

TRUE TALES OF OLD MADISON COUNTY

(ALABAMA)



Virgil Carrington (PAT) Jones



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of
Old Madison County
(Alabama)

Publication of *True Tales of Old Madison County*, in reprint, is timely recognition of the contribution of Virgil Carrington "Pat" Jones to the enrichment of our history. It is my pleasure to grant permission for this **Historic Huntsville Foundation** reprint.

Dorothy Scott Johnson
December 1992

TRUE TALES OF OLD MADISON COUNTY

(ALABAMA)

Tales of early Madison County
Pioneers and their historic old
homes.

By:

VIRGIL CARRINGTON (PAT) JONES

A

Johnson Historical Publication

Huntsville, Alabama

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The illustrations throughout the book are by Mrs. Robert Light. Her interest in local history and enthusiasm for the stories of Pat Jones are reflected in the intensity of her illustrations.

Karl Swartzel is credited with most of the photographs throughout this book. Not only is his photographic talent appreciated but also his patience and spirit in helping to locate and get to some of the subjects.

The photograph of the remains of the High-Brown-Routt mansion (The Haunted House of Hazel Green) is by Howard Gruder of New York City. Mr. Gruder braved an Alabama summer's crop of poison ivy and snakes to take the photograph on Page 20.

The photograph of the McCrary home on Page 14 is by M. R. "Steve" Stevens. A special note of appreciation is due Mr. Stevens for taking this photograph on very short notice the day before the manuscript was due to go to the printer.

The enthusiasm, encouragement and cooperation of Mrs. Richard H. Gilliam, Jr., President of the Tennessee Valley Genealogical Association, has been inspirational in compiling this work. Mrs. Gilliam also contributed the priceless photographs of two of her ancestors, J. O. Kelly on Page 70, and Charles Waite Strong on Page 41.



Introduction

In the early 1930's, Virgil Carrington "Pat" Jones, a young writer, contributed a number of historical articles on Madison County which were published by The Huntsville Times. Mr. Jones spent countless hours researching his material and presented the public with factual and highly entertaining data on the colorful facets of Madison County, Alabama, history.

Of this history, Mr. Jones states: "...something should be done to acquaint Huntsville residents with the history of their area. It is rich and important, from the standpoint of the county, the state, and the nation. Not long after I went to The Times as a reporter in 1931, I began to read and hear of it and got an urge to put more of it in print. . . ."

"It kept me pretty busy. On week days, I put in a daily stint as city editor of the paper - 7 a. m. to 4 p. m. Then, after I got off from work, I would go out on my own and dig up the information from the courthouse files, the court records, surveyors' records and interviews. In my routine, I spent the week-ends and the first four days of each week gathering material. On Friday nights, after dinner at Mrs. T. W. Freeman's on Lincoln Street where I boarded my early years in Huntsville, I would begin writing. The article had to be ready the next morning in order to appear in the Sunday paper. More than once I have gone to sleep at the typewriter, but was always up in time to report for work next morning and always with the article finished. I sometimes devoted more than 90 hours a week to them and to writing news stories.

"I began by writing historical features, something I liked to do, and turned in one about every week-end. After a time, the managing editor, the late Reese Amis, suggested I write the series of stories on the old homes. When that was completed - I did 50 or more as I recall - I continued with the feature articles on any bits of history I could uncover. Some of the most amazing stories I ever heard were there."

Now, some thirty-odd years later, countless new faces

have appeared on the Huntsville-Madison County scene and they hunger for the information Mr. Jones contributed, information which would have been lost in time's march forward had someone not cared enough to preserve it then.

Dorothy Scott Johnson
Editor



In The Beginning - DANGER !

Rattlesnakes, rather than Indians, caused John Hunt his greatest alarm when he first came to the Big Spring to build his cabin, Anne Royall, early American woman journalist, wrote after a visit to Huntsville in 1818.

Her letter is perhaps the earliest personal record on the settlement of the community. Included in it are many details on this first English settled town in the state.

Hunt's water supply came solely from the immense spring near his cabin. This pool lay amid a mass of rock at the foot of a wooded cliff.

When the pioneer went near the spring, however, his presence was proclaimed from the rocks by rattlers in uncertain numbers. They seemed to be everywhere and he was forced to step with care to avoid their fangs.

These neighbors bothered John. He could outfight or outsmart an Indian, but here was need for some other type of warfare. He scratched his head and pondered deeply until he finally hit upon a plan.

Long canes were hollowed and filled with powder. These were shoved back among the fissures of the rocks and the charge ignited. Weeks of this went by before the settler was able to fill his gourd without the usual greeting from the reptiles.

Only two or three years before the snake-killing experience John Hunt and Andrew Bean, on their way to Alabama from Tennessee, sat quietly on their horses amid a dense thicket and watched a party of Indians pass along a vale below. Andrew had saved them from possible trouble for it had been his eye which had detected the band as it topped a rise nearly two miles distant.

When the Redskins finally disappeared in the distance, Hunt drew from the pocket of his buckskin shirt several bits

of leaf tobacco, crushed them in the palm of his hand and packed a stubby black pipe.

"Tis' here we should have our next vittles, Andrew," he said, producing from his saddlebag a small flint and steel. "The foire we make will loight me poipe."

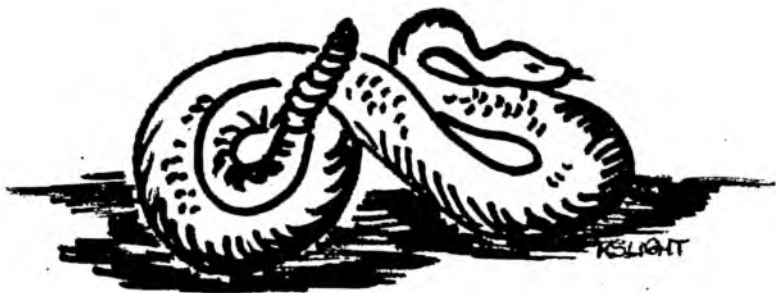
Together they dismounted. Hunt hung his beaver skin cap upon a nearby limb and started a small fire from wood he had selected with care. The fire burned with an intense heat but gave off only the slightest wisp of smoke.

Equally well acquainted with his fair share of the duties connected with their means among the forest, Bean cut several strips of jerked venison with the large knife he carried in his belt. Scarcely twice during their repast did they speak.

What picturesque pioneers - these two bearded Irishmen! Simple but determined in their actions, honest as the manner in which they lived, their very existence depended upon fearlessness - a characteristic they recognized as a natural attribute.

Hunt, the older of the two, had come from Ireland only a few years before. Standing five feet, ten inches in height, his 180 pounds were a mass of flexible steel. His courage and endurance were immeasurable. He was fond of hardships, adventure and daring, but he was valued most among those early frontiersmen for his caution.

His companion, a single man, was no less an outstanding pioneer, and was noted for his courage. His friendly Irish eyes, set in a sandy head above a tall and lithe frame, reminded one of a smile, and did little to indicate that he was as active and stealthy as an Indian.



Isaac Criner, First Permanent White Settler

Just as the beginning of Huntsville lies about John Hunt's cabin which once overlooked the Big Spring, so is the early history of New Market wrapped around the home of Isaac Criner. Isaac, who with his uncle, Joseph, and his cousin, Stephen McBroom, is recalled as one of the first three men to settle in Madison County.

The present structure, built between 1836 and 1840, is still in a sound state on an exposed knoll overlooking a narrow little valley leading south between the ridges of the Cumberland foothills. It is the successor to two log cabins, gone years ago, one a quarter of a mile away and the other on the site of the home.

Both the dwelling and the larger part of the estate, through these more than 160 years, have remained in the pioneer's family and without burden of mortgage.

Several sources of information in regard to this father of all local residents are available. Early histories, state and county records, old newspapers, data preserved by the family and older persons who remember Criner before he died at the age of 93 in 1876, contribute to the account.

In 1803 or 1804, Isaac and his two companions followed the general movement which had brought white families down into Tennessee and Georgia. They crossed the mountains by way of the old immigrant trail, now the Winchester Road, and explored the northern part of the county around New Market. They found promising country, virgin forests and rich soil, and returned to East Tennessee for their families.

Upon coming back to this section during the Spring of 1805, they began their homes, living probably in crude shacks until the more substantial quarters could be completed.

Joseph's cabin was the first erected and was located some

miles away from the spot chosen by Isaac. Mr. McBroom, the last of the three to build, settled his family near Gurley.

While the first to settle in the county, these men were not the first to reach it. John Ditto had come to Huntsville as early as 1802 and had built a shack beside the spring, but he was an explorer and trader so bought no land. Soon afterwards he removed to Ditto's Landing on the Tennessee River and established a ferry.

John Hunt is also mentioned as the first white settler but before his death, Criner told of Mr. Hunt's arrival in the county.

Samuel Davis came to the Big Spring prior to Hunt, Isaac recalled, and started the foundation of a cabin but left it uncompleted to return to his family. Just after the Criners had moved into Joseph's home, Hunt, accompanied by David Bean, stopped there for the night. The next morning they continued on their way, carrying with them bread which had been baked especially for them. Upon reaching the spring they found the work left by Davis. Bean helped Hunt finish the cabin but was dissatisfied with the country and went back to Tennessee to settle near Salem on a creek later named after him.

When Davis returned and found Hunt occupying the shack he had started he changed his original plans and settled near New Market.

Unbroken wilderness lay over this section in 1805 and the settlers acquired a habit of living to themselves. Because of this fact it is impossible to know just how many families came into the county during that year but it is a certainty that the Davises, Walkers, Campbells, Browns, Baylesses, Rices, Matthews, McCains and Reeces also arrived soon after the others mentioned.

In addition to his uncle, Joseph, Isaac was accompanied upon his return by his mother, Rebecca, whom he had brought from that part of No. Carolina which later became Tennessee. Rebecca had migrated to that area from the German colonies in Pennsylvania. Isaac also had with him at that time his younger brother, Granville, who settled here and later removed to Texas.

For the site of the little two-room cabin he was to erect, Isaac had selected a spot near a spring on Mountain Fork of Flint River from which flowed a stream of clear water as large as that from the spring in Huntsville. This location

was three-quarters of a mile from the boundary line of the land acquired by the government from the Cherokee and Chickasaw Indians. It was situated in a narrow strip that was not bought from the Cherokees until 1819.

Criner often referred to the fact that he and his family were chased from their home by U. S. regulars and that he would move over into the 1805 purchase until the soldiers departed. He also alluded to the time his cabin was burned by the Indians. This may have been the occasion on which he erected the larger log structure near the site of the present home. Isaac had quite a bit of other trouble of a negligible nature with the Indians. He and his family built up an early friendship with the nearby tribes, exchanged gifts with them and confessed no fear of bodily harm at their hands but his property fared none too well. Any article, even a pot or pan left on the outside of the cabin at night most assuredly was to be missing the next morning. There was no shooting at prowling thieves while a horde of redskins occupied the hills which surrounded them.

Due to his small quarters and large family, his mother and wife kept their looms in a shed near the cabin. Several times they returned to their work the next morning to find that the finished cloth had been cut away during the night. At last they formed the habit of laboring until the small hours to complete the needed piece and then took it inside with them.

On another occasion a hive of bees was found missing. As he passed the Indian settlement a few days later, Criner was invited in to have a bite to eat. Much to his surprise, he was offered honey - and it was not wild honey. Over this he often chuckled.

Though the valley in which the Criners lived is now a rich farming tract, this was not always the case. When Isaac first settled there it was covered with trees and thick cane-brake. One night as he looked out over this jungle from his cabin on the hill, there echoed through the bottom a plaintive cry, as of some wild animal. Shouldering his gun and with the aid of a torch, he went to investigate. Less than half a mile from his door he found a woman from another settler's family, lost in the maze.

Criner hired two negro carpenters, slaves, to build the present home from yellow poplar. A year was required

for the work. The second cabin he had erected was moved back to make way for the new building and later was turned into slave quarters.

In planning his home, Criner arranged it with intentions of adding to it as he needed. The idea never materialized, however, for the Civil War interfered.

Seven rooms were laid off with the four larger chambers composing the main part of the house. A dividing wall entirely shut off from each other the two upstairs rooms. To pass from one into the other it was necessary to come back to the first floor and climb a separate stairway. This was devised so that the girls could have the privacy of one side of the dwelling and the boys the other.

Huge fireplaces were built at each end of the home downstairs. Ceilings were low and windows were few and small. All material, including the weatherboarding, was cut by hand.

To carry out the plan of a plantation mansion, he ordered a wide, double porch at the front of the house. Entrance to the upper veranda was gained only from the boys' side of the upstairs rooms.

Slave quarters were placed at the back and on the west side. Other outbuildings included a big smoke-house of cedar logs, a large kitchen with an immense fireplace, and a store room.

When the house was completed Criner moved into it with his wife, Nancy McCain, whom he had married in this county in 1814. His mother had died in 1826 in the second log cabin.

Isaac's family consisted of 12 children, nine daughters and three sons, all of whom were born at the time they occupied the new home, as follows: Lucinda, wife of James Scott; Rebecca Jane, wife of James Franklin Scurlock; Alfred, who married Elizabeth Walker; Mahala, unmarried; Isaac McClure, who married Lucy James Strong, parents of Mrs. George Okes, Frankford, Mo.; Nancy, wife of Charles Edwin Whiting, later defeated as governor of Iowa on the Democratic ticket; Elizabeth, wife of William Newton Flippin; Louisa, wife of Newell A. Whiting, Cleveland, Ohio; Martha Woodson, wife of William Henderson Moore, Lincoln County, Tennessee.

As soon as the family became settled, their new home was turned into one of the most beautiful in this section.

A large lawn, separated from the back by a row of cedars, was laid off and planted with nearly every variety of flower known to this part of the country. Large shade trees towered above, casting such a shadow that the place was called "Shady Hill".

The garden at the rear was divided into four squares and was separated by wide walks bordered with flowers. Each of these later was assigned to a daughter who, aided by slaves, saw to its care with the desire to have her section look better kept than those of the others. More than one sly thrust at romance occurred while these girls showed their suitors about their respective plots.

As Criner advanced in age and his fortune increased in size, including as assets land in Jackson County and other acreage in Iowa, this home became a veritable retreat for the man who dared the wilds of the Mississippi Territory. He loved music, especially that of the violin, and the gayety of young people about him. More than once crowds of visitors from Huntsville and other nearby communities enjoyed the favors of his hospitality.

On balmy summer evenings he sat there on the veranda of his mansion and gazed out into the darkness. Faint lights twinkling in the distance marked the young settlement of New Market which had grown up while he watched. Only a few feet from his door Mountain Fork rolled along almost silently in the direction of the town. Occasionally, the sound of some animal, most likely that of a heifer among his large herds of cattle, floated faintly up from the valley, while at the rear darkies murmured contentedly among themselves.

These negroes, descendants of whom still are to be found in the county, were loyal to their master. Many of the 40 or more remained on the plantation for years after the war, while only one ran away to join the Union Army.

Locked in the peace of the valley, only honesty and a man's word were encountered in the dealings of these people. Neighborliness was the backbone of their livelihood. A bucket dispatched for sugar or syrup or lard was expected to come back filled. And once, Joseph Miller, a neighbor, desiring money, sent his 12-year old son to Isaac with a request for \$500. The sum was handed the boy without even a pencil mark as a record.

Criner was nearing 80 when Alabama seceded from the

Union. He was unable to shoulder his gun in defense of his home but he stood by and watched two of his sons, the only ones alive, march away never to return. Calvin, who joined the cavalry, fell dead from his horse in Georgia. Isaac, of the Fourth Alabama Infantry, was killed from ambush at Meridianville.

The Criners received many frights from the Yankees, the worst of which occurred after a skirmish on Winchester Road in which General McCook, a Federal officer, was killed while being borne along in an ambulance. Some soldiers accompanying him swore vengeance for his death and set homes afire on all sides. The sight of rising smoke was proof of their wrath so Isaac and his daughters, his wife having died several years before, moved much of the furniture and stores up into the mountains.

On this occasion, one male slave, who died in Huntsville in the early 1930's, was sent to hide the dishes under the



Photo by Swartzel

In 1969 two chimneys are all that remain of the Criner Mansion.

moss and water cress growing along the banks of Mountain Fork. It was his opinion, even up to his death, that many of these never were located again.

One raiding party came in rather unexpectedly and caught them napping. Even the sugar hidden amid the cotton seed in the barn - that is, all except that which an old Negro woman managed to scoop into her apron - was carried off. When the soldiers finally left they took with them the entire herd of horses and a Negro boy, Allison.

From the front of the mansion, the veranda has given way to a single porch. Windows, doors and almost the entire inside of the building, with the exception of the large fireplaces which have been reduced in size, remain unchanged.

Henry Fanning occupied the Criner mansion for many years after Isaac's death. Mr. Fanning would sit in front of the fireplaces, before which Criner more than once read his Bible, and recall the only time he ever came in actual contact with the aged pioneer. Fanning and his father were on their way home and were forced to seek refuge from a storm coming up out of the west. The Criner house was the nearest.

Isaac was unusually hospitable. He remembered a big man who once had been strong and robust and "ready to lick his weight in wildcats - or Indians." Quietly and cheerfully they had talked there in the lower west room until the rain had abated, listening to their host's rare humor and interesting tales. When they left, he had waved goodbye to them from the gate.

Descendants of this settler point with pride to the spot where his cabin was built and to another site, a hole dug back in the side of the slope above the spring to obtain a level space for a shack for supplies or other purposes. They consider them a monument. But Madison County itself is a memorial to Isaac Criner.





The Legend of Monte Sano

The Indian maiden refused to accept the offer of the white man. With him, she knew, would come others of his race, ready to change the land in which she had lived her life as the carefree daughter of an Indian Chief.

Axes and fallen trees! Paleface hats and smoking chimneys! Guns and a scarcity of game! Cleared fields and beaten paths! These pictures flashed through her mind as his words fell impassably upon her ears. She was solid with an inherent firmness.

