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THREE DOLLARS

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# THE HISTORIC HUNTSVILLE QUARTERLY OF LOCAL ARCHITECTURE AND PRESERVATION



**UPON THIS ROCK:  
A FOUNDATION IN STONE CONSTRUCTION**

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Cover: Stone wall and office cabin at Monte Sano State Park.  
Photo by Heather Cross.

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## UPON THIS ROCK: A FOUNDATION IN STONE CONSTRUCTION

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## From the Editor

This *Quarterly* takes a slightly different approach to architectural history and preservation. It is based on the idea that without a sturdy foundation of knowledge of the elements and processes that form buildings there is no true understanding of the depth and complexity of what a historical structure is and what it takes to preserve it. Stone as a building material offers the base upon which other elements of construction build, so it makes sense to begin there.

This issue is not meant to provide a workable knowledge of stone construction, but offer enough information to make readers aware of the variations and possibilities of building with stone. These structures hold historic importance because they originate in a time when craftsmen formed buildings based on physical labor and the art of fitting and carving stone. The stone structures are the record of a time and a skill that has been replaced by assembly line repetition and a desire to use what fits, not work with natural variety.

Stone is the foundation, literally the bedrock, upon and out of which humans have made their homes. Caves carved out of mountains by wind, water, and weather; outcroppings that shelter animals and provide nesting ledges; simple enclosures that protect fire from spreading and going out. From simple huts to pyramids and from an altar to a gravestone, we employ stone to protect ourselves and serve as vessels to hold our hopes and beliefs.

Stone is monumental at the same time that it is scaled to the human body. Pick up a pebble; rest upon a rock. Raise a stone circle to measure time; drop a stone into a lake to show a child the expanding ripples.

Stone endures and allows humans to leave a mark that will outlast us all. Stone contains the remnants of how this planet began, and we use it to mark where we end. Stone remains to mark our connection to the earth and our return to it.

—Heather A. Cross



*The Eastside Community Center, Old Town—Threatened by road development and expansion, this crenellated, castle-like building is a prime example of uncoursed random stone work used for public buildings in the early 1900s. Repointing and the stone's durability have helped the structure weather many uses.*

# Stone Construction: A History and Primer

*Heather Cross*

Structures made of stone stand for very long periods of time—the Pyramids at Giza, the Parthenon, the Pantheon, Notre Dame cathedral, the Washington Monument. The weight, both figuratively and literally, of stone is what makes it enduring and gives the spaces it shapes a sense of permanence, but not all stone buildings are quite so monumental. Think of fieldstone fences meandering along edges of woods, old stone stairs worn into cradles for your feet, mossy headstones whose names and angels have melted into smears. The surface textures of pebbles tumbled in streambeds or the hollowed out ridges of sand blasted cliffs also capture stone's duality.

Buildings made of stone are assemblies of many pieces, yet the combined impression is of solidity and strength. Stone is a foundation for our homes, our barns, our steel beams; stone is the crust of our planet, keeping us safe above the molten core. Stone melts, drifts, grinds, settles, moves, and endures. Our use of stone to build is but a small section of history, but one we know first-hand.

## **History**

The use of stone as a building material in America began before nationhood. The early colonists of the East Coast used what they could find and knew. Those from countries familiar with stonework quarried stone and used it near the site. Fieldstone found when plowing or digging earth shelters was dry-laid or fixed with lime mortar in simple thick walls (Rifkind 245). The abundance of timber in the colonies led to stone being relegated to the role of foundation material or outbuildings. By the mid- to late-1700s, the Georgian influence led to stone being used but stuccoed to present a refined exterior. Other decorative elements such as brick quoins or wood trim were faux painted to suggest more costly stones than were available. The faux stone of choice in interiors was marble.

The newly established nation of the early 1800s turned to the Federal style, a Democratic pattern based on Roman design. Buildings relied on brick with simple cut stone lintels and quoins. The shallow relief



*Monte Sano (Chapman) Dairy—The 19th century limestone cooling barn of the dairy sits near a springhouse and bottling barn. Before the Gladstone Place Homeowners Association stabilized the stonework in 1995, the rubble interior of the wall was exposed (top). Stonemason Robert Ervin repointed the walls with a lime-based mortar and constructed a random cement cap to stop further weather deterioration. Photos by Diane Ellis.*



*Monte Sano (Chapman) Dairy—The preserved ruins of the roughly-coursed, undressed limestone walls illustrate the vernacular use of stone. The thick stone walls also helped the dairy maintain cool temperatures for their products. Photo by Diane Ellis.*

and minimal design elements were popular in homes such as the Charleston houses, and stone was mostly decorative. Masonry work in America began to mature during the Greek Revival (1820-1860) when the temple became the ideal form to express nationalism. Smooth, fine joints, and intricate lintel and trim designs were worked with regional expressions. Plantation homes of the South echoed the stone columns of the North with stuccoed brick columns or painted wood (Rifkind 38).

Ashlar masonry was used for important public buildings while coursed or uncoursed cobblestone was still implemented for vernacular buildings and bridges. As larger building spaces became necessary, stone became the ideal support for heavy milled-timber structures. Ironically the brick mills of 1820-1860 rested on stone foundations. Machined, high-quality brick and stone led to construction techniques for vaults and domes, making stone structural again (Rifkind 258).

