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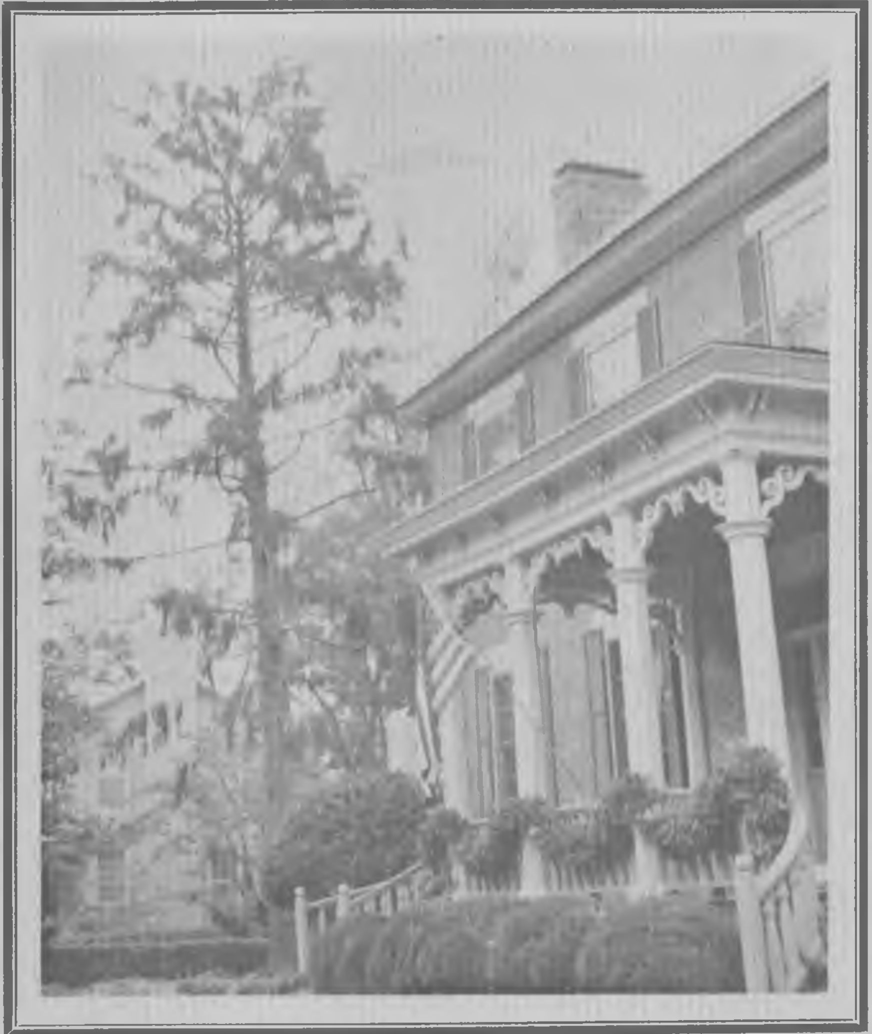
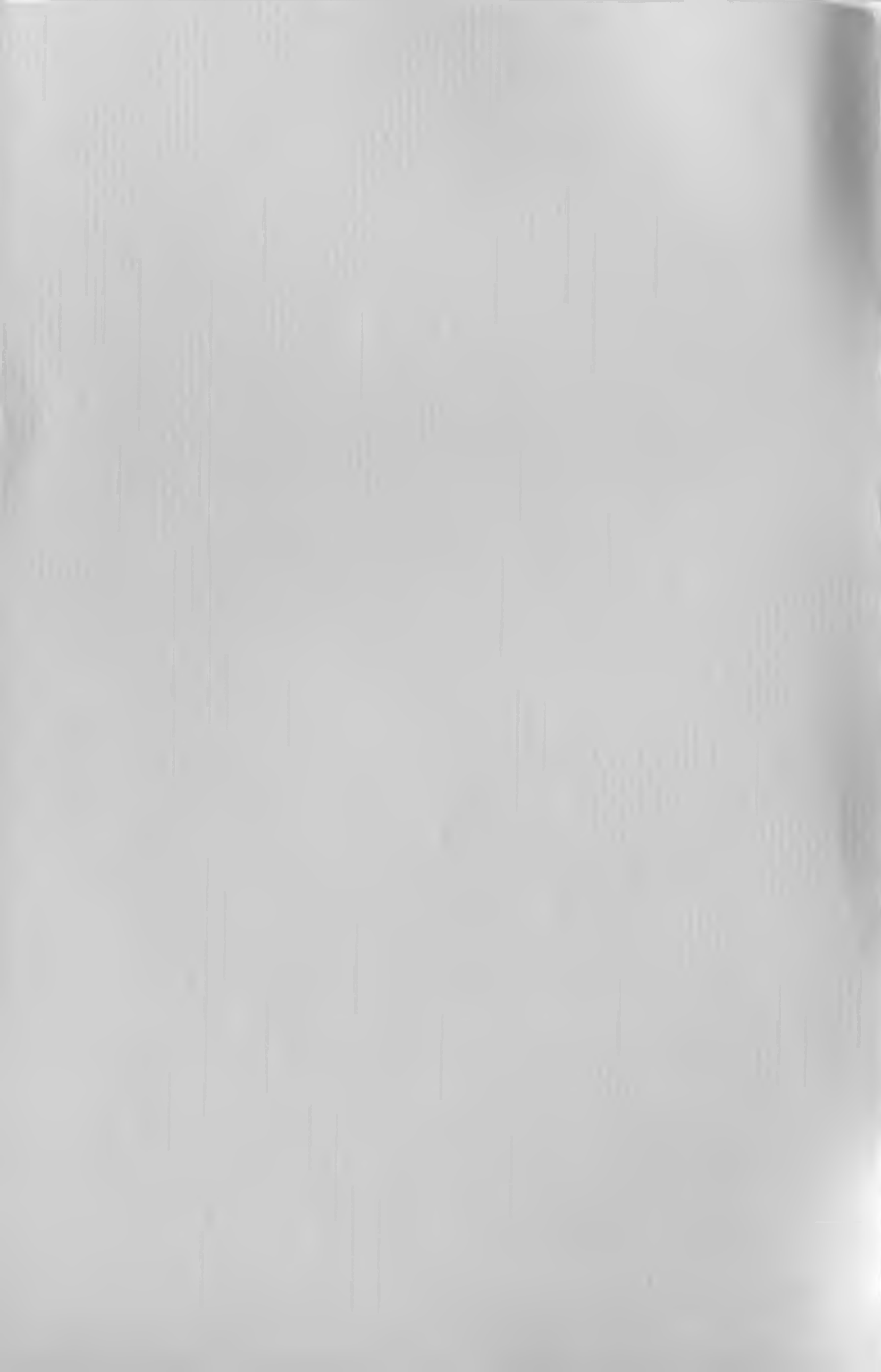


Spring/Summer 1983

THE HISTORIC HUNTSVILLE QUARTERLY
Of Architecture & Preservation



THE HISTORIC HUNTSVILLE QUARTERLY
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Vol. IX, Nos. 3 and 4 Spring/Summer 1983

2 QUIETDALE
by Micky Maroney

17 HABITAT
by Susan Luther

18 THE McCARTNEY-BONE-WILBOURN HOUSE
Historical Background
by Laura Mae Wilbourn
Civil War Reminiscences
by Lillian Bone Paul

25 HUMOROUS HUNTSVILLE HAPPENINGS
by Patricia H. Ryan

29 THE CALHOUN HOUSE
by Linda Bayer

37 PRESERVATION BRANCHES OUT
by Ralph Allen

40 ETCETERA

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QUIETDALE

by Micky Maroney

Happily, for all of us who love old houses and appreciate early architecture with its aura of times past, a grand old masterpiece is being restored by its new owners, Mr. and Mrs. Niles Prestage, Jr. Their new old home, Quietdale, has had relatively few changes made over the years and remains much the same as when it was new.

A mansion of sixteen rooms, plus an adjacent six-room building originally used for the kitchen and slave quarters, Quietdale was found to be in remarkably good structural condition in spite of some termite and weather damage. The usually expected interior refurbishments that must ordinarily be made in an old house must be made here, too.

Previous owners had, of course, installed electricity and plumbing when two of the original dressing rooms were converted to bathrooms and the kitchen was moved into the main house. A coal-fired, hot air central heating system was installed, necessitating the excavation of a partial basement. However, the major interior change was the creation of a big stairhall from two smaller original stairhalls. In this larger room, one entry door to the back porch was partially filled in to form a window.

The only exterior changes made were prior to the 1930s when the house and slave quarters were connected by means of a short flight of covered steps between the upper porches of the two structures, and the back porch roof was extended. Also, one of the interior staircases was removed and reinstalled on the two-tier porch of the house. At the same time, a small lean-to room was added to the north side of the house, and the north end of the first floor porch was enclosed to make a service entry, or pantry, off the inside kitchen. Exterior and interior work duplicated the original features. Inside the pantry, one wall retained the original beaded weatherboards and narrow exterior architraves around the door, while the three other walls were plastered. A new entry to the room was framed with architraves removed from the remodeled stairhall.

Actually, more alterations have been made to the slave quarters building than to the house. Here, too, electricity and plumbing were added. During the 1920s, two upstairs rooms were redecorated in a modern style of the period for use as a den and billiards room where the master of the house could spend some relaxing moments. Sometime later, the third up-

per room was partitioned into a kitchen and bathroom, creating a three-room apartment upstairs. Downstairs, the three rooms were converted into two apartments by partitioning the center room into two small kitchens and two small bathrooms.

On the outside, there is evidence that the exterior stairway has been relocated, possibly from one end of the two-level porch to the other. During the conversion to apartments on the first floor, the center entry door was partially filled in to form a window, and one window was eliminated so a closet could be added under the porch stairs. There are no interior stairs.

The Prestages are gradually working on the restoration of Quietdale, including appropriate interior decoration and restitution of the surrounding gardens. The greater portion of the exterior weather damage has been repaired, old paint removed and fresh paint applied. The forty-two pairs of louvered blinds (commonly called shutters today) have been repaired or replaced and painted. Work on the interior and the gardens progresses at a steady pace. And the fine old house stands proudly once more.

