

# The Historic Huntsville Quarterly

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## The Historic Huntsville Quarterly of Local Architecture and Preservation: Preservation for the Common Good, Vol. 23, No. 4, Winter 1997

Historic Huntsville Foundation

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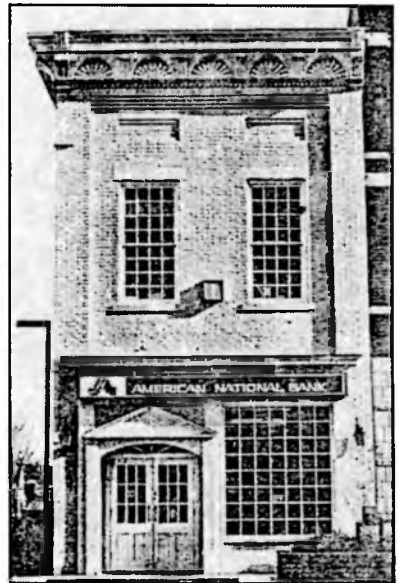
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*The Historic Huntsville*  
**QUARTERLY**  
*Of Local Architecture and Preservation*



*Preservation For The Common Good:*  
*Land, Art, Memories and a New Foundation Home*  
*Next Door To Harrison Bros. On The Square*

# HISTORIC HUNTSVILLE FOUNDATION

Founded 1974

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### *Cover:*

The Hundley Building spanning the centuries will go into the year 2000 as the new office home of the Foundation. Once the Millinery Bazaar owned by Miss Lizzie Vogel with the photography shop of I. F. Collins (1896-97 Directory), the according to the 1911-1912 Directory occupied by Searcy Judd, Photographer, who resided there also, and Miss Hattie McClendon & Co. Milliners. Singer Sewing Machine occupied (1929 & 1931 Directories), Fleming-Thornton Real Estate & Ins. and Equitable Life Assurance Society (1940; 1943; 1947 Directories), Thornton & Thornton Equitable Life in 1951-1957.

**Looking For More Information!!!!**

***THE HISTORIC HUNTSVILLE QUARTERLY***  
***of Local Architecture and Preservation***

Vol. XXIII, No. 4

Winter— 1997

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## ***From the Chair...Ben Walker***

As many of you are aware, these are very exciting times for the Foundation. After several weeks of negotiation we have “offer and acceptance” with regard purchase of the Hundley Building at the corner of Southside Square and Franklin Street, the building next door to Harrison Brothers Hardware. The closing took place on Friday, January 9th, and we are now the proud owners of this fine and historic structure! Our mission now is to put the building to productive use in a manner that both meets the objectives of our foundation and provides income, allowing us to pay for this investment. Renovations will begin right away for that portion to be used as the HHF office with the balance following as soon as we have determined the adaptive use. If you have any thoughts as to perspective use/tenants or know of someone that might be interested in occupying space in our new building, please let me know as soon as possible. I can be reached at 881-5050.

While awaiting the completion of our new facilities in the Hundley Building we have established a temporary office for the Foundation at 4906 B Whitesburg Drive. This is the small building in the back of the corner lot, northwest corner of Whitesburg Drive and Airport Road. Our phone is being installed and the number for now will be 883-4544. A fax will also be available through this same number. We are currently making an effort to centralize our files and records at this location pursuant to our move into our downtown building.

As many of you are also aware, Diane Ellis has come onboard as of January 1st as our full-time director of the Foundation. She will be housed in the temporary office at Whitesburg and Airport Road pending the move downtown and is already busily trying to organize the boxes of documentation and establish for us some permanent files. If you are interested in some of the projects currently underway, you can contact her at the above noted phone number or, if out and about, just drop in to say “Hi!”

I know all enjoyed the membership tea as much as I did and join me in saying “thank you very much” to Dr. and Mrs. Richard Rhoades for their gracious hospitality. It was a delight to tour one of the most unusual and interesting houses in our city. The turnout was one of the best in recent years.

We have many worthwhile and exciting projects planned for 1998. It is the support of members like you that makes it all possible. Your continued efforts are certainly appreciated.

## ***From the Editor...Elise Stephens***

This Winter issue of the *Quarterly* is entitled "Preservation For the Common Good: Land, Art, and Memories." Running through each article as clear as water is the assumption that we are all sharers, partakers, and contributors to the common good. The role of the Historic Huntsville Foundation is to focus attention on our man-made environment, but where would we be without nature's gifts to us. At best we preserve the bounty of field and forest, as it is fundamental to all further art and science.

In this, my last issue as resident *Quarterly* Editor, I want to tie together some loose ends and wrap them in browns and greens. Hence, our first article is a tip of the pen to the Huntsville Land Trust celebrating 10 years of achievement as the public defender of our natural beauty, assuming ownership of acres contributed by citizens for the common good.

The articles about the Alms House and Three Caves were prepared by volunteers and staff a few years ago. This 10th Anniversary offers a way for all of us to gain a deeper appreciation of our gifts and the Land Trust's contribution.

The article on Beulah Land was written by my student at A&M a number of years ago. I asked permission then to keep the paper for possible publication. Now is the time. This year the Huntsville-Madison County Library's Heritage Room and the Tennessee Valley Genealogical Society are sponsoring a series of seminars and speakers on African-American genealogy. The field is rich. Pam Bridgeforth adds not only to family archives but offers a valuable lesson about our land and those who have tended it so faithfully and productively.