Not even the slightest stir of a falling leaf was noticeable on Monte Sano to disturb them as they talked, seated upon a ledge overlooking a heavily wooded valley which had seen only a few of the covered wagons in which the white man had come. He sat with his arm around her, his mouth pressed against the ebony hair so smoothly held by the ribbon he had given her. As if in deep thought, she leaned slightly forward, her head bowed, her hands folded in her lap:

"When the air was sweet and balmy,
Softly blown by Southern breeze,
Indian maid and paleface lover,
Loitered 'neath the forest trees.

"Now they climb the rugged mountain,
Gain at last its lofty height,
Sitting by a giant boulder,
Gaze upon a wonderous sight.

"Hill and valley, glen and wildwood,
In a panoramic view;
Waving tree tops, blooming flowers,
Tiny streamlets trickling through".

The Indian maid and her paleface lover sat in silence broken only by the man's pleading words. But they were not alone. Concealed in the rocks behind them lay a young brave, deeply torn with grief, for he, too, loved the Chief-tain's daughter. Stealthily, he had followed them each foot of the way.

"Must he lose his childhood's idol,
Will the white man win her heart?
Leave him crushed, his fond hopes blasted,
Living from his kind apart?"

The warrior was battling with a love which had followed him since he first had roamed the forests with this dark-eyed girl. Her memory had led him into more than one battle, or had encouraged him during his jousts with other young bucks of his tribe. Now this paleface had come between them.

"He hears the white man: 'Darling Monte,
Tell me I may ever stay,
With you in this land of beauty;
Do not, darling, tell me nay!"

These words brought an uncontrollable shudder from the young brave:

"But she answered not, for near her,
In her own tongue whispered low,
Pleads her Indian lover softly,
'Monte, say no! Monte, say no!"

"Then she turned to the white man,
Bade him to his friends return,
Should she wed him, ever after
For her own her heart would yearn.

"She would wed her Indian lover,
They would roam the forest wild;
Not for her the white men's dwelling,
She was ever nature's child."

Thus ended that romantic scene upon the mountain many,

many years ago. A white settler's love refused by an Indian girl to keep unspoiled her beloved forests!

"Years have passed, and man and maiden,
Each a lowly grave has found;
But their spirits ever wander
Through their happy hunting ground.

"But to us they've left the mountain,
Glorious in the sunset's glow,
As when christened by the warrior,
"Monte, say no! Monte, say no!"

In this way, Monte Sano got its name, according to the legend of an unknown author. From the depths of a warrior's torn heart behind the rocks that day came a combination of syllables which was to be carried in time to many distant corners .





The McCrary Home

Mr. McCrary And The Slave Uprising

Thomas McCrary, among the settlers who obtained land grants when Madison County was first formed in 1809, carried to his grave the exact year in which his home, two miles north of Three Forks of Flint and one and one-half miles west of Deposit, was erected.

This mansion, which for more than a century has housed the family of its builder, was altered soon after the Civil War by a son's bride, who was granted her wish to live in a one-story building, instead of the higher residences selected by her father and father-in-law.

Under the roof of this dwelling once rested one of the largest slave and land owners ever to settle in North Alabama. More than 300 slaves, and each with a trade, was both his motto and his aim. No record in the early days, whether legal or otherwise, seemed complete without the name of Thomas McCrary, and he signed many of them.

Born in Charleston, S. C., January 17, 1789, Thomas entered three quarter sections of land, that on which the home stands, in Nov., 1809. Daniel Wright, an emigrant from near Raleigh in Surrey Co., N. C., obtained a grant on a half section adjoining McCrary during the same month of that year. William Wright, his brother, patented, in April of 1811, the remaining quarter of the section in which McCrary had located, thus leaving him situated between the two.

Thomas was to marry daughters of each of these men. His first wife, Betsey, daughter of Daniel, was born April

12, 1793, married Sept. 23, 1812, and died Aug. 10, 1821. The second bride, Nancy, who was wedded to him Nov. 23, 1823, was born Dec. 26, 1805, and died October 16, 1895.

It is supposed that McCrary married Betsey elsewhere, for no record of the ceremony can be found in this county. Perhaps he met her when she came down on a short visit with her father to see the scene of her future home. Perhaps Thomas returned to N. C. with his neighbor at some time and was introduced to her there. At any rate, reason exists for the belief that she did not settle here until 1813 or 1814, for her cousin, Nancy, whose family probably accompanied that of her uncle, recalled that she came down in a gig at the age of nine.

McCrary doubtless started his home as soon as possible after he was married the first time. The building was erected of brick made there on the plantation by slaves. In the front was a small porch, perhaps a third as wide as the house, with four brick columns, the two largest of which, extending to the roof of the dwelling, were on the front corners.

Six rooms made up the mansion. These were arranged on each floor with a large chamber on one side of the wide hallway and two smaller chambers on the other. A cellar was excavated beneath that side of the house on which the largest were located.

Double doors set off the front while brick terraces were laid around each side of the building almost as far as the frame kitchen at the back. The family slaves were quartered in eight brick buildings, surrounded by a separate fence at the side of the yard, four arranged at right angles to the other four.

McCrary had four children by his first wife. These were James Alfred, born July 4, 1813; Nancy Evelyn, born March 28, 1815, wife of Orville Eastland; Mary Elizabeth, born Aug. 25, 1817, wife of Josiah Battle, and Lucinda, born July 21, 1819, wife of James B. Cloyd.

By his second wife, he had Williams, born Oct. 17, 1827, died Feb. 21, 1891, and Thomas Augustus, born July 10, 1837, died 1843.

A few years after his marriage to Nancy, her parents died, leaving several small children. Thomas assumed the responsibility of their care and brought them to his

home to live, later sending them to school in Huntsville.

In order to house these additions to his family, McCrary was forced to build an ell a story and a half high at the back. These later rooms were the only part of the old mansion left unchanged when it was remodeled.

Even from the beginning, this settler was a shrewd and true business man. Often, he mounted his favorite riding horse in front of his home, early in the morning, to return that night from Winchester, Tenn., a town 40 miles away.

His land was increased rapidly until he owned thousands of acres, the majority of which lay around Deposit. Each fall, his cotton was hauled to Whitesburg in specially made wagons, drawn by six horses, for shipment to New Orleans. He also owned two tanyards, one at Deposit and the other near Meridianville. The first Huntsville directory, published in 1859, shows that he was a member of the firm of McCrary, Patterson and Sprague, grocers, rope manufacturers and operators of a cotton mill. Their business was located on Jefferson Street, north of its intersection with Holmes Avenue.

McCrary's numerous slaves were listed with the date of birth and the names of their parents in the large family Bible, still in the possession of his descendants. The majority of these lived on the part of his plantation near Deposit known as McCrary's Quarter. Each slave was taught a trade so that this section, bordering on the old Winchester Road, appeared to be a community in itself. Weavers, shot makers, tailors, blacksmiths and men trained in many other occupations were included there.

Even up until his death on August 31, 1865, Thomas was considered an active and influential citizen of the county, both in business and social circles. Often, he drove with his family to balls in Huntsville, or went with them to some party at a neighbor's mansion. Though he continued to take part in festivities past the three-quarter-century point of his life, no younger partner could tire him and no step on the floor was considered lighter.

The esteem with which McCrary was held by his fellow men is indicated in the following incident taken from Capt. Frank Gurley's own account of his experiences during the Civil War:

"In two or three days, a man came to my camp and told me the Yanks had arrested Old Man McCrary, and that a Negro named Chaney was against him. The old man sent me word not to let the Negro come there if I could help it. I found the old Negro was a blacksmith and belonged to McCrary. I had a few suits of Yankee clothes, so I put on one suit and put one suit on another man. Then we went late in the evening to see Chaney at his blacksmith shop.

"He thought we were Yanks, and all was nice. I told him the Rebs were after us and that I needed him to pilot me out of their reach. He had an old blind mule to ride so he got the mule ready quickly and we were soon on our way, as he thought, to safety.

"We soon began to find my other men. Not long afterward, we found a grandson of old Major McCrary. Then the Negro discovered he had been trapped. As we were riding along a dense thicket, he jumped off his old mule and into the thicket, but he had not got one jump away before the man who was riding on that side fired at him and broke one of his legs in three places. We went to the crippled Negro, and after he finished the most powerful prayer I had heard, we carried him to a sink hole in the mountain. There we got all the information out of him we could.

"He told us the Negroes had a night set to rise and kill all the white people, and then they would marry all the young white girls. He had picked out a young lady living close by there for his wife, and the same girl later married one of the men who was listening to him.

"After telling me the names of a good lot of his Negro officers who were to be in the insurrection, he stopped talking very suddenly. 'No,' he said, 'I have got to die, and I will tell you no more.'

"He never spoke another word. I got him on his old mule and carried him close to the sink hole. I took

my halter rein and put one end around his neck, the other around a tree limb. We led the old mule off and the old Negro swung into the darkness.

"After he had quit struggling, we took him down and carried him right to the sink hole and pushed him off. His head went to the edge of the hole and we raised his feet up and he went to the bottom, 50 feet down. No one has found him up to this date. Old Major McCrary was kept in jail in Huntsville for a month and then turned loose."

Upon his death shortly after the South surrendered, Mr. McCrary was buried beside his first wife in the cemetery on the Daniel Wright plantation adjoining. On one of the stones in the wall surrounding their graves is inscribed, "The earth within these walls is dedicated to the dead therein."

McCrary's estate was largely reduced by the war, but despite his losses he owned, at his death, 1267 acres of land valued at \$8. an acre, personal property estimated at nearly \$13,000., 350 shares in the Memphis & Charleston Railroad worth only 72 Cents on the dollar at the time, and 50 shares in the Madison Turnpike Co., worth \$6. each.

His son, Williams, married Alice Ellett, daughter of Alfred H. and Mary Hewlett Ellett, March 31, 1858. Their children included Emma, who died young; Nancy, wife of O. C. Hammond of Deposit; Willie, wife of Dr. J. P. Watts, deceased; Mamie, wife of John R. Thomas who lived on an adjoining farm; Robert S., who lived on a part of the old plantation at Deposit; Ellett, also on the Deposit plantation; Thomas, Hattie and Lucy, the last three of whom were all single, lived in the old home.

In 1873 the dwelling was changed as Williams' wife desired. The remodeled part was erected on the site of the old mansion and directly in front of and attached to the ell which had been added. The old cellar was discontinued and a new one dug on the other side of the house.

Many pieces of the family furniture, much of which was brought from New Orleans, remain in the dwelling. The original brass fire set, a four-poster bed, the major's Hepplewhite desk with its secret drawer, the old hatstand,

the sideboard which stood in the hall of the old home, and the dining room table around which the fifth generation of this family was reared and at which some of the sixth generation have sat, are included. Even some of the century-old cut glass and china dishes are there.

Beneath the six large original oaks on the lawn is to be found a memorial to the slaves who once served Thomas McCrary. This is a stone mortar for beating corn into hominy, lifted from a place near the old Negro quarters at the back to a dignified spot beside the ancient rows of box-wood along the front walk, and now serving as a bird bath.



The skeletal remains of the High-Brown-Rouff Mansion.

The Haunted House of Hazel Green

Built on an Indian mound several hundred yards from any other breach in the earth's surface, the home of Mrs. Elizabeth E. Routt, better known in county history as Mrs. High Brown Routt, a mile east of Hazel Green, once held the limelight of local attention, principally because it harbored more scandal than any since and has kept folks awake around the fireside.

Both books and pamphlet, now unobtainable, recorded this choice gossip, and caused passersby, back in those days before the Civil War, to slacken the reins upon their horses and strain their necks for a glance of the mansion's owner.

The home, built in 1847 in the heart of a 500-acre plantation, once was beautiful, surrounded with flowers and well supplied with costly furniture. Even its predecessor, a two-story log cabin immediately to the rear, bore some charm.

But its distinctiveness is gone now. No longer does it indicate that it once sheltered wealth and aristocracy. The disasters of tenantry have befallen it.

History around this home lies almost altogether with Mrs. Routt. She was, before her marriage, Elizabeth E. Dale, daughter of Adam Dale, Volunteer Revolutionary soldier at the age of 14, and member of a company of boys raised in Snow Hill, Maryland in 1781.

Her grandfather was Thomas Dale, who married Mary Hall and commanded two companies of "Minute Men" sent to protect Salisbury, Md., Whig headquarters for that state, from a Tory uprising in 1777. Adam, who died while visiting his daughter in 1851 and was buried there on the plantation, received, with his father, land grants for service and re-

moved to Tennessee in 1797. He later raised, equipped and commanded a company from Smith Co., Tenn., and served under Andrew Jackson in the War of 1812. His wife was Elizabeth Evans.

Mrs. Routt was a beautiful and charming woman, with auburn hair, dark brown eyes and fair complexion. She was well educated, an aristocrat and had in her veins the blue blood of men who had followed in the steps of Lord Baltimore and Cecil Calvert. She loved fine clothes, fine horses, fine furnishings and all conveniences made possible by the considerable wealth of her family. Her appeal to men was unusual.

Before she was wooed by Alexander Jeffries, a widower and early settler from Madison County, she was married twice, first to a Gibbons and then to a Flannigan, both of whom had died rather mysteriously a short while after, leaving no children.

Jeffries had started the plantation at Hazel Green long before he met Mrs. Routt. In 1817, he had bought from Archibald Patterson the northeast quarter of a section for \$1,800., and had followed this the next year with the purchase of the east end of a quarter of an adjoining section from Thomas Murphy for \$700. Both tracts were entered by these former owners in 1812.

Then had come for Jeffries the task of clearing this acreage and of constructing the log house, which was to be a fairly spacious structure of its kind with four rooms. He had chosen the Indian mound for its site so that he could, from this higher point, look out upon the virgin forests and sparsely wooded country around him.

When the fields were cleared, he had planted them in cotton, a crop found by earlier settlers to be well adapted to this section. Slaves had been added as he needed them, advancing both his investments and his fortune.

Not long after the death of his first wife, he had visited Tennessee on business and had met Mrs. Flannigan, as Mrs. Routt was known then. Her fascination had led to a courtship which resulted in their marriage.

Two children were born to this couple, William A. and Mary Elizabeth. The daughter's birth occurred November 8, 1837, and her death August 13, 1844. She was buried on the plantation.

In 1837, Jeffries died, at the age of 65. Whether there was any suspicion concerning the cause of his death is not known, for his will, filed the next year, states that he was in bad health, though of sound mind.

In taking over the plantation, his widow found little trouble. She drove her slaves with an iron hand, terrorizing them with the fury of her commands, and slyly began to look about for another "lord."

Robert A. High of Limestone County, a native of North Carolina, was the next to succumb to her wiles. This man was a representative in the state legislature from 1838 to 1839, and was a zealous advocate of common schools. William Garrett, author of "Public Men in Alabama," writes of him as follows:

"At the time he served in the capitol, he was a dashing widower, seeking his fourth wife. His head was a little bald, which fact he took great pains to conceal. He filled a large space in society at Tuscaloosa and succeeded in marrying before his term of office expired."

But High lived only a few years after his marriage to Mrs. Jeffries on May 15, 1839, dying in April, 1842. The widow's next choice was Absalom Brown, merchant of New Market, whose wife she became on March 16, 1846.

Mrs. Routt had planned for years a fine home to which she might invite her guests, some of whom were members of Madison County's most prominent families. After this betrothal with Brown, she began the present structure, which required a Negro slave carpenter more than a year to complete, even with all his assistants.

The frame house, facing the east, was ell-shaped and had eight large rooms, four above and four below. Two stairways connected the two floors, one in the hallway separating the four chambers in front and the other midway between the front and back.

The front hall was of moderate dimensions, with an opening at each end. The main door was in two panels, bordered with tiny panes of glass. Only a few feet from the north side of the building and at the foot of the mound on which it was erected ran the road from Hazel Green, which intersected a few hundred yards to the front of the house with a lane bordered by a dozen or so slave cottages.

No more care was taken in preparing this mansion than was placed in the layout of its surroundings. A row of tall cedars and pines around the hill circled bed upon bed of all kinds of flowers and shrubs. Bear grass was planted along the main walk in front of the dwelling, while shrubbery of some nature skirted even the brick walks which led toward the stables and icehouse to the rear.

Furnishings were the richest obtainable. In this respect, Mrs. Routt was never satisfied, for she had in mind tall mirrors and costly mantlepieces, items she did not acquire before she lost her fortune.

When completed, this home was not a lonely abode there amid its curtain of trees. Often, its owner took in travelers for the night, while again, she returned from a trip to Columbia, Tenn., with guests for a house party and other festivities. Every convenience was furnished them, even servants' bells in each room.

Brown died in 1847, of some unknown malady which caused his body to swell so that it was necessary that he be buried during the night following his death. Present residents of the county recall that their parents and grandparents often remarked on their part in this ceremony there in the dark, aided only by lantern light, held by shaking darkies.

But this was not the end of the widow's matrimonial adventures. On May 11 of the following year, she was married to Willis Routt, her sixth husband. He, too, passed the way of the others within a short while.

Around this time, Mrs. Routt became engaged in a controversy with Abner Tate which eventually led to her trial in the courts in Huntsville on a charge of murdering her husbands, but she never was convicted.

Tate, a neighbor, had several squabbles with her over loose livestock and other plantation matters. They confessed no liking whatever for each other. Tate was blind to her beauty and openly charged her with murder. Consistent with this accusation was the rumor, substantiated by sight, that the woman had a hat rack in the main hallway of her home upon which she hung each husband's hat after his death.

Mrs. Routt sought to put an end to this enemy of hers. In 1854, Tate was wounded by a shotgun in the hands of one

of his slaves. Rumor had it that his neighbor paid one of her slaves to shoot him, and that this Negro, in turn, had hired one of the victim's men to commit the deed.

