

Two Dollars



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THE HISTORIC HUNTSVILLE
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of Local Architecture and Preservation

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from the Editor . . .

It has come to the attention of the editor that the Victorian home on Madison Street, identified in the Summer 1985 **Quarterly** (p. 16) as the Frances Davis home, was, in fact, the Frances Jones home (Mrs. Paul Jones). Rather than being demolished, the house was moved to the town of Madison where it is still in excellent condition.

We are also happy to report that the gatehouse to the O'Shaughnessy Lodge on Monte Sano (Summer 1985 **Quarterly**, p.20) was moved to the Oaklawn estate on Meridian Street at Highway 72 East, where the present owners are planning a future restoration for the gatehouse.



COVER:

Green Lawn, built in 1850, is located in Madison County near Meridianville.

PHOTOGRAPHS AND ILLUSTRATIONS:

Courtesy of Dr. Frances Roberts: pp. 8, 10.

Courtesy of the Huntsville Public Library: p. 9.

Courtesy of Mrs. Irene Cater and Mr. Frank Williams, Jr.:
p. 12-14.

by Micky Maroney: pp. 8, 17, 19, 21-28, 30, 32-35.

Letters to the Editor . . .

(EDITOR'S NOTE: FOLLOWING IS AN EXCHANGE BETWEEN CLAY LANCASTER, AN ARCHITECTURAL HISTORIAN, AND DR. ELEANOR HUTCHENS WHOSE ARTICLE ON HER FAMILY HOME APPEARED IN THE WINTER/SPRING 1985 ISSUE OF THE HISTORIC HUNTSVILLE QUARTERLY. AN EDITOR'S NOTE PRECEDING DR. HUTCHEN'S ARTICLE CONTAINED THE PHRASE "ERRONEOUS INFORMATION" IN REFERENCE TO MR. LANCASTER'S 1968 ARTICLE ON THE ORIGINS OF THE HOME. THE EDITOR WISHES TO RETRACT THAT PHRASE, AND, ACKNOWLEDGING THE SCHOLARLY NATURE TO THE EXCHANGE BETWEEN MR. LANCASTER AND DR. HUTCHENS WHO REACHED DIFFERING CONCLUSIONS FROM THE HISTORICAL DATA AVAILABLE TO THEM, APOLOGIZE FOR THE UNFORTUNATE CHOICE OF WORDS.)

22 October, 1985

Dear Ms. Maroney:

In today's mail I received a copy of the Winter/Spring issue of The Historic Huntsville Quarterly containing Eleanor Newman Hutchens' article "Dating the Bibb House: Lore, Theory, and Fact." In the editor's introductory note I am accused of having published "some erroneous information about the Governor Thomas Bibb house in Huntsville" in my study called "Some Greek Revival Architecture in Alabama" in the January/February 1968 issue of Alabama Architect. Because of this study I was given the Award of Merit "for outstanding service to the preservation of Alabama's heritage" by the Alabama Historic Commission, which republished it in 1977. In the last paragraph on page 11 there is reference to the "Bradley-Beirne house on Williams Street in Huntsville," followed by a short description. The statement is made that "The severity and great scale of this house makes unacceptable the claim that it was built in its present form during the 1820's." Later I suggest that "there is the possibility that the entire building was renovated around 1850 and, if so, it was a thorough endeavor because the interior is as typically mid-century as the exterior."

In her article, Miss Hutchens furnishes the information that in March of 1836 Bibb advertised in The Southern Advocate that his "new splendid family residence on Williams Street" was in a "nearly finished" condition (page 6, second column). If the house were "new" in 1836, then it had not been built six to sixteen years earlier, and if only "nearly finished" then it was not being lived in by the Bibbs; and it substantiates what I had said about its not having been built during the 1820's. This was no esoteric insight on my part, but only through having observed that the woodwork of the house had been turned out by steam-powered machinery, and knowing that such technical advance did not appear in America until the 1830's. I referred to the building as the Bradley-Beirne house because of its early occupants, James Bradley after 1836, and Andrew Beirne after 1844, following standard procedure used by architectural historians in identifying buildings of no remarkable design distinction.

In the illustrations accompanying "Dating the Bibb House" essay, through comparing the features of Belle Mina and the Huntsville house, one can see the style change that has occurred during the decade between their construction. In the earlier house the original elements are Federal, such as fan doorways, twelve-paned window sashes, colonnetted mantel, six-paneled doors, chairrailing, and a banistered, open-newel staircase. In the Williams Street house the machine-made features are heavier. The front doorway and appropriate mantels are stark in their simplicity, windows have six-paned sashes, baseboards are deeper, there is no chairrailing, and the staircase has small columns for newel posts. Mrs. Hutchens pointed out the single tall panels in the doors. She also called attention to the Federal-style mantels in the upstairs bedrooms as being earlier than the house, perhaps "saved from the house that preceded the present one" (caption page 19). The black marble mantel in the dining room indeed looks to be original, but the white marble mantels in the drawing room and library are later than "mid-19th century." The last is Eastlake in style, which did not come to this country until the 1870's.

On pages 10 and 11, I am quoted as being "fairly certain" that the portico of Belle Mina was a later addition, and this is refuted because the "1835 advertisement mentioned the colonnade running across the full front." Yes, of course, by 1835 it could have already been appended, but it still does not accord with the original style of the house.

Also here, referring again to my article in the Alabama Architect, I am accused of being "strangely mild in suggesting a date later than 1815 for the portico of the Leroy Pope house. He attributes the design of that house to George Steele, who was 16 years old and had not yet come to Huntsville at the time it was built. There is some indication that Steele did design the portico in the 1840's." Being an

outsider writing on Alabama architecture, I went to the best authorities I could find for such information. In Ralph Hammond's book Ante-bellum Mansions of Alabama, published in 1951, on page 52 he says: "In building his mansion, Pope had the services of George Steele," and on the following page Hammond states that "It was built around 1815." Inasmuch as the illustrations of Belle Mina were taken from the Hammond opus for the Hutchens essay, this discrepancy should have been laid at its source. In all fairness to myself, it should have been recognized that the last sentence in my Alabama Architect article about the Pope house, after citing its characteristics, says: "All of these elements belong indeed to the Federal category but, in noting the difference in the modillion cornice to the main part of the house, the delicacy of the colonnetted front door (not visible in our illustration), and the shallow depth of the building (only about twice that of the portico), one wonders if the colonnade were not an afterthought" (page 10, paragraph 1).

