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THREE DOLLARS

VOLUME XXVII, No. 4  
WINTER 2002

# THE HISTORIC HUNTSVILLE QUARTERLY OF LOCAL ARCHITECTURE AND PRESERVATION



**ADDING TO HISTORY:  
PRESERVING NEWMAN AVENUE**

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Cover: Original pen and ink sketch of 420 Newman Avenue by Cynthia Massey Parsons.

# THE HISTORIC HUNTSVILLE QUARTERLY OF LOCAL ARCHITECTURE AND PRESERVATION

Volume XXVII, No. 4

Winter 2002

## ADDING TO HISTORY: PRESERVING NEWMAN AVENUE

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## From the Editor

It is not difficult to think of an historic district as a static area bordered by velvet ropes and encased in a giant bell jar to prevent too many “modern” changes from creeping in. This is not the case, however. The example of Newman Avenue being added to the existing Twickenham Historic Preservation District shows the flexibility and adaptability that an historic district can encompass.

This issue of the *Quarterly* focuses on the addition of a street of homes to an already existing historic preservation district. The attempt is not to justify its inclusion; that has been done. The purpose is to offer an overview of the process and history of adding the street, and then to move to personal accounts of living in an historic home, renovating an historic home, and tracing the evolution of a home.

The owners and occupants of the featured structures of Newman Avenue show their own understanding of the significance of their homes in words and drawings. People live in historic districts; people leave historic districts; homes are altered in historic districts; homes are

lost in historic districts. These events allow us to remove the bell jar, duck under the ropes and walk through the life of historic architecture without incurring the anxious stare of the docent.

—Heather A. Cross



# Newman Avenue's Beginnings

*Linda Allen*

Newman Avenue was created in 1924 by the platting of the Moorman-Newman Addition from a portion of land which was bounded by California Street on the east, Locust Avenue on the north, Adams Street on the west, and roughly the edge of the California Street Park on the south. Moorman was Marion R. Moorman who was an eye, ear, nose, and throat specialist who lived on West Holmes Avenue. Newman was William W. Newman, a cotton merchant with offices on Madison Street, who lived on Williams Avenue in the Eleanor Hutchens house. The Newman family had purchased a portion of the land in 1885, while Moorman had bought two acres from W.W. Garth in 1919.

The subdivision included all of the north side of Newman Avenue between California and Adams and all but the four westernmost lots on the south side. The west end of the south side still belonged to the Nance family who had originally purchased the land in 1859. They continued to reside in the old house at 715 Adams. The Moorman-Newman lots were approximately 25 feet wide and buyers were given the option of buying any number for their new home.

By 1928 seven homes had been built facing Newman, predominately on the north side, and two were built fronting Adams. By 1940 there were 16 houses on Newman and by 1948 all the present houses in the Moorman-Newman Addition were in place, although several vacant lots remain today. At one time the city had intended to put a street through where these vacant lots are, but then abandoned the idea. In 1947 the city sold the two south lots to the Pizitz family who owned the adjoining house. The two lots on the north served as the garden plot for a house on Locust.



*Map showing the boundaries of the Newman Avenue area added to the Twickenham Historic Preservation District—The area includes the Moorman-Newman Addition and some of the lots from the divided Belle Nance estate. Courtesy Huntsville Planning Department.*

The four lots on the west end of Newman remained in the Belle Nance estate until 1949 when an unrecorded plat divided that property into five lots, four of which faced Newman Avenue, with the fifth (where the old house stood) fronting Adams. By 1950 three of the Newman lots had been sold and houses erected on them, while the fourth lot was not sold until 1956.

The houses built during the late 1920s on Newman were a varied lot although all were influenced by the bungalow craze; they were modest houses with low gabled roofs accented by a smaller front gable over the porch or doorway. They mostly displayed grouped windows and generous front porches. Several were true craftsman bungalows,

several displayed vaguely English cottage features such as shouldered chimneys and arched doorways while others had no strong stylistic features. They were constructed of wood, brick, stucco, and manufactured block—truly a fascinating diversity in a population of only nine samples. Two of them were apparently duplexes. These first generation homebuilders on Newman included a dentist, a surgeon, an insurance agency owner, a builder, and the circulation manager for the Huntsville Times.

