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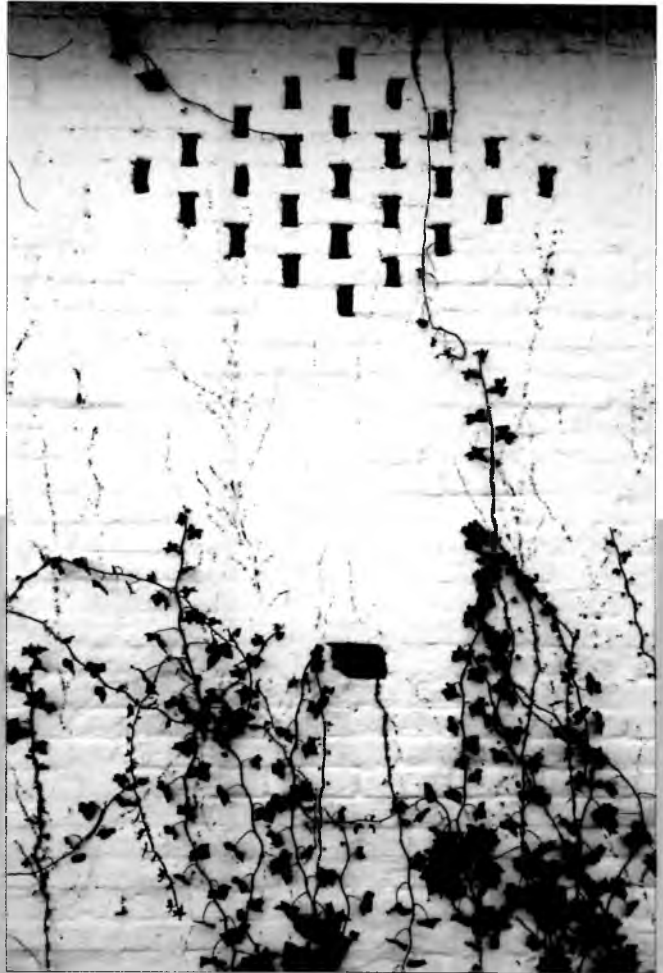
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Historic Huntsville Quarterly

OF LOCAL ARCHITECTURE AND PRESERVATION

19th-Century Dependencies

*The brick wall of an old
smokehouse on Adams
Street becomes an
abstract canvas for the
21st century. Photograph
by Doug Brewster*



VOLUME 32, NUMBERS 1-2, SPRING/SUMMER 2006
SIX DOLLARS

Historic Huntsville Quarterly

OF LOCAL ARCHITECTURE AND PRESERVATION

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19th-Century Dependencies



The McCrary-Thomas property in Madison County exhibits one of the more intact rural landscapes standing today. Photograph by Linda Allen, 2006

An Overview

The antebellum southern house was more than just a house, it was a whole assemblage of structures, scattered about the yard. The number, density, and variety of structures depended on the size of the yard, the wealth of the owner, and the number of activities undertaken on the property. The poorest families may have had just one or two small sheds in addition to the house, but at the other end were the major cotton plantations, a few of which had as many as a hundred structures, when all the workshops, sheds, and slave houses were counted. It was very much an agricultural world, and the preference was to have a separate structure for each activity, at least when circumstances permitted. Visitors to the South often commented on the clutter of structures observed on many homesteads; the preeminent architect Benjamin H. Latrobe even wrote that “outbuildings seemed to cluster around southern houses ‘as a litter of pigs their mother.’”¹

The first half of the 19th century is notable as being the last period in the United States during which life continued much as it had over preceding centuries, that is, as a sparsely settled, rural, handcraft, pedestrian society. In 1800 the young country had 5.3 million people of which almost 95 percent lived in rural areas and made a living by farming. Only New York and Philadelphia could boast of having more

than 25,000 residents; the country remained largely a vast wilderness broken occasionally by scattered villages or hamlets and by isolated farms.

This required the family to be the primary social and labor unit, and it was essentially self-sufficient, raising and producing its own food, clothing and shelter. Transportation was by foot or horse unless a navigable waterway was convenient. Communication was by letter or newspaper, both of which were dependent on the inadequate transportation systems; roads, where they existed at all, were dirt trails and impassible much of the year. As a result, contact with others was restricted and news could take weeks or months to be transmitted. The church formed the center of what community life there was, being the focus of gatherings for baptisms, funerals, worship, and socials. In small towns and villages, the bleakness of this existence could be relieved somewhat by the availability of a few staple consumer goods and by the presence of neighbors.

In the antebellum South, the relatively benign climate, the considerable dearth of infrastructure and technology, and the distinctive social division into free whites and black slaves merged to create a tradition of relegating household chores to the yard and to a variety of dependent structures. This system was made workable by the presence of one or many slaves who were primarily responsible for completing the chores under the supervision of an overseer or owner. As a result, convenience to and ease of work was not a prime consideration.

Obviously, a property owner's financial status and taste dictated the size and finish of his house and the extent of his land; the smaller his house lot, the fewer outbuildings there could be or the more they would need to be combined. In 1855, Huntsvillian George Yuckley advertised his three-room house for sale, which included a separate kitchen, negro house, smoke house, dairy, stable, and well, all located on one acre.² Presumably this was Mr. Yuckley's sole residence as he had all the requisite dependencies on his house lot. But many Huntsville residents also owned one or more plantations in Madison and neighboring counties. Even though these wealthy landowners had the largest town houses, they may have had fewer

dependencies as much of the food production and processing could be conducted at their country holdings where farming was the predominant activity. A traveling thespian, who spent several weeks performing in Huntsville, observed that the “wealthiest and best informed classes...resided not generally within the town limits, but from two to five miles around in the adjacent country...”³ In fact, many of the houses we now consider part of downtown were built outside the municipal limits, which extended only one-half mile from the center of the Courthouse Square until 1866.

A local advertisement in 1844, offering for sale the house at 621 Franklin Street, illustrates how extensive the premises of a town house could be:

a two-story brick tenement of nine rooms, a spacious two-story kitchen attached, a brick stable with eight stalls, carriage house and cow shed,



The house at 621 Franklin Street began in the 1820s as two rooms and a stair hall and was expanded during the later Federal period to nine rooms. Photograph by Linda Allen, 2006

a brick smoke house and dairy, a well constructed ice house, with out houses for servants, a well of excellent water and a fine garden, with a choice variety of fruit trees and shrubbery, a meadow and other small lots, conveniently situated and embracing between eight and nine acres.⁴

Even an exceptionally large and luxurious house such as this would have been heated by fireplaces and lit by candles or crude oil lamps. Water would have been carried from a well or hydrant in the yard and carried out again after being used, and the only refrigeration was that provided by the dairy or an ice house, which had to be filled each winter with blocks of ice cut from frozen ponds. There would have been no window or door screens to keep out flies and mosquitoes and no air conditioning other than what could be obtained by natural ventilation. Clothes, blankets, and linens were hand sewn of homespun fabric, laundry was washed with lye soap and pressed using sad irons that had to be reheated every few minutes at an open fire. Meat and poultry had to be raised or caught, killed, and cleaned before it could be cooked in the kitchen fireplace. Some meats and fish could be purchased at the city market house as could fruits and vegetables in season, but mostly they were home grown. Food not only had to be prepared for each day's meals but also preserved by smoking, salting, drying, or pickling for future use. A popular method of preserving corn was to convert it into corn whiskey, otherwise known as bourbon. A few staples could be purchased from the local grocer, but even these were limited to items such as coffee and tea, loaf sugar, spices, mackerel, bacon, flour, rice, salt, and, oddly, oysters.

The cluster of accessory structures necessary to accommodate all the chores required by daily life can be roughly classified into four categories: structures devoted to food storage and preparation; stables and barns for livestock and carriages; living quarters for slaves/servants; and that collection of small, but indispensable, structures—the well house or hydrant, the woodshed, and the necessary house, more commonly referred to today as the outhouse or privy.

The kitchen was the most prevalent dependency, often placed perpendicular to the



The house at 518 Adams Street is a notable example illustrating how the kitchen and servants' quarters were frequently attached to the main house. Photograph by Linda Allen, 2006

rear of the main house to create an ell, and although these two structures typically were not physically joined until late in the century, they were frequently connected by a covered passageway. The rationale for moving the kitchen out of the house was based on preventing kitchen fires from damaging the dwelling; on keeping excess heat and vermin, such as flies and mice, from the house; and on a perceived societal need to express in physical form the relative relationship between owner and slave. The kitchen consisted of one room with a large fireplace where food was cooked, while a bake oven might be built into one side or located in the yard. More rarely, the kitchen was located in a basement room with an adjoining dining room.

It was common practice to combine the kitchen with quarters for the cook and house slaves; one or more rooms were frequently provided beside the kitchen or on a second floor above it. A real estate ad of 1834 for a local dwelling states that the property contains a brick smokehouse and a kitchen with two lodging rooms for servants.⁵ It was not uncommon for an owner to have the kitchen dependency built first so the family could live in it while the big house was under construction.

Surviving kitchen-and-quarters in Huntsville are predominantly of brick, one- or two-story with galleries along the front of each floor, and side gabled roofs that extend over the galleries. The quarters were commonly one room deep with each room having access to the gallery. A rare extant example of a frame kitchen-and-quarters structure stands behind Quietdale. Our under-

standing of these particular dependencies may be skewed by the fact that larger examples tend to survive better than smaller ones, and that brick outlasts wood. Because the surviving structures were usually of brick, substantial, and close to the house, many have been connected to the main house and converted to bedrooms, offices, and other contemporary uses, while a new, modern kitchen was constructed inside the dwelling.

Free-standing slave quarters took multiple forms; some were brick, a few clapboard, and many were log or plank structures. In town they often combined two or more rooms—one per family—in each structure with a porch across the front. Surviving examples of such dependencies are rare in town.