I cannot see that I have perpetrated any "erroneous information about the Governor Thomas Bibb house in Huntsville" or any other building in my study on Alabama architecture, and I do not appreciate having been maligned in The Historic Huntsville Quarterly by both an author and its editor. It is only fair that my name be cleared of false accusations before those to whom they were made.

Respectfully submitted,

/s/Clay Lancaster

Clay Lancaster



Dr. Hutchens Replies:

Ralph Hammond's book, which Mr. Lancaster used, correctly states the date of Thomas Bibb's death as 1839. The following passage from Mr. Lancaster's article, suggesting that the house was built after 1840, carries with it the implication that it was built by someone else:

The severity and great scale of this house makes unacceptable the claim that it was built in its present form during the 1820's. One would have to look to examples dating at least two decades later in Kentucky and Tennessee (and but slightly earlier in the Piedmont region of Georgia) to find these characteristics, and for a sport to have come into existence in Alabama seems unlikely. Of course there is the possibility that the entire building was renovated around 1850 and, if so, it was a thorough endeavor because the interior is as typically mid-century as the exterior. The house was sold to Andrew Bierne in 1844, which offers a tantalizing date with regard to whom (sic) should be given credit for the existing building.

The March 1836 advertisement I cited, in which Bibb described his new family residence on Williams Street as "nearly finished," invalidates Mr. Lancaster's suggestion. The family tradition that the house took nine years to build, and was occupied by the Bibbs before completion, leaves open the possibility that it was begun in the late 1820's. Thomas Bibb was living on the Williams Street lot in a previous house when he bought the property in 1821, as the deed shows.

My real hope in sending Mr. Lancaster the article was that he would use it as a starting point for new research of his own, toward showing that architectural history has assigned too late a date to the introduction of Greek Revival architecture in this part of the country.



Private Schools of

Yesteryear :

Shepherd's School and Williams Training School

by Joberta Wasson

There have always been fine private schools in Huntsville. Two old ones which deserve to be remembered were Shepherd's School and Williams Training School.

Charles O. Shepherd's School for Boys

It is impossible to discuss Shepherd's School without discussing Shepherd himself in some detail. Shepherd's School was Shepherd.

This remarkable schoolman's career spanned almost sixty years. He was a profound scholar and widely read. He scorned mediocrity. Under his formidable tutelage and the threat of his hickory stick, generations of careless boys learned to become

real scholars. He did not hesitate to apply the stick to the "seat of learning" of any boy reluctant to do his lessons properly. And misbehavior in his classroom? Only the most foolhardy would dare.

His career began in 1846, the year he graduated from La Grange College at Leighton, Alabama when he was just eighteen years old. He opened his own school at once, and by all accounts, he maintained strict discipline even at this youthful age.



An oil painting of Shepherd in his younger years, painted shortly after the Civil War by local artist William Halsey.

His flowing black beard may have helped to give him added maturity. It was naturally red but was always dyed black to match his black hair - perhaps his only vanity.

He soon relinquished his school to accept a position with Greene Academy, where he was a professor, and later principal, until the Civil War resulted in the school's closing.

He enlisted in the Confederate cause, served with distinction, and earned the rank of captain. These war

years were the only ones he spent away from Huntsville except for college. He came back to his family home at 505 Holmes Avenue. (This charming brick cottage is still standing.) He remained a bachelor, too, continuing to live with his mother and unmarried sister.

Federal troops had burned Greene Academy in 1864. So again he opened his own school, this time permanently. It operated successfully until he retired in 1909 at age eighty.



505 Holmes Avenue, the residence of Charles Shepherd. The small schoolhouse, now demolished, was located behind this home.

His school was called simply "Shepherd's School," and it was a beginning college preparatory school, with no frills, for young boys. The school was housed first in a plain rectangular building on Clinton Avenue across from the present Central Church of Christ. This building was torn down fairly recently to make way for a parking lot. Later, the school was moved to a small building behind his residence. This building, too, has been demolished.

Elizabeth Humes Chapman graphically describes a classroom scene in her book **Changing Huntsville:**

It is a question whether the boys dreaded Mr. Shepherd's reproving looks or the hickory stick more. Both were used unsparingly. There was never a day that did not witness several administrations of the hickory. Mr. Shepherd sat on his rostrum stroking his long beard, looking critically over the top of his spectacles at his class. "Read that passage, Conrad." Conrad did. "You read as if this is your first acquaintance with it, sir. How many times have you been over this lesson?" "Six," boldly from Conrad. The class gig-



Charles O. Shepherd, schoolmaster. This photograph was taken in the early 1920's, a year or so before Shepherd's death three days short of his ninety-fifth birthday.

gled. They had seen Conrad lay his book carefully open on the sidewalk on his way to school and hop over it as they counted six. "Then your head is empty as the stovepipe yonder," remarked Mr. Shepherd.¹

We are not told the consequences of this gambit, but they must have been

severe. Continuing, Miss Chapman says:

Punishment for misspelling or for certain phases of misconduct was to write the misspelled word five hundred times, then use it in ten or more original sentences.

Frequently thin lads would appear at school

¹Chapman, Elizabeth Humes, **Changing Huntsville**. Privately published, 1972. p. 136.

with two or three suits of clothes on. His schoolmates met him with a rallying, "Why are you so fat today?" They knew well enough. They, too, had met the hickory and dreaded its second use. It was never slow at Mr. Shepherd's.²

There was no rebellion or resentment on the part of the boys. On the contrary, they respected and admired Mr. Shepherd. Though strict, he was just. Among his pupils were Archie L. Rison, Harry Moore Rhett, Sr., Lawrence Cooper, Paul Speake, Morton Hutchens, Robert Spragins, William P. Dilworth, Sr., and many more who became prominent in business and professional life.