When I was putting together the issue on the Central Presbyterian Church for Spring '97, I was fascinated by the complexity of picture restoration and the artistic dexterity required to achieve best results. Among the articles I readied for that issue were the ones featuring Christine Young. Anyone in the preservation business knows that art, too, must be lovingly and painstakingly protected.

Lastly, memories are the common store of us all. Shared ones make us all richer. Gary Griner first introduced us to George Plummer in the Summer 1994 issue of the *Quarterly*. This man who did so much to build homes for the common man reminds us that Huntsville is more than Twickenham, Downtown, or any one segment of the population.

Ann Maulsby's interview of Mill Village Memories involving the little-known first Merrimack School brings us to an exciting new chapter in the Foundation's history. Forth-coming issues will highlight the Foundation's new initiatives in Mill Village surveying and restoration.

As I begin a new chapter in my life, it gives me deep pleasure to see the Foundation beginning a new chapter in its worthwhile career. For it, as for me, success has been measured in myriad contributions made by so many in great and small ways. Preservation calls for a shared faith in a future bright with the promise of the inheritance of our richly-endowed past. We are blessed. God Speed and heartfelt thanks to all.

## **Letter to the Editor**

**April 13, 1997**

*To Whom It May Concern:*

*This is in response to the newspaper article asking for anecdotes of the Harrison Brothers. I hope it is not too late. We moved here in 1965, because my husband was to become one of the new faculty at UAH. The barn on Cruse Alley had been renovated for our arrival. I walked down to buy a mailbox to put out front. One of the Harrison brothers waited on me. I paid for it and picked it up to go, but Mr. Harrison gently took it from me and said, "Where is your car Ma'am?" On being told I walked down to the store, he said, "No lady is ever going out of this store carrying something like this. I will deliver it myself." And he did after the store closed that evening. I don't know what he thought about people who lived in a barn. After a few happy months there, we bought a house and sublet to the young artist, David Parrish and his wife, who lived there quite some years.*

*Sincerely,*

*Virginia D. Lavender*

## **The Madison County Alms House: A Poor But Proud Tradition**

*Oral history from the following—*

Cecil Ashburn, David Fisher, Henry E. Gattis,  
James & Irene Jarrell, Raymond B. Jones,  
Wendal C. Payne, James Record Sr., Elise Stephens,  
and Walter Terry

The purpose of this report is to present as much information about the Madison County Alms House as can be gathered in the time available. Sources include the Madison County Commission Records and interviews with numerous residents of the area at the time and employees of the Madison Limestone Company. In gathering oral information forty years after the fact, there were some gaps and inconsistencies relating to the beginning and ending of the Alms House. These we rectified as best we could.

Madison County was operating a poor house as early as 1863. The earliest indication found to date of a county poor house was when six year old Jim Britt was taken there by his mother. Jim was mentally and physically handicapped and his father had just been executed as a Yankee spy. Jim remained a ward of the county until he died in 1929 at 72 years of age. During his life, Jim lived in three different houses Madison County operated for the indigent. The first one he was taken to was replaced in 1870 by a poor farm of 200 acres given by Joseph Rice. Supervision of the farm alternated between Mr. T. P. Hereford and Mr. W. P. George. Mr. George supervised the Alms House during most of the 1920s and 1930s. An investigation into the condition of the children at the poor farm in June of 1920, may have led to the decision to relocate.



In 1922, J. N. Williams Construction Company built the new Alms House, more commonly known as the poor house, for Madison County. The poor house was located in what is now the center of the park on Kennamer Street which was then known as "poor house road." The building was approximately 80' x 30'. It was constructed of clay brick with a tin roof. There is some confusion as to whether it was one or two stories high. Oral accounts from several people agreed that it was two stories in front with a balcony and one story in back. A porch ran its length on both sides. There was a large common room in the center flanked by approximately eight rooms on each side. All rooms including the bathrooms opened onto the porch. The building was heated with coal oil. The structure seems to have been erected quickly because the plans were approved by the county commission 6 March 1922, and it was ready for occupancy 4 August 1922.

For the next thirteen years the Alms House served its purpose with no documented major changes. Most of the county records deal with routine expenditures: 19 February 1922—purchase of two stoves; 23 June 1923—installation of coil system for cooler water; 7 November 1923—repair of water pipe; and 20 June 1923—purchase of supplies costing \$50.63. The staff and supervision of the Alms House received attention from the board of commissioners. On 6 July 1925, the superintendent, Mr. Tom Giles, was asked to resign for unspecified reasons. Mr. W. F. George was elected to replace him. On 3 December 1928, Mr. George was still serving as superintendent. Records state he was directed to dismiss a colored employee. The only minutes dealing with the size of the staff are from 20 June 1934, which stated the salaries for the three employees amounted to \$37.50 per month. The average monthly cost of the Alms House was \$557. This figure comes from the following expenses: superintendent salary, \$50; employees salary, \$37.50;

physician, \$30; supplies, \$363; milk, \$6; clothing, \$37; and livestock feed, \$34.

The Madison County Commission Court ordered residents to and from the Alms House. These residents are referred to as “inmates.” The reasons for ordering someone to the Aims House, as opposed to placing them on the paupers list is not known. People on the paupers list were provided a monthly dole of approximately five dollars.

