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Huntsville, Alabama

Volume 1 April, 1971 Number 2

Editor
Elbert L. Watson

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CONSTANTINE B. SANDERS: THE SLEEPING PREACHER OF NORTH ALABAMA

By ELBERT L. WATSON

My long quest had finally ended in the quiet solitude of the little community cemetery in Stevenson, Alabama. Facing me, at the extreme western edge of the grounds, was the gravestone which told the simple story:

Rev. C. B. Sanders
Born July 2, 1831
Died Apr. 14, 1911

How incongruous, I thought, as I stood there in quiet respect. To think, that all his dreams, hopes, and life were summed up in the simple epitaph: he was born and he died. As my thoughts tumbled back across the years, I was aware that his final resting place, on a softly rolling hillside, was in marked contrast to the mental and emotional turbulence, which had so often painfully wracked his gentle nature.

Constantine Blackman Sanders, the son of James and Rebecca Sanders, was born about sixteen miles north of Huntsville. The younger of two sons in a family which included eight sisters, he suffered an emotional shock at age six when his father died.[1] Thereafter, he was particularly close to his mother, and remained on the farm with her until young manhood. By nature susceptible to her strong religious

influence, he regularly attended community protracted meetings and revivals. On September 5, 1851, he was converted in a revival held about twelve miles north of Huntsville, and joined the Cumberland Presbyterian Church the next day.[2]

In 1854, recognizing his need for some kind of formal education to prepare for his chosen field in the ministry, young Sanders enrolled in a school at Elkton in Giles County, Tennessee, about twenty-five miles northwest of Huntsville. While away at school that summer, he was stricken with typhoid fever, and experienced periods of convulsions in his entire system, especially in his arms, chest, throat, and tongue. On one occasion while he was in considerable pain, he took the hand of Mrs. A. M. Harlow, his landlady, and placed it to his forehead. To her amazement, Mrs. Harlow felt what appeared to be a separation of the skull into which she could almost place her little finger. This unusual depression extended from about the center of Sanders' forehead to the top of his head, then down towards each ear. Mrs. Harlow observed that when the paroxysms subsided, the depressions would nearly close up. Sometime during this illness, Sanders told Mrs. Harlow that there would be a burial at her home the following day. About an hour after this remark was made, a man arrived at the house to ask her permission to bury a body in the family cemetery.[3]

Thus, young Constantine Blackman Sanders experienced his first known contact with that mysterious secondary personality, which assumed the title X+Y=Z. During the next twenty-two years this unusual psychic phenomena occurred to him under a variety of circumstances, in numerous places, and at different times day or night. The attacks took place wherever Sanders might be and in the presence

of any number of people. His religious faith, resting as it did upon fundamental teachings of the Bible, regarded anything associated with spiritualism as either a Satanic force or religious cult.[4] This uncontrollable malady, therefore, brought personal embarrassment to Sanders in his ministerial office. In fact, he was so insecure over his condition that if he was unsure of a person's friendship, it quickly crossed his mind that the individual might be thinking of him as an "arrant humbug." When preaching, he was usually plagued with thoughts that his audience regarded him as hypocrite or pretender.[5]

There is little recorded information about Sanders' activities between 1854 and 1876. Evidence indicates that he rarely, if ever, ventured more than fifty miles from his birthplace. On October 29, 1856, he married Miss Duanna A. White, also of Madison County. This was a fortunate marriage for him, because his wife's nature made her adaptable to providing the kind of constant, uncomplaining care which he needed during his psychic attacks. The Federal Census of 1860 listed the young couple and their two children, Alice and William, at the Hayes Store post office in Madison County, near the Tennessee line. They owned no real estate, and their personal estate was valued at only $450. Sanders was ordained into the full ministry in 1862. He held a brief pastorate in Meridianville, Alabama, from 1866 to 1867. In 1869, he moved to Maysville, about eight miles east of Huntsville. Interestingly, although he pastored there until 1876, he appeared in the Federal Census for 1870 in Brownsboro, three miles south of Maysville. By then his family included two more additions, Walter and Veulah, but his personal estate was down to $400.[6]

During this time the mysterious second nature

X+Y=Z was a frequent visitor to Sanders' consciousness, coming often as a thief in the night. Following his initial attack in 1854, Sanders regularly endured excruciating headaches and body cramps which would contort his physical frame. Associated with the headaches were "violent lancinating pains in the chest," which sharply reduced his respiration. It was common for his eyes to be overtaxed with blood, which, because of the intense pressure, sometimes trickled down his cheeks in droplets. These periods of suffering were usually accompanied by a condition of "sleep." As he "slept" Sanders apparently could "see" events that were transpiring elsewhere with no consideration of time or place. One account attempted to explain this condition as a "cerebral disturbance a superexcitation... of the sensorium that pushes his mind or soul free and untrammelled into space, and thus, uninfluenced by surrounding objects, it sees clearly all things happening around."[7]

On other occasions while under his psychic spell, Sanders would write down whatever he "saw" transpiring. In 1874, he recorded the outline of a sermon delivered by Dr. F. A. Ross one night in Huntsville twelve miles away.[8] Dr. Thaddeus C. Blake, an editor of "The Cumberland Presbyterian," told of an incident which also occurred about 1874 at his home in Nashville. It seems that Mrs. Blake had misplaced a ring which belonged to her daughter, who was quite upset over the loss. At breakfast one morning, Dr. Blake, knowing that the Negro cook was superstitious, mentioned in her presence that he planned to write Sanders to see if he could locate the ring. After a brief period of silence, the cook told her son to look under the window where Mrs. Blake often sat. There the ring was found. Dr. Blake met

