

*Summer*

*Three Dollars  
1994*

**THE HISTORIC HUNTSVILLE  
QUARTERLY**  
*Of Local Architecture & Preservation*



**A Preservation Sampler**

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**Founded 1974**

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INSIDE BACK COVER: Schiffman House on Monte Sano, 1890

THE HISTORIC HUNTSVILLE  
QUARTERLY

of Local Architecture and Preservation

Vol. XX, No. 2

Summer — 1994

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## From the Chairman:

Dear Foundation Members:

As you probably know, the Foundation has owned and operated Harrison Brothers Hardware for ten years. We believe that this is the only instance in the country where a preservation group has saved not only a structure, but the business housed in it. This could never have been accomplished without the volunteers who have staffed the store these ten years. As we approach the fall selling season, it is crucial that we have more volunteers to adequately staff this surviving business.

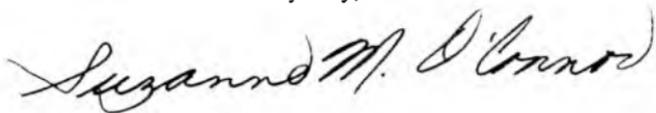
While our volunteers do not have many opportunities to have accolades lavished upon them, they do reap a few benefits by working at Harrison Brothers. Volunteers receive a ten percent discount during any month in which they work at least one four-hour shift. If a volunteer works three or more four-hour shifts during a month, a twenty percent discount is granted. Volunteers are invited to attend a Christmas get-together and the yearly volunteer appreciation picnic. They are also afforded the opportunity to meet and welcome visitors to Huntsville who come here from all over the world. Perhaps the biggest benefit which the volunteers receive is the camaraderie built up among the volunteers themselves.

If you would like to help at the store, call either Aggie Carter or Wanda Carlen at 536-3631. You do not need to know how to operate a cash register or anything else for that matter! All we need is your presence to help continue the effort to keep Harrison Brothers in operation into the twenty-first century and beyond.

"Follies '94: Way Off Broadway" is being jointly sponsored with Alabama's Constitution Village and will take place August 26 and 27 at the VBCC. Our goal is to raise \$75,000 to help with the restoration of the Humphreys-Rodgers house. With Gayle Milberger and Roger Nicholson as co-chairmen, our annual Old Fashioned Trade Day will be September 10. Also, the annual meeting of the Alabama Historical Commission is being held here October 21 - 23 hosted by the Foundation and Alabama's Constitution Village. We will then conclude this busy year with the annual membership tea in December.

As you can see, there are many ways in which you can become *really involved* with the Foundation. Your help is needed to make *all* of these activities successes. We appreciate your membership, but we also need YOU!! Please call me at 539-8737 to volunteer and really put your membership to work!

Very truly,



Chairman

From the Editor:

## A Preservation Sampler

Preservation finds friends of many persuasions. This *Quarterly* celebrates individuals and groups who have cared enough about historical preservation to make their unique contributions. Wonderful individuals like W. W. Varnedoe, Jr. with his fire wagon and the Ron Barnett's with their Keller automobile and antique fire engine, have devoted hours to meticulous restoration. Then there are groups, spearheaded of course, by individuals, whose purpose has been to preserve historical settings. The Monte Sano Historical Association under the leadership of Jane Barr has succeeded in securing recognition and a historical marker for Viduta on the mountain. The Gladstone Place Association under the leadership of Jim Hayes is acting to preserve the natural setting and stonework that remains of the Chapman dairy, the home of Huntsville's famous cow, Lily Flagg. Writers Walter Terry and Dorothy Scott Johnson preserve the flavor and the record of these places. Gary Griner is a preservationist turned historian, a not uncommon outcome. His research into G. A. Plummer, a local builder in the early 1900's, broadens our knowledge and appreciation of the man, the times, and the dwellings he built.

Are **you** restoring an old piece of furniture, holding on for dear life to a family heirloom or painting? Perhaps you are one of the millions who collect, anything and everything, from matchbook covers to Madonnas (my passion). Or you may be one who records life in writing, photo, picture, sculpture, quilting and myriad of other forms. The acts of restoration, collection, recollection and recording are all parts of historical preservation. *The Historic Huntsville Quarterly of Local Architecture and Preservation* is your mouthpiece, your vehicle of public expression. This *Quarterly* brings individuals together from many walks of life to share the souvenirs of our journey and preserve them for posterity.

Won't you join the pursuit? Let me hear from you.

## HUNTSVILLE'S OLDEST EXISTING FIRE WAGON

*by*  
W. W. Varnedoe, Jr.

When the government of Huntsville was turned back to civilians following the military occupation during the Civil War, one of the first things the new government did was to appoint a committee to study and recommend fire defenses for the city. This committee recommended extending the water mains to the city limits and the purchase of a horse-drawn steam fire engine and a horse-drawn hose reel.

Minutes of the city show both recommendations were promptly acted upon, and in 1866-1867, the Silsby Co. of Seneca Falls, New York (later part of American LaFrance), delivered both a horse-drawn steam pumper and a hose reel complete with hose. This hose wagon cost \$836.

*How it  
looked in  
the 1870's.*



In the old days, there was no room on the pumper to carry hose, so it was necessary to have two appliances, the pumper to pump the water and a separate hose wagon to carry the hose. The hose wagon also carried axes, nozzles, firefighters and other tools. The water mains were wooden. In the event of a fire, the firefighters simply dug down to a wooden main and drilled a hole in it. They then drafted water from the resulting puddle. After the fire they hammered a wooden plug in the hole — our modern fire hydrants are still called, "fire plugs."

An old photograph in the archives of the Heritage Room of the Huntsville Public Library shows these two fire engines in front of the old Post Office that used to be on Green Street. The dedication plate on the Hose Wagon can be read in the photo with a magnifying glass; it names the Foreman (a rank now called Fire Chief) as John Spence, probably during the 1870's. Earnest Smartt has another photo showing this hose reel in front of the fire station, which was then on the southeast corner of Jefferson and Clinton streets. This early Fire Department was fully volunteer, except the Chief. Its name was The Huntsville Steam Fire Company. Their monogram can be seen in one of those photos.

*How it  
looked  
in the  
1970's.*



The steamer has long since gone to the cutting torch as scrap. Somehow however, the old Hose Wagon survived, but was neglected. I found it, bent all out of shape and rusting away in a dump. I asked, and was given the old apparatus by Chief Tolen, when he was Fire Chief in 1970.

I completely disassembled it and, over a period of 10 years, put it back in working order. Although all of the metal parts survived, rusted and bent, including the nameplate, all of the wooden parts, including the wheels, were long gone.



*How it  
looks  
today.*

I used the old photos and some factory catalogs and documentation (which, amazingly, still exists) to rebuild the rig. The wheels came from an Amish craftsman in Indiana. The metal parts were hammered back into shape and there were some paint chips left on some parts to give the paint color. The reel axle was so deteriorated that a machine shop had to make a new one using the old as a pattern. The only things now lacking are the horse harness and some fancy scrollwork painting. The scrollwork on the reel can be seen in

the old photo, but, of course, not in color. Unless someone wants to donate his skill, this is likely not to get done. The Seneca Falls Historical Society and American LaFrance have furnished authenticating documents, but the old photos clearly identify this fire engine as one Huntsville used in the late 1800's.

The harnesses for fire engines were unique. The horse collar was split and hinged, so as to drop down on the horses, be fastened below, and thus, ready to go in a jiffy when the alarm sounded. One of these rare split horse collars is in the Harrison Brothers Hardware store.

If the Huntsville Fire and Rescue Department ever has a fire museum, then I will place this historic piece of old Huntsville in it. But for now it is in the Green Mountain Volunteer Fire Station, Huntsville Station No. 13, and can be seen by appointment.

*Bill Varnedoe has been Chief of the Green Mountain Volunteer Fire Department for 24 years. He was an Engineer at NASA, now retired. The GMVFD was originally just in Madison County, but now that Green Mountain is wholly inside the city, it is Station 13, although still completely volunteer.*

*He has also been doing some research on the history of Green Mountain, but reports that little remains of the past to see. He would love to hear from other fire buffs and Green Mountaineers. His address is: 5000 Ketova Way, Huntsville, 35803.*

# PRESERVING A DIFFERENT TYPE OF HISTORY: A Keller Returns to Huntsville

by  
*Ron Barnett*

## Introduction

Ron and Sally Barnett epitomize the collector-couple. Their enthusiasm for two and four wheeled vehicles runs the gamut from a 1923 Cleveland to a 1947 Keller car manufactured in Huntsville. Ron even bought Sally, who actively restores and collects, her very own red fire engine. Children's Librarian for the Huntsville-Madison County Library, Sally used the Keller for the summer reading program and undoubtedly will use the fire truck. When Ron completes restoration of the Keller, he has promised it to the Depot Transportation Museum on long-term loan for Huntsville's enjoyment.

The Keller is an important part of Huntsville's industrial history: a product of the city's only automobile factory. Yet, until Ron Barnett purchased and brought the Keller home, Huntsville was without the auto it birthed. Ron spent over ten years looking for an tracking down his number 22, amassing files of supporting information and documentation.



When I visited the Barnetts at Lone Oak Farm on Brindley Mountain, I was literally transported into another world. Ron and Sally keep their autos and bikes in a fabulously converted Arabian horse stable. It works perfectly. There is a machine shop, paint booth, records room, dirty work area, and memorabilia in every nook. Collectibles show up in every imaginable place. Sally's large metal toy trucks rim the wall, their scads of hats hang like banners. The stable is more than an antique auto barn. It is a folk museum.

The Barnetts have their favorites. "Old Betsy," a '34 Chevrolet has pounded the highways and still gives a solid ride, their '61 Cadillac "Big Red" also tours. My favorite is "Harry" Hudson, a 1911 touring car. It's a beaut. I cannot think of a more accomplished or approachable couple. Their hobby is Huntsville's gain. They share it and their story joyfully.



## The Collectors and Their Quest

Ron and Sally Barnett live on a farm on top of Brindlee Mountain. At first glance it is an attractive, but rather conventional horse farm with fenced pasture, a well-tended garden, and a large white barn. Horses graze the pasture and there is no visible evidence that the Barnetts are very involved in the preservation of history, with the lone exception of the 1948 American LaFrance fire truck parked in front of the barn.

Entering the barn, however, provides visitors with a whole different picture. Here one finds a well-equipped automotive restoration shop and displays of automobilia that provide an exciting insight to the history of the automobile. Ron and Sally have a collection of cars, motorcycles, powered bicycles, literature, tools, toys, signs, and gas station

equipment. But Ron is quick to point out that this is really a working shop, not a museum.

They have some vehicles which are primarily for shows such as the 1923 Cleveland motorcycle, 1942 Powerbike, and a variety of mopeds such as the 1938 Norman, 1959 Raleigh, 1948 Aberdale and a 1947 Whizzer which belongs to Ron's dad, Van Barnett. They also like to drive their antique cars, so the collection includes a 1911 Hudson, a 1934 Chevrolet and a 1961 Cadillac (fire engine red, of course) for touring. Ron is now working on a 1904 Cadillac which they will use for the very early one and two cylinder car tours.

The Barnetts are deeply involved in almost all aspects of the antique automotive hobby. Ron is a National Director and Past President of the Antique Automobile Club of America (AACA) and both Ron and Sally are Senior Master Judges in the AACA. They are members of the North Alabama Region, AACA, and participate in numerous local and National Meets during the year. Sally recently served as the Chief Judge at a National Meet in Shelbyville, Tennessee. She is one of only four women in the AACA to hold this position. Ron also serves on the Board of Directors for the AACA Library and Research Center and has been a consultant with the Huntsville Depot Museum.