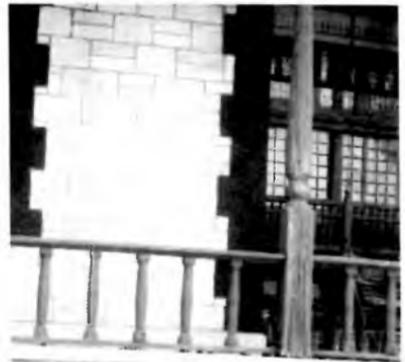
During the Early Victorian era (1840-1860) the influence of Gothic stone work and Italian Villas led to stuccoed towers inset with pebbles for texture or stone carved for tall chimneys and stone tracery for

stained glass windows, or left rough to imply ruins. The Victorian style (1860-1900) relied on Italianate heavy solidity with shadows and rusticated surfaces. The brownstone of urban areas included stone quoins, horizontal coursing, and balusters if not rusticated stone exteriors (Rifkind 62). Mixed in with the more streamlined stonework of later buildings were Victorian remnants of limestone rosettes, dark brick walls with Gothic stone arches, and richly carved doorway ornamentation.

Fire codes in urban areas led to greater use of structural stone, brick and terra-cotta blocks from 1860 to 1895 (Rifkind 193). The resulting style leaned toward a light sandstone, limestone, or marble revival of Chateau and Classical facades of the Renaissance. Steam power made the quarrying, cutting, and polishing of stone quicker and more readily available. Larger pieces of stone could be lifted into place onto metal (wrought iron and steel) reinforced structures. This technology led to stone façade pieces with metal reinforcement and structures. The result was thinner walls, more openings, and larger spans with less reliance on stone for structural strength (Rifkind 271).

In a revival of stone structures, Henry Hobson Richardson designed Romanesque public buildings during the 1880s. Heavy, solid, rugged stone and brick structures with low arches and dressed granite and brownstone enhanced the visual and tactile rough-hewn stability (Rifkind 194). Richardson's work also proved that stone could be structural and decorative simultaneously.

Modern heating and cooling no longer needed to rely on thick walls to help maintain temperatures, and thinner walls were ultimately



*"Kildare"—The O'Shaughnessy home has a foundation of rusticated limestone. The first-floor facade is a combination of a variation on broken range ashlar finished with patent-hammering and painted brick quoins. Photo by H. Cross.*

cheaper. So, by the early to mid-1900s the use of stone was mostly in facades and ornamental applications. The exceptions occurred in the Arts and Crafts movement and the Prairie School, which emphasized a link to nature with materials and form. Bungalow pier foundations of cobblestones or boulders tied Arts and Crafts homes to the land and made use of local craftsmen. The Prairie School, epitomized in Frank Lloyd Wright's Fallingwater, emphasized smooth, layered stone and lighter colored horizontal coping. Early American Colonial, a revival of the 1960s, brought back some vernacular stone use, but on a smaller scale in homes and community facilities (Rifkind 100-101).



*Stone bungalow along Oakwood Drive—Low heavy arches of porch and unraised foundation maintain a connection to the earth appreciated by Arts and Crafts builders. Photo by H. Cross.*

Concrete (block and poured) replaced the need for stone structural elements. Stone and brick facings are still used where the solid impression of stone lends a building presence at a high cost, especially for industrially polished granite, marble, and travertine. Concrete forms can easily be textured, colored or mixed to look like stone and, due to the public's unfamiliarity with natural stone, usually passes for the real thing (Rifkind 293).



*2335 Brandon—A later stone bungalow which incorporates broken range and random range ashlar as well as brick around wall openings and tile on the porch and stairs. Photo by H. Cross.*

## Geology

The use of stone as a building material in Northern Alabama rests on the underlying geologic structure and the availability of stone. Madison County lies on the Cumberland Plateau of the Appalachian Plateau and has a geologic profile of hard sedimentary rock from the Paleozoic era (Daniel 3; Malmberg 7). The movement of the Appalachian Mountains led to the up folds (anticlines) and down folds (synclines) of rock layers that produced local valleys and mountains. These “wrinkles” of rock were easily fractured and exposed softer rock to the elements. The eroded and fractured tops leveled off into plateaus and revealed layers of rock on their sides.

The composition of Madison County stone reflects its early beginnings as a seabed. Most of the local sedimentary rock is composed of calcium, carbon, silica, sand, or clay. This organic, underwater formation led to a wide range of hardnesses, layers, colors, and compositions of stone. The major types of rock found in Madison County reflect this range of qualities.

Limestone is an organic sedimentary rock that is composed of basic calcium and carbon bonds. Its smooth light grey to tan surface makes it an ideal building stone. The Tennessee River Valley is especially known for its limestone. Sandstone is composed of sand, clay, or silica. It ranges from hard to soft and contains easily seen grains of mineral. It is the most prevalent stone in Madison County and most commonly used for stonework.

Dolomite is a calcium and magnesium carbonate which ranges from cream to black in color. It is not structurally strong but does contain veins of crystallized elements in saddle, or curved, patterns. Conglomerate stone is a hard mix of fragments, silica, and calcite formed underwater. This stone ranges in composition and characteristics depending on the area. It often contains fossils and a mix of all other local stone. Shale is thin, built-up layers of silt or clay formed in moving water like a stream or river. Cleaved into sheets and layers, shale is non-structural but can be used for paving.

Local builders easily transported or found stone for their building needs for vernacular projects. The geography of the Cumberland Plateau made transport of large rocks or cut stone for bigger building projects

difficult until 1821 when the Canal Big Spring linked with the Tennessee River (Malmberg 13). Stone quarries took advantage of this transportation route for thirty years and then used the railroad for transportation of stonework, brick, and terra cotta building materials.

### Construction

The construction of stonework or masonry is defined as “stone, brick, or similar elements installed so that the weight of a unit bears on the one below, typically with mortar in the joints between the units”

(Bucher 285). Prior

to the 20<sup>th</sup> century

this often meant

stonework. It now

implies both stone

walls and stone

veneers over back-

ing. The backing is

an inferior or cheap

material used for

structure behind the

exposed face stone.

