

# Historic Huntsville Quarterly

OF LOCAL ARCHITECTURE AND PRESERVATION

## *Cotton Hill*



*Cotton Hill, February 2004.*

*Photograph by Lakin Boyd.*

VOLUME 31, NUMBERS 1-2, SPRING/SUMMER 2005  
SIX DOLLARS



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## Contributors

**Linda Bayer Allen** has been researching and writing about Huntsville's architectural past intermittently for thirty years. She served as editor of the *Historic Huntsville Quarterly* for five years and is retired from the City of Huntsville Planning Department.

**Lakin Boyd** is a retired art and art history professor, presently teaching as an adjunct professor at Calhoun Community College.

**Lynn Jones**, long-time Foundation member and former officer and board member, is one of the editors of the *Quarterly*.

**Annette Philpo't** is executive director of the Historic Huntsville Foundation. She received her master's degree from the University of Alabama in Huntsville and has been active in historic preservation on a local, state, and national level for more than twenty years.

**Patricia H. Ryan** is the author of *Northern Dollars for Huntsville Spindles* and the editor of *Cease Not to Think of Me, The Steele Family Letters*. She was the pictorial researcher for *Huntsville, A City of New Beginnings*.

**William J. Stubno, Jr.**, is the Command Historian at the U.S. Army Ordnance Munitions and Electronics Maintenance School, located at Redstone Arsenal, Alabama. In addition to the duties of that position, he specializes in the research and dating of old houses, especially ones built prior to the Civil War. He also serves as an advisor to the Alabama Historical Commission.

Editors for this issue of the *Quarterly* were Linda Allen, Diane Ellis, Lynn Jones, and Patricia Ryan.

## Acknowledgments

The editors of the *Quarterly* wish to thank the following people:

**Cecil Armstrong**, owner of Cotton Hill, for his hospitality in allowing descendants of Luke Matthews to tour their ancestral home.

**Wayne Kuykendall**, the preservationist and builder in charge of the restoration of Cotton Hill, who pointed out many unique architectural features of the house and clues uncovered during the restoration process, and explained in detail the challenges involved in the project and the restoration methods being employed.

Family members had also expressed an interest in touring some of the homes in Huntsville that were once owned and occupied by Luke Matthews and other family members after they left Cotton Hill. Thanks to the following people who graciously opened their homes to us that afternoon:

**Mr. and Mrs. Gene Sapp**, 528 Adams Street

**Frank Nola**, 601 Franklin Street

**Mr. and Mrs. Walter Johnson**, 2409 Dairy Lane

**Jean Berry**, led the tour of Cedarhurst, 10 Northampton Drive, now owned by the Cedarhurst Home Owners Association

## From the Executive Director

ANNETTE PHILPOT

As long-time HHF members well know, since 1974 the Foundation has worked to preserve architecturally and historically significant sites and structures in Huntsville and Madison County. What's probably not well-known is that the Foundation began its work four years prior to the landmark Penn Central decision, which upheld preservation law on the local level, and sixteen years before the State of Alabama enacted statewide enabling legislation that allows municipalities to establish laws to protect their historic resources. We can pat ourselves on the back for being ahead of the curve early on regarding historic preservation. Over time, the Foundation's focus has expanded from the restoration of prominent landmarks and districts to projects diverse in scope and partnership, paralleling the national preservation movement.

Preservation of an early plantation house such as Cotton Hill, the subject of this *Quarterly*, like restoration of residential and commercial historic districts, celebrates our heritage and conserves our resources. Moreover, it's now well understood by most cities and counties that preservation serves as a catalyst for economic growth. Communities that safeguard their historic assets experience improvement in many areas of community life.

Since Historic Huntsville Foundation was formed, an array of laws and preservation programs have been established that provide better direction and support for local programs such as ours. In June 2005, Gale Norton, the Secretary of the Interior, designated twenty-four new places in America for inclusion in the "Preserve America" program. Supported by the current administration, this program was designed to foster local involvement in the preservation of America's "cultural, natural and heritage" resources. These visual legacies of our past provide a clearer understanding for citizens and visitors of the individuals, influences, and forces that shape the present and influence the future.

Many resources help the Foundation respond to and work with its membership and partners. Programs available to aid in preservation include the National Register of Historic Places, which designates properties deemed worthy of national significance; The Historic Artists' Homes and Studios program, designed to help American historic sites that have connections to art; Century Farms, which designates farms in Alabama that have been cultivated by the same family for 100 years or more; and The Alabama Cemetery Alliance, which provides education for the preservation of Alabama's cemeteries.

Historic preservation is always changing and never finished. Groups such as the Historic Huntsville Foundation, and individuals such as Cecil Armstrong, Cotton Hill's owner, and Wayne Kuykendall, its restorer, are key to saving the past for the future.

## Preservation Effort Revives a House and Inspires a Family Gathering

LYNN JONES

Last year, when the *Quarterly's* editors learned that Cotton Hill, an antebellum plantation house, was being restored, we immediately wanted to investigate. The architectural significance of Cotton Hill, a long neglected and almost forgotten rural Limestone County jewel, had been recognized by the Historic American Buildings Survey (HABS) team in the 1930s and was photographed by the survey in 1935 as part of the Alabama collection. Already more than 100 years old by that time, the house, though still occupied, appeared in the photographs to be in a very dilapidated condition.

Cotton Hill's current restoration is a cause for celebration. According to Bob Gamble, senior architectural historian with the Alabama Historical Commission, the Alabama HABS collection is one of the largest of all the states' collections. Sadly, due to abandonment, neglect, vandalism, and other causes, by 1985, 40 percent of the documented structures had disappeared. Today that percentage would be higher still. Researchers Lakin Boyd, Bill Stubno, Jr., and Linda Bayer Allen followed the trail of Luke Matthews, the presumed builder of Cotton Hill, from Virginia to Limestone County and ultimately to Madison County, where, after the Civil War, he and his large family would weave themselves into the fabric of Huntsville. The trail proved interesting, and to our surprise, it also led to a Matthews family reunion at Cotton Hill in June, as well as a tour of some of the prominent homes in Huntsville that were once owned or occupied by members of the family.

Luke Matthews of Campbell County, Virginia, was in his mid-twenties when he migrated to Limestone County about 1822 with his mother and several siblings. His father, Luke Matthews, Sr., had died the previous year, leaving a sizeable estate to his wife and children. Apparently Luke was one of many migrants who at the time was lured from more settled regions by the possibilities of accumulating greater

wealth in the frontier states of Alabama and Mississippi, with their cheap fertile land and new opportunities for adventure. Writing in *A History of Madison County and Incidentally of North Alabama 1732-1840*, Judge Thomas Jones Taylor said, “It appeared as if all Virginia was moving Southward.” (p.45)

Architectural history writer and publisher Mills Lane, in his book *Architecture of the Old South: Mississippi & Alabama*, describes the migration this way:

Many Virginians made their way to northern and central Alabama by way of Tennessee and Kentucky. Though they were not the most numerous settlers, the Virginians, because of their wealth, education and prominence, made contributions to Alabama’s early architecture far greater than their numbers. In 1834 Henry Watson, a New England lawyer, wrote from Greensboro, Alabama: “The country about is now settled by emigrants from Virginia and the Carolinas...[and] is thus filled with much more intelligence than you would have expected.” (pp. 37 & 41)

The story of Cotton Hill illustrates the blend of mystery and discovery that often accompanies historic preservation projects, stimulating the interest of workers and researchers and, we hope, readers as well.