Mr. Shepherd died in 1923, three days before his ninety-fifth birthday. His obituary reads: "He was a man of the very highest literary and educational attainments and numbered the students by the hundreds who had prepared in his school for other schools and colleges."³

A colorful family reminiscence of Charles Shepherd's last day on earth is offered by a relative of his: After he had taken a walk, he came in and sat down in his favorite armchair, drank a glass of wine, and died.

Williams Training School

Although the Williams Training School was in operation for only three years, it made a lasting impact on Huntsville. Its overall excellence set an example for schools to come, and its principal and his assistant were to become influential community leaders later in their lives.

Early in the twentieth century, a group of concerned citizens, deciding the town needed a new boys' preparatory school, proceeded to establish one. They incorporated, sold stock to raise money, and oversaw construction of a school plant on land purchased for the purpose. It was tentatively called the Huntsville Training School. Joe J. Bradley served as president of the board of directors for this venture, and William R. Hutton served as treasurer. Some of the others on the board were Malcolm R. Murray, Lawrence Cooper, T. T. Terry, and Frank W. Webster.

Their plans materialized rapidly. In 1908, a handsome two-story, clapboarded school building with a hipped roof and a Greek Revival portico stood ready for occupancy on a pleasant campus at what is now 1427 McCullough Avenue.

²Ibid., p. 137.

³Weekly Community Builder, May 3, 1923, Huntsville, Alabama. p. 1.



The school building shortly after construction, and the school baseball team. Renamed Williams Training School, it was located at what is now 1427 McCullough Avenue and was in existence only from 1908 to 1911.

On the recommendation of Mr. Webster, a young Vanderbilt graduate from Columbia, Tennessee, Mr. Frank Wharton Williams, was selected to head the school. Mr. Williams, in turn, recruited his friend, Mr. Clifton Boswell, to be his assistant. Though Mr. Williams had had several years' experience in teaching and school administration, Mr. Boswell had just graduated that year from Vanderbilt. However, his college record had been outstanding. He was a Phi Beta Kappa and had been president of the senior class.

The school, now known as

Williams Training School, opened with all grades - first through twelfth - in September 1908. Although it was essentially a boys' school, a few little girls were accepted in the primary department.

Mr. Williams set rigid standards for the school. Only studies directly preparatory for college were offered, and students were required to take every course, i.e., English, Math, Latin, Greek, and History - no electives. The younger children learned writing, spelling, and geography instead of Latin and Greek, Mrs. Jo Anna

White being their teacher. She also taught elocution, a course deemed almost indispensable by many.

As to discipline, the school catalogue states: "Those who will not submit themselves to rules are not wanted. Boys who insist on exerting a low influence will not be harbored by us. We positively will not keep them."

Upon entering, every boy was required to sign a pledge that he would not be absent from his boarding house after dark (there were no dormitories) and that he would not go to town without permission. For those who were not boarding students, the pledge read: "I will not loiter in the town."

Not surprisingly, the school earned the nickname

"Williams College." Athletics, however, were not neglected. There was an athletic field, and the school boasted both football and baseball intramural teams, with Mr. Leonard Darnell as coach.

Another extra-curricular activity, one popular in that day, was debating. The school sponsored two debating societies which competed against each other. The boy judged best in declamation received a gold medal at the end of the year.

Although the school received enthusiastic support from many townspeople, it did not attract enough students to make it a financial success. The 1911 term was the last one. The public school board rented the facilities for a new public high school. This arrangement, too, lasted

An artist's conception of the proposed Huntsville Training School, from a 1908 school brochure.





Frank W. Williams, Headmaster of Williams Training School from 1908 - 1911.

only three years because the building burned to the ground in 1914.

Mr. Williams, his family, and Mr. Boswell all said goodbye to Huntsville, probably with little hope of returning here to live. Mr. Williams secured employment as a school superintendent in Tennessee. But in 1920, he accepted an offer to return to Huntsville as superintendent of the public school system, a position he held until his untimely death in 1928. On that occasion, the **Huntsville Times** for February 19, 1928 stated: "He was one of the best known and most popular educators in Alabama and his reputation extended

throughout the south."

Mr. Boswell went into the real estate business in Texas, but not all his ties with Huntsville had been cut. He returned in a couple of years to marry his sweetheart, Miss Alberta Chapman Taylor. Though he whisked her off to Texas, they returned during World War I with their little girl Ellalee.

He became a partner in an insurance firm with Mr. Shelby White and remained one of its heads throughout his lifetime. The Boswell Insurance Company was not only prosperous, but highly respected throughout the South.

Mr. Boswell became one of Huntsville's best-liked and most influential citizens. Long after his retirement from teaching, he was greeted by a fond "Hello, Professor" whenever he met a former pupil on the street. He and his wife were both vitally interested in education. Both served on the school board, and for many years he was its chairman.

Today's parents would certainly not tolerate Mr. Shepherd's hickory stick and probably not Mr. Williams' rigid course of study; but let us remember that strict discipline and rigid courses in the Classics were the norms for the era, and that for the most part, the children who grew up in these schools, or others like them, became solid, stable citizens.



Sources:

Chapman, Elizabeth Humes, **Changing Huntsville**. Privately published, 1972. pp. 136, 137.

Williams' Huntsville Directory, Vol. 1 - 1859-60. Coltart and Son, 1859. p. 15.

Jones, Katie Sanford, **Early Schools in Huntsville**. Pamphlet, Business and Professional Women, no date. Pages not numbered.

Glimpses into Ante-Bellum Homes. Booklet, American Association of University Women, Huntsville Branch, 1976. p. 30.

Superintendents - 1875-1975. Centennial Pamphlet, Huntsville City Schools. Pages not numbered.

Williams School Catalogue, Session of 1908-09.

Huntsville Daily Times, April 27, 1923. p. 1.

Weekly Community Builder, May 3, 1923. p. 1.

Huntsville Times, February 19, 1928. p. 1.

And grateful thanks to the educators' relatives who helped immeasurably:

Mr. Shepherd - Dr. Frances Roberts.

Mr. Williams - Mrs. Irene Cater and Mr. Frank Williams, Jr.

Mr. Boswell - Mrs. Kate Jordan.

The Oteys and

Green Lawn

by Micky Maroney

"And I am engaged to be married and to one I do not love ... And he thinks I love him," wrote Octavia Wyche in her diary on the 6th of March, 1849, the day after she had agreed to become the wife of Madison Otey. She continued, "Oh, how perfectly miserable I am."

