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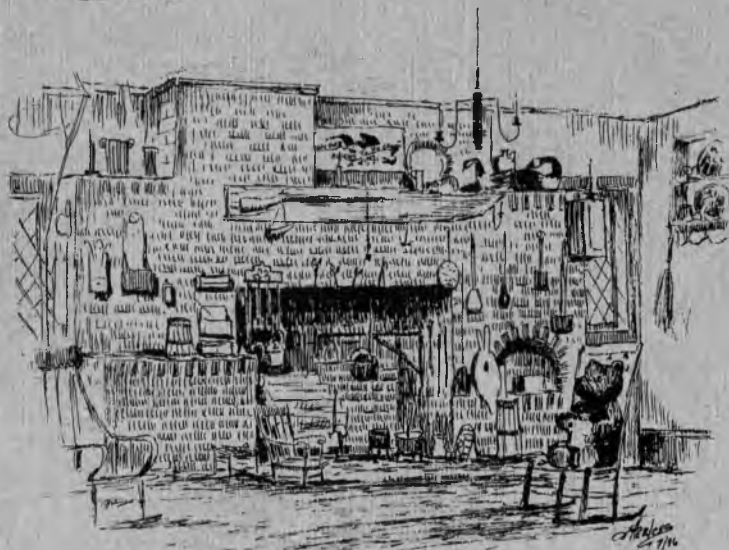
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Three Dollars

Summer 1996

THE HISTORIC HUNTSVILLE
QUARTERLY
Of Local Architecture & Preservation

HOME IS WHERE THE HEARTH IS



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THE HISTORIC HUNTSVILLE
QUARTERLY
of Local Architecture and Preservation

Vol. XXII, No. 2

Summer — 1996

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From the Chair...Diane Ellis

Home is where the hearth is, we learn in this *Quarterly*, and, 90-degree-plus weather or not, Board members have been stoking the coals and really cookin' during the last few months.

In May, we tended the fires of our community hearth by sponsoring special activities for National Preservation Week, starting with a wonderful walking tour led by Harvie Jones and Hall Bryant, Jr. on Mother's Day Sunday. On Monday, at Harrison Brothers, Mayor Hettinger issued a proclamation recognizing our sponsorship of National Preservation Week in Huntsville. Thursday brought a covered dish supper and a presentation by photographer Chip Cooper. The week's grand finale on Saturday was the biennial Moveable Feast party and fundraiser, chaired expertly by Stephanie Sherman. The Foundation netted approximately \$2,400 from the event. As if we hadn't had enough partying, the Foundation and the Harrison Brothers Management Committee hosted a picnic in June for Harrison Brothers volunteers.

It hasn't been all fun and games. New folks have joined the Board to replace the members whose tenure of office has ended. Committee responsibilities have been set for the year. A new bookmark is circulating to publicize the work of the Historic Huntsville Foundation. Suzi Bolton is getting set to produce a brochure for us. Ira Jones is becoming an expert on the use of easements in historic preservation. Lauren Martinson is leading the revolving fund effort and reviewing the National Trust's Main Street program materials for ideas we can use in downtown Huntsville. Ben Walker is making headway on negotiations concerning the freight depot. Carol Harless is keeping a determined and hard-working preservation committee on track, and ideas for workshops, conferences, fundraising and membership-building are percolating everywhere.

Trade Day, September 7th, is taking shape under the able guidance of Suzi Bolton and B. J. Robinson, and, thanks to Gayle Milberger, we'll enjoy the Annual Holiday Tea in December at Jack and Emily Burwell's house on Holmes Avenue.

So there's lots to do, and we need your help with all of it if we're to keep the home fires burning in the cause of historic preservation. Jump in and get involved in some of the hot projects we're cooking up on the Board these days. It's really the cool thing to do.

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Diane Ellis". The script is fluid and cursive, with the first name "Diane" and last name "Ellis" clearly legible.

From the Editor...Elise Stephens

This issue grew from a poem to a grandmother's tale for her grandchildren to a "witch house," all in the course of exploring the possibilities of the theme "Home Is Where The Hearth Is." Before TV, the fireplace was the focal point of the family: lives were shared, as hours unfolded in story-telling and memory-gathering around the fire. The idea was to consider the hearth as a preservation icon, capturing the emotional attachment to home and place that is at the heart of preservation. But there is another side to the warm hearth: the all-too-often burned-out chimney standing gaunt against the sky. That, too, is a preservation icon of sorts. Issues like this one do not come about by design as much as by happenstance. The creative joy is derived from weaving an unexpected welcome mat for each piece so that our readers open/enter each expectantly and exit satisfied, ready for the next.

The hearth of the issue is located in "The Witch House," the name and design Dale Rhoades has introduced to Huntsville architecture, which is an adaptation and inspiration from Old Salem's famous "Witch House." The style is called New England Medieval. It originated in England and was brought to this country by the New England settlers.

The first time Dale saw the Salem house, it spoke to her not in frightening terms but esthetically. Here was a design as singular in its stark simplicity as in its stately proportions. What could be simpler? Or more compelling? Could its outward design convey such a sense of magic that one is drawn to approach and seek entry? And what would be awaiting the visitor? What could one expect? Suspend skepticism and toss adult reason.

Enter *Narnia*. Leave your worries and cares at the door. You are about to enter a house of fantasy, a story-book place where witches, bears and little boys and girls mingle freely, and you may gain a quickening sense of possibility as childhood memories wash over you, renewing your spirits.

Come, my friends, the door opens.

Memory will do what science and medicine cannot do and return us to our childhoods, Joe Bramm has a Grandmother's Tale for us to share with our young ones. We already have our hearth and our bears. Now we need a special little boy, or girl for that matter, a grandchild. Joe supplies the rest: A story she wrote out of love and the desire to plant a simple tale with a simple moral in her grandchild's mind where it could last a lifetime and be as fresh as the spring

jonquils. Like most of life's most valued lessons, the admonition not to "fool with the fire" is one dear to the hearts and hearths of all preservationists. Joe has done us a favor by putting into our hands a story we can use to teach youth that necessary bit of wisdom.

Memories are also awakened for us by Lois Mason Miller. The Lyric, one of her favorite retreats, burned down, twice! Geographer, Marilyn O. Dabbs, describes a way of life now gone, giving a scholar's reason for the deserted homes and scattered remnants of chimneys she had studied in Jackson County.

The bitter taste of fires comes through an excerpt from Elizabeth Chapmans' *Changing Huntsville*, to which I have added an afterword. Then, Margaret Anne Goldsmith Hanaw brings the issue to an ironic close, with her soul-searching poem which brings up another preservation question: When—if ever—is it all right to burn or destroy a house that nobody wants; yet, however humble, refuses to go gently into that good night?

We begin celebrating hearths and life. We conclude lamenting the perilous effects of fire on preservation. From one icon to another, this issue takes a natural although serendipitous course. Joe Bramm's story needed a setting, and Dale Rhoades gave it that. The little bear of Joe's story actually lives in the Witch's House. All the photographs in Joe's story were taken for this issue by Dale and Dick. By bringing together two disparate undertakings, a magical world has been created. *Thanks Dale. Thanks Joe.*

Lastly, a hearty thanks for a job well done to Suzi Bolton who has stepped down as chair.



William And The Bear

by

Joe Bramm

November 3, 1991

William lived in a log cabin in the middle of the forest with his mother and father. They had a big room downstairs and a loft up above. The mother and father slept in the loft and William slept in a little bed near the fireplace.

One day, not long before Christmas, William's father said, "I have to take my gun and get our Christmas turkey or goose." William's mother said, "I have to go to the cranberry bog and pick cranberries so we can have sauce to go with the turkey."



They both said, "William, while we are gone, do not fool with the fire, do not fall down the well, do not climb in the loft."



William said he wouldn't do any of those things.

After they left, he drew pictures on his slate and rubbed them out.

Suddenly, there was a knock at the door. William opened the door and what do you think he saw? A big Bear!!!



The bear said, "I see you have a nice fire. Now I was fishing in the creek and fell in and the water was SO cold and when I climbed out, I tore a hole in my fur coat so it is drafty Could I come in and get warm by the fire?"

William thought awhile. "I told mother and daddy that I wouldn't fool with the fire or climb up into the loft or fall down the well, but I never promised anything about bears. I guess it will be all right." So he stepped aside and let the bear come in.

The bear stretched out near the fire and began to dry out and get warm. He looked very happy.



William said, "It's cold now, why aren't you hibernating? I thought bears all went to sleep in the early fall and slept till spring."

"We don't really sleep all the time, but wake up from time to time. It hasn't gotten too cold this fall so we are eating as much as we can now to get us through the time the ground is covered with snow and we can't find much to eat. I will probably go into my cave in a week or so."

William said, "How do you know when to come out?"

The bear said, "You know those yellow flowers on the long stems? Jonquils?"