Sanders the following week in Madison County and started to discuss the incident with him. Whereupon, Sanders interrupted to complete the story and even described the inscription on the ring. He added that the entire transaction was written down while he was in a trance.[9]

Thus, X+Y=Z came and went during the course of twenty-two years. In time, Sanders became somewhat reconciled to his condition and was able to regard his companion as a friend rather than an adversary. His ability to do this resulted in part from the fact that X+Y=Z revealed himself to be spiritually devout and theologically sound.[10] Sanders' personal cross was made even lighter by the confidence which his denomination and local churches placed in him. In fact, his congregation in Maysville felt so strongly about retaining him as pastor in 1876, that the elders and deacons drew up a resolution affirming their confidence in his "integrity, veracity, and piety."[11]

But regardless of his growing awareness that he and X+Y=Z could cohabit the conscious reaches of his mind, the presence of this mysterious psychic force kept the world of C. B. Sanders extremely small. One can only conjecture at this point, of course. But it seems from the few fragments of records which have been preserved, that Sanders sought companionship only with those whose friendship was unquestioned. Had Sanders lived in a more materialistic era and been less fundamental in his Christian faith, it is conceivable that considerable wealth and notoriety would have devolved upon him because of his condition. But in that day his theological and personal inhibitions did not permit such a radical step. So he unassumingly lived and labored on in the highways and hedges of Madison County,

ever apprehensive that his story might someday leak out to an unfriendly world, which might treat his case with human cruelty and misunderstanding.

Mooresville in Limestone County was one place where Sanders knew he was among friends, the chief one being Dr. W. T. Thach with whom he became acquainted about 1860. There is some disagreement over whether or not he ever held a full-time pastorate there, although it is known that he held numerous revivals in the community. Perhaps he also was a supply pastor from time to time. In Mooresville today, tall, stately trees still tower above old homes which bespeak a vanishing charm and elegance of another day, when life was tender and gentle in meaning. Perhaps it was this opportunity to find quiet refuge that caused C. B. Sanders to turn toward Mooresville and his friend, Dr. Thach.[12]

Ironically, it was in Mooresville that Sanders was first publicly exposed. In September, 1875, the Nashville Daily American, having heard about him, prepared a lengthy article on the subject. Referring to him simply as the "Sleeping Preacher," the article cited Sanders as an "humble minister of the Cumberland Presbyterian Church," who could, if he wished, "produce a number one sensation as a spiritualist."[13] The article was largely concerned with a report by a Williamson County, Tennessee, Cumberland Presbyterian minister, who had recently heard Sanders preach in a protracted meeting in Mooresville. One evening after the service the unidentified minister was notified by Dr. Thach that Sanders, who was staying in his home, had lapsed into a trance. Arriving at the house, the minister found Sanders sitting in a rocking chair in the parlor, his eyes closed and head resting against the back of the chair. In a low semi-tone voice, he was

A sketch of Reverend Sanders made from a photograph taken in 1876 by C.C. Giers of Nashville, Tennessee, while the minister was in one of his trances.

Imposing gravestone to the memory of Reverend and Mrs. C. B. Sanders in the family burial site in Stevenson, Alabama.

singing a hymn which reminded the minister of "angels whispers" with a "tone of inexpressible melancholy about it that reached the heart of every one present." An earnest, piteous prayer preceded a sermon which Sanders based on the Thirteenth Chapter of First Corinthians. The address, the minister stated, seemed to fall "as gentle and pure as the snow. To say that it was eloquent does not express it. It was simply glorious, chaste and intellectual."[14]

This article, although it avoided sensationalism, and another one which appeared in the Cincinnati Tribune on November 26, made Sanders heartsick. Now the X+Y=Z secret was out! He abhorred the glaring notoriety and undesirable publicity which was being distributed by curiousity-seekers who came to the neighborhood. To set the record straight, Sanders asked the Reverend George Washington Mitchell, pastor of the Cumberland Presbyterian Church in Athens, to document his story. The Reverend Mitchell, known as a venerable churchman, compiled his information from living witnesses who were regarded as unimpeachable in moral and mental resources.[15] There were sixty-nine in all from such scattered places as Athens, Brownsboro, Decatur, Hazel Green, Huntsville, Madison, Leighton, Maysville, Meridianville, and Mooresville in Alabama; Elkton, Lebanon, Salem, Nashville, Tullahoma and Winchester in Tennessee; and Montgomery, Virginia. Ten of these persons were clergymen, six were physicians and one was a member of the Alabama Legislature. One contributor, Dr. B. W. McDonnold, was president of Cumberland University. The information which was compiled was published in 1876 as a book entitled X+Y=Z or The Sleeping Preacher of North Alabama.

Since this is not a critical study of the life of C.

B. Sanders, it is probably ludicrous to analyze the documents which Mitchell obtained. But naturally the temptation is there! Insofar as the eye-witnesses were concerned, they all seemed to be thoroughly honest, reputable people. Much of their testimony, however, was drawn from personal recollections, some of it coming many years after the event. Some degree of error, therefore, was inevitable. But in discussing the basic aspects pertaining to Sanders' psychic periods, they were remarkably consistent. All of them agreed that something quite beyond his natural person could possess his spirit, and release his mind to witness unnatural events.