That failing, Mrs. Routt next turned to a cleverer scheme. She had been receiving much attention from D. H. Bingham, a school teacher at Meridianville, who desired her hand in marriage, for this woman was beautiful even at 60. So when it was reported that a drover from Kentucky, on his way back from selling his herd in South Alabama, had been murdered at Tate's home and cremated in a large fireplace there, she had this suitor prefer charges against him.

Tate answered these accusations in a book called "Defense of Abner Tate Against Charges of Murder Preferred by D. H. Bingham." He also struck even further at Mrs. Routt, charging that her "bridal chamber was a charnel house," and spoke of her as the woman "around whose marriage couch six grinning skeletons were already hung."

This book led Mrs. Routt to file a \$50,000 damage suit against its author for defaming her character. The following quotations from Tate's book were taken from the circuit court records of 1857, the year after the suit was entered:

"poor soul - she is alone - she ought to have a husband, an industrious, sober husband like D. H. Bingham! She has not been particularly fortunate in that respect heretofore, and in Bingham's opinion was entitled to all the consolation an industrious, sober man can bring to the bed around which nightly assembles a conclave of ghosts to witness the endearments that once were theirs, and shudder through their fleshless forms at the fiendish spirit which wraps the grave worm in the bridal garment and enforces a lingering death with a conjugal kiss. The worst fate I could wish for Bingham would be the success of his undertaking, but I doubt whether the prize will ever be his. He is dealing with a shrewd, bad woman, and she may calculate that she can induce him to goad me beyond endurance on the ... day ... 1856."

Then later in the record comes this quotation:

"I say for money, because I cannot believe even in him any amorous passion mingled with his feverish anxiety to get possession of the hand of Elizabeth

Routt. He knew her past history. He knew that she offered herself as a reward to him only on the condition that he accomplished a murder. If he succeeded, every time her lips touched his, desire must have fled in horror, as if from the cold, clammy taste of a putrid corpse. He would indeed have waded through my blood, and the tears of a heartbroken wife and a host of agonizing relatives, to the possession of her property, but her person he could not touch. The clasp of her arms around his neck would call up dreadful shapes to sit upon his dreary pillow and make his nights as fearful

As if the dead could feel
The icy worm around them steal,
And shudder as the reptiles creep
To revel o'er their rotting sleep."

The evidence presented in the record closed as follows:

"Mr. Bingham has failed but he deserves the possession of the venerable bride; I trust that happiness will not be denied him. The union is one so eminently fit and proper that it would be a pity to prevent its accomplishment. There is no crime, no vice, no detestable meanness that is not familiar to one or both of them, and though the dead should flee away in shuddering horror from the bride, there will be enough of grinning friends to witness the ceremony and congratulate the happy pair on the... day of April, 1856."

This case, however, never was decided, for Mrs. Routt sold the home to Levi Donaldson in 1855 and went with her son, William A. Jeffries, to Marshall County, Mississippi, later dismissing the suit. Whether or not she married Bingham is unknown.

Other quotations, from the chancery court record of 1858, point to the suspicion with which Mrs. Routt was held. She sued Abner Tate and Jacob H. Pierce for \$1400. that she claimed they owed her for her cotton crop of 1840. The following letter, presented in the case, was written to her by Pierce in 1843:

"Madam, in the name of God, do you intend to try to ruin me? When I have protected your interest ever since the death of your late husband, Alexander Jeff-

ries, in thousands of instances? Lest your mind should be treacherous, I will name a few. After the death of Mr. Jeffries, when his children should have been your friends, but instead of that, they were your most inveterate enemies and even went so far as to say you were the cause of his death, which was reported from one end of the county to the other. Who were your friends?..."

And Mrs. Routt replied:

"I received your letter by father late on Friday evening, and company came in just at that time, so I had no time to write until I got home from church this afternoon. I am sorry to find your feelings are hurt with me, for I never intended to say or do anything to hurt you in any respect. Your kindness to me I do esteem in the highest, and ever shall, for I always have believed you to be my friend, and you may rest assured that I will not nor never intend to sue you..."

Then came the following postscript:

"I intended to have sent this last evening, but on account of Mary E. having a chill at church, it detained me so that when I was done writing, it was too late to send it. Then I thought I would get father to hand it to you in Huntsville, but finding you will be at home today, I will send it there. I hope all will be well yet. I am your friend..."

Donaldson, grandfather of Mrs. A. D. Rogers of Huntsville, who was married in the home, bought the plantation for \$12,500. He lived there until his death in 1874, then passed it on to his heirs who kept it until 1902.

Few things about the mansion now mark the wealth which once paid for its upkeep. There is no orderliness, no neatness in its vicinity. The structure has become ramshackle and prone to the whims of its occupants. Doors sag, window panes are missing, and plastering has fallen by the wholesale. On the north side of the house, two brass door knobs appear conspicuously out of place.

Only one forgotten item about the plantation remains in memory of the woman who lived there three-quarters of a century ago - the graveyard. A few yards to the south of the house, beneath an immense holly tree, surrounded by

a low thicket, tombstones lie in a random pile - that of husband, child and ancestor, a harbor for reptiles and field mice.

Note: The High-Brown-Rouff home burned to the ground in the fall of 1968. From the main road, skeletal remains of two chimneys are the only visible evidence that a house once stood on the ancient Indian mound.



The ante bellum smokehouse on the Wade estate is now used as a retreat for the present owner's children. 1969.

Wade's Clock House

From a picture on the face of a clock, carted slowly down from Virginia, came the exterior design of the Robert B. Wade home, built in 1818 by his grandfather, on a lane leading to the west of Meridian Pike (Ed: North Memorial Parkway), one mile south of Meridianville.

Out of the soil there, on a several hundred acre plantation, this mansion grew, brick by brick, each made by five huge Negro slaves, also brought from the Old Dominion.

Nearby as they worked stood David Wade, the master, carefully supervising the construction of this domicile which was to be his castle in the new land to which he had migrated. It was to be a structure that would last, and he wanted to see that it was well done.

The builder's purpose has been largely realized, for a member of the fifth generation to live there is one of the present occupants. The building is solid, almost as it was when completed, but time has not kept up the neat appearance it once had.

Just what induced David Wade to come to Alabama, other than the general trend southward at that time, is not known. He had been active as a farmer at his old home and had been located in Hanover County, one of the richest agricultural sections in the state. These points are revealed by a slave agreement of 1809 which he brought south with him.

In the spring of 1817, David and his two brothers, Berry and John, loaded their supplies and equipment in oxcarts, gathered up all their cattle and horses, and set out. A strange cavalcade they appeared, picking their way through the country, with their slaves strung out behind them.

When they reached Tennessee, John admired the land there and decided to settle, but the others continued on to

Alabama, which then had been open to immigrants only a few years.

After reaching Madison County and finding the type of soil he was looking for, David sent word back to his wife, Eliza Grantland, who came down with her children by boat and was met at Ditto's landing by her husband.

On April 10 of the year he arrived, this settler bought two adjoining half-sections of land from Peyton Cox for \$3,525. According to the deed filed on the transaction, this acreage then was in the Mississippi Territory, and had been entered by Thomas Freeman, who surveyed the county for the government.

Then Wade began his home. As quarters until the home was completed, he had his slaves build a two-room log cabin on the plantation.

Often back in Virginia, David had sat before the fire and gazed at a mansion pictured on a fine Seth Thomas clock standing on the mantelpiece above him. This dwelling was imposing, stately looking, just the house to be surrounded by rolling acres of cotton. So, naturally, when he actually began himself a home, he looked to this ideal for guidance.

In a cleared spot a few yards from the site, the slaves began making brick. Thousands were prepared, for thousands were to go into the home. While some worked there, others dug the cellar and started laying the walls.

Including the basement, which was a little more than half under ground, the house was to be three stories high, with three rooms on each floor. Chambers were large, and those on the end had six big windows to them. Walls were thick and solid.

On the outside of the brick portico, he built his colonnade, extending all the way to the eaves of the mansion, just as shown in the picture. Six columns were erected, with more than 12,000 bricks in each.

The entrance to the dwelling is its distinguishing feature. A stairway at the back of the columns leads up four or five feet to a large vestibule, bordered on each side by a smaller column.

Exactly in line with the front doorway, a walk was laid off between rows of boxwood to the road, nearly 200 feet away. A wide lawn stretched out on each side.

The dining room and kitchen, the latter with an eight

foot fireplace, were built of brick several feet behind the home. This was particularly a convenience during the summer when members of the family could go out in the small building under the trees and eat with the shade to protect them.

David Wade lost no time in clearing his land. The two half-sections he had bought were separated by the road in front of the home. That part on which he built was of a gradually rolling nature, while the other led gently up to a low range of mountains. With the cotton that grew on this soil, he began a fortune which was to grow into a fairly large figure before his death.

On June 7, 1826, David wrote to his niece at Charlottesville, Virginia, partly as follows:

"I understand from your letter that you married Mr. D. S. Mosby, and that your friends approbate the same, and further it appears from your writing that you entertain a very favorable opinion of Mr. Mosby's doing well, which I earnestly hope he will, for your prosperity through life would afford me great pleasure. The death of your grandfather and grandmother, and particularly the death of your own mother, must no doubt have brought on you those sympathizing feelings which we all have on those occasions, but these events should remind us of our own dissolutions, for in a few years we shall be removed from this terrestrial ball to the invisible world where the virtuous will enjoy peace and tranquility through endless eternity.....

"My family are all in good health and going on pretty well. I have five children, and as you never had the opportunity to see them I will here set their names - Margaret, Amanda, Malvinia, David, Harriet and Robert B. These are the names of my rising family, and they beg to be remembered to you. I have had some thought of bringing Margaret to Virginia to go to school. You will, therefore, much oblige me by writing me, respectively, the terms of board, tuition, et cetera, in Charlottesville..."

Of these children, Robert married Mollie Borgas and re-

moved to a plantation in Big Cove, while Margaret became the wife of John Turner of Limestone County.

Upon the father's death just prior to the Civil War, the plantation was left to the two single daughters, Amanda and Harriet.

This was a good move, so far as Amanda was concerned. Many residents still remember her as an active little woman with sparkling brown eyes and black hair, almost frail in appearance and very animated. They recall that she rode horseback a great deal, and that she was afraid of nothing. Often, she rode to town by herself in the dead of the night through necessity, or wrapped her robe about her and tramped off to the barn in the dark to investigate a strange noise which had awakened her.

Her sister, however, was of just the opposite type. She was a blond, resembled Queen Victoria in features, and was larger and taller than the other.

These two women lived there alone. Amanda was the manager of the farm, while Harriett took care of things around the home.

Apparently, no task about the plantation was too big for Amanda. When there was work to be done, she saddled her fine little riding horse and rode out to see that it was done. Those who remember her recall that she had a good business head and that she could not be tricked. To illustrate this latter trait, they cite the time she distrusted some men who were digging a well for her, and had them let her down into the hole so that she could watch them work.

One of her principal business deals was to have a saw-mill brought down from Tennessee to saw up timber felled in clearing some of her land. The McCormick home on Meridian Pike was built from a part of the lumber resulting.

Amanda had a time during the Civil War. When the Yankees made their appearance in the county, she went at once to the commander and obtained the following order:

"Protection is hereby given Misses Harriet and Amanda Wade for their plantation and property. No foraging will be allowed on this property without special orders from the general commanding."

She also obtained numerous passes through the lines,

An order of this kind, obtained in 1863, follows:

"Permission is hereby given to Miss Amanda M. Wade to go by Shelbyville with one two-horse wagon and teamster, and one carriage or buggy."

On a trip through the blockade to Nashville, she once was accompanied by several of her neighbors, including Mrs. Octavia Otey, Mrs. Hancock, Sabe Darwin, John Bentley and Will Hancock. Along with them also went Zenie Pruitt, slave of Mrs. John Pruitt of Meridianville, who bought the supplies she was sent for with only her memory as a guide.

But all the orders for protection she obtained failed to keep some Yankee from stealing one of Miss Amanda's mules. She spent more than one disappointing day riding



FARM RESIDENCE R. B. WADE

about the Federal camps in search of it. Even up to 1892, shortly before her death, she had a lengthy correspondence with General Joe Wheeler, then in Congress, asking him to introduce bills or to advise her the best manner in which to have her claims for this stolen property recognized.

Amanda and Harriet took two of their nieces, Helen and Anna, to educate. During their stay there at the home, numbers of dances were given for them in the big rooms of the second floor. A band was brought out from Huntsville and couples were gathered from the surrounding neighborhood. And while all this merriment was going on among the young people, the two old maid aunts would look on with approval, occasionally slipping off to another room to see that nothing had happened to the dainties they were to serve on a huge table later in the evening.

Hospitality, with as true a Southern purpose as David had in taking his design of a mansion from the clock, has always been the keynote in the home. Often, barbecues, spiced with mint juleps from the large wine cellar in the basement, drew crowds there to spend the day beneath the shade of trees at the side of the lawn. Festivities of this kind sometimes were held in the moonlight, while musicians waited to begin the waltz.

Harriett was the first of the sisters to die. She was followed a few years later, in 1898, by Amanda.

Shortly before their death, they had taken Robert B. Wade, the present occupant and son of their brother, Robert, there to live with them. Upon their death, the home was left to him. His granddaughter, Rene Rush Shamblin, grandniece of Stonewall Jackson, is the fifth generation of the family to occupy it.

Much about this home now reminds one of the antebellum days. Heavy antique furniture decorates each corner and rare chinaware bedecks the sideboard. Small window panes and ceilings of hardwood with floors of white oak, remain unchanged.

At the rear, dining room and kitchen - with pothook still hanging from its huge fireplace - stand, but are not used. In the loft above is to be found a spinning jenny, more than 100 years old, upon which the family once spun thread for its clothes.

Off to the side, the smokehouse remains almost as solid

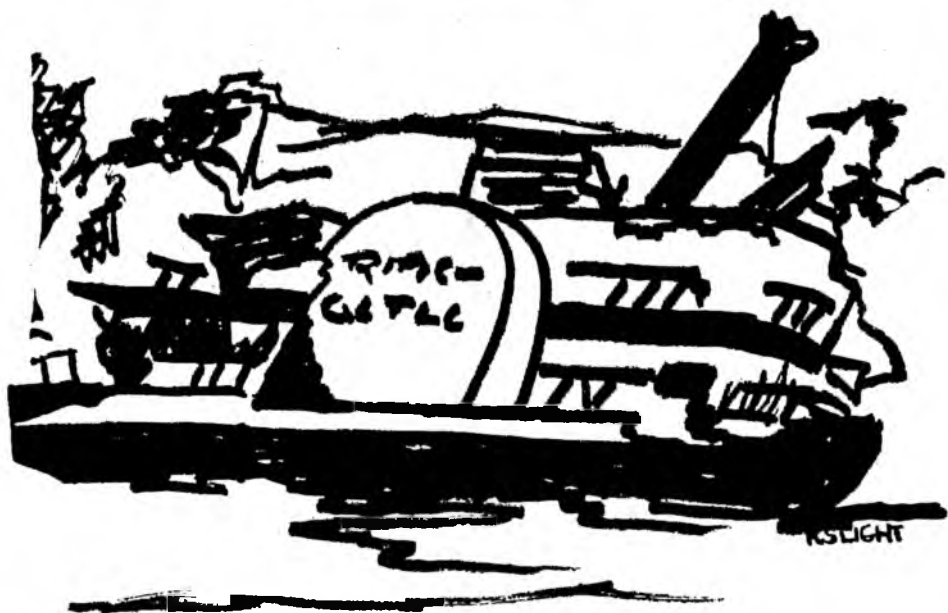
as the day it was put there.

The sound of David Wade yelling to his slaves is all that is needed to put this home in its clime. The rest is there, even to the old clock standing upon the mantlepice, idle now, but ready to run after a moment's winding.

Ed: The Wade home is no longer in existence, but the smokehouse is as it was in the 1930's when this story was written, "solid as the day it was put there."



The fireplace in the Wade smokehouse. Smoke from hickory fires was channeled through a specially built chimney to the upper floor where meat was hung to cure from hand hewn rafters.



Mr. Strong's "Riverboat House"

Early days on the Tennessee River, the sound of engines churning the muddy water, or cotton buyers and plantation owners as they bargained in the cool of the evening, or darkies chanting happily beneath the pale glow of a Southern moon, all might echo from the walls of the old Charles W. Strong home on a hill overlooking the highway a mile this side of Meridianville. (Ed: Mount Charron subdivision on North Memorial Parkway now lies on what was once part of the Strong estate. The home still stands on the crest of a hill north of, but adjacent to, Mount Charron.)

This house came bit by bit from the wreckage of an old river boat which ended its journeys up and down the stream at a point near Ditto's Landing at Whitesburg.

Today, it stands in its entirety, nearly 100 years old, a memorial to that period in Alabama history when a man built his home as a place from which he might daily go out into the fields to work and direct, returning at meal time for food obtained almost altogether from the surrounding acreage.

Though passed from the hands of its builder's family more than two score years ago, many of those who descended from its halls - the Powells, Kellys, Davises, McClellands, Burkes, Morrows and Strongs - still live not so many miles away.

Charles Strong, the builder, was born in Goochland Co., Virginia, in 1804. With his parents, George and Mary, (also called Polly), Strong, he migrated to Alabama several years prior to 1820, and settled on a large tract of mostly virginland near Meridianville, much of which was obtained from John Meux, heir to Richard Meux. His brothers, Pleasant, Hopson and Robert Strong, were also along.

In 1828, at the age of 24, Charles married Didama Humphrey, two years his junior. His wife had come South with her parents in an oxcart at the age of 12, taking turns with the rest of the family in walking and riding, and likewise had stopped on a farming site at Meridianville. After his marriage, he had lived in a two-room log cabin on his father's place, making his money from cotton that he grew on certain tracts allotted to him.

In 1828, this settler bought 60 acres of land in a section adjoining that on which his dwelling later was built, beginning a series of purchases which were to continue until his death in 1871, and to bring his total holdings to nearly 2500 acres, including lots in Huntsville and Meridianville, and several larger plots between the two settlements. His home site was acquired from his father's estate in 1835.