"Yes," said William.

"Well, we look outside the cave and if the jonquils are blooming, we know it is spring and we can come out into the sunshine."

William felt very comfortable talking to the bear. The bear was getting warm and happy.

When he was almost dry, the bear looked at William and said, "You know what would taste good now?"

“No, what?” said William.

“I would really like to have some honey. I haven’t found a good bee tree all fall and I do like something sweet before I go to hibernate.”

William thought, I promised not to fool with the fire and not to climb into the loft and not to fall in the well, but I didn’t promise not to give some honey to a bear.” So he did!



“Yum,” said the bear. “This is extra good honey. The bees must have found a clover field.” And he ate a big jar full.

“Now, I must be going,” said the bear. “Thank you for letting me in and for the honey too.”

“You’re welcome,” said William, “have a nice hibernation.”

A little while later, his daddy came home with a big, fat turkey and his mother came home with a big basket of cranberries.

“Were you all right by yourself while we were gone?” they asked.

What do you think William said?



Photography & Setting by Dale Rhoades.



Joe Leroy Bamm (she was named after her grandfather) was born in Memphis and educated at Lasell Junior College in Massachusetts, and graduated from the University of Tennessee. She moved to Huntsville in 1957 with her husband, Dr. Horace Bamm, and two children. Dr. Bamm practiced ob-gyn here for over 30 years. She has been active in a number of civic and political organizations. She told this story to her oldest grandchild, Jonathan Bamm (son of Dr. and Mrs. David Bamm) while on a family trip. She later wrote it down and dedicated it to Jonathan and to Margaret and Charlotte Dunn, granddaughters, children of Dr. and Mrs. Lawrence Dunn of Durham, North Caroline.



A Touch of New England in Old Town

Dale Rhoades

The story of our house is not one of historic preservation as is usually written about in *The Quarterly*. Perhaps it is a suitable subject though because, in building, we chose to use traditional architectural and interior designs that have stood the test of time. In a sense, we are preserving historic designs.



The outside of our house is a replica of the Witch House that was built in Salem, Massachusetts, in 1642. It is considered to be the oldest existing house in Salem. The style is called New England Medieval. The interior is an eclectic collection of things I've seen in museums, historic buildings, books, and magazines—things that spoke to me. When something grabs me in such a way that I'm consumed by its very presence, that's a religious experience for me. That's the way the Witch House and the interior designs we chose to use affected me.

The Witch House is not haunted and a witch never lived there. It got its name because one of the judges who tried the Salem witchcraft trials in 1692, Jonathan Corwin, lived in the house at that time and some of the hearings were held in an upstairs chamber.

I first saw the Witch House 20 years ago in the summer of 1976. I was completely captivated by the “intuitively appealing” exterior. Before I ever went inside for the tour I thought, “I could live in that house.” I never recovered from that feeling. While on the tour I bought a post card that showed the exterior of the house. I went home and in my mind's eye laid out a floor plan. Several weeks later I sketched that floor plan on a piece of notebook paper. My dream was born. For the next 17 years I refined my floor plan and interior designs. I cut templates of our furniture; placed them on the floor plan; then, drew the walls.

All the while I was building this house mentally, I really had no serious intention of ever moving from our house on Monte Sano. It was a charming house and I loved it. It was built as a summer cottage about the turn of the century when the mountain was a resort. Our furniture looked good in that house and I really planned to spend the rest of my life there. Dick and I lived there for 26 years. Three daughters grew up there.

Somehow the desire to build the Witch House grew and the “If I could build a house this is what I'd build,” became “When we build....” The lot in Old Town that I'd looked at longingly for years became available. I appeared before the Huntsville Historic Preservation Commission with a picture of the Witch House saying, “If we get the lot this is the house I want to build. Will you approve the plans?” The answer was yes. If the plans had not been approved I would not have wanted that particular lot. I wanted to build that house on that lot. We bought the lot.

We chose Joe Butcher as our draftsman. We took the picture of the Witch House, my floor plan, Dick's site plan, and my 17 year collection of pictures and ideas to Mr. Butcher. From that mass of paper came our house plans. When I saw the drawing of the elevation I was awe struck by the project we were about to undertake. I recut templates of our furniture for the floor plan just to make sure everything would fit where it would be placed. Everything fit. My dream was taking shape.

The two biggest obstacles we had to deal with were choosing a builder and locating the wide pine boards I wanted for the flooring and the raised-panel wall in the great room. Both were finally accomplished but neither came easy.

The search for the right builder started with our asking friends if they knew or could recommend builders. We compiled a list of builders to talk to and a list to avoid. I was amazed at the horror stories that some people shared.

The comments I heard most often from the builders with whom I talked were: "You can't do that; that won't work; that's not the way we do it; that's not the way it's done now; the pitch of the roof can't be done." Naysayers! But the most upsetting thing we were told was, "It'll cost you \$75,000 more than you want to spend." I was encouraged. If enough builders would come down \$25,000 each, then we'd be able to do it. Some builders just returned our plans without ever giving a bid.

One day I ran into HHF member, Norma Oberlies. She asked how the house was coming and I told her of our problems in finding a builder. She told me of the house recently constructed next door to her new house. She said her husband had watched it go up and when it was finished, he hadn't seen anything the builder did wrong. When I mentioned this to Dick he said, "Call him." I made my first call to David Collins Construction. Soon after my first meeting with David I knew I had found a builder with whom I could work. He was young, energetic, and open to suggestion. And, he wasn't negative. Months passed before we actually signed a contract and broke ground.

During these months, while Dick and David were working out the details that didn't interest me, I turned my energy to locating wide pine boards. Of the many ads I answered, the same two problems kept



recurring. The pine boards I located in the Southeast were only up to 12 inches wide, which was not wide enough. The really wide pine boards I located in New England were not affordable. The fact that we needed 2,200 square feet added to this problem. One of the phone calls

I made was to Craftsman Lumber Company in Groton, Massachusetts. It was really encouraging, but their prices were so good we wondered about the quality of the wood. Coincidentally, Dick had a business trip to Boston and made time to visit the lumberyard. The quality was good and he placed our order. I had made a special request for “one magnificent board” to be the focal point in the raised panel wall. When the boards were delivered the following spring, I had one of my religious experiences when I saw them. The widest floor boards were 22 inches wide and my magnificent board was 28 inches wide by 6 feet long. It was perfect.

One of the reasons we were so pleased with David as our builder is because he was one of the few with whom we talked who was willing to help us economize, and was also agreeable when we told him we wanted to do some of the work ourselves. To get what we wanted and to keep it affordable, my job was to sand, stain, and oil all the pine boards for the pine flooring. Together we would do all the interior painting.

We broke ground on December 13, 1994. I started a diary, but it didn't last long. I was so busy building a house, I didn't have time to write about it. When the house was framed, I was almost embarrassed by how big it was. I just didn't realize it was this big. I could actually see it while driving I-565. I looked over one day and thought, “It looks like Stone Mountain!” I didn't want a big house, I only wanted the Witch House.

My need to have a walk-in fireplace might have brought on the building of this house. For years I had collected wrought iron and cast iron cookware and fireplace utensils. I had never had a proper fireplace in which to display my iron in our house on the mountain. It just sat on the hearth collecting dust and falling over. I had very definite ideas about what I needed in my fireplace. We had spent hours talking, planning, and looking at pictures. When work commenced I sat on a stack of bricks in

the corner of the keeping room and watched almost every brick be laid. Changes were made and many decisions were made as they worked. When it was time to mount the cranes, I made a quick trip to Lewter's to get the right size eye bolt to use as a bracket. The contractor, Ed Bracken, and the master mason, Tony Leonard, are very good at what they do. I'm still impressed by the care Tony took in planning and lining up each row of bricks. My fireplace is beautiful and exactly what I wanted. And the chimney draws, too!



My only disappointment was in the placement of the beam. We were given two wonderful old beams that came from the buildings of the Monte Sano Female Seminary erected on the mountain in the 1820's. Mildred Rowe Sanders, a lovely lady who lives in Cullman, is the great granddaughter of the Rev. and Mrs. Rowe who founded the school. She offered us the beams. I chose one for the lentil in the fireplace and the other to go in the kitchen above an open counter. City fire codes

prevented one being used as the lentil, so it became the mantel instead. The change works very well. It's a very attractive, as well as useful, open shelf.

