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The Memorial Fund

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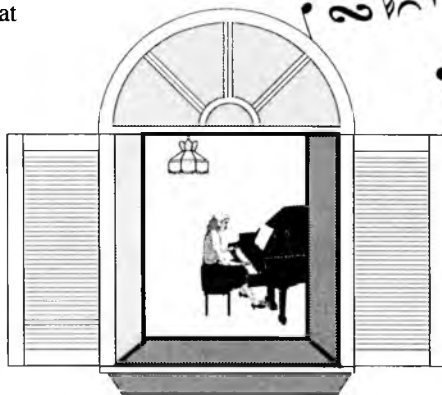
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The Memorial Fund

There are few things we can plan for in this life with any certainty. But, those blessed with substantial longevity, resources, and sound mind can design a will which makes possible a future of infinite possibilities. The story of the Freeman House is inextricably bound up with the story of a fund and the persons who helped shape that fund: the Kirby Cartwrights and the Hugh Hawthornes. But most particularly, Marguerite Cartwright, Mrs. Hugh Hawthorne. The Kirby Cartwright and Margaret Steele Cartwright Hawthorne Memorial Fund came, quite literally, like a bolt out of heaven to Central Presbyterian Church of Huntsville, Alabama. Who were these obviously caring and generous benefactors? Granted, the awesomeness of the bequest exceeds explanation, yet it behooves us to find out more about Marguerite Cartwright Hawthorne and her family.

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Margaret Belle Mahoney [Crow] grew up on Bank Street (Fountain Row) a street over from the Cartwright house on 308 Oak Avenue. While her most vivid childhood memories involved time spent atop her garage armed with homemade binoculars scanning the skys “looking for ENEMY aircraft!” she also remembers, “like yesterday,” being introduced, somewhat inadvertently, to the world of opera by Marguerite Cartwright. Marguerite visited her parents’ home in the early 1940’s and, true to her musical career, practiced daily. Playing out in her backyard, Margaret Belle marveled at the “Ah, Ah, Ah, AH, Ah, Ah, Ah,” arpeggio which swelled up and out over the back lot, filling the distance between herself and the windows of the Cartwright House. She didn’t know what kind of singing that was and ran in to ask her mother, who said, “It is opera,” that Miss Marguerite came from New York City and sang opera. That was about as much as one wide-eyed little girl could absorb at one time.





Brother George, five years older than Margaret Belle, likewise came to his knowledge of the arcane world of OPERA by way of Marguerite's arpeggios. His vivid, though scant recollection, was of an opera singer who visited her parents in the summer, the "Ah, Ah, Ah, Ah Lady from New York." Both Margaret Belle and George ended their separate interviews, unbeknownst to each other, marveling at the distinctness of this memory from their childhood and commenting, "but I never saw any of them. Ever."

Margaret Belle retains one other memory about the Cartwright family. She remembers sitting, barefoot, on the curb across the street and watching a coffin being carried out the front door and down the steps. It was one of her earliest encounters with death or any of its trappings. Ironically the two memories she could contribute to this special issue of the *Quarterly*, take on additional significance in view of the will Marguerite Cartwright Hawthorne wrote, *The Legacy* she left Huntsville. Her presence and that of her family will be heard and felt far beyond the grave. We may have never seen them, but their presence will be known by what she has left us.

The search for information about the Cartwrights began at Maple Hill Cemetery where Marguerite is buried beside her husband and at the foot of her parents. That Maple Hill is the final resting place of an important corporation attorney who practiced in New York City and his wealthy widow who died in Fairfield, Connecticut, at the age of 94 attests to the close relationship the couple had had with her parents, the Kirby Cartwrights, and with Huntsville. Their stones give us vital statistics: Kirby Cartwright, 1866–1944; Marguerite Steele Cartwright, 1870–1953; Hugh Hawthorne, lawyer born in Washington County, Virginia, 1885–1962; Marguerite Cartwright Hawthorne, 1895–1990.

City directories, Church records, and the *Huntsville Times* supplied additional information about Marguerite's parents. Interviews with Bess Pratt Wallace help us to see the person Margaret Belle and

George only heard. Bess also distinctly recalled how handsome Hugh Hawthorne was. The *Times* obituary tells us he “was a frequent visitor to Huntsville.”

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HUNTSVILLE, ALA. (1920-1921) CITY DIRECTORY

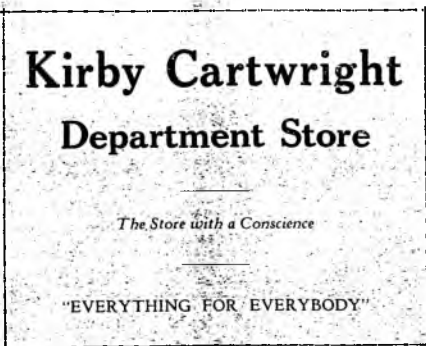
Carter Robt (Pearl), carp, h 728 Meridian
 Carter Sanford A (Rebecca), emp Merrimack Mfg Co, h 483 C (M)
 Carter Win C (Mary O), mgr H & L M Warten Cotton Co, h 605 e Holmes
 Carter Thelma Miss, h Church extd
CARTWRIGHT KIRBY (Maggie), dry goods, millinery, clothing, ladies ready to wear, shoes, groceries, hardware, etc. 123 s s Square—phone 269, h 208 Oak av—phone 358-J (see p 10)
 Cartwright Marguerite Miss, h 208 Oak av
 “Cartwright Norah, bottler Coca-Cola Botg Wks, h 312 n Patton
 “Cartwright Rosa, dom, h 312 n Patton
 Case Henry (Zoe), emp Lincoln Mills, h 37 Davidson same
 Cassino Park, Pratt av beyond limits
 Cater Adolphus (Esther), emp Dallas Mills, h 505 Rison av same
 Cater Frances Miss, tchr Grammar Schl, h Ward av cor 5th
 Cates Geo (Minnie), emp Dallas Mfg Co, h 315 Stevens av

