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THE OLD ALLISON HOMESTEAD
ON WINCHESTER PIKE

by

Bill Stubno

Considered by local inhabitants as just another Victorian house on Winchester Road, the old Allison place is actually a Federal Period home, built in the early 19th century. Basically, it is a two-story structure with brick chimneys at both ends. Especially evident of The Federal Period style are the fireplace mantels with delicate, feminine molding. The entrance to the house, however, is not typical of the era due to the hall-and-parlor plan, although in some instances, such a combination was utilized in Madison County in the early 19th century. The attic of the home reveals further evidence of an early date, for much of the lumber is pit-sawn, while the rafters are joined at the ridge with large wooden pegs.

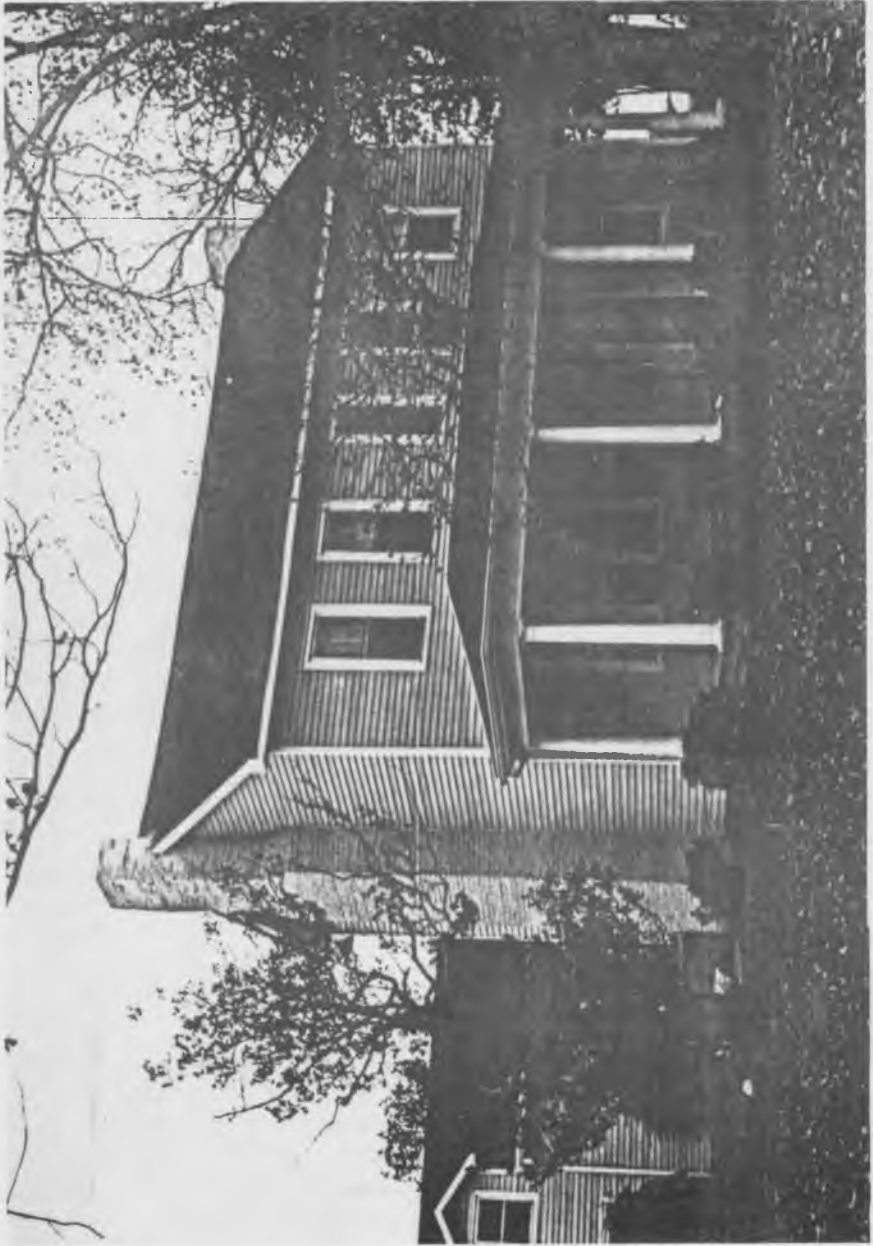
The Allison home was specifically located in the northeast quarter of section 3, township 3, range 1-east, a 160 acre tract of land entered by Caleb Owen on September 18, 1809, at the Nashville Land Office. Other purchasers of the section were Jacob Johnston in 1812, and Stephen Pond and Uriah Bass, Sr., the following year.¹ In 1813, Owen migrated to Madison County and lived on his quarter section of land, assessed by the Mississippi Territory in 1815 as being worth \$480.00.² Moving to Tuscaloosa in 1818, he sold his real estate to Uriah Bass, Sr., without the recording of a deed.³ Bass, who died on May 30, 1819, willed the tract, then known only as "Owen's land adjoining Johnston's", to his son, Richard, who held title to it until his death in 1834. Leaving no wife or children, Bass left instructions in a will directing John R. B. Eldridge, executor, to sell all real property.⁴ Subsequently, Eldridge sold the northeast quarter of section 3 at auction. Uriah Bass, Jr., brother of the decedent, bought the 160 acres, and in March 1836 requested Eldridge to issue