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*Cotton Hill in 1981; the two dormers were added after 1935 and have since been removed. Photograph by Harvie Jones, F.A.I.A., 1981. Courtesy Architectural Collection of Harvie P. Jones, F.A.I.A., Department of Archives/Special Collections, M. Louis Salmon Library, University of Alabama in Huntsville, Huntsville, Alabama*

# Cotton Hill: A Rediscovered Treasure

LAKIN BOYD

In 2001, Cecil Armstrong bought Cotton Hill, a two-story Federal brick house that would look more at home in Southside Virginia than atop a knoll in southeastern Limestone County. The house is located just east of Athens, facing south and overlooking a long driveway that proceeds through a stately pecan grove to Brown's Ferry Road. It is surrounded by some of the best cotton land in Limestone County. One of the most architecturally significant antebellum houses remaining in the county, Cotton Hill was photographed in 1935 as part of the Historic American Buildings Survey (HABS). By the time Cecil Armstrong bought the property, Cotton Hill needed a complete restoration. To supervise what would be an ongoing project to revive the property, the owner hired two master craftsmen, Wayne Kuykendall, a local preservationist, and Paul Tennison.

## Background

Cotton Hill was constructed near the end of the Federal period of architecture, and it displays the characteristics of that period as they were transplanted from Virginia by settlers moving into the Tennessee River Valley. With a few notable exceptions, upscale Federal houses constructed in North Alabama during the first few decades of the 19th century retained the Georgian Colonial house form that had become traditional in the United States during the 18th century, that is, a rectangular box, two stories high and one or two rooms deep, with three or five symmetrically placed openings across the façade on each level. In the southern version, chimneys were usually located on the side walls, and the whole was completed with a side gable roof lacking dormers. The layout of such houses often featured a central hallway with two or four rooms per floor, with the second floor echoing the first floor arrangement.

The Federal label is sometimes used synonymously with the terms Adam style or

Adamesque, a late-18th-century style that originated in England with the brothers Robert and James Adam, whose designs were distinguished by a taste for lighter and more delicate details than were common in Georgian Colonial construction. The Adam style relied on attenuated columns, and curved, arched and elliptical designs for both room shapes and their décor. In America, examples of full-blown Adamesque houses were erected in the major cities and seaports; but in rural areas, houses tended to retain the boxy, right-angled spaces of the previous century, which could be dressed up with a few Adamesque details such as fanlights and sidelights at the front door, classical swags, reeding and sunburst patterns on mantelpieces, door and window moldings, and molded chair rails. While the Adamesque style was widely accepted in the United States, it appeared primarily as interior details and as enlarged but refined interpretations of Georgian features. The majority of stylish early-19th-century houses, especially in rural areas, did not embrace the full Adam style and are more accurately identified as Federal to distinguish them from those structures that did more closely follow the English models.

Cotton Hill nicely illustrates how the Federal style integrated the boxy Georgian shapes and strict symmetry of arrangement with Adamesque fanlights, mantelpieces of delicate proportions decorated with classical patterns, and a projecting and pedimented Palladian portico (now missing) to achieve a distinctive new architectural style.

The construction of Cotton Hill is attributed to William Parham (born 1792), a master craftsman and builder, who immigrated to Limestone County from southern Virginia and settled in the Cambridge community. Little is known about Parham other than that he worked as a builder, was married four times, and fathered many children. According to Chris Edwards and Faye Axford in *The Lure and Lore of Limestone County*, he built Cotton Hill in the early 1830s, although whether he was responsible for the brickwork as well as the carpentry remains unclear. A brick dated 1824, recently found during repair of the upstairs west fireplace, might indicate an earlier date, but no other evidence has yet been found to support

that possibility. Parham's own house, located nearby, was of frame construction and of much less imposing design than Cotton Hill and the other stately brick houses that have been attributed to him, only one of which, the nearby John Girault Gamble house, is extant.

The original owner of Cotton Hill was Luke Matthews (1796-1875), who also emigrated from southern Virginia in the early years of the 19th century and purchased acreage in the Cambridge area close to other transplanted Virginians. Samuel Matthews, one of Luke's brothers, also came south and built a substantial house closer to the river before relocating to Huntsville. Luke operated a thousand-acre cotton plantation of which Cotton Hill was the center. Luke married twice, both times to women descended from prominent Virginia families, and had twelve surviving children, many of whom married into Huntsville families. Not long after his second marriage, he left Cotton Hill and moved to Oakendale, his plantation in Madison County, before eventually settling in Huntsville on Adams Street in a house owned by his brother-in-law Samuel Peete. In 1868 Luke purchased the house on McClung Avenue where he resided until his death seven years later.

### **Exterior**

Cotton Hill as originally constructed was a two-story brick house with a full basement, a side-gabled roof, interior end chimneys, and a central hall plan. It is called a five-bay house because there are five openings across the façade on each level. The present roof cornice and fascia boards on the façade and back are not original. They were probably replaced when the house lost its original two-story Palladian porch or when the roof was replaced. A mid-20th-century owner added two roof dormers but they have since been removed.

The HABS photograph of the back of the house indicates the "ghost" of a one-story porch that covered the double doors at the back of the entrance hall and connected the door of the dining chamber to a service ell. Undoubtedly, this ell housed the original kitchen, as the one basement fireplace in the west basement chamber isn't





*Cotton Hill in 1935 showing the north-facing rear and east side elevations. Historic American Buildings Survey, Alex Bush, photographer, May 21, 1935*

a cooking fireplace, and there is only one basement window on the west end of the back wall, suggesting the practicality of the builder. Why place a basement window under a porch? A one-story frame room was constructed after the date of the HABS photo, but it has been replaced by a later owner with a two-story brick ell that is visible in the 2004 photograph that appears on the cover.

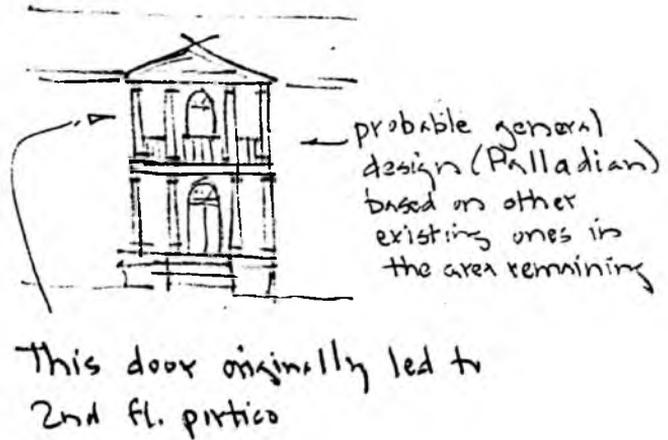
Architectural evidence shows that Cotton Hill was constructed all-of-a-piece, whereas many of the area's surviving Federal-period houses started with just two rooms. These starter houses had one room on each floor, and various later additions increased them to their present size. Thus, Cotton Hill must have been unusually ambitious for frontier Limestone County in its initial conception and was certainly

ambitious in the refinement and extent of its woodwork.

The house was originally entered through a pair of six-panel doors set in a deep paneled reveal crowned with a fanlight. Physical and historical documentation strongly support the original presence of a double-tier, pedimented portico sheltering both the main entrance and the single door on

the floor above it, which also is crowned by an arched transom. Such porches were inspired by the work of the Italian Renaissance architect Andrea Palladio (1508-1580), whose designs were popularized in England by Inigo Jones in the 1720s and included the projecting two-story porch and the three-part Palladian window, which were widely adopted in the United States where they became associated with the Federal style. At Cotton Hill, existing brick pilasters flanking the front entrances, as well as traces of white paint on the wall between the pilasters, provide evidence of the dimensions of the portico, since it was traditional to paint white both the portico and that portion of the wall sheltered by it. The current owner intends to replace the porch as closely as possible to what is believed to be the original configuration.

Cotton Hill's brickwork is exceptional. The front is laid in Flemish bond with common bond used on the sides and rear, which was the Federal practice. A holdover from Georgian tradition is evidenced by a convex molded brick water table that



*Probable design of Cotton Hill's original front porch. Drawing by Harvie Jones, F.A.I.A., 1981. Courtesy Architectural Collection of Harvie P. Jones, University of Alabama in Huntsville*



*Front entry fanlight and brickwork of Cotton Hill; doorway infill is not original. Photograph by Harvie Jones, F.A.I.A., 1981. Courtesy Architectural Collection of Harvie P. Jones, University of Alabama in Huntsville*

provides an elegant transition from the main wall to the thicker foundation wall. Tapered lintel bricks, as well as the arched bricks over the front entry and the door above it, are gauged and rubbed.