The large yield of cotton brought in by this rising young planter was transported for shipment to Whitesburg by means of wagons with large scoop bodies on them, somewhat resembling bowls on wheels. One day, while on such an excursion to the river, he noticed a boat anchored high and dry in the shallow waters near the shore. Upon inquiring, he found that it had been damaged and had been towed there to be junked.

Dressed lumber was a scarce article in that day, so the thought of wasting such good building material naturally caught his attention. He had a cabin, but he needed a real home.

Without further delay, he traced the owners of this craft and bought the hull for a paltry sum. Then, for weeks these odd-shaped wagons hauled cotton to the landing and returned loaded with boards and beams.

Two Negro slaves, Charlie, a professional blacksmith, and Jim, equally as well trained in the shoemaking trade, were his lieutenants in erecting the structure, which was to be his castle until he died. These men saw to every item that went into the building, preparing the foundation, chimneys, floors and all.

When they needed a piece of lumber which had not been salvaged from the ship, they went to a platform they had erected for the purpose and sawed by hand the required weather-boarding or sleeper, one standing on the top of the frame and pulling a cross-cut saw, while the other co-

operated from the bottom.

The house was placed on a high hill overlooking Madison County for many miles in all directions, except that shut off by a range of mountains behind. The foundation was of limestone rock, fitted into the excavation made there in the side of the fairly sharp slope to the road below. Two big rooms, with two small pantries, made secure from the outside by small barred windows between them, went into the basement. Immense fireplaces and doors were located at each end of this lower part.

A stairway led from the room on the south to a wide hallway above. This corridor, opening to the front and back, was bordered on each side by rooms 22 feet square. Stairs near the rear enabled one to clumb to the attic above, used as a sleeping quarters for the children.

The front door was in two panels, each five feet wide. These opened out upon a porch made of cedar and standing several feet from the ground on two large rock columns.

The lawn, terraced to prevent erosion and to aid descent to the circular driveway beneath huge trees beside the road, was set off mostly with cedars, and planted in many different kinds of flowers and shrubs.

Designing the layout of both the home and plantation to suit his own taste, Strong had the icehouse dug a few feet from the house on the north side. On the south was located an immense cistern, 30 feet deep and holding close to fifty thousand gallons of water. A two-room kitchen and store-room was erected a few feet to the rear and southwest side of the cistern. A dozen or more cabins for the slaves stood directly behind the house.

The stable and gin were built in a bottom on the south side of the rise on which the home was located. Near the stable was dug a 90-foot well. As water could be obtained from the source at only certain seasons of the year, Strong had another excavated in the field directly across the road, a quarter of a mile from the house. Water there was free-stone.

A half-acre plot of land a few yards south of the stable was exempt from taxation. This was the family graveyard. Around the area were planted alternately, pines and cedars. Another row of the trees divided the tract in half, allowing a space to bury members of the family on one side and

slaves on the other.

Strong was a great lover of fishing, even up to his death. So to furnish him a field for this sport and to refill his ice-house during the winter, he had a spring in a bottom toward the mountain dammed, creating a pond that covered at least an acre.

This planter knew his cotton and made his livelihood chiefly from that source but fruit was his hobby. He had practically every variety that would thrive in this climate planted around his home. Grapes held first place among them. On the top of the mountain behind his home, he started a vineyard that covered a six-acre field, in addition to two or three smaller vineyards.

Eight children had been born before the family moved into the home. These included Mary, who died young; George, a physician who died in Meridianville; David, killed in the Civil War; Robert; Sally, wife of Josh Kelly; Pleasant DeKalb; Fanny, who was married successively to Dr. Holbert Davis, George Schamberger and James Jackson; and Sue, wife of Will McClelland.

Those born in the home were Nannie, who never married; Henrietta, wife of Dr. James Burke; Cornelia, the present Mrs. Peyton Powell, and the only surviving son or daughter; and Callie, wife of Tom Morrow.

As each of these children married (except Pleasant DeK.) the father divided off a section of the lowland and a section of the wooded mountain land, averaging more than 100 acres, and gave it to them. This was his little bridal present.

Strong, like many another Southern plantation owner, lost a great deal during and following the Civil War. Much of this was in property taken by the Yankees, or in food and other articles destroyed to keep the invaders from carrying it off, but the principal part, of course, was in the scores of slaves freed in 1865. Despite this misfortune, however, the planter died without having once been in debt.

Many raiding parties stopped on their way south from Meridianville to raid his larder. One band carried away 12 mules at a single visit. They left certificates for the property, to be cashed by the Federal government, but Strong was never successful in collecting on them.

Mrs. Powell recalls that more than once she and her

mother and sisters fed Yankee soldiers in one of the two main rooms of the house while Confederates munched quietly in the other.

She also recalls the destruction of all but 50 barrels of wine made from grapes grown in her father's vineyard. He had stored these up prior to the war to age. When raiding parties began to arrive he ordered his slaves to carry one barrel up into the mountains and hide it, and to break in the heads of the others.

Both Robert and David went off with the Rebel recruits from this section, the former at the age of 18. Robert fought through the entire conflict and surrendered at Vicksburg. David was killed at Greensboro, Ala., and had been buried there in the Moore Cemetery for three months before the news reached his family.

Deed records show that, in almost consecutive years between 1828 and 1861 Strong bought some tracts of land.



Charles Waite Strong

Then for five years, from the outbreak of the war until the year following the surrender, his name was not recorded. Nevertheless, in 1866, he again began to build to his estate, and added nearly 700 more acres before his death.

His closing days were spent quietly there among his daughters and with his aging wife on his plantation. Fishing occupied most of his time. So did the fruit trees and the flowers. Almost daily he turned his horse's head up the winding pathway, bordered on each side with bear grass, to inspect carefully the vineyard he had last seen only the day before

With servants gone, members of his family were forced to turn their hands to many things unknown to them before. The kitchen out in the yard was abandoned for one of the two rooms in the cellar. The other was used as a weaving room. Many inconveniences about the home were altered to become part of the revolution that followed the end of slavery.

The planter died in February, 1871, and was followed seven years later by his wife. That was the end of the Strong home.

This land, bought in 1830 by George Strong from John Meux, was sold to Dr. J. O. Watts in 1878. Five years afterward, it came back into the hands of John P. Powell, J. P. Burke, Robert N. Strong and Sallie B. Kelly, heirs to the Strong estate. Then it was sold to William Allen. Many different persons have owned it since. The home is now occupied by W. P. Satterfield and family.

The orderliness and thoroughness of the plantation days are gone even though the house still stands in a sound condition, with only the addition of a room at the rear as a change. Chimneys, floors, the roof, large windows at the front and tiny windows at the back, the wide front door and rear doors of two boards, even the hand-carved mantelpieces, have served for nearly a century with little evidence of their age. The walls of the foundation, the brick floors of the cellar, the two tiny pantries in which were stored molasses, sugar, flour, coffee, cheese and the more valuable gems of the larder in the old days, are almost as sound as ever. Even the small hole concealed back into the rock facing the fireplace, as a safe place to store the long-stemmed, burning clay pipe, remains in the lower room on

the hearth.

The immense cistern and surrounding cedars seem to have been the only items about the yard to have withstood the wear of time. Only a pit marks the icehouse. The kitchen, slave cabins, stables and gin have been obliterated. So has the fish pond which in later years became the power source for the gin. The vineyard is still there.

In an open bottom below the house, the graveyard, which once was bordered by the entwined boughs of cedars and pines, now is a pitiful witness to the absence of either sentiment or respect for the dead. A later owner felled the trees almost level with the ground. Tombstones are piled here and there about the exempt spot. Perhaps, in a few more years, only the childish markings on the walls of the home will remain as a monument to Charles Strong. (Ed: This home has been completely restored. 1969)



Scandalous Affair of 1836

All Huntsville, except residents on the "inside", was aghast when John C. and his wife, Emeline, bundled into a stage coach at close to midnight on the evening of Dec. 21, 1836, just four days before Christmas, and hurried off to her father's home at Greensboro, Alabama.

Indignant gossip was a common thing across the tall fences around the town's back yard the next day.

"The idea of old John C. sending away such a pretty young thing!"

"I don't see how she ever came to marry him in the first place. Him and his crabby ways! Wonder she hadn't chased him away."

"They say she fell in love with an actor down at the theatre, and John found out about it."

For days, weeks, on into early spring of the next year, they talked, with an occasional item of truth leaking into their conversation. Then John C. filed his suit for divorce, charging his wife with adultery.

This was the beginning of perhaps the outstanding divorce case in Huntsville history. Most of its testimony involved incidents that occurred within a block of the present post-office. Before it was ended, some of the town's most distinguished early settlers had contributed to its testimony.

No thought of such an unhappy climax attended the wedding of John and Emeline at Courtland on Dec. 24, 1829. They and their relatives could see only happiness ahead.

While many years her senior, John was prosperous, had a successful land office in Huntsville, and boasted as a distinguishing feature the fact that he had come to the town with his parents in 1811, the year it was founded. He was the ideal husband, everyone thought, for a much younger

wife.

Emeline also was of a prominent family. Not quite 15 at the time of her marriage, she was girlish, light-hearted, had a trim figure and an extremely romantic and imaginative mind. In this last characteristic, particularly, she and her husband differed.

A few days after the wedding, John brought his wife to the home of his mother, a mile and a half from Huntsville. Emeline apparently became fond of her husband's two sisters, Narcissa and Delia, both unmarried and much older than herself, for they were together much of the time when she was not with her husband.

Early in 1831, the mother died. The following June 1, John bought the brick home still standing at the northeast corner of Greene and Randolph Streets, directly across Randolph Street from the Central Y. M. C. A., and removed there with his young bride.

On January 1, 1835, the two sisters, who remained at their mother's plantation, also purchased a house and lot in Huntsville and came to town to live. The two families were in close association with each other. Scarcely a day elapsed without a visit between them. For nearly two years this continued.

Then, on August 9, 1836, a cloud of trouble moved across this peaceful horizon in the form of a handbill, dropped over the high board fence that surrounded John's home. It announced that Henry Riley, "state manager of many of the principal theaters in the Union," would present an entertainment consisting of recitations, imitations and songs.

When it was brought to her by her favorite Negro girl, Ann, this notice interested Emeline, and she made her plans to attend the performance.

That night, John begged off, with the excuse that he preferred to stay home and read. So Emeline, accompanied by a Negro attendant, set out for the theatre, then diagonally across the block from her home, on the lot directly across Lincoln Street from the Jewish synagogue.

Up to the front row she went, for choice seats in a theater then were reserved for ladies. The curtain was raised, the audience applauded, and then the actors began their series of recitations from Shakespeare, Sheridan, Holmes and Southey.

Emeline fidgeted impatiently. This wasn't particularly to her liking. But when the second act got under way, she sat up quickly, her heart aflutter.

Upon the stage had appeared her ideal of a man. He was Henry Riley, there to give his "celebrated" imitations of several distinguished performers.

The manner in which Emeline met Henry Riley has been lost to posterity. And how their acquaintance developed so rapidly is a mystery. At any rate, she dispatched the following note to him by Ann, her servant, a few days later.

"Come after tea here, and I will come down to the garden."

Within a day or two, she wrote him again: "Henry, if you will come down to the theater this evening, I will go there and tell you where you may see me. Let no one know of this, not for your life. Mr. C. is in the country, I am alone. Your Emeline."

With all the innocence of a rosebud, this adventure suddenly blossomed into a full-grown love affair. Emeline's heart beat rapidly and her temples throbbed at the thought of Henry.

"All seems cheerful and gay around me, yet, Henry, my heart feels desolate," she wrote in another message. "It wanders like a drop from the ocean which cannot meet its kindred drop, like a voice which in all Nature finds no echo. Keep that ring I sent you in remembrance of me. One who loves you. Farewell. Farewell."

Then, a little later, she sent Henry another note, telling him to meet her in the garden after nightfall. That was a bad move.

At the hour set, she slipped out of the house and down to the fence at the back of the garden, on the opposite side of which was the theater lot. For minutes that seemed like hours she waited, until, at last, her lover appeared out of the darkness.

They talked in whispers, for a much longer time than they had intended. As Emeline kissed him lightly and ran toward the house, the back door opened, and through it stepped her husband. She called his name aloud, both in fright and in fear that her lover had not gone.

John wanted to know where she had been so long. Inside the house again, he accused her of meeting someone

in the garden, held her firmly by the arms, used unkind words, and told her that if she did not tell him whom she could go her way and he would go his. Emeline was silent through it all.

After they had gone to bed, she thought seriously of telling him the whole story and then of running to Henry's arms.

But fear that her husband would kill her lover caused her to lie there until her eyes closed in troubled sleep.

When Emeline had recovered from her fright, she sent Henry two poems, both of which she herself had written about their love.

On September 19, the actor prepared to leave. While he worked over his trunks at the theater, the servant girl brought him a note. It read:

"I will direct my letters to Mr. Sam Cowell at Tuscumbia. You must address yours to Edwina Johnson."

Emeline's next message to Henry was a long letter in which she told him of the awful emptiness since he had gone, and of a dream in which he had rescued her from a ship that had struck a rock on the shore of a strange lake.

Then came a note of alarm. Her husband had missed a picture he had of her, and she had told him that she lent it to a friend, not that she had passed it across the garden fence to Henry Riley.

"I am betrayed on every side," she informed him, "but if you will send the picture, all will be straight again... do not write to me any more."

The next was more emphatic:

"For God's sake do not write to me any more, for I wrote to you the other day and gave the letter to one of the Negroes to put in the office. She carried it, instead to Mr. C.'s sister, who gave it to him. In it I spoke of my picture, and he told me he would send me to Greensboro to my father. If he does, then I will write you."

On October 17, Emeline wrote Henry that she was leaving the next morning for Greensboro, accompanied by Judge Crawford, to attend the bedside of her mother who was extremely ill.

"I thought you would have come," she added. "At least, I have looked for you in vain. I never wished to see anyone so much before in my life." From Greensboro on Oct. 22,

she dispatched a long letter. "If dreaming of you be a crime," it began, "my crime is dark indeed."

Then followed a beautifully worded description of how her lover, in disguise, had saved her from death in the "dark waters of a stream."

"At last I am desolate and unhappy," she confessed. "Here it seems as though I were away from all I hold dear on earth. If you were here, all would be sunshine. But a cloud is over me. Brooding shadow fears I shall never see you any more."

In desperation, she wrote on the folded and sealed paper: "Mr. S. Cowell, Tuscumbia. If not there, please direct to wherever he is. Will postmaster please do this."

The following week, she sent a message that she was returning to Huntsville at once.

"You say I must write you what you must do," she concluded. "How can I tell you? Come to H. and see me. And that is all I can say you must do. I was once a bright jewel, but you have robbed me of its luster. If I never see you more, you have my blessing."

After Emeline's return, John hoped that they once more might settle down to that undisturbed married life they had enjoyed during their first years together. He noticed that his wife had lost some of her girlishness, had a wan and tired look on her face, and liked to sit for hours alone in her room. All this he supposed to have been due to the strain brought upon her by her mother's illness.

John's life since early September had been anything but that of a happily married man. When his mind was not too heavily taxed by his business, he more than once had brooded over certain ugly rumors about his wife which had originated among the Negroes.

These tales had been brought directly to his ears by his two sisters, both of whom, living in idle spinsterhood, had made it their business to gather up as much of this gossip as possible and to run with it to his land office. In fact, Delia, the younger, had even spoken about the reports to Emeline and had received a firey tongue-lashing in return. That had marked the end of the frequent and friendly visits between the families.

But with Emeline at home once more, apparently as true and as faithful as a wife should be, the rumors ceased and

gradually were forgotten. Not nearly so often did neighbors turn their prattle to the inmates of the two-story brick home on the corner.

This situation continued to improve until the middle of December. Then it stopped with a surprising suddenness, brought about when a familiar face emerged from a stage coach in front of the Bell Tavern on the north side of the square. It was that of Henry Riley.

From that time on, Emeline's love affair was snatched from her bosom by the neighbors. The fact that Riley had come back to town, unannounced, without his theatrical company, and without any apparent business, excited widespread suspicion, and every rumor about him was dragged from the grave.

Around 2 o'clock on the afternoon of Dec. 19, Preston Yeatman and John H. Lewis were "engaged in their own affairs," as Yeatman later testified, in a brick stable, formerly in the northeast corner of the Central Y. M. C. A. block. From behind the grates of the building, they saw Riley approaching along Randolph Street, from the direction of the square.

As the actor passed the C. home, Yeatman and Lewis saw the blinds of a window in the second story cautiously open and a piece of paper drop down at Riley's feet. He looked hastily about him, picked up the paper, thrust it into his pantaloons pocket and turned back toward the courthouse.

The two who had witnessed the incident bubbled over with their shocking news. It was too big for them to handle so they went with it to James W. McClung, local lawyer.

McClung considered himself John C.'s friend, so he rushed down the street to the land office. After telling his then second-hand story, he sat back to study the effect it would have upon the husband.

John admitted that a circumstance once had arisen which had caused him to believe that his wife had been unfaithful to him, but that she had asserted her innocence so strongly and had offered such sound alibis that he had let the matter pass. In the light of this new rumor, however, he said that he would apply for a divorce if he could get enough evidence to justify the act.

McClung suggested that they seize Mr. Riley and take the

paper away from him. This they did in front of the Bell Tavern a few minutes later, aided by several bystanders.

Back at the land office again, they opened the crumpled note to find the following written in Emeline's legible hand:

"I am so much pleased to see you here once more, but it is impossible for me to speak to you. I am still the same and ever shall be. Return home, Henry, and forget me, if you please, but if it is ever in my power to become the bride of H., with honor I will, and as soon as I can, you shall know it. Keep my secret. Never betray me so long as you live. Write a letter this evening, and tonight, after tea, slip it through the window blinds of the porch. I will be there playing on the piano. Adieu, Henry. Yours."