In 1935 another, and somewhat unclear, period began for the Alms House. It is not known if this change was due to the improving economy decreasing the number of destitute or if it was a simple change in policy. This uncertainty is heightened by the lack of available records. In any case, on 27 June 1935 the commissioners requested the Red Cross find homes for the sixteen residents of the Alms House. About one month later, 21 July, the Red Cross reported back their impressive success: they had located homes for all but two residents. This couple was now the sole residents of the Alms House, along with Mr. and Mrs. Lovelace who were placed in charge. How empty it must have been in such a large building with only four people in residence. On 2 September 1935 the county struck a deal with the City of Huntsville. The county allowed the city to tap into the power line at the Alms House in order to provide power to the growing Blossomwood Community springing up in return for the city paying the electric bill for the Alms House.

The fog around the poor house becomes more dense. On 16 September 1940 the Alms House was rented to Mr. M. J. Bingham for \$120 a year, with the City retaining the right to cancel the lease and use the Alms House as a T. B. hospital. This indicates the county was finished using the Alms House for its original purpose. There is a gap of sixteen years until 1956 when

the county made plans to sell the Alms House. What went on at the Alms House during these sixteen years?

Based on discussion with people who walked this area as children and with workers at the nearby Three Caves Quarry, the following changes developed. A paramount fact is the Alms House became multifunctional. There were numerous residents during the late 1940s and early 1950s who were indigent and Caucasian. Some were couples but most were elderly women. One woman was so stooped, that she placed her hands on a chair seat for support. One of the boys, Wendel Payne, grew up to be an insurance salesman. He tells of stopping by to collect insurance premiums from two elderly ladies in the early 1950s. He and his wife later took Christmas gifts of slippers and cotton stockings to these ladies. Their sincere appreciation and heartfelt gratitude are pleasant memories that linger still.

In addition to the Alms House, there was a small cow barn located approximately in the angle of Kennamer Street and the present pool/park fence. Other livestock included horses for the wagons and pigs as food supply. There was also a vegetable garden which today would be located across Kennamer Street. This garden was worked by both staff and residents. Oral history from most folk interviewed indicate the major pastime of the poor house residents was sitting on the front porch in rocking chairs and having good talks.

However, all residents of the poor house were not necessarily poor. A considerable number were Three Caves quarry workers. Both single and family men migrated to the Three Caves Quarry from the closed mines at Sherwood, Tennessee, around 1945 when the Madison County Limestone Company opened the quarry. There proved to be some unfortunate connections between Three Caves Quarry and the poor house. One of the workers who lived there was Philip Scott and his wife

Berlene. It seems that after arriving in Alabama they bought a brand new sporty red 1949 Ford. Berlene took great pride in this new car and washed it almost every day. One day, as the car was parked on the slope beside the Alms House, a blasting charge at the quarry went awry and deposited a 3' x 3' rock onto the trunk of Berlene's new red Ford. Berlene took exception to this occurrence and proceeded to the quarry. Once there, she gave vent to her emotions with an explosion similar to the one which launched the rock. Several big men restrained her. Mr. Jarrell, the quarry owner, and by all accounts a true gentleman, bought the Scott's a new car. On another occasion a charge sent a rock crashing through the poor house roof. Even without these stray missiles, the noise from the blasting, the grinding from the rock crushers, and the roar of the truck traffic must have been horrible.

Exactly what caused the county to finally close the Alms House? While the precise answer cannot be reconstructed, we can surmise that it was a combination of these factors: the Three Caves Quarry activity was making the nearby poor house untenable, the Alms House was over thirty years old and not economical to maintain, and social policy towards treatment of the indigent had changed, coupled with the economy that was reducing the number of indigent people. Due to these reasons and perhaps others, the county took steps to dispose of the poor house. First, the few remaining residents were moved. No record to date has been found regarding when or where these people were moved. Mr. Payne remembers that in 1954 or 1955 the elderly ladies from whom he collected insurance money were moved. The county commission minutes of 23 July 1956 states that demolition of the Alms House was to begin. A large tree in the middle of the present park playground was likely nicked by a bulldozer while removing the Alms House foundation. This was followed four months later by minutes of 2 November 1956, which state that a survey was taken and plans made to

expedite the sale. These plans were formally approved in the meeting of 13 November 1956, and the sale advertised 8 December. Just nine days later, on 17 December the bids were rejected as too low. It is a mystery why the bidding period was so short in view of the fact that obviously there was no market for the property. The high bid was \$25,150 for the 24 acres. It is a further puzzle as to why, after expediting the sale and then refusing to sell, the county seemed to lose interest in trying to dispose of the total 24 acres. It made one last attempt on 1 April 1957, to lease the area to the city for a public area. This fell apart. On 29 April the county sold 1.51 acres for a swimming pool with the provision that the city maintain access to the fallout shelter in the Three Caves Quarry. A month later, 6 May 1963, the county leased an unspecified number of acres to the city for \$2,000 for a park, again, providing the county allowed access to the fallout shelter. Apparently these transactions ended any action related to the Alms House property until the 1980s when the Madison County Commission transferred 78 acres to the Huntsville Land Trust.

Since this time the Huntsville Land Trust has been administering the Three Caves and the Alms House site in the public interest.

## Three Caves Quarry

*Oral history from the following—*

Cecil Ashburn, David Fisher, Henry E. Gattis,  
James & Irene Jarrell, Raymond B. Jones,  
Wendal C. Payne, James Record Sr., Elise Stephens,  
and Walter Terry

The Three Caves on the west side of Monte Sano Mountain in Huntsville, Alabama, is not a cave at all, but a limestone quarry. The story of Three Caves has its roots in Tennessee with the Jarrell family. Mr. Frank Jarrell operated a limestone quarry in Summitville, Tennessee, from 1935 until 1945, when the quarry ran into some underground caverns that were obstacles in the mining operations there. Interestingly, this coincided with his idea of moving south to Madison County, Alabama. Lawson Jarrell, Frank's oldest son, had just married a young lady from Decatur whose brother was the agricultural agent for Madison County, Alabama. He recognized the availability of rich limestone deposits in Madison County and their useful applications to agriculture and road and bridge construction. These three factors: the availability of limestone in Madison County, its need in North Alabama, and an exhausted quarry in Tennessee, resulted in the decision to move to Madison County in the spring of 1945.

