

Two Dollars



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THE HISTORIC HUNTSVILLE
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COVER:

Drawing of Wills-Taylor School by Louise Butler Marsh. Mrs. Marsh was a member of the high school Class of 1926 of Wills-Taylor School and continued her studies at Ward-Belmont and Newcomb College of Tulane University. She has won awards for her paintings in watercolor and as an art educator, and was Art Supervisor of the Huntsville City Schools when she retired. Her 1926 Class Prophecy stated: "We will surely hear of her as a successful artist."

PHOTOGRAPHS AND ILLUSTRATIONS:

Louise Butler Marsh: Cover.

Mary Sue Collier Emfinger, "The Montesanon 1925" : pp. 7, 9.

Sophye Lowe Young, "The Montesanon 1926" : pp. 2, 4, 8, 11.

Huntsville Public Library, Rane Pruitt: pp. 5, 6, 10, 12.

Dr. F. Calame Sammons: pp. 15, 17, 19, 20, 21 top left, 22 top, 32.

Micky Maroney: pp. 18; 21 top right, bottom left, bottom right; 22 bottom.

Harvie Jones, FAIA: pp. 24 - 31.

Lee Harless: pp. 34 - 40.

Prominent Private Schools - 1908 to 1929

(Including Butler and Wills-Taylor)

by Joberta Wasson

BUTLER TRAINING SCHOOL

One of Huntsville's finest private schools owed its beginning to a fracas among the public school officials. In 1907 Huntsville had two school boards appointed by rival factions and working at cross purposes. High school principal Professor Samuel Riley Butler resigned in disgust. A month or so later, one J. E. Conder, principal and owner of a small private school on Franklin Street, abruptly departed from Huntsville, leaving behind a stack of unpaid bills and 128 students. Professor Butler was urged to take over the school. He declined, but the following September, in 1908, Butler Training School opened its doors in that same building, the Todd Building at the corner of Franklin and Gates Streets. The school was solely the property of Professor Butler. It offered all grades, primary through high school, was non-denominational and co-educational.

One year later the school moved to Professor Butler's newly constructed building on the tree-shaded grounds of what is now the southwest corner of Andrew Jackson Way and Wells Avenue. Built of brick and concrete, two stories high with a bell tower, it was considered the most magnificent school building the town had ever seen. There were seven classrooms. The assembly hall, on the second floor, was made light and airy with large windows. The building's unique heating system boasted two furnaces, one for moderate weather, the other for extreme cold. A ventilation system changed the air in all rooms every seven to eleven minutes.

For the next twenty years there was always a private school headquartered in this building, though not always with the same headmaster.

The school soon achieved a well-deserved reputation



Designed by Huntsville architect Edgar L. Love and built as Butler Training School in 1908, this building housed five prominent private schools before becoming part of the Huntsville city school system in 1929. Located in the block bounded by Eustis and Wells Avenues, White Street, and the present (later) Andrew Jackson Way, the building was torn down in 1962.

for excellence. Professor Butler was both a scholar and an outstanding administrator. Portly and authoritative in his invariable frock coat, he maintained perfect discipline.

Of course, where there are children there is mischief, Butler School being no exception. One Halloween a group of boys tried to play a prank on their professor. They decided to steal his buggy and hoist it up on top of the school building.

Since he lived across from the school, they were confident they could succeed. They crept into his stable after dark, but when they reached the buggy they found it occupied -- by Professor Butler. He had anticipated their prank. Their punishment was to walk the "bull ring" -- a circular path around a pole. In all the years the school existed, with all its different principals, the bull ring served the same purpose.



Architect's drawing of the proposed Butler Training School, signed by Edgar L. Love. Although the school as actually constructed appears quite different from the above drawing, note the similarities in the fenestration (windows), the cornice trim, the similar treatments of the entrance, and the decorative brickwork at the ground-floor level.

Butler School offered strong courses in English, History, Science, Mathematics, Latin, Greek, German, French, and Music. Nor did it neglect athletics. There was already a football team in 1910.

A local newspaper, the **Weekly Democrat**, enthused, "It seems indeed absurd for parents to send their young sons and daughters off to college with a school like the Butler School in their midst." (June 7, 1911.)

Unfortunately, perhaps, for the school, the professor held another position. He was Madison County's Superintendent of Schools. For sev-

eral years, he juggled the two jobs successfully but found this increasingly onerous as the county grew. In 1913 he sold or leased the school to his language teacher, James Goodrich.

THE GOODRICH SCHOOL

Mr. Goodrich, a fine Latin and Shakespearean scholar, maintained the school's reputation for academic excellence and good discipline. He was a stern man but with a saving sense of humor.

"We were scared to death of him, but we adored him," an ex-student declared. She went on to tell how, as a



1909 Class Picture, Butler Training School. (This information was noted on the back of the photograph; no identification of individuals was given.)

saucy co-ed, she slipped away from school one day to joy-ride with a boyfriend on his motorcycle. She was seen and reported to Mr. Goodrich. For punishment he assigned her to write a long paper entitled "Why I Must Not Skip School," and to read it at an assembly attended by the entire student body. The experience gave her enough courage to voluntarily repeat the performance, this time with a parody on his beloved Shakespeare: "We come here not to bury Goodrich but to praise him." He pretended to be unimpressed, but she learned long afterward that he had secretly asked for a copy of her opus.

The Goodrich school was quite small. For instance, a May 1914 newspaper, **The Weekly Times**, describes an elaborate commencement pro-

gram with a music recital, several debates, and a young ladies' social -- but there were only five graduates. Perhaps it is not surprising that he relinquished the school in 1918 to move to Fayetteville, Tennessee. Professor Reuben P. Wills purchased the school.