The 1935 Historic American Buildings Survey compiled a brief description and history of Quietdale but made no measured drawings as was done with several other Huntsville houses. Interestingly, this information includes several errors that have been perpetuated in subsequent descriptions of Quietdale, undoubtedly acquired from the erroneous HABS material.

More recently, Quietdale was listed on the National Register of Historic Places in February of 1982.

HISTORY

William Robinson, high sheriff of Madison County, never lived to see his Quietdale built. He had spent many years planning, with meticulous detail, the plantation home for his wife and five children. In 1852, while attending a picnic on Monte Sano, he died in the forty-fourth year of his life.

As one of the most prosperous landowners and businessmen in the county, he spared no expense in his plans for Quietdale, intending it to be one of the most elegant plantation homes in the area. It was to be suitable for gracious entertaining, yet comfortable and convenient for his family.

Curiously, he chose to build a frame house, although it is said that he owned one of the first brick manufacturing companies in the county. From Bridgeport, Tennessee, he obtained the finest lumber available and had it shipped down the Tennessee River to Whitesburg Landing, then hauled by oxcart to Huntsville. Reportedly, enough lumber was gathered to build two houses the size of Quietdale. Recorded in the inventory of his estate at the time of his death is a listing for "1 Lot Lumber for building and Raw Brick" appraised at $1,500 and a parcel of "55 Acres on Turnpike Road" (Meridian Street) valued at $3,500. He also owned other plantations near Huntsville and in Mississippi and Tennessee, but the family lived in town at the corner of Gates and Henry streets (Fountain Circle).

His sorrowful widow of twenty-nine, Caroline Moore Robinson, decided that the house would be built precisely to her husband's specifications, and build it she did, exactly as he had planned it. Finding skilled workers was no problem for Caroline because William had trained a number of his many slaves in the construction arts, including masonry, woodworking, and delicate plaster work.

The exact date of construction of the Quietdale mansion has not been documented, but records in the Probate Court indicate that the house was built between the years of 1853 and 1858. Confusing the issue as to when the present dwelling was built is an inscription reading "Quietdale 1840" located in the cement top step of a brick stairway leading down to the root cellar under the slave quarters/kitchen building.

Located just east of northern Meridian Street, the property is known to have had earlier dwellings and outbuildings constructed on it. Three quarters of a section of land were first entered at the government land sales in Huntsville in 1809 and 1810 by John Williams Walker. He later sold the tract to John F. Newman, who in turn sold it to William Fleming. An 1831 deed of the property from Fleming to Lemuel Mead states, "...being the same tract on which said William Fleming lately and John F. Newman formerly lived...the parcel of land with the tenements and appurtenances thereunto belonging...." It could be possible that the plantation was called Quietdale long before William Robinson came into possession of the property, and that the present six room outbuilding was erected on the site of an earlier structure.

However, the deeds do not indicate clearly how or when William Robinson became owner of the land. In 1844, 173.7 acres of the Newman tract were deeded by Lemuel Mead to John Robinson, William's cousin. Perhaps the cousins made a private transaction for William's fifty-five acres, and the deed was never recorded. Not until June of 1855 is the record clarified when the Chancery Court made a decree that the land be transferred from the heirs of the estate of Martha Mead to the heirs of the estate of William Robinson. And the Robinson estate was ordered to pay court costs in the suit. William died without a will, so his brother and his cousin, James B. and John Robinson, were appointed administrators of his estate by the Probate Court.

Most likely, construction of the mansion was started soon after the 1855 Chancery Court decree was made, because by 1858, the house had been completed and furnished, according to an "Appraisement of Personal and Real Property" filed in the Probate Court that year when Caroline was appointed administratrix of the estate.

Never remarrying, Caroline lived at Quietdale for the remainder of her years, rearing her five children, running the plantations, and tending to estate business. She must have had many financial worries in the years during and after the Civil War, according to the many listings concerning William's estate in the Probate Court records. But she managed to keep Quietdale running efficiently and kept much of the estate together.

Of the five children, sons William and James P. never married; son Charles T. married Medora Reynolds of Pulaski, Tennessee, and lived there with her and their four daughters; daughter Mary K. married Dr. Amatus R. Burritt, and they were the parents of Dr. William Burritt who built Burritt mansion on Monte Sano; daughter Fannie J. married Dr. James L. Ridley, for whom Ridley Hall at the Church of the Nativity was later named. The Ridleys had three girls.

When Caroline died in 1885 at the age of sixty-two, her will named her daughter Mary K. Burritt as executrix of the estate. Later that year, the house and remaining land were sold at public auction to Alexander Erskine Mastin, who later sold it to his daughter and son-in-law, the Eugene R. Gills. They in turn sold the property to the Guy S. Bishops, who lived there until 1982 when they sold it to the Niles Prestages.

EXTERIOR

Due to the careful planning and personal preferences of William Robinson, Quietdale comprises a mixture of architectural styles. The two-story, five-bay house has a basically Georgian appearance with its hipped roof topped by a flat deck. But the Georgian influence is overpowered by the Gothic Revival aspect of the long one-story front and side porches with their gently pointed Tudor arches, octagonal columns, and scrolled, intricately cut roof brackets. Despite this mixture of styles on the outside, the interior is unquestionably Greek Revival.

The rather elaborate entry is crowned by another Tudor arch supported by heavy pilasters with recessed panels. Atop the pilasters are scrolled brackets matching the ones at the porch roof eaves. Flanking the double front doors are unusual sidelights made of rich, ruby red glass, called "witches' glass." Each pane has an etched design of graceful grape clusters, leaves, and vines. According to legend, witches' glass was used in sidelights so that the occupants of a home could look out to see if the witches were riding before admitting an unknown guest through the door. The dark red glass prevented the witches, or anyone else, from seeing inside. Over the entry doors is a transomlight of a long, single pane of glass painted in a diamond pattern of gold and green. These colors certainly do not enhance the beautiful ruby glass, and no other transom in the house contains a long, single pane of glass; so one must conclude that this is a replacement for the original transomlight. The transom over

the door to the side porch contains three panes of colored glass—one gold, one blue, and one red—placed closely together without the use of muntins to separate the panes.

A feature of refinement at Quietdale not usually found in local houses of the era is the use of plaster on the ceilings of all porches, including the upper level of the two-tier back porch which follows an ell formed by the main structure and its northwest wing. The one exception is the downstairs back porch which has narrow, grooved and beaded ceiling boards, no doubt installed when an interior staircase was removed from one of the stairhalls and installed on the back porch.

Each level of the two-tier porch is enclosed by a balustrade composed of plain square balusters. But at the outer end of the lower level, the plain balusters have been replaced by much fancier turned balusters of Victorian style, while those continuing around the corner are the original square ones.

The front porch ceiling is a masterpiece of the plasterer's artistry. Following the perimeter of the ceiling are two parallel rows of delicate moldings in the shape of grape clusters, vines, leaves, and flowers, similar to the design used in the sidelights. Additional rows of plasterwork divide the ceiling into three sections. From the center of the ceiling hangs a finely worked wrought iron lantern in a leaf and flower motif. Four glass panels, each painted with a different scene, originally fit into the four sides of the lantern, but at least one of the panels has been broken.

The house rests upon a brick foundation which has regularly spaced air circulation vents. These foundation vents are of the usual kind found in many early Huntsville houses, having a heavy square sill, closely spaced vertical wooden posts set diagonally into the sill, and framed by smaller boards topped by a large wooden lintel.

Both the house and kitchen-slave

quarters are covered with wide, beaded weatherboards (clapboards that have a narrow groove at the bottom edge, giving a beaded effect). The weatherboards are attached to the house frame with square cut nails with square heads. These nails are found in various locations throughout the house, although the major portion of wood joinery, including the hidden framework, was done by the pegged mortise and tenon method. This is visible on all doors, windows, blinds, and mantels throughout the house.

The tall, four-foot-wide windows have six lights (panes) in each sash. The sashes are double-hung, using pulleys and counter-weights to raise and lower them. Each of the forty-two windows in the house has exterior louvered blinds (shutters are solid and were not used locally for houses, only businesses). Window sills and frames on the exterior are narrow, only four inches wide, as are the outside door frames, although the door sills are six inches wide.

At the roof edge, plain box cornices are used, concealing built-in wooden gutters lined with sheet metal, with outlet pipes projecting through the bottom of the box cornice to the leader. Immediately under the box cornice is an unadorned board frieze twenty-four inches in width.

Access to the deck roof is gained by a narrow, steep attic stairway leading to a trapdoor measuring three feet by five feet. The trapdoor, a rough-sawn board door, is constructed with the square cut nails found elsewhere in the house.

It is said that the trapdoor was Caroline's idea, so she could dry fruits and herbs there for winter use. A story has been passed down that during the Civil War Caroline watched a skirmish on a nearby hill from her rooftop perch. Union troops had barracks on the hill at the time and maintained them for several years after the war, but never once did they molest the family or pillage the house.

Atop the hipped roof, the large flat deck is covered with strips of copper sheet metal, probably original to the roof. When the house was built, it is quite likely that the deck area was enclosed by a low wooden balustrade although none exists now. Bordering the entire rim of the deck are the concealed gutters with hidden outlet pipes leading through the unfinished areas of the attic to the gutters at the edges of the hipped roof. From the ground, the concealed deck gutters appear to be a simple crown molding.

The hipped sections of the roof and the gabled roof over the northwest wing are currently covered with aging post-Victorian French method shingles (square shingles laid diagonally to form a diamond pattern). It is difficult to determine the type of original material used for this part of the roof without dislodging some of the shingles for a look underneath. To date, no clues have been uncovered since no roofing repairs have been made.