This interest in automotive history combined with their residence in the Huntsville area naturally led them into researching the Keller automobile. In 1983, Ron had a casual conversation with Paul Hatmon, an automotive journalist from Independence, Missouri. When Ron said he lived in Huntsville, the discussion turned to the Keller. Hatmon said he knew where there was a Keller and that he had been trying to buy it for many years. But the gentleman who owned it refused to sell.

In 1988, there was an article in the *Huntsville Times* about a Keller owned by Buzz Howell, the Grandson of Hubert Mitchell, the Executive Vice President of the Keller Motors Corporation. The article claimed that the car was the only

remaining one of the 18 made in the Huntsville plant. This claim increased Barnett's interest in the Independence, Missouri car, and led to additional correspondence between Barnett and Hatmon. But it was not until October 1993 that there was any encouraging news that the car might be for sale.

After returning from the AACA National Fall Meet and Flea Market in Hershey, Pennsylvania, Ron had a letter from Ed McVay, the son of the man who owned the Keller. It was a brief letter and said that if interested, Ron would have to talk to his father, James W. McVay. Ron called and had a very fruitful conversation with the 91 year old man, learning more about the history of this Keller.

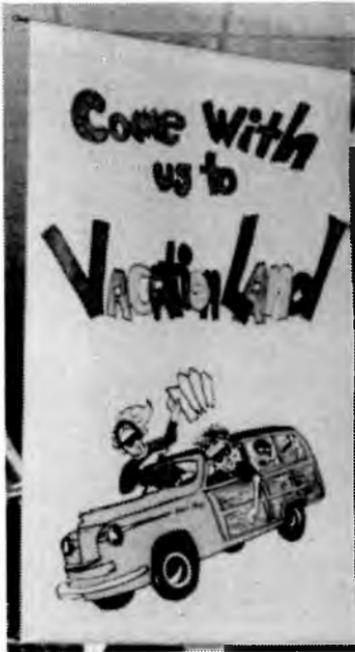
Car #22 was "presented" to Mr. McVay, Kansas City, Missouri, by Mr. and Mrs. Keller at the Huntsville plant sometime in 1949. McVay had been hired to represent Keller to all franchise dealers West of the Mississippi. The car was used to show prospective dealers that Keller could produce a vehicle that would make a lucrative automotive dealership when full production started. A few months later this dream died, but McVay continued to drive his car until he tired of people crawling all over it to figure out what this weird little vehicle was. He put some 45,000 miles on it and then parked



*Mr. & Mrs. George Keller giving '47 Keller to J. W. McVay (in center) in front of Building 4471, Redstone Arsenal.*

it in a garage in 1951. Sometime in the 1970's he moved it to a trailer van where it resided and collected dust, unobserved by anyone.

A few days after talking to Mr. McVay, Ron went to Independence, still skeptical about the prospects of finding a Keller that could be restored for the city. After a frustrating search for the keys to the trailer van in which the car was stored, Mr. McVay finally approved breaking the locks. When the trailer was opened, there sat a Keller Station Wagon, grimy with years of accumulated dirt and dust, but in amazingly good condition. Barnett and McVay negotiated for a while. Ron was not about to lose the catch he finally had hooked. Soon he was bounding down the highway heading home to Huntsville with #22 safely tucked away on a U-Haul trailer.



Phase I of the restoration started immediately. The objective of this phase was to clean off the dirt, rebuild the engine, drive train, and brakes, and get the car operational. This step is nearly completed. The Keller was displayed at the Huntsville/Madison County Public Library as a part of the Summer Reading Program (Sally's idea), the first time that a Keller had been seen in public in Huntsville in nearly four decades.

Phase II will include complete restoration of the wood and aluminum body. The car will then be placed on display at the



Huntsville Depot Museum on loan by the Barnetts. It will be properly returned to the City of Huntsville as a part of its heritage for all of us to see. Alongside the Keller will be a 1927 Erskine, another car which can claim some relationship with Huntsville, but that is a different story.



## History of the Keller Corporation

*M*uch of the recent history and growth of Huntsville is related to the technological developments associated with space travel and military missile systems. So much so, that few remember that in the late 1940's there was a small company here that had a very different dream about Huntsville's future. It wanted to make this city the automobile capital of the South.

The Keller Motors Corporation planned to manufacture and market a compact station wagon just right for American consumers who had been without new cars for all the war years when automotive production was curtailed. The Keller originated in San Diego, California, as the Bobbi-Kar. It was the product of an engineer, John Leifeld, who wanted to get back into the automotive industry after years of working for an aircraft manufacturer, and a “get-rich-quick” promoter, S. A. Williams. A couple of small, rear-engined convertibles were made and attracted the attention of George Keller, a former Vice President of Studebaker, who was hired as consultant.

Unfortunately for the small company, Mr. Williams’ somewhat shady past and brief jail term for fraud also attracted the attention of the California Commissioner of Corporations and the SEC. They refused to permit Williams to sell stock in California, and it became evident that a new home would have to be found for the company.

The Bobbi-Kar was moved to Birmingham, Alabama, and a few more prototypes were made. Again, Williams’ reputation became a factor. To save the company, Keller persuaded a group of Alabama investors to buy Williams out and organize the Dixie Motor Car Corporation. One of these



investors was Hubert Mitchell, of Hartselle, Alabama. Mitchell had been manufacturing seats for military aircraft. With the war's end, one of his major customers went out of business. When he heard about the Bobbi-Kar Company, he decided to sell it seats for its cars. He ended up buying the company.

Late in 1947, two major changes were made. Since it was obvious that Keller's stature in the automotive industry would enhance market position, the name of the company was changed to Keller Motors Corporation. The second change was to move the production facilities to a recently emptied building at Huntsville (now Redstone) Arsenal. Two buildings were leased from the United States Government; however, only one was actually used by Keller, the building currently identified as Redstone Arsenal, Building 4471.

Three of the seven prototype cars, including at least one rear-engined convertible, that had been built by the proceeding companies were rapidly modified to look like the car Keller wanted to build. Marketing then became the primary focus for the new company. The cars were shown at major automotive shows across the country. Enthusiasm of potential buyers was enormous. Early plans were to make a Chief and Super Chief in two styles: a convertible, with either front or rear engine, and a "woodie" station wagon.

Meanwhile, production of new prototypes was also started. Keller Motors Corporation made 18 prototype cars in 1948 and 1949 in the Huntsville plant. For a short period they continued to display the Bobbi-Kar/Keller convertible. However, as the company's plans matured, the convertible was dropped, and all of the 18 prototypes were the Super Chief station wagon models. Records preserved by Hubert Mitchell (now in the possession of his Grandson, Buzz Howell) list cars numbered 1 through 27. The first two were the ones built in San Diego by Bobbi-Kar, and cars #3 through #7 were the ones made in Birmingham. Apparently there was some superstition in the Keller Motors Corporation, since there was no car #13.

The frames and bodies were made by Keller. One of the unique features was the “torsilastic suspension” made by B. F. Goodrich, which used rubber moulded between concentric tubes instead of springs. It was advertised as the “cradled in rubber” ride, one that would never squeak. Standard Hercules 1XB-3 engines, found in many other industrial applications, were used for the prototypes; however, a decision was made to use Continental engines in production. The majority of the remaining parts, such as transmission, clutch, differential, instruments, door handles and other hardware were items used on other production cars of the time. This minimized the need to establish a costly supply system for spare parts.

They had hoped to go into full production in 1948. Unfortunately, the SEC was taking a careful look at all of the companies then trying to enter the car market. This included the Tucker, Playboy, Davis and other companies that were trying to break into the market with the major producers. After two years, the Keller finally survived the SEC investigations and a stock sale was approved. By September, 1949, Keller had signed up more than 1,500 dealers and arranged a \$5 million stock sale. Keller executives convened in New York for the sale. They celebrated with a dinner on the evening of October 4, 1949 and a breakfast the next morning. George Keller did not show up for breakfast and was discovered in bed, dead of a heart attack. The stock sale was withdrawn, and dreams of making Huntsville a major automotive manufacturing center died as well.

In February 1950, Keller Motors Corporation was placed in trusteeship in federal district court. The remaining cars were inventoried and distributed to varied individuals who had invested in the company. Unfortunately, the records are not very clear about who actually received most of the cars, and it appears that the last Keller to remain in Huntsville was sold to an individual in Texas in the 1950's. The home of the Keller automobile has not had one since then, certainly a loss to our history. But that loss is now to be corrected.



## MONTE SANO MYSTIQUE

*by*  
*Walter S. Terry*

*M*y memories of Monte Sano begin with visits to Grandfather and Grandmother Terry's summer home at the north end of the plateau. Dr. John Moorman and wife Dorothy now live on this choice lot overlooking Huntsville.

My grandparents' house, torn down years ago, was a sprawling wooden structure with a wrap-around porch laced with gingerbread. Its lack of physical conveniences, even those common to that era (the 1920s and early 1930s), was — to this dreamy, adventurous kid — part of its charm.

Across the sandy road was the ghost of Memphis Row, an empty (and no doubt haunted) relic of the glorious days (the 1890s) of The Monte Sano Hotel, host to the rich and the famous. A serpentine, two-rutted gravel road with a toll gate at its bottom was the only access to the mountaintop since the old choo-choo had stopped running sometime

before the hotel closed. The train, it has been reputed, was an adventure in itself and eventually lost out to poor odds of a safe ascent or descent.

At the summer house a hand-operated well provided water. Kerosene lit the lamps and fueled the cookstove. Primitive outhouses provided sanctuary for the more personal bodily functions and meditations of mind and soul. And adventure: I was almost disowned by my mother when at age four or five I slid — feet-first, happily for me if not for my shoes — into the muck of the two-holer. It was not, I discovered the hard way, a place for leaping around.

All of these strange and beautiful differences melded into a mystique that lives yet in some secret corner of the spirit. I was to write about it over the years, once as a story of father and son driving at night up that shadowed, twisting road in a Model-T Ford to visit the boy's sick grandmother. It was a fine opportunity to develop what I considered to be an unbreakable bond that every father and son should have.

During our summer days at this mountain retreat both my mother and dad traveled this road many times, sometimes afoot. My dad, and grandfather, often hiked up the road at night after closing their stores downtown. At least, afoot, the famous (or infamous, depending on how you looked at them) "Double S's" could be by-passed on short-cutting paths.

My father liked to tell of coming up the road one night with a side of beef in a horse-drawn wagon. He swore to his dying day that a snarling, wailing bobcat trailed close behind most of the way up that lonely road. (My dad was not a drinking man, though perhaps that night he wished he were.)

My mother, a young and celebrated beauty at the time, was walking the road on a hot day, fanning her face briskly to ward off a swarm of gnats. As she fanned she saw a man, also on foot, approaching and waving most enthusiastically in return. My mother, completely flustered, fanned even harder as they closed the gap between them and exclaimed in a way she prayed could not be misread, "My gracious, the gnats are something fierce today, aren't they?"

Bobcats for Dad, gnats for Mother. For me it was a broken arm. Somehow at age five or so, I managed to back-flip over the house's porch railing and break both bones in my right forearm. A grotesquely twisted

arm was bad enough, but the trip down the Double S's in my Aunt Ruth's Ford coupe was even more shocking. She, a 1920s flapper visiting for the summer, spared no thrill on that wild, gravel-spitting ride, Charleston-and-Black-Bottoming it all the way down to Dr. Grote's office.