Backing can be

rubble, fieldstone,

concrete block,

poured or cast

concrete, or a frame

wall with sheathing

(Phillips 21). In any

case it must be

structural and able to

be linked to the stone veneer.

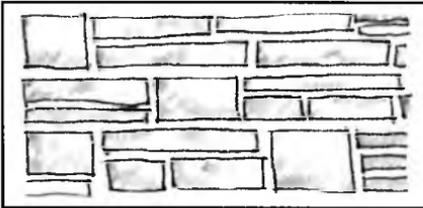


*5607 Panorama—This rubblework fence in front of a stone/frame house incorporates found shapes as well as stone roughly cut for the top two courses of jagged, pointed projections.*

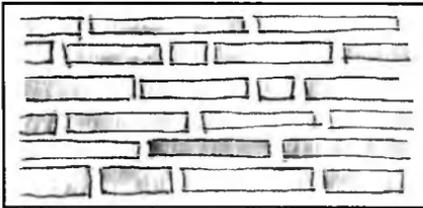
*Photo by H. Cross.*

The configuration of stone, whether a veneer or an integral part of the wall, in masonry construction is named according to the type of stone or finish of stone that makes up the courses. As in brickwork, courses are the horizontal layers delineated by bands of mortar. Not all stonework, however, is evenly coursed. Due to the irregular shapes and cuts of stone, the coursing can be irregular or nonlinear.

Rubblework—also called cobweb rubble, random, or mosaic—contains irregular stone left in the shape it was found. Think of stone that is rough and crude like a fieldstone fence or stone that is applied on a backing for a rustic feel around a prefabricated fireplace enclosure (Phillips 144). Variations of rubblework are known as fieldstone and cobblestone. These types use large mortar joints between the stone for irregularity and are built in natural forms that are usually wider at the base and taper upward. Cobblestone is a bit more refined and selected for shape and then used as a veneer over a backing material (Phillips 74, 109).



*Broken Range ashlar pattern*



*Coursed ashlar pattern*



*Random Range ashlar pattern*

Stone that has been squared, given a high-quality finish, and set with thin lines of mortar is termed ashlar. The term ashlar can also be applied to fired clay and masonry tiles (Phillips 19-20). Ashlar is mostly used as a veneer or surface finish due to its relatively small bearing surface versus its large face surface. Ashlar is commonly laid in three configurations: broken range, where the heights of the stone pieces vary; coursed, where all stone pieces are the same height; and random range or broken ashlar, which contain irregularities in courses and height.

Dressed stone involves more labor and allows many different effects from a single type of

stone. Granite, gneiss, marble, porphyry limestone, and sandstone are the stones most commonly dressed by a mason. The surface finish, regardless of the stone's shape, provides variation in patterns, shadows, reflections, weathering, impressions, age, height, strength, and effect. The mason forms a finish for dressed stone by 1) hand or machine sawing, 2) rubbing with abrasives, 3) hewing with an ax or pick (soft stone), 4) hammering with an ax or hammer (hard stone), or 5)

chiseling with a mallet or hammer (soft stone) (Phillips 159).

The patterns achieved by these methods also carry names. Broached is a series of parallel grooves. Brush hammered is a stipple effect done on granite and hard limestones that employs a stiff wire brush. Crandelled surfaces are pebbled and soft and usually incorporate imperfections and existing pebbles in sandstone. Patent-hammering produces parallel short grooves that are broken into irregular lengths. A pointed stone has shallow grooves made with a pointed tool. A rock face or pitch face has no finish except for the cuts made to the edges of the stone to make it pitched or cut true for easier laying. Vermiculation displays what looks like worm tracks over the stone's surface. Rustication emphasizes a naturally rough surface by carving a small beveled margin around the face and edge of the stone. Any polished stone surface is said to be machined.

By the 1870s imitation stone block offered a cheaper alternative to hand dressed stone (Phillips 53). The most common example was a concrete block with one face finished to look like rusticated stone. These rockfaced "stones" provided a uniform structural unit for foundations which still looked like natural stone from a distance. Entire sturdy and fireproof outbuildings could also be built from these blocks. Quoins, the corner reinforcements necessary with smaller stone or brick construction, also took advantage of manmade rockface stones which were lighter and less expensive than professionally dressed stone options.

Today almost any type, style, or dressed stone surface can be imitated by concrete and admixture combinations. These created stones are hung on steel frames and mortared with expansion joints and caulk. The pure mass and weight of stone that limited the height of stone buildings, is easily distributed over the surface of a structure through the use of veneers. The buildings still have the illusion of solidity of stone to convince the public that they are sturdy and strong. The desire to see stone on a building, however thin a surface, belies our need to touch and trust materials that only time and nature can produce.

*Heather Cross, an instructor of Freshman Composition at UAH and a technical editor at TRW, has always collected stones and drags her fingertips along rough walls.*

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# The Old Stones of Monte Sano

*Adapted from material by  
Jane Barr*

“A place without old buildings  
is like a person without a memory.”

—Timothy Cantwell, British town planner

The U-shaped crescent of Monte Sano Mountain rises nearly 800 feet above the city of Huntsville. Its ancient limestone slopes—enriched with clay and silicates after millennia spent as an undersea plateau, then thrust upward by the violent geological upheavals of the lower Appalachian range—have given rise to a lush, forested landscape.

The Huntsvillians who make their homes on Monte Sano embrace its natural beauty and its heritage. Formed nearly a decade ago, the Monte Sano Historical Association is dedicated to preserving the remnants of that heritage, protecting what remains of the mountain’s early homes and other structures. Unfortunately, the past century—easily as tumultuous as those eons-old geologic upheavals—has left all too little behind to commemorate Alabamans’ early stamp on the region.