Sixteen years later, shortly after Madison had died, Octavia again wrote in her diary: "Oh my God, what shall I do, my poor husband is gone ... my heart's constant cry is how can I give him up."

In 1849, eighteen-year-old Octavia had debated for a long time over her reply to Madison's proposal of marriage. At times she felt she

did not love him at all. At other times she loved him ardently. There was no question that he loved her, but the difference in their ages bothered her - Madison Otey was thirteen years her senior. Knowing her future happiness depended on her answer, she was distraught at her own indecisiveness.

Octavia Aurelia Wyche was accustomed to living in luxury with her mother and step-father at their plantations in Madison County, Alabama and Yazoo County, Mississippi. Born in 1831 after her parents had moved to Alabama from Brunswick County Virginia, she was the daughter of Mary Ann Rebecca and William Henry Wyche. Her father died in 1836, and a



Green Lawn was built in 1850 by William Madison Otey for his bride, Octavia Aurelia Wyche, and is still owned by their descendants.

few years later her mother married John Kirkland, also of Alabama and Mississippi.

William Madison Otey, too, had been born in Alabama after his parents had moved from Virginia. He was born in 1818. Like Octavia, he was a small child when his father died, but his mother never married again. At one time, Madison's father had been one of the largest landowners in Madison County, owning a majority of the land between Meridianville and the Flint River.

The Early Generations

Madison's father, William Walter Otey, was the son of John Otey, a colonel dur-

ing the Revolutionary War. Walter Otey married Mary Lucy Walton of Salem, Virginia in 1800. From their home in Liberty County, Virginia, they moved to Huntsville in early 1817. Walter soon bought a quarter-section of land near Meridianville and set forth clearing the heavily wooded acreage for planting.

With timber cut from his land, Walter built a log dwelling for his family. Located on a gentle rise of land near the narrow lane leading from Huntsville north to Tennessee, the house was typical of the dwellings erected by recently-arrived families. It consisted of only two spacious rooms separated by a large center hall.

Although constructed of white oak logs, the house was finished with plastered walls inside and weatherboards outside. These materials not only refined the appearance of the small home, but added insulation against the cold of winter and the heat of summer.

Often, when plantations prospered, these basic log houses were enlarged or replaced entirely by bigger, more stately homes of brick or clapboard. Perhaps it was Walter Otey's plan to build a larger house someday. But he suffered an untimely death in 1823, a few short years after arriving in Huntsville.

Following the purchase of his first quarter-section of land, Walter remained busy purchasing, clearing, and planting more and more land. His business endeavors included the endorsement of financial notes for various friends needing security for investments.

In 1819 and again in 1820 he co-signed, with other endorsers, two notes for Irby Jones for the purchase of the Huntsville Inn and Bell Tavern. (See *The Historic Huntsville Quarterly*, Spring/Summer/Fall 1984, pp. 13-16.) By early 1821, Jones had failed to make payment on the Bell Tavern note, so the tavern was offered for sale at public auction and Walter Otey was the highest bidder. Unfortunately, he "departed this life without having obtained ... a deed of conveyance" for the tavern. Nevertheless, it was legally his, and an 1823 inventory of its "goods and chattels" is listed along with his other

assets in the Probate Court records of Madison County.

Family history has it that Walter's untimely death was caused, at least in part, by an immense financial loss due to his practice of endorsing notes. For a friend named Christian, whom family members to this day cannot identify, he apparently gambled and lost. In order to pay off Christian's note, he was forced to sell 1300 acres of his own land. This loss must have been unbearable because he died soon afterward.

In spite of Christian's note, Walter's estate remained solvent. Much property, real and personal, is listed in the Madison County Probate records. Many debts are also listed. To pay these debts, several properties were sold. Bell Tavern was finally sold after the Alabama General Assembly in December 1823 passed an Act enabling the administrators of the estate to sell the deedless Bell Tavern for payment of debts due from the estate. After all debts were paid, the widowed Mary Otey was left with only 250 acres and the log home, but she apparently took charge of the remaining plantation and managed to provide for her family.

Of the nine Otey children, the four boys received educations at the best universities of the South, and the five girls were properly educated, as well. After they were grown and married, most of the brothers and sisters remained in the area and became prominent citizens of Huntsville.



Stark winter scenery on Otey land.

Madison's eldest brother, John Walter, was the first Probate Judge of Madison County. Before John's marriage to Cynthia N. Smith in 1828, he went into business with Rodah Horton, who had purchased Bell Tavern from the administrators of the Otey estate. A newspaper advertisement in the May 13, 1825 issue of **The Southern Advocate** announced that Bell Tavern was newly opened by Rodah Horton and John Otey. In 1824, Rodah had married the eldest Otey sister, Lucy Ann, and they also owned a plantation near Meridianville.

Two of Madison's older sisters married Robinson brothers. Caroline Louisa Otey and John Robinson were married in 1828, and Mary Frances Otey and James B. Robinson were married in

1831. These two couples also had plantations (Oaklawn and Forestfield, respectively) on the Meridianville Pike north of Huntsville.

Eliza Otey married Paul Hildreth in 1830, and after being widowed, she married a Mr. Dillard. Christopher Otey was married twice, also, first in 1831 to Isabella Emily Smith, and in 1850 to Margaret A. Blackwood, a widow. In 1843, the youngest Otey sister, Maria Melinda, married John W. Pruitt of Meridianville, where he and Madison jointly owned a storehouse and lot (at the time of Madison's death). There is no Madison County marriage record for Armistead Otey, but family history lists him as having married Elizabeth Dosier.

Madison Otey was the

last of the Otey children to say the wedding vows, having devoted many years to helping his mother manage the plantation. As he was growing up, the older brothers no doubt helped with plantation matters, but one by one, they left home to start their own families.

By 1849, Madison was yearning to be wed to Octavia Aurelia, and she was struggling to give him an answer. In September of that year, the wedding took place - she finally did realize that she loved him and that the difference in their ages did not matter. Family lore has it that Madison sent his elegant carriage, shaped like half a goose egg, to fetch Octavia for the wedding. Perched high on a small seat in front of the vehicle was the Negro driver Henry, in command of two fine carriage horses, Jim Black and Jim Brown.