Even with this latest evidence, however, John was not satisfied. So, after McClung had gone, he summoned to his office his very best friend, Samuel Cruse.

Upon hearing his story, Cruse advised that they go to the tavern and inquire whether Riley, who by that time had disappeared, had left any baggage there.

At the tavern, John M. Caldwell, proprietor, informed them that the actor had left a trunk in his room. Up they hurried, much against the innkeeper's approval, and forced open the trunk. Inside, wrapped in a play bill, they found a bundle of letters and a miniature of Emeline.

That night, after supper, John called his sisters to his home. Then, in the presence of his wife, he gave his decision: Emeline would have to return to her father's home on the next stage, which left the following Wed., Dec. 21.

Between 11 and 12 o'clock Wednesday night, as scheduled, Emeline climbed aboard the stage in front of the Bell Tavern. Inside, she nestled down between two passengers. As the wheels started rolling, she glanced back over her shoulder momentarily, then clasped her hands in her lap to await the next step in her uncontrollable romance.

The following March, John filed suit for divorce. When the case came up for trial at the October term of court, several prominent witnesses were called. Emeline, who did not appear in person, was represented by her solicitor, S. Pete.

After reviewing the evidence for two long days, Judge George W. Lane ruled in favor of the plaintiff.

Included in the voluminous court records which led to

the decision was Emeline's sole message after her embarrassing departure. She had had her counsel write in answer to her husband's charge that she believed the complainant's suspicions were aroused by persons permitted to approach him in the disguise of friendship but who really desired to destroy his happiness and her reputation.

"This respondent is informed and verily believes," she added, "that the evil-disposed persons who have excited the ill-founded suspicions of the complainant have until lately been his bitterest enemies. This respondent further saith she believes these evil-disposed persons are persons whom the respondent did not choose to associate with, and for the purpose of revenge have been busy in exciting the unfounded prejudices of her husband."

With these words she ended her Huntsville chapter - this girlish young wife, married before she was 15, and driven away from the home on the corner which still stands as a monument to her romance.



The Sivley Treasure Recovered

One of the first homes in Madison County was built some time after 1809 around a winding stairway and harbored buried treasure which brought a family descendant all the way from Chicago in search of it. These features made the Sivley home a mile southeast of Merrimack, stand out as the most striking of local estates.

Once an important mansion in the lives of Huntsville's first settlers, this home is forgotten now. Few county residents know of its existence. At its point beside the Big Spring branch, midway between Merrimack and Whitesburg Pike, passersby are few, and those who stop to view it find nothing to indicate its part in history.

The whole atmosphere of the home suggests feudal England. It stands barren-like on a knoll, in next to the last stages of ruin, without even a shade tree to break the force of the wind sweeping across the fields that lead up to the mountains to the south and west.

In reviewing this home, two houses must be considered, one a frame structure, the other a massive brick. Which of these was built first is not known, but it seems likely that the frame superseded the other, for the brick was given the preference in location, standing a few feet to the front of the other.

The Sivleys, according to tradition, came to Alabama from Tennessee in 1809, floating down the river on a flat-boat. The family originally came from the Dutch colony in Pennsylvania, settling next in Hanover or King William Co., Virginia and then moving South.

Four brothers, Andrew, Joseph, Jacob and Jesse, and their wives, are supposed to have come down on this migration. The father, Jacob Sivley, however, must have

accompanied them or followed shortly afterward, for he and his elder son, Andrew, then 26 years old, acquired grants adjoining each other from the government on August 28 of the year they arrived.

Assuming that the frame house is the older, this was built by Jacob on a rise beside the Big Spring branch, a small stream of clear water. All uprights and beams in the structure were fashioned from cedar logs. Other lumber used was from yellow poplar. This building was oblong in shape with a tall chimney at each end, had four rooms and was simple in construction. From these quarters Jacob was to direct his slaves in their work about his farm which he named St. Andrew Plantation.

The son, on the other hand, built his home across the stream from the father. In addition, he put up a dam nearby and formed a pond to supply water for his grist mill which was to be his chief means of livelihood. This was the beginning of "Sivley's Mill", as it has been known even to the present generation.

The father and son worked together ideally to carry on their interests in that section, covering much of the site of the present Merrimack village.

Jacob died in 1816. The following receipt was given his son-in-law, William Fine, on Sept. 20 of that year in answer to a bill from William Nesmith: "To a coffin, six feet, at \$2 a foot, \$12." This box, like all others of those pioneer days, was made of planed boards and fitted with iron handles.

Two years later, Jacob's estate was bought by Andrew. This deed, signed by his heirs, follows in part:

"Joseph Sivley and wife, Rachel; William Smalling and wife, Nancy; John Sivley and wife, Elizabeth; Jesse Sivley and wife, Elizabeth; Bannister Bond and wife, Peggy, all of Madison County. Thomas and wife, Elizabeth, of Limestone County; William Fine and wife, Catherine, of Giles County, Tennessee, which said Joseph Sivley, Catherine Fine, Nancy Smalling, John Sivley, Elizabeth Evans, Jesse Sivley, Peggy Bond, Rebecca Davis are children of late Jacob Sivley, to Andrew Sivley, November 19, 1818."

One noticeable feature of this record, still well preserved, is that the daughters were unable to sign their names, using an X with a witness as their signature, due evidently to a

belief in those days that education was not needed by a woman, as she was cut out only to become the wife of man.

Around this time seems most likely to have been the date at which the brick home was erected on a rise nearby, and with a better view than that of the frame structure. Both were somewhat similar in outward construction, but were vastly different on the inside.

In the basement of this finer home were arranged three rooms, all well finished. One of these, that at the west end, was set aside as the kitchen. Its fireplace, half the width of the room, was large enough to roast a large section of beef at one time. Entrance to the cellar was gained through a door at the west end of the house.

Food was taken from the kitchen up a stairway to the dining room above, which had a cupboard built into the wall in its northwest corner. Another stairs led from this chamber to the top floor, allowing passage up and down without entering the other part of the home.

The main door of the building faced the north, toward Huntsville. This was in two panels, below an arch of brick. Upon entering the home, visitors found themselves in a barrel-shaped hallway, easily 30 feet from its bottom floor to its ceiling. Near the entrance, a winding stairway began its circuitous route to the upper landing, passing just above the door at the opposite side of the house. This was, without doubt, the most picturesque stairway in Madison County.

Two large rooms were located on each side of the hall, one above the other. These measured 30 feet in dimensions, with ceilings 15 feet high. Large windows allowed a view to the north and south.

Fireplaces were built in each room. That in the upper chamber to the east was of an odd arrangement, facing obliquely to the center. On one side, it was flush with the wall, while on the other, its corner stood four feet out in the floor. This probably was so arranged in order that a fire burning on the hearth would not reflect in the eyes of a person sleeping in the section outside the scope of the light.

Three porches, a long one on the north, and a smaller on each of the south and west sides, set off the outer appearance of the building.

In 1832, Andrew sold a tract of land, on which was located the mill pond, to James B. Martin. This sale was

made on the condition that the canal boats would be allowed to pass, and that the company be permitted to use water from this source to fill its lock. Furthermore, Sivley was to retain the right to water his stock from the lake.

Shortly after the middle of the century, Andrew, approaching the age of 70, felt that his days were numbered. Rebecca, too, was climbing in age and showing a feebleness that urged her older husband to relieve her of all responsibilities and worries. So he made plans for their retirement.

In 1853, he sold the plantation containing 750 acres to his son, Joseph, for \$15,000. This change of property was made on the condition that the buyer would take care of his parents as long as they lived. The mill was included in the sale.

Then came his will. Andrew had eleven children, as follows:

Elvira (1813-1833) who married a Mr. Cooper; Deborah, married Jack Harris and lived near Gunthaven, Miss.; Hamilton, born 1807, married Sarah Jane Baker; George W., (1830-1857); Lucy C., (1822-1834); Rawley, born on the flatboat while his parents were on their way to Alabama, married Eliza Jane Burleson and lived near Raymond, Miss.; William B. (1826-1840); Martin; Joseph, married Clara Marshall of Alabama; Elvira, first married to a Mr. Wallace, later to Oliver Vassar Shearer of near Birmingham. The name of the eleventh child is not known.

Of these children, only four were mentioned in the will, the others either having died or severed connections with the parents.

According to his will, Andrew left his wife, the former Rebecca Denton, 11 Negro slaves and the furniture of the home, specifying that the slaves were to be divided among the children upon her death. His three grandchildren by the name of Sivley, all descended from Jacob, were willed \$1,000 each. The four resulting from the marriage of his daughter to William Faris, were left a similar sum but Hamilton was guardian and trustee.

The remainder of his estate was to be divided among his children, Rawley, Elvira and Hamilton, and among the children of Martin, deceased. It was explained in the will that Joseph had gotten his share in the payment on the home

allowed him.

The last time a Sivley's name was recorded on the deed books of this county was in 1870.

Among present descendants are, from Joseph, Miss Lucy Landman of Huntsville; Joseph Landman of Memphis and George P. Landman of Chicago; from Hamilton, Mrs. Moore Moore, wife of a Memphis physician, and a Mrs. Fields of Washington, D. C.

Laura M. Landman, who first was married to Robert Randall Kelly and later to Thomas J. Young, both of Huntsville; Emma E. Landman, who was married to J. F. Young, and Arthur S. Landman are all deceased grandchildren of Joseph.

Joseph, the member of the family to last own the home, had five children. They included Mary Frances, who was married to George P. Landman, former prominent local cotton broker; Anna Rebecca, who was married to D. J. Jones; Elvira J., who was married to Richard Halsey, all of Huntsville; Sarah Estelle, who was married to J. R. Little; Raleigh, N. C., and Archie, who died while young.

This home, today is a poor monument to the fineness which once lay about the winding stairway in its very heart. Mill tenantry and poor upkeep have carried it into a dilapidated state.

Its cellar door stands open to the passing tramp, to the wandering animal or food-seeking fowl. Trash is piled in all corners, while ashes from the last tenant's fires are heaped high upon its hearths. Windows, devoid of panes, allow the wind to whip the dirt about on its floors. Boards from crates now take the place of the door of fine woodwork that once hung beneath the archway at the front. Even the railing of the winding stairs has partly been carried away. Chimneys at each end of the house are in good condition, but cracks follow the four walls from the ground to the shingled roof now covered with tin.

Outside, porches are gone and there are no signs that there ever was a lawn. A plowed field runs up to its front doorstep. A few feet away, a pit marks the site of the ice-house where was stored ice from the pond below. The mill was razed years ago but the old frame house appears far sounder than the main dwelling.

Few persons are present visitors, from the standpoint

of curiosity or interest at this home. Last February, there came to the estate an expensively dressed woman in a fine car, driven by a chauffeur in uniform. She was from Chicago, she said; and the granddaughter of a Sivley. After looking the place over and getting her bearings, she left.

The next day, however, she appeared again, this time ordering her car up a narrow winding road to the small family graveyard, surrounded by cedars some half a mile from the house. Nearly two hours later, she departed without coming near the old home again.

This visitor left her mark behind her. In the southwest corner of the burial ground, ten feet from a large grave stone and at the base of an immense cedar tree, she had her chauffeur dig. First, in order to do so, he cut away the roots on that side of the tree, some of which measured six or eight inches in diameter. Soon, he uncovered a brick vault, four feet square and two and one-half feet deep, extending under the tree.

What was taken from this vault, which certainly was not once a grave, is not known. It may have been a fortune cached there by her forefathers, perhaps during the Civil War. This wealth may have been in the form of gold, silver or jewels. Again, it may have been valuable papers buried there so many years ago, with a tree planted on top of it, that roots from the seedling, and even the tree itself, have grown to a massive size.

Whatever she found, this woman doubtless was one descendant of a historic family who believed the cryptic message left for her on a map found in her grandsire's strong box.

(Ed: Part of what was once the Sivley property was purchased for use as the Huntsville Airport, west of South Memorial Parkway, after this story was written. The old homes are no longer in existence but the tiny cemetery and the old tree with its damaged roots, are still in existence at the end of an abandoned runway. 1969).

The Otey Mansion

The Otey home, just south of Meridianville, Ala., on North Memorial Parkway, claims two chief features of distinction: that it was an early residence and that it embodies the fundamental characteristics of a real Southern mansion.

Always surrounded by flowers, even from the first, this hospitable home sits and broods over the days that were, the days of the Deep South, of slavery at its height, and of the supreme enjoyment of the square-dance when the home circle was the dominating appeal.

This residence was built about 1850 by Madison Otey as a surprise for his bride, Octavia Wyche of Mississippi.

Walter Otey, son of Col. John Otey who commanded a battalion of riflemen during the Revolutionary War, was the first of his family to come to Alabama. He and his wife, Mary Walton of Salem, Va., whom he married in 1800, came to Huntsville early in 1817. For a few months they lived in the town, rapidly growing in population, then bought a section of land a mile south of the present site of Meridianville.

Then, that section of the country was heavily wooded, but it had much promise as a farming section. Walter first cleared away the forests on the brow of a gradual rise leading up from the trail that had been broken north from Huntsville toward Tennessee (Ed: This trail is now North Memorial Parkway.) With the trees he felled he fashioned a two-room log cabin, spacious on the inside and having a large hallway between the two rooms. This structure of white oak was weather-boarded and plastered, providing the coolest type of home in the Summer and the warmest in the Winter. Using this cabin as his domicile, he began

a plantation. More land was cleared, more acres added, more slaves bought to carry on the work. Finally, he had acquired one of the largest farming tracts in the county, comprising the majority of the land between his home and Flint River. This acreage was virgin soil, rich and ready for the plow, so he made the most of his opportunities.

Faith in friendship, however, which required merely that he sign a note of security, nipped his efforts in the bud. This friend's name is one which even Otey's descendants cannot identify now, but Walter staked nearly all for him and lost. When obligations were paid he had only 250 acres to call his own.

That blow was the death knell to the original owner of the property. Soon afterward, he died.

His widow took over the estate. The children of this pair included John Walter, owner of Bell Tavern in Huntsville and the first Probate Judge of Madison County, who married Cynthia Smith; Lucy Ann, wife of Rhoda Horton, former owner of the McCracken home on Meridian Pike; Mary Frances, married to James Robinson, owner of the adjoining plantation and whose home once stood near the old McCormick estate; Caroline Louisa, married to John Robinson, builder of the Dilworth home, whose land adjoined that of her sister, Mary Frances; Eliza, wife of Mr. Dillard; Armistead, who married Elizabeth Dozier; Christopher, who first wed Emily Smith and later Margaret A. Blackwood; William Madison, who married Octavia Aurelia Wyche; and Maria Melinda, married to John W. Pruitt of Meridianville.

These children were educated at the best universities the South afforded, after which they were married, an event in their lives which took them, one by one, away from that little two-room cabin - that is, with the exception of Madison who remained to take care of his mother.

Madison began to look about for a wife. His search ended at the plantation home of the Wyches, an old English family that first had settled in Virginia. Octavia accepted his proposal to marry and he returned home to prepare for the ceremony.

First, Octavia must have a home that would approach to a substantial degree the mansion, surrounded by slaves, to which she had been accustomed while living with her father.

The present home was the result of that preparation. This spacious ten room house was originally Italian in style but since has been changed so that it now is embellished by the four Ionic columns that characterize this Old Southern mansion.

As planned by Madison, the dwelling was divided into ten rooms, those on the first floor measuring 20-foot square, with unusually high ceilings. A 40-foot hallway, with double doors in the center, divided the house. Bannisters of cherry wood followed the course of the stairway as it led up from a point toward the back.

The woodwork of all windows and doors, secured with wood pegs, was fluted and painted in ivory. Floors were made of hard pine, sawed in wide planks and planed on one side. Only hand made nails were used in the construction.

A row of slave cabins was built at right angles to the main dwelling. As a final step, he had one room of the old cabin moved to the rear of the house and used as a kitchen, another characteristic of those days, for the odor of cooking must not bother the master or his family.

Next came the arrangement of a lawn that would serve as a suitable surrounding for the front of the house. Madison had vague ideas about this but he engaged the services of an English landscape gardner to complete them.

First, the architect laid off a drive a little to one side of the mansion, which ended in a circle directly in front. Next, he planted a row of pines along the lawn's edge, then a row of holly, and finally a row of cedars, interspersed with walnut and locust trees. These he arranged in such a manner as to allow passersby a full view of the home.

Two huge oaks down on the side of the road escaped the gardener's axe. These later became a resting place for travelers. Here they reined their horses and chatted idly in the shade, while a Southern sun baked the dusty wagon tracks only a few feet away.

The peak of the landscaper's work came in the two flower gardens he placed at each side of the mansion. These were arranged in squares, on the inside of which two ovals of boxwood, set three feet apart, allowed a strolling place for lovers or for an admirer of flowers.

Next to the inner circle of boxwood were planted tall, white lillies, then a double row of tulips, then hyacinths

and finally a pink crepe myrtle. At each side and end of the ovals of boxwood were placed rosebushes. In the little triangles at the corners of the square, peonies and roses, bordered with white and blue duck lillies and violets, bloomed.

Walks led from each end of the porch to these gardens, while still another carried one from the front to the flower bordered circle of the driveway and to the horse block.

Upon completing the last details, Madison had his Negro driver, Henry, hitch up his two fine carriage horses, "Jim Black" and "Jim Brown" to carry him to get his bride. This vehicle resembled half a goose egg, with Henry perched high up in front on a small seat.

Upon their return, Madison and his bride, Octavia, began a characteristic plantation life. Numerous dances and other social events livened its halls. While a bright moon lighted the way for guests as they strolled about the lawn, an orchestra from Huntsville furnished music to as many as 40 couples at one time. Never a Christmas went by that attention did not center upon a bounteous dinner for at least a score of friends. Among those who enjoyed the hospitality of this home was Bishop Harvey Otey of the Tennessee diocese. He and his daughter, Donna, stopped there as guests when he dedicated the Episcopal Church in Huntsville.