Among the remains are some noteworthy stone structures, a few of them dating back almost 200 hundred years. These examples of pre- and post-Civil War stonework are all that is left of once-proud homes, wells, entranceways and property dividers, a school, even a magnificent hotel that once catered to America’s rich and famous. Apart from those few historical sites denoted by landmark plaques scattered across the mountaintop, almost nothing else remains to mark the people and progress that once turned Monte Sano Mountain into a flourishing center of life, recreation, and economic pride for northern Alabama.

But stone remembers, and even its ruins tell something of the tale...

## **Early Settlement**

Historical records show that Charles Cabiness is credited as the first land owner on Monte Sano, staking his claim on Sept. 18, 1809.

Another gentleman, Thomas Martin, purchased land on Jan. 3, 1814.

But it was Dr. Thomas Fearn and his brothers, Robert and George, who are generally considered the founders of the earliest white settlement on Monte Sano Mountain.

In 1827, during a terrible epidemic of yellow fever, malaria and cholera, the Fearn brothers were drawn by the cool air and medicinal springs to establish a small colony on the northern section of the mountain Thomas would later dub *Monte Sano*, which is Spanish for “mountain of health.” In 1833, the Fearn family officially founded the town of Viduta (derived from the Spanish word *vida*, meaning “life”), which included an inn, a number of summer homes for valley dwellers, and the Monte Sano Female Seminary.

### **The Rowe Seminary**

The Monte Sano Female Seminary, an institute of education and spiritual instruction, was opened in 1830 by Reverend James Rowe and his wife Malinda, Ohioans who migrated south in search of healthier living. Situated on what is now Lookout Drive, the seminary may have been the first major stone structure erected on Monte Sano Mountain.

According to a letter written by Malinda Rowe in Oct. 1831 to her family back in Ohio: “We have a boarding school. We have now on hand a stone house intended for the school and other uses, which is 56 feet long and 45 wide” (Barr 8). The building, a two-story structure (according to a brochure for the seminary distributed in 1832), was of Federal design, as was popular in the early 1800s among southerners influenced by the wealthy Charleston elite. Based on classic Roman design, the Federal-style structure would have featured a shallow relief design and likely would have included brick and cut-stone lintels and quoins.

Tragically, Malinda died in 1833, just as interest in the seminary was growing. Her grieving husband buried her in a small cemetery on the property, closed the school, and took their two young sons back to Ohio. The seminary building has since passed out of public record, suggesting it may have been destroyed in the Civil War. A historical marker stands on the site of the seminary, but it is perhaps no better a record of the Rowes’ lives and work during their brief stay on Monte Sano than the pair of weathered granite obelisks which still indicate the resting place of Malinda Rowe.

### **Influx of Residents**

Already, more homesteaders were coming to Viduta, including farmhands and miners who bought cheaply, worked hard and lived on



*3618 Fearn—Random range rubblework on a solid stone wall home. The stone window sills are sloped away from the window and contain a drip edge (a shallow groove underneath the front edge) so that water drips to the ground instead of running back toward the stone where it can wear away mortar. Photo by H. Cross.*

Monte Sano year-round, as well as wealthier Huntsvillians who built comfortable summer homes on the mountain in order to escape the valley's blistering heat waves. It's not surprising that many builders chose stone for their homes and structures. Limestone was readily available thanks to the mining operations throughout the area, and stone—which cooled interiors during the sweltering summer months and retained heat during winter freezes—provided an effective and temperate natural alternative to other building materials.

One such builder was Arthur Hopkins, a member of the 1819 State Constitutional Convention. In 1836, Hopkins erected a stone house and extensive garden on what is now Monte Sano Blvd. and Lookout Drive. Like the Rowe Seminary, no record exists to explain what happened to the house, though it too may have been put to the torch by Federal soldiers as the Confederacy crumbled. Unlike the site of the Rowe Seminary, however, others would build here again...

### **Century's End**

By the end of the post-war Reconstruction, local commerce was again booming, expanding from resource-harvesting (timber and minerals) to

entertainment. In 1887, the North Alabama Improvement Company and local entrepreneur Col. James O'Shaughnessy built the 223-room Hotel Monte Sano, a health resort that became a haven for industrial giants including the Vanderbilts and the Astors. Closed in 1900, the hotel was converted into summer residences and finally demolished for salvage in 1944. All that remains is the brick chimney on Old Chimney Road and a historical landmark plaque on the corner of Old Chimney and Monte Sano Blvd.

The lure of improved health also drew the military to Monte Sano Mountain. In 1888 and 1889, soldiers from Ft. Barancas, Fla. were stationed at Camp Monte Sano to recover from malaria and yellow fever contracted during the Spanish-American War.

James O'Shaughnessy had embarked on an ambitious building project in what is now known as Monte Sano State Park. He intended to erect a sprawling, Queen Anne-style home complete with stone gates and fencing and an ornate wooden gazebo. But the economic downturn that shut down the hotel and railroad at the start of the new century forced him to abandon his dream home as well. It was demolished in the years that followed.

The intricate stone architecture O'Shaughnessy had planned for his home could be seen in the earliest completed elements: the fence and well-house. The stone fence boasted a three-rail crest and a wrought-iron gate between stone piers, believed by researchers to match the limestone *porte cochere* of the house, of which no images have survived. The stone well-house at the front gate had a single door, a stone font and a conical roof with wooden fish-scale shingles, a popular late-19th century motif in which the exposed edge of the shingles is rounded like the scales of a fish.