The site of Three Caves was owned by Madison County and leased to Mr. Jarrell for a royalty of five cents per ton of limestone hauled away. Initial capital for the operation was only \$50,000 and was provided by First National Bank of Huntsville on Mr. Jarrell's signature. Mr. Jarrell called his new business The Madison Limestone Company. All the movable equipment from the Summitville quarry was transported to Madison County. The initial operation was on a very small scale: dynamite was used to blast the ground and expose limestone; large

rocks of the limestone were broken with manual labor by using a sledgehammer and hauled in wheelbarrows to the hammer mill where it was then crushed into usable limestone. The finished product was trucked away for use in either agricultural or road and bridge construction.

About eight workers came with Mr. Jarrell from the Summitville area and others came from the quarries around Sherwood, Tennessee. Several of these workers commuted weekly from their homes in Tennessee. Some of the workers rented rooms in the nearby Madison County Alms House which was located only yards away from Three Caves. Two other workers, "Uncle" Charlie Battle and his nephew "Nuck" Walter Macon, built a one room shack on the site, installed a small stove and cots, and spent the work week there rent free. Uncle Charlie's job was to operate the jaw crusher for the quarry.

Following World War II, the demand for construction limestone increased. In order to supply the fast-growing Huntsville area, the quarrying operation expanded. A jaw crusher was installed which took the place of men with sledgehammers. Dumpsters replaced the wheelbarrow for hauling the limestone rock to the jaw crusher. To keep pace with demand, another jaw crusher and two more hammer mills were added. Eventually, Euclid's, which are huge earth moving carriers, replaced the dumpsters. At its height, Three Caves employed 25 workers, some of whom still reside in Huntsville.

The initial quarrying technique at Three Caves was "drill and shoot." This process began on the ground surface by drilling a hole and placing the dynamite vertically inside and igniting a charge. Around 1949, this method was changed to the "room and pillar" technique which placed the charge at the base of the rock face causing a horizontal blast. The result of this method can be noted in the large underground rooms separated by the



*The results of the “room and pillar” technique.*

eighty foot pillars which were carefully engineered to support the roof. There were two reasons for the change to “room and pillar.” First, the upper strata contained rocky earth which had to be removed in order to access the rich limestone in the next lowest level. This was not economical in terms of money or time. The second reason was the encroachment of the City of Huntsville into the Three Caves area. Nearby houses began to receive numerous airborne rocks from the “drill and shoot” method. One rock landed in a nearby resident’s refrigerator and another went through the roof of the county Alms House. The best story involves the wife of a quarry worker. Philip and Berlene Scott had just bought a new sporty red 1949 Ford. Berlene polished the new car almost every day. One day a blast sent a 3' X 3' rock onto its trunk. She promptly marched to the quarry to “discuss” the matter. It took several of the big quarry workers to restrain her. However, the quarry bought her a new sporty red Ford.

The “room and pillars” method requires more precise judgment because the person responsible for the excavation must determine where to leave the pillars for roof support and



where to place the charge to keep the ceiling level. The Madison Limestone Company had an advantage in the person of Lawson Jarrell. He observed this technique in operation at the Sherwood quarry and adapted it for use at his own quarry.

A strange quirk of nature occurred at Three Caves in the summer of 1951. An electrical storm suddenly arose which caused all activity at the quarry to be shut down. However, a fellow named Jordon was working with explosives at the far end of a tunnel and did not get the word. Suddenly, a lightning bolt entered the cave and traveled through the tunnel. The workers at the entrance heard a loud blast. They quickly drove to the end of the tunnel to see if anything was left of poor Jordon. To their surprise they met him running out! It seems Jordon was on the very top of a ladder when the lightning struck and set off the charges on the ground. The blast knocked him down and shook him up, but did not hurt him. However, the driver of the vehicle didn't want to let Jordon ride with him because he was sure Jordon was a ghost and was about to disappear. Eventually they took Jordon to a hospital for a check-up and he was fine.

In 1952, the Three Caves quarry closed for several reasons. Surprisingly, lack of limestone was not one of them. The increased cost of excavating the limestone was a prime consideration. As the quarry progressed further into the earth, it became too expensive to extract limestone compared to the less expensive open pit technique. A second reason was the growth of the City of Huntsville. As the loaded trucks hauled the crushed limestone away, they had to drive through the city. When the limestone spilled, as it often did, it caused a nuisance and outright hazard to drivers. Area residents complained of the noise from the blasting, of the constant rumble from the jaw crusher and hammer mill, and that the roar from the trucks raised the noise level. All of these combined to cause the Madison Limestone Company to move operations to the airport.

There was no further activity in the abandoned limestone quarry until 1962, when the Cuban Missile Crisis developed. The Madison County Commission determined the Three Caves would serve as an ideal fallout shelter should the US be attacked. The Alabama National Guard was ordered to ready the area. An engineer company spent several weekend drills clearing out the rubble from the entrance and inside the caves. The company commander himself sometimes operated the bulldozer due to a shortage of trained operators. Plans to stock the shelter with food never met completion because the crisis was solved peacefully.

