

The Historic Huntsville Quarterly

Volume 23 | Number 1

Article 5

3-20-1997

The House Next Door

Historic Huntsville Foundation

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



Part of the [Historic Preservation and Conservation Commons](#), and the [History Commons](#)

Recommended Citation

Historic Huntsville Foundation (1997) "The House Next Door," *The Historic Huntsville Quarterly*. Vol. 23: No. 1, Article 5.

Available at: <https://louis.uah.edu/historic-huntsville-quarterly/vol23/iss1/5>

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

The House Next Door



The land upon which the Freeman House was built originally belonged to LeRoy Pope. In 1840, George Steele came into its possession, giving us another twist of irony as we shall see later on when a watercolor of C. K. Colley's modification of Steele's Courthouse was miraculously salvaged by custodian Nathan Dean. In 1906, Sarah and Ellis Bainbridge deeded the property to C. H. Gilbert who erected the present structure in 1907.

Sallie and Tom Freeman purchased the property in 1922, for \$7,500 and in the next quarter century gave it a name, the Freeman House, and an important role in the community. Tom Freeman, as genial a host as any of that distinguished cadre Huntsville has produced, welcomed guests to his home with the same flair he dealt out a poker hand and plied his traveling salesman occupation.

All will agree, however, it was his wife, Sallie, Sarah Mason Freeman, who ran the house and made it "home away from home." Ken Turvey fondly recalls Miss Sallie always asking him when he'd be sprucing up to go out, "Where you going, Ken?" just like he was a member of the family. When his folks came to town they were expected to eat there, too.

Miss Sallie was famous for her Southern cooking. Interestingly, her two star boarders, Albert Lane and Ken Turvey were Yankees by birth and palate. It took them a while to get used to certain of Miss Sallie's dishes. One in particular, they could not abide was stewed okra. Turvey said he tried eating it, but he just couldn't. He laughingly recalled the teasing he took when he tried various jellies

on the cornbread which was a daily staple. Excerpts from Albert Lane's letters home could have been written as well by Turvey. While we can't be sure (whether) it was something in the food they ate or didn't eat, it must be observed that both gentlemen courted, fell in love, and married within a year or so after their arrival, and that the Freeman House was their launching pad to matrimony.

Albert Lane...Freeman House Boarder

There were four loves in Albert Lane's life: art, music, Mildred, and God. Huntsville shared him with Battle Creek, Italy, and the Smithsonian in Washington, D.C., as he pursued his loves. In 1955, he made his operatic debut in Florence, appearing in both opera and concert in Italy and Sicily. Returning to New York in 1957, he sang a concert performance of "Rigoletto" with the American Symphony Orchestra. The Midwest claimed the Lanes from the late 1950's to 1963, when he accepted a position as Visual Information Specialist with NASA's Marshall Space Flight Center.



Mildred Lane 1944

Throughout the next decade, Albert sang and painted his way into Huntsvillians' hearts. Mildred also was active in musical, community, and church affairs. Albert left Huntsville again in 1974, to join the staff of The National Air and Space Museum of The Smithsonian. While there, he was a soloist in the Choir of the Old Christ Church in Alexandria. In 1976, after the museum opened, Albert returned to Huntsville. The three loves of Albert's life had been largely dedicated to his last love. And, in 1983, at the age of 66, after a lengthy illness he went home to be with God.



Old Christ Church



Albert Lane's last work.

Some memories fade, but fortunately Lane's letters from 205 Lincoln will give us all a fresh look at the Freeman House, Huntsville in 1939–40, and at ourselves. Leaving his close-knit family in Battle Creek, Michigan, Albert Lane set out to mold his career as artist by answering the call of Monroe Letterheads, Huntsville, Alabama. Surely the hand of God was at work bringing this young man, bursting with talent, into our midst. His "Sagredo" in *Galileo Galilei*, "Tony" in *The Most Happy Fella*, "Tevya" in *Fiddler on the Roof*, still sound in our ears and our hearts as we remember Albert Lane's rich and vigorous voice and spirit.

Lane's watercolors of Huntsville homes and landmarks are prized possessions. His letters indicate that he valued the gifts God had given him and sought to develop them with dedication and discipline. Yet, his generosity of spirit led him to give freely of himself and his talent. The watercolor on the cover is typical of him. In splashes of greens and blues, browns and whites, and dashes of black, Lane throws together a memory, a keep-sake gift for the lucky recipient, in this instance the Freeman's.

*1979 portrait of
Albert Lane
by
Bonnie Henderson*



His boss, D. C. Monroe, a leading Huntsville businessman and band leader, found Lane lodging at the Freeman House. Huntsville's noted baritone and visual artist would stride right in to the city's cultural and social life, learning its "Southern" ways over early morning coffee with "Mr. Tom" and contributing his "Yankee" perspective. Quite a catch, his arrival was duly noted by Huntsville's fairer sex. Having looked over the field, Lane's eyes soon fell on Mildred Baker, a Scottsboro native, who lived on Holmes and whose high school English teacher, J. G. Roy, introduced to the young man-about-town.

