

Historic Huntsville Quarterly

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Historic Huntsville Foundation, Inc.



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Huntsville, Alabama

Seventy-five Cents

April-June 1975

JEREMIAH CLEMENS HOME

Lot No. 82, where the two-story, brick house, known as the Clemens house stands, was first sold by LeRoy Pope to Phillip A. Foote, a local merchant, for \$300 on May 18, 1817. Foote then sold the property to James Price in 1818. A year later, Clayton Tolbert, a local innkeeper, purchased the lot for \$1200. He appears to have built the house on the lot, for (con't on page)



BOSTON MUSEUM REFINISHING SECRETS

Although the principles of furniture restoration are relatively simple, everyone--including the experts--makes mistakes from time to time. So it never hurts to go back to the beginning and review the basic rules that a professional restorer uses when he first approaches a fine piece of furniture. Keep in mind that these remarks apply only to pieces that are valuable and worth taking special pains with.



Don't do anything that can't be undone. In the real world, everything changes, shifts and moves. That includes glued joints and surface finishes. So if you have a piece of furniture worth preserving (cont'd on pg 5)



Huntsville

150 Years Ago



Historic Huntsville
Quarterly

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by Nan Holloway



"RUNAWAY

From the sub-
scriber, living
eight miles
northwest of
Huntsville, on

the Pulaski road, on the 12th of
March, a negro fellow named

SAM,

about 35 years old, one eye out,
occasioned by a stroke: was pur-
chased several years since from
Martin Jennings, near Winchester,
Tennessee. A liberal reward will
be given to any person who will
apprehend said negro, and return
him to me, or have him confined
in any jail so that I get him again.

DUDLEY SALE. "

April 1, 1825

"Alabama Republican"



Advertisements such as this were
indicative of the affluence of
society in Huntsville in 1825.
The fact that a man could ad-
vertise for the return of another
was the accepted thing. The mutual pull
together of "keeping slaves enslaved" was
condoned by almost everyone—such ad-
vertisements flourished in the area news-
papers.

Nor did things go well for white offenders
of the law. A Madison County horse thief
received a typical punishment from the
Circuit Court. He was whipped, branded,
fined one hundred dollars, and imprisoned
12 months.

Glorious news for Huntsville planters came
during the second quarter of 1825. The
prices of the cotton market increased
rapidly. Here the staple was worth 20 to
25 cents and was quoted (Cont'd on page 6)

CHARACTERS

Officers of the Historic Huntsville Foundation, Inc.

CHAIRMAN: C. Lynwood Smith, Jr.
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 TREASURER: Tommy Beason
 SECRETARY: John R. Wynn
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TREASURER'S REPORT

by R. Thomas Beason



The following is a statement of the Historic Huntsville Foundation, Inc. for the period ending March 31, 1975.

Income

Dues	757.00
Donations	500.00
Subscriptions	7.50
	<u>\$1,264.50</u>

Expenses

Supplies & Postage	68.92
Subscriptions	12.00
	<u>\$ 80.92</u>

Excess of Revenue Over Expenses & Fund Balance March 31, 1975

\$1,183.58

Assets

Cash in Bank \$1,183.58

Fund Balance

Fund Balance \$1,183.58

TEA—DELIGHTFUL!



unday afternoon of June first, The Historic Huntsville Foundation enjoyed a lovely tea held at the home of Dr. Corley and Mr. Tidmore.

The purpose of this delightful occasion was to welcome all new members and prospective members into the foundation.

The group then progressed to the Masonic Temple where Professor Jeffery J. Bayer of the University of Alabama-Huntsville Art Department gave a very informative slide presentation entitled, "Parade of Styles in Architecture."





MINUTES OF MEETING

A meeting of the members of Historic Huntsville Foundation was held on Sunday, April 6, 1975 in the Madison County Courthouse. The Chairman, Mr. Lynwood Smith, called the meeting to order. A quorum was present. The minutes of the last meeting were read and approved.

The Treasurer's report was made by Richard Van Valkenburg due to the absence of Tom Beason. He reported that the Foundation's bank account showed a balance of \$1,181.38.

The nominating committee will give its report to the next general membership meeting on Sunday, June 1, 1975.

