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# Living History in Five Points

*Susan Bridges*

According to the Huntsville *Weekly Democrat*, October 12, 1892, Vol. XXVI, “East Huntsville is a cynosure for citizens in their drives and walks, with its broad, beautiful avenues and street homes and general air of prosperity, makes that portion of town especially attractive.” That East Huntsville Addition later became the neighborhood we call Five Points. And that’s where we have had the good fortune to reside.

When my husband, Rob, and I first moved into our house, passers-by would inquire about the man who used to sit at the picnic table in our backyard. It was a pleasant feeling that so many people were concerned about Bobby, my father-in-law, but sadly we had to explain that he had recently lost his battle with cancer. We were now the owners of this lovely cottage—a lovely cottage in need of a lot of work and tons of love. Fortunately, we had plenty of love and determination to shape our small house into a comfortable home. But owning a home in Five Points is more than occupying a residence, it’s being part of a thriving residential and commercial community.

While we were busy working on a total remodel of our house, hardworking neighbors were busy putting a plan together to establish Five Points as a historic district. We were approached to sign a petition to help convince the City of Huntsville of the importance of preserving the history and way of life so many have known and shared. Of course we wanted to



*Mr. M. Emery—Photographed on a pony, as were many neighborhood children. Courtesy Emery/Bridges.*



*708 Ward Avenue, mid-1920s—Initially purchased by McLane, the home was then sold to Marcus and Addie Emery, O.G. Pitts, and Bobby Bridges. Note the shingled skirt of the enclosed porch, the single front dormer, and the stone foundation. Courtesy Bridges/Emery.*

be a part of such a project.

When our neighborhood was designated historic, our curiosity about the history of our home became an exciting adventure. We wanted to know more about our neighborhood, but more specifically, about all of those who had called our home theirs. Who were they and what were their roles in our community? They walked the same sidewalks on summer evenings and visited neighbors living in the homes of friends we visit today. We spent many hours at the courthouse and the Heritage Room of the library reviewing documents and searching desperately for any deed, tax record or mortgage stating the age of our home.

### **Living Resources**

Adding to the excitement of our research was the chance meeting with Mr. Mike Emery, a man who had been born in our home in the early 1920s. Compounding our good fortune was the handful of photographs he had to share showing the house during his childhood.

It was great fun to watch him wander the rooms he had lived in nearly 80 years earlier. It was fascinating for him to show us which parts of the house had been added or changed. Our favorite part of his visit, though, was his reunion with an old playmate, Mr. Winston who still lives across the street.

Now we were more determined than ever to find information on the first owners. Finally, one day after work, I decided to look once more for the document my heart knew existed. The deed of sale stated: "January 23, 1901, Mr. Edwin C. McLane purchased from Mr. W. I. Wellman Lot 8 and ° of Lot 7, Block 81, of the East Huntsville Addition, with the promise to insure the residence thereon..."

In yet another stroke of luck, we have been able to become friends with Willard I. Wellman's grandson, Mr. Willard Wellman Young. He lived with his family in a beautiful home where Regions Bank now stands at one of the "points" of Five Points. At one time, he owned a great



*708 Ward, 2001—The Bridges renovated the home as it existed when they inherited it. Note the addition of additional dormers, removal of the shingled skirt and the opening-up and expansion of the porch. Other areas in the rear of the home appear to have been enclosed porches or additions to accommodate modern needs. Photo Susan Bridges.*

number of the lots on which our homes were built. The home built for Mr. Wellman's parents still stands on Holmes Street. Mr. Wellman, one of the original planners of Five Points as an officer of the Northwest Land Association, was responsible for many of our homes being built. This planned neighborhood was an effort in support of the numerous mills that the Association was building during the late 1800s and early 1900s. How lucky we are they prized this lovely part of town to plan a community where people would share their lives.

We were able to go further back in time with our research of Five Points when we obtained abstracts recording John Brahan obtaining "quarters" (approximately 160 acre parcels) of land in a grant from the government in early 1800.

With all the research complete, we have grown to realize what it means to live in a historic district. It is an adventure through time. It's an appreciation of the lives of others and their contributions to our community.

Now the passers-by who once asked us about the man at the picnic table are our friends, neighbors, and partners in appreciating and preserving history.

*Susan Bridges resides in Five Points and serves as Treasurer of the FPHDA. She also is on the Newsletter Committee for the Association. She enjoys learning local history through research and personal interviews with long-time residents of the area.*