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# MONTE SANO'S VIDUTA HISTORICAL DISTRICT: A Prototype

by  
*Jane Barr*

The following excerpts come from the Monte Sano Historical Association "Briefings," 1992, prepared by Jane Barr who has done a mountain of work researching and interviewing.

## MONTE SANO HISTORICAL ASSOCIATION

December 3, 1992

Dear member,

Since our first meeting, April 23, 1992, we have made great strides in forming a basis for archival information on the Monte Sano community. This coming year we are looking forward to even further discoveries. In particular we will be examining areas where there are known maps and photographs. Work will also be concentrating on the survey of settlements, landscapes and buildings of the mountain plateau.

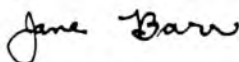
We have been taking an inventory of the myriad cultural resources of the mountain. Several of the sites are being evaluated for possible inclusion in the Alabama Register of Landmarks and Heritage.

We have a program of visits, lectures, and instruction which will introduce you to some of the varied and rich archaeology, architecture, and history of Monte Sano Mountain. These include Indian trails, the early Viduta site, the Monte Sano Railway route, the O'Shaughnessy Place homestead site, Civilian Conservation Corp camp site, numerous springs, CCC and Scout Hiking Trails, the rich prehistory of our mountain as well as the beautiful rocky blufflines. We are committed to the enhancement and interpretation of these cultural resources for the benefit of the community.

WE ARE EXCITED ABOUT THE RESPONSE WE ARE RECEIVING FROM INDIVIDUALS AND FAMILIES WHO ARE SHARING FIRST-HAND LETTERS, DIARIES, PHOTOGRAPHS, DOCUMENTS AND EXPERIENCES DATING FROM THE MID 1800'S.

We look forward to seeing you at the meetings and at the sites.

Yours sincerely,



Jane Barr  
President

MONTE SANO HISTORICAL ASSOCIATION  
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HUNTSVILLE, ALABAMA 35801  
(205) 534-5698

August 25, 1993

Melanie A. Betz  
Alabama Register Coordinator  
Alabama Historical Commission  
468 South Perry Street  
Montgomery, Alabama 36130

Dear Ms Betz,

We have carefully researched abstracts and deeds and conducted numerous personal interviews. We have reached the conclusion that Viduta is a significant historical segment of north Alabama worthy of acknowledgment.

After reviewing our data and slides we would appreciate your consideration in designating **Viduta a Historic District** for the **Alabama Register of Landmarks and Heritage**.

"Viduta" Latin for life-giving. "Monte Sano" Latin for mountain of health. The cool air and medicinal springs proved a marketable commodity when yellow fever, malaria, and cholera threatened the public health. Dr. Thomas Fearn established a small colony in 1827. Dr. Fearn and a group of partners established Viduta in 1833. There was an Inn, the Rowe Female Seminary and several fine homes. There was a general, a judge, a banker, a state senator, and a future Confederate congressman. The end of the Civil War left the mountain top a shambles of ruined buildings. Prosperity returned in the 1890's with the Monte Sano Hotel and Railroad. By 1914 the economy took a nose-dive. Boom days of the late 20's saw another spurt of activity. Land prices skidded, and the Great Depression took over. A new spirit came with the Space Program. In 1954 Viduta was annexed into the City of Huntsville. This residential district contains a wide variety of architecture: Dogtrot (mid-1800's), Queen Anne (late 1800's), Arts and Crafts (1920's), Tin Spraddle-Roof Folk (1930's), Usonian and Ranch (early 1950's). Throughout the roller-coaster development of Viduta it has remained a mountain retreat for pioneering spirits who love the woods, springs, wildlife and a park-like environment.

Thank you for your assistance and consideration,

Most sincerely

Jane Barr  
President

## EARLY LANDOWNERS OF MONTE SANO

John Martin (1814, 80 acres) John procured a patent (grant from the government) for the future site of Viduta, Jan. 3, 1814.

Levin Wilson Shephard

John Brahan (1814, quarter section)

William Patton (1814, second landowner, 40 acres, future hotel site)

Hunter Peal (1814, quarter section)

Charles Cabaniss (1809, first landowner, 80 acres)

Martin Miller (1814, quarter section)

Judge William Smith (Pre-1814, third landowner, 160 acres)

By the early 1800's the mountain had an Inn and several log cabins. The wealthy took advantage of the healthy conditions of the mountain. Reverend James Rowe, a "Circuit Rider" for the Methodist Church, and his wife Malinda, a school teacher with rheumatism, chose the "mountain of health" for their school.