The pine boards were delivered in mid-March. I set up shop with my saw horses and sander and began the seemingly endless job of sanding, staining, and oiling. This could have been a very tedious job, but it turned out to be the most fun I had while working on our house. Our finish carpenter, Danny Gibson, came to work. Before he started David told him, "I don't know what she wants, but she knows what she wants. Just go down there and do what she wants." Danny came to work with the feeling he'd last at least one day, maybe two, with this opinionated woman and her Ph.D. husband. He'd had unfortunate experiences with Ph.D. engineers wanting him to do *his* job *their* way and he was not looking forward to us. Something happened to change his mind. We clicked. The three of us worked very well together probably because each of us was so busy doing our own jobs we didn't have time to interfere with each other. Maybe, too, it's because Dick and I worked just as hard and quite often longer than many of the contractors and their crews. Danny takes a great deal of pride in his work, and I think he really enjoyed doing the different things we wanted done. Most of his jobs began with "How do you want this done?" and he always rose to the occasion when something called upon to deviate from the way its done today.



A good example of this was the front door. The foyer was panelled with the wide pine boards but the front door was mahogany. I stained the inside of the door with pine stain and it turned bright orange. Awful! I had some of the boards planed. We took the door down and clad the inside with pine boards. The door actually looks very similar to the door of the original Witch House. The boards on the outside are vertical and the boards on the inside are horizontal and are held in place with hand cut Tremont nails. It's beautiful.



I would be remiss if I didn't acknowledge Kenny Parker at Gobble-Fite Lumber in Decatur for his help. The fluted trim and rosettes I wanted for door and window trim were not always easy to get. The fluted arc over the front door was a particular problem, but the third time truly was the charm. My little foyer is completely pine and lovely.

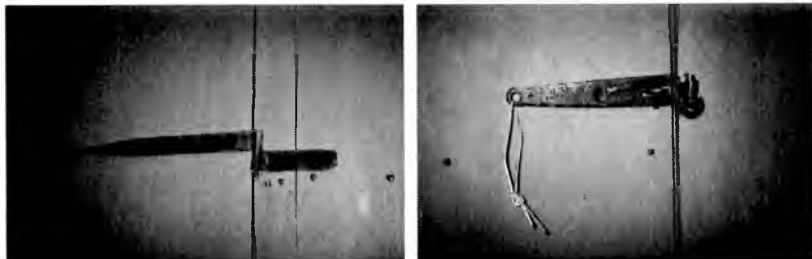
The trim on the door frame between the foyer and the great room was inspired by the trim on a door frame at Oak Place. When I saw George Steele had a pocket door in a thick wall and wide door frame like ours, I thought that might be an idea we could use. I made arrangements with Lee Kilbourn for David and me to go to Oak Place for David to see the door trim. From David's description of the trim, Danny was able to trim our door the same way.

The door is typical of the problems that arose throughout our construction. But I decided early on there is a solution to every problem. And there is. I was not about to let any problem outweigh my excitement. More often than not, the best solution was the simplest. I approached each challenge by asking how it might have been done 350 years ago.

The beam in the kitchen is another example. Some of the men in my life at that time thought the beam would be very heavy and need to be supported from the ceiling with iron bands. After listening to this, Danny asked how I really wanted to mount the beam. I said, pointing to the cabinets, "A hole in this end and a hole in that end with no visible means of support." That's what we did and it works beautifully.



Another example of the men trying to make a problem where none existed arose when we were ready to hang a board door Danny had made in the wide board wall. I wanted to use my antique strap hinges and latch. “Won’t work. Door’s too heavy.” I asked that the door be hung with my antique hinges, and if they didn’t work, then we could hide modern hinges inside the door frame. Danny hung the door. My antique hinges work perfectly. My antique latch works and looks good.



There are some simple things I did to preserve the integrity of my interior design. There are no light switches in the great room. All light switches are just outside the doors in the hall. My microwave is in the pantry. The steps going into the basement are in the garage rather than underneath the inside stairs. This gave us a small closet beneath the stairs. But more importantly, Dick doesn't haul his lumber, tools, paint—all those workshop things—through my kitchen and down the hall.

An exciting time in our construction came when it was time to put up the paneled wall. The inspiration for our wall came from the raised panel chimney wall in the Chowan house that was built in North Carolina in 1755. The room in which this wall stood was moved to and reconstructed in the Museum of Early Southern Decorative Arts in Old Salem in Winston-Salem, North Carolina. After I saw the picture in a book, *Southern Antiques and Folk Art*, and again in *Colonial Homes Magazine*, I told Dick we had to go to Old Salem to see that wall. Our daughters were at the right ages to appreciate Old Salem, so we took a long weekend and went to see the wall. Another religious experience!



Our cabinet maker, Davis Cabinets, made and installed the panels. But, before they could go up, they too had to be sanded, stained, and oiled. The challenge here came in making sure I matched this finish with the shell-domed corner cabinets that I had ordered from Rachel Heeschen at Greenlawn Interiors. (The story of finding shell-domed corner cabinets is another one of numerous futile contacts until I got in touch with Rachel and she not only rescued me but her own mother as well. I'll spare you the details.) My corner cabinets were made in South Carolina of southern pine, and my wall was made of Canadian and New England eastern yellow pine. There are subtle differences in the colors of the woods and staining would be tricky. Since they were all on the same wall, they had to match. They did. And they, too, are beautiful. By varying the numbers of coats of stain I was able to achieve a match. And my magnificent board in the chimney wall truly is a focal point between the shell-domed corner cabinets.

As we neared completion it was time to install the light fixtures. The one above the





dining room table is one that I made 23 years ago with the help of Maples Sheet Metal and a sheetmetal worker named Mike. It is a light-weight sheet metal cone in which I punched two pineapple designs. It has six arms that hold candles. Our workers called that my “witch hat.” After I was unable to find a pineapple chandelier I decided I might have to make that one, too. I found two wooden pineapple post tops at Lowe’s. I cut the pineapple leaves from tuna fish cans, painted everything the right color and took these pieces and a sketch I’d made to Maples Sheet Metal. They cut and shaped the arms. My next stop was Richards Lighting where I collected everything we needed for us to assemble the fixture and for Dick to wire it. The candle cups at the end of each arm are actually patty shell pans from Harrison Brothers. The chandelier for the keeping room was also made of post tops from Lowe’s, curtain rings, and a wooden curtain rod finial. This one was easy because it isn’t wired. The arms that hold the candles were cut from a pair of sconces I’d had for a number of years.



The very last things to be installed were the leaded glass windows that Wayne Lumpkin made for us. The leaded glass



panes are made of diamond shaped reproduction antique glass and were installed on the inside of the casement windows. They, too, are beautiful. The thank you note I wrote Mr. Lumpkin said they are the finishing touch for our house. They are exactly what this house needed. They are perfect. Another religious experience.

I've never worked so hard or so long in such hot weather as I did that summer of 1995. Neither have I ever felt such a sense of satisfaction in hard work. I came out of this construction project loving my builder, loving my framers, loving my masons, loving my finish carpenter, and loving my house (and, of course, my husband who let me do it my way). Would I do it again? Yes, but only if it were the same house on the same lot with the same builder.

We've lived here for nine months. I still walk through almost every day and say "I can't believe I got what I wanted." Dreams really do come true.

Meet Dale and Richard (Dick) Rhoades

Dale was born and reared in Gay, Georgia, and went to school in Greenville, Georgia. Her father was a rural mail carrier and her mother worked in an antique shop. Dale's interest in antiques was sparked when she got in the habit of looking at things in the shop where her mother worked. After graduating from LaGrange College in LaGrange, Georgia, with a degree in Psychology and with certification in elementary education, Dale taught first grade for 7 years in DeKalb County, Georgia, and in Huntsville. She traveled for one year doing market research for Proctor and Gamble.

Dick was born August 15, 1938, in Northampton, Massachusetts. He received his Bachelors and Doctorate in Chemical Engineering from Rensselaer Polytechnic Institute followed later by a Masters in Management from MIT. He saw Army service at Aberdeen, Maryland, and Redstone Arsenal, and has over 30 years of civil service for the Army Missile Command, including assignments as Director for Propulsion, Associate Director for Technology, and his current position as Associate Director for Systems. His hobbies include skiing, golf, reading, and gardening. Dick provided engineering ideas for the design of the house and landscaping, installed the wide pine board floor, and was the interior painting "contractor."

In the midst of the construction of their home, Dale turned to Dick and mused, "Wonder what I'd be doing now if I hadn't married a Yankee and had never seen a Witch House?" To which he quipped, "**Probably building Tara, my dear.**"

Photography courtesy Harvie P. Jones.





Dale Rhoads

I made my first teddy bear 13 years ago when our youngest daughter, Lee, was in third grade. I made her a Garfield costume for Halloween and then she picked out a beautiful teddy bear at a toy shop to be her Garfield's Pookey. I explained to her that if she got that bear it would be for Christmas and it would not go Trick or Treating. It was much too nice for that. She didn't handle disappointment well. While trying to solve this problem I remembered a teddy bear pattern in a magazine I'd had for several years. I'd never attempted to make one because I was intimidated by how the joints were made. The head, arms and legs are movable because the joints are made with cotter pins and fender washers. I didn't know what a cotter pin or a fender washer was so I assumed I couldn't do it. I finally decided to make her a bear and thought if it falls apart at midnight—so what. It would have served its purpose.