The houses built during the 1930s were predominantly of brick construction, retained the one to one-and-one-half-story height, still favored gabled roofs with one street gable, but front porches began to diminish in importance. House design in the 1940s in this neighborhood continued the trend of moderate sized houses but they demonstrated a slight shift to more formal, symmetrical facades evoking colonial antecedents. They were evenly split between brick and wood construction with the exception of one house in coursed uncut stone under a half-timbered gable, while another hinted at the lingering popularity of the English cottage. The last of these houses were constructed in the early 1950s and demonstrate a continuation of the trends of the earlier decades.

The Newman Addition to the Twickenham Historic Preservation District nicely meets the district statement of significance defined in 1972 “to encompass a living architectural museum of structure built over a period of time from 1814 to 1972...” The Newman block contributes to the tradition with its clearly defined examples of middle-class housing choices between 1925 and 1950—the last building phase before Huntsville was propelled into a new life as the Rocket City.

*Linda Allen works for the Huntsville Planning Department. This article is adapted from a talk she gave on January 31, 2000.*



# The Addition of Newman Avenue

*Nancy Munson*

When the Twickenham Historic Preservation District (THPD) was formed in 1972, Newman Avenue was part of at least one version of the proposed district. At that time, however, a majority of the residents of the avenue had decided not to be a part of THPD. The street was accordingly left out.

In the spring of 1998, then President of the Historic Huntsville Foundation, Ben Walker, and then Director Diane Ellis asked me if I would initiate a project to see what the present attitude of Newman Avenue residents might be toward becoming part of a historic district. The Twickenham area had recently lost a historic home near Newman Avenue. This had alerted many of us, including Newman residents, to the fact that Newman Avenue was in a very vulnerable position, and might easily lose historic homes to redevelopment. I said that I would be glad to do it, and so began a project of two years until Newman Avenue's inclusion in THPD in 2000.

I knew a few residents of the street to begin with: Renee Katz was a longtime volunteer for Friends of the Library and Martha Musgrove the mother of good friend Tom Musgrove, who lived nearby. Mrs. Julia Harless was the mother of artist Lee Harless who had contributed so much to THPD by sketching historic houses. In addition, Newman resident Jennifer Hopkins had contacted the City Planning Department with a view toward exploring the possibility of Newman Avenue joining the district. The signs were very encouraging!

Linda Allen of the City Planning Department supplied me with a list of homeowners, and I began to contact people by visits and by telephone.

Newman resident Cyrial James Breece was a wonderful help identifying residents (especially those who lived in rental property).

By the fall of 1998, Donna Castellano had agreed to serve as the contact person on Newman for the project. She and Cyrial worked hard keeping a dialogue alive on the street. We got out a questionnaire in January 1999 and it seemed that many were interested—at least in finding more information.

At this point I visited a board meeting of THPD Association (THDPA) on the invitation of then President Melanie Murray, and presented the idea to them. The board reacted positively to the idea and said that they would give consideration to the request for admission to the district if Newman residents voted for inclusion. My role as a member of the Historic Huntsville Foundation was really to function as a liaison between Newman residents and THDPA and to provide organizational and other support.

Responses to our questionnaire showed that some people did not have strong feelings either way and that others were disinterested absentee landlords. Most were interested, but others had concerns about living in a historic district.

In order to answer these concerns, we organized a panel discussion in February 1999 for Newman (and Twickenham) residents. Diane Ellis authored, duplicated, and mailed an announcement to all residents. On the panel were Wayland Cooley, then head of the Madison County Tax Assessors Office; Linda Allen of the City Planning Department; and David Ely, an architect and member of the Huntsville Historic Preservation Commission. I served as moderator. Mr. Cooley allayed fears about instant city property tax increases, saying that property tax rates were the same for Huntsville residents whether in a historic

district or not, and that property values were reviewed systematically every three years. Mr. Ely explained the role of the Historic Commission in approving projected alterations to the exterior of district residences. He explained that homeowners were not restricted as to interior modifications but needed to make any exterior changes compatible with the period in which their home was built. He also explained that no one ever *had* to make improvements simply because of inclusion in a historic district. Ms. Allen explained that inclusion in a city-designated historic district would protect the residential designation of the street and would, as experience in other districts showed, increase the value of residents' property.

Following the meeting, residents discussed the matter amongst themselves. We distributed forms petitioning the City of Huntsville to include Newman Avenue in the Twickenham Historic Preservation District at the meeting (and by mail to those who had not attended). Residents were to approve or disapprove the idea. Donna Castellano, Diane Ellis and I had many tense telephone conversations as the petitions Donna and I collected inched their way up to the 60% total of street residents required for success. That number was finally reached (and exceeded) by mid-March 1999 after obtaining all petitions, including those mailed to non-resident owners. Donna visited a THPDA Board meeting to deliver the news.