WILLS AND WILLS-TAYLOR SCHOOLS

As Wills and Wills-Taylor, the school reached its apex. The enterprising Mr. Wills, with a number of patrons, organized a stock company. This additional financial foundation enabled the school to grow rapidly.

In 1919 a boys' dormitory was constructed on the east side of the campus. Still standing, it is now a dwelling, the third house



TOP: The boys' dormitory, built in 1919, was later used as a science laboratory. Now a dwelling, it is the third house east of Andrew Jackson Way on the south side of Wells Avenue.
BOTTOM: The president's home on the north side of Eustis Avenue, also east of Andrew Jackson Way, is situated directly behind the boys' dormitory and is still used as a dwelling.





Taliaferro Hall was constructed around 1919 as a two-room building for the primary grades; the rear wing was added later. Still standing, it is located at the southeast corner of White Street and Wells Avenue. Note Butler Hall in left background.

east of Andrew Jackson Way on the south side of Wells Avenue. The Principal's home, situated directly behind it (on Eustis Avenue), is likewise still there. Added on the west side of the campus was a primary building, Taliaferro Hall, a two-room, one-story brick bungalow. It is now headquarters for Fantasy Playhouse.

In 1920 Mr. Edward Ira Taylor entered into a partnership with Mr. Wills, and the school became known as the Wills-Taylor School.

Serving on the first Board of Directors were Samuel O. Holmes, E. I. Taylor, Judge Paul Speake, Judge

Thomas Jones, William F. Esslinger, Dr. Inzer B. Wyatt, Almon Milton Booth, James H. Pride, and R. P. Wills.

The school continued to be co-educational with all grades. The curriculum remained much the same as before. Mr. Wills stressed literature, with special emphasis on all the nineteenth century romantic poets except one -- Lord Byron. Impressionable youths must not be sullied by Byron's shockingly immoral attitude, according to Mr. Wills. So the textbook selections from his works were omitted. No doubt, Byron's banned works became more familiar to the youths than all the rest -- but in their leisure time.

The professors fostered a competitive spirit. The school body was divided into four groups which competed against one another. Every Friday afternoon there were debates, declamations, and spelling bees.

Mr. Wills boasted the school would provide a thorough education, correct faults in character, and develop any special talents students might have.

The school's music department was outstanding, with Miss Bessie Pettus as director. Music was taught in every grade and could even be taken as a major in high school. One pupil, Orville Lee Erwin, became a nationally known organist.

Wills-Taylor's football and baseball teams won championships in the early years. A playing field had been opened between Randolph and Clinton Avenues in the 1300 block. Some form of athletics was required of all, but it was made to be a fun thing. School spirit ran high.

"Wills-Taylor was a happy school," recalls an ex-student. The harsh discipline

Three of the faculty members of the Wills-Taylor School-Huntsville College, from the yearbook "The Montesanon 1925." **TOP TO BOTTOM:** Reuben P. Wills, Headmaster; Edward Ira Taylor, Mathematics and Science professor, also Coach and Athletic Director; Albert H. Clemens, English professor and Head Coach.





Wills-Taylor professors A. B. Miles (left), Latin and French, and Dwight M. Wilhelm (right), History and Economics.

of former years no longer prevailed. There were many young teachers, among them the future Senator John Sparkman. He taught French and some other subjects. Dwight Wilhelm, the History teacher, had worked his way around the world on a freighter. Miss Dorothy Speake, the sixth grade teacher, jumped up from her desk one day in mid-term and announced, "I'm sick of teaching. Good-bye." She marched out of the classroom, never to return.

Many men and women who were children in the 1920's remember Wills-Taylor fondly. They might recall eating Hokie Pokies (ice cream bars with chocolate, vanilla, and strawberry flavors) at recess, Nannie Pierce belting out jazz on the piano at noon, Annie Wade Street debating "Against Smoking," the boys' secret cloakroom society, or Mr. Wills' foot protruding through the studyhall ceiling when he stepped off a beam in the attic.

Certainly they remember, but not fondly, Mr. Wills' invention. This was a device by which side-arm desk chairs could be clamped together in a row. Thus, the children could not walk around the chairs or shift their positions. Eventually Mr. Wills manufactured his device in his Series Desk Factory for sale to other schools and reportedly did well.

THE JUNIOR COLLEGE

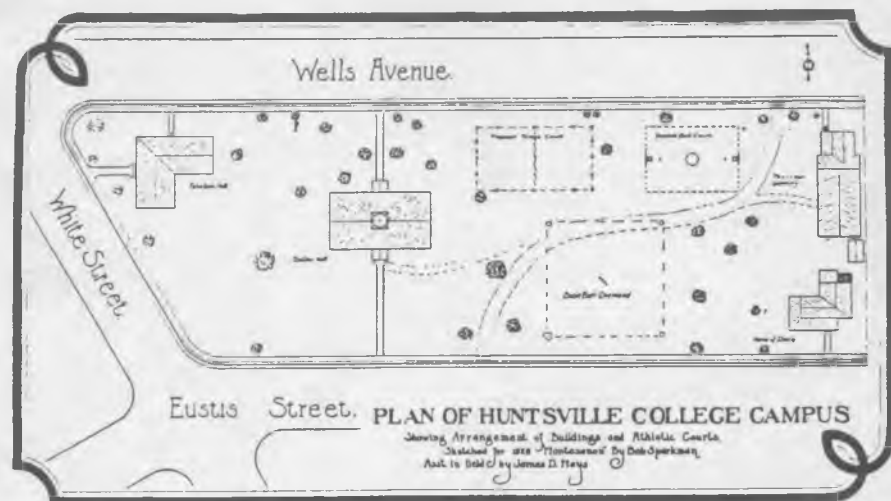
In the meantime, the school was prospering. In 1923 the Board felt sure Wills-Taylor could add a two year junior college successfully. A new stock company was organized and incorporated under the name "Huntsville College." Eighty enthusiastic citizens purchased certificates, and this new corporation replaced the

original Wills-Taylor company.

