needed. The most recent restoration of the sign was in 2010 where an article in the Decatur Daily showed David Bentley and Carlton McMasters Jr. proudly standing in front of the glowing neon sign. The two look more like friends than business associates in the pose, which is appropriate, since they first met when they attended a local middle school together.

(Figure 10)

---

## 9. Major Bibliographic References

**Bibliography** (cite the books, articles, and other sources used in preparing this form)

Johnson, Audrey. *Decatur Daily*. "Vroom and bloom: Simpson's Florist truck refurbished after 35 years." April 2023, updated April 10, 2023. On-line. [https://www.decaturdaily.com/news/morgan\\_county/decatur/vroom-and-bloom-simpsons-florist-truck-refurbished-after-35-years/article\\_8ea9ef06-69c3-5562-b494-34c52014bcb2.html](https://www.decaturdaily.com/news/morgan_county/decatur/vroom-and-bloom-simpsons-florist-truck-refurbished-after-35-years/article_8ea9ef06-69c3-5562-b494-34c52014bcb2.html) Accessed 2023.

Morgan, Cullene. "Construction Up Sharply So Far." *Decatur Daily*, April 4, 1957, n.p.

Simpson's Florist

Name of Property

Morgan, AL

County and State

n/a. *Decatur Daily*. "Simpson's Florist – Design an Ad – 2015." April 20, 2015. On-line.

[https://www.decaturdaily.com/special\\_reports/design\\_an\\_ad/simpsons-florist---design-an-ad---2015/collection\\_7a9e78c0-e78a-11e4-9e97-e3c7c11af4c9.html](https://www.decaturdaily.com/special_reports/design_an_ad/simpsons-florist---design-an-ad---2015/collection_7a9e78c0-e78a-11e4-9e97-e3c7c11af4c9.html) Accessed 2022.

n/a. *Decatur Daily*. "Simpson's Florist – Design an Ad – 2017." April 20, 2015. On-line.

[https://www.decaturdaily.com/special\\_reports/design\\_an\\_ad/eastwood\\_elementary/simpsons\\_florist/simpsons-florist---eastwood-elementary---design-an-ad/collection\\_4ba61372-1bbb-11e7-ab77-1b2b676ba772.html](https://www.decaturdaily.com/special_reports/design_an_ad/eastwood_elementary/simpsons_florist/simpsons-florist---eastwood-elementary---design-an-ad/collection_4ba61372-1bbb-11e7-ab77-1b2b676ba772.html) Accessed 2022.

n/a. "Door Prizes To Be Given At Show." *Decatur Daily*. April 23, 1957, pg 5.

n/a. "Simpsons Open Florist Concern." *Decatur Daily*. April 7 1957 pg 18.

n/a. "Third Florist Here Offers FTD Service." *Decatur Daily*, January 18, 1959, pg 3.

Thomas, Ronnie. *Decatur Daily*. "A Sign of the Times." July 22, 2010. On-line.

[https://www.decaturdaily.com/news/morgan\\_county/sign-of-the-times/article\\_cae4e9b6-ac8e-5141-ab2a-51b6094df181.html](https://www.decaturdaily.com/news/morgan_county/sign-of-the-times/article_cae4e9b6-ac8e-5141-ab2a-51b6094df181.html) Accessed 2022.

*Sanborn Maps:*

1927, with 1930 and 1940 updates

1952 with 1953, 1955 and 1957 updates

1952 with 1953, 1955, and 1961 updates

*Advertisements in the Decatur Daily:*

January April 7 1957 pg B6

April 5 1957 pg 8

April 14 1957 pg B4

April 14 1957 pg B7

April 19 1957 pg 5

December 15, 1957 pg 20

December 24, 1957, pg 7

May 4, 1958, pg 26

December 7, 1858 pg 15

December 14, 1959 pg 17

December 20, 1959 pg 19

March 27, 1959 pg 12

May 8, 1959 pg 5

April 6, 1960 pg 17

April 10, 1960 pg 16

Simpson's Florist  
Name of Property

Morgan, AL  
County and State

---

**Previous documentation on file (NPS):**

- ☐ preliminary determination of individual listing (36 CFR 67) has been requested  
☐ previously listed in the National Register  
☐ previously determined eligible by the National Register  
☐ designated a National Historic Landmark  
☐ recorded by Historic American Buildings Survey # \_\_\_\_\_  
☐ recorded by Historic American Engineering Record # \_\_\_\_\_  
☐ recorded by Historic American Landscape Survey # \_\_\_\_\_