Cynthia Caffey gave a membership committee report stating that the Foundation had seven new members. She also stated that plans are underway for increasing the membership.

Upon motion duly made, seconded and carried unanimously, the Foundation approved the location of its office in the slave quarters behind Sophy Lowe Young's home. Anyone willing to donate office equipment was encouraged to do so and should contact Pat Laxson in this regard.

A report was then given concerning components from demolished buildings.

Lynwood Smith reported that he has had conversations with Dr. Bayer at UAH who



Membership in the Historic Huntsville Foundation

If you want to become a member of the Historic Huntsville Foundation, and to assist in enhancing Huntsville's future by preserving its significant architectural and historic heritage, send your name, address, telephone number (home and office) and check in the appropriate amount (made payable to the Historic Huntsville Foundation Inc.) to: Mrs. Lochlin W. Caffey, Chairwoman, Membership Committee, Historic Huntsville Foundation, 100 Calhoun Street, S.E. Huntsville, Alabama 35801.

MEMBERSHIP CLASSES

Student.	\$ 2.50
Active (Individual).	10.00
Business.	50.00
Patron.	25. - 99.00
Benefactor.	100. or more

is an authority on structures having architectural and historic significance. Dr. Bayer and his wife have offered to give their services to the Foundation and to assist in publishing a walking tour book.

Mr. Smith also reported that he has made an inquiry with the grant office of UAH concerning the availability of federal and/or state grants to the Foundation.

There being no further business to come before the meeting, and upon motion being duly made, seconded and carried unanimously, the same was adjourned.



ATTENTION

All Artisans, Carpenters & Craftsmen

Wishing to Advertise
Trades & Skills
Useful in the Restoration
of Historic Homes
Are Invited

to Submit Notices to
the Historic Huntsville Quarterly
Phone: 534-1404 or 881-2174

by a too-hurried approach to repair and refinishing. Wait until the excitement or impatience has passed before you start to work. More finishes have been ruined by excessive haste than by ignorance.



Test your materials. Different materials react differently on different surfaces. You are never completely sure what's right for your piece until you test on an inconspicuous place.

In selecting a stripping agent, for example, you would look for the mildest chemical that will do the job, and yet not damage the wood. The most common solvents and strippers, starting with the mildest and arranged in approximate order of chemical ferociousness are:

Boston Museum Refinishing Secrets
(Continued from page 1)

anything you do today will have to be re-done by you or someone else in 25, 50 or 100 years.

For example, synthetic resin glues (such as Elmer's Glue-All) are rarely used on Museum pieces. The aging characteristics of these glues are unknown—as compared with animal glues that have been used on furniture for centuries. And when you have to remove a synthetic glue in order to re-glue a joint—good luck!

The animal hide and hoof glues used at the Museum are water-soluble and can always be dissolved when repairs are necessary. For the same reason, linseed oil finishes or other oil-based varnishes are not used on the Museum's furniture. More on that later.

Never in haste. Whether it's a newly-acquired piece you're very excited about, or an old piece you're in a hurry to refinish—take your time. Many fine pieces have been ruined



- Mineral spirits (benzine)
- Turpentine
- Toluene/Xylene
- Diacetone alcohol
- Denatured alcohol
- Acetone
- Commercial paint removers
- Morpholine
- Pyridine

NOTE: Morpholine and pyridine, which are really "eager eaters" give off toxic fumes and should only be used in a well-ventilated space.

If these solvents fail to do a satisfactory job, the only option left is mechanical abrasion—sandpaper, steel wool, etc.

Don't remove all wrinkles of age. At the Boston Museum, the intention is never to make the piece look like (Cont'd on page 6)

Boston Museum Refinishing Secrets
(Continued from page 5)

new. Dents and worn places are one of the consequences of a piece of furniture being old.

However, broken or missing parts that might otherwise prevent the viewer from appreciating the overall concept of the design are repaired and replaced.

Incidentally, here's a handy trick for duplicating a rosette or piece of wood carving that may be missing. You can use dental alginate to make a mold of the carving that remains on the piece. The alginate will make a soft, flexible mold that will accurately reproduce undercuttings on carvings. You can

then pour Lucite molding compound into the mold. Depending on the ratio of Lucite powder to monomer you use, the material will harden in 15 minutes to two (2) hours.