The next role for Three Caves was as a movie stage. "The Ravagers," starring Richard Harris and Ernest Borgnine, was filmed there in 1978. It is the story of the occupation of Three Caves by the survivors of a holocaust which destroyed civilization. Approximately 350 residents of Huntsville served as extras. Davis Fisher, a former equipment operator in the quarry, and very knowledgeable about the site, assisted as set advisor and was hired for the use of his water truck as a rain-maker for the movie.

This brings us to the current use of Three Caves. In 1987 Madison County transferred title of this land to the Huntsville Land Trust. The Land Trust is a non-profit organization which administers well over 1,000 acres for the public good. Its object is to maintain this land in its natural state for the enjoyment of area residents by developing hiking trails and periodically sponsoring hikes.

### **Three Caves Trivia**

Taken from *Scenic Views*, Volume 4  
Issue 1, Summer, 1997

- “The Ravagers” starring Richard Harris and Ernest Borgnine was filmed at Three Caves in 1978.
- The Three Caves were originally a rock quarry.
- Many of the roads in Madison County were paved with the rock from Three Caves.
- Today, the quarry which feeds into natural caves is evolving into a natural cave. You can actually see the formation of stalactites and stalagmites beginning.
- During the Cuban Missile Crisis in 1962, the National Guard began preparing the Three Caves for use as a fallout shelter. Thanks to the peaceful resolution of the crisis the preparations were never completed and the caves were never used as a fallout shelter.



**EXECUTIVE PRIVILEGE:**  
**Thanks to the Community**  
by Mike Watson  
Taken from *Scenic Views*, Volume 4  
Issue 1, Summer, 1997

As the Huntsville Land Trust celebrates its 10th Anniversary, it is not only a time to recognize the substantial achievements made in preserving acreage, but the notable contributions of so many community leaders. From its inception, the Land Trust has been the beneficiary of countless hours of help and support from volunteers, who exhibit the spirit and vitality of the Trust in particular, and the community of Huntsville as a whole.

The vision and passion of city officials, business and civic leaders, and scores of just "ordinary folks" who value the uniqueness of the land has amazed me. There has been such a dedicated commitment to birth, develop and nurture what was a very fragile possibility, and see it become stronger, more self sufficient, and certainly more vibrant. The names are too numerous, their deeds are evident and ongoing. The Land Trust thanks and will continually work to merit your support.

Our future more secure, we are now able to focus on the ideas for improvement on the trails and acreage. While the tasks facing us are difficult and varied, we have every confidence that we will continue to grow, continue to meet recreational needs in the community, and to be one outstanding example of the possibilities that exist in Huntsville. In our appreciation and our thanks lies our challenge. We are more than the land; we are the leaders, volunteers and school children who make up our membership. You have all done well. **BE PROUD, AND BE CHALLENGED.**

## **A Brief History of the Bridgeforth Family** by Pamela Bridgeforth

from a paper submitted July 16, 1987

From conversations with various family members, it became apparent that many of us were unaware of the size of the family. We knew other family existed, but had neither seen nor met them. Thus, the idea of a family reunion had its inception.

Our Bridgeforth family tree was initiated by the planting of two acorns in the 1840s, when George Bridgeforth and Jennie Andrews were born in Elkton, Tennessee (approximately 10 miles north of Alabama, where they later settled). Eventually the union of these two produced a mighty oak with many descendants.

Both George and Jennie were children of their masters. They were fortunate because they never had to work in the fields. Also, tutors were hired to educate them. In his early twenties, George joined the Union army and at age twenty-six, the Civil War ended. Rumor has it that George's master would and did give him eighty acres of land if he married Jennie. Next they moved to the Coperland Place in Limestone County, Alabama, located across the Tennessee River near Athens, and Decatur. Some years later they purchased 360 acres in Beulah Land, a community in Tanner, Alabama. This was a palatial estate. The plantation included a large colonial house and facilities to accommodate 60 to 75 slaves. Previously this property had belonged to a white slave owner. The house was a show-place in the South. This land is still owned by various family members.

During these years, nine children were born: Sarah, William Andrew, George Ruffin, Parthenia, Issac, William, Nancy, Betty and Bascom. All the children received a formal

education through high school. Issac received a Bachelor's degree in education from Tuskegee University. George Ruffin received his Bachelor's degree from the Massachusetts Institute of Technology in 1898 and later taught at Tuskegee University.

George Bridgeforth farmed more land than any other black agriculturalist at this time. Cotton was king and this was the farm's chief crop. George and Jennie would arise each morning at 4:00 a.m. George and his sons would tend to farming chores while Jennie and the girls would prepare a hearty repast. Then to work. George certainly had his hands full operating such a large farm, and Jennie was very busy maintaining their home and caring for her husband and children.

Jennie died in 1921, and George passed in 1923, after amassing quite a fortune. Their farm was worth approximately \$100,000: \$60,000 in cash and farm equipment, which was auctioned off for \$50,000. Considering inflation over the last 50 years, in 1987 dollars total assets would probably approach \$1,000,000.

Issac Bridgeforth met Ila Townsend while teaching school in Red Hill, Tennessee. Long before the death of his father, Issac moved back to Beulah Land and began farming with his father. Though his degree was in education, his success came from the trade that had been taught to him by his father. Issac and Ila survived the Depression and later prospered in the field of agriculture, thereby gaining the respect of blacks and whites alike throughout the area.

