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Significant Sites and Structures: What Qualifies?*

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THREE DOLLARS

FALL 1998

THE
HISTORIC HUNTSVILLE QUARTERLY
OF LOCAL ARCHITECTURE AND PRESERVATION



SAVING HISTORICALLY OR ARCHITECTUALLY SIGNIFICANT
SITES AND STRUCTURES:
WHAT QUALIFIES?

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*Cover: Madison County Health Department, 1955.
Courtesy Harvie Jones.*

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The Historic Huntsville Quarterly of Local Architecture and Preservation

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Fall 1998

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From the Chairman

These continue to be very exciting times for our Foundation. We have considerable activity in many areas and, quite frankly, need your help. The magnitude of our current projects has overloaded the board members and stretched their talents and capacities to the breaking point. I would ask that through our *Quarterlys*, newsletters, and word-of-mouth, you become familiar with all our undertakings and join us in carrying them out. They are all very worthwhile and lots of fun.

A hearty congratulations to our Director, Diane Ellis, for her work in getting the grant to restore the facade at the Hundley Building. We received word August 24 that our request for approximately \$23,000 had been approved. I might add that there were substantial complimentary comments, which should go directly to Diane, concerning the completeness and form of our application. These funds will be of great assistance to our Hundley Building Task Force as it concludes its plan for a stable operation of the facility.

As you remember, the Hundley Building is to be the permanent home of our Foundation. At the end of August, we relocated our office from its temporary site at Whitesburg Drive and Airport Road to our new home on South Side Square. The move required a change in our telephone number; it is now 539-0097. We are, for the moment, operating in space on the first floor while the renovation upstairs is done in what will be our permanent office. When you're downtown, drop by and visit.

Another of our current objectives is to increase our membership, particularly among the younger people in the community. Like so many other groups, the mean age of our membership is steadily creeping upward. While I do love older people, especially since I am becoming one of them, the future of our Foundation will depend on its appeal to the next generation and the one that follows it as well. I ask you to encourage all the younger adults that you know to give us their consideration. Gift memberships are always nice.

Ben Walker

From the Editor

My heartfelt thanks to all of you who have encouraged and complimented me on the Summer 1998 issue of *Quarterly*. I offer special thanks to the Publications Committee who are making my job a pleasure. Special thanks to Frances Robb who is still willing to hold my hand as I learn Pagemaker. As I am still learning, any and all help is gratefully accepted.

From the purpose of Historic Huntsville Foundation: "The Historic Huntsville Foundation was established in 1974 to encourage the preservation of historically or architecturally significant sites and structures throughout Huntsville and Madison County and to increase public awareness of their value to the community."

This issue will be a little different: the charge to the editor is to feature, at least, one significant historic structure or site in each *Quarterly*. So I decided to find out what makes a structure or site historic. Is it because someone famous lived there (Washington's Mount Vernon); is it because something famous happened there (Kitty Hawk, North Carolina); or is it historic because of its place in history (Huntsville's mill villages)?

And the answer is yes. All of the above. In one of my past incarnations, I was a high school English teacher; I was fond of sending my students to the dictionary to "look it up." Well, I have followed my advice, and I offer you *Merriam-Webster's Collegiate Dictionary*, 10th Edition, definitions: *historic*: a. famous or important in history b. having great and lasting importance c. known or established in the past d. dating from or preserved from a past time or culture; *historical*: 1.a. of, relating to, or having the character of history b. based on history c. used in the past and reproduced in historical presentation 2. famous in history; *significant*: 1. having meaning; *esp.*: SUGGESTIVE 2.a. having or likely to have influence or effect: IMPORTANT. In addition, Historic Huntsville Foundation defines a building as historic if it is 40 or more years old. Well, that means the 1950s ranch house I live in is historic and wor-

thy of preservation. (In fact, I'm coming to appreciate its street appearance and plan to preserve that 1950s look. Inside is still up for grabs.) Structures and sites are significant as they are important or give meaning to our lives. So the Big Spring is a significant historical site because Twickenham (later known as Huntsville) grew up around it. The Madison County Health Department is a significant historical site because thousands of Huntsvillians received their first doses of Salk vaccine there. You may argue then that any structure or site could be historic, and my answer is, again, yes.

This issue of the *Quarterly* will feature people from different neighborhoods of Huntsville writing about the significant and historic areas they love. Jane Barr, Monte Sano resident and chair of the Historic Huntsville Foundation Preservation Committee, has two articles—one on an 1880s house she restored and another on the 1950s Monte Sano Elementary School. David Bowman, deconstructionist, writer, and editor of the once *Huntsville News*, sends from Arkansas his diary of deconstruction of an 1850s house on the corner of Smith Street and Holmes Avenue. Jack Burwell, Huntsville native and attorney, describes growing up on East Holmes Street in a 1904 bungalow. Bill Easterling, Huntsville author and *Huntsville Times* columnist, writes of growing up in a mill village. Diane Ellis, Executive Director and Historic Huntsville Foundation preservationist, contributes two essays: one on the Dallas Mill water tower and the other on the Madison County Health Department property fronting Eustis Avenue and Green Street. Jerri Hightower, long-time resident of Huntsville, writes on the value of living in her Twickenham neighborhood from her 1919 stucco house on Randolph Avenue. Kent Wilborn, assistant manager of Monte Sano State Park, writes of the restoration of the Civilian Conservation Corps (CCC) buildings in the park. As you will see in this *Quarterly*, the contributors agree it is the people and the memories associated with the structures and sites that make them significant and historic.

This brings me to a request I make to you, the *Quarterly* readers. On page 5 in my *Challenge to the Membership* is a list, submitted by a local architectural firm (your editor made this request of six local firms), of five endangered structures in the Huntsville/Madison County area. The structures or sites don't have to be endangered, but I would like for you also to submit lists of structures or sites you think worthy of preserving. Along with these lists, please give your reasons for preserving these structures or sites and furnish any photographs, drawings, etc. if you have them. In following *Quarterlys*, we will feature a section with your submissions. I also solicit memoirs of neighborhoods and places; these too may develop into articles or sources of articles in future *Quarterlys*. Places live in us because of our memories associated with them.

I look forward to hearing from you and sharing your lists with our readers.

Margaret J. Vann

Challenge to the Membership

As residents of Huntsville and Madison County, you have the opportunity to see a variety of building styles in Huntsville and Madison County. Later issues of *Historic Huntsville Quarterly* will list endangered historic buildings in Huntsville and Madison County. We will not limit our definition of historic to any period.

What the *Quarterly* would like of you, our readers, is a list of architectural structures or sites that you feel should be preserved or are endangered. The *Quarterly* has and will continue to contact architectural firms in Huntsville for their choices. The list will be published in later issues of the *Quarterly* as a continuing feature.

Please send me your lists with reasons why these sites or structures need to be preserved. And if you have any pictures of these structures or can tell me where I could get pictures, please send that information also. I look forward to your selections.

To get you started, here are five endangered properties suggested by SKT Architects, P.C.: Drake Hall, Alabama A&M University, c. 1924; Huntsville Y.M.C.A. (downtown), c. 1920s; Merrimack Mill village, c. 1899; Norfolk Southern Freight Depot, c. 1856; Oak Place (George Steele residence), c. 1840s; and the McCrary-Thomas House (near Three Forks of the Flint), c. 1824.

October 1998

Margaret J. Vann, Editor



Fig.1 The Empire State Building of Jack Burwell's childhood.
Courtesy Margaret J. Vann.

Johnson-Burwell Bungalow

Living in the Shadow of the Empire State Building

Jackson P. Burwell

In 1948 Huntsville, Alabama, was four square miles in size and had a population of about 13,000 people. It was almost as big as Decatur but not quite. I was born in Huntsville that year at Huntsville Hospital and was brought home to the house I now occupy fifty years later. In 1948 the address was 406 East Holmes Street. The house is located about three blocks north-east of the Courthouse within easy walking distance. Some time in the 1960s or 1970s, the address changed to 405 Holmes Avenue NE. I guess the city planners felt that the streets and avenues were running the wrong way and needed correcting.

My parents didn't own the house at 406 East Holmes Street. My grandfather, Ed Burwell, owned the house. My father, Ed Junior, having spent four years at war in Europe, was trying to save his money so he could start his own retail photographic business. His first store for Universal Photo Shop was located next to the old Twickenham Hotel on East Clinton Street just down from Johnson and Mahoney Men's Store. Those stores from my childhood are long gone now, replaced by a parking garage.

At five I felt quite privileged to live less than a block from the tallest building in the world. I had heard my grandfather talking about the Empire State Building and how it extended upward almost to the sky. And sure enough, when I went out the front door of my house, there was this gigantic building that just seemed to go up and up and up. It was obviously the building my grandfather was talking about. I don't know when I learned that the real Empire State Building is in New York City and that the building down the street, which is about twelve stories high, is really the old Huntsville Times Building. To this day when I go by the old Huntsville Times Building, I recall the time when I used to think it was the tallest building in the world.