One case which I was able to trace to some extent might be mentioned here. In 1876, the Reverend Mitchell and Dr. J. S. Blair recalled an incident which occurred in 1866 in Mitchell's house in Athens. Sanders, they said, was sitting by a front window in the parlor. Suddenly he assumed a countenance of great sorrow and said: "Poor fellow! What a pity! He is gone, gone, gone!" When questioned as to the cause of his melancholy manifestations, Sanders intoned that "Lieutenant McClure has just died suddenly from an internal hemorrhage near Clarksville, Tennessee." McClure, Mitchell recalled, lived in Athens but was on a quick trip to Tennessee to see his parents. While visiting at the home of a friend, he suddenly began to cough violently and spit blood. He died almost immediately. Word of his demise reached his young wife, the former Pattie Vasser, by telegram early the next morning in Athens.[16] Mitchell thought that the date was either November 1 or 2, 1866. Fortunately, an obituary on McClure was recently found in the Clarksville <u>Weekly Chronicle</u> for November 9, 1866. It stated:

> At the residence of Dr. Beaumont, in this county on the 1st inst., of consumption, R. W. McClure, Jr., in the 30th year of his age. Mr. McClure was born and raised in the community and was highly esteemed for his noble traits of character. He was a worthy member of the gallant 14th Tenn. Regiment, and remained a true soldier throughout the war.[17]

Walter Franklin Prince of the Boston Society for psychic Research analyzed this particular case in 1929. Relying entirely on the Mitchell and Blair accounts, he stressed that there was not any expectation of death for young McClure. Had death been imminent, Prince believed, McClure would not have been out of town alone on a visit. At this distant date, probably no one will ever know why McClure was in Clarksville. It is interesting to note, however, that the newspaper account places his death at the home of Dr. Beaumont. The question which naturally arises is what was he doing at the residence of a physician. Perhaps the hurried trip to Clarksville was necessitated by McClure's rapidly deteriorating physical condition with consumption, instead of a mere pleasure visit. Dr. Beaumont may have been a long-trusted family physician, to whom McClure turned as a last resort.[18]

On February 2, 1876, Sanders was probably surprised to learn that his ubiquitous companion had addressed a letter to him, consenting to leave for an indefinite period. This proposed departure apparently came about because X+Y=Z was convinced that Sanders wanted to be freed from what seemed to him to be a burden. On May 5, X+Y=Z bade farewell in the following way:

> My Casket, I now come to address you, personally, before I depart. You have been to me greatly a submissive servant, in suffering, in contempt, in wonder, in reproach, by night and by day, from year to year past... You can never fully see all you have passed in this life until you see the life to come... I have given you many valuable lessons, and prevented you from many difficulties and sorrows... With Heaven's benediction I will now bid you adieu.[19]

Apparently X+Y=Z kept his word. From May 5 until Mitchell's book was published four months later, Sanders did not experience any lapses into his previous psychic state. With the exception of some headaches and trouble in his chest, he was living a normal life for the first time in twenty-two years. After a brief melancholy period, his countenance had changed, and his spirits risen as he adjusted to his new condition. On one occasion, upon awakening from sleep, he realized that he had dreamed for the first time since the inception of his peculiar spells.[20]

The whereabouts of Constantine Blackman Sanders after the departure of X+Y=Z are difficult to trace. Efforts to locate original manuscripts written during and following his experience thus far have been futile. Important church minute books have vanished along with the congregations of the little rural churches which he was known to pastor. The records of the Tennessee Presbytery for 1886-1890 contain only inconsequential references to Sanders when he attended meetings or served on a committee. After 1906, when many Cumberlands rejoined the Presbyterian Church U.S.A., he was no longer listed in the Cumberland Presbyterian records. He was not found again until 1912 when his necrology appeared in the General Assembly Minutes of the

Presbyterian Church U.S.A.[21] The place of his death was Stevenson, Alabama.

So it was to Stevenson I went, hardly knowing what to expect for my effort.[22] But I found him there resting quietly among friends and loved ones of another day. As I looked long moments upon the noble monument erected to his memory, I could not help but muse over the place where they had placed him. It was on the edge of the grounds, almost set apart from the others who reposed there. In a way it seemed to me that this was where he always found himself - on the outside of humanity. But just beyond those shadows I saw a magnificent sunset, dropping brilliantly in the western sky. And then I felt that Constantine Blackman Sanders was at rest after all.

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[1]An article in the Nashville, Tennessee, Daily American expressed the belief that there must have been a predisposition toward cerebral disorders in Sanders' family background. September 15, 1875, 4.

[2]G. W. Mitchell, X+Y=Z or The Sleeping Preacher of North Alabama (New York, 1876), 21.

[3]Ibid., 25. In 1876, Mrs. Harlow claimed that the death occurred about 25 miles from her house, making it practically impossible for Sanders to know of the sickness or death of the man. Mitchell is apparently in error when he refers to Mrs. Harlow as being a widow in 1854. The 1860 Federal Census for Giles County listed an Allen M. Harlow, a forty-year-old farmer, still living with his wife, Mary, and their children. The article in American also contradicts Mitchell's account of Sanders' bout with typhoid fever. The American said that it occurred after his marriage to Duanna White, in 1856.

[4]Walter Franklin Prince, "Two Old Cases Reviewed," Bulletin No. 11 (Boston Society for Psychic Research, 1929), 50-1. Generally, Americans of that period were skeptical of psychic phenomena, which was well known in pre-literate societies and Oriental and Occidental cultures. A strong reason for this was the influence of the Judeo-Christian religions, which rejected any forms of spiritualism.

[5]Mitchell, op. cit., 44-5.

[6]There is little left today of either Maysville or Brownsboro. Mr. Charlie Crowson, an eighty-one-year-old resident of Maysville, told the author on April 27, 1969, that the Cumberland Presbyterian Church stood one block north of the two general merchandise stores, which constitute the business district of Maysville today. He did not recall any local stories about Sanders.

[7]Nashville Daily American, September 15, 1875, 4.

