

The Lee House Today

The Darwins moved the Lee House to 104 Metaire Lane in Madison. John Tyler Darwin passed away when he was in his eighties, and his wife now resides in Huntsville. The house was sold to Mr. and Mrs. Allen Lacy. Mr. Lacy moved to Madison from a northern state, and said he knew of no family connection to the Lacys in Alabama. In 2005, the Lacys submitted application for the “Lee Mansion” to the Alabama Register for historic homes. At that time, a representative from the AL SHPO office contacted the Redstone Arsenal Staff Archaeologist, seeking information about the house. The researcher was invited to accompany the AL SHPO staff person on a visit to the house, now the residence of the Lacys.

The front of the house faces Metaire Lane and what was once the middle section of the Lee House is abutted to a steep hillside (some local residents would say a mountain). The bricks from the old home site have been used to make brick walkways around the house. Mr. Lacy pointed out one of the bricks in the walkway to the gate which had a well-defined imprint of a large dog’s paw. The brick must have once been part of a more sheltered area of the house, to be so well preserved over 160 years later.

The inside of the house is a credit to Darwin’s restoration skills. The four front rooms are as described by Corrine Harris, except they are much more elegantly furnished and decorated now than when a farm family lived there. Set as it is, against the hillside, well kept with pristine white paint, it is hard to equate it with its former life, that of a working farm, with an associated blacksmith shop, a number of other outbuildings, turkeys in the yard, and large water tank beside it. The context of the farm has been lost.

Listing on the Alabama Register as an Historic House

An application for nomination to the Alabama Register for historic structures was submitted by the current owners of the house in 2005. The name for the house was submitted as the Lee Mansion. The application submitted to the Alabama Historic Commission dated the house as being constructed from 1820-1840.

The Alabama Register Review Board met in Montgomery, Alabama on March 24, 2005. The Board voted and found the Lee Mansion eligible for the Alabama Register. The period of significance for the Lee House is recorded as 1820-1840. The part of the Cooper/Lee house that dated back to 1820 was the original two-room house built by James Cooper. This old section of the Cooper/Lee House (the Lee Mansion) was razed when the larger section of the house built by Houston Lee was moved from the arsenal. Lee began construction of the section that was moved and is called Lee Mansion in 1841. The period of significance for the Lee Mansion should reflect that date rather than be shown as 1820-1840. Nevertheless, the work of John Tyler Darwin to obtain the house, which he remembered with nostalgia from his past, and to painstakingly restore it must be appreciated, and it is fortunate that the house has current owners who will maintain it.