Petitions were then turned over to Linda Allen who had the crucial job of deciding the boundaries of the district and evaluating the area for inclusion (e.g., homes on Lowe Avenue were not a part of the original Twickenham proposal and therefore did not receive petitions at first but were included in the re-drawing because Lowe Avenue made a natural boundary for the district to the south). At this point, the Newman Avenue project had to wait until the whole Five Points Historic District boundaries were drawn and approved by the City Council because their

petitions had been received before ours. In addition, flooding in Southeast Huntsville also demanded City Planning's attention. We all felt the tension: what was going to happen to our petitions? After several meetings called by Ms. Allen with Newman and Lowe residents, the new boundaries of THPDA were finally drawn. On February 24, 2000, the Huntsville City Council approved Newman Avenue's petitions and it became a part of the Twickenham Historic Preservation District.

The whole project was a revealing exercise in the democratic process. I enjoyed doing it and felt privileged to share in the ideas and concerns of the residents.

*Nancy Munson has served on the Historic Huntsville Foundation Board of Directors and lives in an old house in a historic district with her husband Bill. She remains interested in historic preservation.*

## 436 Newman Avenue: Shaping a Home

*Donna Castellano*

Unlike other residences located throughout the Twickenham Historic Preservation District, houses on Newman Avenue do not come with distinguished architectural pedigrees. The Castellano house at 436 Newman is no exception. Constructed in 1929 from a stock plan, this house is typical of brick bungalows built during this period.

The front porch that stretches across the front of the house indicates that bungalows were designed with families in mind. Originally the structure consisted of a living room, sitting room, dining room, bath, bedroom and kitchen. The home's second owners, Mr. and Mrs. Guy, carved two bedrooms and a bath for their two sons from the attic space.



*436 Newman Avenue—The red brick bungalow of Donna and Michael Costellano is typical of the Newman Avenue homes built in the late 1920s. The wide overhangs, the shallow front peak and the brackets supporting the porch roof over brick piers and stepped porch wall reinforce the horizontal facade. Photo by Donna Castellano.*

The Castellanos bought the home in 1997 and are only the third family to have lived there.

The house has features characteristic of bungalows. There is no entry foyer. Instead, visitors enter directly into the living room, which has a fireplace, built-in bookshelves, and three cased-arched openings that lead to other parts of the house. It is both an element of its modest square footage and design philosophy that the floor plan has no formal rooms, a reason why people associate the style with warm and cozy environments.

Although neither Donna Castellano nor her husband Michael had ever owned an older home—much less considered restoring an historic home—they bought the house on impulse because it reminded them of their grandparents' houses. Initially, they plotted the changes they would make to the house to update its function. However, as they lived in the house they realized they were molding their life to fit its design. The house's layout drew their family together and forced them to simplify their lives. It is impossible to calculate how many conversations developed because they all occupied the same space, and how those exchanges—those connections—would have been lost had they been able to retreat to separate places.

A lack of closet and storage space challenged them to develop new attitudes toward their belongings. They carried possessions from house to house out of habit, never questioning the value or use of the articles dutifully packed and unpacked with each move. With a commitment to keep only those things they used or loved, they found they had ample storage space.

The Castellanos lived in the house three years before undertaking any significant renovation work. In January 2000 they began a kitchen

renovation and added a laundry room and small den. Built-ins that were common to bungalow kitchens, such as a butler's pantry and window seat, were added. All windows and trim were specified to match the original moldings. The addition respects the design integrity of the house; the kitchen, laundry room, and sitting room are in scale with rooms in the original portion of the structure.

Living in an unreconstructed bungalow still presents its challenges. It is difficult to return to a 1920s bathroom after a stay in a hotel room with a bath that includes a shower and a separate whirlpool tub, double-sink vanities and heated tile floors. Friends warn that as their son enters his teen years the Castellanos may need to build an addition to house his attitude. For the moment, however, the house provides for all of their needs and satisfies many of their wants—and reminds us there is a significant difference between the two.

*Donna Castellano has a Master's degree in history and teaches history at UAH. She is a board member of the Twickenham Historic Preservation District Association, directing her efforts toward raising funds for the continuing preservation of the Weeden House.*

# **420 Newman Avenue: Revisiting the Pizitz Home**

*Information from Harold Pizitz,  
Raymond L. Hamilton, Jr., & John Christopher Craddock  
Compiled by Heather Cross*

It is rare to find a home that is continually occupied by one family, let alone a family that recalls in detail each change and transformation of the structure. The Pizitz house at 420 Newman Avenue contains the history of the family that built it, and it has recently been renovated by new owners to continue its record-keeping role. Taken as a portrait of other homes on the street, 420 Newman Avenue offers an inside view of the connection of building to family history that many of the homes on Newman share.