Additional mystique, as I think of those days, was provided by the old man who lived in a hollow log beside a spring close to where the Burritt Museum driveway now begins. (This, too, I have used in my writings.)

Some of the names I associate with those old days on the mountain are Schrimsher, Hutchens, Johnson, Moorman, Yarbrough, Cooper, and Mimms. Earlier, there was the Reverend Rowe and his female seminary, and the yankee O'Shaughessy, who inhabited his own point of land at the southeast corner of the plateau.

Later, in my teen years, the adventurer's spirit led back to Monte Sano, to hikes and camp-outs on the mountain's lush west slope forests. This fairyland was easily accessible from our house at the far end of Locust Street (at that time only three houses from the city's eastern limit).

College and two wars and work in various places passed. Then, in 1954, I was able to return to fulfill a driving ambition to build a house atop the enchanted mountain of my childhood. With blood, sweat, tears and elation my wife and I erected a house of warmth and joy and filled it with six children, who, I believe, came to love the place and the home as much as we do.

This house, as well as this body, is where the soul resides — the former coming close to destruction in severe ice storms and a 1974 tornado that wasn't aware that "tornadoes never hit the tops of mountains."

I believe I can feel most comfortable about dying if it happens in or around this house. But in any case, the privilege of having lived in it, on this mountain, very likely will be enough.



## Extracts from **THE BOTTOMLESS WELL**

by  
Walter S. Terry

### **The Town**

A mile away from the eastern town limit Buena Vista Mountain [Monte Sano] rises a thousand feet above the valley floor, providing a backdrop of green in the spring and summer, turning to a potpourri of color in the fall, fading to a gray-green in the winter. At one end of the mountain, the north end, a crude rock road twists and strains up the steep slopes to the summit. Up there is a narrow plateau where some of the moneyed families of Garth [Huntsville] maintain summer homes. On that plateau, at the tail end of the previous century, a hotel enjoyed a brief vogue, honored by visits from statesmen and magnates from the business world. The altitude, the waters of iron and limestone springs, were advertised as the very essence of good health. A cable railway lifted the people up out of the valley to this health resort for millionaires; or surreys brought them up the twisting road. In less than a decade the hotel succumbed to the fickleness of human tastes. In more recent years its gray and rotting structure has stood like a bleak ghost on the west bluff, with the old cable railroad only an occasional faint scar in the mountain forest below.

### **Homesite — The Mountain**

"It's beautiful, Clay," Grace said, looking out over the valley. "I never imagined there would be such beautiful hills in these parts."

"We call these mountains," Clay said. He pointed at Morrision Hill down in the valley. "*That's* a hill."

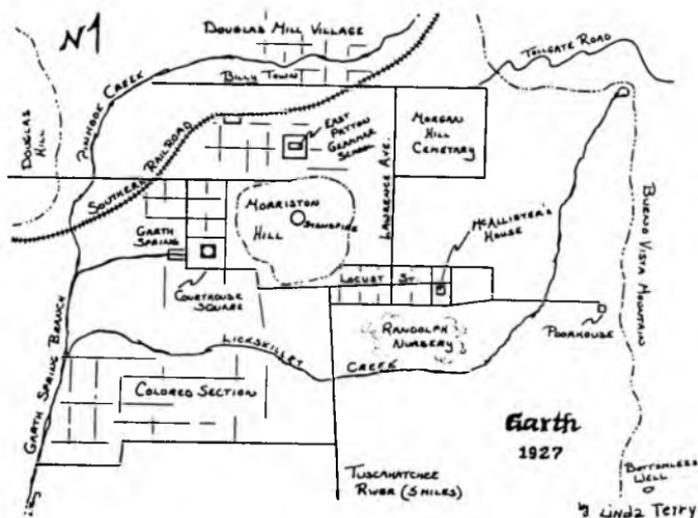
"All right," Grace said, "*mountains*. By any name they're beautiful."

To the south, the chain of mountains, of which Buena Vista was a segment, stretched away toward and beyond the river. The winding, seeking course of the river could be seen until it disappeared, easterly, through a gap in the mountains and, westerly, into the flat blue-hazed horizon.

The land, and the town, lay before them. From this height and from a spot halfway up the side, where he and Ross used to go to sit and look and dream and in other moods tear wildly through the mountain woods on the magic feet of youth, the town appeared as a thing you could hold in your grasp, to feel and treasure and even understand. In miniature, its infinite complexity of human emotions and human actions was lost. It was one bound entity, the simple fact of a town, the beautiful and pristine. Sometimes, as a boy and as a youth, he had tried to take this concept of the town down the mountain with him. He was never able to; once he had stepped across the city limit, that severe line between dreams and reality, his detachment was lost; he became as much a part of the town, as subject to its joys and its hurts, as all the people in it that he had looked down upon so few minutes or hours before.

Now the town was changing. Its new growth spread like twisting octopus arms toward the south and the east, the south-reaching tentacles threatening the river, the east-reaching tentacles encroaching on the mountain's foot. Across the river the buildings of the Arsenal looked like the sudden upsurging of another town, with the river caught between its growth and that of Garth.

Clay's eyes moved to the left. He saw that the upper balconies of the Old Buena Vista Hotel, and part of the roof, had collapsed. Weeds and bushes obscured most of the lower windows.



# MONTE SANO'S VIDUTA HISTORICAL DISTRICT: A Prototype

by  
*Jane Barr*

The following excerpts come from the Monte Sano Historical Association "Briefings," 1992, prepared by Jane Barr who has done a mountain of work researching and interviewing.

## MONTE SANO HISTORICAL ASSOCIATION

December 3, 1992

Dear member,

Since our first meeting, April 23, 1992, we have made great strides in forming a basis for archival information on the Monte Sano community. This coming year we are looking forward to even further discoveries. In particular we will be examining areas where there are known maps and photographs. Work will also be concentrating on the survey of settlements, landscapes and buildings of the mountain plateau.

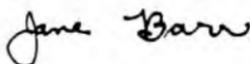
We have been taking an inventory of the myriad cultural resources of the mountain. Several of the sites are being evaluated for possible inclusion in the Alabama Register of Landmarks and Heritage.

We have a program of visits, lectures, and instruction which will introduce you to some of the varied and rich archaeology, architecture, and history of Monte Sano Mountain. These include Indian trails, the early Viduta site, the Monte Sano Railway route, the O'Shaughnessy Place homestead site, Civilian Conservation Corp camp site, numerous springs, CCC and Scout Hiking Trails, the rich prehistory of our mountain as well as the beautiful rocky blufflines. We are committed to the enhancement and interpretation of these cultural resources for the benefit of the community.

WE ARE EXCITED ABOUT THE RESPONSE WE ARE RECEIVING FROM INDIVIDUALS AND FAMILIES WHO ARE SHARING FIRST-HAND LETTERS, DIARIES, PHOTOGRAPHS, DOCUMENTS AND EXPERIENCES DATING FROM THE MID 1800'S.

We look forward to seeing you at the meetings and at the sites.

Yours sincerely,



Jane Barr  
President

MONTE SANO HISTORICAL ASSOCIATION  
4618 PANORAMA DRIVE  
HUNTSVILLE, ALABAMA 35801  
(205) 534-5698

August 25, 1993

Melanie A. Betz  
Alabama Register Coordinator  
Alabama Historical Commission  
468 South Perry Street  
Montgomery, Alabama 36130

Dear Ms Betz,

We have carefully researched abstracts and deeds and conducted numerous personal interviews. We have reached the conclusion that Viduta is a significant historical segment of north Alabama worthy of acknowledgment.

After reviewing our data and slides we would appreciate your consideration in designating **Viduta a Historic District** for the **Alabama Register of Landmarks and Heritage**.

"Viduta" Latin for life-giving. "Monte Sano" Latin for mountain of health. The cool air and medicinal springs proved a marketable commodity when yellow fever, malaria, and cholera threatened the public health. Dr. Thomas Fearn established a small colony in 1827. Dr. Fearn and a group of partners established Viduta in 1833. There was an Inn, the Rowe Female Seminary and several fine homes. There was a general, a judge, a banker, a state senator, and a future Confederate congressman. The end of the Civil War left the mountain top a shambles of ruined buildings. Prosperity returned in the 1890's with the Monte Sano Hotel and Railroad. By 1914 the economy took a nose-dive. Boom days of the late 20's saw another spurt of activity. Land prices skidded, and the Great Depression took over. A new spirit came with the Space Program. In 1954 Viduta was annexed into the City of Huntsville. This residential district contains a wide variety of architecture: Dogtrot (mid-1800's), Queen Anne (late 1800's), Arts and Crafts (1920's), Tin Spraddle-Roof Folk (1930's), Usonian and Ranch (early 1950's). Throughout the roller-coaster development of Viduta it has remained a mountain retreat for pioneering spirits who love the woods, springs, wildlife and a park-like environment.

Thank you for your assistance and consideration,

Most sincerely

Jane Barr  
President

## EARLY LANDOWNERS OF MONTE SANO

John Martin (1814, 80 acres) John procured a patent (grant from the government) for the future site of Viduta, Jan. 3, 1814.

Levin Wilson Shephard

John Brahan (1814, quarter section)

William Patton (1814, second landowner, 40 acres, future hotel site)

Hunter Peal (1814, quarter section)

Charles Cabaniss (1809, first landowner, 80 acres)

Martin Miller (1814, quarter section)

Judge William Smith (Pre-1814, third landowner, 160 acres)

By the early 1800's the mountain had an Inn and several log cabins. The wealthy took advantage of the healthy conditions of the mountain. Reverend James Rowe, a "Circuit Rider" for the Methodist Church, and his wife Malinda, a school teacher with rheumatism, chose the "mountain of health" for their school.



### Monte Sano Female Seminary - 1829

Educational facilities reached an early peak with the founding of Monte Sano Female Seminary in 1829 by the Reverend and Mrs. James Rowe. Excerpts from a letter written by Malinda Rowe to her mother with the heading Monte Sano Oct, 27th 1831: "We still live on the mountain, the most beautiful place in the world. We have a boarding school. We have a stone house intended for the school which is fifty-six feet long and forty-five wide." and signed "Malinda A. Rowe."

In a brochure dated June 19, 1832 James Rowe described courses of instruction.

Reverend Rowe purchased half of Lot Two when Viduta was established early in the year 1833. The school closed after Mrs. Rowe's death November of the same year. The Rowe Cemetery was established on Lot Two by Reverend Rowe's great-grandchildren, April 1992. (Rowe file)

## MONTE-SANO FEMALE SEMINARY.

**T**HIS Institution, under the superintendance of MRS ROWE and her Assistants, being now considered by the proprietor as permanently established, he asks leave to call public attention to his classes, under a belief that it possesses advantages seldom equalled, and not surpassed by any Academy in this section of country. In point of local situation, being about 2½ miles N. East of Huntsville, this Academy is situated. Occupying one of the summits of a range of mountains, the elevation of which is 1100 feet above the plain beneath, a prospect, the most beautiful, variegated and extensive, forever charms the eye. Favored by the mountain breezes, contagious Health scarcely here to have made her favorite residence; whilst Retention, with her handmaids, Constipation and Headaches, follow in her train. The experience of nearly three years has conclusively proved that Monte-Sano is entirely free from the miasmatic diseases of this climate; not a single case of fever having occurred, either in the school or family, within that time. Its elevated situation, pure and constant breezes, and an abundant supply of cool and limpid water, present rare chances to an exemption from disease, than in Monte-Sano there blessed.—In addition to the new ample buildings of the Academy, the proprietor is erecting a spacious and commodious two story stone building, which will, it is probably, be finished early in the fall. With this addition, a still larger number of pupils can be furnished with suitable and comfortable accommodations.