deeds to John Allison, Corbin Lewis, and Murphy Douglas, an indication that Richard Bass had intended, in his lifetime, to formally convey the acreage to the named individuals.⁵

With the completion of the land survey, Douglas received the northeast and southeast quarters of the quarter section (almost 80 acres) for \$1,082.00, while Lewis obtained a part of the southeast quarter of the same area (34 acres), the price of which was \$380.00. Allison, on the other hand, purchased a little more than 43 acres, roughly the northeast quarter of the northeast quarter, for \$527.35.⁶ It was on this land that John Allison built his home, probably around 1823. (See explanatory footnote).⁷

Born in Londonderry, Ireland in 1769, Allison migrated to New Castle, Delaware, in 1797. Around 1810, he settled in Madison County, then part of the Mississippi Territory, and married Miss Duanna Hewlett of Richmond, Virginia.⁸ In 1811, Allison entered the southeast quarter of section 34, township 2, range 1-east, although actual title was placed in the name of his oldest daughter, America M. Allison, born the same year.⁹ Another daughter, Harriet, was born in 1812.¹⁰ Pamelia, a third child, was added to the Allison household between the years 1815 and 1820.¹¹

Due perhaps to a growing family and farm, Allison decided in the early 1820's not only to increase his acreage, but also to build a more spacious home. As mentioned earlier, he built the new dwelling around 1823 on a 43 acre plot in section 3, adjoining his original property. This land contained a natural water source, one credible explanation as to why he built the home there. Allison, however, did not officially own any land at this time, for his acreage in section 34 was still in his daughter's name.¹² In 1824, this property was conveyed to him by Thomas Lyle, who acquired it the same year through marriage to Allison's daughter, America.¹³



Shortly after the birth of his youngest daughter, Emily, in 1824, John Allison bought additional land, essentially the northeast quarter of section 34, township 2, range 1-east, from William Jones, a wealthy planter. For a time, this tract was deeded in trust to William E. Johnson, a third party, because Allison owed money to the estate of William Jones, who died in 1832. This debt was later satisfied.¹⁴

In 1834, Allison deeded two acres of his land in section 34 to the Bethlehem Congregation of the Cumberland Presbyterian Church to whose membership he belonged.¹⁵

In 1836, Allison received title to the 43 acres in section 3, mentioned earlier, and thus possessed a farm of about 361 acres.¹⁶ Five years later, in the summer of 1841, the old Irish immigrant died.¹⁷

