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BEFORE Picture taken in 1985.

Other Case Histories: A Glimpse of What Was and What Has Become

by
Harvie Jones

CIRCA 1825, Cedarhurst
Whitesburg Drive and Drake Avenue
(Federal Period)

Cedarhurst originally had a refined double-tier, eight-columned Tuscan-order Palladian style portico as did many country houses of the early 19th century. In the early 20th century, half of the columns were removed (leaving two columns per floor instead of four) and the first floor columns were cut short and mounted on heavy brick piers in an apparent attempt to give the portico a modern bungalow appearance. However, the original interior features were mostly retained.

In 1982, the house and its once-rural surrounding acres were purchased for a townhouse development. The developer wisely chose to retain this fine Federal Period house and restore it as a guesthouse and for social functions for the townhouse residents.

Many developers would have bulldozed such a house without a second thought; and Huntsville is fortunate that we still have this excellent early house, now carefully restored, with its original and beautiful Palladian double-tier Tuscan portico brought back.



AFTER Picture taken in 1992.

Editor's Note: It would have taken more than bulldozers to kill the story of Miss Sally Carter's ghost and her old cemetery stone that took a tumble one stormy evening. (*Glimpses into Antebellum Homes*, Huntsville AAUW, revised 8th edition, 1992, p. 68.)

CIRCA 1835, Sprague-Chadwick House
307 Randolph Avenue
(Federal Period)

In 1970, the Sprague-Chadwick House had been long empty and in disrepair and was known to local children as “the haunted house.” Its owner offered to donate its bricks to the proposed Constitution Hall Village since it was assumed the late-Federal Period house was of no value. The front porch was rotten and collapsed, windows were broken, paint peeled, etc.

But, as is usually the case, the derelict appearance was just easily- fixed cosmetics, and the house was extremely sound and intact. The rotted porch was an inappropriate late-Victorian addition and was well-gone. The house was purchased for land-value alone, since the previous owner apparently assumed the house was not worth anything and was then nicely renovated for professional offices. The new owner obtained beautiful and prestigious historic offices for only about two-thirds the cost of a modern-design, new, ordinary office building of the same floor area.



BEFORE Picture taken in 1970.



AFTER Picture taken in 1985.

Editor's Note: Built in the mid-1830s, this Federal house contains a Federal stairway "with turned banister, two rectangular balusters per step, and bracketed stair ends." Original Greek Revival features contrast with later Italianate additions, which included heavy roll mouldings, four-panel doors with transoms, and segmental headed windows and front door..

The Sprague house is an important local structure, one of Huntsville's older buildings. The extensive additions during the Victorian era provide excellent contrast with the details of its original three rooms. "This handsome building is a fine example of the value of preservation." (*Glimpses into Antebellum Homes*, revised 8th edition, p. 53.)



BEFORE Picture taken in 1974.
Includes a 1960s carport and kitchen addition.
(Taken after the 1973 fire.)

CIRCA 1858 Ward House
424 McClung Avenue
(Gothic/Italian Villa Style)

The Ward House originally had a tower, as evidenced by the 1871 “Bird’s Eye View” of Huntsville and clear clues on the bobbed-off tower. By 1970, a steel outside stair led to second-floor apartments and the house had been generally cut up in an ad-hoc manner. In 1973, a major fire unroofed the house, and thus it sat until 1974, with no roof, resulting in significant damage to its elaborate decorative plaster. However, since 19th century wood is highly rot-resistant, there was little permanent damage to the framing and flooring.

In 1974, after about two years with no roof, the house was roofed and dried-out. Later in the decade some renovation occurred. Beginning in about 1990, the house was thoroughly restored, including the reconstruction of

its missing tower, with conjectured details similar to other towers of the mid-19th century. The house is once again a beautiful and historic element in Huntsville's historic districts.



AFTER Picture taken in 1996.

Editor's Note: This Gothic Revival, an example of Andrew Jackson Downing's work, was built circa 1858. It's owners included Popes, Walkers, Bollings, Spragins, Watts, Stocktons, and lastly, Dr. and Mrs. Dworsky. (*Glimpses into Antebellum Homes*, revised 8th edition, p. 53.)