I bought fake fur, cut it out, sewed it up and stuffed it. My bear parts and I went to Lewter's Hardware, and I naively asked a clerk if he knew what cotter pins and fender washers were. He knew. I pulled out the magazine, pattern and bear parts and showed him where the joints went. He helped me pick out the right sizes, showed me how to turn the cotter pin, and I went home feeling triumphant. I finished putting the bear together. I admired my handiwork not believing I'd really made something so appealing. Lee loved it. She couldn't believe her mother had made it. Neither could Lawren and Liz, but they wanted bears, too. For Christmas that year I made seven more bears as gifts for some very special children.

That was the beginning of a very satisfying hobby. Since then I've made between 125 and 150 bears ranging in size from 1-1/2" to 30".

Even though I use the same pattern for all my bears (it has been reduced and enlarged to meet my needs), each one looks different and has his own personality. I have quite an inventory of fake furs. The choice of fur and the tilt of the head gives each bear his own charm.

To keep this hobby interesting I've diversified a bit. Several years ago I made a Crazy Quilt bear that led to my teaching that bear to quilting classes in Huntsville and Birmingham. Occasionally someone will ask me to make a bear resembling one she had when she was a little girl. This usually requires a particular kind or color of fur. More recently a friend in Birmingham asked me if I'd make teddy bears for her and her children from her aunt's old mink coat. I'd never worked with skins or leather but told her I'd try. I agreed to make one and if she liked it, I'd make the others. Once again I was intimidated by a bear. After two weeks of stalling, I finally cut into the mink! I did it! It was the most exquisite bear I'd ever made. My friend thought so, too. I made four other mink bears for her and they are, without a doubt, the most elegant teddy bear family I've ever known.

I don't sign my bears with my name, but every bear I make wears my logo, an embroidered heart that says "HOMEMADE BEAR, MADE WITH LOVE" because they are.

I'm sure I learned to sew because my mother sewed beautifully, I grew up wearing smocked dresses she made. I learned to embroider in 4-H in elementary school. Although I wasn't interested in quilts or quilting at the time, I remember playing house under my grandmother's quilting frame while she and her neighbors quilted. Yes, an old-fashioned quilting bee! I grew up sleeping under her quilts, too. My great aunt Martha talked a great deal about the beautiful needlework my other grandmother and my great grandmother did. The desire to do needlework must be in-born and comes to me from both sides of my family.

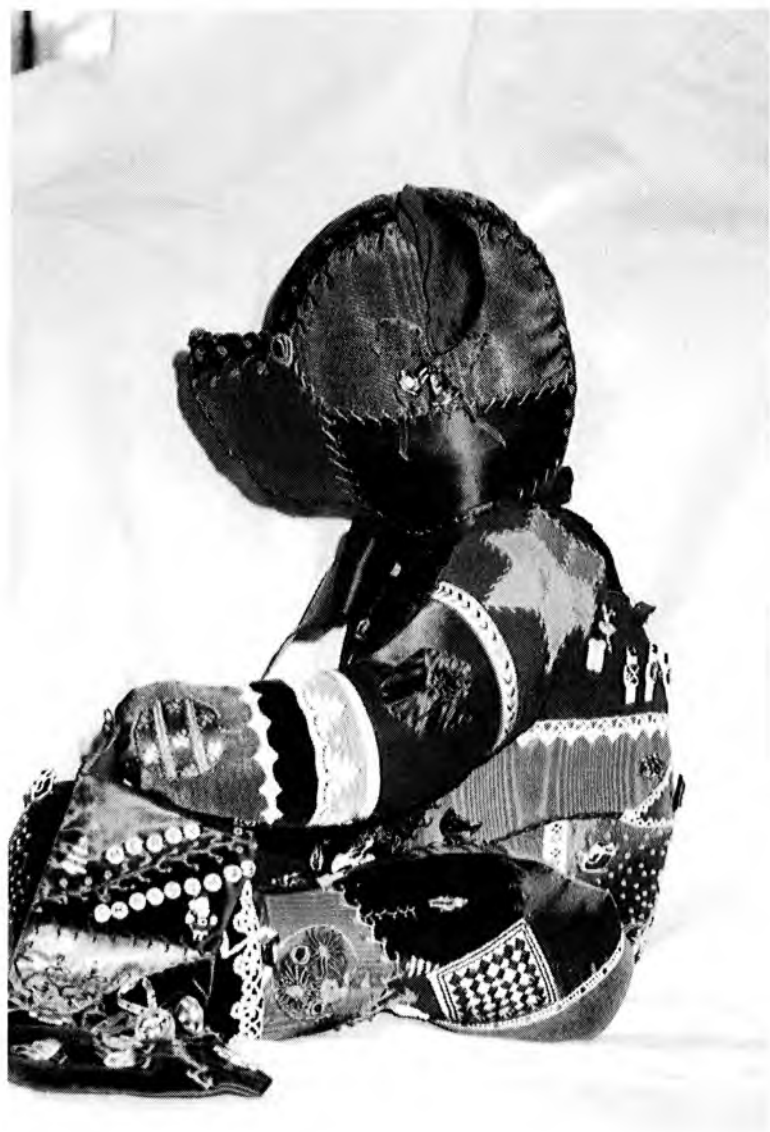
Our three daughters grew up wearing smocked and French hand-sewn dresses and bonnets. I occasionally sew for my granddaughter, but she is now wearing the dresses I made for my children and have saved

for this very purpose. When our girls outgrew these fancy things. I was well into teddy bears. Next I took quilting classes, joined the Embroiderers' Guild of America, and then the Heritage Quilters of Huntsville.

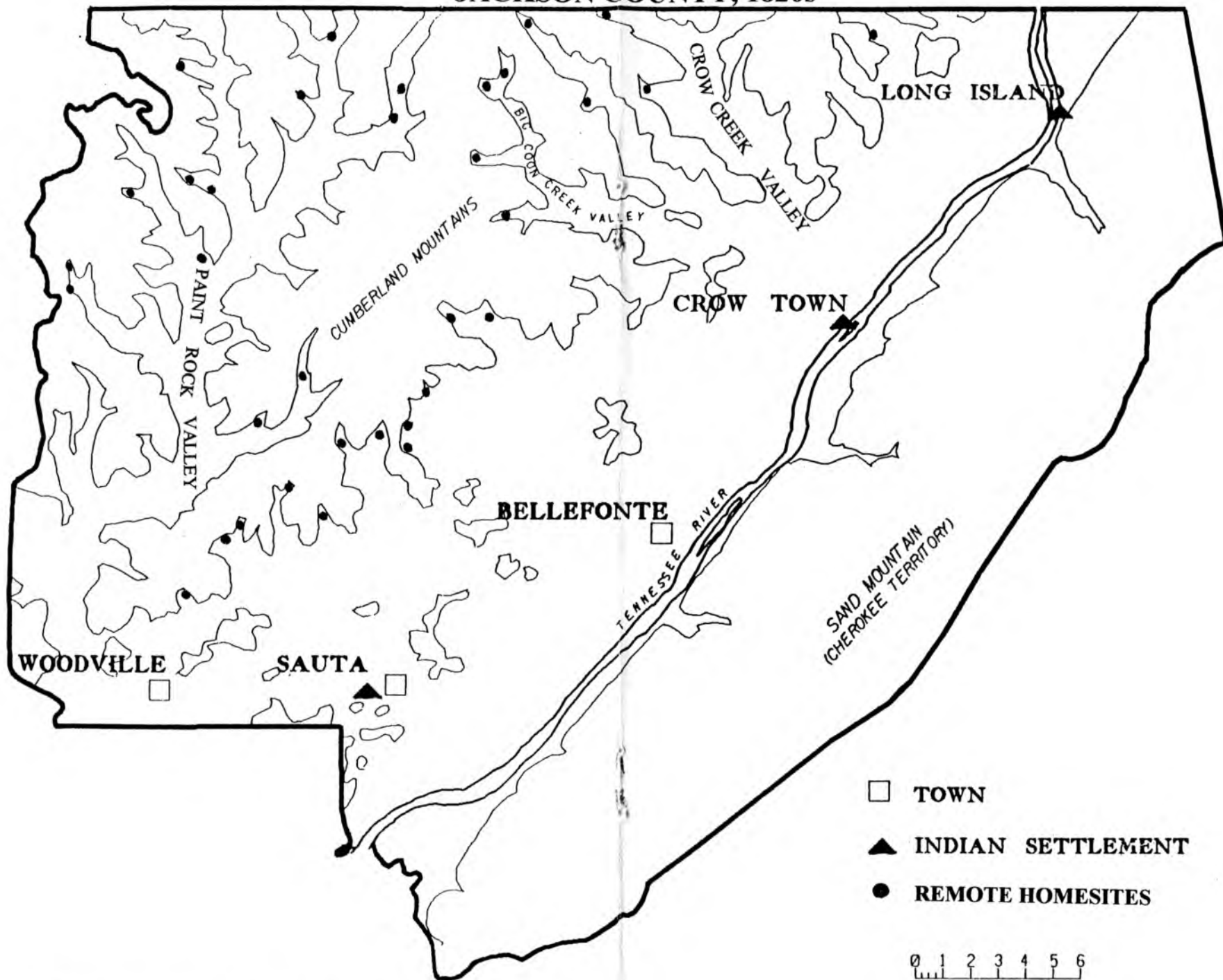
All our children are grown and away, and after having been a full time, stay-at-home mother, I now have the time to pursue all my passions: my house, antiques, needlework, and working as a volunteer at Harrison Brothers. Lawren is an LPN, is beginning an new job with the Red Cross, and is mother of our only grandchild, Shelby. Liz graduated from Duke last year and is now at the University of Michigan working on her Ph.D. in biophysics. This fall Lee begins her first year of graduate school at Wake Forest working on her Master's degree in accounting. Shelby will go to kindergarten at Farley this fall.