The double-hung sash windows with twelve panes (or lights) in each sash (12/12) that were used on the first floor and the 12/8 sash configuration used on the second (removed by a previous owner) have been replaced with exact reproductions by Larry Jaynes, who did much of the restoration work on Belle Mont in Colbert County. Belle Mont (ca. 1828) dates

from the same period as Cotton Hill, probably shares a Virginia provenance, and displays a fine (restored) example of a Palladian double portico.

The wooden elements of Cotton Hill exhibit pegged mortise and tenon joints except in the attic where there is an unusual ridge board rather than the usual lapped and pegged ridge joint. According to preservation architect Harvie Jones, only this house and the now demolished Kelly house (pre-1830) in Madison County have been found to have a ridge board. The present roof deck is 20th-century pine on 19th-century pit-sawn (hand-sawn) framing members. The original roof deck would have been constructed of 12-inch to 24-inch wide slab planks spaced 2 to 6 inches apart; handsplit and drawknife-smoothed wooden shingles would have been nailed to these. The nails used in Cotton Hill are square-cut of various sizes made by machine; by the late 1700s, most cut nails were made by either water- or steam-powered machines.

Cotton Hill originally had exterior blinds, not shutters as we call them today. Blinds have blades with openings between them, whereas shutters are solid-paneled to exclude light and air when closed and were used primarily on commercial buildings for security purposes. In contracts of the early 19th-century, blinds are referred to as “Venetian blinds” and functioned to block the sun and discourage the entry of insects without blocking cooling breezes. Blinds also provided security to a house with open windows. In the 1935 HABS photographs of the house the hardware for the blinds can be seen on some of the windows.



*Cotton Hill's convex molded brick water table.  
Photograph by Lakin Boyd, 2004*

### **Interior**

The glory of Cotton Hill is its interior woodwork, which is almost completely intact. The entry hall retains its original stairs, chair-rails, baseboards, flooring and interior doors; only the front entry doors are missing. One of these original entry doors, found in the basement, will serve as a model for the missing exterior doors, including the one that led to the second floor portico. The newel posts of the stairs are beautifully turned, and the stair rail is roughly circular in cross section to fit the hand. The stair balusters are small and rectangular in cross-section, a feature that is common to many surviving houses of the period in this area. One unusual feature is the landing balusters that pass through notches cut in the floorboard of the second floor hall.

The edges of the stair risers are decorated with scroll brackets. Doors on the north wall that opened to the back porch are original, as is the door under the stairs that opens to the basement. All walls, except those in the basement, and all ceilings,



*Stairs on west side of entry hall. Historic American Buildings Survey, Alex Bush, photographer, May 21, 1935*

including those in the basement, were plastered. Laths (strips of wood) were nailed to ceiling joists to provide groundwork for the plaster. The stairs are boxed and plastered in this manner.

The door into the parlor is centered on the east wall of the entry hall. The parlor is surrounded by a three-piece chair-rail like the ones in all the rooms except those in the basement. Fluting and repeated reverse slanted reeding decorate the mantel, as the photo illustrates.

The splayed window jambs and heads are also reeded in this room. No crown molding at the top of the walls is found in Cotton Hill, nor in any known Federal-period house in this area. The baseboards in the house have no small shoe molds at the floor since shoe molds were a later device.

During the Federal period, the baseboard bottoms were scribed to fit any irregularities at the floor, creating a much neater detail than tacked-on shoe molding.

A door at the bottom of the stairs opens to the dining chamber. This room has built-in cupboards on either side of the chimney. These cupboards are original and fitted with shelves and have never been painted on the inside. The doors are made like Federal-period furniture, with the beveled faces of the panel facing inside. The tops of the cupboards are decorated with reeding made of separate glued-in panels

similar to decoration in the 1819 Weeden House in Huntsville. The bottom third of the cupboard on the north side of the chimney is boxed to create headroom for the exterior basement door. The mantel in this room is the most elaborate in the house. It is decorated with a reeded sunburst and “i” dentils, ornaments composed of a row of dentils with a pierced hole above, thus simulating in appearance the letter “i,” primarily a Federal-period motif. Window jambs are splayed and paneled in this room. On the north wall a door led to the original dependency.

The floors throughout the house are six-inch heart pine laid directly on the floor joists without a sub-floor. The floorboards have tongue-and-groove joints and appear to have never been varnished or scrubbed with lye water to a gray finish like most floors of early 19th-century houses. Prior to the Civil War, wooden floors were periodically scrubbed to keep them a light bleached color. Varnishing was a post-Civil War fashion.

The flooring was mechanically sawn by water-powered sash saws, as was all of the wood except for the large framing members, such as floor joists, which were ax-hewn and pit-sawn. Pat Jones writes in a 1935 *Huntsville Times* article on the Rowe home, as Cotton Hill was then known, that the lumber for the building was provided by Rev. James Rowe, who operated a sawmill in Madison County. Rev. Rowe was an early circuit rider and was for a time pastor of the First Methodist Church in Huntsville. On March 1, 1879, his son Andrew Jackson Rowe bought Cotton Hill and approximately 200 acres from John B. McClellan, who had purchased the plantation from Luke Matthews in 1873.



*Landing balusters that pass through notches cut in the floorboard of the second-floor hall are an unusual feature. Photograph by Harvie Jones, F.A.I.A., 1981. Courtesy Architectural Collection of Harvie P. Jones, University of Alabama in Huntsville*



*Detail of parlor mantel showing fluting and reeding. Photograph by Harvie Jones, F.A.I.A., 1981. Courtesy Architectural Collection of Harvie P. Jones, University of Alabama in Huntsville*

The second-floor hall is lit by a window in the north wall and a fanlight over the door that originally opened to the second-floor portico. A door in the boxed stair on the south wall leads to the floored attic, which is lit by a pair of four-pane windows flanking each chimney. The east bedroom has an original cupboard with shelves on either side of the mantel. This mantel, which is similar to the one in the parlor, still retained its original black paint when photographed for HABS in 1935.

All of the upstairs windows have plain splayed jambs. In the west bedroom the mantel is reminiscent of the 18th-century Georgian style rather than Adamesque. Flanking the mantel on the left is another built-in cupboard, and on the right, a window. There are no windows in the north wall, which indicates an intent on the part of the owner to add a two-story ell at a later date. It was a common practice to construct houses in sections over time as funds and/or space needs increased, a practice that was greatly facilitated by the prevalence of a more or less standard house configuration.

## **Future**

The restoration of an old house is a daunting and expensive task if it is done correctly. Fortunately, Cotton Hill is being restored by an owner who understands the meaning of historic preservation. The house was graciously opened to us to encourage other preservationists to carry on in spite of the many problems encountered during restoration. Cecil Armstrong is aware of the delicate balance between maintaining the historic integrity of the structure and providing the necessary modern



*Mantel and flanking cupboards in second-floor east room. Historic American Buildings Survey, Alex Bush, photographer, May 21, 1935*

conveniences that allow maximum use by present and future owners. Aspiring restorers who share his appreciation for the work of earlier architects and builders should be encouraged by Cecil Armstrong's continuing efforts at Limestone County's Cotton Hill.

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*Detail showing reeded sunburst and “I” dentils on the dining room mantel. Photograph by Harvie Jones, F.A.I.A., 1981. Courtesy Architectural Collection of Harvie P. Jones, University of Alabama in Huntsville*



## Go Slow, Do It Right: Restoration Progress at Cotton Hill

PATRICIA H. RYAN

During our June visit to Cotton Hill, Wayne Kuykendall noted some of the restoration steps the team has taken to return the house to its former Federal elegance. Despite a recent addition containing a kitchen/family room and bedrooms, Cecil Armstrong, the owner, and Wayne Kuykendall, a preservationist and builder, are committed to preserving the house's architectural integrity in meticulous detail. Work has progressed over about a year and a half, with hopes for project completion in several years. Wayne, who has a "real job," can only work on Cotton Hill in his spare time.