### **The Legacy of the Hopkins Site**

In 1892, ground was broken again at the site of the former Arthur Hopkins home, but with no more promising results than Hopkins himself had enjoyed. It was the intention of Mrs. Lucy Beirne Matthews to erect an Episcopal chapel on the site in memory of her late daughter, Eliza Gray Matthews. Six-foot high stone walls were built of fieldstone—heavy rocks and boulders pulled from fields during plowing or site clearing, stacked and supported by large mortar joints—but

then the project was inexplicably scrapped. Local homesteaders Carl and Edith Murphy completed the structure that same year, converting the intended chapel into a new home. The rectangular, one-story stone structure had a three-bay front with recessed side wings, a hipped roof, vine-covered wooden porch columns (which were later replaced with limestone blocks), a lovely interior chimney with rock mantle, and a trap-door in the kitchen which led to a concealed basement.

The Murphys did not remain long in the home either; the death of a boarder before the turn of the century may have been a case of murder stemming from an uncovered love triangle. Whatever the cause, the unhappy legacy of the site was no match for the lure of “the mountain of health,” and in the early 1900s, a couple named Charles and Molly Hutchens took up residence in the home. Local rumor suggests the property may have served as Prohibition-era “speakeasy” in the 1920s and early ‘30s. It remains standing and in use as a home today.

Interestingly, one of the stones from the original Episcopal chapel project remains on view at the Monte Sano Methodist church. The three-sided stone, which is approximately 24 inches by 25 inches, includes inscriptions on each side. On the first: a Celtic cross with three flowers on a common stem and the words, “Jesus Christ The Chief Corner Stone. The second side reads: “May 30th A.D. 1892, Suffer The Little Children To Come Unto Me And Forbid Them Not For Of Such Is The Kingdom Of God.” The third side is inscribed with the words: “The Church Of The Holy Innocents. Out Of The Mouth Of Babes And Sucklings Thou Has Perfected Praise.”

### **Century’s Beginning**

The economic pitfalls that caught up with the nation between the conclusion of the Spanish-American War and the start of World War I had caught up with Monte Sano Mountain as well. Fewer of Huntsville’s privileged kept their summer homes, while the year-round families endured by tending small gardens, and perhaps a corn patch or fruit trees. Many kept chickens and a hog or two; some even had a milk cow. Goats ran wild across the mountaintop.

It was around this time that the Huntsville Times’ editor and publisher, a Mr. Pierce, lost both his newspaper and his intended new homestead on the mountain, which was situated at what is now 3021 Panorama.

Dr. Pierce and his family had been living in a temporary log house on the property, preparing to build a permanent home. The only part of it Pierce managed to complete was a well-crafted stone stairway and rock patio leading up to the house. Here, before he fell on



*3021 Panorama—Stone steps and wall surrounding the patio from the Pierce house as they exist today. New construction of a frame home sits behind the stone structure. Photo by H. Cross.*

hard times, Pierce reportedly held Sunday afternoon parties, complete with a local orchestra of black musicians. The log house remained in use for nearly a century after the Pierces moved on, and was demolished in 1998. Only the stone steps and the patio remain.

### **The Roaring '20s**

Another flurry of development exploded on Monte Sano in the 1920s, as post-war prosperity brought back jobs, wealth and security to the nation and likewise to the Huntsville area. As the so-called "Florida Route" (which would later become Highway 231/431) became a major travel route between Huntsville and Guntersville for truckers and tourists alike, local builders tackled new projects across the mountain, including a planned community center, hotel and other recreational facilities—and most importantly a new road cutting directly across the plateau. Monte Sano Blvd. opened on Independence Day, 1927.

The Monte Sano Construction Company, which spearheaded the new growth on the mountain, issued a brochure that same year, spotlighting homes on the mountain to encourage new homesteaders and investors to leave the valley below. Among the properties depicted in the brochure were several noteworthy stone homes, including that of S.S. "Sam" Thompson, a bungalow with a hipped roof, stacked limestone pillars supporting a broad porch and *porte cochere*, and an enclosing stone fence. Demolished at some point in the mid-1900s, the house was situated at what is now 5510 Panorama Drive. The surviving stone

fence was renovated for the current owners in 2000 by architect John G. (Gerry) Simpson.

Other properties on display in the brochure included the J.E. Sanford and C.B. Orendorff homes. The Sanford home was a stone-crafted combination of Tudor and Romanesque influences; unfortunately, it was destroyed sometime after 1930. Orendorff's two-story, Arts and Crafts-style stone home, however—with an expansive front porch supported by stone piers and exposed wood timbers—remains intact and occupied today at 1711 Monte Sano Blvd.

Another notable survivor is the S.W. Judd home, an Arts and Crafts/Craftsman-style stone dwelling situated at 1733 Monte Sano Blvd. A Tennessee native, Searcy Judd was a professional photographer and a widower who came to Huntsville in 1903. He built his stone retreat on Monte Sano almost entirely by himself on weekends in the years that followed, and completed it in the late 1920s.

The one-story horizontal design was intended to blend into the land, neatly integrating the home with the surrounding woodlands. The



*1711 Monte Sano Blvd.—The Orendorff home is an Arts and Crafts two-story stone and wood structure that incorporates random range ashlar on the main home and rubblework with slight coursing for the piers that support the porch and front steps. Photo by H. Cross.*

home had a tiled roof and sash windows. While its interior—including informal room arrangements and a rough, stone-faced fireplace—seems in



keeping with Judd's widower status, he was a stickler for detail to the exterior's Arts

*1726 Monte Sano Blvd.—The Judd home displays rubblework with thick, irregular mortar as well as rough stone window sills and lintels. Also note the flagstone path from the front door. The tile roof no longer exists and evidence of modern plumbing can be seen to the right of the door. Photo by H. Cross.*

and Crafts style: a long gable to cover the side porch, stone accents carried over to the steps, terraces and garden walls, and ornate wrought iron topping the low stone wall that fronted the property. Though the back part of the structure was lost to fire in the middle part of the century and had to be rebuilt, the tornado that ripped through the property in 1974 and felled nearly every tree in sight did only very minor damage to the Judd home—attesting to the strength and durability of its stone construction.