**Primary location of additional data:**

- ☐ State Historic Preservation Office  
☐ Other State agency  
☐ Federal agency  
☒ Local government  
☐ University  
☒ Other  
Name of repository: family photo albums

**Historic Resources Survey Number (if assigned):** \_\_\_\_\_

---

**10. Geographical Data**

**Acreage of Property** .16

Use either the UTM system or latitude/longitude coordinates

**Latitude/Longitude Coordinates (decimal degrees)**

Datum if other than WGS84: \_\_\_\_\_

Enter coordinates to 6 decimal places.

1. Latitude: 34.59480

Longitude: -

86.97990

2. Latitude:

Longitude:

3. Latitude:

Longitude:

4. Latitude:

Longitude:

**OR**

**UTM References**

Datum (indicated on USGS map):

☐ **NAD 1927** or ☐ **NAD 1983**

1. Zone:

Easting:

Northing:

2. Zone:

Easting:

Northing:

3. Zone:

Easting:

Northing:

4. Zone:

Easting:

Northing:

5. Zone:

Easting:

Northing:

Simpson's Florist  
Name of Property

Morgan, AL  
County and State

**Verbal Boundary Description** (describe the boundaries of the property) Lot is bordered by 6<sup>th</sup> Avenue SE on the west side, by 5<sup>th</sup> Street SE to the north, an alley to the east, and a parking lot to the south.

**Boundary Justification** (explain why the boundaries were selected)

Boundaries are those of the original lot for the florist, the Decatur Land Improvement and Furnace Company lot, subdivision 4, platted on July 27, 1907.

---

**11. Form prepared by:**

Name/Title: Caroline Swope, M.S.H.P., Ph.D. Historic Preservation Specialist  
Organization: City of Decatur  
Street & number: 402 Lee Street  
City/Town: Decatur State: AL Zip Code: 35601  
Email: cswope@decatur-al.gov Phone: 256-476-7520  
Date: January 2023

---

**Additional Documentation**

Submit the following items with the completed form:

- **Maps:** A USGS map or equivalent (7.5 or 15-minute series) indicating the property's location.
- **Sketch map** for historic districts and properties having large acreage or numerous resources. Key all photographs to this map.
- **Additional items:** Check with the SHPO, TPO, or FPO for any additional items.

**Photographs**

Submit clear and descriptive photographs. The size of each image must be 1600x1200 pixels (minimum), 3000x2000 preferred, at 300 ppi (pixels per inch) or larger. Key all photographs to the sketch map. Each photograph must be numbered and that number must correspond to the photograph number on the photo log. For simplicity, the name of the photographer, photo date, etc. may be listed once on the photograph log and doesn't need to be labeled on every photograph.

**Photo Log**

Name or Property:  
Simpson's Florist  
City or Vicinity: Decatur  
County: Morgan State: AL  
Photographer:  
Caroline Swope  
Date Photographed:  
2021

Description of Photograph(s) and number, include description of view indicating direction of camera:

Simpson's Florist

Name of Property

Morgan, AL

County and State

Photo 1 of 18: front façade, looking east

Photo 2 of 18: front façade, looing northeast

Photo 3 of 18: north and east elevations, oblique

Photo 4 of 18: east elevation, looking west

Photo 5 of 18: east and south elevations, oblique

Photo 6 of 18: south elevation, looking north

Photo 7 of 18: detail of sign, looking north

Photo 8 of 18: main showroom, looking east

Photo 9 of 18: main showroom, looking south

Photo 10 of 18: main showroom, looking north

Photo 11 of 18: main showroom, looking west

Photo 12 of 18: conference room, looking east

Photo 13 of 18: workroom, looking east

Photo 14 of 18: workroom, looking north

Photo 15 of 18: workroom, looking south

Photo 16 of 18: workroom, detail of flower cutting station

Photo 17 of 18: cold storage room, looking east

Photo 18 of 18: storage room, looking east

**Paperwork Reduction Act Statement:** This information is being collected for nominations to the National Register of Historic Places to nominate properties for listing or determine eligibility for listing, to list properties, and to amend existing listings. Response to this request is required to obtain a benefit in accordance with the National Historic Preservation Act, as amended (16 U.S.C.460 et seq.). We may not conduct or sponsor and you are not required to respond to a collection of information unless it displays a currently valid OMB control number.

