LOST MANSIONS OF

Mississippi

VOLUME II

MARY CAROL MILLER

LOST MANSIONS OF MISSISSIPPI

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This book is dedicated to
Mary Rose Carter,
my wise and patient companion
of a thousand back roads.

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PREFACE

In 1996, University Press of Mississippi published my first book, *Lost Mansions of Mississippi*. It chronicled fifty-nine of the state's historically and architecturally significant antebellum homes, all vanished victims of neglect, war, fire, or weather. Three years of research and dozens of forays into courthouses, libraries, archives, and private homes yielded photos and tales of those houses, some of which were well known and revered but many of which had been completely forgotten.

The impetus for that book was a faded photograph in the files of the Mississippi Department of Archives and History. The Historic Preservation Division has cabinets jammed with information on extant and nonextant buildings. Blue, green, and manila folders represent existing buildings, and red folders indicate a structure that has been lost. Unfortunately, many drawers are awash in red, a sad litany of homes and churches and courthouses and schools that didn't survive. Warren County's section is one of the largest, reflecting the rich architectural legacy of Vicksburg and environs. Tucked away in one thin file was a single photo of a decaying three-story brick mansion, its windows broken out, shutters missing, and two elaborate chimneytops crumbling. On the back of the photo, someone had noted, in pencil, "Porterfield House, Vicksburg, Mississippi." That was it. No dates, no background, no explanation of how this exceptional example of artistry and craftsmanship had come to such a precarious plight.

Queries around the office yielded no further light on this mysterious house. I delved into the archives library and contacted sources in Vicksburg, and slowly the story of "Shamrock," as Mr. Porterfield called his house, began to emerge. The photo I had found documented the last days of this elegant mansion, reduced by the 1930s to a lumber storage facility and soon to be demolished. It had survived the siege of Vicksburg, taken a direct hit from Union gunboats, evolved from a private home to a boardinghouse, and fallen on the hard times so common to the great antebellum buildings throughout Mississippi and the South.

Porterfield was just the first of these discoveries. There were literally hundreds of the dreaded "red files," each an introduction to something, somewhere, that had been carefully built, served its purpose, and then disappeared. The chaos of the Civil War was a contributing factor in many losses, but not in the numbers which I had anticipated. The classic Hollywood tale of the old home place being torched as the family looked on did happen, but not very often. Much more common themes in the destruction of these houses were simply fire and finances. Remote locations, aging electrical systems, heavily oiled

wood, and faulty fireplaces left a depressing number of the state's finest Greek Revival, Italianate, and Gothic houses as nothing more than piles of brick and ashes. The most notable example is Windsor, whose monumental columns still stand in a Claiborne County clearing, iconic symbols of the "Old South" more than a century after fire ravaged Mississippi's largest house.

Financial reverses were another bane of old homes. A family that was flush with cotton money in 1850 and poured those resources into a twenty-room showplace was often reduced to penury just a generation or two later. Half a century after they were built, these structures had evolved into white elephants: impossible to heat, exorbitantly expensive to paint, and often inconveniently located on plantation land that no longer provided jobs for anyone. Some families managed to keep the roof on and maintain a semblance of their ancestors' lost lifestyle, but others simply gave up and walked away. Waverley, the Clay County home of the Young family, was left furnished and open to the elements when the last of that family left in 1913; it would be fifty years before it was occupied again. Salisbury sits deep in the woods of Wilkinson County, void of life for more than a century. Windy Hill Manor, east of Natchez, rotted out from under the elderly ladies whose father had built it, leaving ghostly doorways that opened into thin air. The *WPA Guide to the Magnolia State*, published in 1938, is a roll call of abandoned mansions and depressing decay.

These tragic losses were the focus of *Lost Mansions of Mississippi*. It was an eye-opening project for me, and I have had the opportunity of traveling all over the state to discuss this topic at libraries, conventions, schools, and historic societies. Dozens of people have shared the stories of their own family homes and houses which were in their communities, and through their thoughtfulness and generosity, I have collected an entirely new set of "lost" houses. The intervening years have been productive, as I have had the pleasure of collaborating with my friend and photographer, Mary Rose Carter, on several books about existing homes and historic buildings, including *Written in the Bricks*, *Great Houses of Mississippi*, and *Must See Mississippi*. Researching houses which still stand and having the luxury of Mary Rose's talented camerawork left me reluctant to return to the daunting task of chasing ghosts, my term for the "lost" genre. But every time I stumbled across one of those files, deep in the closet or the archives cabinet, with just a lone photograph or a yellowed newspaper clipping, I felt an injustice was being done to these forgotten homes. When I finally compiled a list of possible inclusions, it ran to more than one hundred sites.

That list was narrowed down to twenty-seven homes, all of which are presented here. As compared to those featured in *Lost Mansions of Mississippi*, there are more examples of houses unfamiliar to the reader, as these are the less extensively documented structures from the antebellum and immediate postbellum period. Vintage photographs were harder to come by, and two of the homes, Kirkwood and the original Prospect Hill, left no visual images at all. Regardless, each of these houses was notable in its own right and is worthy of inclusion due to its architectural or historical impact.