But once again, the prosperity of the period was not to last long. Just as the Monte Sano Construction Company was clearing brush on the south plateau, preparing to initiate construction on the 100-room Monte Sano Manor hotel, the Great Depression cast its pall over the nation.

### **The Work of the Civilian Conservation Corps**

In 1931, determined to break the nation out of its crippling economic paralysis, President Franklin D. Roosevelt announced the formation of the Civilian Conservation Corps. More than two million young men and war veterans joined the Corps in the next four years, devoting themselves to building roads, bridges, cabins, shelters, dams, water systems and other critical facilities for the country's state and national parks systems.

On Monte Sano Mountain in 1935, the Corps was represented by the 3486th Company of State Park 12 and 13 District D, 4th Corps. Dozens of Corpsmen bunked in military-style, prefabricated barracks on the south plateau, which officially became “Camp Monte Sano.” There, they were tasked with building Monte Sano State Park, including all necessary roads, structures and landscaping requirements.

The 3486th, which contained a number of skilled stonemasons, built a number of Arts and Crafts-style stone cabins, using native rock quarried right on Monte Sano Mountain. They cut the exteriors and carefully chiseled the interiors of each stone to build the 20-foot-by-28-foot cabins, which included an exterior end stone chimney with stone hearth; accentuated wooden structural members; rectangular, spreading rooflines; and a low-pitched, single broad gable roof. Some included open terraces overlooking the bluff.



*The CCCorps camp wall—Composed of stone piers with a stone wall between, the wall flanks the intersection of Highland and Monte Sano Blvd. The wall contains stone that has been surface dressed to maintain the slope of the piers but otherwise left in irregular shapes. Photo by H. Cross.*

The Corps also erected the low stone wall at the camp’s entrance, which—like the cabins—remains intact to this day. In addition, they erected a one-story stone structure with ell projections and gables that would originally serve the Corps as a lodge and tavern and later would become a home for the park rangers. This

structure burned in the early 1990s; in recent years, Huntsvillians have begun talks to have it rebuilt.

After three years of the Corps’ steady labor, the “Showplace of the Tennessee Valley” opened to the public on Aug. 25, 1938. For Monte Sano Mountain, as for the rest of the nation, President Roosevelt’s plan

to put Americans to work—and to provide the country with valuable natural natural attractions and environmental preserves—had been an overwhelming success.

### **Path to the Present**

The advent of World War II in 1939, the creation of Redstone Army Arsenal in Huntsville, and the start of the space program in the early 1950s, which further changed the economics of the area, signaled the end of an era for Monte Sano Mountain. In 1954, the Monte Sano Civic Association was formed, and the mountain was re-zoned as a residential-only area, causing all farming to cease and livestock to be banished to the valley below. The following year, all of Monte Sano, including Viduta township, was annexed into the City of Huntsville. And while the people of Monte Sano enjoyed the benefits of a modern era—including an elementary school, grocery stores, churches, a fire station, and community recreational facilities—many of the legacy structures of the past were razed to make way for that modern era. Steps have been taken to prevent those losses from continuing. The formation in 1992 of the Monte Sano Historical Association led to the Viduta Historic District being listed two years later on the Alabama Register of Landmarks and Heritage.

For their part, the stones—what few remain—stand in memory. The worn tombstone of Malinda Rowe holds silent sway over what was once a place of spiritual growth and education. The salvaged stone from Lucy Matthews' failed Episcopal chapel still cries out over the loss of a child, and of all such children. Mr. Pierce's stone patio still grows warm in sunlight that on Sundays past might have glinted off brass instruments as they belted out a ragtime tune. And the stones laid in Monte Sano Park welcome the great-grandchildren of the men who cut and placed them, who may never need know work of that nature, born out of that necessity.

As much as anything can be, the stones *are* our memory.

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*Civilian Conservation Corps Camp Wall—Corner of Highland and Monte Sano Blvd. camp wall pier. Photo by H. Cross.*

# The A. A. Baker Marble Yard

*Jacquelyn Procter Gray*

Albert A. Baker was working on the Tennessee State Capitol building in Nashville when he heard reports of possibilities in a north Alabama town. After a visit in 1851, he decided to stay. After setting up shop in Huntsville, Baker and his partner had enough business to earn themselves a comfortable living. For over half a century, the business known as A. A.

Baker Marble Yard produced exquisite monuments, as well as contributions to the thriving town of Huntsville.

Although larger examples of Baker's craftsmanship have been lost to fire, vandals, and "progress," some of the Baker monuments still exist in area cemeteries.

One example of the A. A. Baker Marble Yard's work is found in the Jones-Donnell family cemetery in a cotton field in Greenbrier, AL. The stone was erected for five-year-old Bouldin Collier Jones, who died in January 1855. The child



*Headstone of Bouldin Collier—Signed by the A.A. Baker marble yard, this example of carved white limestone illustrates the ability of the material to withstand weathering and pollution.*

was the son of John Haywood Jones and his wife Sallie of Athens. The memorial consists of a reclining child on a carved cloth-draped pillow atop a platform raised above the stone's molding capital. The concave and convex series of cove molding designs show the delicate and geometric carving skills of the mason. These elements were designed to allow shadow and light to delineate the strong horizontals in contrast to the vertical stone and the more organic forms of the child. A garland of intricately detailed flowers and leaves crowns the face and sides of the stone. The white limestone has collected permanent shadows of grime and the crisp edges are slightly weathered. The lettering however, is still deeply etched into the surface—even the misspelled “eldist.” The monument bears the signature “A. A. Baker, H. V. Ala.”