A smokehouse was also built adjacent to the house as it provided the most practical method of preserving meat, primarily pork, after slaughter. The aim was to expose hunks of meat, suspended from joists, to the smoke of a smoldering fire that was kept going in a central pit. To accomplish this, the house had to be relatively



In 1934, the 518 Adams house was documented in drawings and photographs by HABS. The two-story section on the far left provided living spaces for house slaves, the adjacent section without a balcony but with the largest chimney would have been the kitchen, and the taller two-story section on the right provided access to the house and dining room. Photograph by W. N. Manning for HABS, 1934



The importance of the smokehouse can be inferred by its proximity to the rear of the main house. This brick example from New Market illustrates a common local design with a vertical-plank door, diamond-patterned vents on each wall, and front gable roof. Photograph by Alex Bush for HABS, 1935

airtight so there were no windows and only one door. To keep the fire going and the smoke moving slowly past the meat without overheating it, small vents were installed in brick structures near the eaves; wooden smokehouses usually relied on the natural leakage between weatherboards for ventilation. Meat usually was cured in the smokehouse prior to smoking by placing it in salt in hollowed-out log troughs. Smokehouses were built in a variety of forms, including one- and two-story, brick or frame, with hipped or gabled roofs. Because the smokehouse contained the owner's yearly supply of meat, the keys to it were closely guarded. Today, most extant smokehouses appear to be used for storage.

Other food preservation facilities included cellars—small structures constructed partially underground without windows—where root crops, squashes, and canned

goods could be stored in an environment designed to remain cool and dark with low humidity and good air circulation. Other methods of keeping food fresh were dairies, also called milk houses, and springhouses. A dairy held cheese and butter and kept milk cool until the cream separated and could be churned to butter. Dairies were small, often square, structures with small latticed or louvered openings and deep sheltering eaves. Ideally they should be partially below grade and the walls well insulated. A similar structure was a springhouse built over a spring of fresh,

cool water or a running stream, which kept the interior cool; while springhouses were used in rural Alabama, they apparently were less common in Huntsville as they required the presence of an active spring or stream on the property.

A third related structure which Huntsville's wealthy incorporated was the ice house. Blocks of ice would be cut from frozen ponds in the winter and stacked in below grade or well-insulated structures, each block generously packed on all sides with sawdust, wood shavings, straw, or a similar material. Leaving the door open for several days prior to loading would allow the ground beneath the ice house to



This extant smokehouse behind the house at 609 Adams was constructed in the 1870s, which may account for its reduced proportions. Although the main house was of frame construction, the smokehouse was brick and topped with a pyramidal roof and finial. Photograph by Doug Brewster, 2004



This well house on Jeff Road was located just feet from the kitchen; its square shape, pyramidal roof and latticed walls are characteristic of many such dependencies. It and the house were burned in 2003. Photograph by Linda Allen, 2003

freeze, which prolonged its effectiveness. Properly installed, ice would still be available well into the summer months. The manufacture of ice and the mechanization of refrigeration in the second half of the 19th century slowly decreased reliance on the ice house, dairy, and springhouse, and they gradually disappeared from the urban landscape.

Food preparation was also dependent on the presence of a well-filled woodshed to provide fuel, not only for the kitchen fire, but to heat the dwelling in winter before coal became a readily available consumer product and the fuel of choice. The woodshed could be as simple as a gable roof supported on unmilled cedar posts to protect the firewood from precipitation.

Another essential structure was a shelter for the source of water. Huntsville had an early water system which placed hydrants in yards for private use or in each block for communal use. An 1829 notice in the *Southern Advocate* illustrates an early water problem.

Persons having Hydrants are requested not to permit the water from them to waste; and such as have milk houses supplied with water from them, are requested to dispense with their use for the present at least, as in consequence of the scarcity of water in the Spring and the immense and useless waste from Hydrants, many families are at present deprived of the use of theirs. Such as give this request their immediate attention, will confer a favour on me, and at the same time be doing an act of justice to others— Those persons who do not, may expect to have their hydrants plugged up without further notice. S. D. MORGAN ⁶

People who could afford the expense had a private well dug on their house lot, which was sometimes supplied with a pump. The well opening usually was surrounded by a three-foot-high wall, either square or round, to prevent people and animals from falling in. A roof, frequently pyramidal, was placed over the well and walls would be left open or filled with lattice. If the well had a pump, it might be located inside the kitchen structure or on a porch; but until the installation of city sewers, all used water still had to be carried back outside for disposal. Surviving well structures today tend to accommodate overflow possessions if they are even partially enclosed.

Bathing was not as popular then as now; without heated running water and drains, many people just sponged off in their rooms. A few of the wealthier citizens had a private bath-house, probably similar to the one near Cahaba that was described as being “an immense cemented pool through which flowed a constant and continuous stream of gushing water from the artesian well”; ⁷ but the majority of residents did without or patronized the public bath which opened in 1825.



This Jackson County privy, still standing but abandoned, illustrates a primitive example of a necessary house; a sloped roof to keep off rain, one small window for ventilation, and an opening in the bottom of the rear wall to facilitate cleanout. Photograph by Linda Allen, 2005

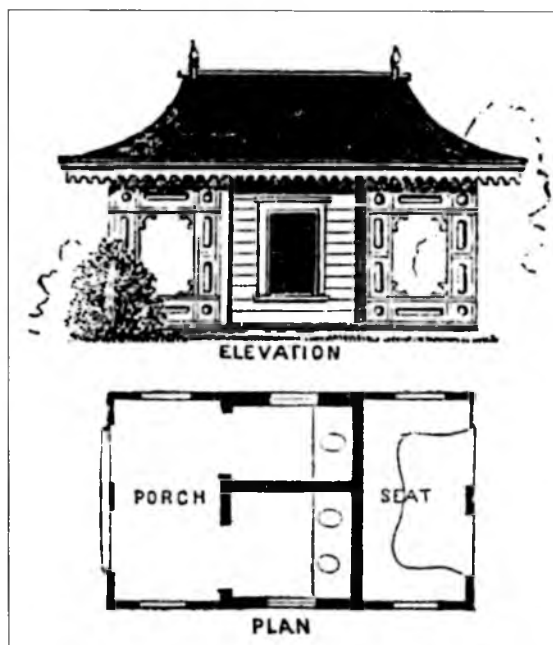
Huntsville Bath—The Subscriber respectfully informs his customers and the public generally that the BATH is in operation. He hopes from unwearyed diligence to give general satisfaction to those who may favour him with their calls...For bathing during this season, to be paid in advance — \$5.00; single bath, warm — 25¢; single bath, cold — 12 1/2¢; single shower — 12 1/2¢. Benjn. W. Hall. ⁸

Service dependencies not related to food were stables for horses, perhaps a barn or cow pen (to lock her up at night as livestock was permitted to run loose during the day, even in town), a carriage house, and some equipment or storage sheds. While food processing facilities were normally convenient to the main house, structures

connected with animals and transportation were placed to the rear of the lot. Few barns and stables in town have survived, partly because they were allowed to fall into disrepair when the auto nudged aside the horse or because their location at the far end of the lot made them prime sites for infill housing in the latter part of the century.

Seldom mentioned in real estate ads of the 19th century was the privy, delicately referred to as the necessary house and by numerous other euphemisms. It was small and could be exceedingly primitive or con-

structed of brick and detailed to match the big house. It could have single or multiple holes; or there could be several facilities designated for separate populations, such as women and children, men, and servants. The most important issue was placement of the privy; in the hot summer, its odoriferous aspect made it desirable to locate as far as possible from the living areas. During the cold winter months, convenience to the house was preferable. In an age that did not understand the connection between sanitation and health, the siting of the privy could be dangerous if its contents filtered into the water supply or were used to fertilize the family's vegetable garden.



Privies could be quite sophisticated as Calvert Vaux, the renowned 19th-century architect, demonstrated in 1864 with this "Design for an Outbuilding," which incorporated porches at either end in addition to inside and outside seating. Villas & Cottages reprinted by Dover Publications, 1970, page 174

Cleaning the privy pit was simplified if the structure was easily moved; some had a hinged lower section on the rear wall to facilitate access for emptying, which had to be done regularly. Cities had scavengers who, for a fee, traveled the alleys at night removing and disposing of the privy contents, leading to the term night soil. In the later 19th century, the process could be completed using a hose and pump rather than a shovel. By the late 1890s, the Huntsville City Council became serious about extending both water and sewer lines throughout the city, which greatly enhanced daily life and community health. By 1924, the city code required that all places of residence and employment be provided with a sanitary water closet and that it be connected to a public sewer main. It was a misdemeanor to use a privy not fitted with a catch receptacle, and where no sewer service was available, the owner was billed by the city for weekly cleaning and disinfecting of such receptacle. The code



The Cabaniss house today located at the northeast corner of Randolph Avenue and Calhoun Street. Photograph by Linda Allen, 2006

then went into two pages of exacting specifications for construction of a sanitary privy.

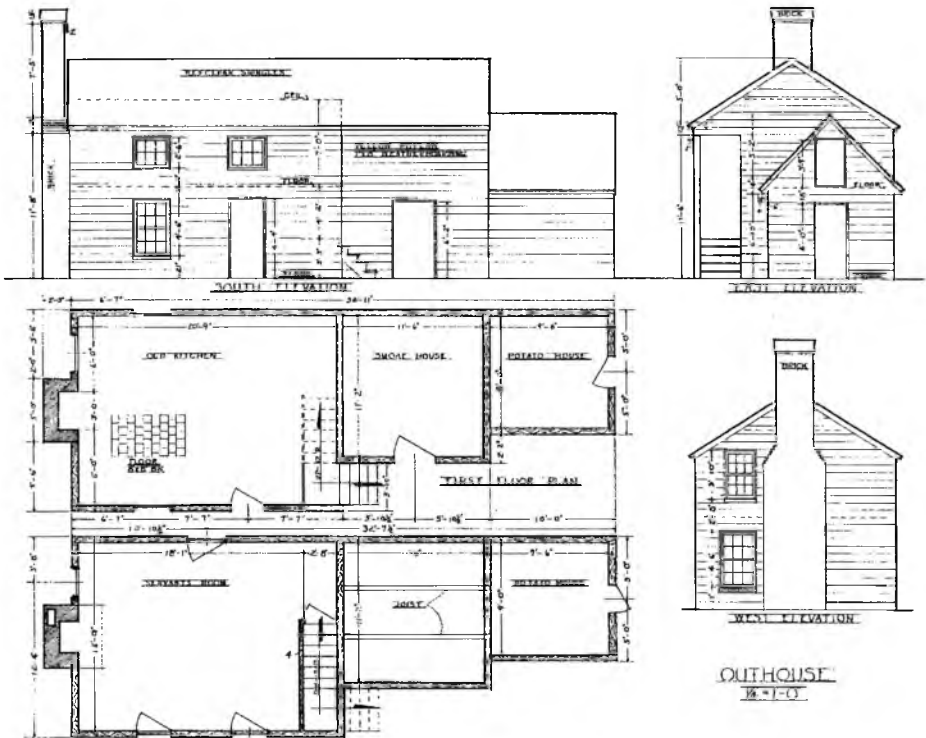
The Cabaniss house at 603 Randolph Avenue illustrates how multiple accessory structures could be combined on a town lot. The 1861 Hartley & Drayton map and the 1913 Sanborn insurance map of Huntsville reveal that the



The 1861 Hartley & Drayton map of Huntsville shows the number and arrangement of dependencies in the rear yard of the Cabaniss property.

