

The Historic Huntsville Quarterly

Volume 23 | Number 2

Article 2

6-21-1997

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Recommended Citation

Stephens, Elise (1997) "From the Editor... Elise Stephens," *The Historic Huntsville Quarterly*. Vol. 23: No. 2, Article 2.

Available at: <https://louis.uah.edu/historic-huntsville-quarterly/vol23/iss2/2>

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From the Editor...Elise Stephens

This summer issue of *The Quarterly* reflects the vacationing, warm weather mood to get Out and About in North Alabama. Since Joseph Wheeler and his daughter, Annie, are among my personal heroes, I included a visit to The Wheeler Plantation. Then I dropped over to the Bibb Mansion at Belle Mina to visit the present owner, Toby Sewell. Both of these estates accommodated the coming of the railroad—indeed provided right-of-way so that cotton could get to market expeditiously. Mindful that such economic facts as the routing of a railroad can alter more than the landscape, I dropped over to Triana—a wanna-be town with Antebellum Prospects of being a major deep-water port on the Tennessee River in the days when paddle-wheelers and flatboats were being joined by steamboats. Triana looked great on paper, it never made it into the big-time because the Memphis-Charleston railroad came through just to the east giving Madison, Alabama, the nod of money and fate.

The Wheeler Plantation is being preserved by the gift of the Wheeler descendants, the State of Alabama, the Friends of Wheeler Plantation, and some federal grants. Belle Mina is being preserved by the loving occupancy of Mr. and Mrs. John B. Sewell, who tend to its needs like solicitous parents of a new born babe. But who is preserving Triana? And what is there that should be preserved?

Nothing much is left of the Antebellum past except ancient elms and oaks and fishing holes. Where once there were scattered residences, a hotel, saloons, an academy before the Civil War, there was not enough after the war to invite growth or prosperity.

The land which was a sportsman's paradise sustained a way of life based on hunting and fishing. This was shared in by the well-to-do plantation folk as well as by poor black folk. Daniel Hundley's 1858 Diary gives the reader a picture of an Antebellum life-style of white Triana. The livin was easy!

Blacks from the time of Emancipation to the present have lived off the land and its river products. That is, until Olin Corporation's DDT plant on Redstone Arsenal drained enough toxins into the river to kill the fish and alert the townspeople that something was terribly wrong. PCBs and DDT were found in Indian Creek and the Tennessee River.

The citizens of Triana have rallied together to survive. But with few exceptions, they don't have any dreams or plans for a greater Triana. A resident referred to the life-style of too many of the older males as being a rambling one—"from one bootleg house to another." These perambulations did not lead to the Parcus places, as those were and still are by common, unspoken "understanding" White establishments.

So what should be preserved of this naturally beautiful site on the river? Lee Harless, the artist, remembers seeing the lock at the river. That might be worth investigating. On the old Toney Place which is now a park, an old rock house still stands that once served as the community's health clinic. Old timers and their children remember getting their inoculations there for smallpox. Community leader Sandra Harris helped awaken interest in the house as a possible site for a public library branch.

And then there are the cemeteries to be considered. The Black cemetery is in good to excellent condition; the White one is in a state of disintegration. Someone needs to do something before its too late.

Back in Huntsville, I discovered that two of the best books about North Alabama homes are out of print, which means that these sources of information are threatened to become extinct. Material from these books is printed in these pages, thanks to Ralph Hammond and the Alabama Members of the National League of American Pen Women.

We conclude this issue with a glance forward. The HHF has invited Dr. Martin A. Davis, professor of architecture, Clemson University, to speak to us and write an article about Reuben Harrison Hunt, an architect of vast, though little noted, significance to the face of the Southern City from the 1880s to the time of his death in 1937. A lengthy, yet undoubtedly incomplete checklist of his known designs is included. So, be on the lookout as you travel. *The Quarterly* is seeking photographs of any Hunt building sightings! Notice the invaluable structures he did for this city alone. We must preserve these buildings and find out more about this man. More later...