Color can be cast into the molding by mixing powdered pigments into the Lucite before casting.

Other molding materials may be equally suitable for your application. Such things as Kerr impression material (also a dental supply), latex, and glue molds can be used. Only experimentation will tell you what's right for your particular job.



Select surface coating carefully. There are two basic types of finish: oil varnish and spirit varnish.

The preceding article has been reprinted by permission from the November 1973 issue of "The Old House Journal."

Huntsville - 150 Years Ago
(Continued from page 2)

in New York at 27 and 28 cents. Many Huntsville citizens made their fortunes within the "twinkling of twenty-four hours"—some 10, some 20, some 30,000 dollars.

While the cotton market was thriving another Huntsville concern, sadly enough, wasn't enjoying such prosperity. The venture of the Indian Creek Canal Lottery seemed to have crumbled when the manager, not able to dispose of all the tickets, found it necessary to inform those who had purchased tickets that the Lottery could not be drawn. Purchasers were promptly refunded their money and the Lottery was


was heard from no more.

Culminating the second quarter of 1825 was the union of Huntsville's two local journals. "The Alabamian" and "Alabama Republican." Their oneness gave birth to the "Advocate," a paper being more extensive and general but traded at the same terms.

The office of the "Advocate" was kept in a brick building, on Eustis Street, formerly occupied as the office of the "Alabama Republican" and nearly opposite the old Post Office.

Jeremiah Clemens Home
(Continued from page 1)

the deed, which transfers the property to Preston Yeatman in 1831 for \$3600, states that the property included "the house where Clayton Tolbert resides." In 1838, Yeatman sold the property to James Clemens, a local merchant, who had been in business in Huntsville since 1812. The sale price was listed as \$3600, the same amount Preston Yeatman had paid in 1831.

lemens retained the property until his death in 1858, when it became part of a long, drawn-out settlement of his estate.

Jeremiah Clemens, his son who was quite prominent in state and local affairs, lived here until his death in 1865.

Jeremiah Clemens was a colonel in the Mexican War, an editor of a Memphis newspaper, an author of several books, a U. S. Senator from Alabama, a leader against secession in 1861 in the state convention, a general in the Alabama Militia, and finally a member of the peace movement to stop the Civil War and to reunite the state of Alabama with the Union. Needless to say, he was not very popular with the people of Huntsville when he died in May of 1865. When the Clemens estate was finally settled in 1874, the Clemens Homestead was sold to Duncan Sherman & Company. The property then passed through several hands until it was purchased as a home by Dr. Milton C. Baldrige, a prominent physician. After his death, it was purchased by Cyrus F. Suggs in 1907. After Suggs' death, it was purchased from his widow by Charles L. Hackworth in 1920. The widow of Charles Hackworth married James A. Williams, and the property remained in the hands of the Williams family until it was recently sold to the Housing Authority. The house has been

FOR SALE

Greek Revival home built around 1840, located on Allen Street in Madison, Alabama. This single story house has 2800 square feet; two baths, four bedrooms, large central hallway, modern kitchen and sun porch. There are five visible fireplaces. A double garage with an overhead attic has been added. Some restoration of the home will be needed.

FOR FURTHER INFORMATION
CALL

Mr. Wallace Youngblood
Madison, Alabama
Phone: 772-3302

modified through the years by its various owners.



brief examination of the house does not provide any definite architectural evidence of an 1825-1835 construction date; but there are, so far, a number of items that could support a construction date of 1825-1835 with a major remodeling in 1855-1875. A more thorough examination of the framing will help to establish the construction date more firmly.

Items Supporting "Federal" Period Construction (1825-1835) and "Victorian" Remodeling (1855-1875):

1. Stone foundation wall is exposed 1 foot to 2 feet high (rough ashlar limestone). This was common in the Federal period, but not in the mid-1800's.