War clouds gathered as the romance blossomed. Upon graduation, Mildred went to work for the draft board in the old Post Office on Holmes. When Albert's induction notice came, instead of mailing it with the others, Mildred hand-delivered it to her sweetheart. Those were anxious days, as Albert was to report to Ft. McClellan and then, assuming he passed the physical, be sent to his initial assignment straightaway sans fond farewells. Mildred will never forget the sinking feeling she took to bed with her the day he left. Nor will she forget his rapping at her front door at 4:00 the next morning, whispering loudly, "I fooled you, didn't I!" Surprised and greatly relieved, Mildred and Albert celebrated his perforated ear drum, a malady that kept him out of the service every time he tried to enlist. The wartime fever that sent many to the alter in those years, worked its power on them as well, and they were married in January, 1942, at the Episcopal Church of the Nativity.



During their courtship Mildred frequently dined at the Freeman House. Sunday lunch was a favorite time. Mildred always remembered the advice Albert gave her the first time she ate at the busy boarding house: take everything that is offered to you the first time it is passed, as you may not see it again. She loved to watch the

Sunday ice cream being hand-made by the black help out on the porch of the little house in the back yard.

Among her keepsakes, Albert's letters which she shares here for the first time, reveal his wry humor, lighthearted criticism of many things "Southern," and his adherence to Christian family values. As he matured and his talents crystalized, Lane's deeply religious nature became abundantly clear in his art and music. It would please his heart to know that the Freeman House and his old room on the second floor front abound in the beauty and joy of music provided by the Central Presbyterian Hawthorne Conservatory.

Kenneth V. Turvey...Freeman House Boarder

Ken Turvey still treasures memories of his first day in Huntsville. Hired as the Director of Music of the First Methodist Church, he was met at the train by church member Holding Homburg, Chair of the Music Committee. They went by the church where he met the staff and then Homberg delivered him to the Freeman House. It was January, 1955. Miss Sallie had his room ready for him. It was off the living room, the closed part of a screened porch. Years later when he would see Miss Sallie, she would give him a hug and tell him his room is "just like you left it." Not that he spent much time in his room, if his first day is any indication. That evening he was invited to attend rehearsals of the Community Chorus then directed by his future mother-in-law, Mrs. Hamm. When he got to Ridley Hall at Nativity, he was asked to play Braham's "How Lovely Is Thy Dwelling Place." Within less than a twelve-hour span, the major elements of Kenneth Turvey's life had presented themselves. There was nothing topsy-turvy about it. He went straight to work contributing his talents to the community. Almost a half century later we are still enjoying his gifts. The Freeman House will always resonate with his quiet charm and majestic music making.

From the "Cotton Boys" to the Music Men, the Freeman House was foremost a place for career-minded young men to live and eat. But, in the 1950's, when the town was bulging at its stretched

seams, Miss Sallie took in young ladies as well. They occupied the upstairs rooms. Ken Turvey recalled that several young ladies roomed and boarded when he was there in 1955–1956. But, he protested, “I was NEVER, NEVER on the 2nd floor!”

The House was in transition then, as it is now. Miss Alyce began teaching little aspiring first graders whose birthdays disqualified them from fall entry into public school first grade.

If ever a house had the proper credentials for the role it is to play in the future, this house does. Famous for its hospitality, for its brilliantly-gifted boarders, for its educational background, now because of another set of God-given circumstances, it will serve future generations of musically talented young people.

First as boarding house, then as school, and now as Conservatory: from sustenance for body to mind to spirit, throughout the musical motif is as strong as Organist Emeritus Georgette Graham’s longest peale on the old pipe organ. Was it accident that the Freeman House boarded the likes of Albert Lane, Huntsville’s premier baritone and visual artist, and Kenneth Turvey, Mr. Music himself, long-time conductor of the Huntsville Community Chorus. Think of the spirits loose in that conservatory! Then add to that the beautiful soprano voice of Marguerite Cartwright. This is an angelic choir.

And, because of her Will and Rhonda Mitchell’s Vision, and Carol Ann Samples’ devotion, the Freeman House will for years to come ring out with music, making a joyful noise. And generations will be blest.

Sing unto the Lord a new song; for he hath done marvellous things: his right hand, and his holy arm, hath gotten him the victory.

The Lord hath made known his salvation: his righteousness hath he openly shewed in the sight of the heathen.

He hath remembered his mercy and his truth toward the house of Israel: all the ends of the earth have seen the salvation of our God.

Make a joyful noise unto the Lord, all the earth: make a loud noise, and rejoice, and sing praise.

Sing unto the Lord with the harp; with the harp, and the voice of a psalm.

With trumpets and sound of cornets make a joyful noise before the Lord, the King.

Let the sea roar, and the fulness thereof; the world, and they that dwell therein.

Let the floods clap their hands: let the hills be joyful together

Before the Lord; for he cometh to judge the earth: with righteousness shall he judge the world, and the people with equity.

Psalms 98 (KJV)