

a case study in

HISTORICAL PRESERVATION

THE SEIBELS BUILDING

Post Office Box One

Seibels, founded in 1869, is the oldest original Columbia corporation still in operation. Their distinctive “Post Office Box One” address reflects a legacy of success. Recent strategic planning gave way to rebranding and an evolution of their business lines. Providing technology driven insurance solutions and services, it was only natural that their corporate headquarters reflect a forward-looking persona. Could this vision for an innovative workplace be achieved by renovating their iconic 1940s, post-World War II-style building? Despite generations of caretaking, staying put would require a significant capital investment and a wholesale upgrade of its buildings systems. Relocation was an alternative, but what location would be better than where they were? This case study tells the Seibels story and how preservation became a financial tool for the transformation of their time-honored workplace.



Photograph of the Carolina Life Insurance Company building in 1956. “Carolina Life Insurance Company,” 12 April 1956. Richland Library: Russell Maxey collection. Identifier: max0117.

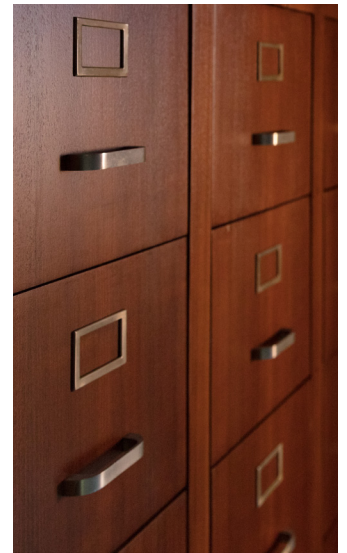
History

Seibels has always exhibited an entrepreneurial spirit, beginning with its founders, Columbia native Edwin W. Seibels and Virginian James B. Ezell. Started in the back of a clothing store in 1869, within just a year their enterprise venture was declared one of the best insurance companies in the US by the Columbia newspaper, the Daily Phoenix. In the 1930s, Edwin Seibels' invention of the vertical filing system would transform administrative systems of his era, and go on to be recognized and displayed at the Smithsonian. In the 1960s, the company led the way as an early introducer of software for handling insurance policies. Today, they describe themselves as an insurance solutions company, providing business process services to the property and casualty insurance industry.

The original Seibels' headquarters located at 1501 Lady Street was designed by Lafaye, Lafaye & Fair and completed in 1949. An influential architectural firm of the time, its principals gave us a number of iconic buildings now listed in the National Register of Historic Places: Wade Hampton State Office Building in Columbia (1950), the US Courthouse in Aiken (1935), the World War Memorial Building in Columbia (1935), and the Tapp's Department Store in Columbia (1940). In 1977, an addition was made to the Seibels' building, but was designed by a different architect. This addition was sympathetic in character to the original 1949 building.

Seibels saw value in staying, and a decision was made to reinvest in their existing buildings rather than relocating elsewhere. To help them carry out this mission, Seibels selected the design-build team of M. B. Kahn and BOUDREAUX. In early design meetings when goals, scope, budget, and available funding were discussed, the design team—having related expertise with historic properties and the merits of tax incentives—suggested that Seibels consider the historic significance of their building as a tool to leverage available state and local tax credits to help offset construction costs. To further educate Seibels about the opportunities and the process, the design team introduced local tax credit advisors and legal counsel Rogers, Lewis, Jackson, Mann and Quinn, LLC (Rogers Lewis).

In 1992, the South Carolina state legislature passed the Bailey Bill, providing local governments the option to incentivize the rehabilitation of historic properties through property tax abatement. Locally, the Bailey Bill legislation allows owners who invest a certain amount of money in their historic structures to freeze the current assessed value of a building for 20 years. These incentives are in addition to the 20% federal income tax credit and 25% state income tax credit for rehabilitation expenditures for certified historic structures.



PROCESS

Interested in securing financial advantages related to renovation expenses, Seibels engaged Rogers Lewis to begin the process of securing a historic designation, as the building did not have previously have one. Based on the building's local significance to commerce and architecture, the nomination was written and submitted to the State Historic Preservation Office (SHPO). Once the nomination was approved by the State Review Board, the 1949 original building was included on the National Register of Historic Places, making it eligible for tax incentives. (A building that is a contributing structure within a National Register District is also eligible.)



The design team then collaborated with Rogers Lewis to provide the information and drawings necessary to submit the "Preliminary Review For the Bailey Bill" describing the proposed work to the City of Columbia Planning and Preservation Department. This form is reviewed by the City's Design/Development Review Commission who deems a building eligible for the Bailey Bill.