Madison and Octavia were the parents of six children. These included Imogene, married to William Fields, owner of a 3000 acre farm at Castlewood, Va.; William Walter of Birmingham who married Sophia Robertson and formerly settled near Meridianville; Marie Rebecca, married to John M. Hampton of West Point, Mississippi, settled near Meridianville; Laura Elise, unmarried; Lucille Horton, married to John Bealle Walker, formerly of Rockingham Co., Va., and who later lived in the old home; and Madison, who died in childhood.

The father was unable to serve during the Civil War because he was too old and because he was afflicted with carbuncles. In his stead, he sent his overseer, named Neaves, who served throughout the war without a scratch.

During the Civil War numerous soldiers were given food from the little log cabin at the back. The family's biggest loss at the hands of the Yankees were 40 tons of hay, stolen

from a field in front of the house. In addition to this, a cedar fence surrounding the lawn was torn down and taken to the camp on the Dilworth estate where the boards were made into stockades for mules.

During Reconstruction Mrs. Otey was a valuable friend to the local Ku Klux Klan. Beside buying whistles for members of this group she made many of their robes and other trappings.

One night Mrs. Otey looked out upon the lawn of her home. There, silently surrounding the buildings were at least 100 white-robed Klansmen. As she walked out upon the porch, each of them bowed low upon his horse's neck. Then the leader asked if there was anything they could do for her. Receiving a negative reply they turned and rode silently away. Later that night a man was taken out and whipped for beating his wife.

Both Madison and Octavia lived to an old age. After their death, the home passed into the hands of the Walkers. This mansion still retains much of its old atmosphere. Large trees shade it generously. Boxwood from the flower gardens, prepared more than three-quarters of a century ago, bedeck it on each side. Even the old kitchen made from the log cabin, now used as a crib, remains.

The two huge oaks that once stood along the roadside have been gone for years. A storm blew down one, while the other was sawed into stove wood to make way for the route of the present highway. At the north of the house, beneath another large oak, water still is obtained from two large springs.

Upon entering the home, the visitor's eyes are attracted immediately to the two oil paintings on the wall. These are of Walter Otey and Mary Walton, sketched before they left their Virginia home more than 150 years ago. In a room to the right hangs another portrait, that of Octavia Wyche and her mother, painted while the daughter was only five years old.

Much of the original furniture of the home still remains. Rosewood, mahogany and cherry fittings, rare in their antiquity, are to be found in every corner. A heavy four-poster bed, a melodeon, a sideboard that antedates rollers, and many other objects of this nature are included. Chief among them all, however, is an odd-looking old piano of

rosewood. From the notes of this relic alone might come more romance of the Old South than even the pages of history have revealed.



The Otey Mansion in 1969.

The Kellys Of Jeff

Born of an early settlement around a spring forming the head of Indian Creek, from the Kelly home at Jeff has grown a community listed on United States postoffice records as Jeff, named for Jefferson Davis, president of the Confederacy.

As closely as can be determined from records, the first part of this mansion was built soon after 1828 by Benjamin O. Wilburn.

Due to a recent remodeling, passersby doubtless view this home with the idea that it is a new structure located on the site of an older dwelling. Nothing about it indicates that one part of it once served as a postoffice for the little frontier colony at the spring.

Today, the residence of Lawson and D. E. Kelly and family, it stands almost at the center of 640 acres of land, an entire section, acquired by J. O. Kelly, their father, from Wilburn in 1853. About it is almost every feature required to make a village, all the result of diligent work and saving on the part of the Kellys.

This tract was patented by various settlers in this county at different times during the three or four years immediately following the land sales of 1809. Each of the four quarter sections involved in the 640 acres, passed through several owners before reaching the Kellys.

The spring, only a short distance away, from which come the waters flowing southward to form the Hurricane fork of Indian Creek, drew the first white settlers to that section. A deed on the sale of a nearby area, dated prior to 1820, has the following reference to this water source: "...lying immediately at the head of Price's Big Spring."

The first houses erected around the little pool were of

the crude type planned not so much to protect their occupants from the elements as to shield them from an occasional arrow of a passing Indian. In their midst was a blockade to which the settlers might flee during a sudden outbreak of hostility among the Redskins.

The only part remaining from the early settlement is a one-room structure which was moved by Wilburn and made a part of the Kelly home. This evidently served the pioneers as a postoffice, for one of its doors bore the usual slot for letters.

Wilburn made his first purchase of land in 1828, buying a quarter section from John Walker and wife, Huldah, for \$800. The following year, he added more, and repeated this act in 1834 and 1835, acquiring a quarter section each time. An odd feature about the Walker tract was that this owner had gotten it from Isaac Jamison and wife, Margaret R., for "six thousand weight of good mercantile seed cotton."

As the first area Wilburn bought is that on which the home stands, there is reason to believe that this man began his home soon afterward, for his additional transactions, following so closely, indicate that he was starting a plantation. The adjoining tract on which the spring is located was added to the farm later.

Just when Wilburn moved the old postoffice up from the spring and added it to his home is not known. The settlement there, however, is reputed to have broken up around 1845 because of repeated outbreaks of malaria fever.

Wilburn, who is buried on the Luke Matthews place nearby, died before Kelly acquired the property. A few years later, his widow was married to Tom Graves, a young man accused of marrying her for her money. Rumor even has it that the woman died a mysterious death.

But anyway, on Sept. 12, 1853, Joshua O. Kelly bought the entire tract from the Wilburn estate. His father, David E. Kelly, had come down from Brunswick County, Virginia, with his brother, Josiah, (their younger brother, Billy, came a few years later) and had settled with his wife, Nancy, near Meridianville some time prior to 1820. Later, he had moved to a plantation on Pulaski Pike, five miles east of Jeff.

David's children included Laura, wife of James Phillips; Amanda, wife of Samuel Davidson; Martha, who died single

at the age of 54; J. O., who married Sally B. Strong, of near Meridianville; W. S., who died at 82 in Texas, and Thales, who died at Corona in Walker County but is buried in the Kelly Cemetery in Madison County.

J. O. married Sally Strong, whose old home still stands on a hill overlooking the highway a mile south of Meridianville, on June 12, 1850. Their children follow:

Sue, wife of James R. Burwell, parents of Kelly Burwell and Mrs. N. B. Stump of El Paso, Texas; D. E., who wed Eva Thompson; J. O., who died in 1928; Lawson; Lena, wife of Judge George Malone of Limestone County; Lula, who died single; and Nanny, wife of Henry B. Malone of Limestone County, parents of Rebecca; Mrs. George Harsh of Memphis; Sally B.; Mrs. Horace Leeper of Denton, Texas, and Nancy of Athens, Alabama.

Finding this land he had bought to be a fertile tract, J. O. began at once an active farming career. Cotton was his main crop. Each year, many acres of this plant were cultivated with the aid of slaves and disposed of on a profitable market. Before he could increase his estate to a safe standpoint, however, the Civil War came on.

Kelly was entering his 46th year when the struggle began, but he volunteered at once, enlisting in the Fourth Alabama Cavalry under Forrest. His battles included that at Shiloh and all of those between Chattanooga and Atlanta. He escaped without wounds.

While he was away fighting, stirring times were occurring at his home. Mrs. Kelly was a hearty woman and a true Southerner. To live with her during the war came her sister, Sue Strong, Another Rebel at heart. These two were outspoken in their support of the Confederacy, and this brought scores of Yankees there to bother them. Things about the plantation were torn up generally and 17 fine horses were carried away at one time. But the meat salted down was saved. This was taken up on the mountain nearby and stored, with a high fence around it to keep animals away.

Yankees often occupied the lower part of the home, so a guard was placed there to protect the family. On one occasion, a colonel was sent out with a force from Huntsville to burn the home, but this man standing there on watch talked the soldier into leaving the building unmolested.

J. O. came back to his home a poor man, but the fortunes of war were not enough to dishearten him. He freed his slaves, who had lived in a row of cabins at the side of the home, giving each of them a supply of food and a sum of money. Several of them remained with him. Among these was Fanny Strong, an old Negro mammy who died around 1912 or 1913. Her substantially built one-room log hut, with its large fireplace, still stands in the yard.

With the help of those slaves who refused to leave their master, he began his reconstruction, his family growing up about his feet. This effort on his part, working amid his then fenceless fields, was a success, for again he farmed wisely.

In 1885, two of his sons, who had reached manhood by that time, formed a partnership in the mercantile, blacksmithing, ginning and farming business under the firm name of D. E. and J. O. Kelly. Excepting the W. R. Rison Banking Co., this is the oldest establishment in the county still under the direction of the family which founded it.

Three years after this business was formed, D. E. was appointed postmaster, a position he has held since. When the postoffice was established there, the name of the community was changed from Jefferson Davis to Jeff, due to a government postal regulation requiring that names of additional settlements be short. His commission is the third oldest in the United States.

In 1888, D. E. married Eva Thompson and moved into a separate home which he had had built on the farm. Their issue included Thompson R., married to Adelene Rhyne, Lexington, Miss.; Aurora, wife of Homer M. Rowe, Lincoln Co., Tenn; J. O., married to Eula Russell, Maury Co., Tenn., and Mary Lena, wife of Jeff Davis Lutten. Children of Thompson, who now live in the old home with their parents, grandparents and great uncle, Lawson, represent the fourth generation of Kellys to occupy it.

J. O., the progenitor of all the Kellys to live in the home, born March 17, 1826, and died on March 8, 1897, almost 71 years to the day after he was born. A writer of that day had the following to say about this man:

"He had a most exalted idea of what a Christian should be, and feeling that he did not measure up to this standard, he soon withdrew from the church and did not reunite with

it until the Summer before his death. This obituary, in addition, explains that J. O. Kelly was tender-hearted and that he was a friend to the needy, discounting bills to widows and handing out food to the poor.

Mrs. Sally B. (Strong) Kelly died May 19, 1915. After the death of this elder pair, J. O., Lawson and Lula, all single, continued to live in the home. But after Lula's death, D. E. and his family, who had moved to the dwelling he had built nearby, returned to the old mansion, where they have resided since.

The home today has only its surroundings to bespeak its age. Remodeled 20 years ago and brick veneered in 1928, the building now appears almost as a new structure, both inside and out. The double porch formerly in front was tossed aside for white columns, floors and window frames were changed, but not the sills and corner posts of hewed poplar.

Twelve rooms, eight of which were from the original house, now make up the home. These are fitted with antique furniture and decorated with many beautiful family paintings, both landscape and animal sketches, all the work of Lula, who was particularly gifted in this line. Many of the doors still seen there are of the original handfluted type. A mantlepice of fine workmanship is found in the dining room.

The beauty of no mansion, however great, could excel that of the lawn at this home. A thick sod forms a carpet, which, even when mowed, allows one to sink in up to his ankles, while tall cedars furnish almost a solid blanket above. This is set off still further by rows of well trimmed boxwood, perhaps 60 or 70 years old, on each side of the walkway leading from the roadside to the front door.

Flower gardens, bordered with scores of nursery plants, are on all sides of the house. The two biggest of these, one of which was started by Sally Kelly shortly after the Civil War, stand nearest the road.

The settlement around the home now, due mainly to the partnership formed in 1885, resembles a town in many ways. There is a postoffice, a telephone switchboard, a blacksmith repair shop and a general merchandise store. In addition to these, the Kellys have established a nursery, a gin, and a sweet potato curing house. They have in-

creased the plantation to 2500 acres, much of which is an orchard, for they probably ship more Early Harvest and Transparent apples and Keiffer pears than any other firm south of Virginia. In addition to this, they have a large cattle business.

J. O., one of the partners, died in 1928, but the firm has continued under the old name.

One of the biggest prides of this family as it directs the business in the little community of Jeff is that not a foot of the land bought by J. O. Kelly in 1853, or any of that added to the tract later, has been covered by mortgage since they acquired it.



J. O. Kelly

LEGEND OF THE INDIANS' BURIED GOLD

"I go 'way. I come back."

These were the parting words of "John," an Indian who, around 1910, visited this section in search of a pot of gold that a faded map his grandmother had left told him was buried on the Shelby Cullom farm near Ryland.

Like a shadow he came, just as mysteriously he left, so Mr. and Mrs. Cullom recall, with whom he conversed at length while he was here. He understood the "white man's" suspicions, and made no move which might excite them.

Evening chores were progressing nicely on the Cullom farm when he appeared. Cows, herded at the pasture gate, chewed their cuds restlessly in the twilight. Strong upon the dewy atmosphere was the odor of hay, newly thrown down from the loft, and meted out into respective hay racks.

Mr. Cullom, busily engaged about the dairy barn, suddenly was interrupted by one of his Negro hired men, who hurried into the building and spoke in a voice pitched high with excitement.

"Boss, dere's a Injun out dere wh-whut wants tuh see yuh," he stammered.

"Oh, go on, John, there're no Indians in this part of the country," Mr. Cullom answered. "Get back to your work."

"But da is, boss. I dun seed him, an' he dun axed fer yuh." The Negro's white eyes showed his earnestness.

Mr. Cullom walked outside. There, a few feet away, stood a huge, broad-shouldered man of around 50. He was dressed in civilian clothes, but his complexion and the cut of his hair showed plainly that he was Indian.

"I come from Tahlequah, Indian Territory," he explained, pronouncing familiarly the name of the city in

Cherokee County, Oklahoma

"I come stay for night."

"We have no room for you to stay," Mr. Cullom told him, thinking of the dinner invitation he and his wife had for that night.

"I stay in barn," the Indian quickly replied.

"No, we have no place for you." Mr. Cullom spoke firmly. The man's great hulk added no little to his suspiciousness.

The Indian glanced about him. Darkies were peering at him from all sides. Then, in as friendly manner as possible, he motioned for Mr. Cullom to follow him.

Behind the barn, he drew a yellowed paper from the small bag he carried.

"This a map," he said. "It tell me where gold my father left here. You let me stay for night, go with me search, I divide."

Mr. Cullom looked at the paper. It was covered with lines and Indian characters. The visitor pointed to a spot plainly drawn near the center.

"There gold," he whispered.

So after a consultation with Mrs. Cullom, the dinner engagement was called off, and the Indian was led to a room. There, he pulled from his pocket a roll of bills.

"Here, you keep for guarantee," he proffered. "I stay here 'till you call. I not go 'way."

But his hosts were convinced of his good intentions, and invited him down on the back porch to eat. When he had finished his repast, which he partook with his fingers, explaining that Theodore Roosevelt had eaten that way while on a visit to Indian Territory, they sat around him in conversation.

He told them in his broken English that his name was John, and that the map had been left his mother, who had died recently, by his grandmother, one of the Cherokees moved from this section to Oklahoma back in the early years of the county. The gold, he said, was too heavy to take along on horseback, so his ancestors had buried it, and had marked the trail to the cache by chopping on white oak and other long-life trees.

He showed a surprising acquaintance with the topography of the county, even mentioning springs and streams, a

knowledge which corroborated his statement that he had studied the map since childhood, while his mother and grandmother pointed.

In discussing the valley in which the Cullom home is located, he informed his listeners that his ancestors had built their tepees nearby, and that they had called this section "Bellfaun," the Indian name for "god of the woods."

"What induced you to come back?" he was asked, after he had mentioned that he had had the map in his possession several years.

"I wait till spirit he move me," the Cherokee explained.

Then he told them of his trip to this part of the country, and that he had gotten off the train at Ryland. The railway schedule of that time conformed to his story.

To the question as to whether he was a single man, he replied affirmatively, but said that his brother was married, and that he had chosen a white woman as his wife. That recollection led him to a tale of land division.

"Indian he say 'Here.' Second Indian he say, 'Here.' White woman she say, 'Here, here, here and here'."

At times while he talked, an old cross-eyed Negro servant at the home stopped near the Indian to stare at him. She did not like his looks and, apparently, that feeling was returned, for John shifted nervously whenever he spied her, evidencing that crossed eyes were an ill omen to his people.

The Cherokee was easily the heaviest sleeper in the Cullom home that night, but he was up with the sun the next morning. An early breakfast, and he and Mr. Cullom were off to hunt the pot of gold that Indian ancestors said was buried generations ago.

Consulting his map at intervals the visitor walked slowly from tree to tree about the immense lawn. Finally, he stopped, grunted, and pointed. There on a huge oak, only a few yards from the house, was an oddly-shaped mark, cut in the trunk so that the bark, during the many years since it was chopped there, had curled in at its edges.

Without more ado, he headed almost directly north, talking freely as he found successive signs of the trail. In a grove of trees still within view of the house, he found a larger mark, plainly the shape of a human foot. There he turned at right angles, continuing until he came to a scrubby

growth of timber. He indicated small mounds in the underbrush, signifying that no trees had been there when the gold was buried, and followed them to the forest beyond.

A few feet in the wood, he came to the largest tree they had encountered on their course, which had led them meanderingly for two or three miles, but never a great distance from the Cullom Home. Marks on this giant were more numerous, of odder shapes, and located nearer the ground.

For a time, the Indian stared in silence. His talkative mood of the early morning was gone.

After several minutes of deep study he said, "I go away. I come back."

That was all. He departed without giving Mr. Cullom even the slightest hint as to what he had read from those characters left by his ancestors.

Perhaps they told him the gods had decreed that it should not be touched again by his people."

Anyway, he faded out of the picture as quietly as he had appeared. No one saw him come; no one saw him go.

But he has not returned, so far as Mr. and Mrs. Cullom know. If he came back and dug up the gold, he concealed all evidence because a close watch for such a move was kept.

As the years pass, perhaps he is waiting for the spirit to move him. Only Indians can tell.



Quietdale

Though it was never seen by the man who planned it, who worked in anticipation of the day he could rest beneath its roof, "Quietdale," the Erskine Mastin home on Meridianville Pike embodies all of those ideals which brought so many young men South to seek their fortune - the love of a spacious mansion as the center of a surrounding plantation. (Ed: Quietdale is the home adjacent to Lee High School on the north. 1969.)