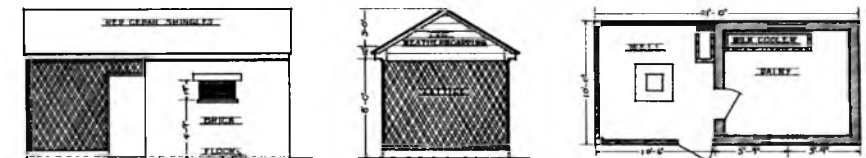
rear yard contained one large structure immediately behind the house and four small ones scattered to its side and rear, while two larger buildings were placed along the rear property line, one fronting on Calhoun Street, which likely would have been a stable, and the other, some type of workshop or storage space. By 1935 when the Historic American Building Survey (HABS) documented this property, the only dependencies extant were the two closest to the main house.

The larger of the remaining dependencies was a two-story frame building, sited parallel with the house, containing on the ground level a kitchen (approximately 15 feet by 20 feet) with a brick floor, three 6/6 windows, and an exterior door. Connected to the kitchen, but smaller and not accessible from it, was the smoke-house, which had no windows and was open for its full two-story height with two joists midway up to hold the meat for smoking. On the one-story end of this complex was an even smaller room, also lacking windows, labeled the potato house. The second floor above the kitchen was a single room of equal size, accessible from a side-entry stairwell through the kitchen; this would have provided housing for the cook and possibly the house servants. A fireplace and four windows provided heat



The primary Cabaniss dependency combined the kitchen, servants' quarters, smokehouse, and potato house. Demolished. HABS drawing by B. F. Coles, 1935

in winter and cross ventilation in summer to these quarters. The whole complex had yellow poplar weatherboarding, red cedar roof shingles, and a massive brick chimney. From the kitchen, servants would have carried prepared food into the



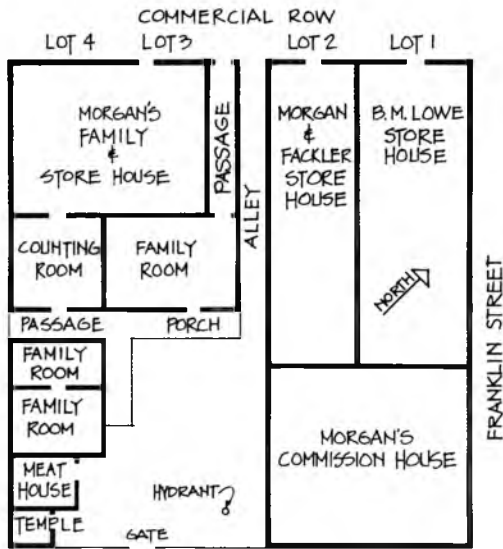
HABS drawing of the combined well house and dairy behind the Cabaniss house. Demolished. Drawing by B. F. Coles, 1935



A rear view of the Cabaniss outbuildings as they appeared in 1935. The small brick structure on the right contained the dairy and well house; the larger two-story frame structure was the kitchen, slave quarters, and smokehouse. Demolished. Photograph by Alex Bush for HABS, 1935

basement of the main house and up to the dining room. The Cabaniss house had a second kitchen and dining room in the basement; the HABS drawings identify the detached kitchen as the old kitchen, but it may be that it was the summer kitchen, and the basement kitchen and dining room were used in the winter.

The other surviving outbuilding, which sat perpendicular to the larger one, was a combination well house and dairy of one story, the two parts distinguished by differing construction materials. The well house was of frame construction with three latticed walls; in one corner was a rectangular stone trough, used to cool perishable foods. The dairy, which shared the cedar-shingled roof, had brick walls on all sides with access only from the well house. Two 19-inch-tall louvered openings on opposite walls provided ventilation. A second larger trough located on the north wall



The layout of Luther Morgan's combined store and home located on South Side Square prior to 1835 when it was demolished. Harrison Brothers Hardware now occupies this property. Redrawn by Ralph Allen, 2006

of the dairy was used to keep milk and other dairy products chilled.⁹

Not all houses in town had a lot spacious enough for even this compact arrangement. Some people lived on the Courthouse Square in structures that combined a store with a dwelling either behind or above it. An ad from 1847 offered for rent a dwelling house and store rooms on the corner of the Public Square containing ten or twelve rooms in the dwelling part of the house and in the yard a well of excellent water with necessary outhouses, stables, cow yards, etc.,¹⁰ demonstrating that even in the very center of town, life maintained a distinctly rural atmosphere. A

second example, on South Side Square (then known as Commercial Row), had a store fronting the sidewalk and behind it a counting room and a family room, the latter accessed by a separate passageway from the Square. These two rooms had a porch across the rear that connected to two smaller family rooms, followed by a meat house, and ending with a "temple" on the rear lot line. The back yard was fenced and contained a hydrant, but no mention was made of the necessary house.¹¹

Significant houses located away from town were usually the center of a large agricultural operation. These houses would need the same facilities as a town house, to which would be added a variety of farm-related structures, including various animal pens or houses, numerous barns, multiple storage sheds, gin houses and press, weaving houses, corn mill and crib, perhaps a still or two, rows of slave cabins for field hands, and workshops for use by the coopers, carpenters, blacksmiths, and



*As the sun sets on it, this barely standing Huntsville privy marks the passing of an era.
Photograph by Linda Allen, 2000*

other mechanics employed in maintaining the farming operation. Other structures that might be included on large plantations were churches and infirmaries.

The formal yards of both city and plantation houses (as opposed to the work yards adjacent to the dependencies) might be adorned with flower and vegetable gardens and fruit orchards. The custom then was to fence animals out, rather than in as is the custom today, so the house and its outbuildings were enclosed by wooden fences or, more rarely, brick walls. Also commonly found on plantation grounds was the family cemetery, but these graves often have been removed or simply lost when the tombstones were vandalized.

Today, little remains of these service dependencies. They were commonly constructed in the most economical manner and of the cheapest materials to serve a specific need; when electricity, plumbing, heating and cooking stoves, and mail-order catalogs became widely available, the need for this clutter of accessory buildings vanished, as did they.

LINDA BAYER ALLEN

Notes

- 1 John Michael Vlach, *Back of the Big House, The Architecture of Plantation Slavery* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1993), 77.
- 2 *Southern Advocate*, 21 October 1855.
- 3 Lucille Griffith, *Alabama, A Documentary History to 1900* (Tuscaloosa: University of Alabama Press, 1987), 315.
- 4 *Democrat*, 11 December 1844.
- 5 *Southern Advocate*, 4 November 1834.
- 6 *Southern Advocate*, 16 October 1829.
- 7 Griffith, 294.
- 8 *Southern Advocate*, 6 May 1825.
- 9 Historic American Buildings Survey, Library of Congress, Washington, D.C., Cabaniss House, Survey No. ALA-431, May 1935.
- 10 *Southern Advocate*, 18 December 1847.
- 11 Chancery Court Record v. K, June Term, 1841, Madison County, Alabama, 561.

Thomas Bibb: Town and Country

Thomas Bibb (1782-1839) acquired great wealth as a planter in Huntsville and Limestone County. A distinguished politician, he was a representative at the state constitutional convention of 1819 and was elected president of the senate when Alabama became a state. In this capacity he became the state's second governor when his brother,



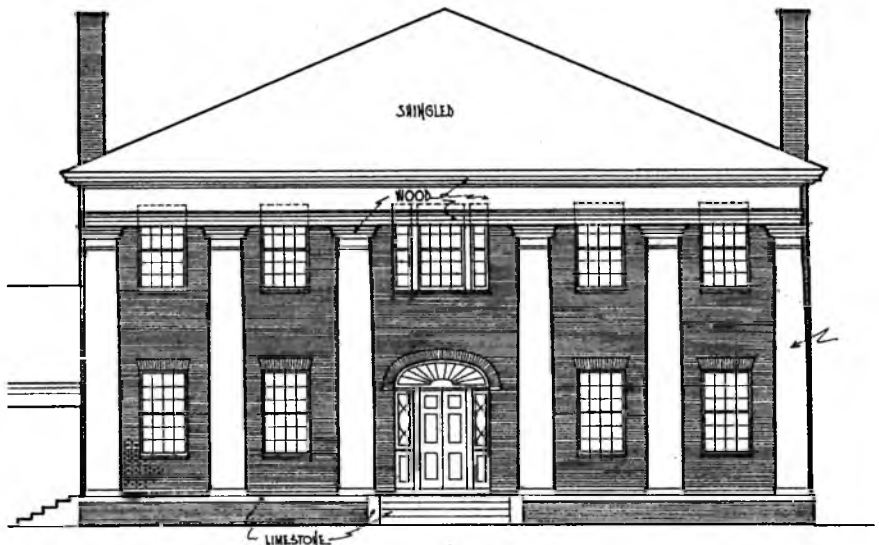
The Bibb-Hutchens house at 300 Williams Avenue as photographed in 1934 by W. N. Manning of the HABS team

William Wyatt Bibb, died in office. By the time of Thomas Bibb's death, he owned three plantations in southern Louisiana and four city lots in New Orleans, as well as property in Arkansas and Mississippi. ¹ Befitting his planter status, he built two elegant houses for his family: his Huntsville residence at 300 Williams Avenue (the Bibb-Hutchens House) and his plantation home, Belle Mina (Belmina), on Mooresville Road in Limestone County.