[8]Mitchell, op. cit., 57. The story was verified by the Reverend H. R. Smith of Huntsville, in whose home Sanders visited the next morning. According to the Reverend Smith, Sanders correctly described the sermon with its text, divisions, and main thoughts.

[9]Nashville Daily American, September 15, 1875, 4.

[10]Prince, op. cit., 57. Sanders was greatly relieved when he realized that when he lapsed into his psychic states he often preached and had many converts.

[11]Mitchell, op. cit., 168-69. The resolution was drawn up when Sanders sought to sever his connection with the church because of his condition.

[12]Pat Jones, The Story of Mooresville (North Alabama Historical Association, 1968), 58. This small volume is a compilation of historical articles which Jones wrote while he was city editor of the Huntsville Times, 1931-7. Jones says that during the times Sanders pastored in Mooresville, he lived in

a cottage across the street from Dr. Thach. Mr. Benajah A. Bibb, with whom the author of this paper talked on April 22, 1969, disputes this claim and says that Sanders never did pastor in Mooresville, although he often visited the town. Mr. Bibb, a resident of Decatur, was postmaster at Mooresville for thirty-five years. The 1880 Federal Census for Limestone County notes that Dr. Thach was suffering from nervous frustration.

[13] Page 4.

[14] Ibid. At the conclusion of the sermon, Sanders went into a paroxysm which so corrugated his brow that it was possible to place a finger in the depression. Then he lapsed into a peaceful sleep.

[15] The Reverend Mitchell was born August 3, 1815, in Maury County, Tennessee, and died April 6, 1904, in Pulaski, Tennessee. He pastored in Athens on two different occasions: 1856-66 and 1873-88. Obituary in The Cumberland Presbyterian, April 14, 1904, 469. For what it might be worth, a memorial to Mitchell at the time of his death by the Reverend T. E. Hudson noted that he (Mitchell) during most of his life was "broken down in health and had to abandon school...he was greatly afflicted, perhaps he never enjoyed a single day of perfect health."

[16] Mitchell, op. cit., 80. Mitchell places Clarksville forty miles south of Nashville instead of north where it belongs.

[17] Page 3. The obituary item made no mention of McClure's present home being in Athens.

[18] Prince, op. cit., 28-31. Mitchell, op. cit., 80, told of a recent letter which he had received from a lady who said she was present at the time of McClure's death. Her name was not mentioned nor was the letter directly quoted. But according to this version, McClure was sitting in her room reading aloud from a book, when he suddenly began to cough violently. She assisted him to a chair where he died immediately.

[19] Mitchell, op. cit., 194-96.

[20]*Ibid.* 201-202.

[21]This information was supplied to me by Professor Hinkley Smartt, Librarian at Memphis Theological Seminary.

[22]Individuals who proved so helpful to me in Stevenson were Dr. George Coleman, pastor of the Cumberland Presbyterian Church, Miss Ruth Smith, and Miss Elise Sanders, granddaughter of C. B. Sanders. Miss Sanders directed me to the gravesite of her grandfather.

EARLY AMERICAN ARCHITECTURE RELATED TO CONSTITUTION HALL STATE PARK

By JOHN MARTZ

In 1968, members of the Board of Governors of the Huntsville Historical Society, Including Mrs. Burke Fisk, president of the society; Dr. Frances Roberts, Mrs. Anna W. Rosborough, and Dr. W. M. McKissack, formed a committee to reconstruct the place where the Constitutional Convention was held on August 2, 1819, for the purpose of entering Alabama as the twenty-second state of the Union. On August 10, 1970, the committee met with Harvie Jones, of Jones & Herrin Architects, to formulate a plan for constructing Constitution Hall State Park at the original site, on Gates Avenue, one-half block south of the Madison County Courthouse. The committee had envisioned the Park after preparing a map of "1819 Huntsville," which had been accomplished after seven years of examining early newspaper articles, want ads, deeds, and assorted letters kept over the years by descendants of some of the first Huntsville families. It was felt that the Park with its historical emphasis would complement the Alabama Space Museum in Huntsville and the new Civic Center to be located near the downtown section of the city. In September, 1970, the site was purchased by the State Department of Conservation.

Methods of Architectural Research

Normally, a modern architectural firm tries to keep up to date on the latest methods and materials available in the building trade, but in the case of Constitution Hall things were a little different since we were moving into the past instead of the future. The research phase, which preceded the construction drawings, was divided into three parts: first, meeting with the Constitution Hall Committee to obtain as much background material on early Huntsville as possible; second, acquiring detailed information on construction from the many books available; and finally, visiting many of the houses built in Huntsville in the early 1800's which are still standing and occupied.

We met with the committee and pondered the following questions: from what areas of early Alabama did the pioneer settlers come? what was the special attraction that made them want to settle in this area of the Tennessee River Valley? how good was their education, and what traditions did they bring with them? was Twickenham (later Huntsville) just another frontier town? are some of the early trails into Madison County still in existence today? were there any photographs, maps, written accounts or descriptions of buildings on the site in 1819, still available? As answers to these and other questions emerged we got a very good picture of what Huntsville looked like in 1819.

We found that in 1805 beginnings were crude with John Hunt and others building their log cabins above the Big Spring. The 1809 federal land sales in Nashville, Tennessee, however, set the boom rolling toward Madison County and people began arriving from Virginia down to Georgia. Most of the new-

Constitution Hall State Park

HUNTSVILLE, MADISON COUNTY, ALABAMA

Overview sketch of proposed Constitution Hall State Park by the author, John Martz.

comers were well-educated English planter families, who brought with them their money and resources to make a living. Roads leading from Huntland and Pulaski, Tennessee, were among the first main routes into this area. Areas south of what is now Jackson County, and below the Tennessee River, were still part of Indian lands, thus forcing people from Georgia to circle as far north as Chattanooga before coming into Twickenham. The Big Spring was highly important to the growing community, for from it came an abundant supply of fresh, clear, limestone water. The valley land was also very fertile and ideal for growing such crops as cotton, corn, tobacco, and wheat. It was found that by 1818, Huntsville was having vigorous trade, both by river and overland, with the port city of New Orleans. A theater, art gallery, and newspaper were here. Two schools of higher learning were known to have existed. Many handsome residences were described.

