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1907 Freeman House
Twickenham Historic Preservation District
205 Lincoln Street
Huntsville, Alabama

Architectural Description

Harvie P. Jones, FAIA

The 1907 Freeman House is of a neoclassical design loosely derived from the 18th-century Georgian style. This style is generally termed “Colonial Revival.” It is a free interpretation of the 18th-century vernacular, however, and makes no attempt to closely follow its ancestors. The long ell-plan front veranda is an influence from the 19th-century Victorian Queen Anne style, here updated by using Ionic (Scamozzi type) colonnettes and a classical roof entablature and balustrade. The wide roof-dormer with a rustic shingle front is likewise a Victorian influence. “Colonial” influences include the simple box like house form topped by a hipped roof, modified Palladian windows in the dormer and second floor hall, the deep classical roof entablature, and the symmetrical center-hall facade and plan. The wide-angled-side bay window in the dining room is a Victorian holdover feature.

The hipped roof has a near-flat top of about twelve feet square. Based on similar house designs of the early 20th century it is possible that this flat section was surrounded by a balustrade, similar to the 1814 Leroy Pope House and the 1848 McDowell

House. The appearance of the house would be enhanced by this feature.

Another Queen Anne feature is the tiny window panes at the entry and at the Palladian windows, an idea derived from Renaissance English houses with similar size panes (a technical necessity of that earlier 16th-century time).

The present veranda balusters and rails were apparently installed in the mid-20th century and are under-scaled for the house. The paint-profiles of the original heavy rails (about two and one-half times the depth of the present modern 2 X 6 rails) are still clearly imprinted on the original Ionic colonnettes. One original baluster was found in the crawl space and is at the office of Jones & Herrin. A goal should be to properly reconstruct the original correctly-scaled veranda balustrade.

The house also contains a few Arts & Crafts style elements, notably the two faceted-leaded glass spherical porch lights and the dining room mantel of simple rectangular oak elements and a leaded-glass overmantel cupboard. These simple mantel forms contain two lion's heads in relief as their only concession to elaboration of form.



There is also one feature which is influenced by the Art Nouveau style—the beautiful brass combination gas and electric light fixture on the stair newel post. The rod that supports the two lights is the whip-lash scroll form that is the hallmark of the Art Nouveau style. Such combination gas-electric fixtures were common around the turn of the century when electricity was still novel and unreliable.



The other mantels are of a Colonial Revival style, variously featuring Ionic colonnettes and applied-relief composition, Adamesque floral wreaths, swags, urns, etc.



The entry foyer is decorated with an outstanding Victorian-style feature; a lacy and delicate curvilinear confection of thin wood open-work spindles and scrolls. The frieze is supported by Victorian-style bulbous-bottom colonnettes topped by Ionic (Scamozzi type) capitals. The colonnettes rest on low oak wainscot-walls. Two small oak trays rest on the low walls, for flower vases, calling-cards, etc.



In the back yard, an original small two-room servants' cottage (which is present on the 1913 Sanborn map) remains, a rarity that should be preserved.

In 1996 the house was thoroughly restored by the Central Presbyterian Church under the leadership of Mrs. Carol Ann Samples for use as a music center and for receptions and social functions. Since the house was in excellent condition and needed primarily current-use upgrades, redecoration and minor repairs, the restoration was a simple and economical process. The cost was about one-half the cost of demolishing the house and building a new modern-design building of the same floor area. The house was redecorated inside and out. Heating, cooling, and electrical systems were replaced to meet the heavier demands of church use. A new kitchen, handicapped rest room and ramp, and code-complying rear stair in a compatible



design were added. Some rear second floor rooms were divided to make small music-rehearsal rooms. The architects were Jones & Herrin Architecture, Interior Design. The contractor was Vandiver Construction.

This is another case of restoration being far more economical than the alternative of demolition-and-modern-construction. In addition, the fine 1907 house has much more character than any new building can muster, is built of old-growth wood (resistant to rot or insects) that is no longer available, and contains decorative elements that are not affordable in modern construction.

The Central Presbyterian Church is to be commended for restoring the 1907 Freeman House so that it will continue to grace the Twickenham Historic Preservation District and also serve the functional needs of the Church.

[Photographs by Harvie P. Jones.]