Both structures were built in the late 1820s and mid-1830s in the newly fashionable Greek Revival style. Architectural historian Robert Gamble called Belle Mina "one of (the) earliest and most sophisticated of Alabama plantation mansions." ² Perhaps this was the Greek prototype for North Alabama. Certainly by the time the Williams Avenue home was built in the mid-1830s, Bibb had a deeper understanding of the style and produced a stately and even more sophisticated Greek residence. No architect or builder is associated with either building; perhaps they were patterned after homes of Bibb's colleagues or those he saw on his travels. The growing

popularity of the Greek style was often disseminated through both the rural and urban South by the builder's handbooks, a compendium of various architectural elements, such as doors or staircases, from which a planter could design his own residence, often to be built by his slaves.³ Gamble writes that the Huntsville house's façade "was skillfully adapted, in its entirety, from the pages of Chester Hills' *The Builder's Guide*, published in Hartford, Connecticut in 1834."⁴ In any case, both houses are brick with the same heavy massing, although stylistic differences occur in the colonnades. However, the outbuildings for each house reveal the diversity between the urban and plantation setting.

For unknown reasons, in 1835-36 Bibb moved to Lafourche Parish, Louisiana, and advertised both homes for sale in the *Southern Advocate*. For the Williams Avenue property, the 1836 listing was simple enough: "FOR SALE. THE subscriber offers



The front façade of Belle Mina facing Mooresville Road as delineated in 1934 by L. A. Wingo of the HABS team

for sale his New Splendid Family RESIDENCE, (now nearly finished,) on Williams street. Terms, liberal.”⁵ In contrast, the necessity for self-sufficiency in the rural environment is clear.

BELMINA FOR SALE. THIS valuable estate, situate in Limestone County, on the road leading from Huntsville to Decatur, 21 miles from the former, and 7 from the latter, and immediately adjoining the village of Mooresville is now offered for sale. The whole tract, (including the Jackson place lately offered for sale separately,) contains 3,190 acres, and will be sold entire, or divided, as may best suit purchasers. The Jackson place lying immediately on the North, containing 1,120 acres, and a tract containing 360 acres, lying on the South, and adjoining the village of Mooresville, both in a compact form, will be sold separately. This will leave attached to the Belmina tract, 1705 acres, with the Mansion House, a large and elegant two story brick building, with 12 or 14 rooms, and a 15 foot passage thro’ the centre, and a colonade the whole length of the front, a kitchen and the requisite accommodations for servants, smoke house, ice house, &c., all except the latter, of brick, and conveniently arranged. Also, a large brick stable and carriage house, and the yard and garden substantially enclosed with a brick wall full six feet in height. There is also upon the premises a Mill with two pair of stones, one for wheat; a Saw Mill, Cotton Gin and Press, all propelled by water. These are situated on Limestone Creek, a fine stream which waters the Eastern portion of the tract. An orchard of Peaches, Apples and other choice fruits. The negro quarters located upon the bank of the creek about a mile from the Mansion House, sufficient for the accommodation of 150 to 200 slaves, are of the most comfortable description, each with a brick chimney and plank floor. There are several Cotton Houses situated at convenient distances from each other. The Mansion House and all the improvements attached are new and in perfect repair, the whole having been erected within the last 7 years.

The place has been uniformly healthy, and when the quality of the soil, and the comfortable, if not elegant style of the improvements, are taken into view, may certainly be considered one of the most desirable in North Alabama. Should the purchaser prefer it, from 30 to 40 slaves will be sold with the land. There are about 2000 acres of cleared land; the cleared land on the tract, as proposed to be sold separately, bearing, perhaps, about an equal proportion to the quantity cleared in the entire tract. The whole is well enclosed—a part with cedar posts and plank.

The Jackson place has upon it an Overseers house, a new Gin and Gin house, and good quarters for 60 or 80 slaves. This place as well as the Belmina tract, is watered by Limestone which affords an abundant supply of stock water and some fine Grass land. ⁶



The kitchen wing, as seen in this 1934 HABS photograph, extends to the side of the main house and was originally connected to it by a covered passage, now enclosed. This wing survives today but has been renovated for contemporary use while retaining the cooking fireplaces and the full-length gallery along the front, the roof of which is supported on brick columns that echo on a reduced scale the dominant columns of the main house. The kitchen structure was of solid brick construction and had limestone lintels over the doors and windows to further accent its importance and its connection with the big house. Photograph by W. N. Manning



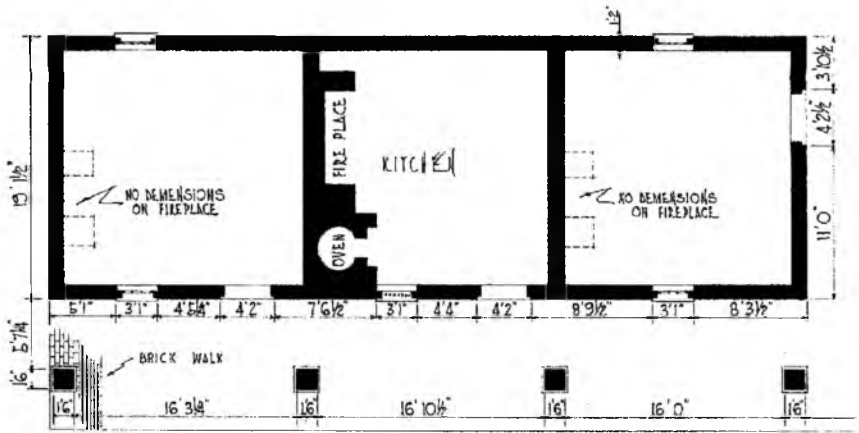
In contrast to the kitchen/servants' wing, the minor accessory structures were of much cruder construction. The two surviving structures, a well house and a storage building (in addition to one slave cabin, much altered), are simply built of massive squared log planks, topped by a gable roof and having dirt floors. It was common for the big house to be of superior materials and workmanship while all other structures, particularly in the country, were of log construction. The majority of small, single-purpose dependencies were built to the same rectangular shape, which meant they were quick and easy to erect and could function for a variety of agricultural uses. The whitewashed well house (opposite top) stands in the front yard near the road, and although no longer in use, it had been electrified in the 20th century. The other remaining service structure (above) stands a short distance behind the main house. Photographs by Ralph Allen, 2006

Today, four of Belle Mina's antebellum structures survive. The kitchen was originally connected to the south side of the main house by a porch. It comprised three rooms, most likely living quarters for the cook and house servants on either end with the kitchen with its large fireplace and rare bake oven in the middle. Today it serves as a family room and study. The other three buildings are identified by their similar

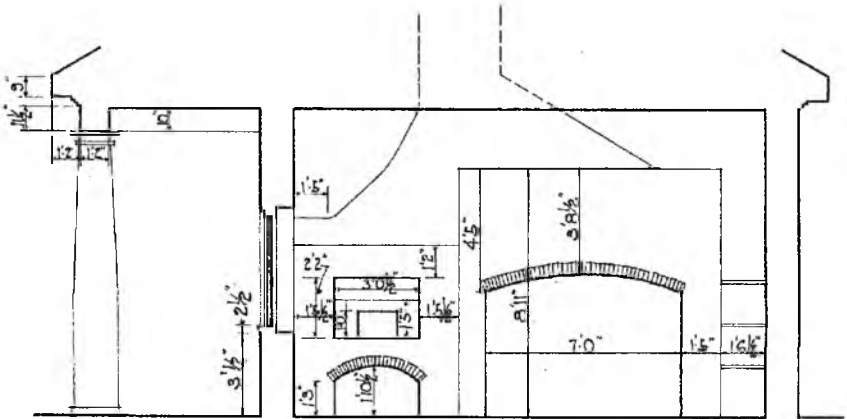


The minor surviving dependencies at Belle Mina have walls of squared log planks measuring roughly 18 inches wide and 4 inches thick square notched at the corners. All had dirt floors, and any openings other than the one wooden door consisted of a wooden shutter that could be opened outward for light and ventilation. The slave cabin was of similar construction but contained a brick fireplace and would have had a plank floor and a plain porch on the front. A former slave from Marysville, Alabama, later recalled that the “log cabins...was daubed with clay to keep the rain and wind out, and the chimneys was made of clay and sticks. The beds was homemade and nailed against the wall with legs on the outer side.” It is unknown how many such cabins would have existed at Belle Mina. Photograph by Ralph Allen, 2006





The brick service wing as drawn in 1934 shows the kitchen in the center room with a servant's room on either side. Apparently food had to be carried from the kitchen along the covered gallery to the dining room. L. A. Wingo, delineator for HABS



This section through the kitchen depicts the arrangement of the cooking fireplace and the bake oven, both of which have been retained and restored. Most cooking was done in the large arched fireplace, but a fire in the smaller arched fireplace to the left heated the expansive, brick-floored oven directly above it for baking breads and cakes. L. A. Wingo, delineator for HABS, 1934

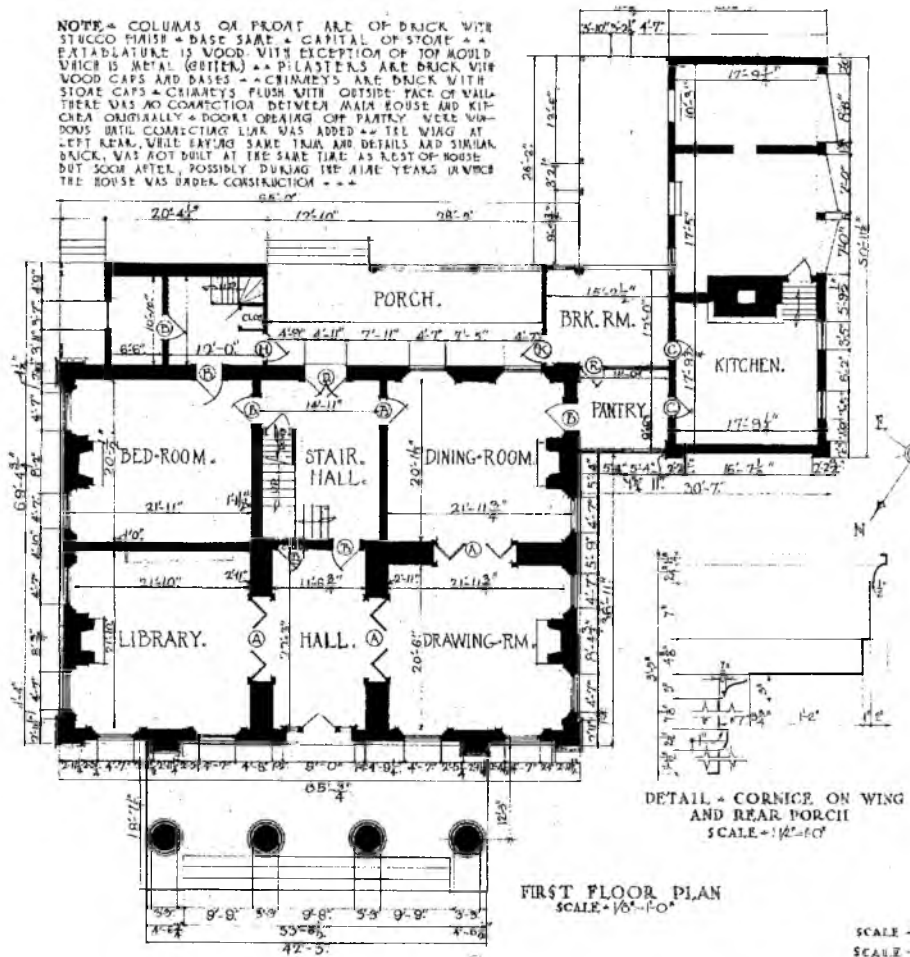
construction of massive hewn log planks joined at the corners by square notching. One structure stands near Mooresville Road and was a well house. Another, at the rear of the house, is unidentified. Both are currently used for storage. The most recognizable structure, a slave cabin, is located some distance from the house above Piney Creek. This location provided easy access to water for the field slaves. At present the cabin is under renovation, and its solid beams will provide the framework for a new residence. The Bibb Cemetery, comprising thirty-four stones when it was surveyed in 1990, lies south of the house.