The restoration of the interior is continuing in various stages. Windows, millwork, and hardware will be replicated to match the original where needed. The wiring will be run behind the baseboards to be inconspicuous. Heart pine floors, trim, and doors will be stripped. Split-system heating and cooling units will be installed. In the dining room, the woodwork will be painted its original dark green color. One fascinating detail pointed out by Wayne was the brick-sized wood blocks that had been installed as part of the original brickwork to provide places where millwork, such as mantels and baseboards, could be attached without damaging the bricks.

Upstairs, attention to detail is exhibited most clearly in a bedroom, the only room to be completed and occupied. The floor had been painted and the joints caulked by a previous owner. To avoid sanding and removing the patina and raised grain, the wood was stripped and cleaned about four times with tools akin to brass toothbrushes. It was then buffed without stain and waxed.

The next major project is the replacement of the two-story portico. By the time HABS documented the structure with photographs in 1935, the portico had been removed. Architectural evidence reveals that such a portico existed, and the owner would like to duplicate it as closely as possible. If anyone reading this knows of the existence of a photograph of the original portico, please notify the Historic



*Cecil Armstrong (right), owner of Cotton Hill, and Wayne Kuykendall, restoration contractor. Photograph by Ralph Allen*

Huntsville Foundation, 124 South Side Square, Huntsville, Alabama 35801.

If a photograph of the portico is not found, the replacement will be based on research and physical examination done by the late preservation architect Harvie Jones and Robert Gamble, senior architectural historian with the Alabama Historical Commission. It will be similar to that of Belle Mont near Tuscumbia in Colbert County and other extant period houses. Cecil and Wayne envision round columns connected by a thin balustrade on the upper and lower levels. The

original door to the upstairs portico will be replicated for use at the lower level. Once completed, Cotton Hill, with its elegant façade and delicate interior detailing, will proudly reflect Cecil and Wayne's commitment to a sensitive restoration for a modern lifestyle.



*Luke Matthews (1796-1875), original owner of Cotton Hill.  
Courtesy Johnny Crutcher and Dr. John Ennis.*

## Luke Matthews of Cotton Hill

WILLIAM J. STUBNO, JR.

The great highway from Virginia to Alabama during the years 1818-1819 was more like the route of an army of occupation than an ordinary public highway, and travelers Northward asserted that they would sometimes journey for many days with out being out of sight of emigrant wagons, accompanied by long files of Negro slaves steadily tramping southward.

Judge Thomas Jones Taylor, *A History of Madison County and Incidentally of North Alabama 1732-1840* (pp. 49-50)

Cotton Hill is located in Limestone County, Alabama, along the Huntsville-Brown's Ferry Road, west of the intersection of that road and Cambridge Lane that runs north to U.S. Highway 72 West. The homesite is further described, for the purpose of historical analysis, as being within the Southeast Quarter of Section 36, Township 3 South, Range 4 West of the Huntsville Meridian Line in Limestone County, Alabama. Consisting of approximately 160 acres, this quarter section is located in an area known for a soil and climate favorable to the growing of cotton.

The section was originally a part of the lands west of Madison County in the Alabama Territory, on both sides of the Tennessee River, which the federal government offered for sale in 1818. At that time, the country was experiencing a period of great inflation, brought about by the changes in the nation's economy as a result of the War of 1812. During the war, foreign trade decreased, necessitating expanded domestic manufacturing to satisfy America's need for war goods. The government borrowed heavily to pay for those goods, which put more money into circulation. The borrowing put a strain on bank reserves of specie (money in coin) held against paper currency or notes. Eventually the pressure led to a suspension of specie payments, which resulted in an increase in note issuance, credit expansion, and rising prices. When the war ended, cotton became more expensive, not only due to the

resuming of foreign trade, but also to the abundance of inflated currency.<sup>1</sup>

By 1818, the price of cotton rose to an all-time high, prompting land speculators to rush to buy the Tennessee Valley lands offered for sale at highly inflated prices with currency of dubious backing. Some of those speculators used Yazoo script, also known as “Mississippi stock,” as part of their down payment. That script or stock, redeemable only in payment for land, was issued as compensation to those individuals swindled in the Yazoo Land Fraud.<sup>2 \*</sup>

On February 9, 1818, Robert Taylor of Orange County, Virginia paid one-fourth of the purchase money, consisting mostly of “Mississippi stock,” for the land where Cotton Hill would eventually stand. The price of the land was highly inflated at \$17.56 an acre, and the remaining payments were due in three annual installments, as indicated in his Certificate of Purchase.<sup>3</sup>

On May 10, 1819, Robert Taylor gave power of attorney in the Orange County Court to John M. Taylor of Huntsville, Alabama Territory, where the local land office was located, to sell “or assign” the certificate that also relieved him of the obligation to make the remaining payments. Shortly thereafter, Theopolius Thomas of Limestone County purchased the certificate and the payment obligations associated with it. Unfortunately, he bought the property at a time when the Bank of the United States was launching a program of monetary contraction to ensure that all notes in circulation were backed by specie. This return to solvency resulted in a rash of bankruptcies, falling prices in cotton and other commodities, and business failures that became known as the Panic of 1819. The monetary contraction also increased the purchasing power of the dollar, forcing Thomas to pay the remaining

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\*The Yazoo Land fraud developed in the late 18th century when Georgia still claimed most of the land that now comprises Alabama and Mississippi. Corrupt Georgia legislators were bribed to sell much of this land to four land speculating companies at a ridiculously low price. The fraud was discovered, the legislators removed, and the enabling law rescinded, but the scandal and ensuing legal uncertainties added further confusion to existing land and currency instabilities. In 1802 Georgia ceded its western lands to the federal government, and Congress assumed financial responsibility for settlements following an 1810 Supreme Court decision that validated the Yazoo claims.



*Lucy Ann Spottswood Matthews (1816-1874), Luke's second wife.  
Courtesy Johnny Crutcher and Dr. John Ennis.*

debt on his land in dollars worth considerably more than before the panic. Thomas, like many other individuals, was not able to make the payments on land purchased from the government under these circumstances.<sup>4</sup>

The inability of so many individuals to make the remaining installment payments on their land prompted Congress to pass a relief act on March 2, 1821, that enabled Thomas to spread his payments over an eight-year period, beginning on March 31, 1822, and ending with the final payment on March 31, 1829. He made the arrangements for making these payments on August 30, 1821, and received a Certificate of Further Credit at that time from the Huntsville Land Office. If Thomas failed to make these payments, the land would revert back to the United States three months after the final installment was due.<sup>5</sup>

During a recent renovation at Cotton Hill, a brick inscribed with the date of 1824 was found in the west upstairs fireplace, raising a question as to the possibility that Thomas built the house on the quarter section sometime after receiving further credit from the land office. If Thomas were the builder, he would have undoubtedly been aware that he would lose the house—a fixed improvement—as well as the land on which it stood, for failure to meet his payment obligations. In any event, he eventually forfeited the land for nonpayment, effective July 4, 1829.<sup>6</sup>

On March 31, 1830, Congress passed a law that enabled individuals to buy lands “sold on a credit, and on which a further credit has been taken, under any of the laws passed for the relief of purchasers of public lands, and which have reverted to the United States, on account of the balance due thereon not having been paid or discharged agreeably to said relief laws...”<sup>7</sup>

Luke Matthews of Limestone County took advantage of the first section of the law by obtaining pre-emption (the right of a settler on public land to purchase it at a fixed price to the exclusion of any other applicant) over the land previously held by Thomas until July 4, 1831, contingent upon full payment in cash at the minimum price per acre. On November 30, 1830, he made the payment well within the

deadline at \$3.50 an acre, whereby he received a Final Certificate entitling him to a patent. The United States issued the patent, or official title to the quarter section, on August 1, 1831.<sup>8</sup>

Various sources, including the records of the Historic American Buildings Survey (HABS), credit William Parham with building Cotton Hill for Luke Matthews around 1831. Sources state, moreover, that Parham was a master builder and craftsman who built several other homes in the vicinity, including the John Girault Gamble House. Parham had originally immigrated to Limestone County from Virginia around 1818. Matthews, also from that state, arrived a few years later.<sup>9</sup>