Due to the fact that the Allison property could not be divided fairly among the heirs, the land was sold at auction in 1846 by order of the Orphan's Court. Fortunately, the widow, Duanna Allison, became the highest bidder for the low price of \$700.00, due in three installments.¹⁸

Besides land, some of the personal property of the Allison estate included seven Windsor chairs, a dining table, kitchen and bedroom furniture, curtains, carpets, silverware, farm equipment, 17 slaves, and other miscellaneous items. These items, worth almost \$11,000.00 revealed the type of life style that Allison had lived--the life of a gentleman farmer.¹⁹

Tragedy again beset the Allison household in 1848 upon the death of Mrs. Allison's daughter, Harriet, wife of Eldred W. Williams. Consequently, Mrs. Allison cared for her daughter's children, Louisa, Aurina, and Duanna, who married Abner B. Truitt in 1863.²⁰ In 1864, Mrs. Duanna Allison conveyed the Allison home to her granddaughter, Duanna Truitt, on the condition that

Mrs. Allison would retain "possession and control of all the houses, stables, yard, well, and garden during her . . . lifetime."²¹ Duanna Allison died 18 years later at the age of 90, on September 23, 1877.²²

Maintaining the Allison home and farm, left to his wife Duanna, Abner Truitt was probably accustomed to farm life. Born in 1830 in Lauderdale County, Alabama, he was the son of John and Harriet Ann Truitt. Besides his wife, he had two children, Lillian and Eldred Allison Truitt, the latter of whom graduated from Vanderbilt Medical School in Nashville, Tennessee.²³

Known by his contemporaries as "a young gentleman of brilliant attainments", Dr. Eldred Truitt was killed by a shotgun blast on a cold January morning in 1887.²⁴ The Negro offender, Allen Weeden, shot Truitt in the head and face, and the seriously wounded man died within the hour. The tragedy, a result of a dispute between the two men over a mule, undoubtedly caused considerable heartache for Truitt's parents who had already lost a younger child less than a month earlier. Truitt was subsequently buried in the family cemetery near the house.²⁵

After the turn of the century, Duanna Truitt, preceded in death by her husband in 1903, willed the Allison home and land to her only daughter, Lillian, the wife of Lucien Hewlett.²⁶

A native of Jackson County, Alabama, Lucien Hewlett was a manager of the Florida and Tennessee office of the F. and O. Cedar Company, a lumber concern. Evidently, the Hewlett's traveled extensively and were financially secure, for they owned a number of homes, one being in Florida.²⁷ Upon the death of Mrs. Hewlett in 1934 at her Crystal River, Florida home, the Allison place became the property of her daughter, Virginia.²⁸ When Virginia passed away in 1943, the real estate fell into the hands of her husband and sole heir, Ieland



C. Poole.²⁹ After the war, Poole sold the property to Dudley S. Powell.³⁰

In 1950, Powell conveyed title to the Allison home to Arthur E. Millsaps.³¹ In turn, Millsaps sold it in 1957 to Robert L. Bradford who divided the property into various tracts known as Blue Springs Subdivision. In 1959, he sold tract 6, 1.24 acres containing the Allison home, to Robert G. Cope.³²

In the 1960's, the old Allison place was owned by various individuals, including Ralph Dean, and later Carl D. Lucas, who held the property for thirteen years.³³ On February 1, 1980, Lucas sold the residence to Charles E. Bull, a retired education and training specialist from USAMMCS, Restone Arsenal.³⁴

Today, the old Allison home has been completely restored by Mr. and Mrs. Bull. Under the house, concrete block piles and heavy timber supports have been put in place. Inside, new plumbing and wiring, carpeting, woodwork restoration, repainting and wall coverings in Plymouth Colony and Old Williamsburg patterns of wallpaper restore the stately elegance of the Federal period of architecture. Moreover, the yard and the grounds around the cemetery, so long hidden from view, have been cleared of brush and undergrowth. A huge hackberry tree, at least a hundred years old, shades the quiet area that is the family cemetery. Now, as one stands before the grave of one of Madison County's early settlers, he reads in silent reverie the words engraved in stone:

"John Allison ...an honest man and a Christian."³⁵

FOOTNOTES

¹ Government Tract Book, p. 145, Probate Office, Madison County Courthouse, Huntsville, Alabama.