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Kirby Cartwright was born amidst the defeat and destruction of the Civil War. His youth was spent at a time when Huntsville, like most Southern communities, was struggling to find a new identity and destiny. Margaret Steele’s world was

much like her future husband’s. Her family conducted a general merchandizing business with Cartwright; Steele and Cartwright at 107 N. Washington in the early 1900’s (see 1911 City Directory). Both Margaret and Kirby were active in the Central Presbyterian Church. She was the Treasurer of the Young Ladies Aid Society in 1905 and as late as 1929, was the President of the Women’s Council, a group she had previously served as Secretary of Religious Education in 1927.

A decedent of Methodist circuit rider, Peter Cartwright, Kirby was an Elder and Assistant Sunday School Superintendent in 1905. Still a young man, he had already shouldered the financial and educational responsibilities of his church and he continued active.



Kirby’s role in the community was as substantial. He served as an Alderman on the City Council in 1910–1911, and was instrumental in inaugurating the City Commission form of government. In the



1920's, Cartwright had moved his business to South Side Square between H. C. Blake Plumbing and Cummings Furniture and Hardware, down from T. T. Terry Dry Goods. These popular Huntsville merchants not only shared business camaraderie but also prayed together on Sundays at the Central Presbyterian Church and served the church in leadership positions.

To this dedicated couple, one daughter was born, Marguerite. She early showed talent for singing as her soprano voice mellowed into that of a young woman's. Educated at Ward-Belmont in Nashville, and Columbia University, in her twenties she studied voice in Europe and moved to New York City to pursue her career. (she is not listed in City Directories after 1922). Becoming well known for her concert work, her interpretations of negro spirituals were noteworthy. She gave recitals for the federation of churches, the Y.M.C.A., The New York City Board of Education, WOR Radio, and at Southern Colleges. Her Huntsville Times obituary noted there were no survivors (the couple had no children). Memorials could be made to "the Jewish Guild for the Blind, Lenox Hill Neighborhood Association, or the Riverside Church."

The obituary gives clues to the personality of the benefactor of the Freeman House. Her interests were to use her talent to teach others. The blind, the needy and the church were her special concerns. It should not surprise us, putting what we know about her parents and their commitment to the Central Presbyterian Church, and about her and her interests in music education, that she chose to glorify God through her gift to the church of her parents. In Alice McCravey's *History* among the gifts listed as given before 1960, we see that Mrs. Kirby Cartwright gave the Second Pulpit Bible and Bookmark and that her daughter, Mrs. Hugh Hawthorne, gave a silver vase in memory of her mother. (p. 67–68). Marguerite was to follow that gift with many more.

As a young girl, Bess Pratt [Wallace] remembers Marguerite would visit her mother, Nita Humphreys Pratt. The two shared musical interests. Bess remembers Mrs. Hawthorne as a pretty lady, always unassuming, simply dressed, wearing no make-up, quietly dignified and bearing a bouquet of freshly-picked garden flowers.

Married on November 29, 1928 in her Huntsville home, the couple resided in New York where he practiced corporate law. Bess remembers that when her parents went to New York, Mr. and Mrs. Hawthorne would take them to the exclusive Metropolitan Club. When he died in 1962, and was buried in Huntsville, he left Marguerite a wealthy widow. Soon after his death, when her parents' home at 308 Oak was being demolished to make room for the library and municipal buildings, she visited Huntsville again. The Reverend Gartrell and Alice Gillespie took her to lunch. She gave Gartrell a hall tree and two oriental rugs for the church. He took her to visit her husband's grave on that visit.

Undoubtedly the kindness of Mr. Gartrell, Mrs. Gillespie, and others, also the influence of Mrs. McCravey, who was related in some way to Marguerite, were factors affecting her as she shaped her last will and testament. But really, her parents' life, her life, and her husband's all worked together to produce the Fund that is going to make such a difference to Huntsville.

Simply stated, the Will provides for a perpetual trust, 4% of the income to be paid quarterly to the library and 96% to be paid to the Central Presbyterian Church. The role of the library is to support the musical needs of the community by acquiring music, books, magazines, recordings and other items. The opportunity for cooperation between the two legatees is obvious, and it was Marguerite's express "desire and wish that the two beneficiaries named cooperate to sustain both gifts." As the music program of the Conservatory gets underway, both parties will be able to complement each other. Huntsville will have the rare opportunity to give youngsters and oldsters a musical education and exposure as rich and diverse as we are willing to work together to make it.

The church's responsibility to the Will is more broad-based than the musical mission: "It is my wish and direction that this income be used in extending the works of said church in the Huntsville area, especially in bringing young people under the influence of the church and into church membership, in furthering the musical program of the church, and in furthering the church's work for the benefit of senior citizens."



Marguerite Cartwright Hawthorne, with her parents