When I was a small child, we kept some chickens in the back yard in a pen. At about the age of five, I learned how to strike matches without the assistance of an adult and proceeded to cause a rather large grass fire in the back yard. After the fire was put out by my mother and Annie, our cook, and having observed the chickens in a rather excited state, I didn't want to admit to my new found knowledge of pyric ignition and insisted passionately that the matches must have fallen out of my pocket and ignited themselves. Maybe even the chickens had something to do with it. But surely it wasn't my fault

My mother didn't seem to accept my story completely, based upon my observations of her general demeanor. However, I did notice thereafter that the chickens disappeared from the back yard. At the time I thought smugly that it served those chickens right for having pyromanic tendencies.

The great love of my childhood from three to ten was toy soldiers and stuffed animals. My mother, Helen Burwell, was amazingly tolerant of the disorder I could create in the living room, which was my play room. At times I would literally have hundreds of soldiers, cannons, and other machinery of war lined up in battle formation on the living room floor. I re-fought the Civil War, the War of Texas Independence, and the two World Wars a hundred times. While I do remember piling my toys away in grocery bags, I never recall being told I couldn't play somewhere.

The stuffed animals I collected were purchased within a few hundred yards of our house in a shop called "Kiddieland" that sat below the skyscraper I mistook for the Empire State Building. There were lions, elephants, a giraffe, tigers, and many more curious creatures. I didn't know it at the time, but these wonderful little animals came from Germany and were made by the Steiff Toy Company. I can remember that the most I ever paid for one of my childhood companions was \$8. Unfortunately, as one of the rituals of passing from childhood, I willingly gave my Steiff animals to my younger cousins in Jeff, Alabama. I hope that the Steiff animals were as loved by my cousins as I had loved the animals.

When I was ten, my parents finally had enough money to build a new house on the edge of town in the Blossomwood area. That was 1958. In 1977 after my grandfather's death, I returned as part owner to the Holmes Avenue house because my father had died two years before my grandfather died. When I came back, the bathroom sink that used to tower over me now was no higher than waist level. It was as though the house had shrunk. When I first moved back to my childhood home, I have to admit that I wasn't overly impressed with it. The wallpaper was tattered, window air conditioners marred the symmetry of each room, and the yellow pine hardwood floors needed a good cleaning.



Fig.2 Front view of Johnson-Burwell Bungalow.
Courtesy Jackson P. Burwell, P.C.



Fig.3 Detail on columns on porch of Johnson-Burwell Bungalow.
Courtesy Jackson P. Burwell, P.C.

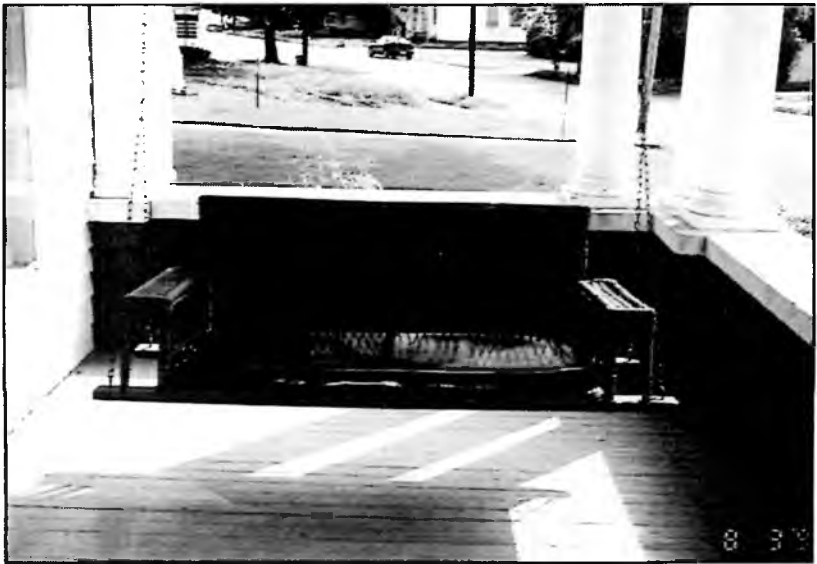


Fig.4 Front porch swing on Johnson-Burwell Bungalow.
Courtesy Jackson P. Burwell, P.C.

However, there were a lot of pluses. The ceilings that are just under twelve feet tall provide a majestic setting to live in. The oak woodwork throughout the house was in good condition and with a little work could regain its original appearance.

After I married Emily Pryor in 1981, we began talking to family members and researching Courthouse records to learn more about the home. The lot at what is now 405 Holmes Avenue NE. and the one next to it at 407 Holmes Avenue NE. were occupied by the George Warwick house in the late 19th century. Warwick was a furniture manufacturer according to an early city directory. Sometime before 1900, the Warwick house burned, and in 1903 Mary Struve purchased the lot. Mrs. Struve gave one half of the lot to her daughter Rose Struve Johnson and the other one half to her daughter Elizabeth Struve Monroe.

The house at 405 Holmes Avenue NE. was started in 1903 and completed in 1904 by Rose and her husband William Johnson. Her sister Elizabeth built the neighboring house at 407 Holmes Avenue NE. in the same year. The style of the house at 405 Holmes is referred to as a bungalow with shingles and classical columns. Rose Johnson, however, lived in her bungalow only about two years. In 1906 (or about) she and her husband moved. Perhaps they had already outgrown their new four-room home.

The 405 Holmes Avenue house was then rented. Charles Shaver, Senior, a local attorney, was born in the house in 1907 and lived there for several years with his parents. Charles Shaver's parents, like mine years later, were finally able to afford their own home in 1916 and built a home on the edge of town on what is now Locust Avenue between Adams Street and California Street. In 1923 Rose Johnson sold the house to my great grandmother, Carrie Davis Burwell; and according to the deed, Carrie paid \$7,500 for the house and lot. Carrie was the widow of Dr. Edwin Dudley Burwell, my great-grandfather (the first).



Fig.5 Detail of inset door on porch of
Johnson-Burwell House.
Courtesy Jackson P. Burwell, P.C.

In 1930 Carrie died and left the house to her son, Edwin Dudley Burwell, my grandfather (the second). After this date the house once again was rented by the owner. According to family history, the house was rented for \$25 per month. My grandfather during this period operated a farm in northwest Madison County and a country store on the corner of Pulaski Pike and Bob Wade Lane. His principal house was next to the country store, but he did maintain a city apartment in order that his son Ed III and daughter Sara could attend city schools. In the late 1930s my grandfather moved in at 405 Holmes after the death of his wife Lallah. His children had begun college.

In 1946 my father, Edwin Dudley Burwell, known as Ed, Junior, moved back to Huntsville with his wife Helen and my older brother, Dudley, and joined his father at 405 Holmes Avenue. As I mentioned earlier, in 1948, I came along. After my parents moved to their own house in Blossomwood in 1958, my grandfather stayed at 405 Holmes Avenue by himself until approximately 1971 when he had the house divided into two apartments, one for himself and one for a renter. After my grandfather's death in 1976, I moved into his side of the house a year later. My cousin Mary Alice Kelly Brinkley and her husband Dan Brinkley lived on the other side of the house. In 1980 Dan and Mary Alice bought their own home in Thornton Acres.

After my marriage to Emily in 1981, the house was returned to the status of a single family dwelling. In 1984 Emily and I had a staircase added to allow access to the second floor. The second floor, which was originally empty attic space, was transformed into bedrooms and living space. Mary Helen, our 15-year-old daughter, is upstairs; while Tom (Thomas Pryor), our 13-year-old son, is still downstairs. Also, the kitchen was enlarged and a breakfast room was added.

Since our renovation in 1984, life in our Edwardian bungalow* has remained an adventure. After several years of experimentation, I think I have finally stopped the leak around the living room fireplace. Also, the wallpaper in several rooms is starting to fray. However, Dan Brooks, who is the curator of Arlington



Fig.6 Johnson-Burwell House, showing kitchen enlargement.
Courtesy Jackson P. Burwell, P.C.

House Museum in Birmingham, made a comment to Emily and me a few years ago after the three of us had toured some historical homes in Natchez, Mississippi, that makes me feel a lot better about my childhood home. One of the houses on the Natchez tour had been redone from top to bottom resulting in the rooms looking almost new. Dan's comment was: "There was something wrong with that house. When I go home to Camden, Alabama, all the old homes have wallpaper peeling here and there. That house just didn't seem like an old historic Southern home at all."