Thomas Tyler Terry, C. Edgar Baxter, E. I. Taylor, Ashford Todd, R. P. Wills, Almon Milton Booth, William Penn Dilworth, Walter M. Wellman, and Jacob E. Pierce were the first directors.

School opened under the new regime that September. The high school was now called the preparatory department. Incidentally, it ranked fifth among Alabama's twenty-seven preparatory schools. The college offered courses in mechanical drawing and accounting as well as the usual academics. It was co-educational. The music department continued to be outstanding. Athletics were given prominence; the football coach, Albert H. Clemens, had been a star

Plan of Huntsville College Campus from "The Montesanon 1926." Clockwise from top left: Taliaferro Hall, Butler Hall, proposed tennis court, basketball court, Laboratory (former boys' dormitory), home of Dean (President), baseball diamond.





Group of Wills-Taylor students and teachers circa 1920's. Handwritten list on back of picture identifies the girls as (left to right): "Nancy Pierce, Louise Butler Marsh, Annie Wade Street Hays, Ruth Elizabeth Pettus Spragins (?), Annie Beryl Fancett (?)." The others were not identified.

player at the University of Alabama, and it is interesting to note that he was an Indian. The college awarded a degree called "Associate of the Arts."

A new men's dormitory was built opposite the athletic field, but it burned only a few years later. The old dorm was turned into a science lab.

The school did well at first. In 1924 the college section introduced a unique co-operative plan, thanks to Mr. Wills' Series Desk Company. Boys who elected to co-op were divided into two groups. One boy in each section was paired with one in the other group. The two

boys would alternate working in the factory and attending class. In theory, this may sound like a fine scheme. In practice, it simply did not work. Any time one of the partners missed a session, both were in trouble.

Furthermore, the school was not accredited. Students going on to institutions of higher learning discovered that the credits they had received from Huntsville College would not be accepted.

Naturally, enrollment dropped. Debts piled up. Even the football team did poorly because Mr. Clemens could not recruit enough good players.

Mr. Wills resigned under a cloud and moved to Birmingham, leaving Mr. Taylor as acting principal in 1926. The school struggled on until 1928. Graduation festivities that year seemed quite special, with a banquet, a freshman-sophomore prom, and a music recital. But the freshmen never had their turn. This was the last year.

At a meeting held July 17, 1928, the directors resolved that the school could not be operated further without continuing great loss. The building and contents were sold to one of the professors, Dwight Wilhelm, for \$700.00 on November 8, 1928. On or about this same date, records show the property being sold at public auction to one of the school's own directors, J. E. Pierce. It is probable that this sale consisted of only the remaining portion of the property.

Sales records are not clear at this point and the description of one transaction is missing. Somehow, the school portion of the

property seems to have reverted to its original owners, possibly through some scheme fostered by Mr. Pierce, though there is no proof of this. Albeit a community leader and the editor of the **Huntsville Daily Times**, he was allegedly a scoundrel. For example, it is alleged that through legal shenanigans, he avoided paying the mortgages on his fine home and his Times Building. On the other hand, Mr. Wilhelm, by all accounts an honest, upright man, would never have taken part in any wrongdoing. The deed to his school property was filed years later, on May 22, 1932. Did he sell his property or did he lose it?

At any rate, the school was sold again "at public outcry," this time to the Huntsville public school board in June 1929.

It was used as a junior high school until 1955. Several years later the beautiful building was torn down, a sad loss.

"Dear Wills-Taylor, Alma Mater,
We come to say good-by;
With reverence for your honored name,
We leave you with a sigh."



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- Record of Auction, Huntsville College Property, Affidavit, Vol. 118, p. 434. Madison County Probate Court Records, Huntsville, Ala.
- The Wills School Certificate of Incorporation. Madison County Probate Court Records, Huntsville, Ala.
- Interviews with former students of the various schools and with friends and relatives of Professor Butler.



401 Lincoln Street

Winston-Orgain-Sammons House : The Evolution and Restoration of a Federal House

by Aida Reinbolt

The restoration of an old house is a dirty, difficult, frustrating, and expensive task. However, it is also a very satisfying one when it is completed. Dr. and Mrs. F. Calame Sammons discovered all of these facts when they undertook the restoration of the Winston-Orgain home that they purchased five years ago. Recently, as the sun shone through the many small panes of their modified Palladian style windows, it reflected off the clean white walls and highlighted the warm tones of the original heart pine

floors. Only a photographic record of conditions before and during restoration remained to portray the effort made to arrive at this stage of perfection.

This attractive two-story Federal style house with Victorian accents was bought by the Sammonses when they decided to return to the doctor's hometown to set up practice in his specialty, orthopedics. The home is situated in the Twickenham Historic District, an area in downtown Huntsville which contains many fine examples

of antebellum and Victorian architecture. For Dr. Sammons, the location had the advantage of being close to the medical district, and they were fortunate to have found the house vacant and for sale.

Built circa 1815, the Winston-Orgain house is one of the oldest homes in Alabama. According to its title history, the land on which the house is situated was originally purchased by LeRoy Pope from the United States Government in 1809. When Arthur F. Hopkins, local attorney and delegate to the Alabama Constitutional Convention, bought the land from Mr. Pope on December 2, 1819, the property, according to the deed, consisted of a half acre lot with a brick house and other buildings which had been built by a Colonel Peter Perkins. Mr. Hopkins sold the house in 1827, and between that year and 1935, the house changed owners twelve times. Mayme G. Woodard bought the house in 1935, and it remained in her family until the Sammons family bought it from her heirs (the Winstons and the Orgains). During its one hundred seventy-odd years of existence, the house has undergone extensive alterations.