In our research we were unable to locate any photographs of the town site before 1890. However, we did find an excellent 1861 map of Huntsville showing three of the original 1819 buildings to scale, and indicating their building material to be of wood frame or brick. These three were the Boardman building, where the print shop of "The Alabama Republican" newspaper was located, and which included the adjacent library; the Clement C. Clay building, which housed a post office and surveyor's office; and the Stephen Neal house which was a typical residence of that period. We found that Constitution Hall before 1819 was a cabinet maker's shop and furniture store owned by Walker Allen. The second floor to the same building was used as an assembly hall in which theatrical groups lived and performed while in town.

There were many other structures on the site in

1819, as indicated in deeds and newspaper articles, but these had little significance to the Constitutional Convention. We did, however, think that reproductions of some of the various out-buildings would add color to the Park, so, a horse stable, carriage house, and a necessary house will be included in the project. Elegant landscaping in the 1819 style is also planned.

Next, detailed architectural information was needed on how buildings were constructed, what styles of architecture existed in 1819 with a range from simple dwellings to the beginning "white pillar" era, and from what periods and places influences were derived. For most of this information libraries and various books were consulted. In this research phase, emphasis was placed on information about pre-and post-1819 architecture, not only in this country, but throughout the world. The late Renaissance in Europe had special interest, for the people who came to this country often brought their European customs with them. Such names as Chippendale, Hepplewhite, Wren, Jones, Gibbs, Morris, Adams, and many other eighteenth century European architects and designers were prominent authors of handbooks on styles of architecture and furnishings including formulae for orders and details. Many of these handbooks were imported into this country after the American Revolution. Architects were few in the early days of the new nation, and so the art of building houses and other establishments of living and working were left chiefly up to the carpenters, who often used these handbooks for any detailing or room arrangements required. Asher Benjamin was one of the first architects in this country to publish a handbook on architectural styles for building use. Benjamin himself, styled many of his own

buildings after Bulfinch (e.g. New England churches, meeting houses, and apartments).

Fortunately, copies of these handbooks are still available today, making it possible for us to obtain much invaluable information about early buildings in America. It was also a very timely lesson on what to look for as we went into the third phase of research. The periods that we were directly involved with are listed chronologically.

Colonial Period (early 1600's to 1780) - characterized by the boldness in color and form of the late Renaissance in Europe.

Federal Period (1780 to 1820) - evidenced a more delicate use of color and form, with abandonment of the provincial style of the Colonial Period. The Roman Orders of architecture were used, for it was felt the new states had their closest analogy with that of the ancient Romans. Handbooks for carpenters usually included a set of the Roman column proportions at the beginning of each publication with adaptations to shape mouldings of wood for fireplace mantles, chair rails, cornices, baseboards, and window and door trim.

Greek Revival Period (1820 to 1861) - the succeeding higher order of architecture after the Roman era was also typified by adaptation of column proportions, this time the Greek temples.

Victorian Period (1850 to 1898) - known as the Gothic Revival in this country, developed into a new eclecticism using older forms of architecture found. The primary reason for studying Victorian styles was to distinguish what not to look for in early Huntsville.

Several significant dates had direct or indirect bearing on the method in building. Most of the iron and brass hardware used in this country before

1790 was imported from Europe. The few iron foundries here at this time produced raw rod or strap iron stock, but little hardware. The local blacksmith of each town would often take this rod or strap iron stock and forge it into hinges, hasp, nails, wagon ware, and other items the townspeople requested. Machine cut nails were imported around 1800. They did not have a round shaft and head as modern nails do, but were square, being cut from strap iron stock, with an offset lip at the head. Screws in the early 1800's did not have points as today. A hole was first drilled before the screw was inserted and turned into the wood. Wood hardware became an excellent substitute when metal hardware was scarce or too costly.

The year 1830 marked the beginning of the Industrial Age in the United States. Water powered mills sprang up and replaced pit sawing lumber by hand. With the invention of the rotary saw, the old method of framing a wood house with post-and-beam using wood pegs and mortise-and-tenon joints, gave way in 1833 to the balloon frame method of building. The ornate detailing of Greek Revival was made easier by using the newly invented machines.

The third and most enjoyable phase of research involved touring a few of the many existing houses actually built in Madison County in the 1810's and 1820's, and applying the two previous areas of study. It was in this part that we became detectives. Many additions and changes were usually made to the original building, over the years, and these had to be distinguished before dimensions, elevations, profiles of mouldings, and photographs could be taken. The pre-and post-1819 studies thus paid off, and accurate physical information was obtained.

Several general considerations had to be kept in

mind during this period of intense observation. Modern conveniences like electricity, gas, and pressured water did not exist, of course. Candles for light, fireplaces and wood stoves for heat, and wells or water cisterns were among the best substitutes our fore-fathers had. Clothing, especially in winter, was heavier. Few powered machines were available, thus parts of wood and metal had to be worked by hand. The curved lines of the rotary saw could be set apart from the rough straight cut of the pit saw. The perfect appearance of drop-forged hardware lacked the individual character possessed by hardware produced on a blacksmith's forge. Hand plane marks were readily noticed on wall boards and doors. Handmade brick also had a color of its own, and often a person or animal would leave his print pressed into the face. Slave labor had its impact on the local economy and building construction. Without it, many of the great strides in developing the area would not have been realized.