Issac and Ila had eight children: John, William Sousa, George Darden, Mildred, Evelyn, Christine, Omelia, and Helen. John died at a very young age. The rest of the children live quite comfortable lifestyles. George Darden has been wearing the title of "Cotton King" for approximately ten years now.

Issac died in 1961 and Ila passed in 1982. Most of the children moved north after finishing Trinity High School in Athens. Darden Bridgeforth & Sons now operate farms in Limestone and Madison counties.

Darden Bridgeforth married Elizabeth White and their union produced thirteen children: George Darden Jr., Ila Marie, John Henry, Paul, Diane, Olivia, Milton, Mitchell, William Sousa, Doris, Gregory, Debra, and Billy. Seven of the boys farm with their father. Billy graduated from Alabama A&M University and married Pamela Yvette Webb.

Billy is in partnership with his father and brothers. Billy has contributed his knowledge and expertise gained at Alabama A&M to help make Darden Bridgeforth & Sons successful. *Progressive Farmer*, which is a national magazine, says that Darden Bridgeforth & Sons is the largest cotton farming operation in the entire Southeast.

*The Bridgeforth family is apparently still going strong. Note the recent flyer from the family nursery appropriately named Beulahland Nursery.*



# Beulahland Nursery

"Family Owned & Operated"



## Specializing in Ornamental Shrubs and Trees

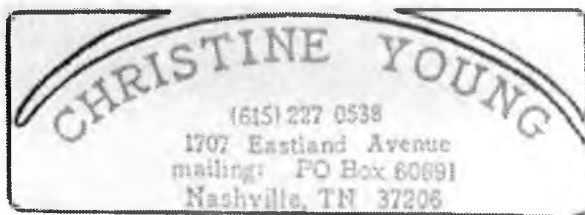
"Available in 1, 2, and 3 Gallon Containers"

American Boxwood, Korean Boxwood, Dwarf Nandina, Zabel, Blue Rugs, Variegated Hosta, Variegated Liriope, Blue Pacifics Juniper, Andorra Juniper, Needle Point Holly, Nellier Stevens Holly, Helleri Holly, Rotundifoua Holly, Dwarf Yaupon Holly, Compacta Holly, Greenluster Holly, Hetz Holly

17374 Bridgeforth Road  
Tanner, AL 35671  
205-232-6804

**Prices Vary Per Container: \$3 to \$7**





October 4, 1996

C.K. Colley  
COUNTY COURTHOUSE  
inks, watercolors and gouache  
image: 24 1/8" h x 35 3/16" w  
support: 29 1/2" h x 39" w  
owned by the Central Presbyterian Church  
contact: Carol Ann Samples

#### CONDITION REPORT

The architectural rendering is created over a graphite underdrawing. The final drawing consists of inks, both blue and black, and watercolor washes. White gouache is used for the globes on the lighting fixtures. The support is a moderate weight sheet of paper; the paper is originally off-white in color and appears to be of rag composition. The drawing is solid mounted to a sheet of laminated paperboard. The board is composed of lignified mechanical wood pulps. The adhesive is unidentified, but watersoluble. There are remnants of an old window mat and animal glues on the margins of paper around the drawing.

The drawing was recently rescued from conditions of extremely poor storage. Deterioration both pre-dates and post-dates this period.

Generalized discoloration of the paper is moderate. The image area is very much darker due to exposure to light. The dimensions of this damage were determined by the opening of the old window mat; the image extends beyond the old window on all sides, by as much as 3/4" on the right side. The severity of this light damage suggests that the drawing was matted and lit for many years. Mottling in the discoloration of the sky area adjacent to the cupola may represent faintly painted clouds, or may be irregularities in discoloration caused by uneven application of the mounting adhesive.

The drawing has suffered significant and severe damages since unframing. The sheet is peppered with waterstains of all sizes. The right hand side appears to have actually soaked in water. The paper of this margin has rotted away without trace. Mold growth is found over the entire drawing. At the right side, the mold has stained the remaining paper fibers in dramatic fashion, with much of the remaining margin being bright orange in color. In addition to mold growth and waterstaining, the drawing is heavily soiled. Most of this is general soot, but

there are also numerous smudges. Circular deposits of soil in the right half appear to have transferred from a spinning or turning object, possibly a shoe heel. Accretions are varied and numerous. Between accretions, mold and old glues, the surface of the drawing is measurably three dimensional.

Other than delaminations and losses due to the aforementioned water damages, the physical condition of the drawing is fair. The paper is clearly degraded and weakened. Shallow surface damages in the form of slashes and gouges are common in the lower half of the drawing. As a form of hidden damage, the paper is weakened and softened by damage to the sizing; this is a form of dilute adhesive added during papermaking to reduce the porosity of the paper and to impart physical strength.

#### TREATMENT PROPOSAL

expose to thymol vapors to kill active mold spores  
surface clean to remove soiling, mold, residues of glue  
remove mount from reverse by delamination  
wash in distilled water with alkali  
overall back with Japanese paper and paste  
inpaint any losses with watercolors

ESTIMATED COST: \$700-800

*Christine Young*



## CONTRACT

C.K. Colley  
COUNTY COURTHOUSE  
inks, watercolors and gouache

I have reviewed the treatments proposed for the item(s) listed above, which were described in the report dated October 4, 1996. In agreement with the statement of policies (below), I hereby authorized Christine Young to proceed with the treatments as outlined. To initiate said treatment, I remit a deposit of \$ 250.00 to be credited against the final billing.

signature

date

*October 8, 1996*

## STATEMENT OF POLICIES

**COURSE OF TREATMENT AND EXPECTATIONS OF RESULT** the conservator will make every reasonable effort to improve the condition/stability of the object. It must be understood by the client, however, that some forms of deterioration and damage are not able to be reversed by accepted methods of conservation, and that it is frequently neither possible nor ethical to return an object to "like new" condition.