Since I heard Dan say that, the leak stains and peeling wallpaper don't bother me half as much as they used to. I know now that Emily and I have an authentic looking old historic Southern home.

*Editor's note: *Bungalow* is defined as a one-storied house with a low-pitched roof and a wide veranda on the front only.

Two Historic Homes of Huntsville Should they be preserved?



Big Cove Road home of Wernher von Braun.
Courtesy of Margaret J. Vann.



Lafayette Circle home of Jan Davis, Astronaut.
Courtesy of Margaret J. Vann.



Fig.1 "Fairview" at time of purchase, 1974.
Courtesy Jane Barr.



Fig.2 "Fairview" in 1977 showing wrought-iron fence.
Courtesy Jane Barr.

What Preservation Means To Me

Jane Barr, HHF Preservation Chair

From April 15, 1974, to July 17, 1976, I spent a great deal of time and energy in a house on Randolph Street. During that time, I literally tore the house apart. Over the years, the house had been made into three apartments. When I first looked at the house, my realtor (and close friend) said: "You don't want this house. I have a better one on Holmes Street." When my husband looked at it, he groaned. I was the only one who could "see the original beauty." That was enough. When my husband saw I was determined, he gave me, as a birthday gift, a one-hour consultation with a man who had a reputation for "knowing about old houses." I first met Harvie Jones when he walked into my old house. I followed him from room to room, absorbing like a sponge.

During the following two years, I'd get my husband off to work, my children off to school, do a bit of housework, and head for Randolph Street. We still lived on Monte Sano, and the Randolph Street house was empty. Down came the modern drop ceiling, down came the partitioning walls, out went the plywood paneling. The walls and ceilings were re-papered (using the first of seven layers as examples to find reproductions). Antique furniture from relatives that had been passed to my husband filled the rooms. By the time the Twickenham Historic Preservation District Candle Light Tour of Homes started in July 17, 1976, my house on Randolph Street was ready.

I wanted my house to be acknowledged as "one-of-a-kind." It was in the Twickenham District, but I submitted the necessary forms and photographs to the Alabama Historical Commission. On October 20, 1977, my house "Fairview" (after my husband's ancestral home in Ohio) was added to the Alabama Register of Landmarks and Heritage. In doing the research, I located a girl-child who had been named Magna; her last name was Carter. Before my research at the Courthouse was finished, I had information about George Hunt. On July 5, 1977, much to my surprise, I received the Award of Merit from the Alabama Historical Commission.

I never lived in the house, but I did become acquainted with the generations of people who had lived in the house. A year later I sold the house. Where is “Fairview” where Tulliola Powers McCalley Hunt and George W. Hunt lived prior to 1885? It’s the yellow house with gingerbread and a wrought-iron fence at 515 Randolph Street. The HHF *Quarterly*, Summer-Fall 1990, had an article on the garden. July 12, 1991, there was an article in the *Huntsville News* for the garden at the residence of Joann and Scott Osborne.



Fig.3 “Fairview” on Randolph Avenue, August 1998, after extensive renovation by Nancy and Harry Brock.
Courtesy Margaret J.Vann.

In 1990 I went to Buenos Aires, Argentina, on an archaeological excavation. Two years later I went to Tenby, Wales, for an excavation. On the plane home, I asked myself: “Why don’t you look in your own back yard?” The next week I invited a few friends to my home, and we started the Monte Sano Historical Association. Since then we’ve had an archaeological excavation at the pre-Civil War Fearn Home and the 1890s home of James

O'Shaughnessy (both in Monte Sano State Park). We've researched, documented, walked the sites, photographed, and filed the necessary papers with the Alabama Historical Commission to get the following on the Alabama Register: the early 1800s town of Viduta, 1994; the 1930s Monte Sano State Park, 1996; the 1880s Schrimsher Farm; and the 1950s Sunrise Terrace Subdivision, 1998.

This year we accomplished getting the Monte Sano Railway Worker's House on the National Register. Every December we distribute to our members an approximate 50-page document (briefing) of our work. Two copies are placed in the Heritage Room, Huntsville-Madison County Public Library.

To answer the question: What does preservation mean to me? It means to have a particular location acknowledged as a special place where special people lived. Not necessarily a building that is still standing as that is only four walls. It means bringing back life. It means remembering the people, even the child Magna Carter, who had a newspaper clipping of a bicycle and a page from a story about a horse, pasted on the wall when her bedroom was re-papered. (Did you know it was the custom for a child to wish for something when she was "this tall," say a five-year-old height, and the wish was supposed to come true when she was "this tall," say a 10-year-old height, the height that the clippings were pasted?) I know Magna had a bisque doll, for I found a broken doll hand in the backyard "trash dump." After Magna's family, several generations lived there with no children.

Yes, I like architecture. I spend countless hours measuring, photographing, identifying the period. But to me, the essence of all my work are the lives of the people who lived in the structures: the man who walked the halls with a candleholder, the child who cried in the night, the laughter that echoed in the halls, the whispers, the shouts, the life.



Fig.1 Wisteria inside storm window.
Courtesy David Bowman.



Fig.2 Front porch before restoration.
Courtesy David Bowman.

A Live-In Deconstructionist At 510 Holmes Avenue

David Bowman

Before I moved to the Arkansas Ozarks, in the fall of 1996, to grapple with my parents' medical problems, I lived for 16 months at 510 East Holmes, in the Old Town Historic District. In those days I was writing editorials and commentaries for the *Huntsville News*; equally fun, or maybe more, was moonlighting as a live-in deconstructionist.

My deconstructionist labors began this way:

For a year I lived one block south, at 526 East Clinton, in a delightful Victorian house owned by Hall Bryant. On my nightly walks around the Old Town neighborhood, I kept circling the forlorn finery of the L-shaped house that turned the corner at Smith and Holmes, and very possibly the house kept circling me.

I had tackled two preservation projects before—an 1885 house at 285 Mill, north of Memphis' downtown business district, and a farmhouse in Giles County, Tennessee, with its oldest portion a log house circa 1820—but this deserted house in Huntsville really beckoned to me.

Its last avatar was as the Cummings Chiropractic Clinic, converted from a residence to a doctor's office in 1968, back when non-residential uses were being allowed in this aging neighborhood, and a few years before the historic preservation revival of the 1970s.

After Dr. Lloyd Cummings' death, the house was for sale, but stubbornly remained unsold, during the first half of the 1990s.

As all preservationists know, there is a tension between the best price for the property, and the sometimes-hopelessly-low price at which the property must be sold, given the considerable burden of renovation costs piled on top of the sale price. That is why cities like St. Louis are still offering brick rowhouses for \$1, as we speak, gambling on the immense value-added benefits a successful renovation will offer that neighborhood.

One sunny day in May 1995, I saw that a wisteria vine had insinuated itself inside the storm window, above an air-conditioner unit on 510 Holmes' Smith Street side (see fig. 1, page 20). I marked that as a sign I should grapple with the back-to-nature forces bent on pulling it down.

I consulted the neighbors on the south, David and Sandra Ely, both passionate preservationists active in HHF, and they gave me all the encouragement they thought I needed.

My approach to the owner, Effie Cummings, was a leap in the dark for both of us. I drew up an agreement to provide sweat-equity labor, 30 hours a month arbitrarily valued at \$10 an hour, plus \$100 a month in cash, in exchange for my occupancy. Like any good agreement, perhaps, both parties secretly felt we were being taken advantage of.

Ceremonially, I celebrated my move into the house on July 1, 1995, with a housewarming party, capped by ripping up the Astrograss green plastic carpeting from the front steps. Assisting me was Harvie Jones, preservation architect extraordinary, rather like the bishop who kindly comes to bless the neighborhood's new gas station or convenience store.

Actually, the house had already beckoned to Harvie too. On or about April 1, 1995, he had drawn up a conjectural "preliminary restored view" of the house, if the deep front porch's ugly brick-veneer-and-plywood coverings (see fig.2, page 20) were removed and porch columns were re-installed.

In my deconstructionist ardor, I had pulled up the wall-to-wall carpeting, and its foam rubber underlayment, the night before the ceremonial BR (pronounced "beer" but meaning "before-renovation") party on July 1. Harvie and others were pleasantly surprised to see that the six-inch-wide flooring planks, in the first two of four "Greek-T" rooms, argued an original portion many decades older than its pre-clinic transformation, which had given it a thoroughly modern look circa 1905.

Several days after our Astrograss eradication, Harvie sent over a sheaf of Sanborn maps, showing the house footprint every few years, plus a blown-up portion of the wonderful "Bird's Eye View" of Huntsville, arguing the house was there virtually intact before 1861.