An important consideration for Dr. and Mrs. Sammons in the acquisition of this antebellum home was the fact that it was habitable and could be occupied during the process of restoration. This proved to be a mixed blessing, as the photographic records reveal. Often, furniture was stacked on other

furniture as rooms had to be vacated for renovation to proceed. However, the major projects are now finally completed, and although there are still minor items to be attended to, now is the time for enjoyment and reminiscence.

Before any restoration was attempted, Dr. and Mrs. Sammons met with Harvie Jones, an architect with the Huntsville firm of Jones and Herrin. Mr. Jones, an expert in the field of historic restoration, examined the house and then made drawings of the way he believed the house had appeared in its several stages of evolution into the building acquired by the Sammons family. Tracing the outlines of a historic home is similar to solving a mystery. When the old wallpaper and plaster were removed, and the floorboards were taken up during renovation, it was very gratifying to see how very correct Mr. Jones had been in his visualization.

Several important points were ascertained. The oldest portion of the house is the north wing, which was originally a brick Federal half-house - a two story structure consisting of a room downstairs and a room upstairs. This was a typical first step in the construction of a home in the early nineteenth century. In this type building without an enclosed permanent stairhall, there was usually a temporary entry and stairway placed on one side of the structure, connecting the two floors. But in this house, restoration work revealed that there was an interior



Restoration work upstairs in the north bedroom revealed where the ceiling had been raised to the height of the newer ceiling in the Federal addition - during the process of removing old wallpaper layers, the plaster came off with the wallpaper on the later, higher area of wall, but but remained attached to the original wall.



corner staircase in the large first-floor room, instead. Also, constructed on the north side as part of the original house was a small one-story office. This smaller room is again serving its original purpose.

Several years later an addition containing two Federal style rooms, plus a central stairhall connecting the two parts, was built on the south side of the house. This was a typical method of home enlargement during this period. It is presumed that, at this point, the original stairs were removed. The ceilings in the new rooms were higher than the original ones, so the ceiling in the older upstairs bedroom was raised to standardize the

roofline with that of the addition. The second-story floor in the new portion, being higher than the floor in the older part, made the original bedroom a "sunken" room reached by two steps down from the new hall. In this sunken room there are also two steps up to a unique raised closet. This closet and another one on the opposite side of the upstairs hall are additions of the Victorian period.

The bracketed Victorian front porch was probably added at the same time the two closets were constructed. Dr. Sammons considered removing this porch, at first, in order to restore the integrity of his primarily Federal style house, but Mr.



North bedroom after restoration. Note the raised closet door and hallway door (left), both opening to the higher-level floor of the Federal addition.

Jones advised against it. There are several houses in the vicinity with similar porches, which Mr. Jones surmised may have been the work of the same artisan. These additions are now about one hundred years old and therefore deserve their place in the historical style of the area. The porch does not detract from the clean lines of the house and helps to protect the beautiful front door from the weather.

The doorway is outlined by a Roman arch faced with large limestone blocks which had been painted, as had the exterior of the brick house. Dr. and Mrs. Sammons removed the paint from the blocks, revealing the natural beauty of the stone. These limestone blocks enhance the nat-

ural wood finish of the Victorian period front door, which is hung in a Federal era doorframe and embellished with a massive brass door knocker.

After deciding on the extent of restoration, the next onerous task was finding contractors to do the work. There were not many contractors willing to take the risks involved because there are many unknowns hidden behind the layers of paper and paint in an old house. Two contractors familiar with restoration work did accept the challenge, but with an open-ended contract. Wallpaper removal was not included; therefore, Dr. and Mrs. Sammons did a major portion of the wallpaper peeling and paint scraping



Detail of limestone and brick arch surrounding the Federal doorframe of the front entrance.

themselves, not because they especially wanted to do it, but finding people to undertake the task for them was difficult and would have been costly.

When the many layers of wallpaper were removed, the plaster to which it had been adhering these many years came off with it. Dr. Sammons correctly surmised that the wallpaper was all that was holding up the plaster. Mrs. Sammons has kept some samples of the wallpaper, and it is interesting to note that the designs are very similar, all large floral patterns in shades of rose, light blue, and light green.

Without the concealing layers of plaster, the previous changes and additions were revealed on the interior

brick walls. The outline of the original corner staircase was clearly visible, as were the original doors and windows that had been boarded up or bricked in. Outlines of the original chair-rails were evident, too, downstairs and upstairs.

Removing wallpaper and plaster was dirty work, but the biggest mess came, according to Mrs. Sammons, with the opening of the sealed fireplaces. Previous occupants had burned coal, and the accumulation of soot was overwhelming. Again, the effort was rewarding when a charming arched fireplace was revealed in one of the upstairs rooms, and it has been retained in its original shape. The mantels above the fireplaces were restored when possible, copied, or re-



ABOVE: In the north room on the first floor, the outline is clearly visible of the original corner staircase and, under it, the original doorway to the office. Chair rail outlines also are visible.

OPPOSITE, TOP LEFT: In the center hall of the Federal addition, the original exterior doorway (left) and window (behind stepladder) are visible to the left of staircase. They were later filled in with lath and plaster. (In solid brick construction, plaster is laid directly on the brick.)

OPPOSITE, TOP RIGHT: The center hall as it appears after restoration.

OPPOSITE, BOTTOM LEFT: The arched fireplace, which had been sealed up, after restoration.

OPPOSITE, BOTTOM RIGHT: Detail of Federal mantel in the first floor south room of the Federal addition.





TOP: North room on the first floor, after restoration. The mantel is original but the arched china cabinet was probably added later. **BOTTOM:** Detail of the north room mantel. It took Dr. Sammons at least a year to refinish this beautiful mantel with its many finely carved details.



placed. One replacement mantel was found in the Historic Huntsville Foundation collection of salvaged house parts, and was beautifully restored by the Sammons themselves.