For the first year or so of their marriage, Madison and Octavia lived with his mother in the little log house, and their first child was born there in 1850. During that time, they were planning, then building, a fine large home - one, Madison felt, that would be more suitable for his lovely young wife and their expanding family. By early 1851, they were settled in the newly-finished house. Mary Otey moved there, too, and lived with them until her death, at age 73, later that year.

The House

The new house was built not far from the log home Madison had lived in all his

life. As a finishing touch, perhaps added sentimentally, or thriftily, Madison had one room of the old house moved to the rear of the new one to be used as the kitchen. (Kitchens were frequently separate from the main house to spare the occupants the heat and cooking odors and to reduce fire hazards to the house.) At the rear of the house, in addition to the kitchen, was a row of slave cabins built at right angles to the main dwelling. Spreading lawns and gardens were soon planted around the new Otey home, inspiring the plantation's new name, Green Lawn.

The two-story house, five bays across, is strictly Greek Revival in style, both inside and out. Arranged on the center-hall plan, it has two rooms on either side of the partitioned hall downstairs and one room on each side of the hall upstairs. The house was built with expansion in mind. At a future date, two more upstairs bedrooms were to have been added to the rear of the structure but the addition was never built, accounting for the somewhat unusual front-to-back profile of the house. A change made to the roofline of the back portion of the dwelling during the 1930's accentuates its unusual appearance.

Classic Greek Revival details enhance the exterior features of the home - long, wide windows with large panes in the six-over six sashes; a wide entry with double doors having two vertical panels each; sidelights and oblong lights over the doorway; and pediments formed by the box-



The unusual front-to-back profile of Green Lawn is due to a 1930's change in the roofline of the one-story section of the house. Note the gable pediment formed by the box-cornice and the roof edge, and also note the chimney configuration at the gable. The original library, now gone, was located next to the front room where the brick of the chimney appears darker.

cornice traversing the gable ends of the house. The chimney configuration at the gables retains the unbroken line of the pediments. Although the main structure of each chimney is interior, it is obvious only at the attic portion of the gable ends and at the roofline. Between the ground and the box-cornice, the brickwork of the chimneys appears to be exterior, projecting about two inches beyond the weatherboards.

The present Greek Revival portico with four massive columns was built in the 1930's. Each stucco-coated column, two stories high, was made from a huge cedar log

cut from the property. Above the columns, the wooden entablature and pediment are simple and unadorned. This imposing portico replaced a two-tier Italianate porch which ran the full length of the house. According to family members, there was yet another portico - the original one - but unfortunately, no one remembers what it looked like. The strict adherence to the Greek Revival style throughout the house would indicate that the original portico could have been Greek Revival, too. Because there is an original exterior door in the upstairs center hall, it is reasonable to conclude that the first porch

had two levels, or at least a balcony.

A smaller one-story porch on the north side of the house appears to be the original entry to a side hall. In the construction of the porch sill, the position of the lap-joint indicates that the porch was an extension of the original north wing - a one-story dressing room off the northwest bedroom on the first floor. In the 1930's, the dressing room was enlarged to contain a small bedroom and bathroom.

A south wing, also original, was located next to the parlor and was used as a library. This room was removed sometime during the twentieth century.

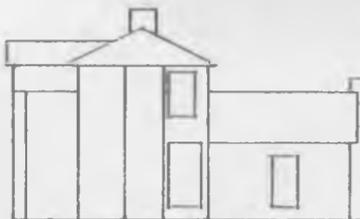
The present sloping shed-roof atop the east (back) rooms of the house was remodeled when the other changes were made during the 1930's. According to family recollection, low attics were accessible through the second-floor bedrooms, and the roofline had a series of three gables across the back, attached at right angles to the two-story section of the

house. Also, when the other changes were made, a cinder-block extension with a deeply sloping shed-roof was added across the rear of the house to contain a kitchen and two other rooms.

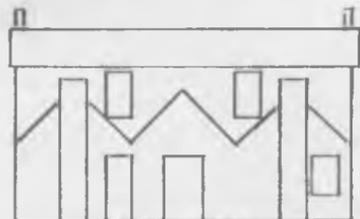
The interior of Green Lawn is dominated by Greek Revival styling, as well, with only one concession to the Federal mode - the use of black paint on the mantels in the two first floor bedrooms, and on the baseboards of all rooms except the parlor and dining room. The six original mantels are Greek Revival in style, as well as the door and window frames and baseboards. All woodwork on the first floor is attractively fluted or grooved, while the upstairs woodwork has flat, smooth surfaces.

All original doors have one or two vertical panels and are fastened by rimlocks. Nearly all doorframes and window frames are topped with corner blocks, the ones downstairs having bullseye centers. The one exception is in the back hall. Architraves are missing entirely from the doorways there, which are delineated only by

Side and back elevations of the way the house looked when the back roof had three gables rather than the present sloping shed-roof. Elevations by Micky Maroney.



SOUTH ELEVATION
SCALE: 1/16" = 1'



EAST ELEVATION
DIMENSIONS APPROXIMATE



Back view of the house. The porch at right is original, while the cinderblock addition, of course, is not!

Detail of the lap-joint construction of the sill of the side porch.





Entrance hall. Visible at right is the back of the staircase, which descends into the back hall.

Detail of random-width floorboards, black-painted baseboard, and fluted architrave surrounding the entrance door and sidelights.





Back hall doorway to entrance hall. Note that there is no wide doorframe; the edge of the jamb serves as an architrave.

the narrow edges of the jambs. Transoms are used above all the principal doors on the first floor. Oddly enough, there are no transoms over the doors upstairs where extra air circulation would have been most welcome in the heat of summer. However, both bedrooms have good cross-ventilation with windows on three walls. The closets, one in every room except the parlor, are original to the house - unusual for 1850, though not unique.

On the first floor, the architraves surrounding the windows extend to the floor, enclosing raised wooden panels under the windows. Second story windows have no panels underneath. Still in place above the parlor windows are the original valances, cast in metal in a floral motif.