By comparison, in Huntsville with stores for supplies and the Courthouse Square only a few blocks away, the Williams Avenue home needed only a few outbuildings. The 1861 Hartley & Drayton map of Huntsville and the 1894 Sanborn insurance map depict a two-story brick kitchen and servants' house connected to the southwestern corner of the house by an open porch. Another porch connected this wing with a two-story smokehouse. In 1861 there were three small unidentified buildings near the house and a few others near the rear property line. By 1894 a coalhouse stood near the kitchen wing and a barn was located on the back of the lot.⁷

Currently only the kitchen wing survives. In the 1920s the original kitchen was incorporated into the main house by enclosing a porch and is still in use today, although its large fireplace has been removed. The two upstairs rooms are used for storage and retain much of the original woodwork. The foundation of the other two rooms on the ground floor was lowered for use as a garage and tool room.

Today, both Belle Mina and the Williams Avenue home stand as a testament to Thomas Bibb's affluence and taste. The outbuildings depict southern society in the 19th century and offer insight into its planter caste system.

PATRICIA H. RYAN



This HABS plan of the first floor of the Bibb-Hutchens house drawn in 1934 clearly illustrates the relationship of the separate kitchen wing to the dining room in the main house. Presumably the two were originally connected by a covered passage, which has now been enclosed. Wilfred R. Van Valkenburgh, delineator for HABS.



A view of the southwest corner of the Bibb-Hutchens house reveals the still standing, although modified, antebellum service wing which contained the original kitchen (located behind the two windows at the far left) and the servants' quarters. A columned porch along the east side of the service building also survives. In the 20th century, this building was modified to create two garages, and the open connection with the main house was enclosed to create a breakfast room and an indoor passage between the kitchen and the dining room. A smokehouse located directly south of this building has been lost. Photograph by Ralph Allen, 2006

Notes

- 1 Thomas McAdory Owen, *History of Alabama and Dictionary of Alabama Biography* (Spartanburg, South Carolina: Reprint Co., 1978), 3:147; Will Book 5, 439-443, Limestone County, Alabama, typed facsimile.
- 2 Robert Gamble, *The Alabama Catalog, Historic American Buildings Survey, A Guide to the Early Architecture of the State* (University, Alabama: University of Alabama Press, 1987), 260.
- 3 Bibb's will, dated February 14, 1839, mentions his slave Anderson, a brick-layer. It is likely he owned other skilled workmen. Will Book 5, 439-443, Limestone County, Alabama, typed facsimile.
- 4 Gamble, 12.
- 5 "FOR SALE," *Southern Advocate*, 9 August 1836; William Stubno, Jr., *A Report Concerning the Construction Date of the Governor Thomas Bibb Mansion, Located in the Twickenham Historic District, Huntsville, Alabama* (Huntsville: unpublished), 5. In 1836 Governor and Mrs. Bibb sold the home to their son-in-law James Bradley. Unfortunately, Bradley's financial instability brought about the sale of the property to Andrew Beirne in 1844, and it remained in the Beirne family until 1920. In 1927 the home returned to Bibb descendants and remains in their ownership today.
- 6 "BELMINA FOR SALE," *Southern Advocate*, 1 March 1836; Stubno, 10, note 10. For whatever reasons, Belle Mina did not sell, and Bibb descendants retained ownership until about 1940.
- 7 "City of Huntsville, Madison County, Ala." (Louisville, Ky.: Hartley & Drayton, 1861); "Huntsville, Alabama" (New York: Sanborn-Perris Map Co., 1894), sheet 6.

Northeast Huntsville Neighbors:

The Chapman-Johnson and Robinson-Jones Houses

Amid familiar elements of modern life—increasing traffic, road expansion, real estate development—the Chapman-Johnson house on Dairy Lane, and Quietdale, the Robinson-Jones home on Quietdale Drive, survive as important examples of 19th-century Madison County homesteads.*

The older of the two properties, the Chapman-Johnson house, was built sometime in the late 1830s to 1840s, according to preservation architect

Harvie P. Jones, who based his conclusion on the house's Greek Revival mantels and doors, as well as saw marks and nails. The builder was an early settler named Allen Christian. At one time it was co-owned with another settler, Lemuel Mead, and was surrounded by more than 800 acres of land. ¹



The Chapman-Johnson house “...is a good example of the smaller house constructed in North Alabama during the early 19th century and is one of the few known intact Madison County examples of a one-and-one-half story frame cottage of the period.” ² The house is seen here in a 1970 photograph by Harvie P. Jones, FAIA. Courtesy Architectural Collection of Harvie P. Jones, Department of Archives, M. Louis Salmon Library, University of Alabama in Huntsville

Over the years the plantation home has been known by a several names: the Withers House; Woodgreen; Monte Sano Cottage; Gladstone Place. The property passed through various hands until 1873, when Reuben Chapman II, Alabama's 13th governor (1847-1849), bought it. Known locally then as the Withers place (see



*The servants' quarters, described in the National Register nomination as a "c. 1870 saddlebag" structure, is situated slightly northwest of the main house. The clapboarded building has a side-gabled roof continuous over an inset porch with chamfered posts. The house rests on limestone piers and features a central limestone chimney between two rooms. There are two four-panel doors in front, and one window bay each on the east and west end walls.³ It is possible that Allen Christian's family lived on a nearby site in an early version of this 1870s structure. Dorothy Scott Johnson understood Harvie Jones to say that the building's two fireplace mantels date from the early 19th century, years before the presumed c. 1830-1840 construction of the main house. Moreover, the Chapman family told the Johnsons that the servants' quarters had been moved from "The Grove," an area east of the main house. The move to the present site would have come sometime after 1884 as the plat of that date shows a structure in The Grove location, but not one on the present site. * Photograph by Diane Ellis, 2006*

plat p. 38), it had been owned for 24 years by Philip Woodson and occupied by his daughter and son-in-law, Mary and Augustine Withers, who called it Woodgreen.

Woodgreen was a 342-acre plantation at the time of Governor Chapman's purchase.

Chapman had owned a plantation nearby, west of what is now Maysville Road, which was confiscated during the Civil War and used by Union troops to billet a black regiment. A Freedmen's Bureau and a prison camp for captured blacks also located there. Barracks were built to accommodate the groups and that area became known as Barracks Place (see plat). Chapman's plantation house on Barracks Place was burned in November 1864. Some years ago, part of the house's foundation was discovered underneath a modern residence on the old property.⁵



The tall one-story frame smokehouse, dated late 1800s by Harvie Jones, with its nail-studded door, is slightly northeast of the main house. It appears in its present location on the 1884 plat. The Johnsons added a stable to the back of the smokehouse for two horses they once owned. A privy is believed to have been located somewhere on the rise of land behind the smokehouse. Photograph by Diane Ellis, 2006

Although Governor Chapman never lived on the Dairy Lane property, the homestead was continuously occupied by succeeding generations of the Chapman family until July 1971, when the house and two acres were sold to Walter and Dorothy Scott Johnson. The house and farm have been the site of some well-known Huntsville history. In 1889, Milton Humes, brother-in-law of Reuben Chapman III, and William E. Matthews** established the Monte Sano Dairy, home of Signal's Lily Flagg, the Jersey cow famous for record butterfat production. The dairy changed owners in 1894 when the Matthews family somehow lost the place, but Rosalie Chapman, widowed since Reuben III's death in 1891, moved back into the house with her children and continued the dairy business.



