

A Brief History of the Briggs Building



In 1865, Thomas H. Briggs and James Dodd opened a hardware store in a small building on Fayetteville Street in the center of downtown Raleigh. Business boomed and the store soon outgrew its quarters, leading the men to construct a larger building on the same site.

Construction of the new building was completed in 1874. It was heralded as “the tallest building in east Carolina and Raleigh’s first skyscraper.” James Dodd retired shortly thereafter, and the business became Briggs Hardware, a family partnership between Briggs and his sons, James and Thomas H., Jr.

The Briggs Building is a familiar landmark for people who grew up in Raleigh. Many residents recall chatting while shopping for wrenches or running to the back of the store to inspect the newest shipment of toys. The building’s upper floors have also seen their share of Raleigh history. Over the years, upper level tenants have included the city’s first Y.M.C.A., the Raleigh Little Theatre, the State Museum (predecessor of the N.C. Museum of Natural Sciences), and even an armory!

A locally significant historic resource, the Briggs Building is one of a few 19th-century commercial buildings in Raleigh that remain essentially unchanged, thanks to its long-standing run as a family-owned hardware store. In 1994, after 120 years downtown, the Briggs family announced it would relocate the business. Debate immediately began over what to do with the empty building. The A.J. Fletcher Foundation and Preservation North Carolina teamed together to acquire and rehabilitate the structure; restoration began in 1997 and was finished a year later. Today the Raleigh City Museum occupies the first floor and lower level of the building; the upper floors are private offices.