Baseboards downstairs are twelve inches wide and are topped with shaped, grooved moldings, while second floor baseboards are only



Note the abrupt termination of the handrail over the newel post on the first floor.

six inches wide and have no moldings or other embellishments. The thick heart of pine floorboards, sawed in wide, random-width planks and planed only on one side, are laid directly over the joists. (The use of subflooring was a later innovation.)

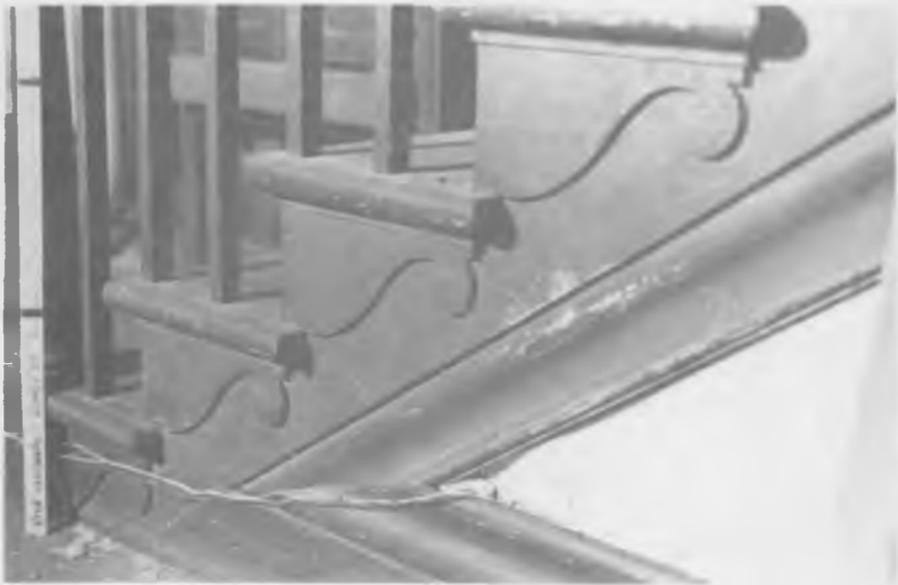
According to family lore, the placement of the

staircase in the back hall was due to Madison's penchant for privacy. With this arrangement, family members could come and go, undisturbed by guests in the front rooms. The arrangement was also a practical one, eliminating the need for an angular staircase with a landing. It allowed the stairway to be built in a straight line from the one-story back hall up to



The second floor newel post is topped by a box and knob.

Detail of the decorative scrolls on the stairway.



the second floor center hall. A rounded handrail of cherry wood is supported by simple, square balusters and round newel posts also made of cherry. The handrail is terminated in a rather unusual manner above newel on the first floor - the rail is simply cut off, having no shaped structure atop the post, such as a box, pad, or volute.

The Gardens

The gardens at Green Lawn must have been among the loveliest in the area. Madison, wanting an appropriate setting for his fine new home, employed an English landscape architect to refine and complete his plans for

the surrounding gardens. A driveway, laid out slightly to one side of the house, extended to form a circle in front of it. At each side of the expansive lawn, a row of pine trees was planted, then a row of hollies, and next, a row of cedars. Interspersed among the evergreens were walnut and locust trees, the whole arrangement designed to allow passers-by a full view of the house.

Two formal gardens, rimmed by boxwood, were arranged in squares at each end of the house. Within each square were two concentric ovals of boxwood planted three feet apart, providing space for a pathway. In the center of each inner oval, a pink crepe myrtle was planted, surround-

View from the front porch steps, looking north down the partly overgrown carriage lane. At the left are two huge old boxwood bushes.



ed by hyacinths. A double row of tulips circled the hyacinths, and next to the tulips, tall white lilies bordered the boxwood. Rose-bushes were planted at each end and at each side of the outer boxwood ovals. In the triangles formed at the corners of the squares, roses and peonies bloomed, edged with white and blue duck lilies and violets. These formal gardens were reached by walkways leading from each end of the front portico. Another walk led from the center of the portico to the horseblock at the edge of the flower-lined drive.

Even today, many of the ancient crepe myrtles, some as tall as trees, still bloom; most of the old trees, planted according to the landscape architect's design, now tower over Green Lawn. But only remnants remain of the formal gardens, with immense, aged boxwood bushes suggesting their former existence.

To complete the fine new house in its park-like setting, Madison and Octavia filled it with fine furnishings which were selected with obvious care. Much of the now-antique furniture of Green Lawn is presently in the possession of Otey descendants.

Letters, Ledgers, and Lists

In addition to the house and furnishings, many family papers have survived to the present. Madison and Octavia saved numerous pieces of correspondence, financial ledgers, diaries, and lists. Family correspondence topics

range from accounts of visits and social life to education and cotton planting, plus comments on religion, politics, and hard times.

An 1852 diary of Madison's consists mainly of ploughing and planting records and other items of plantation business. Starting in 1856, Octavia used the blank pages of his out-of-date diary to make lists concerning household details such as meat salted down, china on hand (and broken), china bought, sewing, linens needed, and things to be bought at the stores. Scattered among the lists are various notations on such dissimilar subjects as an unusual dream, invitations issued, a Christmas gift list, and the behavior of a child. For example:

Christmas Gifts - 1856

Imogen - Tea set and doll
Willie Walter - Monkey in
a box, candy
Marie Beck - Doll, Little
Woolly dog

Christmas group list

Almonds, raisins, rice,
cheese, Rennet, oysters,
white sugar, candies, fruit

Marie Rebecca, the Otey's youngest child at the time, inspired Octavia to pen the following comment in 1857: "Mollie Beck is the worst child I ever had, she has done nothing but cry for the last two months, nearly all night long - She is very good in the day."

Later Generations

In all, six children were born to Octavia and



Drawing room. At left is a wide doorway with triple doors between the drawing room and dining room. At top right is an original drapery valance.

Rimlocks are still in place throughout the house.



