

7-1-1981

## "Flint River Place" in Antebellum Times

William J. Stubno Jr.

Follow this and additional works at: <https://louis.uah.edu/huntsville-historical-review>



Part of the [History of Art, Architecture, and Archaeology Commons](#), and the [United States History Commons](#)

---

### Recommended Citation

Stubno, William J. Jr. (1981) "'Flint River Place" in Antebellum Times," *Huntsville Historical Review*. Vol. 11: No. 3, Article 4.

Available at: <https://louis.uah.edu/huntsville-historical-review/vol11/iss3/4>

This Article is brought to you for free and open access by LOUIS. It has been accepted for inclusion in Huntsville Historical Review by an authorized editor of LOUIS.

"FLINT RIVER PLACE" IN ANTEBELLUM TIMES

by

William J. Stubno, Jr.

Among the plantation homes in Madison County to survive the Civil War is Flint River Place, located on Jordan Road north of Chase Creek. With shady trees, fresh air, and relative isolation from the cares of city life, the atmosphere is indeed pleasant. Northeast of the old plantation house is the Flint River, meandering its way down to Brownsboro, an early settlement in the area. To the south is Cedar Gap and the Southern Railroad tracks, at one time part of the route of the Memphis and Charleston Railroad that ran from Huntsville to Gurley. The history of all of the area can be traced back to the early land purchasers who bought their respective tracts from the Federal Government. The acreage upon which "Flint River Place" is located is among the earliest entries.

The plantation dwelling was specifically located in the northwest quarter of section 14, township 3 south, range 1 east, on 159.74 acres (certificate number 137) entered by Jesse Wilson of Rutherford County, Tennessee, on August 10, 1809.<sup>1</sup> Wilson was an early settler who later moved to Shelby County, Alabama.<sup>2</sup> On October 7, 1814, he and his wife, Betsey, sold this land, excluding 8 1/2 acres conveyed to Benjamin Wilson on October 5, 1814, to LeRoy Pope. The entire southeast quarter of section 11, township 3 south, range 1 east, was also included in the deed to Pope. The price paid by him for the land, amounting

to 312.19 acres, was \$4,500.<sup>3</sup> In 1820, Pope conveyed this land plus the southeast quarter of section 14, township 3 south, range 1 east; the northeast quarter of section 14, township 3 south, range 1 east; and 32 acres in the southwest quarter of section 11, township 3 south, range 1 east; to Dr. David Moore, a prominent Huntsville physician, planter, and statesman.<sup>4</sup> This tract, a total of 672.17 acres, was known at that time as "the Wilson tract of land, which the said LeRoy Pope purchased of Jesse Wilson, Benjamin Wilson and William Derrick...by reference to their deeds of conveyance and the patents from the United States."<sup>5</sup> In the deed, Pope also sold to Moore an acre of land with a cotton gin and two acres adjoining Moore's plantation near Huntsville. These additional three acres with substantial improvements accounted for the large sum of \$16,490 that Moore had to pay for the various properties.<sup>6</sup>

In 1843, Moore decided to dispose of the Wilson Tracts, and on November 7th, entered into a contract with Daniel B. Friend, a local planter. The agreement stipulated that Friend was to pay for the land in three installments: \$1,666.66  $\frac{2}{3}$  due January 1, 1845; \$1,666.66  $\frac{2}{3}$  due January 1, 1846; and \$986.00 due January 1, 1847.<sup>7</sup> After the bond was signed, Friend began building "Flint River Place," probably sometime in 1844 (see explanatory footnote for architectural comment and date of construction.)<sup>8</sup>

Born in Kentucky in 1802, Friend came to Madison County around 1826, when he married Maria Buchanan Bentley, daughter of Efford Bentley, a veteran of the Revolutionary War.<sup>9</sup> His wife, seventh in descent from

Pocahontas, had a brother, Henry H. Bentley, who was killed at the Alamo.<sup>10</sup> Though a planter, Friend also engaged in a cotton freighting business, known by the name of "Friend, Johnson and Company."<sup>11</sup> Land records further reveal that he speculated in real estate.