Born in Campbell County, Virginia on September 10, 1796 (his tombstone gives September 20 as his birth date) Luke Matthews, or “Mathews,” was the son of Luke Matthews, Sr., and his wife, Judith. He had seven siblings, namely, John (his twin), Samuel, Edward, Washington, Nathaniel, Nancy, and Susan. During the War of 1812, he served as a private with Captain William Cock’s Troop of Cavalry of the First Regiment of the Virginia Militia (Campbell County) between August 30 and September 20, 1814. Prior to coming to Alabama, he was employed as a clerk in Lynchburg, Virginia.<sup>10</sup>

Around 1822, Luke Matthews, his widowed mother and other family members left Virginia and moved to Limestone County. On March 8, 1826, he married Miss Judith Peete, daughter of Benjamin and Ann Blunt (“Blount”) Peete, and eventually had eight children, four of whom lived. The children, however, were left without a mother upon her death in January 1842.<sup>11</sup>

On January 26, 1843, he married a second time, to Miss Lucy Ann Spotswood of nearby Huntsville. She was the daughter of Elliott and Sarah Dandridge Spotswood. In addition to her new role as stepmother, she would in the course of time become a mother to eight children of her own.<sup>12</sup>

In 1846, Matthews moved with his second wife to Madison County, where he had purchased a plantation near Elko Switch, a stop on the Memphis & Charleston rail

line southwest of Huntsville near the Limestone County line. Although he was now a resident of Madison County who would eventually move into Huntsville, Matthews continued to hold on to his Cotton Hill plantation, containing approximately 1,092.40 acres, until he sold it to John B. McClellan in 1873.<sup>13</sup>

Records reveal that in the years following his move from Limestone County, Matthews bought and sold various properties in the county as well as in Huntsville. One such property, purchased in 1868 for use as a residence, was the house and lot in town at 416 McClung Avenue. Perhaps due to age and declining health, he transferred title of this residence to four of his children (James, Betty, Lucy, and Susie) in 1874, the year his second wife died. Matthews continued, however, to live at the residence until his death on August 1, 1875.<sup>14</sup>

At the time of his death, Matthews was survived by nine children, including Mrs. Nancy (Mary) Jane Robertson of Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania; Mrs. Maria D. Erskine of Huntsville; Mr. Benjamin L. Matthews of Marshall County, Alabama; Miss Elizabeth R. Matthews of Huntsville; Mr. James P. Matthews of Huntsville; Mr. William E. Matthews of Marshall County, Alabama; Mrs. Betty M. Watkins of Huntsville; Miss Lucy Matthews of Huntsville; and Miss Susie Matthews of Huntsville. He also left property consisting of a storehouse at Number 2 Commercial Row (the east side of what is now Harrison Brothers Hardware on South Side Square), a vacant lot on Locust Street, and the Sivly Place, located three miles from Huntsville.<sup>15</sup>

In regard to the later owners of Cotton Hill, John B. McClellan divided the property and sold the house with 212 acres in 1879 to Andrew J. Rowe, the son of Rev. James Rowe, who had founded the Monte Sano Female Academy in 1830. The homesite, further reduced to 100 acres after Rowe purchased it, eventually passed into the hands of his son, George, who conveyed the 100-acre tract to his brother-in-law, J.E. Hardiman, in 1930. In 1973, the Hardiman family sold the old plantation house with only 25 acres to William and Betty Summerfelt, a retired couple from Michigan. With intentions of restoring it, Cecil Armstrong purchased Cotton Hill with its remaining 25 acres from Mr. Summerfelt in 2001.<sup>16</sup>

## Notes

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- 1 Thomas P. Abernethy, *The Frontier Period in Alabama, 1815-1828* (University: University of Alabama Press, 1965), pp. 64, 66-67; Murry N. Rothbard, *The Panic of 1819* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1962), pp. 1-58.
- 2 Abernethy, *Frontier Period*, pp. 64-68.
- 3 Certificate of Purchase Number 1790, Land Entry Case File Number 108, Record Group 49, National Archives, Washington, D.C.; Tract Book Records, General Land Office, Springfield, Virginia.
- 4 Daniel Feller, *The Public Lands in Jacksonian Politics* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1984), p. 22; Power of Attorney, Land Entry Case File Number 108; Rothbard, *Panic of 1819*, pp. 1-58; Abernethy, *Frontier Period*, p. 69.
- 5 “An Act for the relief of the purchasers of public lands prior to the first day of July, eighteen hundred and twenty,” *Statutes at Large* 3, pp. 612-614 (1821); Feller, *Public Lands*, p. 35; Tract Book Records, General Land Office; Certificate of Further Credit, Land Entry Case File Number 108.
- 6 Interview with Lakin Boyd, Art and Architectural Historian, Huntsville, Alabama, 10 May 2005; Tract Book Records, General Land Office.
- 7 “An Act for the relief of the purchasers of public land, and for the suppression of fraudulent practices at the public sales of the lands of the United States,” *Statutes at Large* 4, pp. 390-391(1830).
- 8 Final Certificate, Land Entry Case File Number 108; Tract Book Records, General Land Office; “An Act for the relief of the purchasers of public land, and for the suppression of fraudulent practices at the public sales of the lands of the United States,” p. 391.

- 9 Records of the Historic American Buildings Survey (HABS), Library of Congress, Washington, D.C.; Chris Edwards and Faye Axford, *The Lure and Lore of Limestone County* (Tuscaloosa: Portals Press, 1978), pp. 182-184.
- 10 *Virginia Militia in the War of 1812*, (Baltimore: Genealogical Publishing Company, 2000), p. 235; Pauline J. Gandrud, *Alabama Soldiers, Volume 19*, 1997, pp. 79-80. William L. Hopkins, *Campbell County, Virginia Wills and Inventories, 1782-1847* (Richmond, Virginia: By the Author, 1989), pp. 65, 72, and 76; *Campbell County Virginia Marriage Bonds, 1781-1854* (Salt Lake City, Utah: Genealogical Society of Utah, November 1937; reprint ed., Salem, Massachusetts: Higgonson Book Company, no date), pp. 71 and 154.
- 11 Deed Book I, pp. 93-94, Madison County, Alabama; Gandrud, *Alabama Soldiers*, pp. 80-81; Edwards and Axford, *Lure and Lore*, p. 183.
- 12 Gandrud, *Alabama Soldiers*, pp. 80-81.
- 13 Deed Book 15, p. 235, Limestone County, Alabama; Deed Book V, pp. 255-256, Madison County, Alabama; Edwards and Axford, *Lure and Lore*, p. 183.
- 14 Edwards and Axford, *Lure and Lore*, p.183; Deed Book JJ, p. 145, Madison County, Alabama; Deed Book ZZ, p. 466, Madison County, Alabama; Maple Hill Cemetery Records, Huntsville, Alabama.

“In the summer of 1820, the United States Public Land Office reported that of the \$21,173,489.87 which would be due the federal government at the end of the year from purchasers of public lands, \$11,220,685.55, or nearly 53 percent, was due from the single state of Alabama.”

Hugh C. Bailey, *John Williams Walker, A Study in the Political, Social and Cultural Life of the Old Southwest* (University: University of Alabama Press, 1964), p.151.

- 15 Probate Record Book 34, pp. 155-156, Madison County, Alabama; Probate Record Book 35, p. 308, Madison County, Alabama; Deed Book RR, pp. 382-384, Madison County, Alabama; Edwards and Axford, *Lure and Lore*, p. 183.
- 16 Deed Book 19, p. 21, Limestone County, Alabama; Records of the Tax Assessor's Office, Limestone County, Alabama; Edwards and Axford, *Lure and Lore*, pp. 183-184; Pat Jones, "Rowe Home," *Huntsville Times*, 23 June 1935, p. 3.