**Estimated Burden Statement:** Public reporting burden for each response using this form is estimated to be between the Tier 1 and Tier 4 levels with the estimate of the time for each tier as follows:

Tier 1 – 60-100 hours

Tier 2 – 120 hours

Tier 3 – 230 hours

Tier 4 – 280 hours

The above estimates include time for reviewing instructions, gathering and maintaining data, and preparing and transmitting nominations. Send comments regarding these estimates or any other aspect of the requirement(s) to the Service Information Collection Clearance Officer, National Park Service, 1201 Oakridge Drive Fort Collins, CO 80525.

United States Department of the Interior  
National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places  
Continuation Sheet

Simpson's Florist

Name of Property

Morgan County, AL

County and State

Name of multiple listing (if applicable)

Section number n/a Page n/a

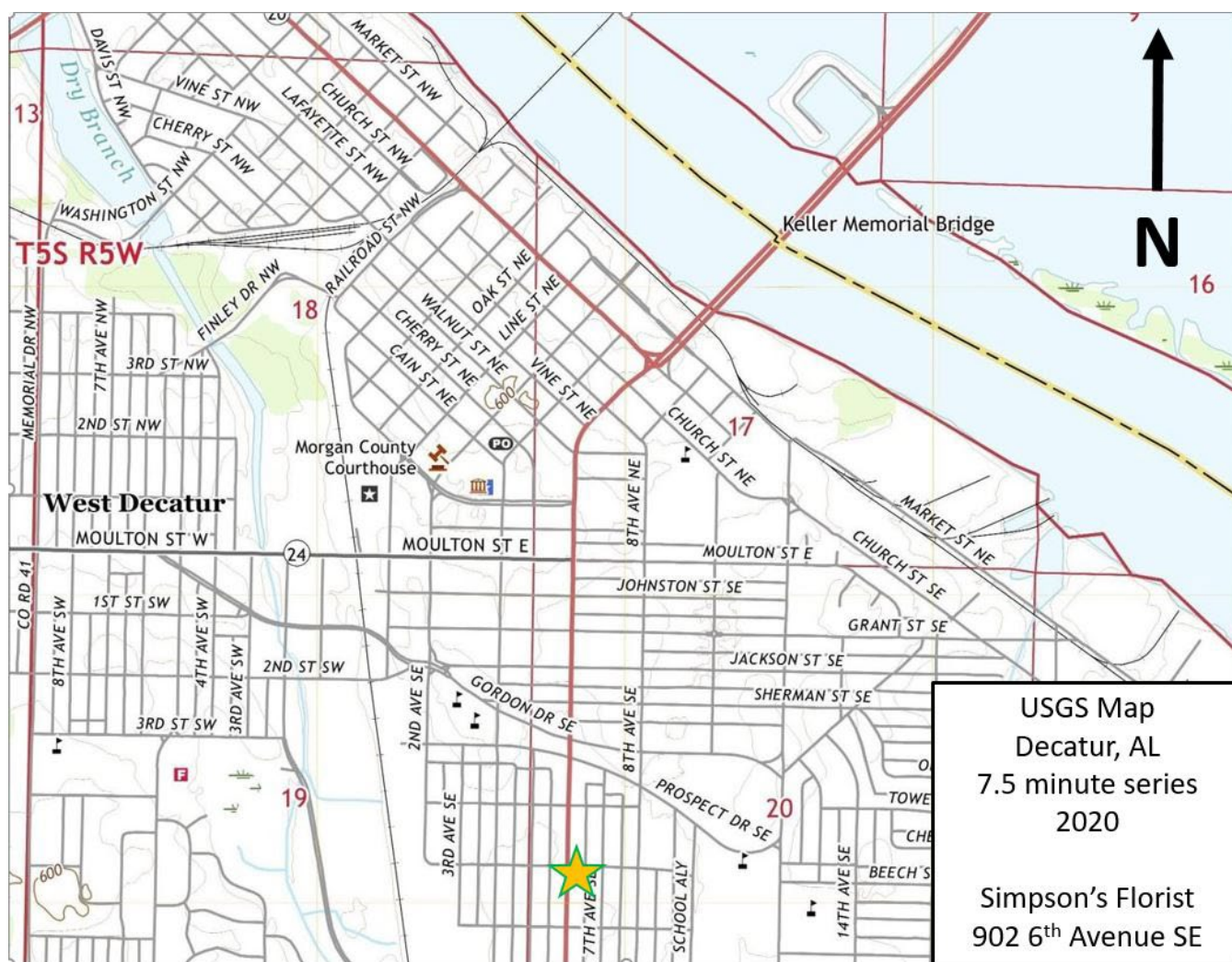