On May 18, 1850, Friend and his wife sold their plantation home of 672.19 acres, described "as the place the said Daniel B. Friend purchased of Doct. David Moore, and known as his Flint River Place," to LeRoy H. Jones.<sup>12</sup> Title to the land, however, was under dispute due to the fact that David Moore had died in 1845 before the condition of the bond between Moore and Friend could be completed.<sup>13</sup> Friend stated that he paid the balance of the purchase money to Moore's executors, Stephen S. Ewing and George P. Beirne. Notwithstanding, Friend still did not have title to the property at the time that he sold it to Jones. Subsequently, Friend petitioned the Orphans Court to compel the executors to convey to him title to the land. On September 9, 1850, the Court ordered the executors to issue Friend a deed of conveyance, clearing the title. Five years later, they complied with the order, giving LeRoy Jones, through Friend, undisputed ownership of the tract.<sup>14</sup>

LeRoy H. Jones, "highly respected" by his contemporaries, was a moderately well-to-do farmer.<sup>15</sup> Throughout most of the 1850's, the plantation owner lived at "Flint River Place." In 1858 he sold it to Samuel O. Nuckles for \$17,532.50, an increase in price reflecting the fact that farm values had risen dramatically in Alabama between 1850

and 1860.<sup>16</sup> Diversification of crops and methods of soil fertilization were among the reasons for these higher land values in the state.<sup>17</sup> Fortunately for Jones, his plantation was still being appraised at \$9,000, the year before he disposed of it.<sup>18</sup> With the sale of his property, Jones moved to Arkansas "and engaged in planting. . ."19

Samuel O. Nuckles, the new master of the Flint River plantation, was a Virginian by birth. Among the wealthiest planters in the area before the Civil War, he held assets of \$90,000.<sup>20</sup> Shortly after his death in the early days of the conflict, his heirs, being of the landed aristocracy, were harassed at various times by Union troops. On one occasion, a number of their slaves were actually taken away by the occupying forces.<sup>21</sup> After the war, the Nuckles estate remained in litigation, in large part due to the Reconstruction Government.<sup>22</sup> This problem was all too familiar, not only in Madison County, but also throughout the South. Prominent Southern families, loyal to the Confederate cause, were losing their fame, their fortune, and their honor. The civilization they once knew was gone. Yet the memory lived on in the songs, in the memories, and in the gracious homes of antebellum times.

#### FOOTNOTES

<sup>1</sup>Government Tract Book, p. 149, Probate Office, Madison County Courthouse, Huntsville, Alabama; Margaret M. Cowart, Old Land Records of Madison County, Alabama (Huntsville, Alabama: By the author, n.d.), p. 241.

<sup>2</sup>William H. Branley, Three Capitals (Birmingham, AL: By the author, 1947; reprint ed., University: University of Alabama Press, 1976), p. 32.

<sup>3</sup>Deed Book B, pp. 93-94, Probate Office, Madison County Courthouse, Huntsville, AL

<sup>4</sup>Deed Book F, pp. 131-132, Probate Office, Madison County Courthouse, Huntsville, AL; Thomas M. Owen, History of Alabama and Dictionary of Alabama Biography (Chicago: S. J. Clarke Pub. Co., 1921; reprint ed., Spartanburg, S.C.: The Reprint Company, Publishers, 1978), pp. 1222-1223.

<sup>5</sup>Ibid.

<sup>6</sup>Ibid.

<sup>7</sup>Probate Court, Record Book 12, p. 104 and Deed Book AA, pp. 140-141, Probate Office, Madison County Courthouse, Huntsville, AL.