The primary objective of restoring this house has been achieved. As much of the original structure and trim as was feasible and practical to save was preserved, while making it a comfortable home with modern conveniences. As examples of the integrity Dr. and Mrs. Sammons exhibited in their preservation efforts are three items that survived renovation only because they were historically interesting. One is a small patch of wall which has been left exposed because it shows the original hewn laths plastered with red clay. Another survivor rescued from under layers of paint by Mrs. Sammons is an attractive bottle glass transom. Not especially attractive, but interesting nevertheless, is an outside ventilation grate which is now extant in an inside wall.

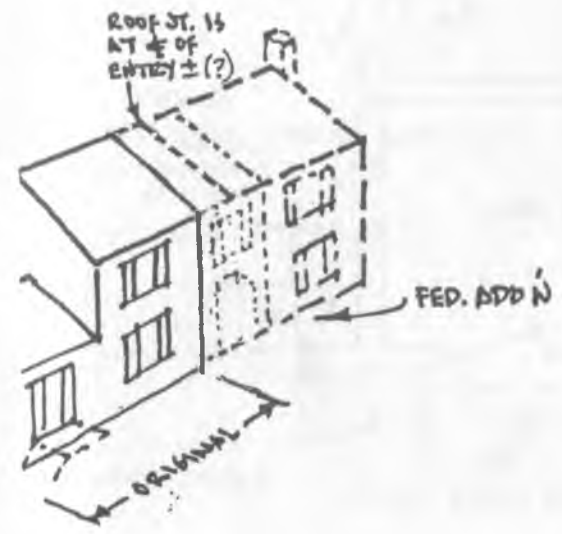
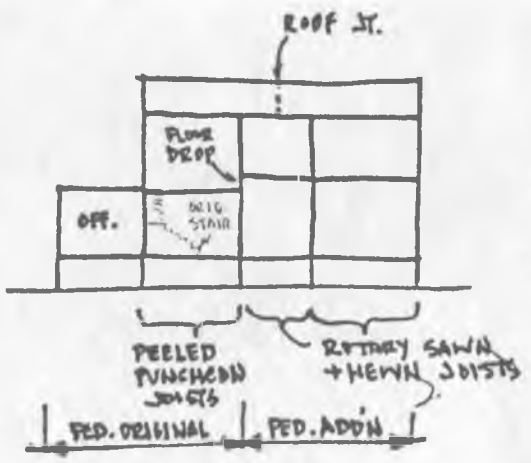
Attempts at modernization while preserving the original features led to problems. The floor of the original part of the house was laid directly upon huge peeled puncheon joists which, in turn, were laid directly on the ground. This arrangement left very little crawl-space in which to install plumbing, wiring and ductwork for heating and air-conditioning. The problem was solved by having the smallest worker available to maneuver in this limited space. Another problem occurred when the solid brick walls, twelve inches thick, had to be breeched to accommodate electrical wiring.

Nevertheless, Dr. and Mrs. Sammons have persevered and can be proud of their accomplishment. They have graciously opened their home to us and allowed their story to be told in order to encourage other preservationists to carry on, in spite of any pitfalls that may be lurking in odd places.