² Caleb Owen, of Welch ancestry, was originally from Camden, South Carolina. He lived for a short time in Tuscaloosa, and then moved to Jefferson and Pickens County, Alabama. At the time of his death in 1842, he lived in Tipton County, Tennessee. James E. Saunders, Early Settlers of Alabama (Baltimore: Genealogical Publishing Company, 1969), p. 50; Mrs. Roy J. Cochran and Mrs. Richard H. Gilliam, "Taxpayers of Madison County, Alabama), Mississippi Territory from 1810-1815 Tax Lists", Valley Leaves 4 (June 1970): 4; Mississippi Territory Tax Rolls (Wooster, Ohio: Micro Photo Division, Bell and Howell Company, Roll number 300).

³ Saunders, Settlers, p. 50.

⁴ "Records of Wills, Inventories, and other Returns of Executors, Administrators, and Guardians, Commencing 1st day of January 1818, Ending 10th day of January 1820", p. 144, Alabama State Department of Archives and History, Montgomery, Alabama; Dorothy Scoot Johnson, Cemeteries of Madison County, Alabama Vol. II. (Huntsville, Alabama: Johnson Historical Publication, 1978) p. 229; Probate Record Book 6, p. 696, Probate Office, Madison County Courthouse, Huntsville, Alabama.

⁵ Deed Book P, pp. 676-677, Probate Office, Madison County Courthouse, Huntsville, Alabama.

⁶ Field Notes 1818-1853, p. 177-178 and Deed Book P, pp. 674-677, Probate Office, Madison County Courthouse, Huntsville, Alabama.

⁷ According to a genealogy written in 1911 by Mrs. Duanna Truitt, the Allison home was built roughly between the birth dates of John Allison's daughters, Pumelia and Emily; for Emily, the youngest, was the only child "born at the old Allison homestead." Specifically, Pumelia was born between 1815-1820 and Emily in 1824. Richard Bass, moreover, was the individual who probably gave John Allison permission to build a home in section 8, for it was a common practice at the

time to allow a person to build on a property that did not as yet legally belong to him. Thus, one could conclude from the above information that the Allison home was constructed between 1819 and 1824 or circa 1823.

(NOTE: Virginia Allison Hewlett stated in 1937 that the Allison home was built around 1812. She perhaps arrived at that date because her grandmother, Duanna Truitt, stated in 1911 that the home had "been in the family for a century." She was, in all probability, just referring to the house in general terms. It appears that Mrs. Hewlett added the years between 1911 and 1937 to the 100 years ("... a century"), and arrived at the figure of 125 years more or less. Furthermore, the information provided by Mrs. Duanna Truitt, granddaughter of Duanna Allison, was obtained first-hand from Duanna Allison because she was raised by her). Mrs. Duanna Trewitt (or Truitt), "The Ancestors of Little Virginia Allison Hewlett Written by her Grandmother July 10, 1911" in Alabama Records Vol. 53, eds., Kathleen Paul Jones and Pauline Jones Gandreed, New Market and Tuscaloosa, Alabama, 1938, pp. 77-79; Census of 1830, Madison County, Alabama, (Washington, D.C.: National Archives, Roll 4, 1943); "Emily Allison", Huntsville, Alabama, The Democrat, 6 March, 1841.

⁸ Circuit Court, Minute Book 23, (1834-1835), p. 144, Probate Office, Madison County Courthouse, Huntsville, Alabama: Trewitt, "Ancestors", p. 77.

⁹ Census of 1850, Morgan County, Alabama (Washington, D. C.: National Archives, M432, 1964), p. 218; Tract Book, p. 144.

¹⁰ Trewitt, "Ancestors", p. 77.

¹¹ Census of 1830, Madison County roll 4.