Figure 1: USGS Map, Decatur, AL 7.5 minute series, 2020

United States Department of the Interior  
National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places  
Continuation Sheet

Simpson's Florist

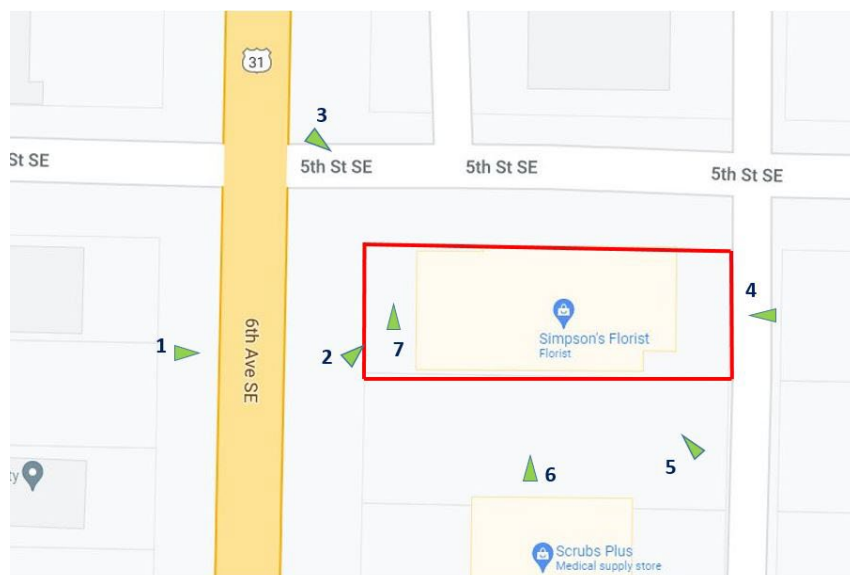
Name of Property

Morgan County, AL

County and State

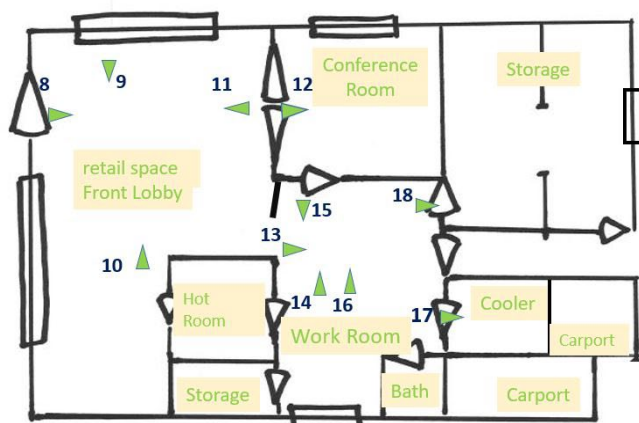
Name of multiple listing (if applicable)

Section number n/a Page n/a



Exterior Photo Key  
Simpson's Florist  
902 6th Avenue SE  
Decatur, AL

Figure 2: Exterior Photo Key



SIMPSON'S FLORIST

Interior Photo Key  
902 6th Avenue SE, Decatur AL  
\*not to scale

Figure 3: Interior Photo Key



United States Department of the Interior  
National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places  
Continuation Sheet

Simpson's Florist

Name of Property

Morgan County, AL

County and State

Name of multiple listing (if applicable)

Section number n/a Page n/a

THE DECATUR DAILY, FRIDAY, APRIL 5, 1957



902 6th Avenue S.E.