The house was built with five chimneys, all placed on exterior walls. Each chimney vents two fireplaces, one

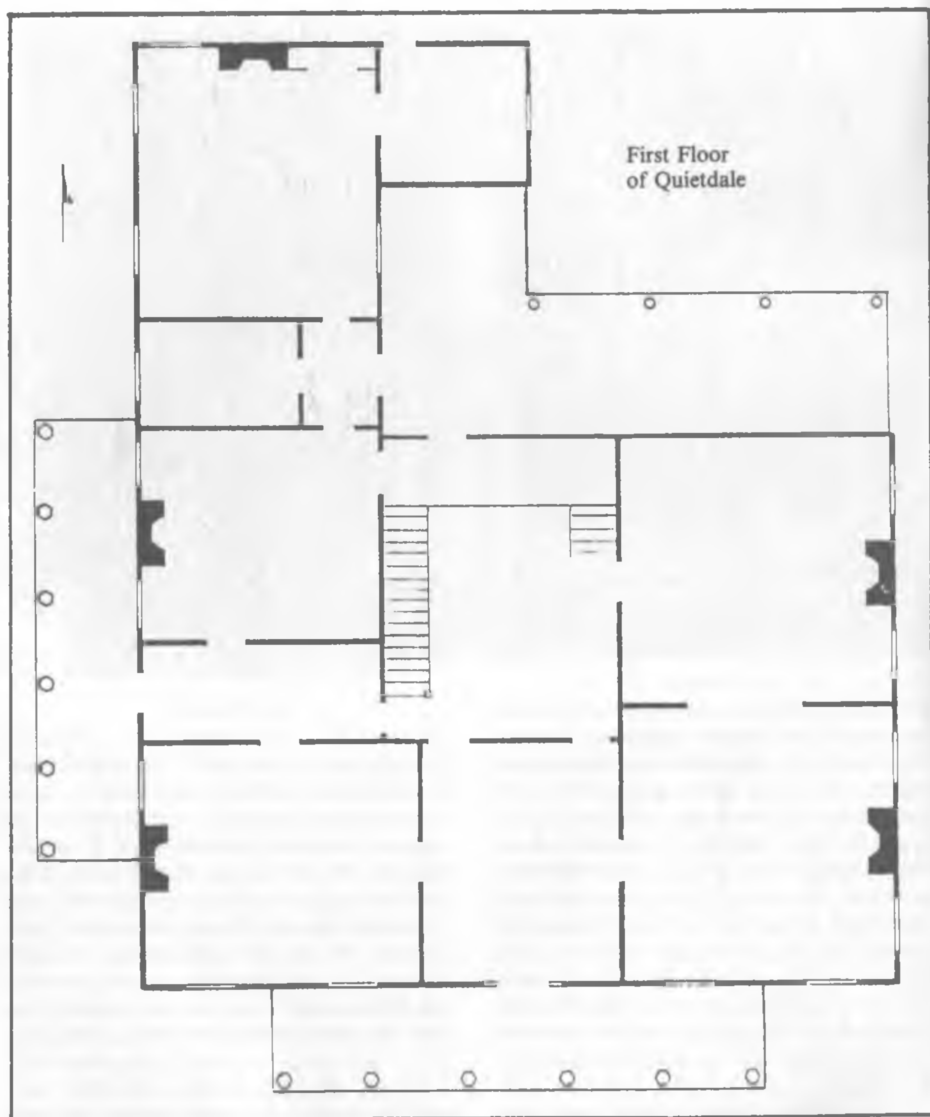
downstairs and one upstairs. The coal furnace in the basement has been vented through the rear chimney on the west side of the house. As most old chimneys do, these curve inward toward the roof. This is caused by a swelling of the mortar on the outer surface which absorbs more moisture from the elements than the more protected roofside surface, gradually forcing the chimney to curve inward. On the east side of the house, the two chimneys have been rebuilt with new brick from the roofline up, while the north end and west side chimneys are still completely original.

A smaller sixth chimney has been added, which emerges through the center of the roof deck. Built of newer brick, it stems from a huge solid brick chimney-like structure running up through the center of the attic room. No evidence can be found of any corresponding brick structure on the levels below the attic room. So, a mystery remains to be uncovered as to the purpose of the sixth chimney.

INTERIOR

The interior of Quietdale also demonstrates William Robinson's attention to detail, elegance and comfort. It was, in fact, a "house divided." But it was not divided in the traditional way in which many early southern houses separated the girls from the boys of the family. These traditionally divided houses had at least two stairways: the main staircase, often located in the center hall, led up to one side of the house; a second staircase, frequently placed in the dining room, gave access to the other side of the house. Upstairs there were no doors between the two sides, thus insuring that propriety would be maintained, especially when overnight guests were present. As far as has been determined, the Robinson house seemed to be divided into family quarters on the west side and a more formal area for entertaining on the east side.

The reception hall gave access to the two separate sides of the house through its



four interior doors, all adorned with silver doorknobs on the hall side. Silver also were both doorknobs on the entrance door so there would be no contrast when the door was opened and closed. On the hall's west side, a door opened into the family parlor which was slightly smaller than the enormous double parlors beyond the corresponding door on the east wall of the hall. These grand parlors opened into each other by means of a ten-foot-wide doorway with sliding pocket doors. At the rear of the reception hall were two doors, each leading to a separate stairhall.

Dividing the twin stairhalls was a wall from the floor of the first story to the ceiling of the second story. On either side of this wall, the staircases were placed side

by side, each rising toward the far end of the room, then curving sharply to join a small landing to the upper stairs which rose in the reverse direction on the opposite wall. These two curving stairways led to upper halls which gave access to the separate sides of the house.

The second floor guest section, reached by a staircase wider and fancier than its family-side counterpart, contained two huge rooms identical in size to the double parlors below them. Originally, these two rooms also had a ten-foot-wide doorway between them which was later

filled in to the width of a single door. The upper guest hall had a doorway opening into the rear chamber and another doorway leading to a small passage. This passage gave access to the front chamber and also to a small dressing room.

It is not known for what purpose William Robinson intended these large rooms to be used. Perhaps they were merely to be guest bedrooms, the use indicated by the 1858 "Appraisement of Personal and Real Property." Or perhaps with the wide doorway creating an area forty feet long, Robinson intended these rooms to be used as a ballroom. The passageway and dressing room would have been convenient for the ladies to freshen their appearance. And the long upper porch, reached by an exterior door in the rear chamber, would have been a perfect spot for the gentlemen to go to smoke their pipes and cigars or to catch a cool breeze.

Gone now are the two staircases and their separating wall. When one big stairhall was created from the two rooms, the fancier guest staircase was moved to the west wall of the larger first floor room, and the two small landings were connected. This long landing now leads to the east wall where the upper portion of the stairs remains in its original position, giving access to a large second floor stairhall.

The relocation of the staircase made it necessary to move a doorway, and possibly two doorways, on the west wall of the first floor hall. Stairs to the basement were placed under the repositioned staircase.

These alterations were the only structural changes made inside the house. All other rooms remain exactly the same as when constructed, although some of the intended purposes have changed with the installation of bathrooms and kitchen.

Floors are made of five-inch and six-inch pine boards laid directly on the joists without a subfloor. The extremely thick (one and one-quarter inch) floorboards have tongue-and-groove joints and are nailed to the joists with the square cut nails. Original floor coverings listed in the "Appraisement" inventory include rugs, carpets, common carpets, shuck carpeting, and straw matting.

depending on whether the room was intended to be a bedroom or the family dining room.

Woodwork throughout the house is Greek Revival in style and seems to have different patterns in different rooms. In reality, only the baseboards have varying contours in nearly every room. Typically Greek Revival are the broad baseboards, fourteen inches high on the first floor and ten inches on the second floor.

The massive door and window frames, nine inches wide, with their bull's-eye corner blocks, are also characteristic of Greek Revival woodwork. These architraves are all skillfully fluted or carved in five basic patterns used all through the house. The illusion of many different patterns is due to the variations applied to the basic designs.

Transoms are used over thirty-two doors, leaving only a few without them.

The walls on the first floor are sixteen feet high, while upstairs the ceiling height is twelve feet. The walls of the reception hall and double parlors are graced with wide cove moldings, cornices and ceiling moldings. The ceilings of these rooms are also ornamented with exquisite plaster medallions—identical dahlia designs centered in the two parlor ceilings, and a star-shaped floral pattern in the hall.

On the west side of the house, the present dining room has wooden cornices decorated with small dentils. A flat wooden ceiling molding and a chair rail are also used.

The present kitchen too is encircled by a very plain chair rail, but its lack of detail does not conform to the other woodwork in the room. No ceiling moldings or cornices are used here either. However this room does contain an original built-in press for linen or china,

An unusual feature of all these transoms is the absence of muntins between the panes of glass. The nearly square transom lights were placed directly together to give an impression of one long pane of glass. Probably this was done because larger panes were not available in the area at the time. For these transoms to be opened, the wood-framed glass panels have to be removed entirely because they are held in place with only two wing-nuts per panel.

Transoms came into popular usage around the mid-1800s when people were becoming aware of the healthful benefits of proper room ventilation. And in the hot, humid southern summers, high ceilings and open transoms greatly aided the circulation of air through the house, thus creating a cooling effect.

The doors, made of poplar, clearly show the pegged mortise and tenon construction which was used extensively through the house. Downstairs, the doors have four raised panels, while the upstairs doors are more typically Greek Revival having two vertical raised panels. The double front doors retain their original graining on the inside, though somewhat scarred near the heavy rimlock and at the bottom rail from nearly 130 years of use. (Graining, almost a lost art today, is the process of lightly brushing on paint to resemble a pleasing wood grain, usually employed on less expensive or unattractive woods.) Undoubtedly, all the hall doors were grained originally. But at some time past, the other four doors were refinished in their natural wood tones.

Raised paneling is also used under the windows of the first floor. Second story windows lack true panels, but the effect is achieved by the downward extension of the architraves to the baseboards.

Original rimlocks are still used to latch nearly every door in the house, and almost all are in working order. The doorknobs are white porcelain except for the silver knobs in the reception hall. The silver doorknobs on the front door have long since been replaced with white porcelain also.

An interesting feature is the use of doorstops which are made of one inch by two inch pine blocks. These stops are nailed to the floor next to the baseboards at a distance equal to the width of each door, effectively preventing the walls from being banged by flying doorknobs.

Intricately carved marble mantelpieces enhance the elegance of the double parlors. Referred to in the "Appraisement" as "1 pr. parlor Glasses & Marble Slabs," the two mantels and two mirrors were valued together as one item at $75. The over-mantel mirrors were not part of the mantelpieces but were listed with them as a matter of convenience. The identical mantels have arched openings and narrow mantelshelves. A large carved scroll connects each mantelshelf with the top center of the arch below.