(Continued on page 8)

Jeremiah Clemens House
(Continued from page 7)

2. Service wing roof has been raised about 2 feet from the original roof line, apparently at the time of the major remodeling, to harmonize visually with the remodeled main house.
3. Service wing has one "Adamesque" mantle, which was typical of the Federal period. This refined mantle would not have been in a servant's room, but it was common to shift mantles around at the time of a remodeling. Two of the mantles in the main house (parlor and dining room) are cast iron, which would mean they were probably installed after the 1850's.
4. All fireplaces were built to burn wood and were later made smaller to burn coal. The present Victorian mantles appear too narrow to fit the "wood" firebox openings.
5. Second-floor flooring is 6" to 8" wide pine, which was standard in the 1820's but was probably unobtainable that wide after the 1850's.
6. Two "back bedroom" doors are in a beaded-edge, six-panel design, which was common in the 1820's and 1830's but completely atypical of the 1860's and 1870's.
7. Entry door sill is of heavy, 8" square wood, which was typical of the Federal period, but stone would be more likely in the 1870's.
8. Stone slabs at the entry porch appear to be the remnant of an

earlier, small (4' x7') stoop, which have been normal in the Federal period.



one of these is conclusive evidence of Federal period construction; but they are strong indications of the possibility, particularly when coupled with the property's history. The only element which would weigh against this is the interior positioning of the chimneys, which is atypical of the Federal but common in the Victorian period.

The Jeremiah Clemens house, as it stands is a fine example of mid-nineteenth-century architecture. Even if it is proved that it is a remodeled period residence, it would be historically proper to restore it in its present form for several reasons:

1. Most of the Federal details, mantles, etc. are gone.
2. Most of the mid-1800 details are still there.
3. Genuine mid-1800 details and materials are preferable to speculative, re-created, early 1800 details.
4. While many of us are not yet able to see the beauty that is in Victorian architecture, it is nevertheless there; and in a few more years, at most it will become evident to all.

Every period of architecture is held in low esteem by the following several generations. In the 1800's, for example, Federal style buildings were generally considered to be plain, boxy, and ugly. This is a fine house and should not be lost.

(Continued on page 9)

Jeremiah Clemens House
(Continued from page 8)



Technically, the house appears to be in good condition. It is in better condition than was the Lowery house on Adams prior to the restoration. Based on two similar restorations, the Jerry Stapp law office and the Public Systems Building (Bill King), the restoration could be accomplished for 3/4 to equal the cost of equivalent technical quality but otherwise "plain box contemporary" new office space with low ceilings, etc.

Thus, the opportunity exists to restore this historic residence for distinctive offices at somewhat less cost than a "standard" new building both of the

above-mentioned projects were done for about 3/4 "standard" new costs. Therefore, it also makes sense to consider the restoration from a purely economic standpoint.

The building will add flavor to the city. be a good public-relations tool for Huntsville Utilities, and may be cheaper to do than new construction.

*The historical account of the Jeremiah Clemens home was written by Dr. Frances Roberts.

*The architectural commentary was written by Harvie P. Jones.

*Illustrated by Trice Hinds.

Products For The Old House

PRE-1840 ANTIQUE HARDWARE

Ruth and Robert Adamsky are a couple of old-house buffs whose passion for authentic restoration has led them into their own business: Dealing in antique house fittings of pre-1840 vintage. They usually have in stock such items as H and H-L hinges, latches (both brass and iron), strap hinges, box locks, boot scrapers, hasps, iron hooks, fireplace cranes, pintels, pot hooks and knockers. They do not carry large architectural hardware such as iron fences, nor

furniture hardware. Typical prices are \$12 for a 6-8" Norfolk latch to \$65-125 for a box lock.

Although they specialize in New England hardware, they do a mail order business with all parts of the country. They welcome inquiries. Write to: Ruth and Robert Adamsky, 244 S. Main Street, Andover, Mass. 01810. Tel: (617) 475-4953.

Have any Experiences to share with other readers? Send your ideas and hints to:
The Editor, Historic Huntsville Quarterly
412 Zandale Dr. S. W., Huntsville, Ala.
35801.

ANNOUNCEMENTS

There will be a BOARD OF DIRECTORS MEETING of the Historic Huntsville Foundation on Sunday, July 13, 1975, at 2:00 P.M., at a place to be announced at a later date.



FROM:

The Historic Huntsville Foundation, Inc.
P. O. Box 2008
Huntsville, Alabama 35804