*Above: Front façade of Oakendale, Luke's Madison County plantation house, prior to being moved. The house had previously been stuccoed and the front entry modified.*

*Below: Rear elevation revealing the clapboard siding and location of the kitchen wing, as it was being relocated on Redstone Arsenal in 1955. U.S. Army Aviation and Missile Command's Historical Function, Secretary of the General Staff, Redstone Arsenal Historical Information Web site.*

## Luke Matthews in Madison County

LINDA BAYER ALLEN

Luke Matthews's impact on North Alabama was not confined to his magnificent Limestone County plantation house, Cotton Hill. He spent the end of his life in Madison County, where he maintained a second, even larger, cotton plantation until the capture of Huntsville during the Civil War when he moved into town. And his numerous descendants, many of whom married and stayed in the city, continued to play vital roles in Huntsville's history.

As early as 1845 while still residing at Cotton Hill, Luke began acquiring an existing cotton plantation and house in Madison County. His initial purchase consisted of 1,233 acres, for which he paid \$12,900. Five years later he made a second purchase of 1,062 acres adjoining the first, for which he paid \$21,519. A third tract, bought in 1856, completed the assemblage of his Madison County plantation, called Oakendale, which contained approximately 2,400 acres. Part of this land had previously been owned by James Manning, Sr., who built the large, magnificent house, now demolished, known as The Grove, once located on the west side of Gallatin Street atop the knoll west of Manning Drive in downtown Huntsville. Indications are that Manning also constructed a large house on his plantation prior to Luke's purchase of it in 1845. Luke's second wife, Lucy Ann Spottswood ("Spottswood"), was from Huntsville, and perhaps this explains his willingness to leave his Cotton Hill plantation and make Oakendale his home. At any rate, they resided at Oakendale for almost twenty years and raised eight children in addition to the four surviving from Luke's first marriage to Judith Peete.<sup>1</sup>

Oakendale plantation was located on both sides of the Memphis & Charleston Railroad (M&C) tracks and along the west side of what is now Rideout Road, which leads to Gate 9 of Redstone Arsenal. In the 19th century, this area was known as Elko Switch, a stop on the M&C line where people could catch the train into Huntsville or load their cotton for shipping, although it had no physical facility.

Today Luke's plantation is occupied primarily by Redstone Arsenal and Thornton Research Park. The house itself was sited southwest of the intersection of the railroad tracks and Rideout Road. Family legend relates that General Ormsby Mitchell, on his way to occupy Huntsville, stopped at Oakendale, presumably to confiscate Luke's cotton. Luke must have suspected Mitchell's intent and had 120 bales destroyed. In return, an irate Mitchell forced Luke and Lucy to abandon Oakendale and move into Huntsville, where they resided at 528 Adams Street (which was owned by Luke's brother-in-law from his first marriage) during the years of the Civil War. Luke stayed on in Huntsville after the war, and in 1868 he purchased the house and four acres at 416 McClung Avenue, where he and Lucy Ann resided until their deaths, hers in 1874 and his in 1875.<sup>2</sup>

After the Civil War, Luke continued to acquire Madison County acreage up to the year he died at age 79. His second rural tract consisted of approximately 1,200 acres located at the northeast corner of Pulaski Pike and Bob Wade Lane, which has recently been developed by Toyota as a major manufacturing facility for the production of truck engines. In 1871 he assembled a third rural tract of 750 acres located roughly between South Memorial Parkway and Huntsville Spring Branch on what is now John Hunt Park and the Huntsville Municipal Golf Course.<sup>3</sup>

But not all his transactions involved rural land. In Huntsville he purchased at auction a one-third interest in a building on East Side Square (now known as the Schiffman building). Another commercial property owned by Luke was the east side of what is now Harrison Brothers Hardware, which he purchased in 1868 for \$6,000. The executors of his estate sold this property in 1881 for \$2,025. The Harrison brothers paid \$1,500 when they acquired it in 1902, following a fire that began in a nearby feed store and spread to adjoining buildings. The Harrisons had previously located their store in one of the damaged buildings. After the expansion, they hired a contractor to repair the two structures, connect them, construct a unifying façade, and build an addition on the rear of their original store. The result of this project was the Harrison Brothers Hardware business that remains in



*416 McClung Avenue was owned and occupied by Luke Matthews from 1868 until his death in 1875; the yard contained four acres and extended down to Adams Street. Courtesy Huntsville-Madison County Public Library*

operation today on South Side Square under the ownership of the Historic Huntsville Foundation.<sup>4</sup>

Luke may have bought Madison County land as an investment, but what seems more likely is that he recognized the precarious economic conditions that prevailed at the end of the war and was desirous of leaving his large brood of offspring land rich. The value of his own holdings must have been considerable before the war to be able to sustain the loss of more than 100 slaves in Madison County alone and still be able to purchase property in the down years of the late 1860s

and early 1870s. From 1845 to 1856 Luke bought only two properties, the Schiffman building and Oakendale; but between 1865 and 1875 he bought nine additional tracts, for which he paid a total of \$63,530. In addition, he retained ownership of both the Cotton Hill and Oakendale plantations until 1873.<sup>5</sup>

In March of 1873 he divided the majority of his Oakendale plantation among three of his sons by his second marriage: James Pleasant Matthews received 700 acres lying on the south side of the M&C tracks which included the “dwelling and houses”; Elliott Robertson Matthews was deeded 600 acres which were already in his possession; and John Nathaniel Matthews became the owner of 596 acres lying on the north side of the railroad on which he was residing. Confusion exists about John’s date of death, which his tombstone in Maple Hill Cemetery shows as 1871; however, his father deeded him land in 1873 and his last two children were born in 1872 and 1874. It appears that John actually died in 1874, especially in light of Luke’s final



*527 Franklin Street was the home of Luke’s daughter Maria Dance Matthews and her husband Dr. Albert Russel Erskine; Maria sold the house in 1912. Courtesy Huntsville-Madison County Public Library*

family deed, which was made in May of 1875, conveying the remaining 462 acres of Oakendale to the five children of John.<sup>6</sup>

Luke's fourth surviving son by Lucy Ann received 833 acres where the Toyota plant now sits; and just months before his death Luke deeded his one-third interest in the Schiffman building to his daughter Maria Dance Matthews, who had married Dr. Albert Erskine. The Erskines lived in the house at 527 Franklin Street, which Luke had deeded to his daughter in 1874, nine years after buying it from her husband. Maria retained possession of this house until 1912 when she sold it to Laura Mae Powell.<sup>7</sup>

Having doled out the largest tracts of his land to his youngest sons, Luke left a peculiar will directing his executors to "distribute all my estate, real and personal of every description between my children according to the laws of said state which govern the distribution of real and personal estates of persons dying intestate...." However, he had kept a record of what he had previously given each child, and those gifts were to be considered as part of his estate in the distribution of his remaining assets. Both Luke and Lucy Ann Matthews were buried in Maple Hill Cemetery; Judith Peete, Luke's first wife, was probably interred on the Cotton Hill property, but her stone has not been found.<sup>8</sup>

When Luke moved to Madison County from Cotton Hill he was obviously accustomed to living in a large, stylish house. All available evidence indicates that the Oakendale house still stands, although in a different location and in a disastrously altered condition. When the U.S. Army condemned land for the establishment of what became Redstone Arsenal, there were two large plantation houses still extant. One, called the Chaney house after its then owner, was located on the Oakendale land and was believed to have been constructed circa 1835, which would have coincided with James Manning's ownership.