The eight wooden mantels in the house are all classical Greek Revival designs. Each mantelpiece has sturdy carved pilasters supporting a wide unadorned frieze which is topped by a rather heavy molding and narrow mantelshelf.

The repositioned staircase with its extended landing spanning the width of the room certainly presents a graceful view. The upper part of the staircase, still in its original position, is gently curved at the ninety degree angle where it joins the landing and the second floor. Unfortunately, the junction of the landing and lower staircase was not as skillfully constructed as the original. The four-foot-wide stairs are trimmed with very plain end-scrolls which are continued across the length of the landing. The balusters, slender and square in shape, contrast with the heavier newel post of turned wood. The handrail is slightly rounded and terminates in a circular pad.

Quietdale's system of servant bells must have been a luxury indeed. Eight bells, each with a different tone, were located on the back porch where they could be easily heard in the slave quarters. The bells were connected to hidden wires

leading to bell-pulls in various rooms. The bell-pulls actually were little round button-like devices, each with a small handle which could be turned one hundred-eighty degrees. This rotation pulled the wires that rang the bells, and the servants would know from the tone of the bell which room needed service.

Today only four bell-pulls remain in place—one each in the double parlors by the sliding doors and one each in the family parlor and dining room by the fireplaces. No doubt the other four were located upstairs. The bells have long since been removed from the back porch.

KITCHEN-SLAVE QUARTERS

The west facade of the slave quarters is especially charming in springtime when white dogwoods bloom in front of the long two-tier porch. On each level the double porch originally had three entry doors alternating with three windows, but the first floor facade was changed during the alterations made in the 1920s.

One room wide and three rooms long, the structure rests upon a brick foundation with air vents similar to, but smaller than, the foundation vents in the house. A root cellar, located under the north and center rooms, exposes the details of the post and beam timber frame construction used in both buildings.

Exterior walls are covered by the same beaded weatherboarding as the main house, and the door and window frames are very narrow, only two inches wide. The exterior four-panel doors, with raised panels outside and recessed panels inside, have transoms containing four lights separated by narrow muntins. The windows, with ten-inch-wide panes, have nine lights in the upper sash and six in the lower sash. Running the length of the structure, the double porch has a plastered ceiling on the upper level. The first story ceiling consists of the bare girts and joists upon which the upper floorboards rest. Box cornices trim the gabled roof which projects over the porch. No hint of the original roofing material has been discovered yet.

Plastered walls and ceilings add a

touch of refinement not commonly found in slave quarters. Each room is about fifteen feet square and has untrimmed, flat woodwork. The baseboards and door and window frames are six inches wide, with door and window frames having flat corner blocks. In spite of later alterations, there is evidence—from door frame heights and the use of original doors—that the rooms were interconnected. Each room also had an entry to the porch and a minimum of three windows. One chimney served four fireplaces, but only the two on the second floor remain. One has been drastically remodelled, but the other appears to be original with a narrow mantelshelf supported by three symmetrically placed corbels. The kitchen undoubtedly was located in the south room downstairs, nearest the house, though no trace of the fireplace remains.

GARDENS AND OUTBUILDINGS

Towering oaks still spread their branches above ancient dogwoods, huge holly bushes, boxwoods, and other ornamental shrubbery. Originally a wide walkway, bordered by boxwoods, led from the front porch across the lawn to a picket fence by a long circular driveway. Planted throughout the spacious lawns were tulips, jonquils, irises, peonies, and roses. Gardens for vegetables and cut flowers were located to the rear of the house on the west side, and an orchard provided fruit for the family.

At the rear of the gardens was an icehouse, and a large smokehouse stood in back of the slave quarters. A later greenhouse was constructed on the east side of the quarters, but only the foundation remains. Parts of the icehouse foundation also remain, but no traces are left of the smokehouse.

Replacing an original wellhouse is one built during the early part of this century, east of the slave quarters. Located far to the rear of the gardens and lawns is an old barn and a later equipment shed.

The picket fence and original circular driveway are long gone, the driveway having been straightened and turned into a public road. From this road, a shorter driveway, bordered with jonquils, circles directly up to the front porch. Although Quietdale is now located well within the city limits, the serenity of a country plantation still prevails when one enters the spacious grounds. ★

HABITAT

"No poem for the groundhog yet,"
I told the Muse—
who obligingly provided the words.

Tell them (she said) how its brown fur
one day appeared in the yard—
how at that distance (city girl)
you couldn't tell whether it was beaver
or mole—how its marmot stance,
front paws quizzical, back ones planted,
its curved tail,
    charmed:

tell how Cat
crouched at it one day
behind the hackberry, its rodent poise
eyeing the unknown beast—

say then how you called Cat in
and it wombled off
at its trundling gait

back under the tool house.
Tell them (she said)
how you wonder if there are young

how you would keep her (she must not
be a him) if it weren't for Cat,
how a colony of them, Ruth says,
live in the hollow of Bob Wallace Road
near Research Park, how even here
in the outlandish suburb
next to a concrete drainage ditch
inside a fenced lawn

wild things thrive.
(We have rabbits too.)

by Susan Luther

THE McCARTNEY-BONE-WILBOURN HOUSE

HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

by Laura Mae Wilbourn

On a rise midway between Berry Hollow and Sharpes Cove in Hurricane Valley stands the two-story earth tone brick house James McCartney built for his new bride Martha Harvie Jordan in 1826. The simple gable, the general lines and the proportions of the severely plain exterior give the house the unmistakable stamp of the Federal period.

The house rises above the ground on three courses of hand hewn limestone rocks. The fenestration is thoughtfully arranged: the upper story windows are proportionally smaller than those of the first story and both groups are in perfect symmetry. The original door of two vertical panels has been removed, but its replacement is still framed by reeded pilasters and topped by a fanlight. The door sill is of limestone; the brick work is of Flemish bond laid up in large size brick. The eave ornaments consist of dentils, classical moldings, and a decorative wood carving of circles and straight lines. The gable ends are solid brick with an exterior chimney centered in each one.

The main house, which contains two rooms downstairs and two rooms upstairs

CIVIL WAR REMINISCENCES

by Lillian Bone Paul

A recent editorial in the "Progressive Farmer," suggesting that as the old Confederates are dying off so rapidly we should make an effort to catch and record for the benefit of future generations their reminiscences of Civil War times, both before and during those difficult years, has determined me to write down all the incidents that I can remember out of the many that I have heard from my father and grandparents. These memories are very fragmentary, and naturally incomplete, but I shall make the attempt anyway.

My grandmother's home was a prosperous planter's home, situated about two and a half miles from the village of Maysville, and was, of course, subjected to all the pillagers and plunderers that made up the federal forces camped below Maysville almost all the years of the war. They carried off everything in the way of food and forage and livestock and wantonly destroyed what they could not use. My grandmother appealed to the provost marshal for protection as neither she nor her husband were belligerents. He gave her a guard, who spent his days at the

each twenty feet square, also reflects the Federal period in its interior. On the first floor the chair rail is an extension of the window sill with solid wood paneling beneath while upstairs the walls are plastered above and below the chair rail. All mantels, mounted with wooden pegs, are narrow and trimmed with classical moldings. The living room mantel is the most elaborate having reeded trim and fluted pilasters. The decorative scroll trim on the side of the stairway is hand done.

As was the custom, the kitchen was a one-story brick structure separate from the rest of the house. This was rebuilt in 1873 to be nearer the house. Today it is joined to the house.

The walls of the one-room basement are lined with the same size limestone rocks as the foundation. In 1976 when the earthen floor was sealed, three small cannon balls were found here.

As was typical of this period in Madison County and its surrounding area, materials for the house, for the most part, were grown or manufactured right on the plantation. All the huge timbers and framing members were cut from forests on the property. The wide heart of pine flooring, the walnut door sills, the poplar steps and the poplar balustrade were formed from timber on the place. The oversized bricks were baked on the site from clay that was dug from fields east of the house.

James McCartney (1783—1831) of Irish descent was a prominent man whose grandfather had come to America as an ordained Episcopal minister. McCartney arrived in Madison County around 1810 and received appointments in both the Mississippi and Alabama territory governments of Madison County. He was an original trustee of the Greene Academy of Huntsville established in 1812. Judge Taylor in **Later History of Madison County** writes of McCartney: "Coming here about 1810, without capital, he

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house, but was not there nights. Why, I don't know, unless the soldiers were all kept in camp at night, and thus left the citizens in peace.

One morning early, before sunup, some of the servants called Grandmother to come, that the Yankees were after her pigs—as I remember, there were but two on the place or maybe just one. By the time she had reached the lot they had killed one pig; there were two men and they were preparing to leave with it. She ordered them to drop it (she was not afraid of anything or anybody), but they refused to obey and only laughed at her.

She ran to the front door to see if her guard was anywhere in sight, it being about time for his arrival. She could see the road for some distance off, as it led around the mountain. Fortunately she spied him coming and began to wave something white to attract his attention. When he saw this, he put spurs to his horse and galloped the rest of the way, arriving at the "big gate" just as the Yankee robbers were going out with their kill. I think they must have stopped to dress it, though I do not remember that part of the story. The guard ordered them to put it down and inquired what they meant by such actions. They said they wanted fresh meat. I suppose he arrested them, but don't know, but anyway they were sent off without their meat, and the federal apologized to Grandma for not being on hand to prevent the slaughter.

Much of the time Grandma was here alone, that is, without a man to take her part against the raiders. Grandfather would be off preaching, and part of the time taught a little day school up at the Negro quarters, some distance from the house. But, as I said, she was afraid of no man, much less the rascally Yankees whom she held in the greatest abhorrence.

Another incident that she used to relate, as we children would gather around her and beg for stories, was that

distanced all competitors, and had his years been prolonged, he would doubtless have been one of the wealthiest men in the state."

His background is reflected in the honesty he sought in the building of his house: no false facades, no shams, no veneered surfaces; instead he insisted on an adherence to the austere discipline of line, form, and order to produce a profound goodness and permanence of construction.