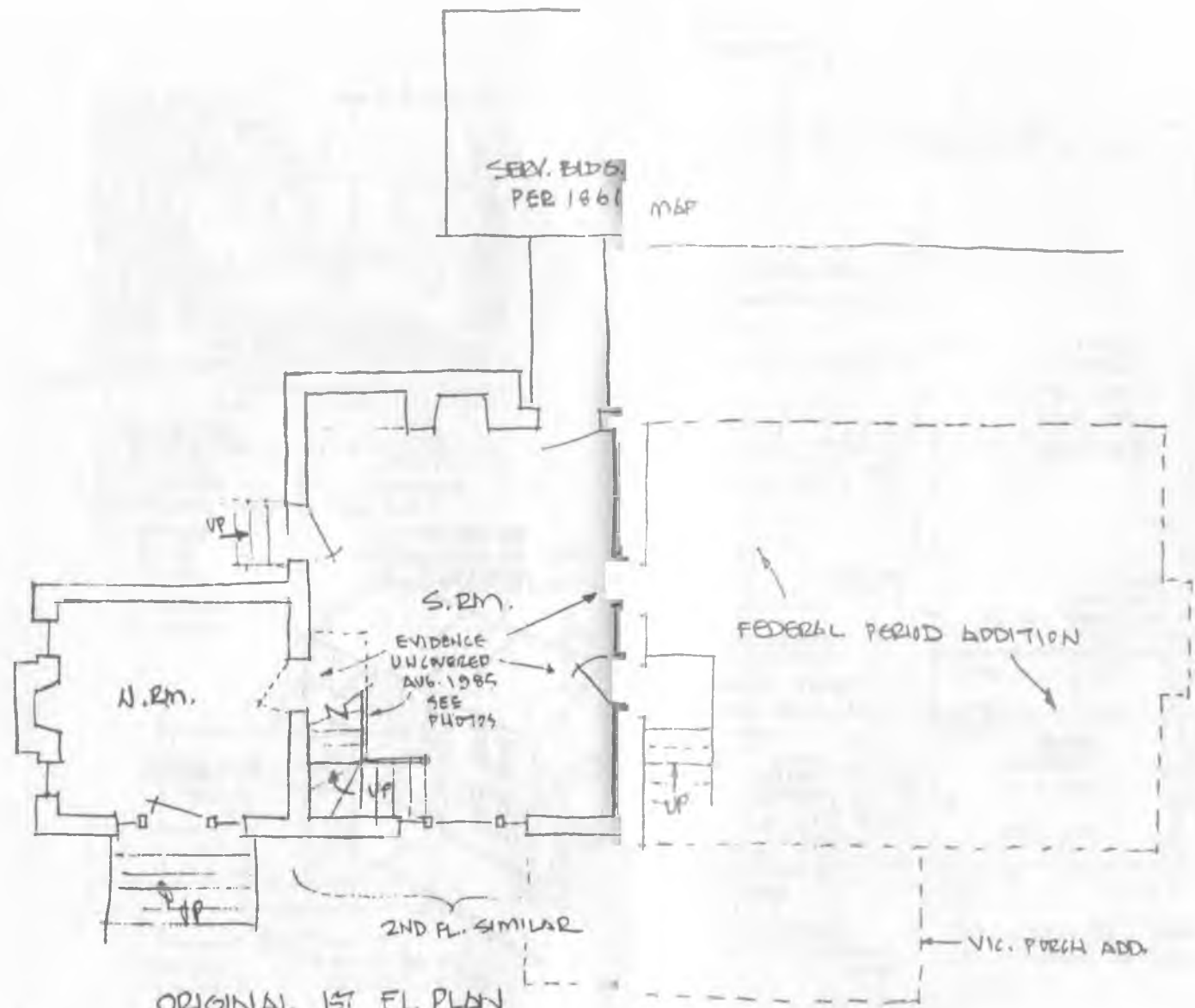




ORIGINAL HOUSE: 401 Lincoln Street
 FINISH BOND, EXPOSED STONE FNDN, PUNCHDOWN FL JOISTS
FED. ADDITION: RUNNING BOND (NO HEADERS) NO EXPOS. STONE FNDN. SAWN (+ HEWN) JOISTS

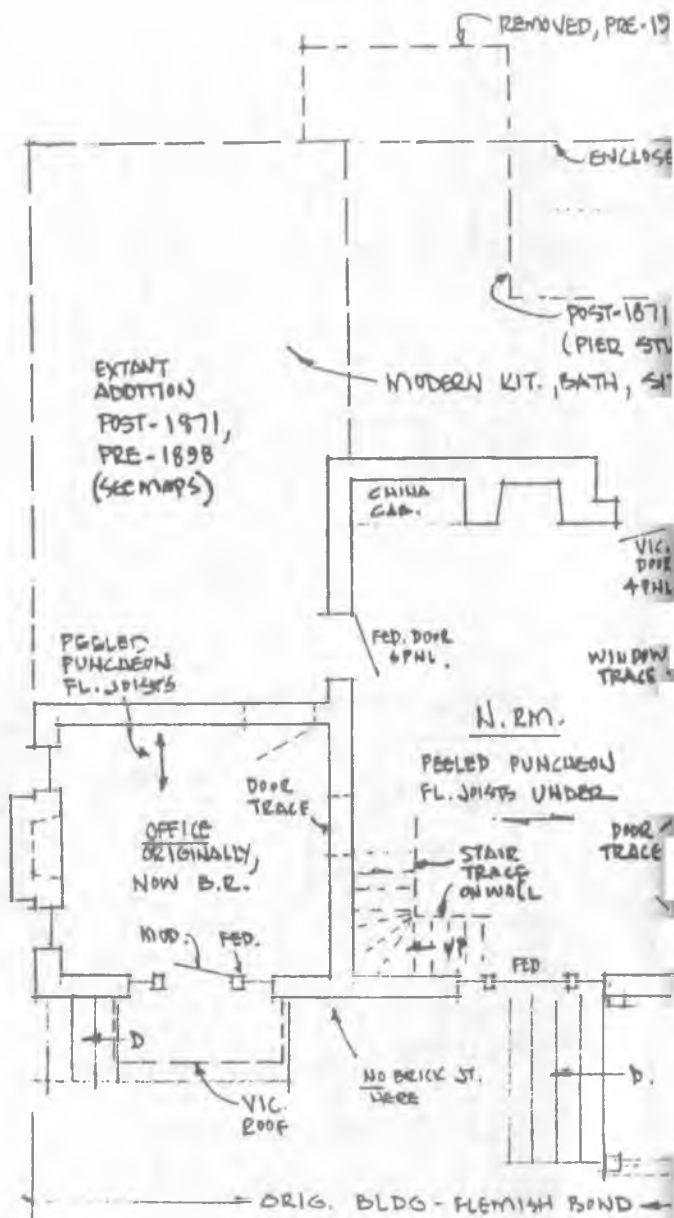


31M w. 1984
 NR Jones
 Revis. 7 Sept '05



ORIGINAL 1ST FL. PLAN

1815 WINSTON-ORGAIN HOUSE
 401 LINCOLN ST., HUNTSVILLE, AL.
 NO SCALE - APPROX. 1/8" / FT.
 7 SEPT. 1985 HP JONES, FAIA



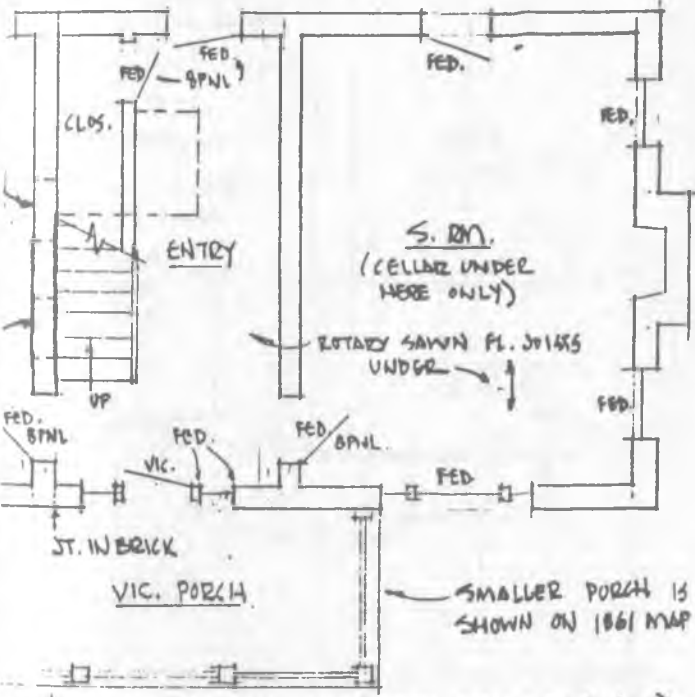
1815 WINSTON - ORIGIN LIKE
 SKETCH 1ST FL. - NO SCALE