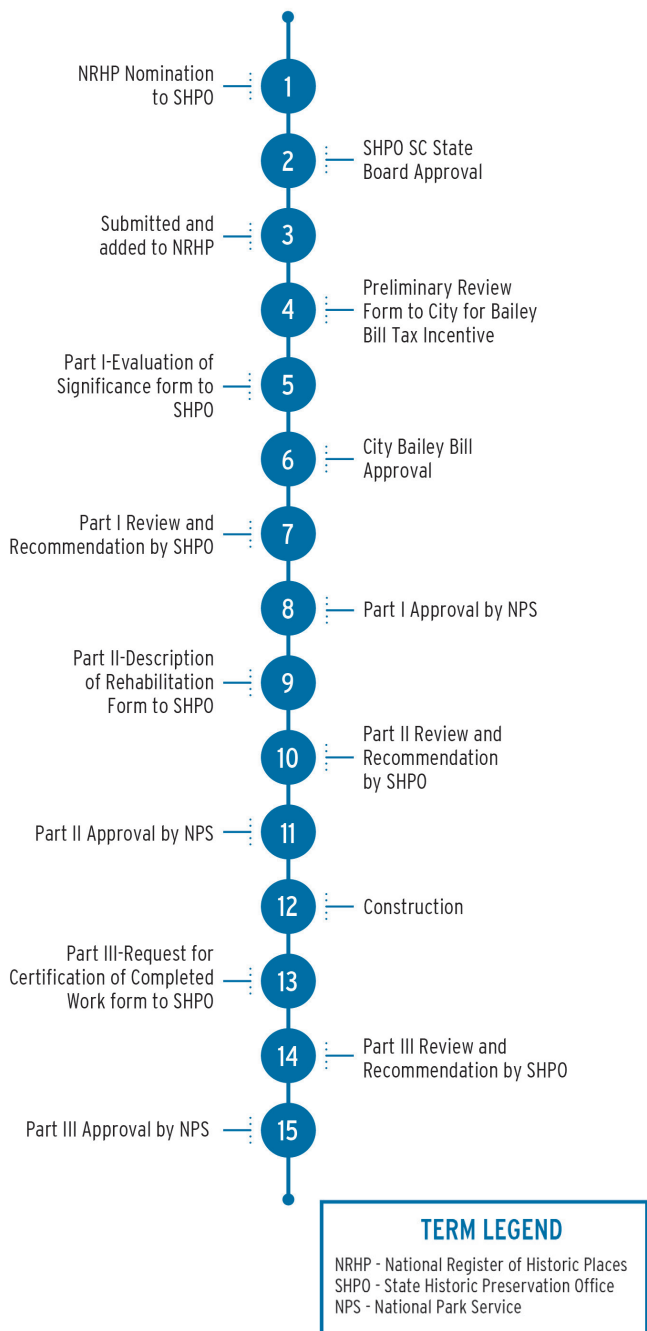
Also, Part I of the Historic Preservation Certification Application was prepared for SHPO. SHPO and the National Park Service (NPS) use the information in Part I-Evaluation of Significance to determine if a property is a Certified Historic Structure. SHPO first reviews the application, provides comments, and revisions are made. Once Part I approval is in hand, the team prepares the Part II-Description of Rehabilitation submittal which describes in detail all the intended work. This work cannot compromise the historic integrity of the building and should be done in compliance with the Secretary of the Interior Guidelines for Historic Preservation. During this process, onsite meetings

were held with a representative from SHPO to identify the period of significance and character-defining features, and to provide input and advice. Again, the Part II submittal is reviewed at the State and Federal levels and, with approval, the work plan is confirmed to be in compliance with the Guidelines and not harmful to the integrity of the building and, therefore, eligible for tax incentives. Once the work is complete, the Part III-Request for Certification of Completed Work form allows SHPO and NPS to determine if the completed work was consistent with the proposed work. Once Part III is approved, the tax credits can be realized.

the requirements

At Seibels, the overall project included reconfiguration of the 128,775 SF interiors to improve departmental efficiency and collaboration, in addition to replacing and upgrading mechanical and electrical systems. A phased renovation plan allowed the building to stay occupied during renovation. Historic preservation and rehabilitation work focused on character defining elements. With tax credit projects, both the character and features of the exterior and the interior are reviewed.