## I

Perhaps most noteworthy is that Lillian Z. Pizitz purchased a 60' wide lot located at 420 Newman Avenue from William S. and Nellie M. Mims in 1929, for \$550, during the heart of the Depression. In 1935, Lillian and her husband, Abe, built a house on the property, which was already part of a growing and vibrant neighborhood in spite of the economic uncertainty of the time. The family of three boys, mother, and father remained owners of the red brick, sandstone, and wood home until its sale in 1998.

According to one of the sons, Harold Pizitz, his mother worked with the builder to draw up the house plans. There was no architect. Mr. Abe Pizitz paid the wages of the workmen. The original house had three bedrooms, a kitchen with a separate breakfast room, a living room, a dining room, and two baths (Interview). There were 2800 square feet on the main floor. The foundation of the house is made of sandstone from Monte Sano. A detached garage was built behind the





*420 Newman today—The Pizitz home, originally of red brick and sandstone (seen around the front door), was painted after exterior renovations to reduce the effect of additions and infill brickwork resulting from restructuring the fenestrations. The home includes English cottage style elements such as the rounded arch entry and peak window, the rusticated stone with keystone over the entry, and the detail of the two front peak fascia boards.*

*Photo by Carol Roach.*

house. The original front porch extended around the east side of the house. When a carport was added later, the porch was enclosed and incorporated into the house. The few closets were small (4' X 5') and additional closet space was added in the 1940s.

The upstairs was unfinished, as was the basement or furnace room. The thick (10"-12") retaining wall was knocked out during the 1940s remodeling of the basement. The workmen dug out the dirt in the enlarged area, throwing it out by shovel through the small existing window into the yard. The finished room was large, contained a bar and was used for entertainment.

In 1939 Abe and Lillian purchased two vacant lots (approximately 45') on the east side of the house. Soon after, the original one-car garage

was torn down and replaced with a two-car garage with a small servants' apartment above. Once again Lillian worked with the builder on the plans, insuring that the new structure blended architecturally with the house (Interview). At the close of World War II when newcomers were pouring into Huntsville and searching desperately for places to live, Mr. and Mrs. Pizitz began renting the apartment.

The neighborhood had “young people [from] all over” the four block area of Newman, Locust, Adams, and Harrison (Interview). On summer days all the boys would get together to have rubber gun battles or play kick-the-can, baseball, and football. They played in the vacant lots on Newman, and as they grew up, they watched many of the houses on the street being built. On Sundays, the fathers and sons would play softball on the vacant lot chosen later by Gene Monroe, Sr. as a house site. On one vacant lot, a farmer grew corn. The boys would fly kites in the cornfield and knock over the old cornstalks.

Neighborhood children walked to school together to the old two-story East Clinton Elementary School, as well as Huntsville Junior High, and Huntsville High School. Harold attended Huntsville High School for one year, finishing his high school education at Castle Heights Military Academy. He played in the original Huntsville School Band, composed of members from several schools (Interview).

The majority of families on Newman had “one car per family” despite the fact that the paving of California Street ended past Newman, so the rest of California was a dirt road. Harold Pizitz recalls that Newman Avenue was home to many prominent Huntsvillians. Ashford Todd, former Probate Judge, lived there, as did Gene Monroe Sr. and Dr. Milton Anderson. Charlie Lyle, long time Huntsville band leader, lived several doors from the Pizitz home, and Harold, who played trumpet, takes credit for introducing Charlie to that instrument and giving him a

few lessons. Other good friends mentioned by Harold Pizitz include Brick Warden, Milton Anderson, Jr. , and Wendal Payne.

Mr. Abe Pizitz, the boys' father, owned Pizitz Clothing Store downtown and worked every day but Sunday. His sons helped him from the time they were ten or twelve years old (Interview), sweeping up and later, waiting on customers. The store never closed until the last customer, mostly farmers and people from the mills, left.

The Pizitz family left its own mark on a growing Huntsville. Abe Pizitz operated several different clothing stores in downtown Huntsville prior to opening Harold's Ladies' and Children's Store on the north side of the Downtown Square in 1951, along with his son Harold. In March of 1957 the family celebrated the grand opening of Harold's Department Store at its new location in Parkway City. That store was closed in 1970.