The needlework thing I've done of which I'm the most proud is to have co-chaired the Signature Quilt Committee with Lynn Jones, and to have pieced the quilt that was made a few years ago as a fund-raiser to pay off the mortgage on Harrison Brothers. We were successful and retired the debt. My longest lived interest outside home and family is my volunteer work as Harrison Brothers. I've been a volunteer for 12 years, since the Historic Huntsville Foundation opened the store in October of 1984. I'm beginning my third term on the HHF Board and have the pleasure of delivering books for the Publications Committee.

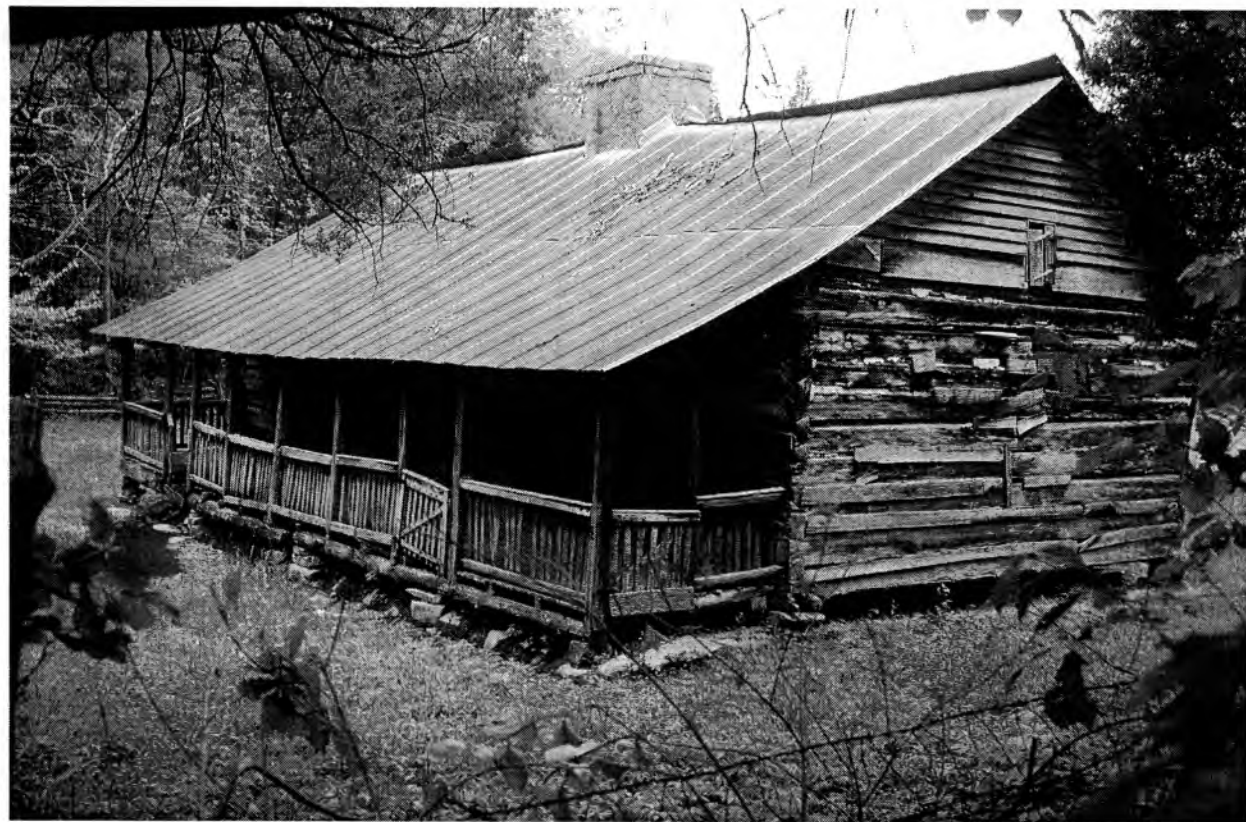
All the things I do come down to my having the time to do the things I love to do and the desire to fill my new house with things that mean something to me.



JACKSON COUNTY, 1820s



SOURCE: GLO SURVEY NOTES



Abandoned Homesites in Jackson County

Merilyn Osterlund Dabbs

High on the mountainsides and deep in the remote coves of Jackson County are the remains of long abandoned homesites. Some of these sites were occupied as long ago as the 1820s and some as recently as the 1930s, but no one lives on them now. Throughout the Cumberland Mountain area of the county are: log houses and out buildings in all stages of repair; piles of stone that were once chimneys or foundation piers; sections of split rail fences; rows of daffodils; clumps of Spanish bayonets; even aged stands of black locust or cedar trees; non-native trees such as apple, pear, pawlonia or empress, and tree of heaven; and rusty tin cans, tools, buckets, and enamel ware—all signs that people lived here at one time.

I first observed abandoned mountainside homesites more than twenty-five years ago while hiking on Nat Mountain which is located just above the town of Paint Rock and east of Keel Mountain. My curiosity was aroused because the homes were on the sides of the mountain, on fairly wide, flat benches, more than 100 feet below the top and more than 600 feet from the bottom of the mountain. Access to the homesites is difficult because the benches are at the base of steep escarpments, good roads are either on the mountain tops or in the broad valleys, and very few roads go over the mountains.

On other cross-country hikes in Jackson County, I came across more abandoned homesites on other mountainsides and in other difficult to access areas such as the remote areas of Maynard Cove, in Devers, Matthews, and Tate Coves, the upper reaches of Reid Hollow, and McAllister and Cunningham Sinks. I believe that abandoned homesites can be found in just about all remote coves and on all large mountainside benches in the county. But, why were homes built in these difficult areas? Who built them? When were they built? Why were they abandoned?

In attempting to answer these questions, I found that cove and sink homesites are older than mountainside homesites. Many of the cove and sink sites were occupied before 1820, possibly as early as 1800, but all were before the Civil War; whereas, the mountainside sites were not settled until the 1890s. Settlers, originally from the mountains of North

Carolina and east Tennessee, moving downstream from the headwaters of Estill Fork, Larkin Fork, and Crow Creek in Tennessee, came into the Jackson County area at the turn of the 18th century. These settlers, also known as mountain men or hill people, were more interested in hunting than agriculture. Their main concern in locating a home site was not the fertility of the soil nor access to roads or market towns, but the quality of the hunt and the range for stock and 'elbow room'.

Their choice of a homesite invariably was at a 'year-round' spring on the lower slopes or foot of the mountain, and the home was built as close as possible to this spring. The spring was improved by removing boulders and digging it out to make a pool of water deep enough to easily fill a bucket. Sometimes a spring house was built over the pool to keep large animals and plant debris out of the water. The spring house was also used for storing foods, such as milk and butter, that needed to be kept cool.

The homesite generally contained some flat, well-drained land that could be used for a vegetable garden and a field of corn. A plot of land was cleared of trees and large rocks and planted with beans, turnips, sweet and white potatoes, tomatoes, squash, onions—all the vegetables a family would need for the year. A larger area was cleared for a crop of corn. The corn was grown mainly for animal feed, but usually more corn than the farmer needed was produced and this extra corn was used as a cash crop. Many of the mountain men used the extra corn to make whiskey, which provided an additional source of income for the family.

The homes were either single or double pen (one or two rooms) built from trees felled on the land. The floor joists and sills were oak, the walls yellow poplar or cedar, and the roof cedar shingles. The fireplace and chimney were hewn limestone. The wooded mountainsides not only provided building material for homes but also ample sustenance for livestock, and plenty of game to hunt.