Batten door of Chapman-Johnson smokehouse. Smokehouse doors were often reinforced to deter unauthorized entry. The nail pattern seen here would have discouraged attempts to saw through the door. Photograph by Diane Ellis, 2006

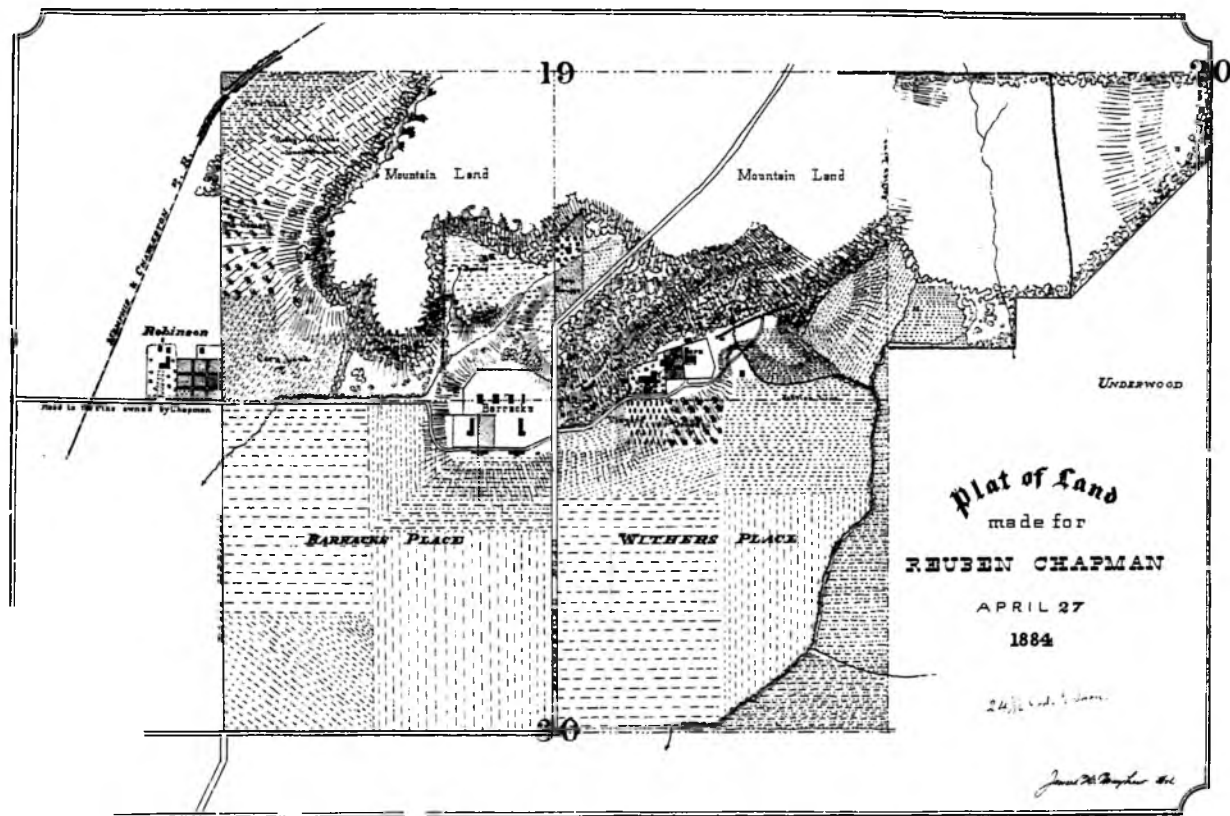
The foundations of a limestone springhouse, built in the Christian-Mead era and said by a Chapman descendant to match the stonework of Governor Chapman's early Barracks Place plantation house, remain in the modern Gladstone Place subdivision near the Dairy Lane property, along with portions of two Monte Sano Dairy buildings. The Chapman-Johnson property was listed in the National Register of Historic Places in 1978. ⁶

Notes

- 1 Dorothy Scott Johnson, personal communication, 2006; Micky Maroney, "The Withers-Chapman-Johnson House: A Plantation Cottage," *Historic Huntsville Quarterly of Local Architecture and Preservation*, Vol. XV, No. 3, Spring 1989, 10-11; Huntsville Branch, American Association of University Women, *Glimpses Into Antebellum Homes of Historic Huntsville, Alabama* (Huntsville: Completely Revised Ninth Edition, 1999), 71.
- 2 National Register of Historic Places Inventory—Nomination Form, Withers-Chapman Home, Prepared by W. Warner Floyd, Executive Director, and Ellen Mertins, Alabama Historical Commission, Montgomery, Alabama, August 17, 1978.
- 3 NR; Maroney, 8.
- 4 Johnson, pc, 2006.
- 5 Maroney, 14-16; Johnson, pc, 2006, citing Nancy Rohr, *Incidents of the War: the Civil War Journal of Mary Jane Chadick* (Huntsville, AL: Silver Threads Publishing, 2005), 228; Johnson, pc, 2006.
- 6 Johnson, pc, 2006; Maroney, 16; Maroney, 18; Johnson, pc, 2006.

*Former *Quarterly* editor and writer Micky Maroney devoted the Spring 1989 issue of the publication to the Chapman-Johnson house, and a good part of the 1983 Spring/Summer *Quarterly* to the Robinson-Jones home. This writer has relied heavily on Maroney's work for the two brief historical summaries appearing here.

**For information on William E. Matthews and his family's activities in Limestone and Madison counties, see *Historic Huntsville Quarterly of Local Architecture and Preservation*, Vol. 31, Numbers 1-2, Spring/Summer 2005. Copies of *Historic Huntsville Quarterly*s are on file in the Heritage Room of the Huntsville-Madison County Public Library.



The ell-shaped Chapman-Johnson residence and the smokehouse are shown on what was then called the Withers Place. A structure located in the wooded area east of the house, conjectured to be the original slave/servants' quarters, is visible on the larger original plat. Across Brownsboro Road (now Maysville Road) is Governor Chapman's Barracks Place. Slightly north and west is the Robinson property, now called Quietdale. In the "road to the Pike owned by Chapman" notation, "Pike" refers to the present Meridian Street.



Quietdale, south front, a house that preservation architect Harvie P. Jones described in his Quietdale photograph book as showing “3 period influences in one: Fed. shape; Greek Revival interior details; Italianate porches (not original).” Slave quarters partially visible at rear. Photograph by Harvie P. Jones, FAIA. Courtesy Ira and Billie Jones

Not far over the mountain slope from the Chapman-Johnson house is Quietdale, the home since 1985 of Ira and Billie Jones. (see “Robinson” notation on plat p.38) Quietdale is a plantation residence constructed on a grander scale. It was built sometime between 1853 and 1858 by the widow of William Robinson, “one of the most prosperous landowners and businessmen in the county,” who acquired the land during his tenure as Madison County’s “high” sheriff (1842-52). During those years, Robinson obtained lumber and other

materials for the house he carefully planned but died before it could be built. His widow, Caroline, saw that it was constructed to her husband’s specifications, using the labor and expertise of their numerous slaves. Although Robinson purportedly owned an early brick manufacturing company in the area, he chose to build a frame house.¹

The Robinson property had been owned by a succession of early Huntsville and Madison County residents, including John Williams Walker, John F. Newman, William Fleming (who sold it to Lemuel Mead—co-owner for a time with Allen Christian of the nearby Chapman-Johnson property)—and Erskine Mastin.

Uncertainty surrounds not only how and when Sheriff Robinson came to own the land, but also what was on the land before Caroline had the house built. Maroney notes that the property “... is known to have had earlier dwellings and outbuildings constructed on it.” Adding to the mystery of the land’s earlier history is “an inscription reading ‘Quietdale 1840’ located in the cement top step of a brick stairway



Nearby carriage house/barn showing alterations for changing uses over the years. Photograph by Linda Allen, 2004.

leading down to the root cellar under the slave quarters/kitchen building.” Perhaps a previous owner called the plantation Quietdale before the Robinsons acquired it. It’s also possible that the present six-room slave quarters (five rooms plus kitchen) located next to the house was built on the site of a previous structure.²

Quietdale’s exterior and interior reflect a mix of transitional architectural and stylistic trends circulating in the mid-19th century. The house has been described variously as Georgian, Federal, and Greek Revival—terms that involve matters of scale, according to Linda Allen. Whichever term one prefers, Quietdale, says Allen, “... retains the classical symmetry to which more stylish ornaments have been attached.” Stylish ornaments seen in the house’s main porch, for example, illustrate the blended borrowings of Quietdale’s design influences. Allen describes the details of the porch as “Gothic-inspired,” noting “octagonal columns supporting shallow Tudoresque arches,” and Italianate-influenced pilasters and “small, scroll-cut porch brackets.”

Allen further noted that “both the Gothic and Italianate revivals were part of the same romantic movement that began circulating in Alabama in the 1850s. At the start, people seldom constructed a full-blown example in the revival style, but rather selected decorative elements for inclusion in a traditional structure; and since both Gothic and Italianate arrived more or less together, they tended to be intermixed. Hence we get vernacular building. I suspect that Quietdale was built in the late 1850s during this transitional period and probably over several years, allowing time for various stylistic features to be included as work went along.”³



Large barn, possibly 1920s. Courtesy Ira and Billie Jones

An icehouse, a large smokehouse, a later greenhouse, and a well house are known to have been on the Robinson-Jones property. A root cellar was located under the slave quarters and its covered entry can still be seen in the Judd photograph. Quietdale was a busy working farm up to the 1940s, says current owner Ira Jones, and a large barn, which Jones believes was built in the 1920s, is still there. There is also a nearby

carriage house/barn of unknown date, and, next to the house, the notable large kitchen/slave quarters built for the house slaves.⁴

The slave quarters is a two-story structure with a porch running the length of the building on both levels. Originally each floor had three doors alternating with three windows on the porch side. Each level was one room deep and three rooms across. Evidence indicates that the rooms were interconnected. Maroney notes that the kitchen was most likely located in the ground floor's south room. Unusual for slave rooms are the plastered walls and ceilings. The ceiling of the upper porch was also plastered. Door transoms with four lights, and windows with nine lights in the



West facade of slave quarters at Quietdale, with covered entry to old root cellar. The “Quietdale” stone was found here in a partially excavated area that Ira Jones believes might have been the foundation of an early cabin. Photograph by S.W. Judd, “one of Huntsville’s most renowned photographers,” according to photographic historian Frances Robb. Born in Tennessee, Judd was in business in Huntsville by 1903, locating first in the present Harvie Jones building on South Side Square until about 1920, then at a studio at 208 Eustis Avenue. He died in 1960.⁶ Courtesy Ira and Billie Jones

upper sash and six in the lower provided ventilation and natural light. The quarters and the main house show similarities in their brick foundations, air vents, beaded weatherboarding of exterior walls, and post-and-beam timber frame construction.⁵ According to Ira Jones, sometime before the 1930s the slave quarters and the main house were connected by a second-story walkway and exterior stairs. That modification was eventually removed. Quietdale was listed in the National Register of Historic Places in 1982.

Notes

- 1 Micky Maroney, "Quietdale," *Historic Huntsville Quarterly of Local Architecture and Preservation*, Vol. IX, Nos. 3 and 4, Spring/Summer 1983, 4; National Register of Historic Places nomination, prepared by Robert S. Gamble, Architectural Historian, Alabama Historical Commission, n.d.; Maroney, 4.
- 2 Maroney, 4, 5, 3.
- 3 Linda Bayer Allen, personal communication, 2006.
- 4 Huntsville Branch, American Association of University Women, *Glimpses Into Antebellum Homes of Historic Huntsville, Alabama* (Huntsville: Completely Revised Ninth Edition, 1999), 68; Maroney, 15; AAUW, 68.
- 5 Maroney, 15-16.
- 6 Diane Ellis, "Staying Power: 128 South Side Square Withstands the Tests of Time," *Historic Huntsville Quarterly of Local Architecture and Preservation*, Vol. XXVI, No. 3, Fall 2000, 12.