His conjecture was confirmed by Linda Allen, preservation planner on the City's planning development staff, in a July 11 memorandum saying: "We had dated this house to c. 1859 based on the maps and deeds with a later, undated, remodeling. The deed history shows a sale of three acres (lots?) in 1859 for \$1700 and a resale about one year later for \$1989 for a one-half interest, which could indicate the construction of a house."

As per our agreement, I filed monthly reports to Mrs. Cummings as to my labors, and in the first month, obviously, I went off the deep-end, totaling up about 110 hours (or \$1,100 worth of labor):

"JULY: Labor task description: Remove carpet and foam underlayment, Rooms 1 and 2. Remove plywood paneling and furring strips, Rooms 1 and 2. Remove room divider partition and doors, Room 2. Clean out thicket of brush west of house. Saw off limbs overhanging roof and remove limb debris. Inspect sills and floor joists for structural condition. Construct new picket fence gate to replace rotted one. Photograph entire house for before and after comparisons. Materials: 3 rolls of film and processing: \$68.70. Gate latch and nails (Lewter's): \$7.65."

You need to see that the six big rooms of the old house had been divided into approximately eighteen little rooms or cubicles, for secretarial staff, examination and treatment rooms, X-ray processing labs, supply closets, restrooms, and other office-related uses (see fig. 3, page 24).

So a good portion of my struggle was to pry off the plywood paneling on the internal wall dividers; remove the electrical circuits within these walls; pull out the doors, trim, and 2 by 4s making up these add-in walls; then strip off the linoleum tiles, and pry off the plywood subfloor underlying the tiles, in all the rooms that lacked carpeting.



Fig.3 Examining rooms, dropped ceiling,
asphalt tile floor in central hall.
Courtesy David Bowman.

Crawling underneath the 3,200 square foot house to inspect its structural condition posed a special challenge. I am a raving claustrophobe, utterly panicked by closed-off spaces, but I discovered I could take a small electric fan under there with me, plugged in to the 50-foot orange cord of my work light, and blow small quantities of air in my face, to suppress the natural and physiological urge to get the hell out of there. This quick-fix allowed me to spend about four hours below the house one Sunday morning and to confirm to my satisfaction that the house was in remarkably solid shape below its floors and walls. I also discovered down there that mechanically the old house was a real mess, with rusted-out vent pipes on the gas floor furnaces, kludged together plumbing, etc.

Inspecting the attic was not so pleasant, because of the decades of choking dust accumulated, but that too confirmed that the roof structure was basically solid, despite its periodic re-configurations.

The new gate was fun to do, using the furring strips I removed as pickets to build a new gate in order to replace the old gate that was rotting away (see fig. 4, page 27). This was the first of many examples of recycling materials removed from the 1968 clinic; other stuff (2 by 4s, molding, plywood, conduit, etc.) I gave away to anyone who would come get it, including set-builders for Theatre 'Round the Corner, the new professional theatre downtown, also on Holmes, four blocks west of my house.

“AUGUST: Remove the doors and partitions of Room 3. Pry up the linoleum and plywood flooring of Room 3. Remove nails from Room 3 floor. Remove paneling from Room 3.28 hours=\$280. Materials: 5 gallons of Benjamin Moore (MoorGard HC-82) from Huntsville Decorating: \$123.25.”

The task of separating the solidly nailed-in plywood from its wonderful pine flooring was maddeningly slow and averaged about one hour per 4-foot by 8-foot sheet.

The paint color (HC-82 = historically correct?) was already ordained by the Huntsville Historic Planning Commission, in an *ex cathedra* ruling handed down on December 23, 1992. Mrs. Cummings had asked the commissioners for permission to repaint her property, which her husband (according to the painter I discovered had done it in 1968) had paid to be doused in the “cheapest possible paint,” a vile yellow-green bile that for years had been peeling off, to the neighbors’ dismay.

“SEPTEMBER: Remove drop ceiling from back porch area. Remove drop ceiling from Room 5. Remove paneling from back porch covering clapboard. 15 hours (see fig. 5, page 27).”

The drop ceiling removal was fun, as were a lot of my deconstructionist labors, since you could pull out the 2-foot by 4-foot acoustical panels, pull apart the sheet-metal gridwork, and then snip off the iron-wires suspending the ceiling grid below the old plaster or wood tongue-and-groove ceilings.

About this time, Mrs. Cummings expressed dismay that I was not altering the exterior, so as to improve its appearance for the neighborhood's benefit. I agreed, and began (for me and most other people) the obnoxious process of scraping, sanding, and painting over the old coats.

“OCTOBER: Scrape and remove loose paint from west side of the house. Paint west side with three gallons of HC-82. Repair or replace damaged or rotted clapboard on back side. Uncover passage opening for french doors between Rooms 1 and 3. Replace glass in transom between Rooms 1 and 2 and re-hang. 33 hours.”

The pay-off proved almost instantaneous. Passersby cheered me along. I was starting to clean up the neighborhood's problem child.

For restoring the french door passage, outlined rather clearly by shadows of old trim removed during the 1968 conversion, I employed two wallbusters. One was my youngest son (Shaw Bowman). The other was a family draftee (Ethan Couch); he eventually took away a lot of plywood panels to paint on them. I captured the moment of them soccer-kicking through the already-scored 1968 wallboard to lend some excitement to the deconstructionist cause (see fig. 6, page 28).

Deconstruction, by the way, is a *tres-chic* scholarly buzzword applied to the process of taking texts apart to squeeze out hidden or additional layers of meaning. I am so ancient the term didn't even exist when I got my Ph.D. in 1969, from the University of Chicago, so I may be defining it incorrectly. Anyway, my labor report for November simply continued the painting circumnavigation with 38 hours expended. By the time it was too cold to paint, when the thermometer dipped below 56 degrees or so, I had completed my snail-circuit around the house. The fellow who painted this house in 1968 dropped by one day to say he wouldn't have touched the house for less than \$4,000 in cash; he implied, quite rightly, that I was a fool for doing it for free.

“DECEMBER: Remove wallpaper from ceiling and board walls of servant quarters southernmost room. Remove nails, tacks, and remaining wallpaper paste, same room. Remove wallpaper from ceiling and walls of servant quarters north room. Paint ceiling and walls with interior white (donated paint) of servant quarters north room. Total labor: 24 hours.”



Fig.4 Handcrafted gate from recycled materials.
Courtesy David Bowman.

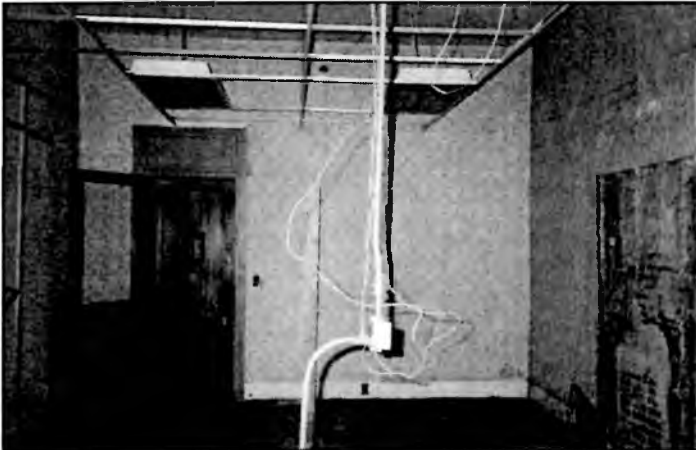


Fig.5 Drop ceiling frame and conduit
Courtesy David Bowman



Fig.6 “WallBusters”: Shawn Bowman and Ethan Couch.

Courtesy David Bowman.

As much as I liked the four generously proportioned Greek Revival rooms, each about 20 feet on a side, with 13-foot ceilings, arranged in a T, it was the two small servant-quarter low-ceiling rooms extending along the Smith St. frontage that were my favorites in the house. Their carpentry was solid, though none of the walls were plumb, and none of the corners were terribly square. Equally interesting, during one afternoon's crawl through the attic, I discovered a gable end, showing the two servant quarters rooms were originally a detached building, bridged to the main house, perhaps in the 1890's, over what was now the kitchen.

Underneath the wallpaper, tacks, and paste of the southernmost room, was a splendid age-darkened pine wall, and ceiling, all unpainted, that I decided would become my office. Its northern twin, when the sagging, torn, and soiled wallpaper was removed, showed that the board walls had already been painted, a cuspidor-stained brown, so I re-painted it a bright ceiling white for a guest bedroom. And, of course, I saved a good square of wallpaper samples I had removed, here, as I did elsewhere in the house.

Winter kept me working indoors. Slowly and surely, however, I was stripping away 1968, to show the older generous geometries of the rooms, and re-exposing the L-shaped porch that connected all the rooms on their back latticed gallery side.