These settlers were also known as squatters, that is, they did not plan to buy the land; they merely wanted to gain a subsistence from the land. Even if they had wanted to buy it they could not, because the land belonged to the Cherokee Indian Nation until 1819 and after that to the United States government which did not open the land for purchase until 1830. About 31 percent of the land in Jackson County was

purchased between 1830 and 1847 at the standard price of \$1.25 per acre. Between 1847 and the onset of the Civil War in April 1861; the standard price was gradually reduced to 12-1/2 cents an acre, and approximately 24 percent of the land area was purchased at reduced prices. As the population increased and more land was purchased in the county, some of the squatters abandoned their homes in the coves and sinks and moved further west. Other squatters stayed and some even purchased their homesites, but with time most of the remote cove and sink sites were abandoned as life styles changed.

The mountainside homesites were not occupied until the late 1800s, most of the homes being built between 1890 and 1905. Since farming was about the only occupation open to young men and all the easily accessible farm land in the county was taken, only approximately 33,000 acres of public land were available for entry. Jackson County is one of the most mountainous counties in the state, and the available public land was either on the tops of the mountains or the sides of them.

The mountain tops in this area are capped with sandstone, which does not make good farm land because rain water percolates too rapidly through the sandy soil. On the sides of many of the mountains relatively flat, wide (approximately 150 feet) areas or 'benches', developed on limestone bedrock, which weathers into rich soil that absorbs and retains moisture. It is on these benches that many young men acquired land through homesteading. Under the Homestead Act of 1862, a man could claim public land by building a home on it, clearing some of it for a crop and garden, and after living on the land for five years it became his.

The homes on the benches were similar to those in the coves and sinks, except that the fireplaces and chimneys were fieldstone rather than limestone. Fieldstone is sandstone boulders that are naturally rectangular with square corners. A plentiful supply of fieldstone exists because as the sandstone mountain tops weather the rock that breaks off comes to rest on the benches. The homes were built near springs and a plot of land was cleared for a garden. Because the soil on the benches was moist and rich, the farmer easily produced enough food to sustain his family and animals until the next growing season.

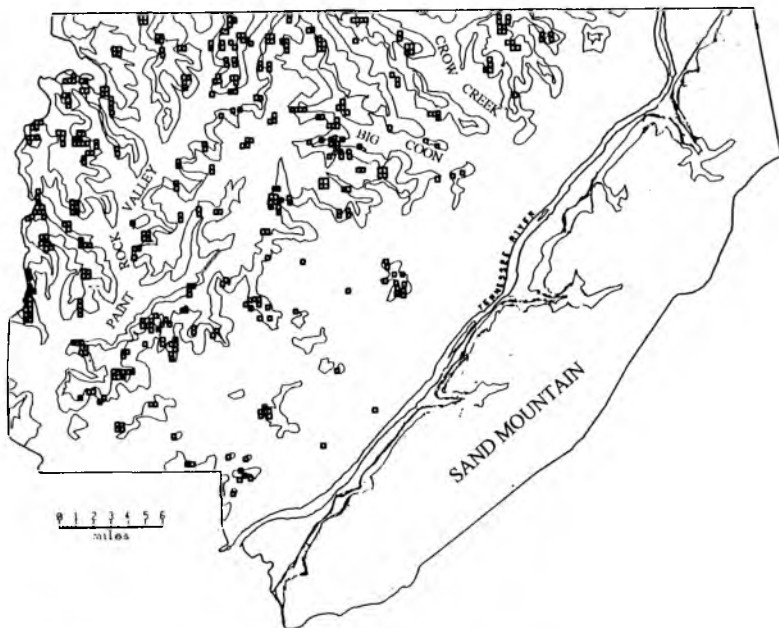
Some of the farmers increased the amount of level land by terracing. Rock walls from 2–3 feet high were built parallel to the contours of the mountain and parallel to other rock walls which were about 20 feet apart. The land behind the walls was either scraped off or filled in to make it level. At one home site eight parallel rock walls each about a quarter of a mile long can still be seen.

Since range laws were not enacted in Jackson County until the late 1930s, the farmer fenced in his crop and fenced out his animals—a milk cow, a few head of cattle, some hogs, and a couple of mules. Three types of fences were built: the worm, the split rail, and the cedar post and rail. Barbed wire fences were not common because of the cost and the difficulty of setting fence posts deep enough in the very shallow soil to properly support the wire. Another, rather unusual, fence was built from large trees (3–4 feet in diameter) that were cut in such a way that they fell end to top forming a fence.

In the early 1900s the benches on the sides of the mountains in the Paint Rock Valley provided a viable way of life for a young man and his family. As Mrs. Wilson, who was born and raised in a log house on the side of Miller Mountain said, “Life was good up there. There was always more than enough food.” Why are there only remnants of homes, a few intact fieldstone chimneys, piles of boulders that were once chimneys, scattered sections of fence just barely standing, and thick groves of even aged black locust, yellow poplar, or cedar trees where there had been cleared fields, and nobody living on the benches today?

When the children who were born on the mountain sides reached adulthood, farming was not the only occupation open to them. The Federal Government began building dams on the Tennessee River in 1918, providing job opportunities. Industries were increasing such as textile mills, metal fabricating mills, fertilizer and chemical plants. Many young men left the mountains to serve in World War I. Life-styles were changing with the increased availability of electricity and automobiles, neither of which were available to the mountain sides. It was the late 1940s before electric power lines were extended up the mountain sides, and even today there are only 3 paved roads up the mountains. The benches on the mountains were no longer viable home sites.

HOMESTEADS, CUMBERLAND MOUNTAINS JACKSON COUNTY



Source: GLO Tract Book

• 40 ACRES OF A HOMESTEAD ENTRY

CONTOURS:

NORTH OF RIVER -	~~~~~	1500 FT.
	~~~~~	700 FT.
SOUTH OF RIVER -	~~~~~	TOP OF BLUFF
	~~~~~	(VARIES 1100-1400 FT.)
	~~~~~	700 FT.

*Merilyn Dabbs has an ABD in Geography from the University of Tennessee, Knoxville. Her dissertation topic is Jackson County. A hiker, climber, and camper, Merilyn has stepped-off a goodly portion of the mountainous neighboring county. Married to Joe Dabbs who is recently retired from NASA, she makes her home on Monte Sano and teaches at Alabama A&M University.*

## **Chapter 9: "Fires of Huntsville"** **from *Changing Huntsville, 1890–1899***

Elizabeth Humes Chapman

Fires were very destructive during this decade. Rodgers' Stable by the Big Spring branch burned in 1890. It was a terrible fire. Horses were roasted. After getting some of them out they ran madly back into the flames. Wells' Stable burned later, but was rebuilt on Jefferson Street below St. Mary's Church.

In April, 1891 about nine o'clock at night, Mr. Joe Bradley's home on Randolph Street burned to the ground. As it was one of the handsome old houses in Huntsville it was a real loss to the town. Set in a formal garden with beds laid out in designs, bordered with English boxwood and ornamented with marble statuary, its white columned porch stood boldly out. Its furnishings were in keeping with the setting. Family portraits, old furniture and silver were consumed by the gluttonous flames. Mr. Bradley was a bachelor. He loved his home and had gone to the expense of maintaining it in hope, gossip said, of some day bringing to it the handsome, charming Sunie White as a bride. But that time never came. He had lived on in elegance, however, with the old dream. It was a bit of romance which returned with every glance at the old house. Humanity likes to be reminded of such faithfulness and is sorry to have that reminder obliterated. It seemed to be a double death.

The home of Major James O'Shaughnessy on Monte Sano burned in March, 1890. The flames attracted many men from Huntsville who drove as rapidly as possible up the mountain to assist the caretaker, Mr. Mat Schrimsher, in fighting the fire and in removing furniture. The flames were so hot that the fire-hose was burned in two. Buckets were then resorted to but they were ineffective.

The volunteers, however, saved about Nine Hundred Dollars worth of furniture. It, too, was a handsome place. The total loss was about Twenty Five Thousand Dollars.

The following description of a fire at Mr. George Scruggs' store on the Square illustrates how the Fire Department worked in 1891:



The Fire Department drove rapidly around Herstein and Lowenthals' corner and passed by and stopped at the western corner in front of J. Weil and Bros., where immediate connection was made with the plug. As soon as the reel-cart could run off hose, Engineer Wooldridge blew his whistle signaling that he had steam a plenty and was ready to turn on the water. Members of the brigade got in their rubber coats and helmets, made nozzle connection, and were ready for action in a very short time."

The fire had caught from the stove in the back of the store and was only discovered by accident. As soon as the City Hall bell rang the fire alarm, citizens from every part of town hurried to the Square to assist the firemen in emptying the store. It was soon extinguished.

The Milligan Block was badly damaged by fire in 1899. That was one of the fires, however, which did good. Mrs. Milligan tore down the old buildings and built the present buildings there.

The burning of the Huntsville Female College has been described in Chapter 16 on schools. The Court House fire of 1895 [see Page 71] harmed only the files. The building was of stone.

By 1899 the city employed three full-time firemen and twelve volunteers. The engine room in the City Hall, located at the west corner of Clinton and Washington Streets, was enlarged to accommodate dormitories for the firemen and Chief Ozra Stegall.

## **Chapter 16: "Schools"**

On Tuesday morning, January 8, 1895, the fire department was ordered to the College. The City Hall bell clanged vigorously until a large crowd was gathered in the street in front of the college. The firemen connected the hose at the plug, the fire engine whistle sounded but the water would not reach the fourth storey of the building. Men volunteered to carry trunks and furniture to safety. They went in in squads while the Hook and Ladder Company put their extension ladders to the roof. One man, bolder than the others, went to the part of the roof nearest the flame. The hose was finally gotten to him but the water

pressure was too weak to be effective. A high wind pounding the trees swayed them near the flame and scattered sparks over neighboring buildings. Men on the ground floor were moving pianos while others were letting trunks out of upstairs windows to men below. Many of the girls were frantically wringing their hands crying, "My clothes are all burning up!" The crowd's attention was suddenly turned by a great cry to the fireman on the roof. The flame had broken out in a long line between him and the ladder. He surveyed the situation calmly. It was too high to risk crossing it. The crowd held their breath while he crawled to the edge of the roof and looked over. There was a large gutter a little to the left. Slowly he crawled to it. Clutching it in both hands he swung himself around it and slid the four stories to the ground in safety. The crowd stood dumb. It was a miracle they thought.

The piano squad saved twelve out of twenty pianos. As the fire raged on sparks carried by the wind set the next house, and those facing Clinton Street, afire. Volunteers began a bucket brigade and were almost as effective as the fire engine.

Finally it was too dangerous to go into the College building or to stand near it. The people were pushed into Lincoln Street and up Randolph to Calhoun. Even after the roof fell in some of the girls wanted to go in after their clothes. The fire burned most of the afternoon.

... Dr. Jones received Twenty Thousand Dollars in insurance on the building and Nine Thousand Three Hundred Dollars on the College furniture. He tried to raise the money to rebuild but the citizens were too poor to give their share so the idea was abandoned and the lot subdivided for cottages.

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*When Elizabeth Humes Chapman wrote her book, Changing Huntsville: 1890–1899, she quite naturally included a chapter, "Fires of Huntsville," to accompany such others as "Clubs," "Schools," "Personalities," and "Civic Organizations." Fires were an integral part of the past. They took on a life of their own and left in their wake stark monuments testifying to their devastating power.*

*Huntsville awakens each morning and, looking up toward the eastern sunrise may catch the dance of light beaming the shadow of the chimney atop Monte Sano that is all that is left of the Monte Sano Hotel. It stands sentinel on the bluff reminding us that fire is a destroyer. We must preserve those reminders. They are grave markers on our landscape, memorials to our architectural past.*

*Since her chapter is brief, colorful, and may help sell a few of her books (proceeds go to HHF) it is included here.*

## More "Fires of Huntsville"

Elise Stephens

The 'fires of Huntsville' have occurred on an annual basis. Certain years, however, stand out in memory for their devastation. In 1850, the heart of downtown blazed helplessly as wind carried sparks and flame northward two and one-half blocks from the Square, igniting a parade of destruction. *The Southern Advocate* (May 8, 1850) described the scene:

"The North side of the square, between the street leading out by Meridianville and by the Bell Tavern (north) out to the open fields, is one smoking mass of ruins—not a house left standing. The centre of the northern half of the town is gone—vanished in smoke."

The *Advocate* had rushed to press and literally by the light of those flames put out an Extra whose headline read: HUNTSVILLE IN RUINS!

The Caldwell House, a large three-story hotel, caught early and fed the night sky. The Bell Tavern, another landmark, received repeated lashings but survived for another fire another day, finely bowing out in 1855, to a roar of flame. Large, expensive town houses owned by wealthy planters and merchants crackled into thin air; even brick chimneys were unable to withstand the heat.

Huntsville's growing number of trades and small business augmented by a growing influx of German and Irish immigrants to the county, was especially hard hit. George H. Warwick's furniture warehouse (where the fire began); Thomas Cain's shop; J. D. Cross and L. G. Figg's saddler's and silversmiths's shop; Dr. Wilkinson's dentist office; J. Johnson's grocery; Parker & McKenzie dry goods; Terrill & Robinson's (free Blacks) barber shop and bath; J. A. Slaughter's grocery store; Mr. Schandies shoe shop; Mr. Callahan's large carriage shop, livery stable, and dwelling; several structures owned by Thomas Brandon; and the homes of Dr. P. B. Robinson, Dr. Francis Newman, J. B. Trottman, George H. Warwick, J. Gaston, D. M. Bradford (occupied by A. B. Jones), Mr. Rebman, Charley Jones, B. Ferguson, Mrs. Robert Graham, Britt Franks, and the large Holmes Street mansion belonging to Mrs. (Dr.) Moore.

The final insult, perhaps, although fully understandable in the light of the fires' extent, is that the engine house and accompanying market house also gave up the ghost. *The Huntsville Democrat*, owned by A. J. Withers blazoned its would-be headline into the night sky as it too went up in flames. Withers may

have been the only victim with insurance; thus insuring that a strong editorial voice would continue to be heard calling for greater safety and fire prevention efforts.

The fires of the twentieth century generally have been more readily contained and quickly doused. They have almost taken on the aspect of spectator events, flickering to the ooh's and ah's of a fire-crazed crowd. But long after the pyromania ceases, the blight of destruction lingers. The urban and rural landscapes at any given time take on a tattered, layered look, as history pursues its inexorable course.

Of all the fires witnessed locally in the 20th century, one stands out for its poignancy and idiocy. The flick of a cigarette, carelessly tossed into a long feeding troth filled with hay, ignited a conflagration, a living hell, not likely to be witnessed here again.

A little nine year old boy, Howard Harbin, carried vivid memories of the fire that seared his soul for all his days. The joy and excitement of coming to town to see a circus parade ended in nightmarish tragedy. Ringling Bros. and Barnum and Bailey Circus had come to Huntsville. It was the last Saturday in October 1916, a year already noted for tragedy in Madison County (Probate Judge Lawler's grisly murder followed by a suicide). Thousands gathered to see "the Greatest Show on Earth" and forget their cares. After the parade ended and people pushed down Washington Street toward the circus site near the Southern Railway depot, a counter-current bolted through the advancing crowd. Billowing smoke, a cacophony of crackling straw and screaming horses broke the air. Then Howard Harbin saw them, thirty-seven of them: "The most beautiful horses" he had ever seen, ablaze, many with eyes burned out, squealing and rearing in all directions.