**PREPARATION OF COST ESTIMATE:** the cost of conservation is determined by set hourly fee plus costs of materials and supplies. In the event of over-estimation, the final bill will be less; if, however, the job is under-estimated, the final bill will not exceed the maximum figure given at the onset of this agreement. If in the course of treatment, the conservator encounters a hidden condition which could not be predicted or assessed at the time of the proposal, and if this condition necessitates significant deviation from the proposed treatment, the owner will be billed for actual hours expended. If this should arise, the conservator will notify the owner in writing prior to continuation of treatment.

**BILLING:** a deposit is required at the time of treatment authorization. This deposit will be deducted from the final bill. Full payment for conservation treatment and related charges is required at the time of the object's release by the conservator. Promptness in picking up completed work is appreciated; any object which is not claimed by the owner within 30 days of notification will be subject to a storage fee of 10% of the outstanding balance.

**INSURANCE:** the owner/agent is required to carry adequate insurance on the object(s) assigned to the conservator. The conservator will take appropriate precaution against fire, flood, theft and vandalism; the owner will hold the conservator harmless in the event of such occurrences.

**PHOTO RELEASE:** the owner grants permission for the conservator to use slides illustrating condition and/or treatment of the object(s) for the purpose of educational lectures.

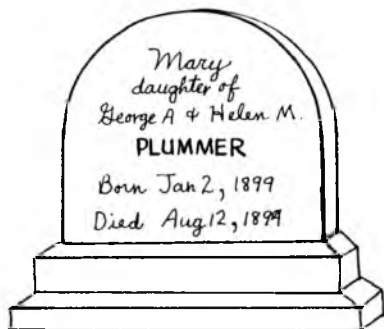
## More on George Plummer

Gary M. Griner

A previous article (Griner, Gary M., "G. A. Plummer, House Carpenter," *The Historic Huntsville Quarterly*, Vol II, No. 2, Summer-1994.) presented the information that I had uncovered concerning George A. Plummer, a builder and planing mill owner who operated in Huntsville from 1897 to 1915. However, I was unable to locate any Plummer family, so the article was rather devoid of personal information. In particular, I did not know what happened to the Plummer family after they left Huntsville in 1918.

Subsequent to the publication of the article, I obtained additional information, primarily from Patsy Plummer Lovingood, a granddaughter. The purpose of this brief note is to correct and complete the story of George and Helen Plummer. The interested reader may wish to review the original article for a discussion of Plummer's building trade and business activities.

Following the publication of the article, I discovered a Plummer burial plot in Section F of Maple Hill Cemetery. Two stones are present that identify the deceased infants that I had seen mentioned in the 1910 U.S. Census records. They are Mary, born in 1899, who lived eight months; and Richard, born



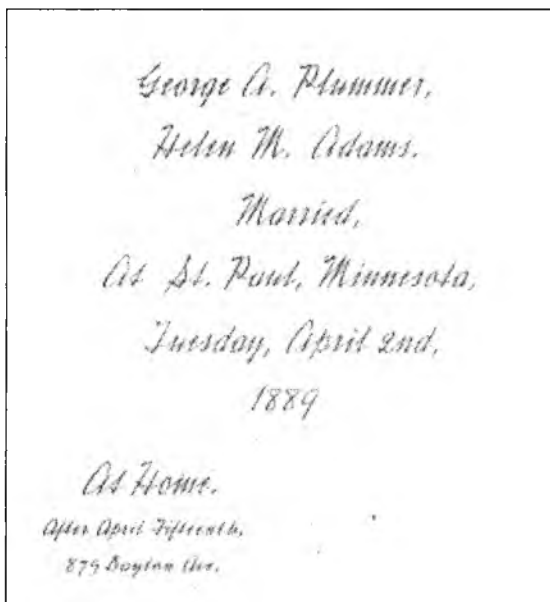
*Sketch of the headstones in the Plummer Plot at Maple Hill Cemetery*

in 1900, who lived a year. This must have been a trying period for the Plummers. During this same time they sold their country home (later turned into a small pox clinic) and built a new house on Clinton Avenue. Baby Mary died dix months before they left the old country house, then Richard died dix months after they moved into the new house.

By way of the cemetery records, I then located Patsy Lovingood who with her sister, Joyce Strickland, have kindly provided family information and photographs. Patsy's father was Samuel Plummer (not "Daniel" as I had incorrectly read from the Census card).

Although George and his wife, Helen Adams, were from New Hampshire and Maine, respectively, they met and married in St. Paul, Minnesota. Their first two children (of eight), Josephine and Frank, were born in Minnesota before they moved to Huntsville. The rest of the children were born in Huntsville. Plummer lost his Planing Mill in 1914, and in 1915 sold the family home and bought 171 acres on Dug Hill Road where they lived for 3 more years.

After leaving Huntsville in 1918, the Plummers moved first to a farm near Brooksville, Florida, and later to New Port Richie on the Gulf Coast. George Sr. died there in 1944, at the age of 80. His widow, Helen, moved to California, where she lived to the age of 96.