## Monte Sano Female Seminary - 1829

Educational facilities reached an early peak with the founding of Monte Sano Female Seminary in 1829 by the Reverend and Mrs. James Rowe. Excerpts from a letter written by Malinda Rowe to her mother with the heading Monte Sano Oct, 27th 1831: "We still live on the mountain, the most beautiful place in the world. We have a boarding school. We have a stone house intended for the school which is fifty-six feet long and forty-five wide." and signed "Malinda A. Rowe."

In a brochure dated June 19, 1832 James Rowe described courses of instruction.

Reverend Rowe purchased half of Lot Two when Viduta was established early in the year 1833. The school closed after Mrs. Rowe's death November of the same year. The Rowe Cemetery was established on Lot Two by Reverend Rowe's great-grandchildren, April 1992. (Rowe file)

## MONTE-SANO FEMALE SEMINARY.

**T**HIS Institution, under the superintendance of MRS ROWE and her Assistants, being now considered by the proprietor as permanently established, he asks leave to call public attention to his classes, under a belief that it possesses advantages seldom equalled, and not surpassed by any Academy in this section of country. In point of local situation, being about 2½ miles N. East of Huntsville, this Academy is situated. Occupying one of the summits of a range of mountains, the elevation of which is 1100 feet above the plain beneath, a prospect, the most beautiful, variegated and extensive, forever charms the eye. Favored by the mountain breezes, contagious Health scarcely to have made her favorite residence; whilst Retention, with her handmaids, Constipation and Headaches, follow in her train. The experience of nearly three years has conclusively proved that Monte-Sano is entirely free from the miasmatic diseases of this climate; not a single case of fever having occurred, either in the school or family, within that time. If elevated situation, pure and constant breezes, and an abundant supply of cool and limpid water, present any chance to an exemption from disease, than is Monte-Sano three times blessed.—In addition to the new ample buildings of the Academy, the proprietor is erecting a spacious and commodious two story stone building, which will, it is probably, be finished early in the fall. With this addition, a still larger number of pupils can be furnished with suitable and comfortable accommodations.

The scholastic year invariably commences on the 2d Monday in February, and terminates on the Friday preceding the second Monday in December, in each year; at the last mentioned period the anniversary of the Institution will be held, and diplomas conferred upon such of the YOUNG LADIES as have completed the prescribed course of studies.

The course of instruction pursued in this Academy is extensive, embracing a judicious selection of all the English, Classical, Scientific and Ornamental branches of Education usually bestowed upon young ladies in such institutions. The superintendent's

will also give their most earnest and unwearied attention to the proper formation and preservation of the morals and manners of the young ladies committed to their care.

The scholastic year will be divided into two sessions of five months each. No pupil will be received for a shorter period than one session, and that only on condition of settlement by note. No allowance will be made for absence, unless occasioned by sickness; but a reasonable deduction will be made in case of patrons who place three or more scholars in the institution at the same time. The whole school will be divided into three classes; the studies of which, and the terms, are as follows:

1st Class—Classics and Belles Lettres (per ses-	
8000).....	\$15 00
2d do—The Sciences.....	15 00
3d do—English and Preparatory branches.....	10 00
ARTISTIC COURSE.	
French and Latin Languages, (per session).....	25 00
Vocal and Instrumental Music, including use	
of Piano.....	30 00
Drawing, and Painting in oil and water colors	
on paper, velvet, satin or canvas.....	10 00
Plain Needle work, including making &c.;	
Ornamental ditto, including open and lace	
stitches, &c.....	5 00
Embroidery.....	5 00
Contingent Expenses.....	1 50
Board, including washing and lodging.....	35 00

Patrons placing a pupil in the school for a regular course, and for graduation, will have the benefit of all the classes, solid and ornamental, with board &c. for \$100 per annum. At the anniversary examination (and at all semi-annual ones, for which arrangements will be made in future,) parents and guardians are respectfully invited to be present; and the invitation will be extended to the friends of the institution and the public in general.

The rules of the house, by which the school is regulated during the hours of study and recreation, can at all times be seen upon application at the Academy.

JAMES ROWE.

June 10, 1832.



## VIDUTA - 1833

Early in the year that the school closed, a boom broke out on Monte Sano. Dr. Fearn and his brother George had planned a real estate development on the mountain since 1814; by 1833 the Inn was prospering, the school appeared to be a permanent institution, and they decided the time had come. They laid an 80-acre portion off into 67 lots, separated by streets and avenues. (Figure 2) Three acres around Cold Spring were set aside as a park. By the end of the year, 38 lots were sold. The town was named Viduta, for the Italian word meaning "view," and houses were erected along all streets. The Official Records of the General Land Office, U.S. Geological Survey shows the town of Viduta. (Ref: 1915 map).