One of the more elaborate and beautiful monuments to come out of the Baker Marble Yard celebrates Margaret Moore and her sister Mary Wright. It consists of twin fluted columns topped with urns and is wrapped in a garland of flowers. Legend says that Union soldiers who occupied Huntsville used the two doves atop the urns for target practice.

The success of A. A. Baker Marble yard was short-lived. The masons' lives, along with nearly everyone else's in the country, were upended. The devastation of the Civil War brought fewer orders for luxury items such as monuments and permanent structures. Many Southern cemeteries reflect the peaks and valleys of family fortunes and elaborate monuments gave way to simple markers, if any.

At the conclusion of the War, Albert went back to his home in Owego, NY to open a dry goods store. His nephew, John G. Baker, was also a talented stonemason. He left New York in 1875 and came to Huntsville to revive the family business.

The Bakers cut the limestone that formed the bedrock in the mountains around Huntsville. Monte Sano Mountain yielded gray limestone, while white stone was cut from Russell Hill. The Bakers owned a quarry south of Toll Gate Road, as well as eighty acres about a mile southeast of Round Top Mountain.

One of John Baker's most impressive memorials at Maple Hill Cemetery is the Burritt mausoleum, built after the death of Dr. Amatus

Robbins Burrirt (father of Dr. William Burrirt, whose home is now the Burrirt Museum on Monte Sano Mountain) in August, 1876. The mausoleum showcases both the stone building construction and the carving skills of the Baker Marble Yard employees. The A. A. Baker Marble yard also built the towering monument to Thomas Bibb, Alabama's second governor. Another fine example of John Baker's skills was the marble figure of a peacefully sleeping baby in a protective glass showcase. Sadly, the memorial to Leila and Willie Ward was stolen.

In 1880 Albert Baker came back to Huntsville to stay. Unfortunately, his return was for the occasion of his nineteen-year-old son Alva's burial. Since he was born during his father's management of the Marble Yard, his body was returned to Huntsville. He was the first of the Baker family to be buried in Maple Hill Cemetery.

Albert joined his nephew and took up his chisel and hammer again. The business thrived and they expanded by opening a marble yard on the north side of the square in Athens. Tragedy struck when fire destroyed everything on March 28, 1882. They had intended to insure the business, but never got around to doing so. They lost \$2,500, including all the limestone and sandstone that either melted or exploded in the consuming heat (Fisk).

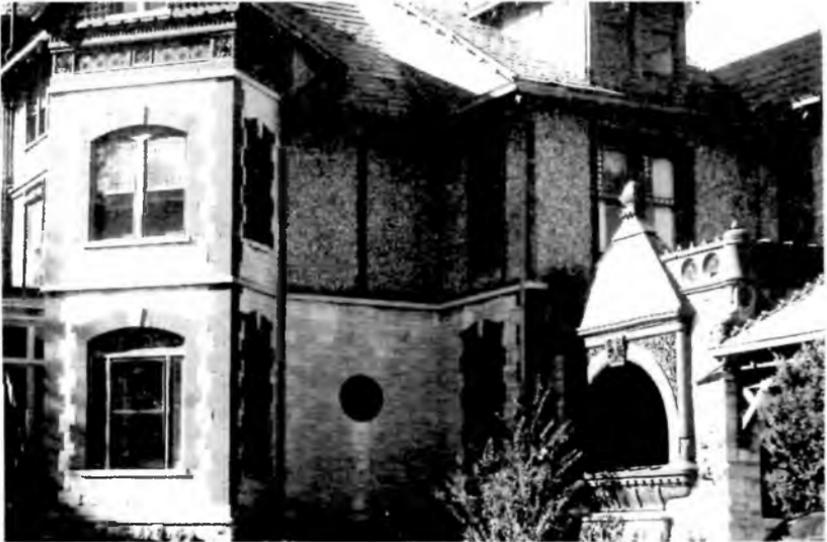
The Bakers' business wasn't limited to monuments and memorials. Among the many local building projects was the Michael O'Shaughnessy home known as "Kildare." O'Shaughnessy and his brother made their fortune in cottonseed oil, and Michael's home was designed to resemble a castle. The outside of the three-story home was intended to be elaborately carved stone from the A. A. Baker Marble yard. The O'Shaughnessy's finances declined and the top two stories are faced with pebbles. The home still stands on the Huntsville Street named for the estate.

John G. Baker was the grandfather of Huntsville historian and writer Sarah Huff Fisk. According to Mrs. Fisk, as John ventured into many different businesses, his place in the marble yard was taken by his brother Lucius and by James Conway. John, with his partner Henry Helms, developed business rental property on Washington Street. John also built, moved, and repaired houses and invested in farm property

until his death in 1892 (Fisk interview).

The A. A. Baker lot in Maple Hill Cemetery is centered on a monument naming all of the family members buried there. The centerpiece is assumed to have been carved by Albert. The tall pedestal design is covered with a flowing cloth and topped by a book. A row of delicately carved lace is edged with overlapping fringe and tassels at each corner. It is neither the largest nor the most elaborate monument by the A. A. Baker Marble yard, but it is a personal and loving application of a family's skill.

The art of stone carving is more than a well-placed chisel and the tap of a hammer. It requires knowledge of the unique properties of the stone—its density, grain, and color. Sand stone and limestone were plentiful and affordable in the area in the 1800s. Unfortunately, the stone's softness, which made it so easy to carve, also made it vulnerable to the elements. Over time the crisp edges and angles appear to melt like butter. Today granite and marble are preferred for their strength and ability to withstand the ages. The art of carving and stone construction has changed too. Computerized stone cutting begins with



*Kildare—The O'Shaughnessy home displays a rusticated foundation and porte cochere piers, dressed ashlar with painted brick quoins, carved stone details around peaks, and a slate roof. The third floor facade is composed of stucco and pebbles. Photo by H. Cross.*

someone programming chips to guide lasers and diamond saws across large pieces of stone. The end result is perfect and sterile.