Williamsburg, Virginia, with little limestone to use in construction, made good use of clay brick and wood. One author noted that the blacksmiths mainly made hardware for buildings and wagons since horses could go unshod on the sandy, clay coastal plain. Madison County, on the other hand, had a plentiful supply of limestone, and implemented the stone to the fullest, making such items as stone foundations and chimneys for buildings, stone steps, carriage or horse mounts, carved stone dairy troughs (refrigerator adjacent to well house), and bases for foot scrapers.

When a newcomer bought land with plans for permanent settlement, he would often build a small one-room house at the rear of his lot, to serve as living quarters until time and money were available to erect

the big house. When the big house was completed on the front of the lot, the small house could be transformed into a kitchen, or used as servants quarters.

Room sizes in most buildings were based on a module of eighteen or twenty feet square. Hallways were eight to ten feet wide in smaller dwellings and up to twelve feet wide in larger dwellings. We found in most examples of Federal Period architecture having hallways, a centered door in one side of the hall would open into a room with a fireplace also centered on the wall opposite the door. A stair leading up to a second floor hall and room was also a common occurrence. Some houses were two rooms deep, others had rooms on either side of the stair hall, and in various combinations.

Flooring boards and structural joist/rafters were taken from a wood log that had been quarter-sawn using a pit saw. This method of cutting would expose the edge grain of the wood, giving a more durable wearing surface on the floors and strength without warping the structural members. We found several samples of wood used in the above manner and counted rings for density. The number of rings per inch varied from twelve to sixteen as compared to eight rings per inch in today's high-yield forestry methods.

Roofs were mostly of cedar or cypress shingles, cut from a short log edgewise using a froe. Smoothing, if needed, was done with a draw knife. Looking up through the roof from inside, daylight could be seen. These openings provided good ventilation in the attic or loft spaces. One might wonder why the roof didn't leak. When the rain started to pour, the dry wood shingles soaked up the moisture to swell and seal the openings from the outside climate. When the rain stopped the shingles opened up again. A

recognizable characteristic of the older buildings was the absence of attic vents in the eave wall adjacent to the roof peak. Attic wall vents did not become a part of the building design until sheet iron and/or tar paper roofs became popular around 1825. Gutters and downspouts were available in 1819 Huntsville, as a newspaper ad pointed out. Buildings without gutters would often have water tables and splash aprons of brick or stone at the foundation.

Glass sized for windows and doors was shown in advertisements to range from 8"x10" and 10"x12" to 12" panes. The larger windows and glass panes were usually reserved for the front or side of the house. As a matter of prestige, when even larger panes of glass became available, entire windows would be changed to keep in style. The smaller windows were left to the rear parts of the main building and more subordinate out-buildings. Early imported glass was only 1/16th of an inch and streaked with bubbles and lines. Wood shutters were necessary for protection against strong winds and storms. Extensive use of glass light transoms over doors, both interior and exterior, took maximum advantage of natural daylight conditions.

Shutters over windows of commercial and residential buildings varied. In most cases a business would have solid wood shutters with some locking device at the first floor windows to prevent vandalism. The second floor windows, if there were any, probably had louvered shutters until thicker glass could be obtained. At that time, from what we observed, shutters at the second floor windows were eliminated. Residences had wood-louvered shutters over all windows, thus providing ventilation and preventing direct sun from penetrating room interiors during the hot summer months. In most cases, half

or all of the louver blades on each shutter were adjustable to vary the amount of light and privacy. Even the doors had large louvered shutters over their exterior to help carry natural convection air currents through the house.

Wood doors varied from the crude rough sawn plank type, in some cases finished with hand plane and beaded edges, to the two, four, and six paneled doors with moulded edges and mortise-and-tenon joints. Heavy doors 1 3/4" thick were found on exterior walls, while lighter doors 3/4" and 1" were used in the interior. A common size found was three feet wide by six feet four inches high. One exterior door decorated in a characteristic English way was located. Upholstery nails (boullion tacks) had been driven into the entire outside face of the door in a diagonial pattern. This or the same manner of decoration was mentioned in The Builder's Dictionary by Francis Price, published in London in 1734. Price had probably seen one of the European medieval church doors with its diagonal spikes, and thought it unique for his handbook.

Many regional differences were noticed among building trends in New England and the South. In the northern states, roofs had a higher pitch for shedding snow; low ceilings seven to nine feet; lower windows because of the low sun angle; smaller in area to keep in heat; and massive chimneys usually located in the center portion of the house to retain heat for the longer and colder winter season. In the southern states, roofs had a lower pitch, high ceilings about nine to twelve feet for summer coolness and ventilation, higher windows because of the high sun angle, and larger ventilation area. Chimneys, used fewer days out of the year, were less massive and usually built on the outside wall.

Building Types in the South

The three structures built in the South at the beginning of the nineteenth century were the log cabin, the wood frame with post-and-beam framing, and the masonry bearing which was usually brick with wood floors, ceilings, and roof. Several sources consider the log cabin an invention of the Swedish people who immigrated to America. In Sweden, timber was abundant, and wood logs, having good insulating qualities and fire resistance, suited their living conditions adequately. It is quite possible that other European immigrants found the log cabin style and method of building to their liking, and copied from the Swedes. The logs, taken from land cleared for farming, were usually squared with an adz, and dado or double saddle joints were made at the building corners before lifting the finished log into place. Chinks, or openings, left between the logs were filled with dobe. Again, room size would average around eighteen feet square. Some log houses would have a loft to increase the area for sleeping quarters. The "dog trot" was felt to be an adaptation by the English, with their predilection for central hallways. The method of building with logs is timeless, some log houses being constructed even today.