Although no 19th-century photographs of the house are known, pictures taken in 1955 when the house was relocated demonstrate that it was one of the county's

outstanding antebellum structures. Of a slightly unusual design for Madison County, it was a large, rectangular box under an overhanging hipped roof, having a symmetrical, three-bay façade and four huge rooms flanking a wide central hallway on each of two floors. Unlike most local antebellum houses of its size, it had one set of paired 9/9 windows on either side of the centered front entry and three sets across the second floor front, a fenestration that was repeated on the rear where the double-leaf doorway with transom was still visible. Also uncommon, although not unique in the county, are the double exterior brick chimneys on either side wall separated by two 9/9 windows per floor and flanked by a single 9/9 window at each outer edge. The wood-sided house had been stuccoed and the front entry altered, obscuring the design of the original entry and porch. The house was twice the size of Cotton Hill, and the Oakendale plantation had twice the acreage of the Cotton Hill plantation.<sup>9</sup>

Nellie McAnally, who lived in the house for several years during the 1920s, recalled in a 1989 interview that the land was

rented out to tenants who grew cotton and corn and bought their supplies from a commissary located in the old kitchen at the rear of the house. A drive lined with cedar trees led to the front door. The house was clapboard then, and had a small porch in front and a larger, screened porch in back. Each room had its own fireplace. There was no electricity and the only running water came from a tap in the kitchen. ‘There were big folding doors between [the front room] and the dining room at the back, so they could open them and make a ballroom. There was a fireplace over there, with columns all the way to the ceiling, and mirrors. It was beautiful. It makes you wonder why they would want to change it all. . . This was our kitchen. . . we had cabinets along here, and on this wall a door led out to our screened porch where we ate during the warm weather. There was a water faucet in here, but no sink. That was the only running water in the whole house, and there were no bathrooms.’<sup>10</sup>



*421 McClung Avenue was the home of Luke's daughter Lucy and her husband D. Irvine White who built it in 1888; the house was occupied by family descendants until 1983. Photograph by Linda B. Allen*

After the house was moved eleven miles across the arsenal in 1955 it was again “modernized.” The only fireplace remaining was faced in pink marble, and a second staircase in the back was removed, as were three of the massive chimneys and the stairs to the attic. Both floors were partitioned into bedrooms, baths, kitchens and closets. The exterior was faced with yellowish brick and a two-story, columned porch added. A 1982 historical buildings survey reported that “although this ante-bellum house represents pre-military land use, it retains little of its original integrity.

The house has been extensively renovated and moved from its original site, and therefore possesses little architectural or historical significance.” Following the move, the army renamed it the Goddard house.<sup>11</sup>

The Matthews retained possession of the 700-acre tract containing the house from 1845 until 1892 when it was conveyed out of the family. By the time the army began acquiring land in 1941, the only Oakendale property still owned by the Matthews family appears to have been 308 acres owned by Luke’s granddaughter Carrie Tardy Matthews. It was taken by eminent domain.<sup>12</sup>

The deaths of Luke and Lucy Ann, however, did not end the Matthews family connections with Huntsville houses and development. Luke had deeded his town house at 416 McClung Avenue to four of his children, and two years after his death, the house was sold to Lucy B. Matthews, Luke’s daughter-in-law and the wife of James P. Matthews. It remained in her ownership until 1902 when her widowed hus-

band and daughter sold it to Alberta Taylor.<sup>13</sup>

Lucy, one of Luke's daughters, married David Irvine White who built the towered brick Victorian house at 421 McClung Avenue in 1888. Lucy lived there until her death in 1939, at which time it was willed to her son Addison White on the condition that he pay each of his four brothers \$2,000. This house is a slightly modified copy of a house in Richmond, Kentucky, built by Irvine White's uncle Shelby Irvine, who, according to family tradition, sent him a copy of the plans.<sup>14</sup>



*601 Franklin Street was bought in 1875 by Henrietta Matthews, widow of Luke's son John Nathaniel. Two of her daughters inherited the house, which stayed in the family until 1944. Photograph by Linda B. Allen*

John Nathaniel Matthews, Luke's son who died early, was survived by his widow Henrietta and five children. In 1875 Henrietta purchased 601 Franklin Street, although family lore relates that Luke (and possibly her father) put up the money so she and the grandchildren would have a home following the death of John. Henrietta willed the house to her two unmarried daughters; it stayed in the family until 1944 and provided a refuge for other family members through the years.<sup>15</sup>

One of Luke's brothers, Samuel Matthews, purchased the house at 413 McClung Avenue in 1857 and his family resided there during the war years, selling it in 1870. Samuel had also built a large frame mansion in southern Limestone County near the Tennessee River about 1840; it was relocated by TVA and then severely damaged in 1974 by a tornado.<sup>16</sup>

William Edwin Matthews, Luke's son who inherited the farm now occupied by Toyota, was unable to hold onto it, eventually losing it and moving to Gladstone

Place (the antebellum home of Governor Reuben Chapman) in 1889, where he operated Monte Sano Dairy and raised Lily Flagg, the 1892 champion Jersey butterfat producer.<sup>17</sup>

In the next generation, one of Luke's grandsons Benjamin and his wife Olive, along with their two sons Oliver Kennedy and Luke, Jr., constituted the entire board of directors of the Spring City Milling Company in 1921. The mill was located as early as the 1890s on the south side of West Clinton Avenue, where the downtown post office now stands. In 1926, Luke Jr., changed the business of the company from a grinding and feed mill to a large cotton warehouse complex, which he constructed on the same site and named it the Dixie Warehouse and Storage Company. At the same time the warehouse for the Spring City Milling Company on the north side of West Clinton became Matthews Brothers Feed Company. Luke, Jr., and his wife, Marjorie, operated the Dixie Warehouse, while Luke Jr.'s brother Oliver Kennedy Matthews and his son apparently took over the feed business, eventually converting it to a building supply company.<sup>18</sup>

The Matthews family also contributed to the development of Huntsville through



*Dixie Warehouse and Storage Company on West Clinton Avenue was established in 1926 by Luke's great-grandson Luke, Jr. and his wife Marjorie; it ceased operation about 1977. Courtesy Huntsville-Madison County Public Library*



*In 1909 The Democrat reported that “Mr. and Mrs. E. R. Matthews have moved out to their home, Bide-A-Wee, at the foot of Monte Sano. It was the old home, Oak Place, built and owned by the late Mr. George Steele. The house and surrounding grove is one of the handsomest old residences in this vicinity.” Historic American Buildings Survey, ALA, 45-HUVI. V, 1-2*

subdivisions of land that they had acquired. The College Hill Addition of 1928 platted lots south of Big Cove Road, east of California Street and along both sides of Lee Highway (Governors Drive). This development opened Westmoreland, Lytle, Gill, and Matthews streets, thereby creating a permanent marker of the Matthews family passage through Huntsville.<sup>19</sup>

In 1947, brothers Luke, Jr., and O.K. Matthews split a large tract of land lying on the north side of Big Cove Road just east of California Street. Luke Jr.’s lot consisted of 43 acres that he subdivided into 106 residential lots in 1950, which was the beginning of a new neighborhood that assumed the name of Luke Jr.’s subdivision: Blossomwood. Luke, Jr., and Marjorie lived on the north side of Big Cove Road for



*Elliott R. Matthews III (1920-2004)  
great-grandson of Luke Matthews, in 2001.  
Courtesy Johnny Crutcher*

years in a lovely stone bungalow. Luke, Jr., died in 1956 and his son Ben continued operation of Dixie Warehouse and Storage until its close, about 1977.<sup>20</sup>

O.K. and Marie Matthews subdivided their 40-acre parcel on the east side of Blossomwood subdivision in 1955 as Windy Hill, which consisted of eleven lots along the north side of Big Cove Road, and, in 1956 added Windy Hill, Second Addition, containing 46 lots lying south of Blossomwood School along the new streets of Woodmont, Olive and East Olive.<sup>21</sup>

Another of Luke's grandsons, Elliott Matthews, Jr., married Margaret Burns, who in 1908 had bought Oak Place, the home built by architect George Steele (circa 1840) on Maysville Road. The following year she deeded the house and surrounding 169 acres to her new husband, but in 1919 they lost the property when they were unable to make the mortgage payments. From then on the family lived in rental quarters, including many of the houses along Franklin Street and McClung Avenue where they had numerous relatives. Elliott Matthews III related that when his mother purchased Oak Place it had been vacant for years and hay was being stored in the downstairs. The Matthewses called the house Bide-A-Wee, a name that recurs on the subdivision street south of it that was not platted until 1956.<sup>22</sup>

Margaret and Elliott Matthews, Jr., had six children, but Elliott III was the one who made the most recent and perhaps most significant contribution to the city by donating to The Land Trust of Huntsville and North Alabama a life estate in his 130-acre farm of pasture and woodland in Limestone County. Although Elliott was born in Huntsville and lived here for much of his life—even working in the City of Huntsville finance department for 14 years—his love was the land, and he became depressed when he saw it being destroyed by rampant development. Elliott believed that Alabama had been good to him and he wanted to repay it by preserving his piece of land for the enjoyment of future generations. Elliott Robertson Matthews III died in January 2004 at age 83, having left a living legacy of the Matthews family for all the families in North Alabama.

