After a recent restoration, the old Fuqua Hardware Co. building at Third and Laurel streets looks almost exactly the way it looked when Henry Luce Fuqua built it in 1905.

**RIGHT:** In the 1940s, the part of the building fronting on Third Street was converted to three storefronts. Frost-Parker (later Frost-Barber), a stationery and office equipment store, moved into the building after Fuqua Hardware left. Frost-Barber later expanded into the corner storefront, as shown in this Advocate file photo from 1984.

**BOTTOM:** Office Pavilion employees design office areas in a working showroom on the first floor of the building.

By CAROL ANNE BLITZER

If Gov. Henry Luce Fuqua were alive today, he would have no trouble recognizing the building at the corner of Third and Laurel streets that housed his business, the Fuqua Hardware Co.

With the recent restoration of the old downtown landmark, the exterior of Fuqua Hardware looks almost exactly the way it looked when it was built in 1905.

Baton Rouge was a bustling community of 10,000 in 1893 when Fuqua opened the hardware store at its first location on Laurel Street.

"The store carried everything," said Alice Hart Phillips Singer, whose father, Elwyn Dwight Phillips, managed the company for years. In the 1901 "Elks Souvenir of Baton Rouge" lists items for sale including "heavy and shelf hardware" as well as a complete line of John Deere agricultural implements, plows, blacksmith tools, wagon material, sewer pipe and fire brick.

Fuqua, a Baton Rouge native and son of a Confederate soldier, was educated at Magruder's Collegiate Institute, a prestigious private academy on Government Street, and LSU. After a stint as an assistant to a civil engineer with the Yazoo & Mississippi Valley Railroad, he returned to Baton Rouge in 1883 to take a job as a clerk and later as a traveling salesman for a local hardware store.

Nine years later, he opened the Fuqua Hardware Co. The business did well enough that by 1895, Fuqua was able to pay George Hill $25,000 for the lot at the corner of Laurel and Third streets, originally the site of a Chinese laundry. There he constructed a new building for the company.

Because of his reputation in the business community, Fuqua was appointed manager of the Louisiana State Penitentiary System in 1916. During his term with the prison system, the state actually made money, and Fuqua's name was brought to the attention of the public.

In 1923, at the urging of several political figures, Fuqua resigned his position to run for governor the following year. He was elected over a slate that included Huey Long, who came in third.

Bert Rosenbaum, his grand- son, Adolph Elgutter, owned the Guarantee Shoe Store in the next block across Third Street from Fuqua Hardware, recalls a family story about the governor. The Elgutter family home was located on Royal Street on the east side of the Old Governor's Mansion.

On Sundays, Mr. and Mrs. Elgutter and their children all had a big midday meal together. One Sunday, Gov. Fuqua knocked at their door during lunch.

"He asked my grandfather what they were having for lunch," Rosenbaum said. Luckily the Elgutters were having their usual baked chicken. It seems that a goose was missing from the governor's coop, and Fuqua was going door to door to inquire if any of his neighbors were feasting on the missing bird.

Everybody in town knew that the phone number for Fuqua Hardware was "1." Those were the days before area codes, when telephone numbers could have as few as one or two digits. As it turns out, the company was not assigned this number because its owner lived in the statehouse but...
because the phone company at that
time was located directly across
the street. Phone lines ran from
the phone company building with
the first customer on the line receiv-
ing the first number.
Because of its nearness to the phone
company, Fuqua Hardware was Baton
Rouge's number 1.
Jos. Fuqua had little time to use
his business skills to run state
government. He died unexpectedly
in office in 1926, just over two years
into his term. After his death, the
business continued to be run as it
had when Fuqua left to manage the
prison system.

Ann McMains, whose family now
c owns the building, remembers
the old hardware company well. Her
father, the late J.C. Griner, was presi-
dent and chairman of the board of
Florida National Life Insurance Co.,
which had its home office in the
Downtown Building right across
the street from Fuqua Hardware.

"It was a common thing for
people to come into the Fuqua
Hardware Co., from the Laurel
Street door and weigh on the
big scales," she said. The scale was
right in front of an open freight elevator.

Much of the merchandise was
displayed on open shelves around
the walls of the building. "You
could see the merchandise," Slinger
said. "They had great big, high
ladders that rolled on rollers. That's
doesn't come off the shelves.