The scholastic year invariably commences on the 2d Monday in February, and terminates on the Friday preceding the second Monday in December, in each year; at the last mentioned period the anniversary of the Institution will be held, and diplomas conferred upon such of the YOUNG LADIES as have completed the prescribed course of studies.

The course of instruction pursued in this Academy is extensive, embracing a judicious selection of all the English, Classical, Scientific and Ornamental branches of Education usually bestowed upon young ladies in such institutions. The superintendent's

will also give their most earnest and unwearied attention to the proper formation and preservation of the morals and manners of the young ladies committed to their care.

The scholastic year will be divided into two sessions of five months each. No pupil will be received for a shorter period than one session, and that only on condition of settlement by note. No allowance will be made for absence, unless occasioned by sickness; but a reasonable deduction will be made in case of patrons who place three or more scholars in the institution at the same time. The whole school will be divided into three classes; the studies of which, and the terms, are as follows:

|   |         |
|---|---------|
| 1st Class—Classics and Belles Lettres (per ses- |         |
| 8000).....                                      | \$15 00 |
| 2d do—The Sciences.....                         | 15 00   |
| 3d do—English and Preparatory branches.....     | 10 00   |
| EXPENSIVE COURSE.                               |         |
| French and Latin Languages, (per session).....  | 25 00   |
| Vocal and Instrumental Music, including use     |         |
| of Piano.....                                   | 30 00   |
| Drawing, and Painting in oil and water colors   |         |
| on paper, velvet, satin or canvas.....          | 10 00   |
| Plain Needle work, including making &c.;        |         |
| Ornamental ditto, including open and lace       |         |
| stitches, &c.....                               | 5 00    |
| Embroidery.....                                 | 5 00    |
| Contingent Expenses.....                        | 1 50    |
| Board, including washing and lodging.....       | 35 00   |

Patrons placing a pupil in the school for a regular course, and for graduation, will have the benefit of all the classes, solid and ornamental, with board &c. for \$100 per annum. At the anniversary examination (and at all semi-annual ones, for which arrangements will be made in future,) parents and guardians are respectfully invited to be present; and the invitation will be extended to the friends of the institution and the public in general.

The rules of the house, by which the school is regulated during the hours of study and recreation, can at all times be seen upon application at the Academy.

JAMES ROWE.

June 10, 1832.



## VIDUTA - 1833

Early in the year that the school closed, a boom broke out on Monte Sano. Dr. Fearn and his brother George had planned a real estate development on the mountain since 1814; by 1833 the Inn was prospering, the school appeared to be a permanent institution, and they decided the time had come. They laid an 80-acre portion off into 67 lots, separated by streets and avenues. (Figure 2) Three acres around Cold Spring were set aside as a park. By the end of the year, 38 lots were sold. The town was named Viduta, for the Italian word meaning "view," and houses were erected along all streets. The Official Records of the General Land Office, U.S. Geological Survey shows the town of Viduta. (Ref: 1915 map).



## THE MONTE SANO RAILROAD

by  
*George F. McCanless, Jr.*  
*November, 1992*

Work began on the railroad from the still existing Huntsville Depot to the top of Monte Sano over one hundred years ago in July of 1888. Formally named The Huntsville Belt Line and Monte Sano Railroad Co., the workers essentially completed it one year later in August of 1889. The railroad was built to transport passengers and baggage to the Monte Sano Hotel, which had opened on June 1, 1887.

The railroad wound along an interesting route, most of which is today paved and serves as roads. It began at a small station located near the Huntsville Depot of the Memphis and Charleston Railroad, the main east-west railroad that still connects Huntsville with Memphis and Chattanooga. It went south on Jefferson Street, then turned east on Clinton Street, and up Bankhead Parkway to the present-day Toll Gate Apartments. The line crossed Toll Gate Road and took a roundabout route through the woods over some creeks. Some of the stone structure used in the bridges still stands. One spectacular turn in this region was called the Buttonhook. The roadbed emerged from the woods near the parking lot at the hiking entrance of the Huntsville Land Trust property just east of the Heritage of Monte Sano subdivision. From this point it traveled up Bankhead Parkway to Monte Sano State Park. When it reached the



present-day Von Braun Observatory, the railroad traveled west along what is now a line of telephone poles until it crossed Nolen Avenue just east of Chickasaw Drive. One can still see a railroad fill there. The line continued west and traveled along what is now Railway Avenue and Denison Avenue. It crossed Monte Sano Boulevard and stopped near the Monte Sano Hotel on Old Chimney Road. The tracks did not form a "Y", so there was no way to turn the train around. The train backed all the way down Monte Sano to the old Depot.

The Huntsville newspapers of the day heralded the building of the railroad with great enthusiasm. On June 8, 1888, the *Huntsville Daily Mercury* announced that the standard gauge "dummy line" was now a certainty. Work would begin immediately and it would be pushed to completion by September 1. On July 5th, the same paper reported a wider objective of this railroad was to lay tracks encircling the city. The July 10 edition announced, "A squad of 25 men with mule teams arrived in the city yesterday afternoon to work on the construction .." of the railroad. A week later, the newspaper regretfully announced Huntsville's first labor strike. The company paid the workers one dollar per day for a ten hour day, but the company management decided to increase the work day to twelve hours while holding to the dollar wage. The tone of the article indicated the company was getting its way. The July 25th edition published a letter signed by CIVIS. He stated that he had signed the petition to have the city give the dummy line the right of way on Clinton Street. However, he had since learned that the railroad would run from the "end to end" of Clinton Street and he regarded this as a mistake. The newspaper announced on December 28 that the "dummy line" was now half complete and would be running to the mountain this summer.

The *Weekly Mercury* (Huntsville) on May 22, 1889 reported "Cuts through solid flint rock to the depths of 20 and 30 feet and hundreds of feet in length, and trestles towering above the tree tops in the gorges below." The track will be laid to the, "second crossing of the turn pike (the Land Trust entrance on Bankhead Parkway) tomorrow night and as the rest of the road is graded on the crest of the mountain, and beyond Cold Springs on the side (intersection with Fearn Street), the track will be laid and the road in full operation by the first week in June." This issue further stated that the company paid over 300 hands each week. On June 19, two state railroad commissioners were invited to "make a trip" over the railroad. They were taken as far as Cold Springs on June 13. The June 26 issue carried the following announcement by the H.B.L. & M.S.R.R. CO.: "Passenger Trains will commence to run regularly from Huntsville

Tuesday, June 25th, on which the Monte Sano Hotel opens. Hacks will meet the train at the end of the track to carry passengers to the Hotel..." The price was, "25 cents each way and additional 25 cents will be collected for hack fair." It further stated that, "tickets purchased on the train going up will be five cents extra." The July 10 issue announced that there were to be three round trips per day. The July 17 issue indicated, "The railway and equipment have cost the management a sum of \$100,000. This (the railroad) is now running within a quarter (mile) from the hotel." On August 14, the paper announced completion. The article pointed out such scenery as "Fagans Canyon" and "O'Brian's Buttonhole." The September 25 edition carried the headline Monte Sano Railway followed by a subtitle, A card from the Manager to the people of Huntsville. "Our trains will run as per new schedule until Oct. 1st, longer if you wish it." The announcement added that the railroad was, "equipped with a train costing \$15,000." The manager continued, "Some say the road is dangerous. We do not find a single passenger on the railway has been hurt, though a good deal has been made when an odd truck (set of wheels) left the rails a time or two." This "card" from the manager indicated that at least one minor accident had occurred and business seemed to be suffering. At any rate, the first year of operation was the high point in the life of the railroad that once ran up Monte Sano.



## THE ROARING TWENTIES

"Early in the 1900's, Charles Hutchens and his wife Molly built a "summer place" of stone facing A Street in the town of Viduta on Monte Sano Mountain. There was a large garden. There were wooden porch columns. The ceilings inside were probably like the current ceilings under the porch, that is, oak planks. The porch was not concrete. There were a lot of doors and windows for cross-ventilation. The windows and sills were wood. There were screens on the windows. The exterior shutters were used to seal up the house in the winter. If there was a summer rain the windows could be left up and the shutters closed. The rain was kept out and the breeze allowed inside. There were nice thick walls and deep windows. There was a rock walk going from the front porch to A Street (Lookout). As a child visiting my grandparents, I would walk through the woods to Aunt Molly's. We children would seldom use the front door. We'd head for the back door which led to the kitchen. The cook would always give us food. My grandfather (William Thomas Hutchens) had a

two-story frame house with porches. It was where you now turn off Monte Sano Boulevard on to Nolen Avenue. There was a barn, a well, and a privy. C. E. Monroe, the artist, was a childhood friend of mine. He lived next door. The only road up the mountain was the toll road, (an extension of Randolph Avenue). It was a dirt and rock mountain road maintained by the mountain residents. We children would scramble to be near the car windows so when we arrived at the toll keeper's we could call out "Hutchens car." We felt very important. I also visited my other grandparents, the Newman's, across from Viduta Lane. Across from our house there were woods up to the Wellman's house (currently Mr. Hall's, 3627 Nolen Avenue). Mrs. Wellman and my mother were good friends. They each had four children. One day they decided to get away from the children so they left Mr. Wellman in charge. He was a big, strong man. He let the children climb up on the shiny tin roof and slide down. He would catch us. Our mothers came home and Mr. Wellman was in deep trouble. I never saw an Indian on Monte Sano or in Huntsville. Arrowheads were like pebbles on the mountain. They were so common you didn't even pick them up. We'd wake up in the morning to the sound of cow bells. I think they came from the Schrimsher farm." (Dr. E. Hutchens, 1992)



## **CIVILIAN CONSERVATION CORPS AND MONTE SANO STATE PARK**

The 1930's, or the Great Depression Years (1931-1940), was a time of crisis when people were experiencing lack of money, poverty and hardships, as never seen before. The Civilian Conservation Corps, referred to as the CCC, was the 1930's version of an economic rescuer. Implemented under President Franklin D. Roosevelt, a million and a half young men and war veterans enrolled in the CCC. The 3486th Company, SP-16 (1935-1940) and SP-12 (1935-1938) were located on Monte Sano Mountain. The purpose of having camps on Monte Sano was to build a 2,000 acre state park. The men of the CCC built roads, stone cabins, furniture for the cabins, hiking trails, a 75,000 gallon water tank, a public lodge and laid 33,000 feet of sewer line and 9,000 feet of three-inch water pipe (CCC yearbook and file). Robert K. Bell, a young Huntsville attorney, was general chairman of the city's biggest and most elaborate occasion in many decades. "The show place of the Tennessee Valley" — Monte Sano State Park — was formally opened on August 25, 1938. A

giant celebration was staged by Huntsville and Madison County. Parades, motorcades, barbecue, speeches, and a Queen's Ball climaxed a three-year dream of local businessmen. **Thanks to the efforts of the CCC men of Company 3486.** When World War II started the men (lacking transportation) walked off the mountain and joined the regular Army.



