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Early Days on Williams Street

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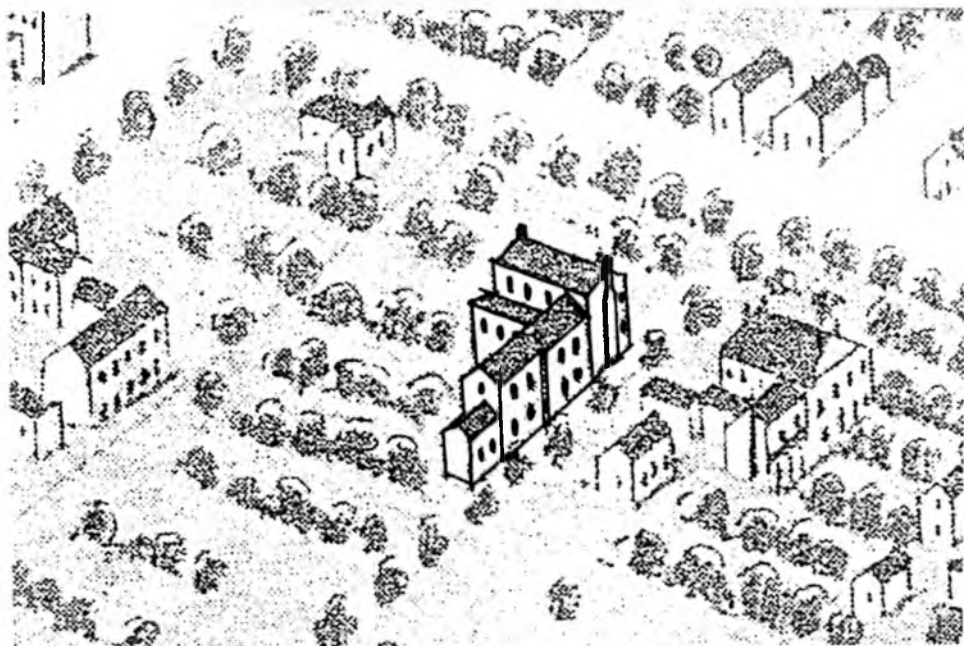
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*The Lowe House, Williams Street
This house was built by Herbert Cowell, who came to Huntsville from Joliet,
Illinois and lived here for several years. Cowell also built the circa 1902 Wilfred
Van Valkenburgh House, with similar Queen Anne massing, at 501 Franklin Street.*



The Fletcher-Lowe property as seen on 1871 map. On the viewer's right is the ca. 1836 Governor Thomas Bibb house.

Early Days on Williams Street

SARAH HUFF FISK

The following article has been adapted by the Quarterly editors from material prepared by Sarah Huff Fisk for the Lowe House Dependency Preservation Planning Study. The study, conducted by Frank J. Nola, Jr., AIA, was commissioned by the University of Alabama in Huntsville Foundation and was funded by a grant from the Alabama Historical Commission, with matching funds provided by the UAH Foundation. The study sought to illuminate the historical and architectural significance of a rare survivor from Huntsville's antebellum period, and to investigate the feasibility of renovation, restoration and adaptive re-use planning to accommodate the current needs of the University of Alabama in Huntsville.

Williams Street has always been a choice area for homesites. Running along the southern boundary of the original twenty-block town of Huntsville, the level land there once had a magnificent stand of tall poplars and oaks that offered early residents plenty of sturdy building timbers.

LeRoy Pope was the original 1809 purchaser of government land in the town area. In 1817, Pope sold to Henry Minor a little over two acres of land below the southern line of Williams Street for \$346.50. Sometime between 1817 and 1820, Minor had a two-story brick Federal-style house built on the property. Minor was a lawyer who shared a Huntsville office with John M. Taylor in a building on the west side of the public square, next to the Planters and Merchants Bank. In 1817, Minor was the attorney general of the Mississippi Territory and a delegate to Alabama's 1819 constitutional convention. He served as reporter to the Alabama Supreme Court, as a justice of that court and, from 1823 until his death in 1838, as clerk of the court. In 1823 he moved his family to Greene County to be closer to his work.* Subsequent owners of the Williams Street property before the Fletcher-Lowe families entered the picture included George Malone, Josephine DeVendel, Robert Fearn, and Robert Fearn, Jr.

By 1883, A.S. Fletcher was in residence. Fletcher was a trustee for Robert Fearn, Jr., as well as a representative in the Alabama House and a delegate to the 1901 constitutional convention. He and his wife, Mattie Lowe Fletcher, replaced the Federal house with the present chateau-style structure, now 210 Williams Street. The house was completed in 1902. Fletcher's nephew, Robert Joseph Lowe, inherited the property upon Fletcher's death in 1908. Lowe served in the Alabama House of Representatives from 1943 to 1947 and in the Alabama Senate from 1947 until his death in 1951. His widow, Jane Knight Lowe, a benefactor of many educational and charitable organizations, died in 1997, leaving the Williams Street property to the University of Alabama in Huntsville.

**Henry Minor's great-great-grandson Philip Mason helped establish the University of Alabama in Huntsville, the current owner of the Williams Street property.*



West side view of upper and lower galleries. Ionic columns were probably salvaged from demolition of original house, around 1900.



Detail of upper gallery railing. Elliptical profile handrail is intentionally cambered and is mortised into columns.