

12South

The area of 12th Avenue South lies between the distinct residential neighborhoods of Belmont-Hillsboro and Waverly-Belmont, and also has served as a historic commercial corridor for the neighborhoods of Montrose and Sunnyside. In the nineteenth century, as 12th Avenue South left downtown Nashville, it became one of the city's many turnpikes out of town, like spokes on a wheel, and became known first as the "Middle Franklin Turnpike" and later "Granny White Pike." The road provided access for the many estates and farms along the route to markets in Nashville. The subdivision of these large farms, including Belmont, Hillside, Sunnyside, Breeze Hill, and Melrose, among others, and changing transportation methods, from horses and buggies to later streetcars then automobiles, impacted both residential and commercial development along the route. This route's proximity to both Belmont University and Lipscomb University also influenced the development and architectural patterns in the area, including the development of historic apartment buildings in some of the nearby neighborhoods (for example, Sterling Courts on Belmont Boulevard), and the emergent use of larger houses for apartments and student boarding.

Of the earlier large estates and farms, only the residences of Belmont (Adelicia Acklen's Italianate summer residence constructed between 1850 and 1860) and Sunnyside (the Greek Revival house constructed in 1852 for Mary Childress Benton) remain. Although a few homes date from the Victorian era, residential architecture in the area is primarily early twentieth-century, featuring bungalows, American Foursquares, and smaller vernacular cottages and minimal traditional houses. These later homes often borrow detailing from earlier architectural styles, such as Greek Revival columns or Italianate windows. Many of the bungalows and cottages feature common Craftsman details, such as masonry construction, front gables, multi-pane windows and multi-light doors, and battered (sloped) porch columns, often resting on piers.

Residents from the mid-twentieth century recall local landmarks such as Clemons School, at the corner of Linden and 12th, where most of the children in the area attended elementary school. Clemons, built c1910 with a 1916 addition, was the first school in South Nashville to desegregate in 1954, when Rev. Kelly Miller Smith's daughter Joy became the first African-American to attend Clemons, as a first grader, under Nashville's "grade-a-year" desegregation plan. Unlike the unruly demonstrations marking desegregation at other Nashville schools, Joy Smith's entrance at Clemons was quietly accepted, and in fact, the white student population at Clemons actually increased in the years immediately following desegregation, where other Nashville schools saw "white flight". Clemons School ceased operation in the 1970s, and was demolished in 1982.

Other landmark institutions in the neighborhood included Manning's Drugstore at 12th and Dallas. Manning's has been described as "the greatest drugstore in the world for a kid walking home from school," with its glass candy case and school supplies. Belmont Baptist Church, at the corner of 12th and Beechwood, was built c1900, but merged congregations with Southside Baptist in 1920 to form Belmont Heights Baptist Church on Belmont. Almost everyone who frequented 12th Avenue South in the 20th century remembers Becker's Bakery at the corner of 12th and Montrose, where generations of Nashvillians purchased cookies, Parker House rolls, rye bread, holiday pies, and birthday cakes, from its founding in the 1920s until the shop closed unexpectedly in early 2004. The Howell family has operated businesses in the 2700 block of 12th Avenue South for three generations.

Although many residences existed along the route, by mid-century there were filling stations, grocery stores, barber and beauty shops, pharmacies, schools, churches, and of course, Becker's Bakery. The corridor continued to evolve throughout the end of the twentieth century with former residences becoming vintage shops, restaurants, galleries, and coffee bars. Along with the traditional early 20th-century architecture, both residential and commercial, the neighborhood now also features Nashville's Islamic Center, Inca-Hoots (Dolly Parton's Spanish Revival offices), and the beloved Las Paletas (in a 1980s Moderne building). By the turn of the 21st century, the neighborhood became widely known as an

eclectic shopping district serving a variety of patrons, including residents, students, musicians, art lovers, fashionistas, and coffee lovers.

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