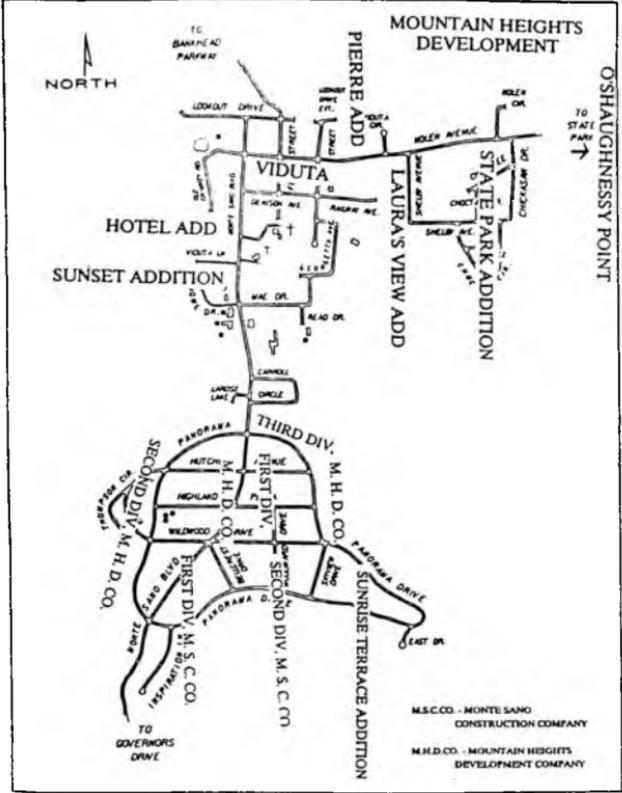
## **MOUNTAIN SETTLERS OF THE '50'S (1950'S THAT IS)**

Spearheading the move of German families from Fort Bliss, Texas were Hans Lindenmayr and Leopold Osthoff. They contacted Sam Thompson, who was a stock holder in the Mountain Heights Development Company and the resident sales representative. He lived near 5510 Panorama Drive (house torn down). Herren Lindenmayr and Osthoff were also interested in a 36 acre farm on the southeast side of Monte Sano Boulevard owned by Mr. Lowe Williamson.

In May of 1950, Mr. Osthoff purchased the 36 acre farm, representing the following families: W. Angele, K. Debus, K. Hager, K. Heimburg. G.

Mandel, H. Millinger, E. Neubert, E. Rees, A. Schuler, H. Horn, H. Bergeler, H. Lindenmayr, W. Voss, A. Rudolph, and L. Osthoff. The price: \$7,000. Now came the work of developing the farm into residential lots. While the families lived downtown the consortium contracted with Ashburn & Gray for a survey. Noojin Hardware and Supply Co., London's, and The Hutchens Company bid on the galvanized pipe and installation for the water supply. By October of the same year, Karl Waltersdorf of the Huntsville Electric System was contacted and installation of 60 Amp. service requested. There were six houses under construction and two others starting in November. Mr. Roy Stone, Chairman - Board of County Commissioners, was contacted for culverts and gravel-covered roads. In a letter to Mr. Stone from L. Osthoff: "I know your Department is tight up with work, however the fact that FHA requirements have to be fulfilled in order to obtain the badly needed mortgage and that in next winter at least 8 people will use the road to get to work may entitle you to consider our request." And so Sunrise Terrace Subdivision evolved. (Neubert file)

Ref. G W Jones and Sons Map, Sept. 8, 1954



# PRESERVATION IN ACTION

## I. The Call

**Dorothy Scott Johnson**  
2409 Dairy Lane  
Huntsville, Alabama 35811

May 30, 1994

Dear Gladstone Place Resident:

As an amateur historian and a 23-year resident of the old Chapman home, I would like to point out some items of historical significance in the neighborhood, especially as they concern the stone spring-house and cooling barn. I understand these buildings are in imminent danger of being destroyed. It is chilling to think that over 170 years of history can be wiped out in a few minutes with a bulldozer.

When a subdivision is built, in the name of progress, it is often necessary to destroy certain minor geological, archaeological, or historical features. If any of these features are of major significance then other measures must be taken.

It is difficult to imagine that where you now live was once under a sea, but just west of the spring-house is a sedimentary rock outcrop embedded with millions of fossilized prehistoric sea creatures.

Before the Indian cession of 1807, the area around the spring was a campground for Cherokee and Chickasaw tribes (mostly Cherokee). Many artifacts such as grindstones and arrowheads have been found to attest to the fact. Some members of the local Archaeology Club have even suggested that the Alabama Historical Commission might like to sponsor an archaeological dig in the area around the spring.



An extremely rare and endangered species of albino, sightless crayfish live in a huge cavern on Cave Hill in northwest Huntsville. During heavy rains these crayfish (some call them shrimp) can be found in the Chapman Spring. According to the late Dr. Walter Jones, Alabama State

Geologist, this is the only place in the world these creatures exist. Any radical changes could easily destroy this animal's natural habitat.

The first white settler in the immediate area was Allen Christian who squatted on the land about the time of the Indian cession. He applied to the U.S. Government for a patent believing he was on the land on which rested the spring. When the survey was made in 1809, he found that his land was a few yards south, much to his chagrin.

George Kaiser got the land containing the spring but did not stay long. Christian and Lemuel Mead (the first Circuit Court Clerk and member of the legislature) co-purchased Kaiser's equity in the land in 1810, and finally obtained the patent October 3, 1820.

In 1835 Christian and Mead divided the land, Mead taking the north part and Christian taking the south part with the dividing line being the spring. Christian actually got the spring while Mead was allowed access. The spring was then called Christian Spring and is the headwaters of Spring Branch.

After obtaining the patent in 1820, Christian began to cut trees and made lumber for his home-to-be (now called the Chapman home) and let the lumber cure for about ten years. During that waiting period, the stones for the house's foundation and those for the dairy barns were cut (probably by slave labor) from the stone found on the side of the mountain. The stonework in all of these buildings is identical as was the foundation to Gov. Chapman's mansion that stood on the west side of Maysville Road.

Allen Christian died in 1836, and his widow continued to run the farm until she died in 1842. The property was in various hands between the time of her death and October 13, 1849, when it was bought by Philip Woodson for \$7,200. Woodson's daughter and her husband, Augustine Withers, had possession until it was sold to Governor Reuben Chapman on January 21, 1873.

Governor Chapman had owned part of the land for many years (west of Maysville Road where the mansion stood) and four generations of his descendants have called it home. It was during the Chapman era that the dairy with its stone barns became a commercial enterprise that helped sustain Huntsville citizens through three wars and the Great Depression. It is also during this time that more detailed history is known about the place.

In 1889, the dairy was operated by William E. Matthews. During his management an attempt was made to make it a showplace. Roofs of the dairy barns and spring-house were shake shingle with typical Victorian fishscale trim. The trim was still in evidence in 1971 when we bought the home.

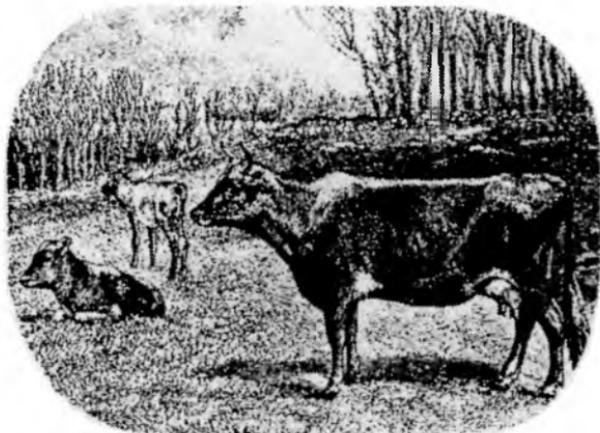
The spring-house had built-in shelving of stone on which eggs and dairy products for the home were kept cool. Water from the spring was piped to the house, to the tennis courts west of the house, and to the cattle pasture in front of the house. It is known that in the last 72 years, the spring has continually run despite some droughts of major proportions.

The dairy herd was composed of registered Jerseys, some imported directly from the Jersey Islands. The dairy house, the southernmost of the



three buildings, had two rooms downstairs plus upstairs sleeping quarters for Mr. Meadows, the Swiss dairyman. Water was piped from the spring into cooling vats which were located on the north and west sides of the cooling barn and were deep enough to submerge five-gallon milk cans.

The cows were milked in a barn across the lane. After milking, there were carriers to take it immediately to the front room of the dairy where it was strained and canned to be submerged in the vats to cool. It was then bottled and capped and delivered to customers twice daily.



Among the cows were two of exceptional productivity: Signal's Lily Flag and Little Goldie. Unofficial tests showed that Lily Flag's output and the butterfat content of her milk far exceeded that of the current world champion; little Goldie was a close runnerup.

Lily Flag soon became the talk of the town and on June 2, 1892, a reception was given her. Mr. Meadows sleeked her up, decorated her horns with iris and ribbons, then took her below the barn to receive callers. One hundred five persons registered, greeted her, and were served a glass of her milk. In October, 1891 she was valued at \$10,000 which was the price of many farms in the South at that time.

A "Lily Flag Supper" was given by Mrs. Matthews (a noted cook) on June 22, 1891 to benefit the Presbyterian Church. Sweet milk, cream, buttermilk, cottage cheese, ice cream of any flavor, sherbert, boiled custard, Delmonico pudding, blanc mange, and Charlotte russe were made exclusively from her milk and served to the guests. Cakes and other byproducts were also served. Few people could believe that one cow could supply the needs of the town.

General Samuel H. Moore, co-owner of Lily Flag, resided in the present Harry Rhett home on Adams Street. He gave a party and invited 1,500 guests with Lily Flag as guest of honor. The party has become legendary in Huntsville. There is a subdivision and some businesses named for her today. Few realize she was part of the Chapman Dairy.

In 1894, the Chapman family resumed control and management of the dairy. During the Spanish-American War in 1898, four regiments encamped on Chapman land. On Trinity Sunday, 1898, they arrived at the Chapman place hungry and weary from a delayed trip from Tampa, Florida on short rations. They asked for food, water and permission to lie on the grass and rest. Mrs. Rosalie Chapman (widow of Gov. Chapman's son, Reuben III) stopped her milk wagons and served the soldiers milk from the dairy. The spring furnished water for the thirsty men.

Next to succeed in management of the dairy was Reuben Chapman, IV, and his wife, Josephine Gaboury (the daughter of Joseph Gaboury who introduced the first electric trolley car to the United States in Montgomery, Alabama). Reuben and Josephine managed the dairy through two world wars and the Great Depression. During the depression, Josephine said many times, "The little children must have milk," and they were given milk regardless of their parents' ability to pay. No one was ever turned away and it has been said that the dairy sustained the life of Huntsville during that terrible period.

The dairy continued to serve Huntsville's milk needs until after the second world war. At that time homogenization became necessary but Reuben and Josephine felt they were too old to go to the expense and effort of changing over. Too, White Way Milk had been introduced in Huntsville and the community would no longer have to rely on this dairy. They sold their herd and gradually sold off the land to developers but retained 34 acres which included the dairy barns.

The dairy barns are believed to have been built between 1820-1830 and the spring-house earlier, probably 1810-1820. This makes them some of the oldest stone buildings in the state and certainly in north Alabama. The destruction of these buildings and landscape would mean an irreparable loss to the heritage and history of the area.

Restored buildings nestled in their beautiful setting will greatly enhance the resale value of your property. It would be a delightful, unique place for picnics and parties.