FORM AND APPROVAL PROCESS



Exterior

- Berea sandstone panels comprise the building's façade, with three granite veneer panels marking the main entrance. The stone was cleaned and all joints were re-caulked with appropriate materials, and resealed. SHPO reviewed mock-ups to approve the cleaning process.
- Original steel framed windows were restored and reinstalled with new insulated glass. The new glass provided improved energy efficiency, but the type of glass was particularly important as to maintain the same visual clarity and color as the original.

Interior

- Corridors and first floor executive offices were established as character-defining elements and, as such, retain their historic features.
- Elevators: Original to the building, the doors feature the original Seibels logo. Elevator cabs were restored to their original 1949 appearance, retaining interior paneling and doors, and replacing the non-historic indicators with buttons from the period.
- Art Deco return air grilles decorate the elevator lobbies of each floor. Since no longer needed mechanically, a black panel was placed behind the grilles while retaining the original character.
- Dark cherry wood paneling and wainscoting was retained and restored in the elevator lobbies and executive office area.
- All light fixtures were salvaged, repaired as needed, and reinstalled.
- Of unique historical and architectural significance were the built-in vertical filing cabinets designed by Edwin G. Seibels. These cabinets, faced in wood to match surrounding wall paneling, were preserved in their original condition.
- The restrooms—with mosaic tile flooring, pedestal sinks, and marble stalls—were representative of the construction period. Metal fixtures not original were replaced with ones closely resembling the original fixtures. Cracked pedestal sinks were replaced with new sinks that replicated the design of the originals.
- A new 12x12 ceiling grid system matching the original pattern was installed in the corridors. The original ceiling tiles, due to age and condition, were replaced with textured ceiling tiles from the same company that had produced the original ones.
- New HVAC grills matching the original were installed in all historical areas.
- Wood wainscoting in the corridors on floors 2-4 was restored to reflect the 1st floor wood paneling.

Recommendations for Success



Images reflect renovations completed in non-historic wing that was constructed in the 1970s.

Ideally, the tax credit review process is completed prior to the commencement of the design process and not in parallel to it. There is some inherent risk in design and sometimes even during construction while the preservation reviews are in process. If approvals are not given to proposed work or modifications made based upon the requirements of the preservation agencies, design must be reworked or in-place construction torn out or redone. Requirements may also have a cost impact as well and unexpectedly increase the cost of the project. Because the tax credits depend on the approvals, the direction of the agencies must be followed. In the case of Seibels – and thanks to the collaborative spirit of the design-build team – the preservation requirements were able to be integrated into the project. Active collaboration with SHPO is essential as well so that the team can discuss in advance treatment of any unique features and develop design and Part II submittals with the guidance and expertise of SHPO in mind, which can help speed the review and approval process. As changes to the scope were made, advice was sought from the preservation consultants to ensure the changes were in line with requirements.

Marking their 150-year milestone, Seibels' decision to preserve their unique building reinforces the pride of a time-honored company, its national headquarters, and its place in the commercial fabric of Columbia. The idea of staying put was an advantage to the company. The value of tax incentives created a financial benefit to the owners, a tool to fund the reinvestment in a building and the transformation of a dated environment into one reflecting Seibels' updated brand and services.

ABOUT M. B. KAHN & BOUDREAUX

Headquartered in Columbia, M. B. Kahn Construction Co., Inc. operates throughout the Southeast from six strategically located offices and serves all market sectors offering general contracting, construction management at risk, and design-build services. Celebrating 90 years in the construction industry, the company has gained a reputation as specialists, providing quality services on time and on budget. M. B. Kahn Construction has grown to be recognized as one of the nation's leading construction firms and is routinely ranked in Engineering News Record's Top 400 General Contractors nationwide.

For more than 40 years, BOUDREAUX has built upon its strong reputation as a dynamic, socially responsible firm committed to excellence in architecture, interiors, preservation, and planning. With extensive experience throughout the state of South Carolina and beyond, the firm has been recognized for its leadership in providing the highest level of service and design to numerous educational, government, community, corporate, and religious institutions. BOUDREAUX is committed to excellence through service, ethical and professional practice, and quality design.

M. B. Kahn and BOUDREAUX have worked together for 20 years



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Helpful Links

- Seibels
<https://www.seibels.com/>
- Seibels National Register of Historic Places Form
<https://www.nps.gov/nr/feature/places/pdfs/16000444.pdf>
- Federal Tax Credit Information
<https://www.nps.gov/tps/tax-incentives.htm>
- South Carolina Tax Credit Information
<https://scdah.sc.gov/historic-preservation/programs/tax-incentives/income-producing>



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