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altered example of Federal period domestic architecture. By studying it, we can gain general insights about Huntsville lifestyles in 1819 and specific insights about the life and art of Maria Howard Weeden in the

late nineteenth century. But more importantly, we can learn to understand our own times--for historic architecture helps us to evaluate our own times within the greater historical context to which we all belong.



The Gardens

by Sarah Huff Fisk

Passers-by along Gates Street on a summer day in the late nineteenth century must often have paused to gaze in delight at the colorful garden that transformed the east lawn of Weeden House into a sweet-scented realm of beauty.

Jane Eliza Brooks Urguhart, wife of Dr. William Weeden and creator of this charming spot, might have given her English and Scotch ancestry credit for her special way with flowers.¹ But her ideas were by no means confined to clipped hedges and formal plantings. Instead she chose old-fashioned flowers, such as heliotrope, peonies, lemon verbena, pinks, and hollyhocks. Roses were her special love, and she planted sturdy stock that continued to flourish for many years to come.

When Dr. Weeden bought the house in 1845, the grounds were quite extensive, reaching from Gates to Williams with a half-block frontage on each street.² There was plenty of room for flowers as well as the indispensable vegetable garden. Funds were ample, servants available, and the project must have been an inviting one to a

gardening enthusiast.

However, tragedy came suddenly in late 1846 when Dr. Weeden died while on a trip to New Orleans.³ His widow, though well provided for, was left to nurture their young family, which eventually included Maria Howard, born six months after her father's death. In this time of sadness and responsibility, the planning and care of a garden must have offered much needed solace.

Exactly when the first plants were set out is not known, but surely there were many treasured roses, cuttings, roots, and seeds transplanted by the family from their former home on Weeden Mountain, southwest of Huntsville. How these flourished or in what stages the garden progressed can only

1 James E. Saunders, *Early Settlers of Alabama* (New Orleans: 1899), pp. 454, 455.

2 *Deed Book EE*, p.520, Probate Office, Madison County Courthouse, Huntsville, Alabama.

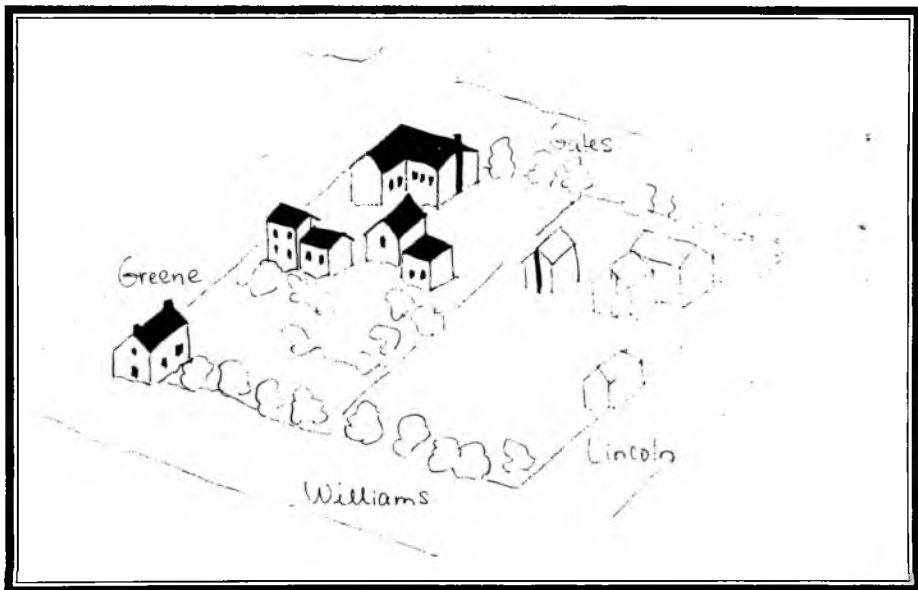
3 *Probate Record XII*, p.272, Probate Office, Madison County Courthouse, Huntsville, Alabama.

be imagined now. It must have faced near extinction when the Union forces took over the house during the Civil War, forcing the family to flee south.⁴

Upon their return, Mrs. Weeden and her family faced many problems in the devastating aftermath of the war. In the face of lost fortunes, waning strength, and scarce help, the revival of the garden must have been both a challenge and a joy.

Howard, the unmarried daughters who lived beside it all their lives. They mourned together when in 1890 hard times forced them to sell the eastern part of the plot.⁵ Yet the remaining portion was all the sisters could hope to maintain.

It was mostly Kate, hardy and energetic, who planned and planted, continuing her mother's work. But it was Howard, frail in health, ever talented, who so memorialized the garden through her poems and paintings



This drawing of the Weeden House property--taken from the 1871 Bird's-Eye-View map of Huntsville--shows the outbuildings and their locations in that year when the lot still extended through to Williams Street.

But finally the infirmities of old age crept upon Mrs. Weeden and she passed away in 1881, leaving the blossoms from her treasured spot to waft their fragrance upon the summer air for many years to come.

"Mother's Garden" was always a cherished spot to Kate and

4 Mrs. William D. Chadick, "Civil War Days in Huntsville, Alabama," *Huntsville Times*, September 11-15, 1955.

5 *Deed Book SSS*, p.542, Probate Office, Madison County Courthouse, Huntsville, Alabama.

that its memory persisted even half a century later when scarcely a sprig of it survived.