“JANUARY (1996): Remove stud wall around clinic’s X-ray photo darkroom in southwest room (Room 5). Remove asphalt tile flooring from entire room. Prepare room’s board ceiling for painting by removing wallpaper, tacks, paste, etc. 21 hours.”

“FEBRUARY: Remove fluorescent fixture from Room 5 and paint ceiling (see fig. 7, page 30). Remove over-counter cabinet and paneling from porch passage to expose original tongue and groove walls. 15 hours. Labor cost: plumbing frozen pipes under house—H.C. Blake, \$81.36, 2/9/96. Ceiling white paint: \$19.11.”

“MARCH: Remove sheetrock from wall blocking off porch passage. Rework stud wall and frame door opening. Rework five-panel door for large glass panel matching kitchen door. Glaze door with large glass panel and hang as passage door. Labor cost: electrical rewiring in passage—Wilbourn Electric, \$85.45, 3/26/96. Glass for door and putty: \$13.21.”

Re-connecting the two halves of the L-shaped back porch gallery was an exciting moment. It ended the damnable devious circuit, through my bedroom (Room 2), through the kitchen, and out into the latticed-in porch, each time I wanted to access the southern wing of the house. The new door also related stylistically to all the other rooms’ back doors, which had large glass panels in them, obviously valuable for receiving light from



Fig.7 Removal process of light fixture and electrical conduits.
Courtesy David Bowman.

the gallery, beneath transoms that could be opened for ventilation and shut for warmth or acoustical privacy. And, finally, the new door aligned itself visually, in a straight public line for visitors, with the series of doors from the front door opening on Holmes. I was exceedingly pleased by what I had done here. The house seemed to like it too, to have its two halves re-connected, in a straightforward way.

“APRIL: Scrape and paint trim on exterior of house. 22 hours. Moorglo (HC-82): \$80.43.”

“MAY: Finish painting exterior trim. Begin to remove stud wall partitions from interior of front porch enclosure. 28 hours. Labor cost: hauling two loads of un-recyclable building materials to city landfill: \$150 (see fig. 8, page 31). Tipping fee by SWDA: \$32.72.”



Fig.8 View showing deconstruction
of interior of porch and room 4.
Courtesy David Bowman.

“JUNE: Continue removal of partitions inside porch enclosure. Remove more of plywood and tile nailed down over Room 4’s six-inch original flooring. Photo-document year-later status for before-and-after comparison. Paint porch passage’s clapboard walls and board ceiling white to brighten space (donated paint). Total: 29 hours. Film and prints developed: \$15.92.” For the July 1 potluck gala open-house, I stuck up photographs taken a year or less before in each room, so guests could do a self-guided tour. I also created in Room 1 a small museum of chiropractic hardware, left behind after the clinic’s closing in 1991, including a wonderful contraption that looked like Dr. Caligari’s Death Ray; it was a carbon arc lamp complete with red-glass goggles and a heavy white ceramic base that suggested mega-amperes flowing forth to create blinding white therapeutic rays. I also hung on the wall the old sign that said

CUMMINGS CHIROPRACTIC CLINIC in large plywood cutout letters. In addition to what looked (to the ignorant layman) like torture chamber racks, there were also lead-lined gloves, X-ray tubes, and old black glass plates. The mini-museum was a hit. So were the BR refreshments.

At the end of one year of deconstructionist efforts, and sweat-equity occupancy, camped out among the debris and dust familiar to every been-there preservationist across America, I was reaching an obvious fail-safe point with the owner, who had remarried and was now Effie White.

Mrs. White made it clear, and a certainly understandable viewpoint it was, that she wanted me to buy the house ASAP.

Unfortunately, we remained about \$30,000 apart in our respective valuations of the property, that seemed to doom any sale. Sad to say, a realistic price for the 510 Holmes property was essentially its land value, about \$80,000, and my appraisal-savvy friends tended to agree.

So as an interim inducement, buying time so as to postpone the fish-or-cut-bait moment, I voluntarily agreed to start paying \$200 a month as my cash contribution, beginning in July, despite getting no reimbursement for material (paint, glass, hardware, etc.) or labor (plumbing, electrical, hauling, etc.) costs I had sunk into the house during my occupancy.

I tried out several alternative scenarios, given my financial balance sheet and post-employment severance package, following the (no joke) Ides of March 1996 shutdown of the morning daily, the *Huntsville News*.

One was to take a chunk of my severance lump sum, and either mortgage or sell my Giles County farmhouse, which I owned free and clear, and buy 510 Holmes at the lowest price possible.

Another was to get at least one, but possibly two, investing partners, since the house laid itself out into either two or three units, which could be virtually self-contained for residential uses, depending on how such a plan could be run through the City's zoning sausage-grinder.

And there was the intriguing (but possibly remote) possibility that the historical character of the house could be restored and yet allow some benign low-traffic use inside like an architect's studio.

During the summer of 1996, I fell increasingly in love with the great long space that had been three clinic offices and, before that, had been an immense porch, which had been doubled in its depth at the time the gigantic picture windows and the beveled glass front doors were added, circa 1905. Instead of returning the space to an open porch, which few people would use now that Holmes is used as a major collector street and gets heavy vehicular traffic all hours of the day and night, I fantasized its reincarnation as a solarium.

I consulted with two architects about the feasibility of putting in large panels of glass, with the glass expanse cleverly screened, behind sections of lattice, between the appropriately fabricated and restored columns. Preservation purists may gasp audibly, at the preceding sentence, and say knowingly that the historic commissioners would never approve such a design solution.

I don't know about that, and never will, since fate handed me an eviction notice, on October 16, in the form of a parent medical crisis that impelled me to Arkansas. Mother's death a week after surgery underlined the impossibility of my 85-year-old father living by himself; their 62 year partnership was terminated by her death October 23, and it seemed likely he could not survive long living by himself.

Nevertheless, because of periodic returns to 510 Holmes, to reach closure there with a house I had come to be devoted to—and I fancied it had come to be devoted to me too—I continued to invest in a house that could never be mine:

“JULY: Remove acoustical ceiling from porch and expose original board ceiling. Begin serving as board member of Historic Huntsville Foundation (nominated for 3-year term) representing preservation issues in Old Town Historic District

where 510 Holmes is located. Anniversary open-house pot-luck for showing one year's work to preservationists. Voluntary increase of rent check to \$200 per month effective July 1. Total: 12 hours."

"AUGUST: Sawing off five large tree limbs from dying maple tree over Smith and Holmes sidewalk. Yard clean-up and trimming. Supervise least-disruptive placement of cable TV installation for servant quarter room. Total: 10 hours."

"SEPTEMBER: Consult with two architects on alternatives for front-porch restoration so as to retain it as enclosed solarium-type room; this would involve removing brick veneering facade, replace appropriate porch column structural elements, in-fill between columns with 8-foot-tall glass modules, screen exterior with lattice, and still meet historic preservation commission guidelines. Donated professional services by architects (two hours @\$100): \$200."

"OCTOBER: Repair cracked cement front-porch steps (cement donated). Paint porch steps and brick foundation course dark green all the way around the house. Paint exterior doors and window muntins dark green. Total: 26 hours. Moorglo: \$28.70."

"NOVEMBER: Sorting and bundling of reusable building materials (see fig. 9). Total: 6 hours."

"DECEMBER: General clean-up of interior before vacating premises. Total: 12 hours. Donated furniture and appliances: 8-foot chrome steel office table (\$50), swivel chair (\$20), working refrigerator (\$80), two 6-foot stepladders (\$30)."

It's hard to express how horrible I felt leaving 510 Holmes behind; it was a house I had studied and worked on as hard as I had toiled on my Ph.D. dissertation at Chicago back in 1967-1969.



Fig.9 Materials piled ready to be recycled.
Courtesy David Bowman.

And yet I have great memories, including help from a whole lot of good folks, who feel as passionate about bringing new life to old houses as I do. It might be termed community sweat-equity. *Pro bono civitatis*. No neighborhoods can thrive without that generous pot-luck cooperative spirit. Fortunately, for everyone concerned, there's a happy ending to my tale. In the spring of 1997, a young couple living across Smith Street, Robert and Lauren Hash, decided to buy 510 Holmes, and contracted with the right craftsmen to do the appropriate restoration and mechanical refurbishment that the house desperately needed.

What you see today at the southwest corner of Smith and Holmes is undoubtedly a house smiling again.

David Bowman
Rush, Arkansas
August 1, 1998



Fig.1 August 1998, 501 Randolph Avenue in Twickenham.
Courtesy Margaret J. Vann.

Living in Twickenham

Jerri Hightower

I have asked myself this question many times. Why do I like living on Randolph Street in Twickenham? Some of the answer is: When I rise in the early morning, I can listen to birds singing and hear the train whistles. I am awed by the hymns of the organ in the church nearby or the church chimes, and it seems to me that the solace of small town Main Street in the youthful dreams of this North Georgia country girl have been truly realized. I think maybe it's the sounds of my surroundings that make me know that Twickenham is where I want to come home at the end of the day.