Wood frame structures are believed derived from the early Tudor style half-timber structures in England in the 1500's. Clapboard soon took the place of brick infill and stucco plaster in America because of dampness and termites. The order of construction was much like the Dutch barns in Pennsylvania today. First, piers of rock were placed where the corners were to go. Next, the sill beams were placed on the piers and joined at the corners with

wood pegs. Corner posts were erected and braced diagonally both ways with the sill beam, using mortise-and-tenon joints and wood pegs. Frequently, a brace would determine how far away from a corner doors and windows were located. In this locale, doors and windows were a minimum two studs or four feet from the building corners. The roof beams, or second floor beams on two storied buildings, were then attached. Notches were cut for floor joist and wall studs at two foot intervals. Roof framing was put up and wood shingles applied. Clapboard siding was nailed to studs and wood flooring laid, using nails or wood pegs.

Post-and-beam was easily recognized from the exterior by the way the corner trim was applied. A single corner board 1 1/2" x 6"± was nailed to the long side of the 4"x8" corner post with the clapboard butted to both sides. Plaster on wood lath strips, or planed wood boards were applied to the inside walls. If plaster was chosen, often a chair rail protected the walls from damage by furniture. Trim and rails were attached to the studs before plastering was begun. A chimney of stone or brick was constructed with a fireplace, making the building ready for occupancy. Room arrangements varied according to the needs of the individual family.

After consulting the plan measurements of the 1861 map, we felt that both the Stephen Neal house and the John Boardman building were originally wood frame English row type houses. The front of these structures, built without porches, was located on the Madison Street property line.

Newspaper accounts of events were found confirming that type building. Constitution Hall was also a wood frame building designed to house a commercial establishment on the first floor and a

meeting house on the second floor. A person touring the Park when it is completed will be able to see examples of the exposed wood joinery especially in the outbuildings.

Masonry buildings were arranged similarly to the wood frame types, with the exception of walls of solid brick twelve and eighteen inches thick, and heavy wood lintels of cedar or poplar over windows and doors to support the wall above. English and Flemish bonding of the brick seemed to have been the trend, from both a decorative and structural standpoint. Ends of brick would sometimes have a gray colored glaze resulting from firing, which was put to decorative use in walls, a solid foundation of stone or brick was built up to support the floor joist. Structural foundation vents of 1 1/2" square cedar rods joined vertically in a cedar frame, would be placed in the walls to keep dampness from under the building and prevent rotting of wood members. Sometimes, if a foundation settled, and the wall had tilting-outward tendencies, an iron rod would have to be run through the building with plates or ties at each end to keep the masonry walls from spreading farther. In our exploration of remaining buildings of the early 1800's, the number of bricks existing are much greater than the number of frame houses still here. The library adjacent to the south side of the Boardman building and the Clement C. Clay building will be the main masonry structures in the Park area.

After much pondering, the architects decided that the best approach to the reconstruction would be to build all houses, offices, and shops as if new in 1819. No attempt to wear finishes or artifically age each building will be done. We have been approached by several people who had parts from old buildings, but

found that nail holes and finishes made the parts difficult to incorporate into the project since these parts would be antiqued, and would force artificial antiquing of all new parts to appear consistent. The freshly done buildings will transport visitors back 150 years when the structures were new.

When construction begins on Constitution Park, it is hoped that the back or alley side of all existing stores facing the south side of courthouse square will be arranged into shops and stores to relate to the Parks (i. e. souvenir shops, restaurants, antiques, etc.). Many displays are planned including maps of the area, tools and furnishings used by our ancestors, documents including a copy of the first Alabama Constitution, a display on archaeological digs done at the site, and other displays on building methods. The Park should intensify efforts to preserve the many old architectural examples still existing, our best and most vivid link with history. The project, it is believed, will give a new spiritual boost, not only to Huntsvillians, but to all who are interested in Alabama history, tourist and native alike.

EARLY HUNTSVILLE'S WEST SIDE SQUARE

By JOYCE SMITH

Each city has a vital spot which in its distant past provided the spark for expansion, the location of a community surrounding that site. Huntsville's vital point was the Big Spring, the existence of which was carried in tales by the Indians to far-off places.

The name of the first white man to behold the spring's gushing force is uncertain--perhaps Old Man Ditto, Samuel Davis, the Criner brothers, or John Hunt. We do know that Hunt was the first to build a cabin on a hillside near the spring in 1805. Other settlers soon followed and in only four years the Indians had ceded the lands to the Federal Government and the great land sales commenced. LeRoy Pope, called the "Father of Huntsville," purchased the Big Spring and surrounding lands for $23.50 an acre, an unheard of price in those days.

The spring and bluffs above it were important in providing water for the settlement and points on a compass for the surveyors. The streets of the new city with the short-lived name of Twickenham were laid out parallel to the bluff which ran N 34° W. This street lay-out looked very neat on the map but occasionally caused consternation to land owners,

who discovered that their carelessly written deeds had divided their adjoining lots with a true N-S line. In reality the land was divided on the diagonal, leaving each owner holding a triangle of land.

Despite the fact that the rocky bluff circling the spring was infested with rattle snakes, the narrow strip of land above it was eagerly sought-after property. This area became the west side of the courthouse square. As early as 1816 there were several two story brick buildings serving as storehouses and advertising elegant assortments of dry goods, hardware, crockery, and groceries. Shopowners promised merchandise of superior quality at wholesale prices, and pledged that no exertion should be wanting in order to merit a share of the public patronage.