The house at 420 Newman adapted to the needs of the Pizitz family as did the neighborhood and houses for others. During a time when the future was uncertain and life moved steadily on, Newman Avenue continued to prosper and support quite a few vibrant and prosperous families.

## II

Harold L. Pizitz inherited the property upon the death of his mother, Mrs. Lillian Pizitz, in July 1990. He rented



*Front Door Restoration of 420 Newman—The front door in its 1998 location shows the broken tile flooring of the original front porch. Photo courtesy Raymond Hamilton, Jr.*

the home to several tenants before putting the property up for sale. On June 26, 1998, the property was sold to the current owners, Mr. Raymond L. Hamilton, Jr. and Mr. John Christopher Craddock.

Upon purchase of 420 Newman Avenue, the new owners retained Bill Peters Architectural Firm and Randy Roper Interiors to oversee an extensive renovation. The home entered a new phase as modern improvements and additions would create a vessel for a new generation of family life.

The interior was gutted down to the studs facilitating new plumbing, electrical, heating and air conditioning systems. The floor plan was reconfigured and the living room and dining room ceilings lowered to incorporate structural steel beams to carry the extra load of the new



*Restored front entry porch of 420 Newman—The front door was moved back to its original location, opening the small recessed entry porch. The multi-colored tiles line the walk to the street. Photo by Carol Roach.*

bedrooms and bath planned for the upper floor, originally one large room.

A double carport on the east side, built by the Pizitz family after the house was completed, was removed and a screened-in porch was added. The front door was moved back to its original location from the front opening of the house to the doorway of the living room, thus regaining an entry porch (see pages 15-16). An arched opening was added to mirror the other side of the porch. The exterior was painted so that the new position of the windows and the addition would match.



*420 Newman garage before renovation—The block and stone structure was built by the Pizitz family in the 1940s to match the home and offer a rentable apartment. The renovation retained and expanded the apartment and storage space. Photo courtesy Raymond Hamilton, Jr.*

The major changes to the layout of the first floor included turning a third bedroom and bath along with the old kitchen pantry into a den along the back of the house. This provided access to the back yard and a new deck through French doors. The newly configured upstairs is now accessed by a reversal of the direction of the staircase. The basement was waterproofed and the existing bathroom updated and enlarged.

All existing interior and exterior doors, most of which were of oak single panels, were used in the remodeling. Original door handles were also incorporated. Existing doorjambs and baseboard were reused and replicated where needed. All the old hardwood flooring was retained and refinished. Only the den has new hardwood flooring since the hardwood that was there was used to patch other rooms.



*Interior of 420 Newman before Hamilton/Craddock renovation—Notice how the arched English cottage style openings of the facade are echoed in the interior. The influence of the bungalow style's flowing spaces can be seen in the half walls of oak single panels, tapering square columns, and French doors linking the spaces and outdoors together.  
Photo courtesy Raymond Hamilton, Jr.*

The detached two-story garage and apartment went through the same extensive renovation as the house and still features the same stonework around the openings as the porch entry. The upper level contains a one-bedroom apartment with a full kitchen and bath, while a second bedroom, laundry room, and half bath were added to the first floor, previously a two-car garage. One side of the garage is used for garden and lawn storage.

### III

Since its addition to the Twickenham Historic Preservation District, Newman Avenue hums with the murmurs of families, history, and possibilities. It houses artists, professionals, retirees, and families of a variety of natures. Return to 420 Newman Avenue, the Pizitz house, in another seventy years and see if it isn't still a vessel for families, memories, and time.

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*Rear elevation of 420 Newman—The incorporation of porches and additions are nicely joined by a new deck and pergola added to the rear of the renovated Pizitz house. Photo courtesy Raymond Hamilton, Jr.*

# 417 Newman Avenue: The Anderson-Hurt House

*Carol Ashburn Roach*

Cecil and Fay Hurt wanted a house with “personality and potential” when they found the perfect house in 417 Newman Avenue. The Hurts purchased the wood clapboard-sided bungalow in 1988. Their home was featured in the September 1998 issue of *Southern Living*, and it was chosen as the first house in the newly enlarged Twickenham



*Front Entry—The new front entry incorporates an arched gable, simple wood railing and posts, and applied detail around the door. The effect combines bungalow and colonial elements similar to other homes on the street. Photo by Carol Roach.*

Historic Preservation District to be included on the Huntsville Pilgrimage Association’s 2001 Tour of Homes.