Then as I walk down these sidewalks along the tree-lined streets to the Jim Williams Aquatic Center through our beautiful Big Spring Park or walk to the Von Braun Center or our new Huntsville Art Museum or to Panoply or Trade Day on the Square or to the Concert in the Park, I think it is the beauty, the serenity, and the convenience that pulls me like a magnet to my Twickenham home.

Then as I sit on my Jackson Vine enclosed front porch, reading my evening edition of *The Huntsville Times*, my neighbors pause from their evening stroll just to find out how things are going, or I hear the giggles of playing children and listen to their delightful breathtaking gasps as Daddy swings them, "Higher, Higher" on their backyard tree swings. I listen to the thump of skateboarders as they jump their handcrafted hurdles and watch the smiles of rollerbladers as they glide down the sun-soaked walkways. I watch the grinning parents as neighbors gather around the carriage to see how much our latest edition has grown, and it is then I am very certain it's the people that make Twickenham, Twickenham.

Yet as I ponder these things I realize that most small town Main Street all over the United States is no different from my Twickenham. So what is so different about Twickenham!

Maybe it's the fact that Twickenham was built in the midst of a pecan grove and that every other year neighbor meets with neighbor to gather pecans if the squirrels have been kind

enough to let us share the year's bountiful harvest. It's like an Easter egg hunt as neighbors race to the treasures before the fuzzy-tailed friend grabs and scampers to bury his stolen winter's subsistence in the soft mulched blooming flowerbeds of autumn or in someone's tastefully placed porch planters.

Maybe the difference is in the architectural features of Twickenham, or even the architects who planned and built all the gingerbread trimmed homes, or the Gothic or Doric columns found here, or even the cottage-style colonnade home of the early 20th century—all together in Twickenham.

Maybe it's the beautiful churches or the elegant synagogue in Twickenham. Each house of worship representing its own historical and theological background, welcoming and inviting believers who each have a story to tell and who invite one and all to come hear about their background and who are anxious for all to know how often we all agree on philosophy here in Twickenham.



Fig.2 Figures Alley in Twickenham between Randolph and Clinton Avenues.

Courtesy Jerri Hightower.

Maybe it's the schools. East Clinton School is just a few blocks away. Or maybe it's the pre-schoolers from the churches marching along, clinging to their life-line rope and daring to wave a friendly little hand, throw a short kiss, or murmur a quick "Hello" before skipping along. We listen to the sounds of those little children on a morning outing satisfied that they have a treasured life as their hearts soar, their spirits rise, and their smiles melt hearts.

I am now convinced, more than ever, that it is not just the historical setting of Twickenham nor the remembered traditions nor the sights or sounds of Twickenham, but the people, the truly wonderful, unique individuals who, combined with all the Twickenham attributes, make this magnificent area called Twickenham deserving of preservation and worthy to be extended to future generations.

Editor's note: Jerri has sold her 1919 stucco home on Randolph, but because she cannot bear to leave the district, she has bought a smaller house on the west side of Wells Avenue just a few blocks from her current home.



Fig.3 View down Figures Alley of backyards in Twickenham.
Courtesy Jerri Hightower.



Fig.1 Dallas Mill Village c. 1910s.
Courtesy Huntsville Public Library.



Fig.2 Rison School 1984.
Courtesy Huntsville Public Library.

Mill Villages

A Memoir of the Dallas Mill village

Bill Easterling

In their absence, the principal buildings of my boyhood, the Dallas Mill and Rison School, stand out like a mole on the face of a pretty girl.

What happened to them was tragic.

The school where so many children of mill workers learned their ABCs was torn down to make room for an interstate highway spur; not even the stately old oak trees, which provided shade for many a sack lunch at noon were spared.

The mill became a shoe factory before it became a derelict, and then one night it became a heap of bricks when a raging fire burned it to the ground. Now most of the bricks are gone. I went and got one myself before the pile was depleted. Those that remain are consigned to memory and covered by weeds, unseen by occupants of cars and trucks rushing past on I-565.

I wasn't born in the Dallas Mill village, but I lived there, played there, and grew to young manhood there in a time when being called a "lint head" was a salute rather than an insult. Well, a salute to those living on streets named for such prominent Huntsvillians as Pratt, O'Shaughnessy, McCullough, Halsey, Stevens, and Humes. They were only names when I was a boy. Later I learned how the owners and stockholders of the Dallas Mill built houses for their workers to live in, formed the Rison School for their children to study in and opened a company store for all of the mill families to buy food and dry goods in.

Huntsville was a mill town from way back. Yards and yards of cloth spun on the looms of the Dallas, Lincoln, and Merrimack mills were shipped across the country. Each of the mills had its own village, and each village had its own special look and flavor. Dallas villages houses were one-story and wooden. Lincoln village looked like a fortress with its stucco houses.

Merrimack village houses were two-story and had colored roofs. There was a school in each village: Rison, Lincoln, and Joe Bradley. Each village had its own company store when the mills were at their height.

Many workers bought the village houses they lived in after the mills closed. Some of the original owners or their children or their children's children live in them now. I often drive down Humes Avenue just to make sure the house where we lived is still there.

Each of the mill villages of Huntsville should be registered as historical districts and properly recognized for the roles they played in the story of this town. But, in fact, not much is left nationwide in the way of a remembrance to the textile industry. The display at the Smithsonian Institute in Washington is basic at best. At one point in America's past, textiles were as important to our economy as computers are today.

If I close my eyes and concentrate really hard, I can still smell the coal being burned in stoves up and down Dallas Avenue on cold winter days, and I can still hear the cheers on a hot summer day when a Dallas batter smacked a base hit against one of the other mill village baseball teams at Optimist Park.

If I turn my memory loose, I can still see Cecil Fain, the great educator who taught dignity and discipline as the same package, strolling the halls at Rison School, principal's paddle in hand, and I can see tired workers leaving the Dallas Mill with lint in their hair headed for home at shift-changing time.

The mill workers lived simple but hard lives. As a community, they were good people. I feel privileged to have spent my formative years in the company of them and their children.

Author and *Huntsville Times* columnist Bill Easterling lived on Halsey Avenue and attended Rison School when he was a boy. He was graduated from Huntsville High School.

Dallas Mill Water Tower

Diane Ellis, Executive Director

Remember how much fun it was to take a long car trip to Grandma's and mark the progress of your journey as you passed familiar points of interest? A certain twisting river, a jumble of mountains, a dense grove of trees overgrowing the highway at a particular bend in the road became dots you connected to hasten the passage to your destination. Burma-Shave signs and the familiar "See Rock City" barns were other markers that entertained thousands of children and helped weary parents survive a journey.

Smokestacks, grain elevators and silos, and water towers were familiar signposts, too. As children, we didn't grasp their significance as symbols of America's agricultural and industrial strength. To us these structures were tokens of the mysteries and delights of a specific place, especially if their metal faces bore legends of local interest: "Welcome to Watertown, Home of the Panthers."

Many of these structures are disappearing from the landscape as America's industries change or relocate and the family farm becomes an endangered species. Preservation groups throughout the country seek to protect these structures as their numbers dwindle.

In Huntsville, our textile mill history has left us a few remnants of an earlier era, and one of these is the Dallas Mill water tower (see cover). It's the old timey kind of tower, and though it's a little rusty and covered with vines, it still looks proud and useful. This is an historic artifact worthy of our preservation efforts. The water tower is the type of structure that is increasingly hard to find. It's a symbol of an important industrial era in Huntsville and the South, and it remains a compelling icon for many citizens who were connected with the mill. Travelers entering Huntsville from the east on Highway 72 and 1-565 have a wonderful view of the water tower. With the water tower presiding over the entrance to the city in the east, and the space-age artifacts of the U.S. Space & Rocket Center welcom-

ing travelers from the west, Huntsville has a set of bookends bracketing two important eras in the city's history.

A clean-up, a couple of coats of paint and a "Welcome to Huntsville" greeting is all that's needed to provide a signpost of interest to a new generation of children going to visit Grandma.



Dallas Mill Water Tower.
Courtesy Huntsville Public Library.

Madison County Health Department

Diane Ellis, Executive Director

Madison County Health Department

One of the most talked about pieces of real estate in our town these days is the property at Green Street between Eustis and Gates Avenues. Here stand two buildings different in appearance from one another but linked by a shared past of usefulness to the community. Plans to relocate the health department services housed in the buildings have sparked keen interest in the property's future and triggered debate about the importance of the buildings involved.

Are these structures historic?