And then the most amazing thing occurred. The horse trainer blew on his bugle, and those panicky horses, their skin falling off, "stopped dead and ran to their trainer, lining up just like they were ready to perform. Just like they were trained." (*Huntsville Times*, interview, July 11, 1975). Mounting his horse, the trainer took his gun and shot "each burning animal as he passed. Mercifully, the animals dropped dead."

One hundred and thirty horses died in that fire or as a result of it. As we get older we tend to forget some things, This is not one of them.



*Huntsville Hotel built in 1860.*



*Huntsville Hotel fire, 1910.*



**288 Sutton Road**

April 6, 1996

Margaret Anne Goldsmith Hanaw

**I knew  
the house was dying  
a skeleton  
rafter bones stripped  
exposed to elements  
it was prepared to go  
having lived its time**



**I burned the house  
on Sutton Road  
it was hard to destroy  
the growth of trees  
that were the house  
where Jim Nunn lived  
who built the house  
dogtrot style  
like his father's  
where he grew up  
on this hill  
years ago**

**Jim Nunn  
reared his family  
in this house  
then lost it  
in the depression  
to pay the note  
covered by my ancestors  
who took the house  
and farmed the land  
with tenant help  
for thirty years**

**That was before  
cotton pickers  
and big machines  
worked the land;  
displacing people  
who moved to town  
for Arsenal pay**



**There were renters  
with welfare checks  
they left at night  
without paying rent  
then vagrants came  
to assume the lease**



**Insurance canceled;  
the corpse house  
I offered  
to movers  
to preservationists  
to the farmer  
who rents the land**



**After vandals  
took the mantles  
I gave away  
the roof  
the doors  
I gave away  
porch columns  
and cornerstones**

**Before the burning  
by Big Cove  
Fire Department Volunteers  
early morning  
April six  
on the porch  
a babg carriage lay  
ouerturned**



**In the attic  
clothes and mattress  
lay memory of naked lovers  
beneath bare rafters  
open to sky  
where mountains stretched  
through broken windows  
above red fields  
plowed for  
spring seed sowing**



**Firemen came  
executioners  
to do my work  
to break ceiling holes  
to spread gasoline  
to light the fire**



**Then smoke began  
rising slowly  
thin at first  
then thick and black  
with leaping flames  
bright yellow and orange  
hot so hot  
they singed my face**



**Out the chimney  
smoke billowed  
one last time**



**Flames leapt  
through doors  
through rooms  
engulfing all  
rafters and doors  
walls and floors  
the growth of trees  
that were the house  
and memories past  
of many years**



**I drew back  
away from heat  
burning my face  
scorching my hair  
watching the inferno  
deuour remains**



**Left behind  
a root cellar  
two chimneys  
silent markers  
and foundation stones  
above smouldering ash  
and lone stairs  
leading nowhere**

**The house  
could have sheltered  
or its remains  
built warming fires**



**Those thoughts  
haunt me -  
but  
I had  
no choice  
but to burn it,  
  
or did I?**

*A resident of New Orleans, Huntsville native Margaret Ann Goldsmith Hanaw spends as much time as possible in Huntsville where she can often be found at her desk on the first floor of the I. Schiffman Building.*

## **Reminiscences of Randolph Avenue**

**Lois Mason Miller**

I was born at home on Randolph Avenue, then known as Randolph Street, the baby girl in a family of three girls. I attended East Clinton Elementary School and always came home for lunch, unless it rained, for we lived so close. This was true for all my years in school through junior high and Huntsville High School on Randolph. Life was simpler then for Huntsville had a population of 16,000 citizens and we walked everywhere.

My Mother never had to chauffeur me to lessons and activities for my dancing teacher, Irene Jones, lived across the street and my piano teacher, Mrs. Edwin Jones, lived around the corner on East Clinton. In the summertime the neighborhood kids and we would walk downtown to the Lyric Theatre on Saturdays. We could attend the movie, buy a candy bar and drink all for 25 cents. Then we would walk home and reenact the cowboy movies, "Hopalong Cassidy." We had such fun!

In those days milk was delivered to your back door by the milk man. Fresh vegetables were sold off of trucks that came to your house. We had a Syndey who sold to us. The ice man came down the street in his green wagon pulled by a horse. He had huge chunks of ice to sale. Our favorite ice man was named "Joe." He liked us kids in the neighborhood and when we asked for a piece of ice to cool us off in the summer, he always had us first sing all together, "Joe, give us some ice!" Then he would give each of us some ice. We loved that cool taste!

When I was in high school, it was the big band era and jitterbugging was the "King of Dance." I jitterbugged many an hour and night at the Russel Erskine Hotel on Clinton Street, now a Senior Retirement Center. The old hotel was at its prime at this time. We had parties in the Blue Room, Green Room, or Red Room (like the White House), depending on the space needed. The dances were held in the beautiful ballroom on the first floor. The Red Room and Green Room were more for small luncheons and dinner parties. One of their specialities was turkey coquettes. Um good! I remember we were told not to go up to the roof of the hotel, but we did several times anyway, for it was an adventure to take the elevator and go to the top!



After I graduated from Huntsville High, I went to Tuscaloosa to enter the University of Alabama. Meanwhile, I had met William Miller and fallen in love while a senior in high school. We both enjoyed the university and in my junior year, he joined the Navy (this was during the Korean Conflict), and was away my last two years of college. We became engaged my senior year and were to be married after I graduated in June.

I had numerous bridal parties, but one I have the fondest memories of is the bridal tea Bill's grandmother gave for me in the home that is now the Peter Barber home on Randolph. Mamie Moring Miller was his step-grandmother having married William Press Miller, his grandfather. His father was E. P. Miller. The house was lovely that day with gardenias out of the yard, roses and other flowers throughout the house. Spiced tea, cheese straws, various finger sandwiches and lots of sweet goodies were served. Friends called from two to four and signed a guest book when they arrived. I still have that book!

At that time the dining room was straight back as one entered the front hallway. This is now a parlor. The house had a front porch which has since been removed. Bill used to bring me a fresh gardenia from Mamie's lovely bushes every night while we dated in the summer. We were married on June 28th.

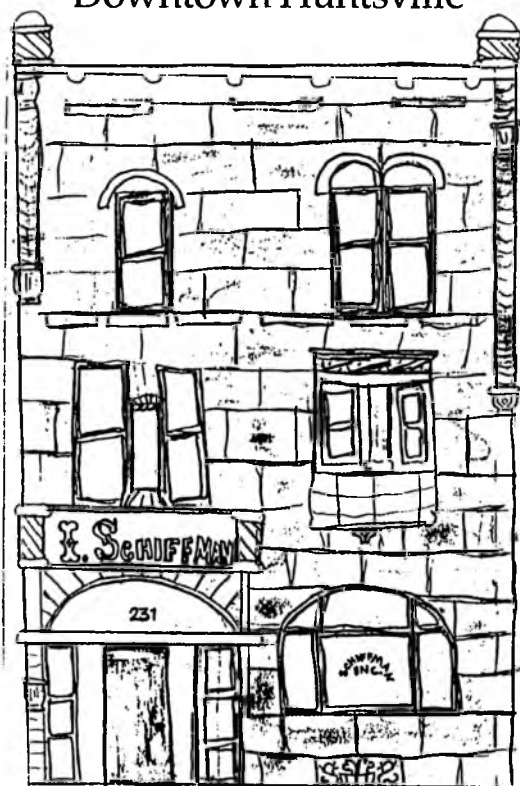
Huntsville was a lazy little Southern town typical of those days in Alabama and the South where everybody knew each other. My family had a furniture business, Mason Furniture Company. My father was William Oscar Mason and my Mother, Mabel Mason, who is 90 years young, still lives on Randolph! Ah what sweet memories for those were the good ole days!

*****

*Louis Mason Miller lived in Clinton, Iowa, for over 20 years where she served on the Board of Education as President. She received the "Woman of Action" Award and she worked for the Governor of Iowa, Terry Branstad. Since returning, she has served on HHF, as Chair of the Library Foundation Board, as Chair and Vice President of the Housing Authority, as Vice Regent of Twickenham Town DAR, and presently serves as Vice Chair of the Republican Party in Madison County.*

# Take A Walk

An Architectural Guide to  
Downtown Huntsville



Kids' Architectural Press

***Take a Walk:***  
***An Architectural Guide to Downtown Huntsville***  
**A Review**

Jamie Hall and Jean Hall Dwyer

**Jamie:** This book was written by 4th and 5th grade SPACE Students from Chapman, Colonial Hills, and Lincoln Elementary Schools, so I thought that they might like to hear what a 3rd grade SPACE student from West Mastin Lake Elementary thought about their book. First, I really liked the pictures they drew. My favorite was of the Church of the Nativity, drawn by Edwin Griffin. I also like the map they included so that we can go see these same houses. I wish that they had included more stories [quotes] about the houses like in last year's *Quarterly*.

**Jean:** I, too, enjoyed the SPACE students's new effort. Their drawings were very well executed. I found the close-up sketches especially helpful. The list of characteristics for each style has already proved useful in our travels through downtown residential areas. Mrs. Kamback can again be proud of her students' efforts.

**Together:** We both agree that the price of this little book will prove to be two dollars well spent. One suggestion for the next edition of *Take a Walk*, is that the students again include stories about the history of the buildings covered. Though many of us can follow the walking tour through Huntsville, personal stories give us a chance to enter into the individual buildings covered.





*All that is left of the Forsyth-Patterson House in Lauderdale County are the magnificent pillars. The circa 1820 mansion survived the Civil War and years of use before it fell victim to fire in 1966. Those columns are monument to the achievements of our ancestors and the nobility of architectural expression. Sadly, they must also serve as reminders of fire's devastation.*

The Huntsville Historic Foundation extends congratulations to Lee Brantley and Dorothy Havens of WAFF, Channel 48, on the production of this year's calendar, *On Common Ground*, featuring the splendid photography of Chip Cooper. The calendar presents historic homes "facing the challenge of sustaining their heritage." Though the year is half over, this calendar is one you will want for a lifetime. Free copies are available at the station on North Parkway near Oakwood Avenue.

# **Take A Walk**

An Architectural Guide to  
Downtown Huntsville

Kids' Architectural Press  
Chapman Elementary  
Huntsville, Alabama  
1996



For purchase at  
Harrison Bros.  
\$2.00

**to**

**Old Fashioned**  
**Trade Day**  
**on the Square**

**Saturday**  
**September 7, 1996**

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The **HISTORIC HUNTSVILLE FOUNDATION** was established in 1974 to encourage the preservation of historically or architecturally significant sites and structures throughout Huntsville and Madison County and to increase public awareness of their value to the community. The **FOUNDATION** is the only organization in Huntsville concerned exclusively with architectural preservation and history. Membership is open to interested and concerned citizens from across north Alabama and beyond.



*Criner Chimney on Old Mountain Fork Road*

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