This home was the idea of William "Black Bill" Robinson, high sheriff of Madison County from 1842 until he died in 1852. For years, he built it in his mind, working over each detail imaginatively. Then death interfered.

Respecting his wish, his widow, however, continued with the plan and erected the house a year or two afterward.

Contrary to the custom today, by which almost every home carries the architect's touch, this dwelling bears the personality of its builder in every detail. No massive columns set off its front, no towering facade marks the south side as the main entrance, yet there is everything about this structure to make it seem out of place in any surroundings other than those of a plantation.

A further item points to the care with which this home was prepared. Robinson spent many months gathering lumber for the dwelling, and when it was completed, there was enough material left to erect another.

Mr. and Mrs. Erskine Mastin worked with a studied interest in restoring the mansion to as near its original beauty as possible. The home has been modernized, but no major feature - and only those minor ones absolutely necessary - has been changed.

The land included in the estate first was entered by John

Williams Walker, grandfather of Judge R. W. Walker of Huntsville, who served as the president of the constitutional convention for the Alabama territory and as the first United States senator from this state. Later, it was owned by John F. Newman, William Fleming, Lemuel Mead and, finally, by Robinson.

This last owner came to Madison County from Virginia around 1825 or 1830, it is believed, for he was not born until 1808. Some of the old-timers here recall that their fathers considered "Black Bill" Robinson the smartest man in the county, and records indicate that they were right, for he was one of the largest land owners in this section, having thousands of acres in North Alabama, Tennessee, Arkansas and Mississippi. In addition to this, it is said his ambition was to own 500 slaves before he died, a desire which was never quite realized. In the settlement of his estate, however, one inventory lists ninety two slaves at an estimated value of nearly \$60,000., but there were scores of others to take care of his seven plantations.

Jerry Robinson, one of his slaves, who later worked for Dr. William Burritt, grandson of "Black Bill" and present owner of his large plantation in Big Cove, often recalled his master's early start. This Negro had run away from his first owner and had come to Huntsville. After a time, he had been leased by Robinson.

"Black Bill" is said to have been the first brick manufacturer in Madison County. If this is true, Thomas Brandon and George Steele, earlier masons, must have obtained their material from the kilns at Chattanooga or elsewhere prior to his arrival, as such often was the case. At any rate, Jerry, the slave, was put to work making brick.

"Marse Bill considered me his right-hand man," Jerry used to recall. Sometimes I was a brick-maker. Then again, I sawed lumber, standing at the bottom of a pit while another Negro worked the saw with me from above. That was what gave Marse Bill his start - me and my knowledge of them trades."

Some of the first brick manufactured by Robinson were used to build the old Mastin's mill at Mastin's lake north-west of the present W. P. Dilworth property.

Later, "Black Bill," who allowed no one to deprive him of his rights and almost daily became engaged in a tiff over

some matter or another, was made high sheriff, a dignified office in those days, and the most sought after position in the county. This was the real beginning of the fortune built up by this man, for from then on he amassed wealth.

He was a keen financier, and almost everything he touched brought him wealth. He signed several deeds of trust which later were executed in his favor. Between 1838 and 1847 he was in a business of some sort with Benjamin Jolley. In addition to this, he owned 298 shares of capital stock in the Memphis and Charleston railroad, the first section of which, that between Huntsville and Memphis, was completed in 1851.

As his wealth increased, Robinson made plans for the home he had dreamed of all his life. Strangely enough, he wanted it to be a frame house and of the best lumber to be had. To Bridgeport, he sent for this material, having it shipped down the river by boat to Whitesburg landing where it was culled and then hauled to Huntsville by oxcart.

After he had collected all this lumber, he died, in the 44th year of his life. The end came while he was attending a Fourth of July barbecue at Cold Springs on Monte Sano Mountain.

Robinson left a widow, Caroline Moore of Hazel Green, and five children: William and James P. who never married; Mary K., wife of Dr. Amatus R. Burritt, owner of a home still standing near Eustis and Greene Streets; Fannie J., wife of J. L. Ridley, and Charles T., who married and lived at Pulaski, Tennessee.

The site chosen for the home met with the widow's approval, for there she could be nearer her husband's family than at her first residence, since torn down, at the corner of Gates Street and Oak Avenue. Across Meridian Pike from the mansion she was to build was her brother-in-law, James, whose dwelling near the McCormick estate also has been razed. Even nearer, at the Dilworth estate, lived John Robinson, a cousin by marriage.

A slight change, through necessity, was made in locating the mansion so carefully planned by her husband. He had selected a point between the present site and the railroad track, but this had been done before the bed for the railway had been laid. When this northern branch of the Memphis and Charleston began to take form, though it was

not completed until after the home was built, Mrs. Robinson decided the building should be farther up on the rise leading to Chapman's mountain.

Every piece of this 14-room house was made or hand-sawed by slave-labor, yet the manner in which each little board or decorative item is put together indicates the care with which work was done in those days. Months were required in preparing the structure.

An odd feature is noticed about this home. Upon passing through the front door, entrance was gained to a reception hall, with four doors, two at the back and one at each side, all leading to other parts of the house. Those at the back each opened upon a stairway, separated by a partition extending up to the ceiling of the second floor. In other words, the house was divided after leaving the entrance hall.

This division, naturally enough, supposedly might have been made so that the women could be segregated on one side of the house and the men on the other, but further details indicate otherwise. Rooms to the right of the reception hall were immense chambers separated by large sliding doors. Those above were of the same dimensions and also had sliding doors between them. On the left side of the house, rooms were smaller and had more intricate divisions, including hallways and dressing rooms.

The most logical deduction, it seems, is that the right side of the house was used for entertainment, while the left side was devoted to family requirements.

All rooms of the first floor were 16 feet high and measured more than 20 feet in other dimensions. The ceilings of each of the two immense rooms to the right were set off with large center decorations of a dahlia design, all done by a slave artist. At each end of the long room, formed when the sliding doors were thrown back, were tall pier glass mirrors which reflected into each other from their locations nearly 50 feet apart. Astral lamps, rare paintings, deep rugs, gold cupids and statuettes formed food for this reflection. Other features of this part of the house were two mantelpieces of imported Italian marble.

Doors were unusually wide, though not of an extraordinary height. All had transoms above them, the glass of which was prepared by fitting two panes of equal size into the opening, perhaps because the single pane of the dimen-

sion needed could not be obtained. This fixture over the door on the west side of the house was enclosed with a tri-colored glass to catch in contrasting colors the dying rays of the setting sun.

A feature of the front door was noticed in its outer knob, which like all those in the main hallway, was of silver, thus avoiding a contrast when the portal was thrown open.

In the attic was placed a narrow stairway leading up to a trapdoor, which permitted one to go out upon the flat copper roof above. This was Mrs. Robinson's idea, for it would aid her in drying her fruit for Winter use.

From this high position, Huntsville appeared almost at one's feet, while an excellent view of the surrounding mountains could be obtained. Mrs. Robinson, through this arrangement, once was enabled to stand upon the top of her home and watch a Civil War skirmish a short distance to the southwest.

Eight bells, each with a different tone, summoned servants to various parts of the house. These signals were worked by wires leading to the chimes on the back porch.

Wide porticoes surrounded the home on all except the east side, thus allowing the early morning sun to penetrate the two large lower parlors. The ceiling of the front porch was highly decorated by panels of plastering in floral patterns.

More than 30 huge oaks, with spreading branches that throw a blanket of shadow about the spacious lawn, towered above the house. Beneath these, scores of boxwood trees marked off the wide walkway leading down to the picket fence, where the roadway circled before the customary horse block. Off to the west side and to the rear of the home were located the flower and vegetable gardens.

Directly behind the dwelling and almost touching one corner of it was built the slave quarters, containing the kitchen and five other rooms. A cellar, in which could be stored fruit and vegetables, was dug beneath it. The double porch on this structure was of cedar.

At the back of the slave quarters stood a large smoke-house while the well-house and barns were off to one side. The ice house, since filled up, was located at the rear of the garden.

In the large rooms of this pre-war mansion have been

held many a characteristic plantation dance. There, lovers stole off from the gay throng for a quiet stroll in the spotted moonlight beneath the towering oaks. And the sound of shuffling feet and the tone of string instruments carried delight back to even the oldest darkies at the rear.

This home escaped all pillage during the Civil War. On the hill to the east of it was located the Yankee barracks, maintained there for several years after the struggle, but not once did the invaders molest the widow and her children in the large mansion near them.

Mrs. Robinson died Jan. 30, 1885. The following Fall, the estate was offered for sale at public outcry and was bought by Erskine Mastin.

Members of Erskine Mastin's family who lived there with him included his wife, nee Lula Spragins, and seven children: Robert, of Pheonix, Ariz.; Mary Irby, Richmond, Va., director of public health nursing for the State of Virginia; Hervey, who died in 1906; Sallie, wife of Eugene Gill; Henrietta, of New York; Laura, who married R. Saylor Wright of Cincinnati, Ohio, and Lula, wife of Jay W. Harlan of Danville, Kentucky.

A visit to "Quietdale," as the estate is now known, gives a fairly comprehensive glance into the life of the last century. All is run on the basis of a profitable plantation.

The boxwood and picket fence have gone from the front lawn, but hedge surrounds the mansion on three sides. The driveway now curves up to the front doorstep. On each side of it and in all parts of the yard are roses, peonies, flags, tulips and other flowers.

Very few changes have been made in the home. Original floors have been left in all cases. The partition, however, which once divided the house from top to bottom, has been torn out, and the stairway moved to one side of the room to the rear of the reception hall, so that it now leads up to the second floor by means of a wide landing.

Antique furniture of all kinds, dressing cases, mirrors, massive sideboards, highboys, desks, presses and walnut closets, now aids in furnishing the large corners of the building. Numerous ancestral painting also give the home a colonial touch.

The old slave quarters at the back have been connected with the upper floor of the main house by means of an

extended porch and short flight of stairs, while the kitchen has been moved to a rear room of the main dwelling.

The interior of the second floor of this outer house in no way resembles its original self. It is now divided into a den and billiard room, both redecorated and the latter cedar lined. This is one spot to which the present master of the home can slip away for a quiet and entertaining hour.



Photo by Swartzel

In 1969 Quietdale retains the charm of the Old South.



ORMSBY M. KNIGHT MITCHELL.

Yankee Occupation - 1862

Huntsville, 3000 population, raged and then turned red in the face over the insult invading Yankees heaped upon its populace during its occupation in the Civil War. Safely tucked away in prison were eleven of the town's leading citizens - the wise-heads and "fathers" as well as a prominent visitor.

They were jailed in an attempt to force the community to change its rebellious attitude toward Federal troops, to stop firing at pickets from ambush, and to extend to Gen. O. M. Mitchell, commanding officer, as well as his staff, customary social courtesies.

The prisoners were requested to do only one thing - to sign a statement urging local residents to cease their acts of hostility. That was the condition. They could accept it, or remain behind bars.

These eleven town "fathers" were William McDowell, William Acklen, A. J. Withers, George P. Beirne, the Rev. J. G. Wilson, William H. Moore, Samuel Cruse, T. S. McCalley, G. L. Mastin, Stephen W. Harris and Thomas Fearn. The prominent visitor was none other than Bishop Henry C. Lay of the Episcopal Church.

Men of good reputation. God-fearing, upright, influential, they were to become the lever by which the town was controlled. They would be the leaders behind whom their fellow citizens would trail into the fold. That was why they were singled out for this unhappy plight. But, above all, the Yankee leader wanted to show his power.

Mitchell's invaders burst into Huntsville early on the morning of April 11, 1862. Their arrival was so unexpected that not an armed man opposed them.

But Federal troops were not permitted to keep possession

of this section of the state without interference. Confederate cavalry, moving swiftly, inflicted injury or annoyance upon them.

During the latter part of April, a vigorous Confederate attack drove the Yankees out of the neighboring town of Athens. General Mitchell was there, but he made his escape by way of the railroad.

Upon his return to Huntsville, he was in no mood for trifling. Added to his ill temper over the inglorious retreat from Athens was the aggravating worry brought by guerrillas who kept his camp in a hotbed of unrest, and who were so smooth with their movements that he knew of no plan of action by which he could repel them. He decided to try a system which might stop these predatory bands.

A Northern sympathizer gave him the names of the 12 men whose prominence and influence in the community were undisputed.

A guard detachment, bearing an order in writing from the general was sent to arrest these individuals. That was on May 2.

At first, eight of the men were confined in the office of the probate judge at the courthouse, while the other four were held at the "Johnson House", but the two groups later were joined. No notice was taken of them until the morning of May 4 - Sunday. Then they were notified that General Mitchell wished to see, at his headquarters, Bishop Lay and two others of the prisoners, to be designated by themselves. Messrs. McDowell and Mastin were named.

When the delegation arrived at Mitchell's headquarters, located in the Henry Chase home on Adams Avenue, the general addressed them at length. He told them that he had made great sacrifices in behalf of his country, explaining that he was a man of science, a lonely, star gazer when the war occurred.

"I am not to be disturbed in my peaceful pursuits," he told the trio. "My highest ambition is to do justice, to love mercy, and to walk humbly with my God. Military glory has no charms for me. But, having satisfied myself that the rebellion is wicked and causeless, I am determined, at every sacrifice, to crush it out."

The general, stern-faced, hushy-haired, then reviewed the triumphs he had directed. He said that his army always

had held the post of difficulty and danger, had led the advance in Bowling Green, Nashville and Huntsville.

"We have conquered your county and we cannot be dispossessed!" he bellowed, then continued in a more settled tone.

"I have sent for you men in the hope that you will help me bring about a better feeling in Huntsville. You see, I have two causes of complaint.

"One is that the community does not exchange social courtesies with me and my officers."

The prisoners glanced at one another knowingly. It was a matter of general gossip about the town that a family to whom the Federal general had brought letters of introduction would not invite him to its house.

"I expect you men to promote kind social relations. I want you to encourage the citizens to regard me as their friend. Even if I do say it myself, I'm a very clever fellow."

Mitchell named as his second cause of complaint the acts of hostility committed against him by the citizens. He recalled some of these "injustices" and expressed in strong terms their wickedness.

"I don't suppose a one of us which you have imprisoned," McDowell remarked, "is in favor of such guerrilla warfare. Certainly you don't hold us guilty."

"I have no charge against any of you," Mitchell replied. "I believe this war should be carried on according to law and civilized usage, as a war between our respective governments."

"But, General," Bishop Lay broke in, "admitting the principles you just stated, I find it difficult to associate with them the imprisonment of 12 persons who have not had it in their power to pass your guards and pickets."

"I repeat, I have no charge against you," Gen. Mitchell continued. "You have been arrested in a time of some excitement, in order to show that no one in the community is beyond arrest."

Bishop Lay pressed his point. "General," he said, "you are the strong man and you can afford to set the example of magnanimity. But if the country people learn that you are destroying private property and imprisoning non-combatants, they naturally will infer that you do not intend to

wage a civilized war."

"Bishop, Providence has decreed that the innocent must suffer for the guilty," the Federal leader replied. "In order to stop these outrages, I must retaliate on innocent citizens, because they are the only ones I can lay my hands on."

Mitchell then sent the delegation back to prison with a promise that they would be released if they signed a pledge which he would send to them immediately. That afternoon, the provost marshal brought them the following document:

"We, the undersigned, citizens of Northern Alabama, hereby solemnly pledge ourselves that so long as our state, north of the Tennessee, is in possession of the armies of the United States, we will not only abstain from any act of hostility, but will do our utmost to persuade others to do the same.

"We disapprove and abhor all unauthorized and illegal war, and we believe that citizens who fire upon railway trains, destroy the telegraph lines, and fire from concealment upon pickets, deserve and should receive the punishment of death.

"We even disapprove all guerrilla warfare, as calculated to embitter feelings already too much excited, as destructive of the best interests of the communities in which such war is waged, and is in no degree calculated to bring to a close the great contest between the North and the South, to settle which a legitimate warfare should alone be waged."

After lengthy deliberation, the imprisoned men prepared an answer which they each signed. It was dated May 4, 1862, and sent to the general, as follows:

"Today, by your order, Bishop Lay and two of our number delegated by us were summoned before you. A free conference was held between yourself and these gentlemen, in which you stated that you had no charge against any of the parties under arrest. In concluding this interview, you declared your purpose to send us a written communication. This document is now before us.

"The undersigned are citizens. They do not belong to any military organization. They have never engaged in unauthorized or illegal war. They have not attacked the guards of bridges, fired upon railway trains, destroyed telegraph lines or fired from concealment upon pickets.

"Thus conscious of innocence as to the past, and in view of your own disclaimer of any allegation against us, we respectfully disclaim the responsibility of condemning to the punishment of death any of our countrymen for acts, the method, motives and circumstances of which are utterly unknown to us."

Bishop Lay added the note: "I subscribe the above with the explanation that I am a citizen of Arkansas, accidentally present in Huntsville."

General Mitchell wrote back immediately: "At your request, I sent you a paper for your consideration. You neither adopt it nor suggest any modification.

"If the form drawn by me is such that you cannot subscribe to it, modify or reconstruct it to suit your own views, and send me the communication which may be satisfactory to yourselves.

"You are at liberty to decline this, though I understood you to express a willingness to state your views to me on the subject of the illegal warfare which has been waged against my troops in Northern Alabama."

The next day, the prisoners replied that "we deem our arrest and confinement, being parties confessedly not obnoxious to the military law, as a violation of the usages of civilized war, and of the pledges formally given in army orders published and circulated by the Federal authorities."

They continued that, "under these circumstances, and as (in the terms of the proclamation) 'peacable citizens, are not to be molested in their persons and property,' we are at liberty to say that we are not willing to express opinions touching matters in which we are not implicated."

There the correspondence ceased. As the same pledge was demanded of all who passed in and out of the town, residents awaited the verdict in anxiety. Several of them visited the imprisoned men, among them Jeremiah Clemens, former major general of the state and a cousin of "Mark Twain". After reading all of the correspondence, Clemens urged them to sign. He said that he had been assured Gen. Mitchell planned to send them to Fort Warren if they persisted in their refusal.