¹² Another individual by the name of John Allison lived in Madison County at the time. He was married to Bryant Cobb's sister. Thomas J. Taylor, "Later History of Madison County", Valley Leave, Special Edition

(December 1969): 82.

13 Deed Book I-J, p. 515 and Marriage Book 3, p. 303, Probate Office, Madison County Courthouse, Huntsville, Alabama.

14 The northeast quarter of section 32 was first entered by John Brahan in 1814. He sold it to John J. Winston in 1822. Winston conveyed it to William Jones the same year. Tract Book p. 144, Deed Book H, pp. 231-232, 438, Probate Record Book 6, pp. 131-133, Probate Case 146, and Deed Book O, pp. 406-407, Probate Office, Madison County Courthouse, Huntsville, Alabama; "Emily Allison", The Democrat.

15 Deed Book P, p. 136, Probate Office, Madison County Courthouse, Huntsville, Alabama.

16 Ibid., pp. 676-677.

17 Johnson, Cemeteries, p. 250.

18 Probate Record Book 13, p. 25, and Deed Book W, page 177, Probate Office, Madison County Courthouse, Huntsville, Alabama.

19 Probate Record Book 10, pp. 13-14, Probate Office, Madison County Courthouse, Huntsville, Alabama.

20 Trewitt, "Ancestors", pp. 77-78; Marriage Book 4-B, p. 530, Probate Office, Madison County Courthouse, Huntsville, Alabama; Pauline Jones Gandreed and Kathleen Paul Jones, eds., "Census of 1850, Madison County, Alabama", 1955, p. 65 (typewritten).

21 Deed Book E E, pp. 16-18, Probate Office, Madison County Courthouse, Huntsville, Alabama.

22 Johnson, Cemeteries, p. 250.

23 Census of 1880, Madison County, Alabama (Washington D.C.: Bureau of the Census, T 9, Roll 22); Trewitt,

"Ancestors", pp. 77-78.

24 "Sad Death of Mr. Allie Truitt at His Father's Farm", The Huntsville Weekly Mercury, 2 February 1887, p. 2; Register of Death 1881-1894, pp. 409-410, Probate Office, Madison County Courthouse, Huntsville, Alabama.

25 Johnson, Cemeteries, p. 250; "Death", Weekly Mercury, p. 2.

26 Will Book 4, p. 140, Probate Office, Madison County Courthouse, Huntsville, Alabama.

27 "Lucien Hewlett Dies In Florida", The Huntsville Times, 9 February 1941, p. 11; "Mrs. Lucien Hewlett Succumbs in Florida", The Huntsville Times, 11 October 1934, p. 1; "Mrs. Hewlett's Rite Are Held", The Huntsville Times, 12 October 1934, p. 5.

28 Will of Lillian Hewlett, Probate Case 8458, Probate Office, Madison County Courthouse, Huntsville, Alabama.

29 Will Book 6, p. 224, Probate Office, Madison County Courthouse, Huntsville, Alabama.

30 Deed Book 182, p. 257, Probate Office, Madison County Courthouse, Huntsville, Alabama.

31 Deed Book 197, p. 604, Probate Office, Madison County Courthouse, Huntsville, Alabama.

32 Deed Book 253, p. 361 and Deed Book 276, p. 213, Probate Office, Madison County Courthouse, Huntsville, Alabama.

33 Deed Book 327, p. 802 and Deed Book 400, p. 486, Probate Office, Madison County Courthouse, Huntsville, Alabama.

34 Huntsville City Directory (Richmond, VA.: R. L. Polk & Co., 1977), p. 77; Interview with Charles

E. Bull, owner of the Allison-Hewlett House, Huntsville, Alabama, July 1980; Deed Book 575, p. 804, Probate Office, Madison County Courthouse, Huntsville, Alabama.

35 The last word of this inscription (Christian) is called "illegible" in Johnson's Cemeteries; however, this writer, after a careful examination of the stone inscription, makes out the letters to spell Christian.