BEFORE Picture taken in 1979.

132 Walker Avenue
(Victorian)

This late-Victorian house on Walker Avenue was, in 1979, abused and cut into several makeshift apartments. The scroll-brackets at the front porch columns were gone, an awkward second-floor extension on posts projected on the west side, and the house was empty and neglected. The house was purchased for about what the land alone was worth, because its owner thought the historic house was valueless.

The restoration was easy because the fundamental structural and decorative elements were mostly intact and in good technical condition. The restored cost was considerably less than for a new, modern-design house of the same floor area.



AFTER Picture taken in 1994.

Editor's Note: "Walker Street was developed after the Civil War and was one of the most desirable areas of Huntsville during the late 1800s." Rich in architectural styles, this street adds greatly to the charm of Old Town Historic District. (*A Walking Tour of Huntsville, Alabama*, Madison County Tourism Board, 2nd edition.)

Begin At Your SHPO

If you need to get your building in the National Register of Historic Places, or to find out if your neighborhood is slated to become a historic district, the State Historic Preservation Office (SHPO) is the place to begin. SHPO officers, one per state, are appointed by their respective government. The officers nominate historic properties and districts to the National Register. SHPOs also administer preservation grants and review cases in which properties listed in the National Register are threatened by federal or federally funded programs. For your SHPO officer's name contact your local preservation organization or the Preservation Assistance Division of the National Park Service. (202) 343-9579.

The Advisory Council Can Step In

The Advisory Council on Historic Preservation advises the President and Congress on national historic preservation issues and reviews activities by federal agencies which might adversely affect properties in, or eligible for, the National Register. While it cannot always save historic structures, the Council's track record is generally admirable. Homeowners might find the Council's intervention helpful, for instance, in the case of a highway construction project that endangers homes in a historic district. Advisory Council on Historic Preservation, 1100 Pennsylvania Ave., NW, Washington, D.C. 20006. (202) 786-0603.

The Roster

The National Register of Historic Places is America's and historically significant buildings, structures, sites, and objects. Of the approximately thirty thousand listings, about ten percent are for historic districts, and the number is growing daily. Listing in the National Register provides important protections for buildings threatened by federally financed projects, but it cannot prevent demolitions or alterations paid for with private money. Register listing is also the basic criterion for eligibility for federal tax benefits and preservation grants-in-aid—when such grants are available. The National Register is updated monthly in the Federal Register, and supplements are issued annually. Your local library will have a copy. National Register of Historic Places, U.S. Department of the Interior, Washington, D.C. 20240. (202) 343-9636.

HABS Can Help

The Historic American Building Survey (HABS), although not in any sense a regulatory agency, can still affect your rehabilitation project if your old house happens to be among the thousands for which HABS photographs, measured drawings, and written documentation have been compiled. HABS's meticulous drawings may be especially helpful to owners whose buildings have suffered severe damage or misguided remodeling. A number of state catalogs of HABS projects are currently available or in preparation, and a nationwide checklist has been recently published. HABS, NPS, U.S. Department of the Interior 20240. (202) 343-9606. The for HABS data is the Prints Division, Library of Congress, D.C. 20540. (202) 287-8399.

Washington, D.C.
official archives
and Photographs
area, Washington,

NHLs Make The Register

National Historic Landmark (NHL) is the designation reserved by the National Park Service for buildings, sites, structures, districts, and objects of national, rather than merely state or local, significance. NHLs are automatically entered in the National Register.

Preservation Assistance Holds The Key

The Preservation Assistance Division (Technical Preservation Services) of the National Park Service reviews all applications for certification of rehabilitation projects. The staff in one of its regional offices will decide whether your project complies with the Secretary of the Interior's Standards for Rehabilitation and Guidelines for Rehabilitating Historic Buildings. They've recently published a pamphlet called *Tax Incentives for Rehabilitating Historic Buildings*, which includes an up-to-date list of SHPO addresses. The Division also provides invaluable technical advice and publications on restoration and rehabilitation techniques. Preservation Assistance Division, National Park Service, Department of the Interior, Washington, D.C. 20240. Telephone (202) 343-9579.