The Lewis-Clay House

Tracing the time of construction of most antebellum outbuildings is usually based on conjecture. The task is especially difficult for researchers documenting structures that no longer exist, as in the case of the now-demolished outbuilding that was formerly located just to the west of the Lewis-Clay house at 513 Eustis Avenue. Fortunately, public and private documents help us fill in some of the gaps about what was once part of the homestead.



*The Lewis-Clay house today located at 513 Eustis Avenue.
Photograph by Ralph Allen, 2006*

The c.1830 house itself was built on 2.8 acres of land adjacent to the Huntsville Female Seminary, which was known as the Steward's lot because the house served as both the steward's home and a boarding house for teachers and out-of-town students. It was advertised in the January 13, 1831, *Huntsville Democrat* as follows: a "Boarding House under the superintendence of Mr. & Mrs. Leech & at which the Teachers will board, is attached to the Seminary..."

On the first page of the *Democrat*, August 23, 1836, however, the Seminary property was offered for sale and now included two large two-story brick tenements, "one of which has hitherto been occupied as the boarding house and has a kitchen, smoke house, servants-house & other out-buildings with a well of fine water.... To be auctioned Sept. 5." Deed records show that Preston and Agnes Yeatman purchased



This HABS photograph from 1934 shows the arrangement of the two buildings, the main house and its equally big dependency. The accessory structure is not connected to the house and is located perpendicular to and slightly behind it with its gable end facing the street. The effect was to create a partially enclosed courtyard behind the house. Photograph by W. N. Manning

the property for \$5,100 in September of 1836. Two years later it was sold to John H. Lewis for the same amount. ¹

John H. Lewis, a man of means with a growing family, soon felt the need for a new outbuilding. The approximate date of the addition is found in a letter from his wife, Mary (Betts) Lewis, to her daughter Mary Lewis, who was in Paris. While this newsy letter from home is undated, it was written after the newest Lewis baby's birth on April 24, 1844. In the letter Mrs. Lewis describes the functions and quality of the new building.

While I write to you in a neat little office I had fitted up for Pa in the new outbuilding which also serves as a dressing room adjoining and entering into a neat little bathing room which you will like, our sweet little babe whom we call "the little white lady" for she is as snow or Pearls rather is lying near me on a lounge...

Sally is careful with her children and as neat in the making their clothes and dressing them every day as I am, and they are as well behaved as necessary for any young children. They all have much finer and better built rooms than we have. Pa has taken down the old buildings and put up a very handsome two story row of rooms numbering 12 and they occupy 6 of them. ² [emphasis added]



The north and east walls of the Lewis-Clay dependency show a major, two-story brick structure having inset galleries on both floors facing the back yard, supported by two-story, square brick columns. The scale, construction, and details indicate that this structure was intended to serve as more than a kitchen and servants' quarters. Demolished. Photograph by Alex Bush for HABS, 1935



This photograph of the back yard of the Lewis-Clay house is interesting for its uncommon view of the rear of the house and the placement of the service building. One sees life being lived—with clothes drying on the line, a rocking chair and swing set, and what appears to be a puppy sitting at one end of a child's seesaw. Landscaping is minimal, indicating that this was more of a work yard than a showplace. Photograph by W. N. Manning for HABS, 1934

In the 1935 HABS narrative attributed to Pat Jones we find the following information.

John H. Lewis: A Virginian, married Mary Betts. Added brick out house which contained kitchen, servants quarters, smoke house and wine cellar, and contained more rooms than the dwelling itself.³

The new building's cost is also traceable. According to *The Old Mahogany Table Tales* published in the *Huntsville Democrat* on December 8, 1909, John H. Lewis lost a bet in the 1844 presidential election when James K. Polk, a Democrat, won and Lewis's candidate, Henry Clay, a Whig, lost. "John H. Lewis lost and paid \$7000 for a brick kitchen building with thirteen rooms instead of \$3500 if Henry Clay had been elected."⁴

Deed records indicate that in 1869 the property was sold at auction to Clement

Claiborne Clay for \$500, and in 1870 was deeded to J. Withers Clay, his brother, “for ‘love and affection’ ” in trust as a homestead for J. Withers Clay’s wife and children. It remained in the Clay family until 1935, when it was sold to Walter L. Humphrey for \$5,000. The Clay children had apparently fallen on hard times, as the property had dwindled to less than half an acre. ⁵

John Withers Clay was the son of Clement Comer Clay, who had been governor of Alabama and a member of the U.S. Senate and House of Representatives. After practicing law for two years with his father, John Withers Clay became editor of the *Huntsville Democrat* and remained editor of that paper for forty years. ⁶ Following his death in 1896, two of his daughters, Virginia Clementine Clay and Susannah Withers Clay, edited the *Democrat*. In order to make ends meet, the sisters also ran a private school, using both the house and the outbuilding, where they taught dancing, French and other subjects. Dr. John Rison Jones, a distinguished local historian, remembers that his father took dancing lessons there. Sanborn insurance maps from 1898 to 1908 show the entire property listed as Miss Clay’s Private School. In 1913 the outbuilding was listed as “Store Ho.”; in 1921 as “Storage”; and 1928 as “vacant.” It is not known when the outbuilding was demolished, although it was still standing in 1935 when HABS photographers documented it.

LYNN JONES

Notes

- 1 Deed Book Q, 121; Deed Book Q, 483, Madison County, Alabama.
- 2 Nancy M. Rohr, *An Alabama School Girl In Paris* (Huntsville, AL: Silver Threads Publishing, 2001), 182, 183.
- 3 Pat Jones, a local historian, wrote anecdotal stories for the *Huntsville Times*.
- 4 *The Old Mahogany Table Tales* by Susannah Withers Clay and Virginia Clementine Clay, granddaughters of John H. Lewis, was a regular column in the *Huntsville Democrat* for a number of years.
- 5 Deed Book BBB, 122; Deed Book BBB, 123; Deed Book 144, 521, Madison County, Alabama.
- 6 Thomas McAdory Owen, LL.D., *History of Alabama and Dictionary of Alabama Biography* (Chicago: The S. J. Clarke Publishing Company, 1921) v. 3, 343.

The Cox-White House

Period newspaper advertisements offering antebellum properties for sale provide a rich source of information about the era's houses and their associated service buildings, helping to date the buildings while providing excellent descriptions of the property. On September 1, 1835, for example, the following advertisement appeared in the *Southern Advocate*:



A 1996 photograph of the Cox-White house and the north wall of its service building located at 612 Eustis Avenue taken by Harvie P. Jones, FAIA. Courtesy Architectural Collection of Harvie P. Jones, Department of Archives, M. Louis Salmon Library, University of Alabama in Huntsville

I offer for sale the house and lot I now occupy situated at the extremity of the avenue that leads to the Female Seminary [then called Maiden Lane, now Eustis Avenue]. The dwelling is in first rate order and the out houses consisting of a Kitchen and Smoke-house, stable, Bath-house etc. are all new, and the lot of 4 acres of ground (part of which will make a good bldg. lot) is enclosed with a new fence. The house stands on a commanding elevation...Geo. Cox

In 1838 Elizabeth and George Cox, Jr., sold the property at what is now the southwest corner of Eustis Avenue and White Street—612 Eustis Avenue—to John R. H. Acklen for \$6,000, who sold it in 1844, six years later, to Thomas White. The property remained in the White family until 1994. Thomas White, a planter, came to Huntsville in 1839. In 1840 he married Susan Bradley, and they had 12 children.

White owned a plantation on each side of the Tennessee River at Whitesburg, and the house on Maiden Lane was the family's town house. White was elected mayor of Huntsville in 1881 and 1882.¹ Major additions to the house were made about 1844; in 1894, according to Susan White's diary, the c. 1844 small Greek Revival entry portico was moved to the rear entry and the present ell-shaped Victorian front verandah was added. The following are the 1894 diary entries:



This undated photograph of the Cox-White house was taken before the small Greek Revival entry portico was moved to the rear entry in 1894 and the present ell-shaped Victorian verandah was added. Courtesy Dr. Rhett and Melanie Murray

Oct.1. Yesterday was one of the very hottest days of the summer, but this morning is cool enough for a fire, with a heavy fog. Mr. Brockus is moving my front porch to the back door.

Oct. 10. My front door and sash have come. I don't know whether I am glad or sorry for everything around me will be so changed. ²

According to information that preservation architect Harvie P. Jones provided the current owners, Dr. Rhett and Melanie Murray, the Cox-White house was built in the Federal style and was a “half-house,” consisting of a side hall on three levels (basement, plus two floors) adjoining two large rooms on each of the three floors, with a small “trunk room” at the north end of the second floor hall. Separate service buildings (six are shown on the 1861 Hartley & Drayton map of Huntsville) contained the kitchen, servants’ quarters, stable etc. Today, Jones noted, “the house is an eclectic evolvement of three major periods of growth and change: Late Federal (c.1836), Greek Revival (c.1844) and late Victorian (c.1894). This casual mixture is its charm.”³

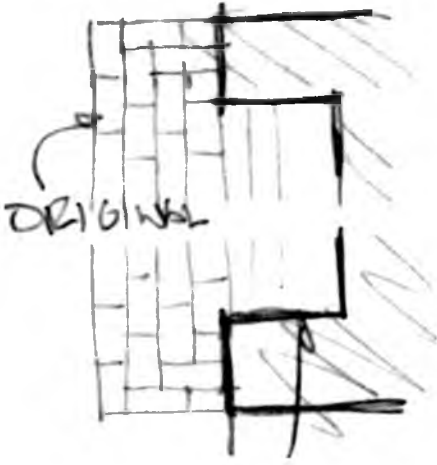
According to Jones, in 1844 “the house was almost doubled in size by the addition of two large rooms (plus the hall extension) on floors 1 and 2 to the rear and a large wing to the east containing two large rooms and a dressing room. Up-to-date Greek Revival trim was installed in most of the interior rooms.” The mantels are

similar to those found in several other c. 1850 houses in this area and were probably installed in the c. 1844 remodeling.⁴

Although the 1861 map shows six separate outbuildings on the grounds, only one of these, a substantial two-story brick structure, remained when the Murrays made their purchase of the two-acre property in 1994. In his report to the Murrays, written October 27, 1994, Harvie Jones noted that “the servants’ rooms were plastered on the interior walls and the ceilings.