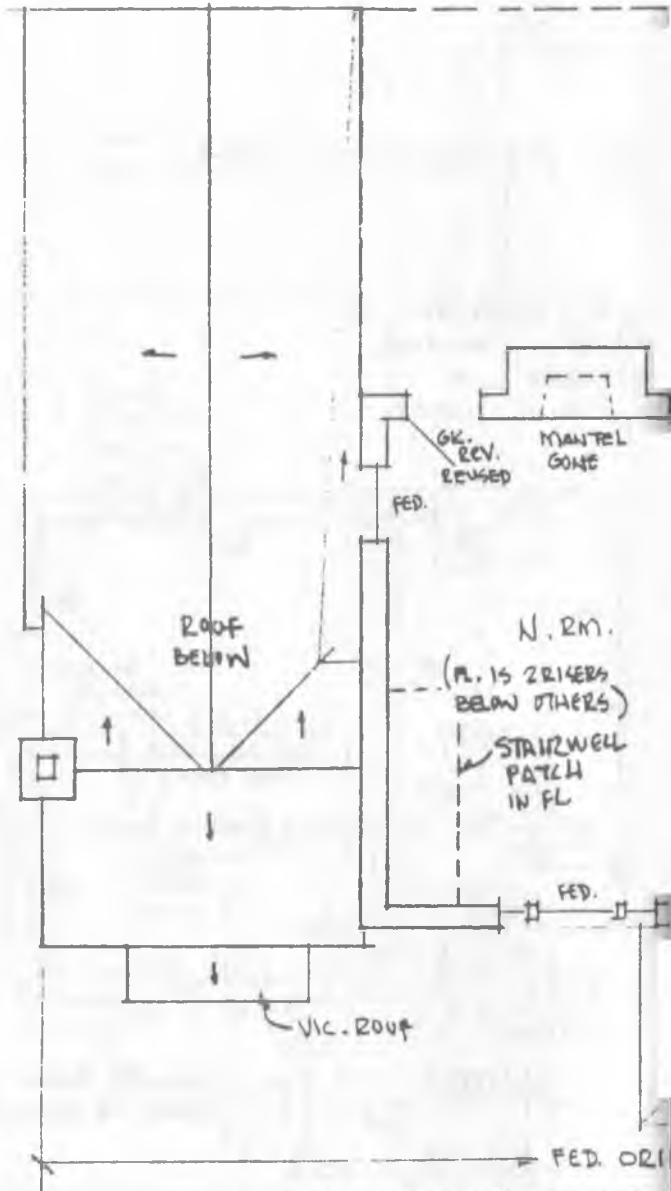
84, POST-1913

D PORCH (POST 1913) EXTANT IN 1984

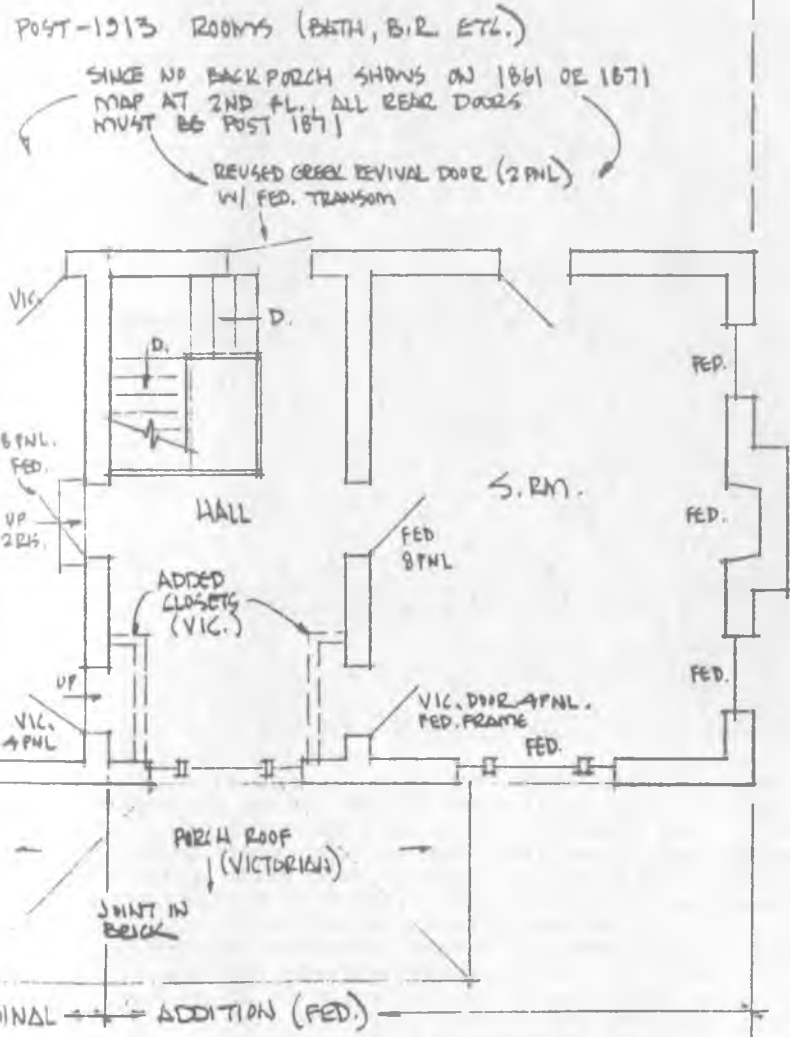
PRE-1898 PORCH EDGE
 BS STILL IN CRAWL SPACE)
 TING, STUDY