Mrs. McCartney was one of those rare beings allowed to live parallel with the nineteenth century, having appeared at the dawn and lingered (with every faculty alert) late into the evening of an era in which Southerners grappled with the opening of new territory, the War between the States, the dismal economic lifestyle the war brought, and the complexities of the age's magic progress. Martha Harvie Jordan, "a lady of strong natural mind and attractive personal features," was the pervading spirit of this house. She was a zealous member of the Cumberland Presbyterian Church and often rode horseback to Huntsville to attend church even in bad weather. Her first two sons died of tuberculosis and her child by her second husband died by accident. She was married the third time to the Reverend Mathew H. Bone, a prominent Presbyterian minister, in 1842. One writer wrote: "M. H. Bone was a giant in the pulpit in his day. He would have been a giant in any profession and in any age." He lived until 1881 and Martha until 1885.

The living that took place in the house is evidenced by the following stories written by Lillian Bone Paul. Lillian was the daughter of Mathew's son and Martha's niece. ★

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of the Yankee and the setting hen. One day she heard a great squawking out in the hen house, and going to investigate, found a Yankee soldier in the house with the one setting hen under his arm; I think she said it was the only hen on the place, they having stolen all the rest. At any rate, she asked him to put that hen back on the nest. He said, "No, I need that hen to make soup for a sick man." She told him the hen was not fit to eat as she had been sitting till she was almost ready to hatch, but still he would not give it up. Then Grandma said she stepped inside the door, the hen nest full of eggs being closer to her than to the soldier who was in the back, and said to him, "Well, if you will have the hen, you must take the eggs too!" picking them up as she spoke. She began to pelt him with them and, her aim being good, splashed him well with the spoiled eggs, some of which were rotten, and the scent terrible. He dropped the hen and left that house as quickly as he could possibly go and, I doubt not, never returned. He might have offered her some bodily indignity for her temerity, but his only thought seemed to be to get away from there.

The Apple Story. To begin as far back as I can, Frank Gurley's troop of cavalry had made a dash into northern Alabama. It was a kind of independent organization, I think, though not bushwhackers. Up around Plevna they came in contact with a band of Yankees very unexpectedly and of course had a skirmish with them. It seems there was an ambulance in this party carrying a federal general, Gen. McCook, who was wounded or sick, and he got killed in the melee. Father told me all this, on the very spot where it happened, on the road that leads into Tennessee above New Market. The federals at Maysville then, in revenge for their general's death, turned loose their soldiers to raid all over the country, taking everything they could or destroying

what they couldn't use. [Note by Kathleen P. Jones: I think McCook was in a wagon and the Confederates did not know it was conveying an incapacitated man. Gurley was accused of the shooting, but it has been said it was a boy in his troop, but neither ever told. Also, I think Gurley's company was a part of Forrest's group—it was part of the time I know. After McCook's death, the Yankees in his party burned a number of houses, homes of people with no part whatever in the tragedy, in vengence.] A bunch of them came here to my grandmother's, and finding all the doors locked and barred, demanded entrance. The big back door at that time opened directly on the yard and was fastened by an iron bar that rested on supports inside. Grandpa was the only man here and did not wish to let them in the house. They called for apples, saying they knew there were plenty of them here with such a big orchard. I do not know the time of year, spring I suppose; he told them there were no apples. They didn't believe him and said they would break in the door if he didn't open it and let them look for themselves. He still refused, so they proceeded to break the door and had one lower panel kicked in when one of their officers arrived on the scene. I don't know where he had been all the time. He stopped the breakage and told them to wait downstairs, and he would accompany Grandpa upstairs to the "little room" where the apples had been stored and see if any were there. Of course the door had been unbarred for the officer. So, Grandpa said they came on upstairs together, and he showed the officer there were no apples except a large hamper full of rotten ones. The officer called this out to his men, but Grandpa was so angry with them, he said he picked up the heavy basket of rotten apples and heaved them over the banisters, right down on top of the heads of the men below, not caring who was hit.

That settled the apple question, but they weren't satisfied and wanted apple

brandy, which they believed was on the place. Assured there was none, they opened the cellar door and saw a barrel down there, sitting up on some blocks, and demanded to know what that was. They were told it was sorghum, so they wanted to know what **that** was? So Mr. Officer said he'd go down and taste it and see, which he proceeded to do. Then he said, "Boys, you don't want that—it's no good." Bear in mind they had already taken everything they could: eatables, livestock, poultry, and all valuables they could lay hands on. Grandmother owned a little sterling silver, spoons and a soup ladle. Old Uncle Harry, her coachman, took this silver off to a field, and she did not know where, and buried it to hide it from them. Then, after the war he faithfully brought it back. If he hadn't saved it, they'd have gotten it; they did loot homes all over the South.

Another story which I cannot tell in detail has to do with an encounter Grandmother had with two soldiers, who came and proceeded to take two mules out of the plow, right down in front of the house. She marched right down there—not being afraid of the devil himself—and took issue with them. I have forgotten whether she won that battle, but think not, and there is no one to ask now. Those Yankees did not care how destitute a condition they left the citizens in, but took pleasure in depriving them. I seem to remember, however, that in this case Grandmother appealed to the provost marshal and got her stock back, but I may be mistaken.

When Lincoln issued his proclamation setting all the slaves free, the Negroes were all highly elated and jumped at the chance to leave their former masters and mistresses. On this place they all, except faithful Uncle Harry, dropped everything and "Went to the Yankees" as they phrased it. In their ignorance, they thought life henceforth was to be one grand picnic with never any more work to do. Perhaps the federal forces were overwhelmed by the influx of so many Negroes, I don't know, but at any rate, they began to put their wards to work, and it did not take long to show the darkies that their new masters would be far more exacting and harder to please

than the indulgent ones they had left. After a day or two, they came slipping back to their cabins under the cover of night and tried to pretend they had never been away. One man, John, a young and lusty fellow, feared the Yankees would come for him and take him back to camp to work for them and maybe send him far from home. So, to prevent going, he set his bare foot on hot coals of fire and burnt it so badly he could not walk. Of course Grandmother heard of it and had to supply remedies for the burn. He became disillusioned quickly in that federal camp. Before the end of a week, every ex-slave had returned home and stayed there. I mean the Bone Negroes; of course, a lot of them in the South did follow the Yankees. [Note by KPJ: I suppose this is the "Uncle" John I remember so well from my childhood. He and "Aunt" Viney owned a little farm on the edge of the mountain to the west of the Bone place.] ★

Humorous Huntsville Happenings

by Patricia H. Ryan

"The Good Old Days"—the mere mention of the phrase is guaranteed to stir the true southern heart with longing for the storied plantation past. Iconoclastic as it may seem, the halcyon past, in reality, wasn't so hot, especially for Southerners after "Our Late Unpleasantness" of 1861. Granted life was pretty terrific for the monied few, but for the vast majority, times were exceedingly grim, especially when assessed against modern culture. In reading Huntsville post-bellum newspapers, one is struck by a number of oddities that on the surface are quite amusing. A second glance provides insight into a society just industrializing, a time when editors ran the gamut from childlike simplicity to bitter invectives to proselytize their readers. This varied sampling has been culled from late nineteenth century and early twentieth century newspapers with the hope it will entertain and perhaps inform. Consider then the following fascinating facts.

On numerous occasions local editors expressed concern about livestock freely roaming about the town. In 1879 J. Withers Clay of the **Huntsville Weekly Democrat** warned:

The hogs have begun their periodic depredations—rooting up sidewalks, undermining fences, breaking into enclosures, and injuring yards and gardens. Ought not our City Fathers to pass some ordinance for protection against the trespasses of hogs and cattle—say to force owners of stock, either to keep them up, or to put rings in their hogs' noses (as was once required here by town ordinance) and to put yokes or some other contrivance on their horned

> cattle of vicious propensities, to prevent them from opening gates and breaking through fences? A great many persons (like ourself) have experienced serious loss, every year, from stock trespasses. [January 29, 1879]

By the turn of the century the problem was somewhat remedied with the establishment of a city cow pound:

> The city is enjoying a fat income from persons who allow their horses, cows, etc. to run on the public thoroughfares. If any of the city ordinances are being enforced, the one prohibiting stock to run on the streets is one of them. The 'pound' was headquarters for about fifteen cows, four horses, and five shoats yesterday. The city averages an income of about $25 per week from the 'pound' depot. [**Weekly Tribune,** July 25, 1899]

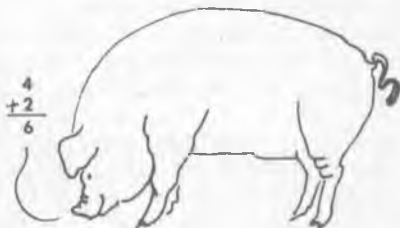
While one might conclude that penning up loose animals was indeed a sound idea, the city ordinance requiring such was not uniformly popular. In 1907 the **Evening Banner** told of the "outcry" at the Dallas Mill village against the enforcement of the ordinance forbidding cows to wander at will. Rumors arose of testing the law in court, but it appeared that the talk came to naught.

The animal problem persisted as late as 1918, when the city took firm steps to eradicate the health menace:

> Hogs within the city limits must go! So says the city council at their recent meeting. They decline to repeal the original ordinance and Mayor T. T. Terry has instructed the police and Dr. Carl Grote, the health officer, to see that all hogs now within the city limits be removed at once. It makes no difference where kept, at livery stables or any other place. The health of the city in the future demands it, to say nothing of city officials. [**Huntsville Weekly Democrat,** March 6, 1918]

Other persons approached the hog problem with considerable imagination. Take the clever Professor Gessley for example:

> Professor Gessley, the man with the wonderful hog [Romeo], announces to the good people of Huntsville that he will be in the city in a short time with his educated porker—a swine that will enumerate, read writing, subtract, multiply and divide—in short, a lightning calculator. Will read the Declaration of Independence and will tell the time of day by a watch. This Professor of Hogology is a wonderful individual himself, having been born without arms. Of course he will be patronized. [**Huntsville Independent,** March 23, 1876]



The wanderlust of hogs and cows was not the only problem to contend with. Consider the din created by 9,000 chickens, geese, ducks, and turkeys which were housed in the Memphis and Charleston depot coops prior to shipping. And the following blurb cautions one to bee careful when strolling along the north side of Randolph Avenue:

> Two hives of bees that have made their home in the Cabiness residence during years past were moved yesterday by P. J. Thullen, the bee man. He found in one place a colony that

> had been under the floor two years and sixty pounds of honey was found. In another part of the house over the ceiling was a colony of bees that had been there over fifty years. The industrious little insects had grown up with the children of the place and had never given any trouble. Both colonies have been moved out to more convenient places. [**Weekly Mercury**, August 20, 1913]

Scientific (and unscientific) experimentation upon the animal population occurred during the Victorian era. In 1890 William Kemmler died in the electric chair in Auburn, New York. The local newspapers carried a number of articles about this new humane form of execution and apparently stirred the curiosity of one John P. Spence, who

> tried an experiment of death by electricity upon a large gopher yesterday at the telephone office. The trial was successful, the gopher dying instantaneously as the application was made. [**Huntsville Daily Mercury**, August 13, 1890]

Today the Orwellian claim of "government interference" is frequently voiced, and our ancestors faced much the same. In 1899 the city council passed ordinances to

> make it unlawful for any female to enter any saloon, pool, or billiard room. Also to prevent lewd women from riding bicycles or on horseback within three blocks of the public square. [**Huntsville Weekly Mercury**, August 23, 1899]

The "lewd women" were apparently more of a threat to themselves than to society at large, for in one day in 1899 three attempted suicide—Mollie Teal by shooting herself, Gladys by eating match heads, and Sady O'Grady by drinking laudanum. Charles Lane of the **Weekly Tribune** glumly surmised that "all of the unfortunate women may recover."