Slinger recalls that the store car-
rried saddles and equipment for
horses and cows with a complete
assortment of china on display at
the checkout desk. "They had
handled all of the china. She was in
charges," Slinger said.

In 1998, the hardware company
moved to the back of the building
and closed Laurel Street as an
entrance. It still occupied the second
and third floors.

Macy's, a men's store, leased the
space on the second floor. "Macy's
slogan was "O.J.,
one price only," Rosenstein said.

"Every suit in the store was $15.
They didn't carry ties. They
don't carry belts. They just carried
suitcases." In 1966, at the beginning of
the "boom" years following World War
II, Ellery's Shoppe, a high-end
women's apparel store, took the
corner location. Thom McAn, a
national men's shoe chain, and
Boston Shoe, which carried shoes
for men and women, moved across
from the street into two other
storefronts created on the Third
Street side of the building.

On March 15, 1956, Ellery's
Shoppe made headlines in the State-
Times, when a young Brahman bull
on the way to the slaughterhouse on
N. 21st Street escaped from a truck
and entered the shop through the
front door. Blanche Ellery, operator
of the shop, told a State-Times re-
porter: "And there Zebras were up
and down in my window, that bull. I
had hardly move at first, I was so
startled," she said.

J.C. Oll, described by the State-
Times as a "husky traffic police-
man" with a weight given as 210 pounds, saved the day when he
"ran into the shop, grabbed the bull
by the tail, then threw it down until
the bull arrived with ropes."

Later in 1956, Fuqua Hardware
left downtown when it moved to
Chaddock Drive. "That was a big
ciasco," Slinger said.

The part of the building occupied
by the hardware store and vacated
for two years until 1958, when
Frank Parker (later Frank
Barber), an office supply and sta-
tioned wear, leased the space and
renovated and remodeled it. The
company sold stationary,
offices supplies and greeting cards
on the first floor. Its administrative
offices were on the second floor,
and office furniture was displayed
in modules on the second floor. The
third floor was used for storage.
In the early 1960s, the company
expanded to the Third Street cor-
nor.

However, downtown Baton
Rouge, like so many urban centers
around the country, faced a mass
exodus of businesses in the 1970s
and 1980s. Most downtown resi-
dents had already moved to larger
areas out of neighborhoods. Parking
was better in suburbs and shopping
centers where stores were newer and
larger.

In 1983, Fuqua Realty Co. sold
the old building to the family of the
late B.B. Taylor, who wanted to buy
two downtown blocks, near downtown
buildings and build modern com-
mercial properties.

"It's for the best that it didn't
work out," said Taylor's son, Ben
Taylor III. "Those are the only two
blocks on Third Street that are still
intact."

By 1985, however, even Frank
Barber had left downtown for In-
terstate Avenue. For the next dec-
cade, the Fuqua Building remained
vacant even though the Taylors had
an occasional tenant in one or more
of the Third Street storefronts.

In the mid-1990s, locals once
again began to discuss the possi-
blity of revitalizing the downtown
district as had been done in many
other communities across the

Several local organizations in-
cluding the Downtown Develop-
ment District, Plan Baton Rouge
and the Baton Rouge Area Foun-
dation came together with the state
of Louisiana and city of Baton
Rouge to make these im-
provements a high priority.

In 1998, Frank and Ann McMains
and their sons, Chuck, Jay, Ty and
Tina, decided to invest in the down-
town revitalization. Family mem-
bers have always been interested in
old buildings and in local history.

Through a family trust, they pur-
chased the old Fuqua building.

Architect Robert M. Coleman III
and contractors Richard Parks
and Craig Sears and Richard Leg
of McAns Associates designed an ex-
tensive restoration of the historic
property.

Because the building had only
two previous owners, few altera-
tions had made by its previous
owners. "It was built like an early
skyscraper," Jay McMains said. "It
has got cast-iron caps at the tops of
the columns."

When workers removed the
Third Street storefront that had
been added in the 1960s, they dis-
covered two concrete blocks with
brick lettering reading, "Establish-
ished 1893" and "Erected 1905."

"They had been sitting there all	hese years," Jay McMains said.

Even the original Old Print ele-
vator was still intact, but because
it was manually operated by pull-
\ Advertisement staff photo by Frank Dennis

Ty McMains, pictured, and his brothers plan to lease the third floor with its original window, pine
posts and exposed brick walls.