Newman Avenue was added to the city of Huntsville in 1924 as part of the Newman-Moorman District. 417 Newman was the first house built on the block. Dr. Milton Anderson, a local dentist, built it in 1927 (Hurt). At the time it was built, it had approximately 1300 square feet. The house contained a small living room with a fireplace, a dining room with bay windows, two bedrooms, a kitchen with a chimney, a bath, unfinished attic space, and a back porch that extended the width of the house. A covered entranceway was located on the east side of the



house. Cecil believes that side entrances were often chosen at the time as the streets were not paved (Hurt). Cecil has learned that the lot was purchased in 1926 for \$800, and the cost of the house was approximately \$3200 (Hurt).

The Hurts were surprised to find that the floors were not level, and the walls were not “plumb.” The remodeling took approximately two years. Vernon Schrimsher, a local builder, worked with Fay’s designs to accent the personality of the house. The previous owner had started a gabled porch on the front of the house. The Hurts completed this work adding circular columns, a wooden railing, and planted greenbrier smilax (commonly known as Jackson Vine) to enhance the front entrance. The Hurts repeated the porch’s arch above the front door with a fanlight effect.



*Site of original entry—The original side porch and entry after renovation. The overhang, interior beadboard and siding, and dimensions of the porch remain but are enclosed to create a sunroom and additional bath and closet space. Photo by Carol Roach.*

The original covered side entrance was enclosed with casement windows creating a sunroom. The Hurts preserved the original exterior clapboard as it became the interior wall of the sunroom. The original entrance door was replaced with French doors opening into the living room, creating an extension of the living space (14'x 30'). In the living room, the Hurts closed an entrance to a bedroom. Cecil believes the bedroom “was originally either a walk-through room or maybe a sitting room because it had no closet” (Interview).

The Hurts preserved many features of the 1927 house: the fireplace in the living room, the arch between the living and dining rooms, the original woodwork, the yellow pine floors, all of the original windows, and the original clawfoot bathtub.



*The living room mantel—Other trim and molding in the room and throughout the home were added to match the Adamesque details from the existing fireplace woodwork. Photo courtesy the Hurts.*

The back porch was enclosed. In this space, the Hurts created a small TV/den area and a walk-in closet. The swing area of the side porch was enclosed as a master bedroom closet. They also added a bath and dressing room for the master bedroom. The kitchen was completely gutted (except for the old windows) and updated with new cabinets and appliances. The old chimney for the stove was dismantled and enclosed in the kitchen wall. The house now has approximately 1600 square feet. The house is open and inviting with a living room (includes the sunroom), a dining room, two bedrooms, kitchen, TV/den, two full baths, and a dressing room.

Cecil talked with many of the original homeowners on Newman when he needed a variance to build the garage he designed for the northeast corner of the lot. It is connected to the house by a landscaped garden that extends to the west side of the house.

The Hurts have enjoyed living through the transition of the neighborhood. When they moved to Newman in 1988, the original owners were senior citizens, many of them “using walkers.” Now, Cecil and Fay enjoy a neighborhood where children’s strollers have replaced the walkers. They feel the neighborhood has returned to its roots with children all around: when working in their garden, Fay has discovered marbles as well as the heads of porcelain dolls, evidence of the vitality of the 1930s neighborhood. The Hurts find Newman Avenue “a delightful place to live.”

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*Cecil Hurt retired from the Madison County Board of Education with 45 years of service in education (37 years in Madison County), and Fay is a visual display associate at Parisian. She moved to Huntsville with her parents in 1959, where her father owned and operated Madison Limestone Company. Cecil moved to Huntsville in 1966 to work with the Madison County Schools. The Hurts married in 1984.*

*Carol Ashburn Roach is a member of the HHF Publications committee. She would like to thank Cecil and Fay Hurt for their time and care in presenting a portrait of their home.*

# 412 Newman Avenue: Continuing Traditions

*Cynthia Massey Parsons*

What building block and mortar turn a house into a home? What architect's tool or ingredient of the artisan's trade joins elements to transform structure into residence? The answer can only be Love... Love of the land, architecture, materials, building... people. Love unifies all in expression.

One such transformer of elements was “Ocie” Cloud—a Huntsville builder who loved his work and the materials he used. It is thought he built the home of Oliver and Etoile Allred in 1948. Messrs. Allred and Cloud probably drafted the quiet symmetry of 412 Newman Avenue. Oliver and Etoile are remembered for goodness and charity—a profile transferred to second owners, Lorene and Wendal Payne. The home has continually served as a place of gathering. This, the third owners, Cynthia Massey and Elbert Parsons, Jr. learned firsthand. Ollie Allred's basketball goal still stands as sentinel and witness of countless good times of a parade of friends and siblings: Julia Ann and Jane; Dave, Rene, and Cindy Payne; and Elbert and Sarah Parsons.