Albert Baker was an artist, as were his partners in the marble yard. We are fortunate that many of his masterpieces still exist and can benefit from constant restoration efforts. And we are fortunate that we can still touch the stone and feel the care with which these craftsmen shaped reminders of the citizens of this community.

*Jacque Gray recently received an award in New Mexico where the Proctor family was honored at New Mexico Highlands University Homecoming as the Distinguished Alumni Family of the Year.*

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## Modern Examples of Stone Construction: A Pictorial Survey

*Text and Photos by Heather Cross*

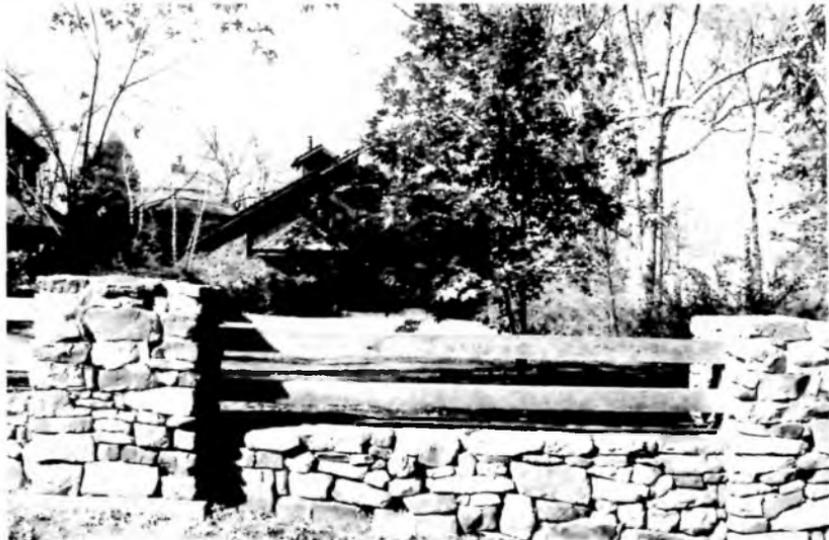
Stone still appears in residential design, but more often than not it is a surface application of cast concrete “stones” glued into place on panels. Local examples are varied and do illustrate other options and applications. The three shown below span an approximately fifty-year period and provide modern adaptations to true stone construction.



*Kildare Street—The random mosaic facade of this early- to mid-1900s bungalow is apparent due to the shallow recess of the window and door. The long span of the overhang porch is also accomplished with a thin steel plate or beam that is able to bear the weight of the stone veneer. A true stone span would rely on a slight arch to distribute the weight or long stone or reinforced concrete lintels. The perfectly square corners of the posts, the straight courses, and the thickness of the squared ashlar revealed at the corners suggest the stone is just a covering around the true structural members beneath. The mortar joints are raised and beaded, a practice that is mainly decorative and weathers poorly. This home sits directly across the street from “Kildare.”*



*5409 Panorama—The random broken-coursed ashlar of this ranch is typical of homes from the 1940s through the 1970s. The squat horizontal massing of the chimney is a direct influence of the Prairie School style. This example seems to be actual stone because of the variation in color, even on single stones, and the non-repetitive shapes. A cast concrete ashlar of this type would include similar, if not identical, “irregular” stones within the pattern.*



*5510 Panorama—This fence, reconstructed in 2000 from recycled stone on the site, rests on concrete foundations to prevent collapse and incorporates an uncoursed, raked mortar design to give the illusion of a dry-mortar, fieldstone fence. The home behind it shows an applied stone veneer panel.*

## Reflection: An Outsider's View of Huntsville's Historic Downtown

*Brad Grant*

While Huntsville has its abundance of futuristic attractions and institutions, the city is equally devoted to its past. Huntsville's historic downtown is packed with 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> century residential and commercial properties. As I wander through the area certain things catch my eye. For example, full-length columns crowned with capitals of inverted scrolls are used on numerous monumental masterpieces. The exterior of the Regions Bank on the square is constructed solely out of stone and even has stone steps leading up to the front door. The Greek styled columns and the smooth stonework give depth to the highly distinguished, historic architecture of the bank. The stone generates a firm, durable, and tough appeal which I love. I believe the stone shows power with its dynamic fashion and presence.

Brick and stone seem to have been the preferred building materials. Another ornate example of masonry construction is the Episcopal Church of the Nativity, located just off the square. This masterpiece is constructed out of handmade brick and is adorned with dramatic stained-glass windows of all dimensions. The house of worship is set-off and enclosed with a wrought-iron fence, a masterful piece of artwork in itself. This vigorous structure has a strong presence and yet remains an integrated part of the area.

My feet notice another feature of the downtown historic district: many sidewalks are constructed out of handmade brick which show wear with time, tree growth, and expansion. The imperfections of the brick are a result of the brick maker's hands, which create the wrinkles, ridges, and folds. These imperfections give each brick its individual character and charm that I adore. The individualistic texture is unmatched by conventional, modern brick.

The buildings and storefronts of times past present the American style with a totally different flair. Buildings built without modern technological advances add to the town's uniqueness. Building materials were handmade as opposed to factory made, thus giving the historic frameworks of Huntsville and America the one-of-a-kind look and feel. Even though modern architecture gives a sense of style, and is, in most cases, a commendable piece of design, I still prefer the more historic look.

*Brad Grant is a freshman at UAH and a resident of Winchester, Tennessee. He has always loved historic styled homes and businesses. This is his first reflection piece on the topic of historic structures and preservation.*

# HISTORIC HUNTSVILLE FOUNDATION

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Huntsville, AL 35804

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

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

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

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

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