The south end of the kitchen building contained the smokehouse and displays a typical diamond-shaped ventilator in the end wall required for proper smoking of meats. Photograph by Lynn Jones, 2006



The fireplace hearth located in the breezeway had bricks laid in this pattern as sketched by Harvie P. Jones, FAIA; he further noted that the side walls of this fireplace were perpendicular to the back wall to retain the heat in the fireplace for cooking (rather than throwing it out into the room), which was a typical feature of fireplaces intended for food preparation. Courtesy Architectural Collection of Harvie P. Jones, Department of Archives, M. Louis Salmon Library, University of Alabama in Huntsville

They were originally heated by stoves rather than fireplaces, a feature not noted [by Jones] in any other pre-1860 service building. Stoves were common in commercial buildings in this period, however.”⁵

A tall brick smokehouse with traditional diamond-shaped vents is located at the south end of the building. A partial second floor dividing the space was added later, probably for storage when the smokehouse was no longer used for smoking meats. Jones also described a breezeway connecting the smokehouse with the servants’ quarters and housing “a rare covered open-air kitchen with its original brick hearth laid in the typical Federal Period pattern where each row of bricks ‘turns the corner,’ with the bricks laid on sand and with no mortar in the tight butt joints.”⁶ There was no evidence that there had been a cooking fireplace in the basement of the house; either this open-air kitchen in the breezeway was the only one, or there was an earlier separate structure that contained a kitchen.

The house and especially the service building were in a very dilapidated condition when the Murrays bought the property. The new owners oversaw a sensitive restoration. In remodeling part of the service building for use as a guest house, as much of the original material as possible was retained. While an outdoor grill was built into the cooking fireplace opening, the original brick hearth remains. The exterior of the smokehouse was repaired and concrete poured over the dirt floor, but the rest of its original interior was left intact. An early carport at the back of the



This HABS photograph illustrates the condition in 1935 of the primary dependency containing the smokehouse, kitchen and five servants' rooms, two down and three up. An early 20th-century garage had been appended to the south end and is now removed. This structure sat perpendicular to the main house and apparently was not connected to it. Photograph by Alex Bush

smokehouse was removed.

Finding useful purposes for service buildings that were once a necessary part of living in the early 19th century, both in town and on large plantations, has resulted in many of them being saved from demolition. Those that remain are an important part of the living history we are privileged to be able to observe, study, and learn from today.

LYNN JONES

Notes

- 1 Thomas McAdory Owen, LL.D., *History of Alabama and Dictionary of Alabama Biography* (Chicago: The S. J. Clarke Publishing Company, 1921), v. 4, 1758.
- 2 Susan White's diary, unpublished, in private collection.
- 3-6 Harvie P. Jones, FAIA, Notes and preservation recommendations presented to Dr. Rhett and Melanie Murray in a letter of October 27, 1994.



The kitchen dependency is seen here after its renovation by Rhett and Melanie Murray. The exterior cooking fireplace referred to is located in the ground floor breezeway which is visible here beneath the upper gallery. Photograph by Lynn Jones, 2006

The McCrary-Thomas House

The McCrary-Thomas house is tucked away in an area that until recently was devoted largely to agriculture. Located several miles from a major road, the house nestles near the Mountain Fork of the Flint River in a serene unspoiled rural setting. Unlike some landowners, Thomas McCrary, its builder, lived on his plantation and did not own a separate town house. Its remote location made it necessary for this family farm to be self-suf-

ficient. What is unique about the property today is the number of outbuildings that remain, even though they were built of wood. In his 1989 nomination of the property for listing on the National Register of Historic Places, Robert Gamble of the Alabama Historical Commission wrote the following:

The land surrounding the house has been cultivated by the same family since a decade before Alabama entered the Union: first as a cotton plantation with slave—then tenant—labor; today, as a diversified and mechanized farm.

With satellite structures that include a log smokehouse, a commissary, a



A side view of the McCrary-Thomas house illustrates three separate phases of construction, with the oldest, two-story section in the center, the replacement house dating from the late 19th century on the right, and the most recent, a frame addition, on the left. Photograph by Ralph Allen, 2006

carriage house, and crib, the McCrary house comprises what is, for the area, an unusually intact 19th-century farm complex.

The present owner, Miss Alice Thomas, is a fourth generation descendant of Thomas McCrary, who, on November 2, 1809, purchased some 480 acres from the



This view along the driveway on the McCrary-Thomas land shows part of the complex of accessory buildings that once dominated the landscape. In the foreground is the commissary, next is the carriage house, and beyond it is the small barn. Photograph by Linda Allen, 2006

Federal Government Land Office in Nashville, Tennessee. McCrary, born in 1789 in South Carolina, became one of the first settlers in the north-eastern part of Madison County. The land on which he was to build his house lay on the west side of the Flint River in a promising cotton-growing area. Over the years he expanded his holdings to include thousands of acres. Besides farming, McCrary operated two tan yards and other mercantile interests. The 1859 Huntsville Directory shows that he was also a member of the firm McCrary,

Patterson, & Sprague—cotton factors, grocers, and commission merchants. Miss Thomas has the large family Bible, which lists Thomas McCrary's numerous slaves and their birth dates. The 1850 county census shows 89. Miss Thomas was told that the slaves were housed in small brick buildings farther away from the house. Apparently these quarters were demolished. According to Miss Thomas, each slave was taught a trade, so that there was a community of weavers, shot makers, tailors, blacksmiths, etc., living and working there. In the National Register nomination, Gamble discusses the original structures that would have been on the land.

Exactly when McCrary built the first permanent residence on his Flint River place is unclear. Federal period woodwork reused in the present



The McCrary-Thomas property still retains two barns, which probably date from the late 19th century. This is the smaller one and like the smokehouse has had a small shed added to each side. It continues the tradition of building farm dependencies to a rectangular plan with gable roof and entries under the gables. This is the smaller of the two barns and was once whitewashed. Photograph by Ralph Allen, 2006

house when its predecessor was demolished would seem to indicate a date no later than the 1820's. Whatever its date of construction, McCrary's early house was a two-story brick structure with a central hall. There was a cellar beneath, while the kitchen was located in a separate building to the rear. Some years after completing the main block of the house, Thomas McCrary added a raised ell at the southeast rear. Stylistic evidence suggests that this occurred about 1840.

Subsequent changes to the house included replacing the original residence with a one-story structure, probably about 1873. Only the ell-addition remains of the earlier house, a two-story brick structure. The kitchen was still connected only by

an open passage beyond the south end of the ell until about 1909. Porches were also added to the front and east side of the house at the turn of the century.

The house and the 500 acres surrounding it were inherited by Miss Alice McCrary Thomas in 1970 and she continues to live there today. Miss Thomas is the daughter of John R. and Mamie (McCrary) Thomas. In 1980 Miss Thomas called on preser-



The McCrary-Thomas smokehouse is a rare surviving wooden example. Raised slightly off the ground, it has generous sheltering eaves projecting over the entry side and features board and batten siding over the log construction. The deep eaves on the front provided a place to hang the pig while it was being butchered prior to moving it inside. The door is constructed of vertical boards, and the sloped-roof shed on the left is a later addition. Both have been whitewashed, which was a standard treatment for farm structures. The importance of the smokehouse to antebellum life becomes clear when one realizes that pork was the primary meat consumed in the South, and that there were no commercial processors; it has been estimated that a small plantation of twenty slaves would need to preserve and store some two tons of meat each year. Photograph by Ralph Allen, 2006

vation architect Harvie P. Jones to design a keeping room with a kitchen and sitting area to replace the old kitchen behind the ell.

Existing dependencies include a log smokehouse, possibly dating from the early 19th century, now covered with siding. A “shop” abutting the smokehouse may be nearly as old, according to Gamble. Inside the smokehouse are two large hollowed logs for salting meats, and a sunken fire pit in which a large iron pot would have been placed to contain the smoking fire. Several of these pots can be seen lying outside. Nearby is a later frame commissary that once served tenant families, and a beautifully proportioned frame carriage house. A large 19th-century “crib,” or barn, and a 20th-century gambrel-roofed barn immediately west of the



Even more rare is that inside this smokehouse one finds the facilities still in place for preserving meat. Prior to smoking, the meat would be placed in a salting trough, made from a hollowed out tree trunk (top), which began the preservation process with a dry salting that could last up to six weeks. The next step was to suspend the pig parts from rafters above the pit in the middle of the floor (bottom) where a fire was kept smoldering day and night for a week to produce the smoke that would permeate the meat with a specific flavor determined by the choice of fuel. The preserved meat was then allowed to hang in place until needed, which converted the smokehouse into a storage building for much of the year. Photographs by Ralph Allen, 2006



This small rectangular structure was the commissary. Presumably its use as such dates from the post-Civil War period when it was common for owners to make available certain goods for purchase by their sharecroppers. Like the smokehouse, it has a gable roof with door and windows in the gable end and is sided with board and batten. The windows were simply openings with exterior, diagonal board shutters, and the double-leaf door also was constructed of diagonal boards; both doors and shutters are decorated with an overall pattern of nail heads similar to that seen on the door of the Chapman-Johnson smokehouse. Inside, crude shelves still line the walls where goods once were displayed. Photograph by Linda Allen, 2006

crib complete the picture. Until 1980, a well house stood just south of the keeping room wing. Most of these outbuildings are whitewashed and kept in good condition by Miss Thomas. This 19th-century farmhouse with its collection of service buildings, still in its unspoiled rural setting, and still under McCrary ownership, offers a rare opportunity to broaden our knowledge of early North Alabama plantation life. It is important that it continue to be preserved if at all possible.

LYNN JONES

Sources

National Register of Historic Places nomination, prepared by Robert S. Gamble, Architectural Historian, Alabama Historical Commission; property listed 1982.

Huntsville Branch, American Association of University Women, *Glimpses Into Antebellum Homes of Historic Huntsville, Alabama* (Huntsville: Completely Revised Ninth Edition, 1999), 73.

Conversations with Miss Alice Thomas.



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