To impress the citizens with the necessity of obeying laws, Lane issued the following warning:

> The Mayor gave instructions to the police this morning to arrest everyone who is found riding bicycles on the sidewalks, and the fine for the first offense will be one dollar and for the second it will be enough to make the purse of the cyclist look like an elephant stepped on it. [**Weekly Tribune**, May 22, 1899]

No ordinance, however, could protect the city's fair ladies from this 1895 indelicacy:

> The residents of Holmes Street saw the first bloomer girl that has appeared on the streets of this city Thursday. She was riding a bicycle and wore the regular bloomer costume with cap and leggings. To their credit we state that she was not a Huntsville girl, but seemed to be some tourist, as she was accompanied by a man and appeared from the direction of the Dallas Mills.
>
> As each lady would see the woman pass, she would gasp, display a look of amazement and then run to the gate and watch the spectacle until it disappeared in the dim distance. [**Huntsville Weekly Mercury**, September 25, 1895]

Equally eye-opening was the case of Gustave De Agnero, who in 1898 wished to purchase the Huntsville Hotel, an antebellum structure on the site now occupied by the First National Bank on Jefferson

Street. De Agnero, a member of the hospital corps of the 69th New York regiment, believed that the hotel was quite valuable and cabled his father the following:

> Please deposit money. He is about to sell the Huntsville Hotel. It will cost about $5,000,000,000, but is well worth the money, so rush it quick. [**Weekly Mercury**, September 21, 1898]

The unfortunate De Agnero was hastily committed to the government hospital for the insane in Washington.

The following passage directs its satire at a city street crew, whose work was apparently unsatisfactory to the editor of the **Weekly Mercury**:

> The grass is about to run over the graders on Echols Street. We suggest to the city authorities that this quartette of so-called laborers be reinforced, and that this work be pressed before the grass season really opens up. If, in a mild week in January, the growth of grass can create a doubt as to where the hands have been working, by the middle of May they would be out of sight in fifteen minutes. As we don't desire to see any of the city's valuable street hands drowned in a heavy spring dew, we suggest that they be equipped with a fog whistle or dew bell, so that in [the] event they get in danger they can ring up Superintendent Blake or the Chief of Police. [February 1, 1893]

This final excerpt was penned by the ever-trenchant "Crocus," the "facetious correspondent" of the **Panola Record**, and reprinted in the **Huntsville Advocate**. The sarcasm was directed toward railroad travel in 1866, a time when the southern rail network was incomplete and war-ravaged.

> We came by the way of the Orange, Lemon and Alexandria Railroad, and would say to persons who are tired of life, and in a hurry to get through, try this line. You leave Washington in the evening, and, as a general thing, arrive in Heaven or Richmond the next day. Each train is provided with a surgeon, undertaker, amputating table, and other 'luxurities,' besides this it has some of the finest coffins I ever expect to see. Hospitals are established along the entire route and in case of fatal accident the bodies of strangers are immediately embalmed. The arrangements are so sure on this road, that many persons have their limbs taken off and embalmed before starting, to avoid delay while on the cars. [August 22, 1866]

These frivolities obviously do not depict any sort of serious portrayal of Huntsville life. That would require countless additional excerpts detailing low or nonexistent health standards, rancid food, foul water, rampant disease, incompetent physicians, and inhumane medical practices to only scratch the surface. H. A. L. Fisher once noted that history is "one damn thing after another." True, and sometimes it's even one silly thing after another. ★

THE CALHOUN HOUSE

by Linda Bayer

"The debris from the old Calhoun building is being rapidly carted off, and the remains of the grand old mansion will soon be a thing of the past."

So wrote the Huntsville **Democrat** in May of 1911 as one of the town's largest and most fascinating antebellum houses was being demolished. Today only bits and pieces of the building's history survive to remind us of the days when it served variously as a magnificent private home, a military hospital, a repository for European art, a U. S. Circuit Court, a dancing school, a tenement house, and a private academy. Tracing the activities and persons associated with the Calhoun

house through the documents still available reveals details of early construction practices and recalls aspects of Huntsville's history that have mostly faded from memory.

A late photograph of the Calhoun house, dating from the 1890s, depicts a massive brick structure of seven bays and three stories. Severe and imposing on the exterior, the house was undoubtedly extremely elegant on the interior. It fronted on Eustis Street, and its terraced and landscaped grounds included the entire block bounded by Eustis, Greene, Randolph, and Lincoln streets. A five-foot tall brick wall capped with stone encircled the property creating a private, secure world for the occupants.

The man who began construction of this house, William Smith, probably planned it to be his retirement home, but he died before its completion, and his heirs only inhabited it sporadically, although it is their name that has always been attached to it.

William Smith was a native of South Carolina who began his career in that state as a planter and a lawyer, having been admitted to the bar in 1784. He had an illustrious political life, serving first as a member and president of the state Senate and then as a judge of the South Carolina Circuit Court for eight years before being elected to the U. S. Senate where he served for six years. He next represented his district in the state House of Representatives before returning to the U. S. Senate for another term. In 1829 he received Georgia's seven electoral votes for vice-president and concluded his political service to South Carolina with yet another session in the state Senate after which, at the age of 70, he moved briefly to Louisiana where he owned four plantations. The following year, 1833, Smith made Huntsville his permanent residence and began construction of the Calhoun house.

His departure from South Carolina at such a late point in his life is frequently attributed to his disappointment at the outcome of the nullification debate in that state, an issue which he had actively opposed. However, he had begun purchasing property in both Alabama and Louisiana in the early 1820s and, in fact, had spent summers in Huntsville as early as 1825, so he may have intended to eventually settle here even before political events made continued residence in his native state untenable.

In 1823 Smith made his first acquisition of Huntsville city property when he bought a lot at the northwest corner of Eustis and Greene streets. The following year he began assembling acreage immediately northeast of the town, in what is now East Huntsville Addition, with the purchase of 640 acres for $18,000 cash. Additional purchases in 1828 and 1831 increased this holding to almost one thousand acres, and this land became his Huntsville plantation which he named Spring Grove. Each year after his initial purchase, Smith bought another parcel of Huntsville land so that by 1832 he owned all of the block where the Calhoun house would stand as well as most of the block that fronts on East Side Square.

In 1825 while still serving in the South Carolina House, Smith contracted with Huntsville builder George Steele to erect a brick spring house on his plantation for which he paid Steele $276 on completion of the work. Although George Steele is today judged to be Huntsville's premier antebellum architect and builder, his work for Smith, which must have constituted one of his earliest jobs, is certainly revealing. In the Circuit Court case of George Steele vs. William Smith, the latter stated that a heavy rain in the summer of 1826 washed away a considerable portion of the spring house. Smith further argued that Steele's work did not meet the terms of his contract which called for the work to be executed in a workmanlike manner, and he went on to point out that after Steele repaired the damage, the next heavy rain again did considerable injury. Steele was contacted to make additional repairs at no charge as

Smith felt him obliged to do by the terms of his contract. However Steele then demanded $15 payment which Smith refused to pay; the case was finally settled with Smith paying $15 and Steele paying court costs.

Aside from illuminating a little known aspect of Steele's early career, this case also demonstrates his poor business judgment for in the future Smith gave all his extensive building contracts to Steele's major competitor—the firm of Thomas and William Brandon. The first of these contracts that has been located was dated August 1829 and engaged the Brandons to execute "a large job of brick work" for William Smith. Unfortunately the site of this structure is unspecified so only an educated guess can be made as to what and where it was. Based on Smith's land holdings at the date of the contract, the building could have been for either his plantation or for the block fronting East Side Square. However one item in the contract seems to favor the site on the public square since it specifies that Smith would receive $400 credit "for all the old bricks and stone that have been taken down or are yet to take down on the lot of said Smith on which said buildings will stand." Smith had purchased the Huntsville Inn, a three-story brick structure operated as a tavern, four years earlier, and this probably was the structure being dismantled because in a deed of the following year, Smith purchased a piece of land lying between the house of the grantors and "the house lately built by the said William Smith on the site of the late Huntsville Inn."

Regardless of where the building was, the contract stipulated that the Brandons would execute the work in a "workmanlike manner for eight dollars per thousand for all brick work...[and] no bricks are to be laid within five feet of the foundation that will not resist the influence of water or frost without dissolving." The latter condition, which was not standard in contracts of the period, possibly reflects Smith's determination not to repeat his experience with Steele. The Brandon's rate was also four dollars per thousand less than that charged by Steele, although this may have been merely a discount given for a large project. The division of labor, common at this period, between the brick masons and the carpenters is made clear by the further stipulation that the "Brandons shall not be unreasonably detained in the progress of the brick work on account of the woodwork."

