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Interview with Gerry and Kermit Moore

Carol Ashburn Roach

As she opened the door and saw the magnificent staircase and the mantels in the living room and dining room, she knew: “This is it!” Gerry Williams Moore grew up in Huntsville, and she has “always wanted an historic home.” Although Kermit Moore did not initially share Gerry’s feeling of “love at first sight,” he did like the bright and cheerful rooms Joe Watson had created with the help of the late Harvie Jones. By the time the Moores saw the house, all the “build-up of dreary wallpaper and paint had been removed.”

Gerry Williams had been in the house as a young adult, and she knew Vivian Donovan and her daughter Jane. According to a local 1942 newspaper article, Jane attended Gerry’s 3-year-old birthday party. Jane was a year older than Gerry, and the two girls were acquaintances rather than close friends. Gerry remembers skating and riding bikes with her friends in the neighborhood that included Franklin Street. She and her friends would walk to the movies at the Lyric, and they often walked past the Donovan home. At that time, Gerry and her family lived on McClung Street.

After their first visit in the fall of 1999, the Moores returned several times to view the home and talk with Joe Watson. Joe had been working on the home since 1997, and the house still was in “rough shape.” As Gerry had seen the house when it belonged to the Donovans, she could appreciate Joe’s ability to restore the historic home and make it work for life in the 21st century.

The Moores purchased the house in December 1999 and moved into the house in November 2000. Joe continued working on the restoration, completing the house in June 2001. Currently, the Moores are remodeling the cottage in the back of the house and adding a carport.

The most spectacular architectural detail in the house is the massive oak staircase located in the front foyer. (See fig.1, page 24.) The detail on the mantels and the original tiles are other features that drew Gerry and Kermit to the house. (See figs.2 and 3, page 25.) Gerry and Kermit still think of their home as “Joe’s House,” and they discuss their ideas with him.



*Note: All photographs are by Carol Ashburn Roach.
Figure 1: Refinished staircase as seen from foyer showing fine details. (See fig. 6,
page 20 for before picture.)*



Figure 2: Fireplace showing tile detail.



Figure 3: Fireplace showing tile detail.



Figure 4: Restored fireplace and mantel in dining room.



Figure 5: Stepback cupboard designed and built for kitchen using old glass.



Figure 6: Back view showing garden and fountain.

The wall between the living room and dining room has been removed creating an open room that is appropriate for today's lifestyle. The original fireplaces have been restored and remain in the rooms. (See fig. 4, page 26.) Joe restored all the woodwork on the walls in the foyer, dining room, the mantels, and, of course, the staircase. The downstairs includes the new addition of a family room with a fireplace, a screened porch, master suite, half bath, laundry room, and basement. In this new family room, Gerry and Kermit have a player piano. The old kitchen is now a den, and a new kitchen was created from a bedroom off the dining room. The kitchen adjoins the new family room, creating a "keeping room."

There are six rooms downstairs and one and one-half bathrooms. The house has five original fireplaces with an added fireplace in the new addition. All the mantels downstairs are original. Joe used old glass in the windows throughout the original structure when possible. He also used old glass in a stepback cupboard designed and built for the kitchen. (See fig.5, page 26.)

The upstairs is now completely restored to the original design that it had before it was divided into apartments by previous owners. The Moores have pictures of the rooms as they existed before Joe remodeled them. The upstairs now has three bedrooms and two full baths. Only one of the original fireplaces was removed from a bedroom to create more wall space. One of the bedroom mantels has been replaced, but all others have been restored.

Since they moved into the house, the Moores have added a garden with a fountain in the back of the house. (See fig.6, page 27.) With the restoration of the cottage and the carport addition, this area will add to the beauty of the home. They plan no other additions. Gerry and Kermit find the home fits their lifestyle. Joe Watson and Harvie Jones had a vision of an exterior that reflects the house's late nineteenth-century origin with an interior that is functional and modern. Their vision is now a reality. 506 Franklin is again a home.

Personal:

Gerry Williams Moore, a Huntsville native, retired as Associate Vice President, Human Resources, the University of Alabama in Huntsville, in June 2001 with 29 years of service.

Kermit Moore, a native Alabamian from Nanafalia in Southwest Alabama, had been Director of Information Technology with the City of Huntsville for 10 years before he retired in May 2001.

Resources:

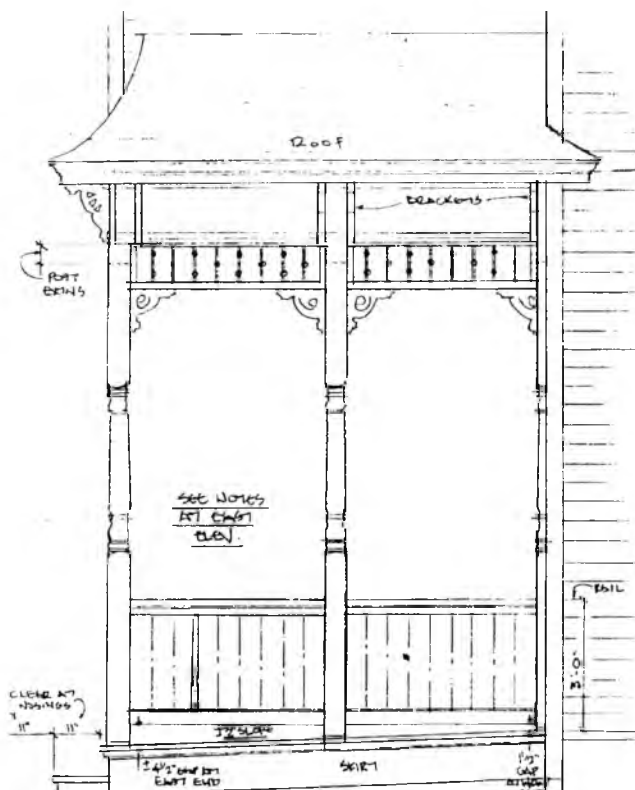
Gerry and Kermit Moore. Personal Interview. March 21, 2002.

Carol Ashburn Roach is a member of the HHF Publications Committee. She and Gerry worked together at UAH for 21 years.



The stained glass window above is the work of local glass artist Wayne Lumpkin, currently a member of the Historic Huntsville Foundation Board of Directors. In collaboration with Jane Wyatt Howell, a local artist, designer, and longtime friend of the Moore's, the window was designed to be compatible with the original stained glass window at the top of the stairs. (See fig. 5, page 19.) Wayne created a total of five new windows for the house in keeping with its Victorian style.

The Historic Huntsville Foundation thanks Margaret Jones Vann for filling in as guest editor of this *Quarterly*. Margaret, a past editor of the *Quarterly*, is an adjunct instructor of English at Calhoun Community College. She loves to garden and write poetry in her spare time.



Porch detail by Harvie P. Jones, FAIA, drawn September 2, 1998 .
Courtesy Lynn Jones.