

The Historic Huntsville Quarterly

Volume 14 | Number 4

Article 4

6-21-1988

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Historic Huntsville Foundation

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Recommended Citation

Historic Huntsville Foundation (1988) "First Bathtub Said to be a Monte Sano Product," *The Historic Huntsville Quarterly*. Vol. 14: No. 4, Article 4.

Available at: <https://louis.uah.edu/historic-huntsville-quarterly/vol14/iss4/4>

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First Bathtub Said To Be A Monte Sano Product

REPRINTED FROM THE HUNTSVILLE TIMES -
HUNTSVILLE'S SESQUICENTENNIAL - SEPTEMBER 11-17, 1955.

Huntsville is credited with many "firsts" for the State of Alabama, and by some, with at least one national "first" - the public waterworks system. But there is another alleged first, of which few people know.

A home on Monte Sano reportedly contained the first bathtub in America.

This was the residence of one Thomas Martin, who moved here from Fairfax, Va. in 1808 and completed a home for his bride on the north-west side of Monte Sano, just a few hundred feet from the Cold Spring. Construction was started in 1815 and completed in 1816.

The Cold Spring, later to become one of the attractions of the area when the Hotel Monte Sano was in its prime as a summer resort, furnished water for the house through a system of hollowed red cedar logs.

Piped some 500 feet, the water went into a milkhouse, and into a bathtub which had been dug out of limestone rock from the mountainside.

This tub, 5 feet long, 19 1/2 inches wide, and 12 inches deep, was in 1934, and perhaps still is, considered to be the nation's first bathtub.

According to the October 1934 issue of Valve World, a trade magazine published by the Crane Co. of Chicago, the tub was used in the Martin home on Monte Sano for nearly half a century.

It was moved, sometime before the Civil War, to a home Martin had built at the corner of Jefferson and Holmes streets, approximately where the Post Office is now located. The tub was uncovered during excavations in 1934 for the Post Office, and for a while was in the possession of John C. Stanard, a



"MARTIN HOME ON MONTE SANO, 1815 - The picture above is a reproduction of a noted 1820 painting by Henry Strode, called 'The Martin Home,' which was built by Thomas Martin near Cold Spring on the northwest side of Monte Sano in 1815-16. It was in this home that the first bathtub in America was used, cut from limestone by Martin... (Reproduction courtesy Thos. W. Martin)." [Photograph and caption were in *The Huntsville Times* Sesquicentennial Issue, September 11-17, 1955.]

resident of Huntsville now deceased. Whether it still exists could not be determined.

Valve World pointed out the discovery of the old tub brought to light "the hoax perpetrated upon the public by H. L. Mencken in December of 1917, when in an article in the *New York Evening Mail*, he alleged the bathtub was unknown in the world until the '40s of the last century, and that it was invented in Cincinnati by Adam Thompson.

"Seven years later in the *Chicago Sunday Tribune*, Mr. Mencken admitted that his former article was 'a piece

of spoofing to relieve the strain of war days."

"Apparently," the article continued, "there is no evidence of an earlier tub in this country, so that the old Martin tub may be accepted as 'the first bathtub in America.'"

The early Martin home itself was well known to residents of the city before time consumed its timbers, originally cut from trees nearby.

It was home for Martin, a son, Thomas Fuller Martin, and three daughters, Sallie, Bettie, and Hassie, the three



Water from Cold Spring was once piped via hollowed cedar logs to the old Martin Home on Monte Sano. Later, the spring, as pictured above, was one of the attractions at Monte Sano Hotel.

girls being born in the home, according to notes made by John C. Stanard.

Bettie and Hassie Martin were married to two Erwin brothers, Josephus and John; Sallie was married to the Rev. Eugene Strode, the first Baptist minister to come to Huntsville.

Sallie Martin Strode was the grandmother of Eugene Hudson Strode, now one of Alabama's best known writers and a professor at the University of Alabama.

The painting of the Martin home on Monte Sano was done in 1820 by Henry Strode, a brother of the Rev. Eugene Strode.

Henry Strode is reported to have become a well known landscape artist after leaving Huntsville, and many of his paintings hang on walls throughout the South. In addition to his landscape paintings, he did many religious sketches in the churches of America before dying at Madison, Ala.