The health department building facing Eustis Avenue dates from 1952. I have in front of me a black-and-white photograph (see front cover) of the building that appeared in 1955 in a book commemorating Huntsville's sesquicentennial. The photograph was taken on a sunny day, and the play of light and shadow on the building emphasizes its simple, clean lines, and modern attitude. This is handsome building. The brick faces that are cantilevered toward the windows and the ribbon window design remain faithful to the building's geometries while the windows themselves offer an appealing suggestion of a cottage casement. The photograph shows the building's original sign, which was attractive and in harmony with the overall architecture.

"The health department building's main design," Harvie Jones notes, "is overlapping planes with a horizontal emphasis." The light colored brick is typical of the building's *art deco* or *art moderne* style. It is the only building of this architectural style in Twickenham and one of only three in Huntsville (East Clinton School and the Henderson Bank Building are the other two).

I happen to like the health department building. It evokes for me formative years spent in the Midwest, where architecture of this type, with its hint of the prairie, is a familiar part of the built environment.

But apart from my taste is the fact that the health department building is a rare Huntsville example of a highly regarded architectural style. It's an artifact of a particular moment in time. Furthermore, the building is associated with a person prominent in Huntsville's history. Dr. William Burritt, whose home on Round Top Mountain became the city's first museum, donated the land at Eustis and Green to the city and county so that a health services building could be erected.

Finally, the health department building occupies an important site on a significant block in an historic district. (The property is a few steps away from the Episcopal Church of the Nativity, one of the state's National Historic Landmarks.) Almost 50 years old, the building is quietly at home in the spot it was designed for, an integral part of an architecturally diverse neighborhood that would be less interesting without it.

For these reasons, I'd have to say the health department is an historic building. With that designation comes responsibility; historic properties must be protected. In this case, proper interior renovations and code upgrading can give the building a new life of service, as apartments or condominiums, office suites or church-community meeting places.

As for the exterior, all that's needed is soap and water and careful landscaping to restore it to the fine specimen pictured in the 1955 photograph. If it's true that it takes about 50 years for an architectural style to be understood and appreciated, the health department may be about to get some respect.

(Thanks to Harvie Jones for information used in this essay.)

The Weil House

What about the house at the corner of Gates Avenue and Green Street, now used by environmental health services?

According to information from the city planning department, the Weil house was apparently built in 1897 on the site of an earlier house. In 1929, the house was extensively remodeled by local architect Edgar Lee Love. City planner Linda Allen has suggested that Love "...deserves to be recognized as the city's first active preservationist for his efforts to document and preserve Huntsville's nineteenth century architecture." Among the many buildings Love designed in Huntsville during his 30-year career, were the downtown YMCA, the Masonic Temple, the Dunnivant's building, and the old Butler School. He was also an early proponent of adaptive reuse, a concept particularly topical where the health department buildings are concerned.

At age 101, the Weil house has escaped flood, fire, tornado, and demolition by neglect or design. Even its remodeling is more than 60 years old. And like the 1955 health department building, the Weil house is associated with a person who made a significant contribution to Huntsville. Moreover, the Weil house occupies a prospect even more important than the health department, which faces a county parking lot directly across the street and a city lot on the far corner. The Weil anchors a corner of an intersection that includes the 1818 Bernstein House, the 1819 Weeden House, and the 1910 McCalley-Stockton House across the street on Green Street. By virtue of its age, connections, and location, the Weil house merits historic status and our preservation efforts to extend its life another 100 years.

(Thanks to Linda Allen of the city planning department for information used in this essay.)

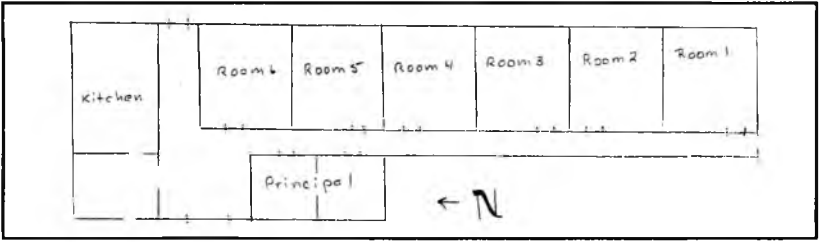


Fig.1 Monte Sano Elementary School, floor plan 1959.
Courtesy Jane Barr.



Fig.2 May Day Program c. 1960s, Monte Sano Elementary School.
Courtesy Jane Barr.

Is Modernism Worth Preserving?

Jane Barr, Chair, H.H.F. Preservation Committee

When Margaret J. Vann, editor of the *Historic Huntsville Quarterly*, asked me to write an article on “What makes a building important, which one, and why?” I replied, “No problem.” for several came to mind.

Sitting in the driveway of Monte Sano Elementary School, I watched a lady intently removing bits of stumps that were jutting out of the ground in the play area. She was preparing the soil for grass seed. Two children, 7- and 8-years-old, ran, jumped, and climbed on the playground equipment. A red-haired toddler tried to keep up with them.

As the 7- and 8-year-old children slid their sweaty bodies into my car and fastened their seat buckles, I asked: “Mike, what can you tell me about the building in front of us?” Mike replied “It’s pretty cool with a hall that has glass (all the way across the front of the building). There’s a nice bike stand and a *Drug-Free Campus* sign.” I next asked Matthew what he could tell me about the building. “Mike’s already said everything I was going to say. It has a very nice shiny chimney.” “That’s not a chimney,” Mike, being a year older, retorted. “You are both correct,” I said. “It is a chimney but not for a fireplace; it’s a vent for the cafeteria stove. You boys wait here a minute. I’m going to talk with the lady.”

As I approached the lady she called out: “Hello, Mrs. Barr.” I returned the call: “I want to thank you for your work in the playground. I’ve been sitting in the car writing about the building while the boys played on the equipment.” I went on to explain that I was looking at the building from the standpoint of preservation. An architectural description, when the school was built in 1959, would have been: brick, rectangular, side hall, one story, six classrooms, single pile from a window-lined hall, flat roof (see figure 1).

No Victorian fussiness. No wasted nooks and crannies. No antebellum super-imposing columns of the Greek temples. When the building was completed, there was a feeling of pride for being at the forefront not only of architecture but also history-making events. The linear building of metal, cinder-blocks, bricks, and glass was a Frank Lloyd Wright Usonian-inspired building¹ using 20th century technology.

No earthbound structure of the ancients, this was a spatial building for children of space age pioneers. Fresh air and maximum sunlight were prerequisites.

Having spent several years documenting architectural styles from basic dogtrot to twentieth-century ranch, I've come to appreciate each architectural style for its value in the continuum. As I would document each style, in preparation for filing National Register of Historic Places or Alabama Register of Landmarks and Heritage forms, I would not only see the building lines and materials, but I also would also become very aware of the people who whispered, shouted, laughed and cried within the buildings.

As I sat outside Monte Sano Elementary School, watching Mrs. C. working in the yard, my mind wandered back to the 1960s when I stood in the same spot watching children performing during May Day Program. Since the Space Program brought people from around the globe, the universal ambiance was reflected in the program. Accompanied by the school band, each class portrayed a different foreign country (see figure 2).

The 6th grade, representing the United States, using the theme of Space Age! Since the school was built to accommodate children of the space age we naturally had speakers like Dr. Eberhardt Rees and Dr. Ernst Stuhlinger, who were not only Dr. Wernher von Braun's assistants but also residents of Monte Sano.

I recalled sitting in the cafeteria listening to the guest speaker, Astronaut Alan Bean, during a Monte Sano Civic Association dinner. Speakers from around the globe came to our mountain and our school.

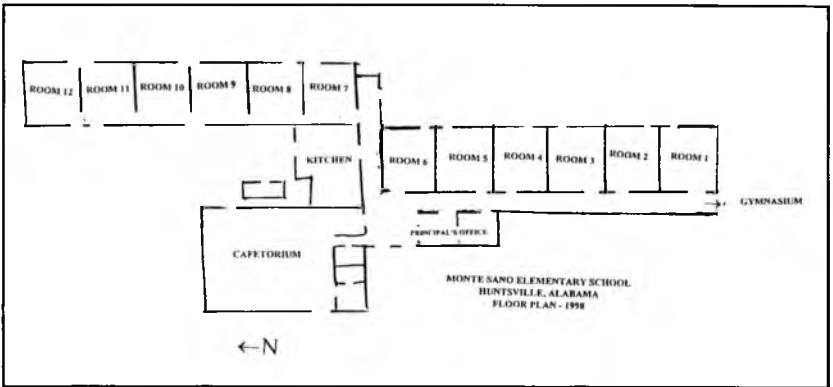


Fig.3 Floor plan of center hall design of Monte Sano Elementary School.
Courtesy Jane Barr.