Smith apparently was pleased by the Brandon's work for in 1833 he again contracted with them "to build certain brick and stone work on his lot in Huntsville...said work to be done under the immediate and special direction and control of the said William Smith." Again the contract fails to identify the location of the work, but this contract is most certainly for the construction of the Calhoun house on Eustis Street. Smith had moved to Huntsville permanently in 1833 and would have needed a home in town—one suitable to his position as "the most distinguished emigrant to our county" during the 1830s, as Judge Thomas Taylor later would describe him. The attention to detail and quality of construction spelled out in this contract further confirm that Smith was building his own house. For example, the Brandons required "such time in which to perform said labor as will give the walls sufficient time to dry, in order that the work may be more substantial and the walls less liable to bend or crack," and they further agreed that "the outer walls of the main building are to show stock or front brick all round on the outside if said Smith requires it."

A bill from the Brandons against the estate of William Smith states that they laid over one million bricks at a cost of $6,000. This was a tremendous number of bricks, but the most interesting aspect is that a quarter of them were used bricks that had been obtained by dismantling another structure. The recycling of brick, and probably other materials, was fairly

common in the early nineteenth century in Huntsville because the soft lime-sand mortars then in use did not contain any cement which allowed the mortar to be easily removed.

The structure erected by the Brandons consisted of a three-story rectangular block facing Eustis Street with seven windows across the facade and a centered entrance. The side walls were two bays deep, and the gabled roof featured eave returns that spanned each end of the house creating the appearance of a pediment. Two, two-story wings extended north from the rear of the main block to give the entire structure a U-shaped layout, while a porch ran along the rear walls and connected to two detached outbuildings, one situated at each end of the two ells. These separate structures were also of brick and each was two stories high. The Brandon's bill also discloses that the site chosen for the house was slightly elevated and that the contractors dug up and hauled off the "top of the hill where [the] house sits." Rough estimates indicate that the Calhoun house contained approximately 12,000 square feet which must have made it the largest private residence in Huntsville at that time.

A contract for the woodwork in the Calhoun house has not been located, but payments, totaling almost $5,000, made by the administrator of Smith's estate to Hugh N. Moore indicate that he was responsible for the majority of the carpentry work. Moore was the proprietor of both a flour mill and a planing and flooring mill, the latter which advertised to furnish "to order all description of Building Lumber for houses; Sash, Doors, Blinds, Floorings, etc." and was located at the northwest corner of Jefferson and Clinton streets. However, a bill is extant from James Neely, who is listed in the 1859-60 Huntsville directory as a pump manufacturer, for work performed from 1838 through 1840. It includes several charges for repairing pumps, but the majority of the items are for turned woodwork such as newel posts (38), columns (22), and room or rose blocks (150), which, based on their numbers, presumably are the corner blocks traditionally used at the top of door and window trim.

The last contract negotiated by Smith was with the plasterer William Gorman who "engaged to plaster the whole of the house...in the most complete workmanlike manner, no cracks whatever to appear, or patched over under any considerations." Smith agreed to furnish Gorman "with sand, lime and plaster now on hand, and more of these materials if necessary." Gorman further obligated himself to pay strict attention to the morals and sobriety of the four Negroes under his care, two of which were trained plasterers and the most valuable of Smith's Madison County slaves. For reasons unknown, Gorman did not fulfill this contract, which had been signed in the fall of 1839, because thirteen months later another plasterer was hired.

After six years of work Smith's house was still unfinished. Smith probably had been living at his Spring Grove plantation somewhere in East Huntsville so he was not without lodging, but the slow pace of construction remains unexplained. He may have spent time traveling to his other plantations near Montgomery and in Louisiana, and although past seventy when he moved to Huntsville, he continued to be active in politics. Smith was elected to the Alabama House of Representatives where he represented Madison County from 1836 to 1840, and he also served as a presidential elector on the ticket of Van Buren and Johnson in 1836. In 1829 while still in South Carolina, Smith had been named as an associate justice of the U. S. Supreme Court by President Andrew Jackson; he declined the appointment, and in 1836, President Jackson again offered him the position. Once again Smith refused. In May of 1840 Smith became seriously ill, and on June 26, he died at his plantation and was buried in the family cemetery. After the

Civil War his body was reinterred at Maple Hill Cemetery when the Spring Grove plantation was subdivided for housing.

Smith was survived by his wife, who died two years later, and a single granddaughter, Mary Smith Calhoun, wife of Meredith Calhoun of Pennsylvania. Smith's will, dated 1839, bequeathed $100,000 in cash to Mary and $50,000 to each of her two children. The remainder of his property was left to his wife. On the death of Mrs. Smith, Mary Calhoun inherited the entire estate which made her an exceedingly wealthy woman. A partial inventory of Smith's estate in Madison County alone lists forty-three slaves, numerous head of livestock, wine valued at $1,000, a library also valued at $1,000, and silver plate worth $4,000.

Meredith Calhoun became the administrator of William Smith's estate and also assumed responsibility for completing construction of Smith's house on Eustis, which has always carried the Calhoun name. (Meredith Calhoun signed his name Colhoun, but since years of tradition have converted it to Calhoun—as in Calhoun Street in Old Town which was named for him—the current usage will be retained.)

Just months after Smith's demise, Calhoun signed a contract with George A. Parker of Tuscaloosa to complete the plastering work on the Calhoun house. The agreement acknowledged that the first coat had been completed and that Parker was "to give the second and third coats, to be plain" at a cost of $700. The two parlors on the first floor were to be finished "with a highly ornamental cornice called the shell" which was to be further marked with the pattern of Calhoun's name; an ornamental centerpiece (ceiling medallion) was also stipulated for each parlor. The principal stairway, the entrance hall, and the gallery were also to be given a neat cornice and ornamental centerpiece as were two chambers on the third floor and one on the second. This designation of floors is confusing since the Calhoun house appears to have been built to a piano nobile plan, in which the main living floor was raised one level above the street. However according to this contract, the two formal parlors would have been in the basement.

At any rate, George Parker agreed to do this work for a total cost of $3,400 and to assure "that all the plain and ornamental work will be entirely free from all cracks and breaks and patches of any kind whatever;" the work was to proceed without interruption unless prevented by the weather. In the last item of the contract, Calhoun agreed to sell to Parker for $4,500 the two slaves belonging to Smith's estate who were accomplished plasterers and would execute much of the specified work. The result of this transaction was to create a barter arrangement in which very little money actually changed hands.

Other extant construction-related bills against the Smith estate reveal that the house had copper gutters and that the painting was probably completed in the early 1840s. A total of the bills available, which are by no means complete, indicates that the Calhoun house cost in excess of $20,000 to construct, this at a time when most local dwellings were built for well under five thousand dollars.

This extravagant life style, initiated by Smith and elaborated on by Calhoun, was to continue throughout Meredith and Mary Calhoun's lifetime, made possible by her inheritance. As early as 1842 the Calhouns were dividing their year between Huntsville in the summer and New Orleans in the winter, and by the 1850s, they had established the practice of spending most of their time in foreign travel, returning to Huntsville only occasionally to look after their varied financial interests. They were reputed to own a luxurious traveling coach in which they journeyed through Europe, indulging a taste for collecting European paintings and sculpture which were shipped to Huntsville and displayed in the gallery of the Calhoun house. The details of their lives during the decades preceding and en-

compassing the Civil War remain obscure, but once the war became a reality, they settled permanently in "Paris, Empire of France."

Mrs. Chadick, who kept a diary of life in Huntsville during the years of the Civil War, related that the Calhoun house and its furnishings were pressed into service for the convenience of the occupying federal troops. The entry for June 16, 1862, states "General Mitchel's family have arrived—furniture, bed, table linens and piano were taken from the [Huntsville] hotel to furnish the Lawson Clay house [601 Madison] for their reception. The statuary and pictures were also taken for that purpose from the Calhoun place." A few months later, after the federal troops had temporarily evacuated, she went with Mrs. Mayhew to visit "the hospital at the Calhoun house, and was struck with the extreme neatness of the place;" the wounded had been abandoned and the women of the town took over their care. The following fall the federal forces again reentered Huntsville, and this time Mrs. Chadick notes that Brig. Gen. Crook was in command and made his headquarters at the Calhoun house.

In the early 1870s both Meredith and Mary Calhoun died intestate, and the estate went to their two surviving children, a son William Smith Calhoun and a daughter Marie Marguerite Ada Calhoun, who were both of age and living in Louisiana. In a deed dated June 1871, the two heirs agreed to divide the real estate and personal property of their mother with Ada taking all the Alabama property including the dwelling house and lot in Huntsville, the Calhoun plantation (Spring Grove), and the statuary and paintings, while William received the Louisiana plantations.

Some of the land that William Smith had acquired in East Huntsville had been sold off piecemeal, particularly along Clinton, Calhoun and Smith streets, by Meredith and Mary Calhoun during the 1840s and 50s, probably to raise money to cover their debts. But it was Mary's daughter and son-in-law who sold off the bulk of the family's holdings to James O'Shaughnessy and in the process made possible the development of Dallas Mills and its village.

Ada Calhoun and her husband George W. Lane apparently resided principally in New Orleans, although they briefly owned the President's House on Randolph Street. For some reason they chose not to live in the Calhoun house, and in 1874 they rented it to Professor George F. McDonald for use as a dancing academy. Two years later the property was leased for a term of four years, later extended, by the federal government to serve as the U. S. Circuit Court for the Northern District of Alabama. The rent was $1,000 per year, and the U. S. marshall was hailed locally for his efforts to rejuvenate the interior of the building while converting the large double parlors on the western end of the house for use as the courtroom. Other rooms were also cleaned up to serve as offices for members of the court staff.

Consequently, the Calhoun house became the setting for one of the most famous trials to take place in Huntsville—the trial of Frank James in 1884 for the payroll robbery of Alexander Smith by the Jesse James gang three years earlier. Smith had been returning from Florence to the construction camp of the Muscle Shoals Canal carrying the weekly payroll when he was held up and robbed of $5,240 by three men. Frank James was the only member of the gang to stand trial in Alabama. By all accounts, everyone in Madison County attended the trial, and a majority of them felt justice had been served when James was acquited.