- 401 LINCOLN ST., HUNTSVILLE, AL.
 APPROX. 1/8" / FT.) 24 MAR. 1984 H.P. JONES, F.A.I.A.
 REVIS. 2 SEPT. 85 HJ



1815 WINSTON - ORIGIN
 SKETCH 2ND FL. - NO SLAB



POST-1813 ROOMS (BATH, B.R. ETC.)
 SINCE NO BACK PORCH SHOWN ON 1861 OR 1871
 MAP AT 2ND FL., ALL REAR DOORS
 MUST BE POST 1871

REUSED GREEK REVIVAL DOOR (2 PNL)
 W/ FED. TRANSOM

PARCH ROOF (VICTORIAN)
 JOINT IN BACK

FED. ORI
 ADDITION (FED)

HSE - 401 LINCOLN ST., HUNTSVILLE, AL.
 : (APPROX. 1/8" / FT.) 24 MAR. 1984 H.P. JONES, F.A.I.A.
 REVIS. 2 SEPT. 85 WJ



Large peeled puncheon* joists, found under the original part of the house, were laid directly on the ground. The thick heartpine floorboards were then laid directly on the joists. Even after one-hundred-seventy-plus years on the ground, the yellow poplar wood, which is highly resistant to insect infestation and rot, is in good condition and remains in place under the house. The more conventional joists under the Federal addition were rotary sawn and hewn.

* Puncheon - A heavy, broad piece of roughly dressed timber. Webster's New World Dictionary, Concise Ed., 1969.

The Man

Behind the Pictures - Artist Lee Harless

by Pat Woodward

[EDITOR'S NOTE: ARTIST LEE HARLESS HAS CONTRIBUTED MANY DRAWINGS OF LOCAL HISTORIC BUILDINGS TO HISTORIC HUNTSVILLE FOUNDATION FOR THE BENEFIT OF ITS VARIOUS PROJECTS. HIS ART HAS APPEARED IN THE HHF **HUNTSVILLE ENTERTAINS** COOKBOOK, IN THE 1980 CALENDAR, AND ON SEVERAL INVITATIONS TO HHF SOCIAL AND FUNDRAISING FUNCTIONS. MR. HARLESS HAS RECEIVED NUMEROUS AWARDS IN LOCAL AND STATE COMPETITION. HE HAS ALSO DONE WORK IN SAVANNAH, GEORGIA AND FOR OTHER HUNTSVILLE ORGANIZATIONS.]

Having grown up in the shadows of the Twickenham District, Lee Harless has always been near the wonderful old homes of Huntsville. As a small boy attending East Clinton School, he would take shortcuts through the yards of those wonderful homes and be amazed at their beauty.

Several years later he would find himself staring out the window of the old Huntsville High School (on Randolph Avenue) during study hall and admire the uniqueness of the older homes. And he remembered what he saw, each and every detail.

"I love Huntsville now and have always loved it. When I grew up, it was a small town, and I loved to go downtown on Saturday because it was like New York City.

The cars would be lined up for blocks with people bringing their goods to town to sell or trade on the square." These were the first words spoken by Lee Harless during a recent rainy afternoon interview.

As a self-taught artist, Lee is well known in the Huntsville community. Look through the pages of the **Huntsville Entertains** cookbook at the drawings of the old homes of Huntsville and you will see some of his illustrations. When he first had the opportunity to observe the work of Albert Lane, his first thoughts were "Gee, I would love to do something like that because no one has taken the time to do that before." Seeing the work of Albert Lane inspired him, and we now have the



"The Cedars" - Pulaski Pike - Built early 1800's. (Calendar)

pleasure of observing the work of Lee Harless.

When asked who is responsible for his artistic training, he is quick to answer with the name of Mable Metcalf. "She was the only art teacher in the school system at the time, and she encouraged me to draw." He would later minor in art at what is now the University of North Alabama, where Hilda Mitchell taught him the basics and further encouraged him. Although his major was in history, Lee has continued with his art. He has been commissioned to paint many of the older homes in Huntsville. He also loves to paint the native natural beauty of this area. "There are many

places you can go and see beautiful wildflowers, birds, and trees. But these places are vanishing right before our eyes, and we must enjoy them while we can. Huntsville is growing so fast." He went on to tell about some of his favorite places to visit nature here in North Alabama. Wheeler Wildlife Refuge (not the civilized part) and the foot of Monte Sano Mountain were just two of his favorites.

Lee owns and operates the Gift Linen Mart at Madison Square Mall. He is married to Carol Anderson Harless and they live on Locust Street, at the edge of the Twickenham District.



Erskine House 1918

Erskine House - 527 Franklin Street - Built 1818. (Notecard)



Shepherd House - 505 Holmes Avenue - Built circa 1828.
(Calendar)



Clay House - 513 Eustis Avenue - Built circa 1830. (Cookbook)



Hollowell House - 601 Franklin Street - Built circa 1835.
(Calendar)



Smith House - 704 Adams Street - Built circa 1854. (Calendar)



Bibb House - 300 Williams Avenue - Built circa 1836.
(Notecard)



Abingdon Place - Meridian Street near Lincoln Mills - Built circa 1880's; torn down 1969. (Cookbook)



Pleasance House - 127 Walker Street - Built 1889. (Calendar)



Halsey House 1894

Halsey House - 308 Eustis Avenue - Built 1894. (Notecard)



Van Valkenburgh House - 501 Franklin Street - Built circa 1902. (Calendar)



Huntsville in the 1890's. (Calendar cover)

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