Madison. Imogen Wyche was born in 1850 in the little log house. After her marriage in 1884, Imogen moved to Virginia with her husband, William Fields, the owner of a 3,000 acre plantation at Castlewood. Born in 1853 at Green Lawn, William Walter married Sophia M. Robertson in 1887 and they lived near Meridianville. Marie Rebecca, known by several familiar names - Marie Beck, Mollie Beck, Mollie, and Mary - was born in 1855. In 1881 she was married to John M. Hampton of West Point, Mississippi. They moved to the Hampton family's Alabama plantation, Sunnyside, which was located directly across the road from Green Lawn. Madison Wyche, called Matt like his father, was born in 1858. He died of pneumonia when he was only thirteen years old. Laura Elise, called Elise, was born in 1860 and never married. The youngest Otey child, Lucile Horton, was born in 1862, only a few years before her father died. Lucy's marriage to John Beal Walker of Luray, Virginia took place at Green Lawn in 1892.

During the years prior to the War between the States, Madison and Octavia lived a customary plantation life - rearing their children, tending to the household, farming and business matters, and leading an active social life. Guests were always welcome at Green Lawn, and the Otey's hospitality ranged from small gatherings of family members to large Christmas dinners, Open House parties, and even dances. Under Madison's supervision, the plantation prospered enough that he was

able to more than double the acreage that had been left to his mother and then to him.

At the time the Civil War started, Madison was suffering from severe carbuncles and was not able to sit a horse. Therefore, according to family legend, his plantation overseer fought in his stead and returned unharmed, "without a scratch." Times were hard during the War and the Oteys were subjected to extensive financial losses, as were many other families. Nevertheless, food from the plantation was given to numerous Confederate soldiers. Although the Yankee soldiers left the family and house unharmed, they did manage to steal forty tons of hay from a field near the house.

In December 1863, Octavia obtained a pass to cross Union Army lines so she could travel to Nashville to purchase supplies. The travel permit was dated "Nashville, Tennessee, the 9th day of December 1863" and stated:

To whom it may Concern:

This may certify, that Mrs. Otey has this day filed in my Office an application and the required affidavit, for purchase of the Family Supplies described in the annexed memorandum countersigned by me, the aggregate value whereof is \$16.00 and for transportation thereof by way of Wagon, to the place of residence of Mrs. Otey.

And by virtue of the authority vested in me, I do hereby permit the said Mrs. Otey to pur-



Detail of drawing room mantel.

chase the said supplies at Nashville, Davidson County, Tennessee, and to transport them from Nashville to Home, Madison Co. Ala.*

This permit will expire and cease to have any force ten days after its date.

The permit was signed by the "Local Special Agent" and the "First Special Agency," whose signatures are, unfortunately, illegible. The attached memorandum was signed in Nashville by merchant John Duff and dated December 18, 1863. The supplies consisted of \$15.00 worth of tobacco and \$1.00 worth of soap. Perhaps they were to be given as Christmas gifts.

During the war years, Madison had become an invalid and his health continued to

decline. He died June 2, 1865, leaving Octavia to cope not only with her terrible grief but also with the dreadful financial losses caused by the war.

At the time of President Lincoln's Emancipation Proclamation, Octavia owned twenty-nine slaves at Green Lawn, plus twenty-five more on her plantation in Yazoo County, Mississippi. These slaves were, of course, given their freedom, but many elected to remain and work for Octavia. In fact, even today, descendants of the Otey slaves, who adopted the Otey name as their own, live and work on or near the original Green Lawn land.

As a young widow of 34, Octavia Aurelia faced harsh realities. The children were still young and the planta-

tions had to be managed. Money was scarce and Madison had died without a will. Not only had she lost her husband, but a way of life, as well.

Probate Court records concerning the estate span eleven years. There was a court-ordered sale of personal property in 1865, but the remaining debts were so large that in April 1868 it was necessary for the court to declare the estate insolvent. Not long after that, to provide for the widow and children, a Decree of Dower was declared, setting aside 287.5 acres for the family's use. Of that allotment, 62.5 acres surrounding the house were designated as a homestead, assuring a permanent residence for the family. In the summer of the same year, there were court-ordered

sales of railroad stock and the remaining 232.5 acres of land. During the ensuing years, claims against the estate were gradually settled. The last entry in the Probate Court records for the William Madison Otey Estate was made on October 10, 1876.

In spite of her troubles, Octavia was regarded as being cheerful, amiable, and brave. She managed her affairs effectively and was able to remain at Green Lawn, making sure her children were well-cared for as they were growing up. One of her special pleasures was reading, and she read extensively. She also had a love for the beautiful in nature and in art, being quite artistic, herself.

When Octavia died in 1890, Green Lawn was passed

Greek Revival fireplace mantel in dining room matches the other three mantels on the first floor. At the right of the fireplace is an original closet.



on to Imogen, Elise, and Lucy. Willie Walter and Marie Beck, after each was married, gave to Imogen their respective shares of their inheritance of Green Lawn.

In 1892, Lucy's wedding took place at Green Lawn at "high noon," and among the family papers is a newspaper account of the event: "... The pretty golden-haired bride was Miss Lucile H. Otey, whose charms of person and character have won and held so many admirers. The groom, Mr. John Beal Walker of Luray, is a typical Virginian, a representative of the charming Valley family of the 'Old Dominion.' ... The bride wore a lovely gown of white bengaline, entraine with flounces and veil of chantilly, and held a bunch of bride roses." The four maids were "gowned in white

India silk, made in the fashion of the 2nd Empire, and carried different colored roses. The parlors were wreathed in roses and smilax and lit with waxen tapers in old silver candelabras of Ante Bellum days." After the ceremony, "the guests were ushered into a delicious luncheon served in courses and with jest and smile and laughter closed the pleasant occasion, Mr. and Mrs. Walker leaving on the East bound train for a Summer in the Thousand Islands and the lake region of the Adirondacks."

After Lucy's marriage, the house was empty from about 1893 to 1902. When Imogen's husband died in 1913, she returned to live at Green Lawn.

Lucy's daughter Imogen (Mrs. Leslie Cummins) was the

South bedroom upstairs. Note the plain, unfluted woodwork, including the mantel. Between the window and mantel is an original closet.





View of Green Lawn from the back yard.

next Otey descendant to live at Green Lawn, and she and her family lived there for many years. In later years after her husband's death, Mrs. Cummins found that the large old place was too much to manage by herself, so in 1966 she moved to Tennessee to be near her daughter Leslie (Mrs. David Browder). The house was boarded up to keep prowlers and vandals out, and a caretaker (whose wife is a descendant of Otey

slaves) keeps a watchful eye on the old place. His own home is right next door to the Otey house and he is diligent in keeping trespassers off the property.