The Circuit Court was still operating there in 1887 when George and Ada Lane sold the Calhoun house—including the entire block which was still surrounded by the tall brick fence—and the paintings and statuary to Ellelee Humes for $25,000. The Meredith Calhoun Art Collection, as it was called, was moved again, this time to the magnificent estate of

Milton and Ellelee Humes called Abingdon Place on Meridian Street, and there it resided until 1911. Milton Humes had come to Huntsville following the Civil War to practice law, and in 1870 he married Ellelee, the daughter of Governor Reuben Chapman.

According to the Huntsville newspapers, the Calhoun collection was locally believed to be one of the finest private art collections in the South. It consisted of twenty-three paintings, eight sculptures, and one Florentine mosaic table. The statuary consisted mostly of marble pieces and included original works by Bartolini, Tadolini, and Thomas Crawford, the latter an American working in Rome whose bronze figure "Armed Freedom" adorns the dome of the U. S. Capitol. There were also two marble copies after Canova and two original bronzes by Trouillard. Of the twenty-three paintings, only three were originals and even these three were by obscure artists. The remainder were anonymous copies after famous artists such as Caravaggio, Raphael, Murillo, and Titian; however since the dates of the copies are unknown as are the artists, it is impossible to make any intelligent assessment of the value of the collection.

Although the Calhoun house had served only sporadically as a home, it now entered its most ignoble period. In 1888 it still housed the federal court, but it also contained tenements, and by 1894 its sole use was as a tenement house, although apparently only the two wings had been subdivided for multifamily units while the main front block was retained for possible commercial lease.

In 1892 the "once grand stone capped wall" had been demolished, and "the beautifully terraced grounds, once so private, in fact absolutely excluded from public gaze" were thrown open for all to see. Plans were announced that fall to subdivide the property for building lots, and in fact, one lot had been sold the previous February to Emma Wells, which would explain the need to raze the surrounding brick wall. Wells had leased her corner at Greene and Randolph streets to Hummel, Schaake & Company for use as their marble yard, and by 1898 two, one-story dwellings facing Randolph Street had been erected.

Still in 1892, the **Mercury** editorialized on the sad state of the Calhoun house and wondered why the "grand old building" was not being utilized. Milton Humes occasionally announced plans to renovate the exterior, but it is doubtful that anything was ever done. However in 1895 the Huntsville Academy, a private school, took up residence in the Calhoun house and stayed there until the start of the 1898 school year; Milton Humes was vice-president of the board of trustees of the Academy, which may have helped him secure this tenant. After the Academy moved to other quarters, announcements appeared sporadically that various other private schools and dancing academies would conduct classes in the Calhoun building. The last of these came in May, 1907, when J. E. Condor leased the structure for a training school and began remodeling the interior. Two months later a fire did an estimated $10,000 damage: "The upper story and roof were completely burned but the brick walls of the fine old building stood the fiery test and are almost as strong as ever. Capt. Humes stated...that the building would be remodeled and restored in time for the opening of the Condor School."

But the house was not repaired. It stood empty and roofless, and the following year Milton Humes died leaving his estate in serious financial difficulties. Furthermore, he had given a deed of trust on the Calhoun property in 1905 which had not been paid off, and as a result, the house and three remaining lots were sold at public auction in 1909 to L. C. Sugg for $10,800. The following January the Huntsville City Council adopted a proposal to buy the entire Calhoun block with the idea of redeveloping it as a municipal complex to contain a YMCA, a Carnegie Library, a magnificent city hall, and a beautiful park. However the pro-

posed bond issue that would pay for this project was defeated by the voters and the plans were dropped. Consequently, in 1911 the remains of the Calhoun house were razed and the grounds cleared.

Meanwhile Ellelee Humes was forced to put her home Abingdon Place on the market and to sell the Meredith Calhoun Art Collection. The latter was purchased by Eli P. Clark of Los Angeles for $60,000 in 1910, and while the Calhoun house was being dismantled, huge wooden crates loaded with the paintings and statuary were being hauled to the depot for transport to Chicago.

The fate of the art collection is unknown. Abingdon Place eventually became the home of the Huntsville Boys' Club and was demolished during the 1970s to be replaced with a Butler building. The last known connection of William Smith's descendants with Huntsville occurred at the turn of the century when his great-great-granddaughter Marie Lane married Michael O'Shaughnessy, the builder of the McCormick house on Kildare Street, although true to family tradition, they resided elsewhere and only made occasional visits to Huntsville.

The Calhoun block was redeveloped during the second decade of this century. Construction of the central YMCA began in 1910 at the corner of Greene and Randolph streets where the marble yard had been. And in 1915 L. C. Sugg began construction of an apartment house on Randolph Street, called Calhoun Flats, and two brick bungalows facing on Lincoln Street. The following year he erected another two rental bungalows on Lincoln, and in 1923 he began work on the construction of his own house at the corner of Randolph and Lincoln and another house sited between the apartment house and the YMCA. All of these buildings survive today as part of the Twickenham Historic District.

And so, the magnificent Calhoun house is gone, the art collection is probably scattered or in storage, and the Spring Grove/Calhoun plantation was converted into a mill village; only Smith Street, a one block long street in Old Town Historic District, remains as a memorial to William Smith and his brief but intriguing role in Huntsville's history.

COVER PHOTO

This Norway spruce tree at 528 Adams Avenue is the largest of its species in the state. The other champion trees of Madison County are listed in Ralph Allen's article beginning on page 37.

ILLUSTRATIONS

Huntsville Public Library: page 29
Charles Weber: cover and pages 37, 38 and 39
Micky Maroney: pages 6, 8, 11, 12, 13, 15 and 16
Linda Bayer: all others

PRESERVATION BRANCHES OUT

The Siberian Elm

When the Alabama lands were opened to settlement, the hills and valleys were covered with vast forests of magnificent trees. They had grown for centuries and had attained a size and character that would bring tears to Smokey the Bear's eyes.

Unfortunately, from the beginning Americans have had a love affair with wood, not trees. We began by building wood forts, log houses, and wood rail fences, went on to railroad ties and telephone poles, and today, one Sunday edition of a major city newspaper levels a sizeable grove.

What do trees have to do with preservation? Isn't our aim to try to preserve our "built environment"? Don't trees just clog up our gutters with leaves and drop sap on our newly washed cars? Well, actually, just like historic structures where George Washington may have slept, many trees are historically significant such as the Stuyvesant pear tree planted by Peter Stuyvesant in 1647 in New York or, closer to home, the Council Oak at Valley Head,

by Ralph Allen

The Shumard Oak

where the Cherokees met when that area was still Indian territory. Just like structures that we judge worthy of preservation because of their age and character, trees that have attained these same qualities should be protected and recognized.

We have all seen photographs of Huntsville when the streets were lined with beautiful overhanging trees. And we can remember the old country homes with the two "husband and wife trees" out front planted when the house was built. These scenes are rapidly disappearing. However, while we have been concentrating on preserving structures, the State of Alabama has been compiling its own "National Register of Trees" called the Champion Tree Program. This program tries to locate and recognize the largest tree of each species in the state. There are currently 128 trees on the list of Alabama's largest, ranging from a fourteen foot tall American crabapple in Mentone to an American sycamore in Myrtlewood that has a circumference of 28.7 feet.

One surprising fact is that Madison County, with eighteen champion trees, has by far more trees on this prestigious list than any other county and has the distinction of having two champion trees

at one location. Those two trees, one a hackberry and the other an American smoketree, are on the the grounds of Echols Hill.

Several of the trees are located in Huntsville's two historic districts, Old Town and Twickenham. And one, the largest Shumard oak in the state, is located on the grounds of one of Huntsville's early outlying houses Oak Place, the home of Huntsville's antebellum architect George Steele on Maysville Road. Steele was known to have brought in specimen plants for the landscaping of his home, and it is possible that this tree is one.

Just as old structures can give us a glimpse of life in our towns and on our farms in an earlier time, trees too were a vital part of the life and landscape of those times just as they are today. ★

The Champion Trees of Madison County

1.	Yellow buckeye	1608 Drake Avenue
2.	Shagbark hickory	New Hope
3.	Hackberry	Echols Hill
4.	American smoketree	Echols Hill
5.	White mulberry	125 Walker Avenue
6.	Norway spruce	528 Adams Street
7.	Shortleaf pine	191 Darwin Road
8.	Carolina cherrylaurel	Maple Hill Cemetery
9.	Chinkapin oak	New Market
10.	Shumard oak	808 Maysville Road
11.	Black locust	416 Eustis Avenue
12.	Sassafras	206 S. Plymouth Road
13.	White basswood	Monte Sano Mountain
14.	Chinese elm	Butler Terrace
15.	Siberian elm	2345 Whitesburg Drive
16.	Japanese maple	North Memorial Parkway
17.	Saucer magnolia	Randolph Avenue
18.	Atlas cedar	North Memorial Parkway

The Hackberry

The Chinese Elm

Etc. Etc. Etc. Etc. Etc. Etc.

As a follow-up to the last issue of the Quarterly (Fall/Winter 1982/1983) which featured an essay on Roadside Architecture, the editor is happy to report that imaginative methods of gasoline marketing are still being pursued in Alabama. Sara's Grocery and Amoco Station just south of Eva has mounted a twin-engine Beechcraft above the gas pumps to serve as a canopy. Installed just over two years ago as a means of creating a distinct image for the station, the airplane presents a startling sight when encountered beside the highway. We hope that this indicates a renewed interest in the development of personalized roadside structures.

In late October 1983 the City of Huntsville Planning Department will publish a special report concerning the town's first industrialization, which occurred in the late nineteenth century. By attracting capital from the North, Huntsville evolved into an important textile center, which owed much of its prosperity for many years to these cotton mills. Of all the Northerners who contributed time and money to promote the city, no one rivaled Tracy W. Pratt, a transplanted South Dakotan, who was remembered by his fellow citizens as "the man who made Huntsville." The report was written by Patricia H. Ryan and will be available at the planning department.

Beginning with the Fall 1983 issue, the Historic Huntsville Quarterly will have a new editor, Micky Maroney, who authored the fascinating article on Quietdale in this issue. Preparing the Quarterly for the printer four times a year is a monumental undertaking; I hope that Foundation members will assist Micky by volunteering their assistance and, most importantly, their articles for future issues. As editor for the last five years, I have found the job to be most rewarding but no longer have sufficient time to devote to the task. I wish Micky the greatest success!

Linda Bayer

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