## II. The Response

### Notes on Springhouse and Other Dairy Buildings on Woodcroft in the Gladstone Place Development

During the week of May 30 - June 4, 1994, several people with an interest in and a knowledge of the history of the site of Gladstone Place toured the remains of the stone buildings on Woodcroft and discussed with some homeowners the historic value of the area and possible ways to preserve it.

Buddy Chapman, who grew up on the property; Dorothy Scott Johnson, a professional genealogist who has researched the history of the neighborhood since moving into the Chapman farmhouse on Dairy Lane in 1971; Suzanne O'Connor, President of the Historic Huntsville Foundation; Elise Stephens, a history professor at Alabama A&M University and the editor of *The Historic Huntsville Quarterly of Local Architecture and Preservation*; and Dee Gilbert and Diane Ellis, Gladstone Place homeowners, met informally twice near the springhouse to discuss the historic value of the springhouse area and what might be done to preserve it while meeting the needs of the neighborhood.

On Saturday, June 4, preservation architect Harvie Jones of Jones & Herrin Architects came to the site to evaluate it and meet with Jim Hayes, President of Gladstone Place Homeowners Association, and several other homeowners gathered there to clean out debris and underbrush.

Harvie Jones noted that the cooling house, with its ashlar stone, appears older than the restored barn behind the McDonald house. He believes it is likely the oldest agricultural structure in Madison County. Jones suggested restoring the springhouse with the remaining original stones, and stabilizing the cooling house by 1) clearing the vegetation growing from the mortar, 2) repointing the stonework with a lime-based mortar, and 3) constructing a random cement cap to stop further weather deterioration. He will give us the phone number of Robert Irving, a mason familiar with this type of pointing who has done work for the Burritt Museum. Jones gave a top-of-the-head estimate of what it would cost to rehab the two structures as between \$5,000 and \$10,000. Since, at this point, no one knows for sure what the original buildings looked like, to do any work beyond this plan of restoration and stabilization would be conjectural and costly.



Landscaping the area and enhancing the spring and stream were also discussed. Jones complimented the association on the appearance of the barn and picnic area behind the McDonald house and offered the suggestion that landscaping be kept simple and rustic in keeping with the style and age of the buildings and in order to keep maintenance costs low. (Pea gravel rather than crushed limestone is a more appropriate ground cover, for example.)

Harvie noted that once the area is cleaned and restored, vandalism and similar mischief is likely to decrease.

Jim Hayes mentioned the problem of run-off from the storm drain in the street affecting the stream, and Jones said that was something that should definitely be corrected.

The site and the larger neighborhood is rich in geological, archaeological, and historic interest. The entire Spring 1989 issue of *The Historic Huntsville Quarterly* was devoted to the area. With this in mind, the group discussed where we might get help to support our restoration and preservation efforts. Harvie noted that brick-and-mortar grants are hard to get but not planning grants. The following ideas emerged:

- Seek a historical marker for the area. You do this through application to the City Council. The markers are expensive, about \$2,000, but if the city accepts the application it pays for the marker. Harvie Jones said our council representative, Jimmy Wall, strongly supports these efforts. He suggested that we might not want to broadcast widely information about the site in the interest of keeping it protected for the neighborhood.
- Seek recognition and help from the Alabama Historical Commission.
- Seek inclusion on the National Registry of Historic Sites if it will include ruins. We would then be eligible for planning grants.
- Seek help from local groups such as the Huntsville Land Trust, the Huntsville-Madison County Historical Society, the Historic Huntsville Foundation, the Botanical Garden, garden clubs, Eagle Scouts, etc. for landscaping or maintenance.
- See if a local archaeological group is interested in doing a dig on the site.
- Reproduce the 1884 plat for inclusion with the historic marker.

Elise Stephens said residents of Monte Sano realized what a historical area they inhabited and formed a group to research and preserve their treasures. We already have a group in place. Diane Ellis will call Jane Barr of Monte Sano to find out how they proceeded in their preservation efforts. Suzanne O'Connor offered a list of historical and preservation agencies that may help us.

The group agreed that we need to develop a master plan before proceeding, but that there is some urgency to prevent further deterioration, vandalism, and theft of the stones. Perhaps we can put up a chain to protect the area while we make our plans for restoration.

6/4/94

Diane Ellis

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**G. A. PLUMMER, HOUSE CARPENTER**

*by*

*Gary M. Griner, Senior*

### Introduction

In 1991, I purchased an old 2-story house which had in 1984, been moved from a lot at the corner of Clinton Avenue and California Street. While researching the history of this house, I learned that the first owner, George A. Plummer, was a carpenter who had built the house for himself in the summer

of 1900. I wondered if other Plummer-built houses still existed. Thus began a long journey through old files and court house records.

There are no permanent documents that identify the company or carpenter that builds a house. But in Plummer's case, he often accepted a mortgage on the house if the owner could not pay cash, and these transactions were recorded. He also did some speculating, buying lots and putting up new houses. This article, based on my research, chronicles George Plummer's activities during the 20 years that he was in the building trade in Huntsville.

### Getting Started

There is a deed dated January 21, 1897, showing that G. A. Plummer bought 24.3 acres on "Athens Road" from W. L. Armstrong (later to be the county jailer). Plummer paid \$885 cash, a sizable sum in those days when eggs were 10 cents a dozen. Athens Road is present day Oakwood Avenue running west from Memorial Parkway. Plummer's land was on the south side of the road about where the Oak Park Shopping Center is now. At the time of the purchase, Plummer was 33 and his pregnant wife, Helen W., was 30. They had two children, Adelle Josephine 6, and Frank A., 4. Census records show that these children were born in Minnesota, so we can conclude that Plummer had arrived in Huntsville sometime after 1892. The Plummers were definitely Yankees: George born in New Hampshire and Helen in Maine. Plummer was a carpenter by trade and may have built his family a 3-room house on Athens Road, but no proof of this has been found.

The February 14, 1900, *Weekly Mercury* carried the following news item:

"City Council Meets. A special meeting of the city council was called at the instance of the county board of health. The discovery of a case of small pox had

brought both city and county authorities face to face with the problem of taking care of the afflicted... The board finally decided to purchase the house owned by Gen. Sam Moore, located at the extreme south end of Madison Street and have it moved up on College Hill and prepared for reception of patients... The board instructed the city clerk to draw up an ordinance requiring compulsory vaccination."

According to local historian, Frances Roberts, "College Hill" refers to the east end of Longwood Drive. The next issue (Feb 28) carried this story:

"Bought a Pest House. Huntsville and Madison County can now boast of a first class pest house. The city and county officials yesterday jointly purchased the Plummer estate two and one-half miles northwest of the city to be used as a hospital for contagious diseases. The consideration was \$2000. The estate consists of a 3-room house and 25 acres of land. The house is comfortably built but it is not considered large enough for the purpose and many additions will be built."

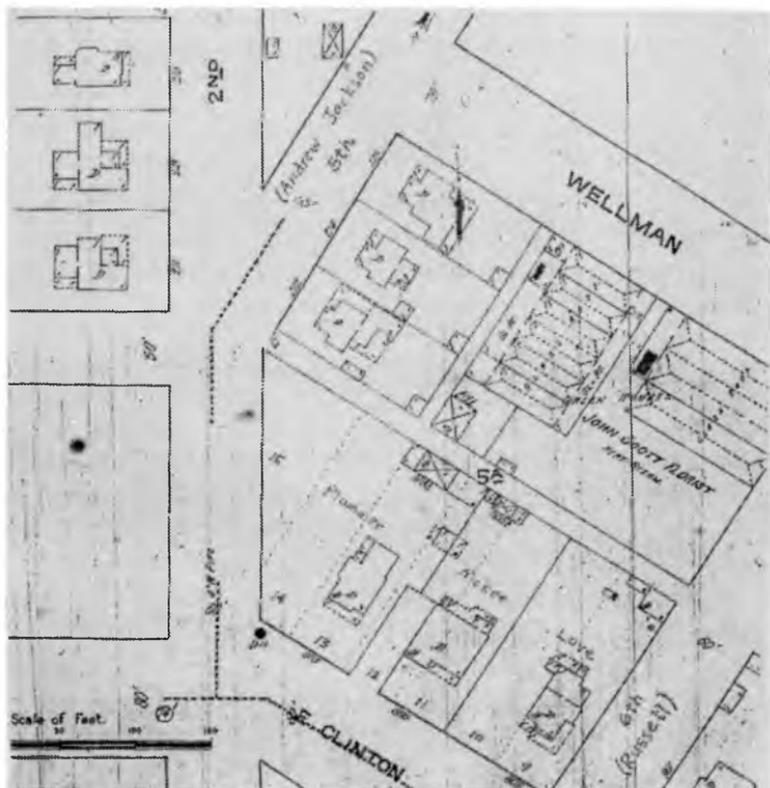
What were George Plummer's activities during those two weeks? Somehow he had managed to get the two bodies to overturn their decision to buy the Moore home and to buy instead Plummer's house which was smaller than they needed. Further, the price was twice what Plummer had paid for it 3 years before. Even if he had "improved" the property by building the small house mentioned in the article, the increase was substantial. Plummer's home became the first publicly owned hospital (note 1) but they took only smallpox patients. By 1921, the property was back in private hands. The building no longer exists.

Note 1. Record, James, *A Dream Come True*, p 105 and p 146. The first hospital for general care opened in 1904, having been left to the city by the infamous Mollie Teal.

## The Plummer House

George and Helen moved their family to town. The 1900 census taken while they were renting, shows that the family now included Albert, age 2, and Helen's mother, Eva Adams, age 52. Plummer's occupation was listed simply as "house carpenter".

With his growing family and sudden prosperity, George decided to build himself a big house. At this time W. I. Wellman was developing his East Huntsville Addition, a huge tract bounded by Pettigrew Avenue (Oakwood) on the north and Wells Avenue on the south. On June 25, 1900, the Plummer's purchased lots 13, 14, and 15 of Block 101 from Wellman and J. R. Boyd for \$500, and he began constructing an 8-room house. This property was on Clinton Avenue at the NE corner of 2nd Avenue (now California Street) and was outside the town limits.



In December 1900, when his house was finished, Plummer obtained a \$1000 mortgage on it from J. E. Pierce (who later became general manager of the Times Publishing Company and editor of the Huntsville Daily & Weekly Times). The interest rate of 8% was not unlike that of today, but the note was due in just three years.