## Postscript

This abbreviated narrative of the Matthews family and its impact on Madison and Limestone counties would not have been possible without the various writings and interviews left by Elliott R. Matthews III, who treasured his family's history and tried to keep alive its legacy by retelling the stories heard in his youth in Huntsville and through dedicated research into the lives and times of his ancestors. Especially helpful was the interview with Elliott taped by The Land Trust of Huntsville and North Alabama in June 2002. Special thanks also go to other Matthews descendants who assisted our research by generously sharing family stories, genealogies, and photographs.

## Notes

- 1 Deed Book V, p.255, Deed Book Y, p.197; Deed Book AA, p.420, Madison County, Alabama.
- 2 Deed Book JJ, p.145, Madison County, Alabama.
- 3 Deed Book OO, p.200; Deed Book RR, p.382, Madison County, Alabama.
- 4 Deed Book X, p.513; Deed Book JJ, p.253; Deed Book FFF, p.228; Deed Book 90, p.169; Deed Book 637, p.860, Madison County, Alabama.
- 5 1856 Madison County Tax Assessments.
- 6 Deed Book VV, p.504; Deed Book VV, p.506; Deed Book VV, p.507; Deed Book ZZ, p.495, Madison County, Alabama.
- 7 Deed Book ZZ, p.504; Deed Book ZZ, p.565; Deed Book EE, p.36; Deed Book XX, p.173, Deed Book 105, p.277, Madison County, Alabama.
- 8 Will Book 1, p.544, Madison County, Alabama.
- 9 [www.redstone.army.mil/history/goddard/welcome.html](http://www.redstone.army.mil/history/goddard/welcome.html).
- 10 Pam Rogers, *Goddard House serves as reminder of pre-Army days... Redstone Rocket*, 25 October 1989, pp.10-11.

- 11 [www.redstone.army.mil/history/goddard/welcome.html](http://www.redstone.army.mil/history/goddard/welcome.html).
- 12 Plat Book 1, p.176, Madison County, Alabama.
- 13 Deed Book ZZ, p.466; Deed Book BBB, p.273; Deed Book 90, p.192, Madison County, Alabama.
- 14 Deed Book XXX, p.213; Will Book 5, p.516, Madison County, Alabama.
- 15 Deed Book YY, p.483; Will Book 4, p.576; Deed Book 166, p.375, Madison County, Alabama.
- 16 Deed Book BB, p.98; Deed Book PP, p.612, Madison County, Alabama; Chris Edwards and Faye Axford, *The Lure and Lore of Limestone County* (Tuscaloosa: Portals Press, 1978), pp.168-169.
- 17 Elizabeth Humes Chapman, *Changing Huntsville, 1890-1899* (Huntsville: Historic Huntsville Foundation, 1989), pp.63-65.
- 18 Corporation Book 2, p.473, Madison County, Alabama; Sanborn Fire Insurance Maps 1913, 1921 and 1928; Huntsville, Alabama, City Directories 1931-1932 and 1940.
- 19 Plat Book 1, p.91, Madison County, Alabama.
- 20 Plat Book 1, p.209 and p.225, Madison County, Alabama.
- 21 Plat Book 1, p.264 and p.323, Madison County, Alabama.
- 22 Plat Book 1, p.318, Madison County, Alabama.



*Luke Matthews descendants at Cotton Hill, June 2005. Bottom: Jim Shackelford, Dr. Harry Porter, Jr., Eleanor Streit, Ben Matthews IV; Middle: Dr. John Matthews Ennis, Cissie Chrisco; Top: Michelle, Troy and Ross Shackelford.*



*Dr. Harry Porter, Jr., Eleanor Streit, and Cissie Chrisco pose with a faux Lily Flagg at Gladstone Place, the dairy where Lily Flagg was raised in 1892. Photographs by Ralph Allen.*



### **Officers for 2005**

<i>Chairman</i>	<i>Jim Rountree</i>
<i>Vice Chairman</i>	<i>Donna Castellano</i>
<i>Secretary</i>	<i>Jeanne Steadman</i>
<i>Treasurer</i>	<i>John Cline</i>
<i>Ex Officio (past chairman)</i>	<i>Mike Holbrook</i>

### **Staff**

<i>Executive Director</i>	<i>Annette Philpo't</i>
<i>Administrative Assistant</i>	<i>Joan Brunson</i>
<i>Store Director, Harrison Brothers</i>	<i>Lynne Berry</i>

### **Board of Directors**

<i>Delia Black</i>	<i>Wayne Lumpkin</i>
<i>Aggie Carter</i>	<i>Lauren Martinson</i>
<i>Amy Creech</i>	<i>Nancy Munson</i>
<i>Louis Durnya</i>	<i>Judy Perszyk</i>
<i>Sarah Hereford</i>	<i>Randy Roper</i>
<i>Delphia Hill</i>	<i>Mary Rutledge</i>
<i>Nancy Horgen</i>	<i>Jean Templeton</i>
<i>Walter Kelley</i>	

### **Ex Officio**

<i>Lynne Berry</i>	<i>David Nuttall</i>
<i>Kyle Davis</i>	<i>Richard Van Valkenburgh</i>
<i>Mary Gray</i>	

## Historic Huntsville Foundation

Since 1974, the Foundation has worked to preserve architecturally and historically significant sites and structures in Huntsville and Madison County.

The Foundation **owns and operates** Harrison Brothers Hardware; **owns and leases** the Harvie Jones Building; **operates** a warehouse of architectural artifacts and materials for reuse in historic preservation; **publishes** *The Historic Huntsville Quarterly of Local Architecture and Preservation*, the 2001 winner of the Alabama Historical Commission's Exceptional Achievement Award, and *The Foundation Forum*, a quarterly newsletter; **hosts** an annual membership tea in architecturally significant homes; **recognizes** people who have made notable contributions to historic preservation; **provides** complimentary information and consultation on the tax credits available for the restoration of historic income-producing property.

HHF **functions** have included *A Rooftop Affair*; *The Moveable Feast*; *Happy Days at the Russel Erskine*; "Through the Garden Gate" book publishing party; *Old-Fashioned Trade Day on the Square*; and members-only events at private homes and buildings.

**On-going projects** include rehabilitation of houses in the Lincoln Mill Village, funded by an appropriation from Congressman Bud Cramer; stabilization and plan development for the Memphis & Charleston freight depot, with funding provided by Congressman Bud Cramer; and marketing the Foundation's book "*Through the Garden Gate: The Gardens of Historic Huntsville*," proceeds from which will establish an endangered properties fund.

**Historic Huntsville Foundation — 2005 Membership Form**

- INDIVIDUAL OR FAMILY \$35–\$49
- SPONSOR \$100–\$149
- NON-PROFIT ORGANIZATION \$25
- SENIOR (65 AND OVER), INDIVIDUAL OR FAMILY \$30
- PATRON \$50–\$99
- BENEFACTOR \$150 AND UP
- BUSINESS \$100

Make check payable to Historic Huntsville Foundation. Membership dues in excess of \$16 (value of subscription to publications) are deductible as a charitable contribution.

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Historic Huntsville Foundation  
124 South Side Square  
Huntsville, Alabama 35801

Annette Philpo't, Executive Director  
Historic Huntsville Foundation  
124 South Side Square  
Huntsville, Alabama 35801  
Telephone: 256/539-0097  
E-mail: [preserve@hiwaay.net](mailto:preserve@hiwaay.net)



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