*Helen M. Adams Plummer,  
age 77  
&  
George A. Plummer,  
age 80*

*Taken in August 1944.*

Of the six Plummer children who grew to adulthood, none survive. Josephine Adelle (not Adelle Josephine), the only daughter, married a

William Sloan and lived in Duarte, California. George Jr., a grocer, lived in both Florida and Lake Arrowhead, California. Frank also moved to California after working for a time in Cincinnati, Ohio. Samuel moved to Ensley, Alabama, and worked as a life insurance agent. Joe worked as a commercial fisherman and at one time was the constable of Hernando County, Florida. Albert (known as "Bob") preceded both parents in death about 1940. He, Joe, and parents George and Helen, are buried near Brooksville, Florida.

George Plummer's lineage has been traced back to Samuel Plumer (one "m"), who was born in Wales in 1619. Helen's line is known back to great-grandmother, Mary Bacon, born 1805.

## The George Plummer Family

Name	DOB	Location	Comments
George A. Plummer	Apr. 1864	NH	died, age 80 (1944)
Helen M. Adams Plummer	Feb. 1867	MA	died, age 96 (1963)

### *Children*

Josephine Adelle	Aug. 1891	MN	known as Josephine
Frank A.	Mar. 1892	MN	
Albert B.	Aug. 1897	AL	died about 1940
Mary	Jan. 2, 1899	AL	died, August 12, 1899
Richard	June 17, 1900	AL	died, January 23, 1901
Samuel B.	Oct. 15, 1901	AL	died, 1976
Joseph C.	1904	AL	died about 1990
George A. Jr.	1906	AL	died about 1979

## Lineage of George A. Plummer

Name	DOB	Where	Father	Mother	# Siblings
George A. Plummer	Apr. 2, 1864	NH	Joseph	Abigail Eastman	6
Joseph Plummer	Oct. 11, 1820	NH	Richard	Sally Fox	6
Richard Plummer	June 10, 1781	NH	Jesse	Sarah Merrill	10
Jesse Plumer	Sept. 18, 1740				
Samuel Plumer	1619	emigrated from Wales			



*Merrimack School built 1914.  
Photo from Huntsville-Madison County Public Library Archives.*

## **Mill Village Memories: Merrimack School**

*by Ann Maulsby*

In September, 1915, just before she was six years old, Hester Smith began attending Merrimack School. Built in 1914, the school was beside the Merrimack Manufacturing Company, on what was then called the Pike, now named Triana Boulevard, on the western outskirts of Huntsville. The school was owned by the Merrimack Manufacturing Company. The company built a larger school in front of and adjoining the original structure in 1920.

Set back from the rock-covered road the school faced west. About six steps led up from the street, and a dirt path led to the front door of the school. A hallway, perhaps twelve feet wide, divided the building in half. On each side of the hall were two doors. These opened into the classrooms. At the end of the hall was the principal's office. There was a set of five windows on each side of the door at the front



of the building. The windows were bare of curtains or window shades. The wooden floors were stained and varnished. A black-board was on one wall of each room. On the wall of the hall were hooks on which the students hung their coats. Heat was supplied by the steam plant that provided power for the Merrimack Manufacturing Company. The outhouses were behind the school.

The principal was Miss May Crutcher. Teachers were Miss Emma Dill, Miss Laughinhouse, and Miss Allison. At times there were seventy-five children in each class, but the attendance varied. The pupils sat in desks in rows. Seating was assigned by the teachers. When a child misbehaved, the small legs were switched by the teacher with a thin branch from a local bush. The children went to their homes for lunch, as did the parents who worked in the mill.

*Hester  
&  
Alfred Smith  
attended  
Merrimack School.*



Hester's dresses were made by her mother, who saw to it that the hem was always below the knees. Cotton stockings and high-top shoes completed the outer wardrobe. The boys usually wore overalls. In the winter most of the children wore union suits. Though these one-piece undergarments were uncomfortable, they were believed to help the children stay healthy.

Pencils and tablets of paper Hester bought from Cheney's, the general merchandise store across the street from the school. She believes that the school books were bought for the children by their parents. Hester does not recall any money-making programs taking place in the school.

School was a happy place for Hester, for she was an eager student. The Merrimack School was a good beginning for her, for she has continued to learn since she left the school.

*Interview with Mrs. Hester Smith Collie, 3511 Dubose Street, Huntsville, Alabama, May 11, 1988.*



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*Hundley Building on corner. Ca. 1960 parade, looking SE.*

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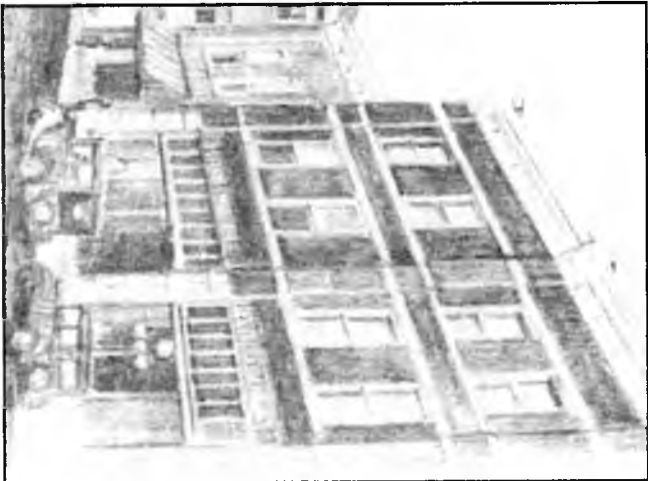
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