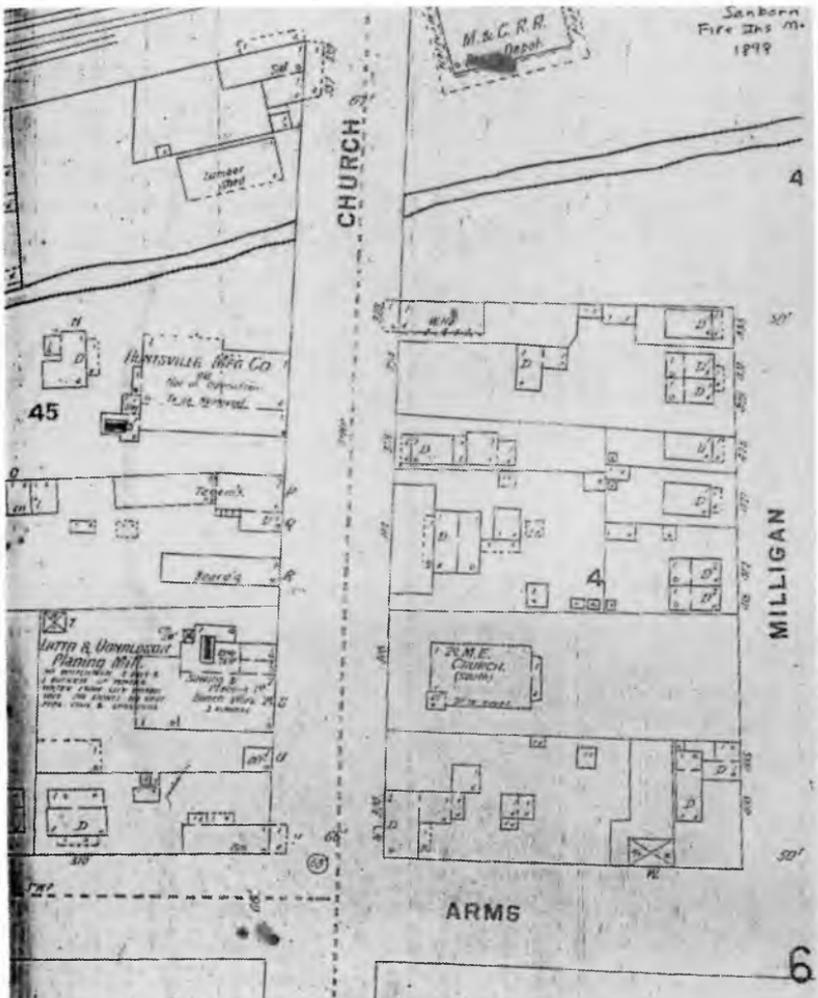
The Plummer's lived in this house for 15 years. In 1984, the building was only weeks away from demolition by the owners, the First Church of the Nazarene, when it was purchased by Anthony and Jennifer Orton who had it moved to a Dug Hill Road location by Kennedy Movers. This is the house that I now own and am restoring.



*George and Helen Plummer raised five boys and one girl in this house. Built in 1900 at Clinton Avenue and California Street, it is now being restored at a Dug Hill Road site by the author.*

## The Planing Mill

June 13, 1901, Plummer bought the adjacent lots 12, 11, and (W/2)10 (note 2) from Wellman, again for \$500. The building boom was hitting Huntsville as the cotton mills thrived, and on October 2, 1902, Plummer took a big step: he purchases the H&L Planing Mill Company on Church Street for \$2000, exactly the amount due on the mortgage held by Sarah I. White (See map). The sellers included the president



Note 2. (W/2)10 is my shorthand notation meaning the west half of lot 10.

of the mill, Robert E. Spragins, who was a prominent attorney and businessman. He was also president of the First National Bank, the Farmer's Cotton Oil & Feed Company, the YMCA, and vice-president of the Huntsville Ice and Coal Co. Eugene E. Latta was secretary of the mill and the deed also named sellers Arthur E. Latta, Lou Q. Latta, and Susie Echols Spragins, daughter of Robert. As part of the deal, Lou Latta bought East Huntsville lots (W/2)11 and (E/2)12 from Plummer for \$400 and Spragins bought (W/2)10 and (E/2)11 for \$200.

Four days later Plummer accepted a \$465 mortgage note from S. B. Phillips (and wife, T. J.) presumably for a house he had finished at East Huntsville Block 103, lot 9. This house still stands at the NW corner of England Street and Clinton Avenue and is owned by Mr. and Mrs. Robert Cantrell. Over the years this house has been "modernized" several times, including a front porch, a rear addition, and the mandatory vinyl siding. It has also suffered from at least two fires.



*S. B. > Phillips house, built in 1902 at the NW corner of Clinton and England streets. Presently owned by Mr. & Mrs. R. Cantrell. The bay window is exactly like that of Plummer's own house.*

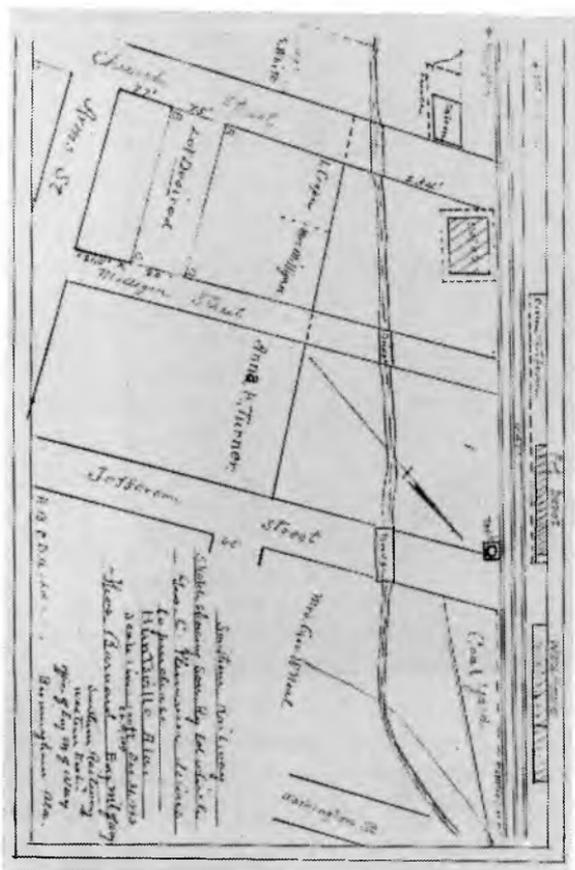
Nevertheless, the similarity to Plummer's own house is apparent (See photo). Two years later Plummer sold this mortgage for \$200 (with \$265 still due) to Susie L. Chaddock.

In the fall of 1902, Plummer decided to speculate on some land closer to the square. On October 21, he bought 16 lots (50'x150') in the Sophia Davis Division for \$1000 cash and a \$2080 mortgage assumption. This works out to about \$192 per lot. Plummer was unsuccessful in developing these lots. The only recorded transaction was a sale of lot 19 (104 Spring Street) in 1904, to Winnie Ingram, listed in the 1910 City Directory as a Negro domestic. The 1921 Sanborn Fire Map shows only five dwellings and labels the area as a "colored neighborhood". The subdivision was entirely eliminated by the Big Spring Urban Renewal Project R-32 started in 1963. Plummer's lots were bounded by Pump Street, Spring Street, and Lowe Avenue, putting them approximately where the Mental Health Center now stands.

In 1903, only one transaction is recorded: Plummer repurchased the property next door to his house from the Latta family. He gave E. R. Latta \$200 for (W/2)11 and (E/2)12, exactly half what he had sold it for the previous year. At this price it is obvious that the lot was still vacant. Presumably, Plummer was spending most of his time operating his planing mill business, although he probably had a crew available to build as well. He began to acquire mortgages from contractors who owed him for building materials. On March 4, 1905, for example, he accepted a \$1000 mortgage from James M. McKee (J.M. McKee & Sons) secured by six lots in East Huntsville (block 71, lots 9&10; block 84, lots 1&2; block 97, lots 13&15). Houses existed on only lots 9 & 10, so Plummer had, no doubt, provided lumber to McKee to build those homes. These structures still exist at 811 and 809 Ward Avenue. In October Plummer sold the mortgage to Margaret E. Graham for an unspecified amount.

## Expanding Operations

Business must have been good because Plummer decided to expand his lumber operation to a vacant lot across Church Street. August 24, 1905, he purchased the property at 308 Church Street for \$800 from the Southern Railway Co. (The M.E. Church shown on the Sanborn map had been moved one lot north to 314 Church Street). The terms were \$200 down and \$200 each of the next three years at 8% interest.



*This sketch attached to the deed shows the location of the lot purchased from the Southern Railway Company in 1905. Note the incorrect reference to "Geo. C." rather than George A. Plummer.*

In October 1905, Plummer accepted a mortgage for \$260 from Simpson and Allie Ellet, a "colored laborer", for lot 78 in McCoullough's Addition. Apparently he had built a small house there. The next day he sold the mortgage again to Margaret Graham. Today this is an empty lot at 220 Ward Avenue just across Dallas Street from the I-565 overpass.

Once again Plummer sold his next door lot, (W/2)11 and (E/2)12. March 26, 1906, he sold it to carpenter, John A. McKee (son of James M.) for \$250. This time the property stayed sold. McKee built a house, and the 1910 census shows his family living there with 2 children. The house was gone by 1975.

In 1906, Plummer teamed with W. J. Bennett to build the city a "natatorium" (note 3). The 50'x50' swimming pool was located near Big Spring Branch. At the same time Plummer was also constructing a meeting house for the West Huntsville Church of Christ on 8th Avenue. This building had outdoor privies and was heated with wood stoves. On May 1, 1906, Plummer accepted a \$360 mortgage on the property to be paid off at \$25 per month. The mortgage was signed by elders J. I. Jones, J. A. Jenkins, and J. T. Reed. Unlike many of Plummer's loans, this was paid off on schedule, December 24, 1906. The wood frame building (see photo next page) was used until 1948 when it was replaced by a brick structure. At present the property is owned by the Huntsville Free Will Baptist Church.

Only one transaction is on the books for 1907. On January 30, Plummer received a \$375 mortgage from Frank and Zulika Vaughan for property at the corner of "Big Cove Road and Whitesburg Road" (lot 8). The mortgage specified that the "grantors now reside..." there, so apparently Plummer had built them a house. The note was to be paid off at \$30 every three months. A year later the mortgage was sold to

Note 3. This swimming pool may have been a forerunner to Burnam's Swimming Pool at Big Spring Park.



*Plummer built this "meeting house" for the West Huntsville Church of Christ in 1906. Congregational photo taken about 1933.*

Thomas (Terie) P. Wade, a local insurance broker. Wade was to buy several of Plummer's properties in the next ten years. Today Vaughn's lot is at the corner of Governors Drive and Madison Street, the site of the Colonial Bank parking lot.

Early in 1908, Plummer teamed up with J. E. Pierce to bid on land sold at public auction. On February 5, they jointly purchased about three-fourths of block 99 in East Huntsville. This block was bounded by Pratt, Wellman (not yet opened), 6th Street (now Russell) and 7th Street (now Coleman). The property was purchased for \$740 from the estate of Milton Humes to satisfy mortgages held by Martha M. Burk of Lebanon, TN (\$380) and Mary L. Windham (\$360). Humes was an attorney and industrialist who had started the Madison Spinning Mill, later to be known as the Abingdon Mill and finally as Lincoln Mill. While \$740 was a cheap price for what amounted to 12 standard size lots, eight of them faced Wellman Avenue which did not yet extend east of 6th. Apparently Plummer and Pierce believed that Wellman would soon be extended, but they were wrong. As late as 1928, the street was still not built and even today no home in that block fronts on Wellman Avenue.

March 25, 1908, Plummer accepted a \$250 mortgage from Henry Landsden for lot 1 of the Carl E. Cramer addition. The document specifies that Landsden was "living on the property," probably in a house built by Plummer. He was to pay \$20 per quarter. The Cramer addition was east of Franklin Street, and lot 1 was at the SE corner of Franklin and Murphy Street (now Rands Avenue). Today this is 901 Franklin, and the one-story frame home has been replaced by the Cramer Travel Agency building.

Plummer kept letting J. M. McKee & Sons purchase building materials even though McKee still was having a cash flow problem. He took a \$600 mortgage from McKee on a piece of commercial property described as the "Hundley Stable lot on Clinton Avenue". To the east across an alley was the City Engine House (note 4) and to the west, a "barber shop occupied by Levi Scruggs". McKee defaulted on the mortgage and the property was sold at public auction for \$700 to Robert E. Spragins. This entire block is now occupied by the Municipal Parking Garage.