**CONGRATULATIONS!**

TO

**Simpson's Florist**

The Undersigned Firms Are Pleased  
To Have Participated In Building  
**SIMPSON'S FLORIST**

Lumber, Roofing, Paint and Millwork By <b>Stone Lumber Company</b> Semerville Road N.E. Phone 61	Refrigeration Equipment Installed By <b>Eagar Refrigeration Co.</b> 335 Lee Street (Comm. Ref.) Phone 1819	Neon Signs Installed By <b>Columbia Neon Sign Co.</b> Sheffield, Ala. EW-317
Wiring By <b>Newby Electric Service</b> 204 Memorial Drive N.W. Phone 1284	Door and Glass Installed By <b>North Alabama Glass Co.</b> 153 2nd Avenue Phone 1048	Floor Covering Installed By <b>Neal Stephenson</b> COMPLETE FLOOR COVERING SERVICE 606 Lamar Street Phone 1
Air Conditioners Furnished By <b>H. Ryan Appliance &amp; Furniture</b> 137 2nd Avenue Phone 3201	Plumbing Installed By <b>Sonny Hargitt Plumbing &amp; Heating</b> 2008 11th Street S.E. Phone 4781	Bricks By <b>Alabama Brick &amp; Tile Co.</b> 800 Market St. N.W. Phone 1

Figure 4: Advertisement for the opening of Simpson's Florist. *The Decatur Daily*. April 5, 1957

United States Department of the Interior  
National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places  
Continuation Sheet

Simpson's Florist

Name of Property

Morgan County, AL

County and State

Name of multiple listing (if applicable)

Section number n/a Page n/a



Figure 5: Mary Simpson (left) and unknown lady, 1968, family collection



Figure 6: Simpson's Florist display window, December, 1959, family collection



United States Department of the Interior  
National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places  
Continuation Sheet

Simpson's Florist

Name of Property

Morgan County, AL

County and State

Name of multiple listing (if applicable)

Section number n/a Page n/a



Figure 7: Simpson's Florist display window, February, 1959, family collection



Figure 8: Advertisement, *Decatur Daily*, December 7, 1958

United States Department of the Interior  
National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places  
Continuation Sheet

Simpson's Florist

Name of Property

Morgan County, AL

County and State

Name of multiple listing (if applicable)

Section number n/a Page n/a



Figure 9: Advertisement, *Decatur Daily*, March 27, 1959



Figure 10: David Bentley (left) and Carlton McMasters Jr. (right), *Decatur Daily*, July 22, 2010

United States Department of the Interior  
National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places  
Continuation Sheet

Simpson's Florist

Name of Property

Morgan County, AL

County and State

Name of multiple listing (if applicable)

Section number n/a Page n/a



Figure 11: Emily Doshier of Barkley Bridge Elementary, Simpson Design an Ad Contest Entry, *Decatur Daily*, April 20, 2015



Figure 12: Chloe Peebles of Barkley Bridge Elementary, Simpson Design an Ad Contest Entry, *Decatur Daily*, April 20, 2015



United States Department of the Interior  
National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places  
Continuation Sheet

Simpson's Florist

Name of Property

Morgan County, AL

County and State

Name of multiple listing (if applicable)

Section number n/a Page n/a



Figure 13: Gavin Martin, Eastwood Elementary, Simpson Design an Ad Contest Entry, *Decatur Daily*, April 25, 2017



Figure 14: David Bentley installing a vintage plate on the Simpson's delivery truck, *Decatur Daily*, April 10, 20

**United States Department of the Interior**  
National Park Service

**National Register of Historic Places**  
**Continuation Sheet**

Simpson's Florist

Name of Property

Morgan County, AL

County and State

Name of multiple listing (if applicable)

Section number \_\_\_\_ Page 1

---