<sup>8</sup>Flint River Place is a good example of the early Greek Revival Period (1835-1850) in Madison County. Although elements of the previous Federal Era, including the three-bay plan and the gable-ended chimneys, are present, the trim is of a larger scale. This characteristic is most noticeable in the trim around the windows. The fireplace mantels are also of a heavier, simpler design, typical of the 1840's. An increase in price from \$4,319.33 1/3 to \$9,000, the price Friend sold the property for in 1850, is another indication that the house was built by Daniel B. Friend. This increase reflects an improvement to the real property. Such

improvements which enhance the land's value usually include buildings, fences, and other additions to the property. It has also been the author's experience that an individual who bought land for a homestead, usually built his house on the property shortly after the agreement to buy the land was signed. Since Friend entered into an agreement with Moore to buy the land in November 1843, it is logical to assume that the moderately wealthy Friend began building his house in the following spring of 1844. In any event, it is known that he built the house between 1844 and 1850, or circa 1844. (Note: In an 1857 real property tax record, the only one to survive between 1815 and 1870, the notation states that the property is assessed at \$9,000.) Interview with Harvie P. Jones, A.P.A., noted architect and expert in the field of architectural preservation, Huntsville, Alabama, April 1981; Probate Court, Record Book 12, p. 104 and Tax Assessment of Real Property for the year 1857, LeRoy H. Jones, Maysville #3, Deed Book X, pp. 576-577, Madison County Courthouse, Huntsville, AL; John W. Reilly, The Language of Real Estate (Chicago: Real Estate Education Company, 1977), p. 216.

<sup>9</sup>Pauline Myra Jones and Kathleen Paul Jones, "Genealogy of the Harris and Allied Families," Huntsville, Alabama, December 1929, p. 98. (typewritten.); Marriage Book 3, p. 469, Probate Office, Madison County Courthouse, Huntsville, Alabama; "Census of 1850, Madison County, Alabama," typewritten copy by Pauline Jones Gandrud and Kathleen Paul Jones, Huntsville, Alabama, 1955, p. 1.

<sup>10</sup>Wyndham Robertson, Pocahontas and Her Descendants (Richmond 1837; reprint ed., Baltimore: Genealogical Publishing Company, 1968), p. 51; Jones and Jones, "Genealogy," p. 98.

<sup>11</sup>Circuit Court, Record Book 46, p. 45, Department of Old Records, Madison County Courthouse, Huntsville, Alabama; Census of 1850, p. 1.

<sup>12</sup>Deed Book X, pp. 576-577.

<sup>13</sup>Frances Roberts, "Dr. David Moore, Urban Pioneer of the Old Southwest," The Alabama Review 18 (January 1965): 45; Deed Book AA, pp. 140-141.

<sup>14</sup>Deed Book AA, pp. 140-141.

<sup>15</sup>"Death of LeRoy H. Jones," Huntsville Independent 4 March 1880, p. 3, Census of 1850, p. 195.

<sup>16</sup>When Jones sold the Flint River tract to Nuckles in 1858, the property was surveyed using the chain measurement. In those days measurements were not always accurate, according to G. W. Jones and Sons, Civil Engineers. Therefore, the twenty-acre difference between the deeds of 1850 and 1858 did not mean that there was more land being sold in the 1858 conveyance, for it was, according to the latter instrument, "the tract of land sold and conveyed to...LeRoy H. Jones by Daniel B. Friend...the 18th day of May 1850." Deed Book BB, pp. 358-359, Probate Office, Madison County Courthouse, Huntsville, Alabama; Weymouth T. Jordan, Ante-bellum Alabama Town



and Country. (Tallahassee: The Florida State University Press, 1957), p. 136.

<sup>17</sup>Jordan, Ante-Bellum Alabama, p. 136.

<sup>18</sup>Tax Assessment of Real Property for the year 1857, LeRoy H. Jones, Maysville #3.

<sup>19</sup>Jones, Huntsville Independent, p. 3.

<sup>20</sup>Census of 1860, Madison County, Alabama (Washington, D.C.: National Archives, Roll 653, 1967), p. 293.

<sup>21</sup>Probate Case 2484, Probate Office, Madison County Courthouse, Huntsville, AL.

<sup>22</sup>Ibid.

WILSON TRACT, known later as  
"FLINT RIVER PLACE"

YEAR	ACREAGE	VALUE
1814	312	\$ 4,500
1820	672	n/a (other property involved)
1843	672	4,319
1850	672	9,000
1857	672	9,000