*Sketch of 412 Newman—Sketches and watercolors of the area are favorites of the owner and artist, Cynthia Parsons.*

The home is set amid now stately trees. A curving herringbone-patterned brick walk laid lovingly by father and son Allred beckons one to the Federalesque structure. Beaded board shutters add to the façade's grace. Dentil molding distinguishes the cornice. An arch atop columns, typifying Doric simplicity, protects the portico. Beveled-glass sidelights designed by owner Cynthia Parsons illumine the home's foyer.

Room layout flows in a circle over hardwood floors. A gracious living room with fireplace is eastward. It opens into an intimate dining room with double windows for view and light. The long kitchen features ample room to enjoy light repast and watch squirrels scamper along leafy branches. A guest bath is followed by the study with wall-high bookcases, shelves lovingly made by Wendal Payne, and painted marble crown molding.



*412 Newman Avenue—The colonial revival facade of the symmetrical house includes wide plank siding, dentil molding under the eaves, a Federal style entry door with fan and sidelights as well as an arched and stepped bracket porch resting on simple Doric columns. The curved herringbone walkway in brick echoes the brick of the chimney. Photo by Cynthia Parsons.*

Upstairs there is a landing perfect for afternoon reading. The master bedroom and bath are the size of the living room below. Two more bedrooms and a hall bath complete the floor plan. Laundry, super-storage, and areas supporting residents' hobbies are in the home's full basement.

The patio greenhouse is built of industrial windows—most likely from Lincoln Mills. It has indulged numerous green thumbs. Oliver Allred grew tomato vines over 18' high, producing fruit weighing 2 to 3 pounds. The greenhouse serves the current resident as a studio for painting watercolors.

Of special garden note is a Shittah tree—known to grow only in the Holy Land and Monte Sano Mountain. The Arc of the Covenant is thought to have been constructed of shittum wood. Near the tree, a dowser pronounced there to be underground water. Most astounding is the presence of an energy vortex originating near the Shittah's base.

The energy, force, or emotion that binds these elements and people, these rooms and these family traditions does so quietly over time. The home and the street, the residents and the neighbors, the past and present gently entwine.

*Cynthia Massey Parsons is an artist who works and lives at 412 Newman. She cherishes the memories of the Allred and Payne families and friends who shared in the compilation of this article.*

# **405 Newman Avenue: A House, a Home, a History**

*Jacquelyn Proctor Gray*

When Lee and Julia Harless moved to Huntsville from Gadsden in 1929, there were only two homes on the market that appealed to them. The two houses, on Eustis and Clinton, were wood frame structures; however, Lee insisted on a brick home for comfort and ease of maintenance.

They built a house that was practically on the outskirts of town and one of the earliest built on Newman Avenue. Cotton was farmed in the lush fields across the street from the \$1500 lot. The house was built for an additional \$1500, thanks to a loan from First National Bank and president Beirne Spragins.

Julia was pregnant with their first child, Jane, when they came to Huntsville, and the young couple rented an apartment on the corner of Franklin and Williams Street while waiting for the completion of their new home. Julia lovingly referred to the family home as “our little cottage.” Julia gave birth to second daughter Virginia and then their son, Lee, Jr.

Virginia Harless Cook and her brother Lee have many fond memories of the home and their childhood at 405 Newman Avenue. The doorknobs were crystal, and their mother insisted on having transoms installed over the doors. Lee recalls thinking transoms seemed so backwards and old-fashioned for a modern home. The home originally had two bedrooms and one bathroom, but when Lee was born the combination kitchen and breakfast room was converted into kitchen and Lee’s bedroom. In its 73-year existence, the kitchen has been remodeled three times.

Virginia remembers that the living room could be closed off with French doors, and during the Depression especially, it was kept closed to conserve heat. There was a fireplace in the living room that was lit only once a year, on Christmas Day. The fireplace had a brass cover and a hearth of glazed green tile, a perfect surface for Virginia's tap dancing practice.

The family relied on a cast iron, coal-burning "Warm Morning" stove for their heat. Smoke from the stove covered and darkened the walls and ceiling around it. At first they would paint over the smudges, but finally decided it was futile and accepted the perpetually blackened walls.