Always a seeker of beauty, Howard Weeden possessed the rare ability to record its essence for others to enjoy. The paintings and poems that fill the pages of her four published books bear plentiful evidence of this talent.⁶ Not only was she able to picture the beauty of the daintiest wild flower or the most luscious rose, but to an even surpassing degree her pen and brush could capture and distill beauty of character in the portrait of an individual.

Very personal glimpses of Miss Weeden's response to nature's beauty are revealed in her correspondence with her close friend and devoted sponsor, Miss Elizabeth Price of Nashville. In October, 1894, she wrote:

The world is so beautiful just now. One feels like leaving pictures and paints and living like a gypsy till the winter.

A friend took me out to the Chase Nursery yesterday to see the last of the roses, and it was hard to tell which was loveliest--the acres of roses, or the woodsides full of wild beauties like golden rod and asters which we saw going and coming. I saw out there, too, the Handsomest grayhound I ever met with--a princely 'Romeo' by name.

6 Books by Howard Weeden: *Shadows on the Wall* (New York: privately printed, 1898); *Bandanna Ballads* (New York: Doubleday & McClure Co., 1899); *Songs of the Old South* (New York: Doubleday, Page & Company, 1900); *Old Voices* (New York: Doubleday, Page & Company, 1904). Also see: Frances C. Roberts and Sarah Huff Fisk, *Shadows on the Wall: The Life and Works of Howard Weeden* (Colonial Press, 1962).

On April 22, 1896, the artist's letter to Miss Price, who was then studying music in Berlin, mentions a recent rearrangement of the downstairs rooms and follows closely with the latest garden news--one clearly as important as the other:

Our little garden is already a bow of roses and wisteria and everywhere we can see your seed of last summer shining--one great bunch of candy-tuft is white as snow with bloom--and we say there's Elizabeth. Mrs. Green, who comes in every spring from her country greenhouse with flowers has them this year at Mrs. Dentlers, near enough to tempt us. But this year, Sister says we must only buy Tomatoe plants and sick me can't indulge in blooms.

On March 5, 1897, Miss Weeden again mentions the garden to her far distant friend:

Sister (Kate) is outdoors this morning working in the garden. She has had the fence taken down between the yard and garden, and comes in every now and then to tell me how things look. 'Elizabeth Bed' she says (we always called the one near the bench that, where you admired the red verbena) is going to be lovely with roses and fresh sown flower seeds. I can see it from my window, for since you were here we have taken the old parlor for our bedroom (front room to east) and that looks out on the garden now that the fence is away.

And then in the summer of 1904, the final year of Howard Weeden's life, when her delicate health was failing fast, Elizabeth Price visited her in the Weeden garden and later told of her visit through the pages of the Nashville *American*:

Miss Howard Weeden is always charming, but most so when in the setting of her own quiet parlor at Weeden Place or in the sweet old-fashioned garden, where one wanders with her

and her sister, who is also a woman of delightful conversation and sympathy....In my visits we strolled about, gathering a pink rose here, a red verbena there, a splendid yellow canna bloom almost as rare as an orchid, a fragrant white rose 'from mother's bush,' mignonette, sweet alyssum and heliotrope. When does one make such a bouquet...a real 'bouquet'...but in the Weeden garden. And talking the while of books and events, breaking off to stroll over into the province of Uncle Locke, who in that delightful poem in Miss Weeden's *Voices from the Old South* tells us that 'mid varying and uncertain fortunes he 'jes keeps a good grip on his hoe. He surely has kept a mighty good grip here, for I found the stateliest corn, the freshest, tenderest lettuce, the plumpest tomatoes in the Weeden garden that I have ever seen anywhere, and I get

to have what Charles Dudley Warner calls quite a 'vegetable air' here in this place of fine gardens and beautiful flowers.

There are several seats about in this dear old garden, and surely the dearest spot is under a bower of roses where one can sit and talk through the quiet fragrant twilight with these two charming women...

Only a few descriptions, such as these, remain to give us a glimpse of that Weeden Garden of the past. But now, with the restoration of Weeden House, hope springs anew that other hands may one day re-create this treasured spot, with its old-fashioned blossoms, old-time scents, and pleasant memories of long ago.



The Owners

by Frances C. Roberts

When the town of Twickenham (Huntsville) was platted in June, 1810, it contained thirty acres. With the exception of the blocks containing the Courthouse Square and the Big Spring, each block was divided into four lots and numbered from 1 through 72. The southern half of the town was sold by Leroy Pope to the commissioners who had been appointed by the Mississippi Territorial Legislature to acquire land and sell lots to raise money in order to construct public buildings.

On July 5, 1810, these commissioners auctioned off twenty-

four lots for prices ranging from \$100 to \$750 each. At this time Alexander Wasson purchased lot 63 in Block 20. When he sold this property to John Jones in 1818, the purchase price was listed as \$350. Jones transferred lot 63 to Henry C. Bradford in May 1819 for \$700. On this site Bradford constructed the two-story brick structure which is known today as the Weeden House. Behind the house he also built a kitchen building, the upper story of which provided quarters for servants.

During the first "boom" pe-