### **The Long Downward Slide**

By 1909 Plummer had overextended himself. Many people owed him money and were not paying on time. On March 9, Plummer and Pierce obtained a \$750 loan against their block 99 property from Sidney J. Mayhew, president of the Huntsville Bank and Trust Company. This may have been a personal loan since the mortgage refers to Mayhew as "Chairman, Board of Pastors and Elders of the Presbyterian Church". The money was borrowed at 7 percent interest for one year but was not actually paid in full for ten years.

On August 24, 1909, Plummer mortgaged his Church Street Planing Mill for \$2200. This was the former H&L Planing Mill property that he bought in 1902 on the west side of the street, not the lumber yard on the east side. The lender

Note 4. This was the Fire Department. The public library was upstairs. See *Photographic Memories: A Scrapbook of Huntsville & Madison Co.*, by Elise Hopkins Stephens, 1991 (p 54)

was Peter Lombardo, who operated a meat market at 300 Arms and later at 224 Jefferson Street (note 5). Interest payments of \$176 were to be made on the anniversary of the loan in 1910, 1911, and 1912, with the principal also due in 1912. Plummer was able to make only the first two payments.

The only other transaction recorded in 1909 was a mortgage of \$105.95 from Bettie Evans for "part of lot 47" in the Sophia Davis Division. Lot 47 was at the corner of Creek Street and Lowe Avenue and was not part of the 16-lot tract that Plummer had purchased in 1902. Whether this represented payment for new construction or only remodeling cannot be determined.

Fannie Miller was listed in the 1910 City Directory as a "laundress, colored". On April 27 of that year Plummer accepted a surprisingly large \$500 mortgage from her for a 65'x150' lot on the west side of Madison Street, 93 feet north of Williams Alley (now St. Clair). The mortgage was transferred to R. E. Smith and paid in full in 1919. Whatever house Plummer built for Fannie Miller was destroyed to build the present Twickenham Village Shopping Center.

That summer Plummer and the other property owners adjacent to Milligan Street deeded Southern Railway the right to lay tracks down the center of Milligan and across Arms Street to the property of John Willis Baer on Jefferson (note 6). Besides Baer, other signers were Mrs. Belle Weil, Glenn Wells (for W. J. Bennett & Co.) and N. K. White. The rail spur and Milligan Street disappeared in the 1965 Central City Urban Renewal Project and Arms Street became Monroe Street.

Note 5. The Lombardo Building (1922) now at 315 Jefferson Street is presently home to the Railroad Station Antique Mall.

Note 6. Who was John Willis Baer? His name does not appear in any city directory of the period. Perhaps he was an absentee landlord.

The U.S. Census taken in April 1910, indicated that his mother-in-law was no longer living with the Plummers but that three more sons had been born: Daniel (1902), Joseph (1904), and George Jr. (1906). It was also noted that a total of eight children had been born but only six were living. Since all of the children were 2 years apart except Albert, it is likely that the deceased children had been born in 1896 and in 1900, the same year he built his house on Clinton Avenue.

So we find George and Helen with six children, a \$2200 mortgage on the business, plus other debts. There was increasing competition by others who were entering the building business and the records indicate that Plummer was not building expensive homes. One must remember that the Civil War had ended only 40 years prior, and Plummer had that distinctive New England accent. Of course this is pure speculation. It is possible that those who could afford to build expensive homes did not need to have Plummer finance the construction and this is why there are no existing records. But we do know that the lumber yard was in stiff competition with both A. M. Booth and C. W. Robinson Lumber Company on Meridian Street and with W. P. Dilworth Lumber Company located just across the Southern Railroad tracks on Church Street (where it still is today).

If Plummer's business was in trouble it was not apparent from the one-third page ad that he placed in the 1910-1911 City Directory, offering "all kind of building supplies" and "building contractor service." [See ad on page ??] He also bought a small ad on the front cover. Booth, however, took out a full page ad and the Baker Planing Mill on N. Washington also advertised.

February 9, 1911, Plummer paid \$90 to W. A. Sibley for lot 13, block 1 of the Fairview addition. When sold in 1913 to Teri Wade the price was only \$120. Evidently no house had yet been built.

In August 1911, Plummer bought two more lots in Fairview; this time from A. W. Newson who was the actual

developer of the large tract which extended between Oakwood Avenue (Pettigrew) and McCullough Avenue. Plummer paid \$190 for the two lots. Like all original deeds in this subdivision, the following legal stipulation appears "...for the ten years next hereafter ensuing, that neither he nor his heirs nor assigns will sell or lease to colored people the property...." This property (lots 1&3 of block 14) was sold for \$700 in 1913 to M. N. Renegar, an employee of Dallas Mills (and of acceptable color), so evidently a small house had been built in the meantime. Today this is the corner of Oakwood and Minor, the site of a modern 4-plex apartment.

It was the summer of 1912, and George Plummer did not have \$2376 to satisfy the loan against his Planing Mill. Though payment was impossible, he still was able to make other small investments. In July he purchased at auction a 60'x40' lot on Jones Street in "Chelsa" from a Lucy Jorgenson. This area (now Chelsea Lane) is off Triana Blvd. just south of Johnson Road. At that time (before Redstone Arsenal was formed), Triana Road continued all the way to the town of Triana. Nevertheless, it was not choice real estate. Plummer paid \$129 for the lot and got \$164.24 for it as part of his 1913 sale to Teri Wade.

January 16, 1913, Plummer accepted yet another mortgage in Fairview: block 1, lot 11 and 20 feet of lot 9. John H. Brazelton, Jr, who in 1910 lived "on Wells Avenue beyond the city limits" signed over a \$260 mortgage. Perhaps Plummer had built a house for Brazelton, but I have been unable to determine if the present dwelling dates that far back.

Plummer and Pierce still owned jointly most of block 99 in East Huntsville, but S. J. Mayhew held the \$750 mortgage. A deed dated March 17, 1913, shows Plummer getting half-interest by paying James H. and Matilda Mayhew (heirs, perhaps?) an amount of \$332 and then, only a month later, the Mayhews turned around and loaned him another \$350 on the property. A strange arrangement.

## Foreclosure

On October 1, 1914, Plummer lost his Planing Mill to Peter Lombardo through foreclosure. With fees, \$2379.60 was owed. He had paid \$2000 for the mill, mortgaged it for \$2200, made two interest payments of \$352 total for a net cost of only \$152 to operate a major business for twelve years. Looked at this way, it was not really a failure, especially if the business had been making a profit. Plummer still had his house and lumber yard free and clear.

The next summer, July 17, 1915, Plummer sold his own home for \$2000 to Edward B. Mooring, owner of the Mooring & Glover Grocery on Meridian Street. The day the sale closed he purchased 171 acres from W. T. Mayes for \$1000. He did not use the cash from his house sale but borrowed the money from Felicia C. Hubbard. The mortgage was signed by her guardian, Ellelee Humes (widow of Milton).

The new Plummer property was located on the east side of Monte Sano on Dug Hill Road at what is now called Robinson Drive (note 7). Approximately half of this acreage is farm land but it is not known if Plummer actually started farming. The 1916-17 City Directory has six listings under "Lumber", but G. A. Plummer is not one of them. Probably he built a house and/or barn because on December 2, he was able to obtain another \$1000 loan against the property, again from Hubbard/Humes. Today there are no buildings on the property that date back to 1916. The existing house is owned by Annie Robinson and the part of the property fronting on Dug Hill Road is being developed as the Cheval subdivision.

Nothing is known of Plummer's activities in 1916, but on October 28, at the Ringling Brother's Circus a flash fire resulted in the destruction of several dozen horses whose remains were buried on the Pest House property on Athens Road - Plummer's former home.

Note 7. I find it a fitting coincidence that 69 years later Plummer's own house made the journey to Dug Hill Road.

July 26, 1917, Plummer settled a debt owed to William P. Dilworth by deeding him an 85'x142' lot in East Huntsville Block 99 on Pratt Avenue. The price was \$5 "plus considerations".

On January 26, 1918, the entire Dug Hill tract was sold to Oscar Drake for \$2000, and the Plummers probably left the Huntsville area. Where did they go? Unfortunately, someone else must solve this puzzle. I do know that George Jr. received Social Security benefits in Alabama and had SS# 417-01-2036. Local resident, Dorothy Adair, recalls the Plummer children visiting from time-to-time after leaving Huntsville. She believes they may have then lived in Birmingham, Ms. Adair also has a few books and pieces of furniture from the Plummer estate sale.

As for the remaining Plummer property, the ill-fated Block 99 was disposed of as follows: a 45'x142' lot to carpenter Herman L. Smith for \$250, August 16, 1919; the entire Wellman Avenue side (158'x320') to Katherine H. Scott for \$500 plus the \$750 mortgage still owed to S. J. Mayhew. Katherine was the wife of John Scott who operated a large greenhouse on the next block east on Wellman Avenue and across the alley from the old Plummer house on Clinton. As to the remaining 15 lots in the Sophia Davis Division, I can find no record of their disposition (note 8).

The final court house record for George A. Plummer was the sale of his lumber yard property on Church Street for \$2000 to J. W. Turner, September 12, 1919. This was considerably more than the \$800 he had paid for it, but storage sheds and buildings had been added, and perhaps building material stock remained.

Note 8. They must have been sold, of course, or else Plummer's heirs have a claim on the Mental Health Center.

## Acknowledgements

I would like to thank the following persons for aiding my research for this article: Dorothy Adair, Gil Brady, Robert Cantrell, Charles Cramer, Robert Cramer, Frances Roberts, Annie Robinson, Robin Wadley, Jennifer Orton, and Glynn Woods. Special thanks to John Rison Jones, Jr. for reviewing the manuscript. The author must, of course, take responsibility for errors of fact or omission.

### Griner on Griner

A man, so they say, identifies with his occupation. I'm an unemployed aerospace engineer. The defense cut-back of 1993/1994 has given me lots of time to restore my 1900 house and to write the George Plummer article for *The Quarterly*.

A native of Ohio, I graduated from The Ohio State University and the University of Colorado. After stints in Virginia and New Jersey, I arrived in Huntsville in 1972 to work for Science Applications International, Corp. I have also worked for UAH and General Research Corp.

At one time or another I have been a member of the Huntsville Concert Band, UAH Wind Ensemble, Community Chorus, Huntsville Little Theater, SPEBSQSA (the Barbershop Quartet Society), Huntsville Track Club and the Huntsville Grotto (that's the local caving group). I quit pole vaulting when I turned 50 (much to my mother's relief) but still am involved in coaching and officiating the sport.

The Plummer article is my first attempt at historical research, not counting the two years I spent digging up old high school track and field results. The idea was to establish the all-time top 10 performers at Huntsville High in each event, both boys and girls. I still maintain these lists and also have the most complete (only?) list of winners from former City Championships and Section Championships, if anybody cares to see them. I suppose one could argue that cave exploration is also historical research of a sort. I find cave surveying and mapping especially fascinating.

Last, but not least, I'm a husband (to Peggy), father (one son and three daughters), grandfather (five times).



*This house was built for Azel A. Love before 1908, probably by Plummer and/or John McKee, both neighbors. The house has been moved to 904 Wellman and is now owned by Glynn Woods.*

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. Membership is open to interested and concerned citizens from across north Alabama and beyond.



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