The home has changed relatively little in its history. Besides having an additional bedroom, it now has one and a half bathrooms. The screened porch, where Mr. and Mrs. Harless sometimes slept in the summertime, was converted to a carport.



*405 Newman Avenue—The simple brick cottage embellished with balustrade topped porch and side porte cochere. Pen and ink sketch by Lee Harless.*





*Garden structures—The eclectic shed and walls constructed for Mrs. Harless. Sketch by Lee Harless.*

Lee Harless owned and operated Gift Linen Mart for many years before his death in the early 1980s. Julia Harless remained in the home she had lived in

since coming to Huntsville. Her son Lee, who cared for his ailing mother, wanted to ensure that she could look out into her backyard and see some of the things of beauty she had admired her whole life. He built a stone gothic greenhouse and an Italianate shed and added sculptures to transform the garden into a welcoming escape. Mrs. Harless stayed in the home until she was nearly 102. She passed away in April 2001 at the age of 103.

Lee Harless, Jr. and his wife Carol, who grew up three blocks away on Echols Street, are in the process of restoring and renovating the family home. They hope to preserve a bit of Huntsville's past—small homes sitting on the edge of a small cotton town—in a way to complement Huntsville's future.

*Jacque Gray is the Associate Editor of Old Tennessee Valley magazine and co-chairperson of the Maple Hill Cemetery Stroll. She is currently working with Fred Simpson on two new books about Huntsville's history.*

## **Mills B. Lane IV**

### **1942-2001**

Mills Lane, a Savannah, Georgia publisher, philanthropist and historian known to Huntsvillians because of his love of and devotion to historic preservation, died in October 2001 at the age of fifty-nine after a brief fight against Hodgkin's lymphoma.

Mills Lane bought and restored his first home at the age of twenty-four and founded The Beehive Press publishing company at the age of twenty-eight. Beehive published books about Southern culture and history. Lane edited and wrote nearly sixty books. The largest undertaking was the eleven-volume series "Architecture of the Old South." Lane spent \$1.5 million of the family's money on preservation and renovation efforts of the Bull Street area and helped finance restorations of many buildings in the Historic district.

Lane served on the Savannah Historic Review Board in the late 1990s and had previously chosen Huntsville architect Harvie P. Jones for twenty-one preservation projects in Savannah. These included restorations of historic structures and the design of appropriate in-fill houses built around several historic squares.

Lane's philosophy on preservation lives on in projects, research, and scholarship:

Preservation [he wrote] is about more than making things look pretty. Its ultimate purpose is to make life better for the people who live in a community. [...] The most enlightened preservationists are not just trying to repair old bricks and mortar but to rebuild an environment in which more human and more civilized values can be restored and flourish.

*(Savannah Morning News. 1 Jan 2000.)*



Cynthia M. Parsons

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***“Buildings are three-dimensional history books that reflect the comings and goings, successes and failures, aspirations and follies of real people.”***

*—Mills Lane, Architecture of the Old South*

**HISTORIC HUNTSVILLE FOUNDATION**  
**P.O. Box 786**  
**Huntsville, AL 35804**

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The mission of the HISTORIC HUNTSVILLE FOUNDATION is the preservation of historically or architecturally significant sites and structures in Huntsville and Madison County. The Foundation also works to increase public awareness of the value of these sites and structures.

*The Historic Huntsville Quarterly of Local Architecture and Preservation*, a scholarly journal, and *Foundation Forum*, a quarterly newsletter, are published by the Foundation. The Foundation owns and operates Harrison Brothers Hardware and has partially renovated the Harvie P. Jones Building next door. Tenants occupy the finished space—Bird and Kamback Architects and The Huntsville Inn, a tea room. A warehouse of architectural artifacts and materials for reuse in historic preservation projects within Madison County also is operated by the Foundation.

The Foundation is actively involved in efforts to establish a formal revitalization of downtown Huntsville and sponsors functions to draw attention to businesses that locate in historic properties. In association with the Von Braun Lions Club, the Foundation co-sponsors “Trade Day on The Square” each September. Other events include public briefings, covered-dish suppers, and an annual awards dinner honoring notable contributors to historic preservation.

Foundation membership includes a subscription to the *Quarterly* and the *Forum*, notification of special sales at Harrison Brothers Hardware, invitations to members-only events at historic private homes and buildings, and advance notice and discounts on Foundation-sponsored tours, workshops, lectures and programs. If you would like membership information, please contact the Foundation by telephone at 256-539-0097 or by email at [preserve@hiwaav.net](mailto:preserve@hiwaav.net).

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