In 1982 Green Lawn was placed on the National Register of Historic Places. Mrs. Browder is now planning to restore the old family home as time and financial resources allow.



Sources

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Marriage Record Book #3, pp. 326, 538, 540, 653, 715, 717.

Marriage Record Book #4, p. 694.

Marriage Record Book #4-A, pp. 317, 365.

Marriage Record Book #12, p. 76.

Marriage Record Book #13, p. 394.

Marriage Record Book #15, p. 290.

Marriage Record Book #18, p. 524.

Madison County Probate Court, Huntsville, Alabama.

1850 Census, Huntsville Public Library, Huntsville, Alabama.

Unpublished Otey family papers, courtesy of Mrs. David D. Browder.

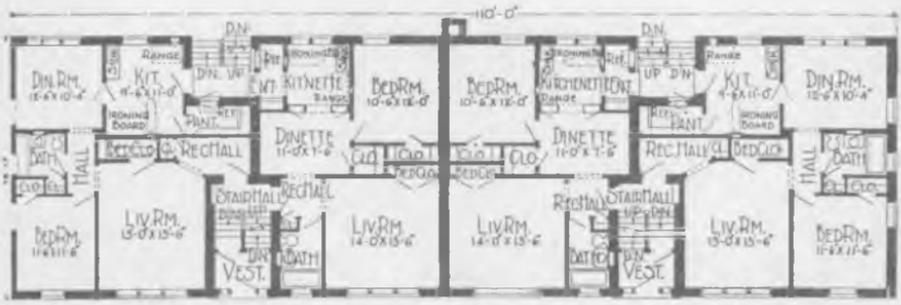
Unpublished Wyche-Otey Papers, Southern Historical Collection, University Library, University of North Carolina, Chapel Hill, North Carolina.



1928 Residential Plans

from the *American Builder*

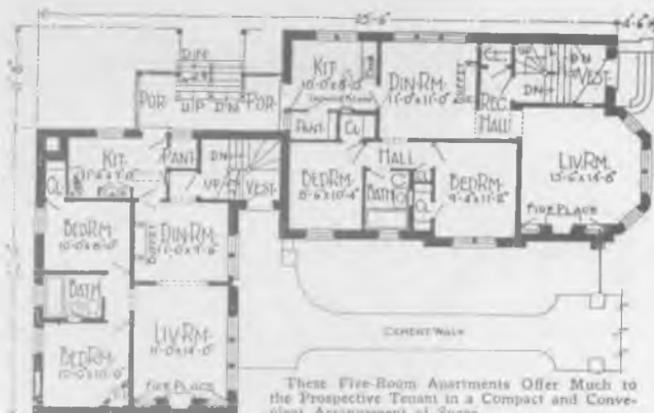
Among the many artifacts found at Harrison Brothers Hardware Store are a number of issues of **American Builder** magazine published by the American Carpenter and Builder Company. Publication offices were in Chicago and New York. The following apartment and house plans are from the November 1928 issue.



Inexpensive yet good income building for shallow lot on North Lockwood Street, Chicago; Bernard L. Roos, Architect. Four-room and three-room units with closet-beds and dinettes give eight attractive and well-lighted efficiency apartments in two-story building, 32 by 110 feet. Refrigerator located in pantry gives exterior access from back entry for ice delivery.

Beauty Achieved by Omitting Ornate Features

BERNARD L. ROOS,
Architect



These Five-Room Apartments Offer Much to the Prospective Tenant in a Compact and Convenient Arrangement of Space.



An apartment building on North Hamlin Avenue in Chicago; Bernard L. Roos, Architect.

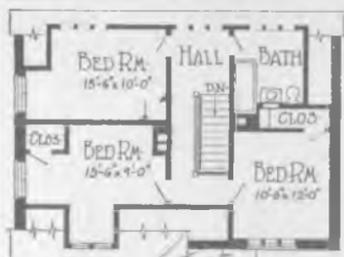


The GRANBY

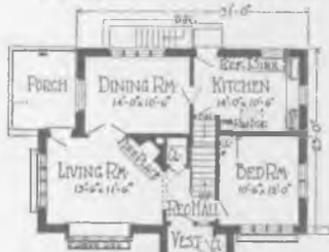
A HOME in the English Colonial style in a traditional manner with modern conveniences. The location that is the best and most desirable is the front porch. The handsome exterior is a delight to the eye. The interior is a joy to the eye and the heart. The living room is a large bright airy room with a fireplace and a large window. The kitchen is a modern kitchen with a refrigerator and a sink. The bathroom is a modern bathroom with a tub and a shower. The bedrooms are comfortable and well-furnished. The overall design is a perfect blend of old and new.



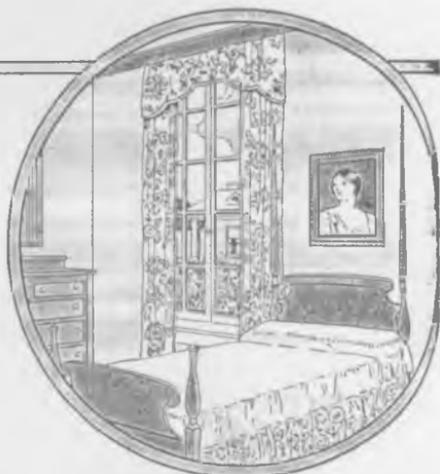
"A home in the English Colonial style." This plan also has the modern convenience of a pantry refrigerator with ice delivery access through an opening in the wall of the back porch.



SECOND FLOOR



FIRST FLOOR



The JUNO

HERE is a compact, substantial home of modern English lines containing seven rooms and bath. A downstairs bedroom is a feature that is often wanted for this room could be nicely used as a library, office or study. Two large bedrooms are found on the second floor.

In the color sketch above is a suggestion for window treatment and furnishings appropriate to this design.



"Here is a compact, substantial home of modern English lines containing seven rooms and a bath."

from

Historic Huntsville Foundation, Inc.

P. O. Box 786

Huntsville, Alabama 35804