On the afternoon of May 6, Bishop Lay and the Rev. J. G. Wilson were placed in solitary confinement. The next morning, the remainder of the prisoners were locked in

separate rooms.

After several days, the group was taken to the courthouse under guard for a conference. At the start it was proposed that they retract their refusal. Then followed a lengthy discussion over the deplorable situation of the country.

It was pointed out that as soon as a train was fired upon, Mitchell's soldiers arrested residents and often burned houses in the vicinity of the shooting. Prisons of the town were filled with overseers and farmers which was attributed to a desire on the part of the invaders to demoralize the Negroes by removing all restraint.

The conference continued into the next day and ended after the group had drawn up a pledge that was not as rank as that prepared by the general. In Mitchell's absence, this was sent to the provost marshal, who permitted the prisoners to go home on parole to report at his office the next morning.

The next day, May 15, however, the paroles were revoked by General Mitchell and the men again were imprisoned. A few hours later, an officer of the provost guard brought them the following document:

"You will communicate to the prisoners who have been arrested by my order that they will be allowed up to 12 o'clock to sign the paper drawn up by me denouncing all illegal and guerrilla warfare by citizens, in the exact language first used, without change or modification."

The letter was accompanied by the paper prepared for their signatures. This they reluctantly signed, expressing the unanimous opinion that it was "difficult to deal with a man who, while thus pretending inflexible resolve, disingenuously evaded the most important issue of the controversy!"



Honeymoon Heartbreak



Three months to live, the doctor said.

In the face of this direful future, Mary Chambers joined hands with William Bibb to take the nuptial vows.

Across the western face of a mausoleum in Maple Hill Cemetery, standing shoulders above other monuments in the corner delegated to Huntsville's earliest settlers, the story is told.

This gray sepulcher, easily singled from the marble horde about it, has an air which might signify to the reflective mind that some unusual episode lay hidden within its bosom.

The key to its century-old past is seen in the message of its evenly-chisled epitaph:

Mary S. Bibb
Wife of Wm. D. Bibb
Daughter of Doct. Henry Chambers
Born October, 1816
Married Feb. 24, 1835
Died May 26, 1835

Three months later, as recorded in the epitaph, Mary died.

Old and young alike mourned her death. It had come as the blush of youth lay new upon her cheek, just as she started out upon the happiest stage of a girl's career.

A not unusual household blunder was to blame.

Huntsville, as proud as it was in the early 30's, felt even prouder that William Bibb and his brother, David Porter Bibb, of Belle Mina, then just reaching manhood, were attracted here by the beautiful belles. Both of these young swains were handsome, polished, a new generation of one of the first families of Alabama, and they drew

attention wherever they went.

Their father was Thomas Bibb, second governor of the state, who had stepped into that office upon the accidental death of his brother.

Frequently, these young men rode their spirited horses along the streets of what then was the largest community in almost the entire state, or hailed into town from their home in Limestone behind all the menial dignity of high-hatted coachmen. Often, they stopped at the residence, now that of W. W. Newman, built by their father for their sister, Mrs. William Bradley.

Few were the big Huntsville dances in that day which did not have the Bibb brothers at some prominent place in their grand marches. The "light fantastic" to these eligible beaux was a part of their education.

So only nods resulted when the pair finally restricted their attention to two cousins of the community - Mary Smith Chambers and Mary Parrott Betts.

Mary Chambers was the daughter of Dr. Henry Chambers, early Alabama legislator. Born in Virginia, he was graduated from William and Mary College in 1808, studied medicine for a time, and then settled in Alabama, where he practiced his profession until 1812.

When the war of that year occurred, he served as a surgeon on the staff of Gen. Andrew Jackson. He set up his residence finally in Huntsville and was a member of the state constitutional convention here in 1819. He was elected U. S. senator and continued in that office until his death in 1826, while en route by horseback to Washington.

In his memory, the Alabama legislature named Chambers County. His wife was the daughter of an army officer, from whom Fort Smith, Ark., got its name.

Quite often after the Bibb brothers had made up their minds, they drew rein in front of the widow Chambers' home, now the residence of R. P. Weeden. There they made love until a reasonable hour, charming the cousins who were drawn even closer together by the attention they shared from these two young suitors.

Relatives on both sides watched with approval. This courtship seemed the logical preliminary to unions which would connect three prominent North Alabama names.

By the fall of 1834, matters had been brought to a head.

The brothers voiced their proposals, and the two cousins had accepted unanimously. They were to be united in a double wedding.

Much excitement marked the Chambers and Betts households after the betrothals had been announced. The ceremony was to be fittingly carried out. No detail, however important, was to miss its share of preparation. Huntsville was to remember the function as one of the outstanding occasions of its history.

Off to Paris went orders for elaborate wedding gowns for the future brides. Both trousseaus were to be prepared of the finest materials, and were to be as complete as the world's leading designers could make them.

Party after party brought the couples into the limelight of social activity during the next few weeks. The prominent of Madison and adjoining counties buckled down to the extended celebration these marriages demanded. Announcement of the wedding date was expected at each function.

Christmas came and went without word of the lovers' plans. January wore on. Yet, no one became alarmed over the state of affairs, because the betrothed were together almost constantly, and there was no lack of evidence that their minds were definitely set.

Only those who were more closely related to the girls' families knew the reason for the delay. The wedding gowns had not arrived.

Parents soothed the daughters by telling them of the time and care required to make bridal outfits from fine materials and of the weeks taken up by a slow voyage across the ocean. France was thousands of miles away, they recalled.

But even these solaces did little to curb the girls' impatience. Each stage coach that rolled into Huntsville, they imagined, brought some message of their costumes.

Not until early February, however, did a large foreign-looking package arrive. And when they breathlessly tore away its wrappings, they found only Mary Chambers' outfit. The other had been held up by lack of material.

The cousins were overcome with disappointment. More relentless days of waiting! Further intensive watch for the mail! Indefinite delay of this happiest event of their lives!

Days went by, and then William Bibb and Mary Chambers declared their intention to marry at once, even though such

a stop would mean the end of their plans for a double wedding. Mary Betts and David Porter, realizing their own impatience, agreed with them in their haste.

The ceremony was to take place at the Chambers home. Excitement increased as days passed. Invitations were dispatched hurriedly. Fingers were busied with sewing. Cooks turned their attention to increased larders. Friends came in numbers to heap congratulations. From distances, relatives wrote that they had made plans to be present.

A few nights before the wedding, an old Negro mammy called the intended bride and her cousin to one side.

"Chilluns," she said, "yo' better tek some medicine 'fo his marriage comes off, 'cause yo' don't want yo' faces mussy when all dem good lookin' gen'mens gits here. I'se gwine fix yuh up some ahead ob time, and den yo'll be de prettiest things present."

The girls looked at each other and laughed, but they nodded assent. This old slave had cared for them since childhood.

The Negro hustled off into another room and returned presently with a glass of clear liquid.

"Tain't nothin' but salts," she coaxed. "Tain't gwine hurt yo'."

The girls hesitated over which should take the medicine first.

"You're the one who's getting married - you take it first." Mary Betts urged.

So Mary Chambers hurriedly drank the distasteful dose. As she set the glass down, she grasped her throat.

"I've been poisoned!" she screamed.

While her cousin soothed her, the Negro mammy dashed into the other room, to return a moment later in tears.

The "salts" had come from a bottle containing oxalic acid!

A slave hurried away for a doctor. In a few minutes, the Chambers home, for days overflowing with happy wedding plans, was buried in deep gloom. William Bibb's fiancée could live only a short while - three months at the longest.

Physicians, minus stomach pumps and other medical discoveries of today, were powerless to help her. It was a matter of slowly dying of ulcerated stomach. William

Bibb was mad with grief when informed of the tragedy. For days he attended his sweetheart's bedside constantly, fondling a hand that gradually weakened in his grasp.

Then, one day, his muscles tensed, and he stared into eyes that watched him continually.

"Mary," he said, "you and I are going to be married."

An entirely different wedding from that planned took place on Feb. 26. Friends and relatives with forced smiles gathered to watch the Rev. John Allen, first pastor of the First Presbyterian Church, unite the couple in holy wedlock.

Across the bedspread, directly above the form of the beautiful girl, lay the wedding gown that had come from Paris.

Mary Chambers lived three months to the day from the date of her marriage.

Afterward, the bereaved husband had one of the finest monuments money could buy placed above her grave. It was a mausoleum, the first erected in Maple Hill Cemetery.

Across the face of this marker were inscribed the three principal dates in Mary Chambers' life - her birth, her marriage, her death. One error, however, was made. The wedding date was given as February 24. This was the date the license was issued. The ceremony was not solemnized until two days later.

This unusual sepulcher was a cause of much superstitious gossip among Negroes in later years. As time blotted out the details of the unfortunate girl's death, darkies explained that the tall mausoleum was placed there because the grave was that of a woman who died sitting up in a rocking chair, so that she had to be buried that way.

Limestone County records show that William Bibb was married again on February 3, 1840, this time to Mary L. Mitchell.

Descendants of Mary Betts, the cousin so intimately connected with this tragedy, today include Mrs. George Duncan, Athens, Ala., granddaughter; Robert Chambers Bibb, Jr., Huntsville, great-grandson; Mrs. James H. Pride, Huntsville, great-niece, and Major Edward Chambers Betts, Washington, D. C., great-nephew.

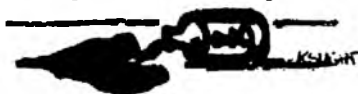




Photo by Swartzel

In 1969 the Watkins-Moore home is one of the most beautiful in the South.

The Legend of Lily Flagg

Though not by far so old as many homes still standing in Madison County, an old residence on Adams Avenue, at one time owned by Samuel H. Moore, prominent plantation owner, bids strongly for a place among local history.

Once allowed to fall back in appearance until it lost even a savor of its former beauty, this building was remodeled in the 1920's to give its present outward aspect, a tall, expansive, square building reaching up into the spreading trees around it. But not even the four tall columns of its front hint of the superb architecture of its interior.

This home, as far back as can be learned, always had been the scene of some of Huntsville's most magnificent social events.

The lover of ghost stories would find ample material with which to frighten Southern darkies, should he interview some of its past owners. Such tales are encouraged largely by a tall tower on the top of the building.

The first sale of the land on which the home stands was recorded in 1838, when John Read bought it from William H. Pope, son of Leroy Pope, who at one time owned all of the land upon which the city has been built. The lot then extended down to Locust Street. In 1842, it was sold at a profit of around \$150 to John Read, also a large landowner. Nine years later, Read bargained with James L. Watkins for \$90 more than he had paid for it. The last owner passed it to his son, Robert H. Watkins.

The Watkins family is given credit for building the home, which was erected in the '50's. By that time, a half century or so after the town first had been incorporated, Huntsville began to be recognized throughout the South for its beautiful homes. This reputation started a local building feud.

Watkins was not to be outdone. On all sides of him were stately dwellings, and he wanted his to be included among them. The corporation limits ran as far south as Williams Street. In this southern section, many of the wealthier residents had built their dwellings.

Not far away from the Watkins property stood the residence of Dr. Charles H. Patton, erected by Leroy Pope. Even nearer was that of Governor Bibb. But all along the streets were houses of more than creditable construction.

To a lumberman at Courtland, who had amassed a name for his remarkable selection of well-grained wood, Watkins sent for cedar, chestnut and walnut pieces. In the meantime, slaves were put to work preparing hand-pressed brick for its walls.

From Charlottesville, Va., also known for its beautiful home, came Charles Bell, a Negro carpenter who had had experience there, to build three spiral stairways as one of the features of the interior. South Carolina furnished another Negro craftsman to make plaster of paris moldings. Frescoing was put together in sections.

All woodwork inside was of walnut. Two spiral stairways led to the second floor. The third, built around a large post, led to the tower on the roof, which consisted of two floors. So far as could be ascertained, no other such cupola was to be found anywhere in the South. World travelers spoke of a similar lookout in Paris, but of no other. This addition furnished a beautiful view of the surrounding country even allowing a sight of the Tennessee River on clear days.

Including the two in the tower, the home was made up of 16 rooms, two of which were large double parlors. Nine doors gave access to the outside and 58 large windows supplied light. Those next to the ground extended down to the floor.

Woodwork was put together with pegs and was of a different style in each room. In tearing up the floor of the kitchen a few years ago, one of the small wooden hammers, used to drive in the pegs, was found under the building.

Beneath the parlor at the southeast corner of the home was built a fine wine cellar. This stood above the ground and was designed on the best advised plan. A cistern also was added. This home was Robert Watkins' gift to his

bride, Margaret Carter. She, however, lived to enjoy it only a short while. Soon after its construction, the Civil War came on and drew the men away to war. The wife had just given birth to a child when the Yankee forces, under General O. M. Mitchell reached Huntsville.

Into the yard of the home they came to spread their tents, alarming the servants so that they ran to the weakened mother with the news. She died a few hours later.

The property afterward became that of Samuel H. Moore, owner of several plantations, chief of which was the one at Lily Flag, considered one of the richest farms in the county. Samuel H. was the son of Dr. David Moore, local physician, who had received his education in Virginia and been graduated in medicine at the University of Pennsylvania. The father had bought considerable land at the first land sales in Madison County in 1809. He was one of the three trustees to whom Leroy Pope deeded one half of his purchase covering the site of Huntsville. They were given the right to divide off and sell lots and to use the proceeds for the advancement of the town.

As times were somewhat better when Samuel Moore became the owner, he improved the interior of the building to a much greater extent. Bathtubs, uncommon then, were brought from New York, lighting fixtures from abroad and marble mantle pieces came from Italy.

This resident was a bachelor and a member of the legislature, but a lover of social activity. Many prominent visitors in the city were his guests; many local celebrities were married beneath the high ceilings of its immense rooms, amid surroundings banked with flowers in true Southern style; and many dancers took advantage of its spacious halls.

Back to this home in 1892 came Samuel Moore from the fair at Chicago, where he had gone to display his prize cow, Lily Flag, just pronounced the world's greatest butter producer. To celebrate her success, he decided upon a reception in her honor.

This event cost hundreds of dollars. A dancing platform, 50 feet square, was erected at the rear of the mansion and was illuminated with one of the first electric lighting systems in this section of the country. Gay lanterns were hung in every nook and corner of the yard and the house,

painted a bright yellow for the occasion, literally was banked with flowers.

Formal invitations, bearing a picture of the cow and the figures of her world record, were sent to prominent persons as far north as Chicago. On the night of the event, guests arrived in evening clothes to join a line which moved slowly through a small stable at the rear, where the little Jersey stood amid a bevy of roses.

An Italian orchestra from Nashville furnished the music for the occasion. Wine and champaign were at hand all about the yard and special tables were brought in to hold the refreshments. One of these was covered by more than 50 different kinds of cakes.

This event lasted way into the morning. Older residents prize it as one occasion in their lives they will never forget.

After Mr. Moore's death, the home passed into the hands of Miss Kate Barnard, his niece, and later to Earl Smith, late local attorney. In 1919, Smith deeded the property to his wife, Mrs. Margaret DuBose Smith.

Mrs. Smith's first move was to modernize the home. Using her own judgment in regard to architecture, she made changes in the house and yard at a cost of \$50,000.

Porches were added, four tall columns were built to set off the front, four bathrooms were divided off on the inside, new floors were laid and the dull walnut woodwork was changed to ivory. Shrubbery was planted about the yard.

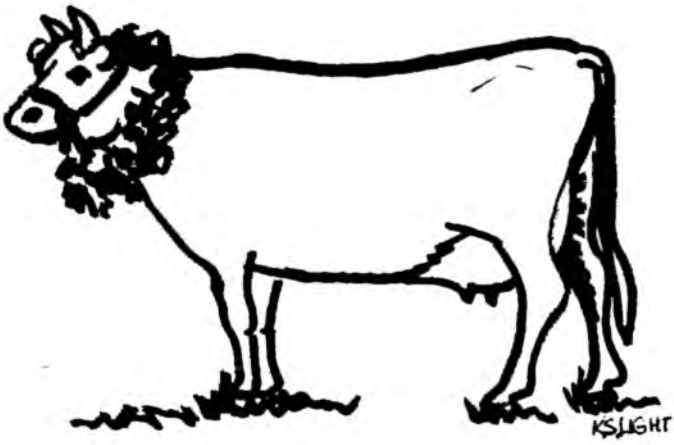
This former owner recalls that she had little trouble hiring workmen to remodel the home. During the Civil War, it is said, gold was hidden in pots about the grounds. One of these, containing \$3,000, was rumored to have been found by a carpenter in later years while tearing up a porch floor. Another, it is reported, was never found.

A knocker, still on a door of the home, was from one of Charlottesville's oldest residences.

During Mrs. Smith's ownership, Admiral Dewey's son, also of the U. S. Navy and a world traveler, visited the home as a possible buyer. He seemed delighted with it, she said, and explained that he had never seen in any part of the world architecture that would parallel that of its interior.

But the spacious rooms and halls, with the odd tower above, reached by means of the winding stairway, gave

the home an air to which some Negro servants could never become accustomed. Their belief in ghosts controlled their imaginations. Mrs. Smith recalls that more than once they rushed to her with tales of lamps that had jumped off tables, of lights that had lighted suddenly when no one was around, and of mysterious noises.



The HISTORIC HUNTSVILLE FOUNDATION was established in 1974 to encourage the preservation of historically or architecturally significant sites and structures throughout Huntsville and Madison County and to increase public awareness of their value to the community. The FOUNDATION is the only organization in Huntsville concerned exclusively with architectural preservation and history. Other similar organizations within Huntsville are concerned either with general history or only with those buildings located within preservation districts.

Summarized, HISTORIC HUNTSVILLE FOUNDATION has two main objectives: preservation of historically or architecturally significant sites and structures throughout Huntsville and Madison County; and, educating the public on and increasing their awareness of this historical heritage.

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