Fig.4 View showing pitched roof of Monte Sano Elementary School.
Courtesy of Jane Barr.

By 1976 there were two additions to the building (see figures 3 & 4). This changed the design to center hall.² The flat roof was pitched to gable in 1989; however, the integrity of the contemporary style remained.³

Original style materials of the 1950s , sky blue and sunshine yellow ceramic tile, bricks, and cinder blocks, were used for the interior of the recently completed gymnasium..

If there is one building, in any community, I'd place at the top of the list for preservation, it would be any elementary school and for us on the mountain in particular, the Monte Sano Elementary school.

The value of the elementary school lies not in the structure but rather in the significance the building holds in the community.

The Historic Huntsville Foundation Preservation Committee recently met and approved a pilot program starting this fall. Using four schools as a nucleus, the children and their parents will be encouraged to participate in a program that will take them, starting with their classroom and school, into their community learning to appreciate and document buildings worth preserving. This program will focus on the historical value as well as the material and architectural value. The program will go into Monte Sano Elementary School, East Clinton Elementary School, Chapman Elementary School, and Lincoln Elementary School. Preservation will start in the schools.

If we can educate and inspire the children of today's "throw-away society," will they become the impetus for preservation? If we don't inspire the children, more, much more, than stark bricks and glass will be lost.

1 For a good example, visit the Sidney Rosenbaum house, Florence, Alabama, by Frank Lloyd Wright. (See Sergeant, John, *Frank Lloyd Wright's Usonian Houses*, Watson Guptill Publications, New York, 1983.)

2 Thanks to Dr. Cathy McNeal, principal, Monte Sano Elementary School, for the fire drill map used by Jane Barr to draw the floor plans.

3 For a good example, see Mossberg House, South Bend, Indiana, by Frank Lloyd Wright, 1946, in Calloway, Stephen and Cromley, Elizabeth, *The Elements of Style*, Simon & Schuster, New York, 1991

Cabins At Monte Sano State Park

Huntsville, Alabama

Kent Wilborn, Park Ranger

In the mid 1930s construction began on what would be a 2000 acre state park with fourteen rustic cabins (see fig. 1) on Monte Sano Mountain. The development of the park was by the Civilian Conservation Corps (CCC) under the supervision of the National Park Service in cooperation with the state of Alabama. The Corps service was part of President Roosevelt's "New Deal" plan to help the depressed economy.

It is interesting to note how the Corps were set up; they were similar to a military unit that would follow through with specific jobs. CCC camps were set up all over the United States. On Monte Sano there were two camps; eventually the only one that remained was the 3486th Company SP-16, Camp Alabama (see fig. 2, page 55). The camps offered the workers educational and vocational classes in the evenings, as well as hot meals and a place to sleep. (Editor's note: See "Civilian Conservation Corps and Monte Sano State Park," *HHF Quarterly*, vol. XX, no.2, Summer of 1994, pages 91 to 92, for more information on the CCC.)

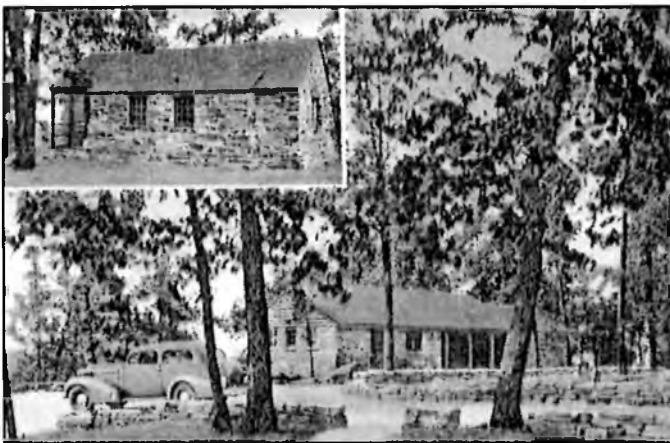


Fig.1 Postcard from 1937.
Courtesy Kent Wilborn.

When we think of the depression years, we think of hard times, but when we see the accomplishments of the CCC's work, we are delighted by the attractive structures the Corps built, such as the cabins at Monte Sano. These cabins were built to develop the 2000 acre park. The site was a large grove; in order to retain the natural environment, local sandstone and wood were used to construct the buildings (see fig. 3, page 55). The stone was laid to make the cabins appear as an outgrowth or outcropping of the sandstone ledges the cabins are built on.

The questions presented to the current staff of the park, were: Why renovate? Why preserve these cabins?

Renovation was necessary for two reasons: First, the cabins looked dilapidated; equipment didn't work; it was not cost effective to repair piecemeal. Second, no major renovation had been done since the cabins were opened in 1938. But in the minor renovations that had taken place, the appearance of the various cabins was a hodgepodge of periods—1930s, 1950s, 1970s. The lack of major renovation made it easier to return the buildings close to their original appearance.

Most of the original wrought iron hardware, hand-crafted doors, and hand-made furniture were in good functional condition, and they remain as intended. We used as much of the original hardware and furniture as possible and tried to duplicate what we couldn't use. The most noticeable changes to the interiors (see fig. 3, page 55) are the new plumbing fixtures, ceramic-tile showers, new cabinets in the kitchens that replicate the original, new appliances, central heat and air, drapes and linens. Eleven cabins have fireplaces that were closed up and used grate heaters, and the fireplaces were reopened as well (see fig. 4, page 56).

The most noticeable changes on the exterior are the wooden divided-light windows that replicate the originals and the composition shingles that look like the original wooden shakes (see fig. 6, page 57). The colors of the exterior trim are a calm buff color. Every effort was made to keep the original intent of the CCC builders. Landscaping of the yards made the renovation complete.



Fig.2 CCC camp near Monte Sano Blvd.
 Courtesy Huntsville Public Library.



C. C. Camps on Monte Sano, 1937

Fig.3 Cabin c. 1937 with shake roof.
 Courtesy Huntsville Public Library.



Fig.4 Remodeled kitchen c. 1970s.
 Notice gas grate in fireplace.
 Courtesy Huntsville Public Library.



Fig.5 Reopened fireplace, 1998.
 Courtesy Kent Wilborn.



Fig.6 Before renovation: notice trim and light roof.
Courtesy Kent Wilborn.



Fig.6 After renovation: notice roof and windows.
Courtesy Kent Wilborn.

The cabins offer beautiful views of the valley and are surrounded by forest with hiking trails leading to both sides of the mountain. In all, \$800,000 was spent in the renovation. From the positive comments of the cabin guests, the time and money spent were worth the effort.

Why preserve these CCC cabins? First, one must take into account the period in which the cabins were built: it was a time when there were no jobs; people were going without food. The camps gave the men who built the parks a chance to survive and feed their families. As a result, we have many unique structures to remember their hard work and craft, but at the same time our eye is delighted. The builders' intent was to build structures that were safe, convenient, and beneficial to the public. Second, the park offers guests an experience similar to what was originally intended—a slightly rustic environment, but one that is safe and convenient for use. The historical importance of the cabins becomes clear.

The National Park Service, architects, and other agencies at the time put many hours of thought into the plans of the parks. Their intent was to keep the parks as natural as possible and keep any intrusion into the natural beauty to a minimum. The structures were to blend with their surroundings as if they had always been there, and at Monte Sano the fourteen cabins are good examples of that intent (see fig. 7, page 59).

One of the goals of the current State Park Service is to preserve unique features and the integrity of State parks so future generations will have an opportunity to enjoy their heritage. Monte Sano State Park is the first of the CCC built parks in Alabama to be renovated. With the efforts of preserving the park by current Manager John Scoble and his staff, as well as past managers, Monte Sano State Park has remained much the same as when it first opened. To further the preservation of the park, Jane Barr, President of the Monte Sano Historical Association, recognized the historical significance of the park; and through the efforts of the association, Monte Sano State Park was placed on the Alabama Register of Historic Places. Thanks to Mrs. Barr and Mr. Scoble and his staff and to all the visitors



Fig.7 Restored cabin, a part of the winter woods.
Courtesy Kent Wilborn.

and volunteers that make Monte Sano a destination for all to enjoy.

The cabins may be reserved for overnight accommodations at competitive rates. For more information, please call 256-534-3757 or write to us at Monte Sano State Park, 5105 Nolen Avenue, Huntsville, Alabama 35801.

Kent Wilborn is the assistant manager at Monte Sano State Park. He supervised the renovation of the cabins. Kent is a north Alabama native. His first job as a park ranger was at DeSoto State Park near his home of Valley Head, Alabama.



Fig.8 Cabin at Monte Sano State Park before renovation. Notice windows.
Courtesy Kent Wilborn.



Fig.9 Cabin at Monte Sano State Park with new roof and new windows.
Courtesy Kent Wilborn.

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