By 1819 there were five general merchandise stores and the offices of three lawyers on this block. At least nineteen lawyers and twenty-one physicians were practicing in Madison County. Apparently some citizens were dissatisfied with the fees charged by the doctors, as evidenced by the following statement signed by several doctors in the *Alabama Republican*:

> In consequence of certain unfriendly reports having been industriously circulated to the injury of the Faculty of Huntsville they have thought it a duty owed themselves and the public to make known the rates of charging:
> For a visit in town -- $1.00
> For a visit in the country -- 50¢ to $1.00 per mile, according to circumstances
> Prescription -- $1.00
> Medicines as usual
> All visits at night double[1]

In 1816 the first bank in what would be Alabama

and one of the first in the Mississippi Territory was chartered by the Mississippi Territorial Legislature. It was the Planters and Merchants Bank and it occupied a two-story brick building on the bluff. This building, as well as the other edifice on the block, used every available inch of land. William H. Brantley, in his book Banking In Alabama, 1816-1860, gave a brief description of the building and said that it extended fifty-four feet in a westerly direction where its rear hung precariously, almost directly over Huntsville's Big Spring.[2]

LeRoy Pope was the first and only president of the bank. The Board of Directors read like a "Who's Who" listing. They included John W. Walker, John P. Hickman, Thomas Bibb, David Moore, John Brahan, John Read, John M. Taylor, Nicholas Pope, James Manning, Thomas Percy, Henry Chambers, and James Clemons, all of Madison County.

Old issues of the Alabama Republican give glimpses into the brief but eventful life of this bank and its employees. One editorial noted:

> Mr. Hill, the clerk in the Huntsville Bank, arrived in town on Monday last with about $50,000 specie from New Orleans. In accomplishing the trip, we understand Mr. Hill has had many difficulties and dangers to encounter, from the great value of his charge and the suspicious character of those who were necessarily entrusted with the secret. This valuable cargo was brought up to the mouth of the Cumberland in a steamboat, but it being impracticable to ascend that river on account of low water, he was compelled to come up the Tennessee in a keel boat to Florence, thence to take wagons to Huntsville.[3]

The bank was robbed twice. The first robbery in 1822 netted $5050 in bank notes from the cashier's desk while he was upstairs eating supper. A servant

in the bank supposedly tipped off the thief when the teller went upstairs. Fortunately, he overlooked $1000 in specie in the same desk.

Two years later the bank was again robbed, this time of $29,000. The cashier, William G. Hill, who had brought $50,000 from New Orleans with no worse effects than fright, was not so lucky this time. Mr. Hill was on his way to the director's office upstairs when the robbery occurred. The _Alabama Republican_ reported:

> We understand that he had taken the bundle from an iron chest and was approaching the back door of the passage which had previously been left unlocked, with a candle in his hand, when it was suddenly burst open by the robber, who stunned the cashier by a blow on the head, and possessing himself of the money, made a precipitate retreat out the back way.[4]

To add insult to injury the bank sued Mr. Hill for the loss, claiming negligence and defalcation but he was acquitted. The money was never recovered nor the robber apprehended.

On February 1, 1825 the bank's charter was voided by a Proclamation of Alabama Governor Israel Pickens. Four years later, almost to the exact day, fire raged on the west side of the square, entirely consuming six brick tenements including the former home of the Planters and Merchants Bank. It was thought that the fire was set to cover a robbery.

In this way Alabama's first bank with a colorful, turbulent history vanished from the scene. However, it remains in memory and the site now holds a handsome marker erected by the Alabama Historical Association.

[1]Alabama Republican, August 8, 1818, 2.

[2]Alabama Republican, September 22, 1820.

[3]William H. Brantley, Banking in Alabama, 1816-1860, Vol. I (Birmingham, 1961), 7.

[4]October 15, 1824, 2.

THE EDITOR'S PAGE

By ELBERT L. WATSON

Some concern has been expressed in recent years about professional historians who have given faulty interpretations of the South. Though we tend to agree, we also feel that much of the responsibility may rest at our own door steps because Southerners have been so inept themselves in providing sound state and local histories. Regardless of his scholarly objectivity, the professional historian will approach his study with certain built-in prejudicies which usually affect his interpretation of the material he uses. Possibly his prejudicies would be modified if more primary sources were available to him.

In most communities descendants of pioneer families possess old family letters, diaries, and pictures which give interesting and often significant insights into political and social conditions during earlier periods of history. Local historians should make sure that citizens understand the importance of placing this material in libraries and archives where it will be permanently preserved. If the owner will not release the original documents to such an institution, then perhaps he will permit their reproduction through microfilm or some other copy-

ing process. The availability of such materials should partially relieve the professional historian of the frustration of not being able to obtain primary sources for his research.

The local historian can further assist in the proper interpretation of his region by encouraging research and writing at the local level. The nonprofessional is fortunate at this point because he is usually close to the heart of his community. While searching through old records, he will often find that names and events will arrest his attention because of his personal involvement in his project. Though he is dealing with history in a somewhat different framework, the local historian's study may lead the professional historian into records which may have otherwise escaped his attention. There is always the possibility, of course, that nuggets of historical fact may crop up in the local historian's research which will reward him beyond the mere pleasure he derives from his hobby.

Through the Review the Huntsville Historical Society is fulfilling its responsibility to preserve and propagate Huntsville's and Madison County's history. Already we envision the possibility of publishing some rare manuscripts which have never appeared in print anywhere. Also, our citizens now have an outlet through which their historical papers can be published without undue delay. We expect the Review to etch a fine mark for itself among journals with similar objectives.