It is my hope that the reader, whether an avid student of Mississippi's architectural history or a casual observer, will find at least a few surprises in these pages. And that may, in turn, bring to light even more of our vanished houses. Each of these homes was important and valued in its own time and place, and all are deserving of a passing salute to the families who built them and the history found within their walls.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

A book such as this can never be done in isolation. Tracing these long-lost houses requires the willingness of countless people to search through their family records or dig in their local archives, and I am grateful to each of those listed here who did just that. Electronic advances in the past fifteen years have made it much easier to share photographs and personal files without fear of irretrievable loss, but I still appreciate the trust which so many have placed in me to document their valued houses as if they were my own.

My thanks, also, to University Press of Mississippi and my editor, Craig Gill, for allowing me to do this follow-up to *Lost Mansions of Mississippi*. This is my fifth book with UPM and fourth with Craig, and I am always appreciative of his insight and guidance when it comes to producing books. It's a pleasure to work with people who share a passion for Mississippi history and care about volumes that will stand the test of time.

My friends at Turnrow Books allowed me to bounce ideas off of them, write in a civilized environment, and often just waste time and drink coffee. Jamie, Kelly, Tad, Becky, Ben, Hank, and Kenny, thank you for your Howard Street hospitality. This is the best literary space in Mississippi, and that's saying a lot.

The staff in the Historic Preservation Division of the Mississippi Department of Archives and History have been the stalwarts of every book I've ever done. Todd Sanders, Jennifer Baughn, and Ken P'Pool know the answers to most of my questions before I even ask them; if they don't know, they'll beat the bushes until they find it. I wouldn't dream of beginning my research anywhere but in their files, and I come away amazed at their diligence in documenting what's here and what's gone.

As always, my deepest thanks go to my family for their patience and understanding through the whole process. Jimmy, Emily and Philip, Jim and Allison: you're all good sports and I suspect you sometimes find these musty old houses interesting. Please keep humoring me. Special thanks to Jamie and Bruce for comic relief.

Following are the kind people who helped me with each house. I can't thank you enough.

Bellevue: Jim Lacey, Jr.
Carter-Tate House: Will Lewis, Noll Davis
Eagle's Nest: Elizabeth Melton, Nan Russell
Etania: Mimi Miller, Joan Gandy, Judy Bolton, Kathy Moody
Glenwood: Mimi Miller, Judy Bolton
Grasslawn: Libby Milner Roland, Ryan LaFontaine, Kat Bergeron

Kirkwood: Jim Lacey, Jr.
Turner Lane House: Hubert McAlexander, Bill Ferris, Ferris Minor Hall, Parker Hall, Julie Hall
Laurel Hill: Kathy Moody, Pierce Butler, Ken P'Pool
Linden: Bryan and Joy Brabston, Gordon Cotton
Llangollen: Mimi Miller, Judy Bolton
Lonewood: Dannie Weatherly, Nancy Bell, Alan Huffman
Montebello: Surget Sanders, Tucker Shields
Austin Moore House: Hubert McAlexander, Frances Buchanan
O.J.Moore House: Bootsie Weed, Brenda Fisackerley
Mount Hermon: Brenda Holloway, Roxanna Arcement
Prospect Hill: Hobbs Freeman, Kathy Moody, Alan Huffman
Salisbury: Keith Bush Gammon, David Smith, Ernesto Caldeira, Holmes Sturgeon
Shipp House: Will Lewis
Skipwith House: Bill Griffith
Stephenson-McAlexander House: Hubert McAlexander
Three Oaks: Dorothy Turk, Hardy Frankel
Tullis-Toledano Manor: David Preziosi
Valleyside: Hubert McAlexander
Colonel Thomas White House: Gail Tomlinson, Brian Hicks, Rachel West

INTRODUCTION

Mississippi is rapidly approaching the two hundredth anniversary of its statehood. That status was endowed just as the cotton gin, the steamboat, the institution of slavery, and the availability of cheap, incredibly fertile land coalesced to rocket the young state into the ranks of America's most coveted destinations. For four decades, the ringing of hammers and lingering odor of brick kilns were the hallmarks of Mississippi's success. From the crossroads of Corinth to the seaside boulevards of Biloxi, wealth was flaunted in this region by ever grander houses, beginning with such icons as Natchez's Spanish-era Concord and Laurel Hill and culminating in veritable castles like Dunleith, Windsor, and Walter Place.

The houses that are spruced up each year for pilgrimage tours in Aberdeen, Holly Springs, Vicksburg, and Natchez are just a token few of the many that were built in the years leading up to the Civil War. Most are long gone, taken down by fire or flood or having suffered an ignominious decline by neglect. They were always outnumbered by dogtrots and simple farmhouses, but almost every community had its "big house," the mansion that their most successful and ostentatious neighbor had erected when times were good.

For those homes that have disappeared, there are usually clues left behind. Some are subtle, some not so subtle. Windsor's twenty-two columns, each over thirty feet tall, still outline the boundaries of Smith Daniell's over-the-top architectural fantasy. Less imposing, but equally poignant, are the three columns remaining of Sir William Dunbar's Forest, lone sentinels overlooking a cow pasture in rural Adams County. Further south, hidden from all except those who know the area intimately, are the columns of Judge Edward McGehee's Bowling Green and the remnants of The Grove. Those five standing columns are sequestered so deeply in the woods that a casual stroller might walk right past them without realizing that there was once a fine home in this spot.

Most clues are more arcane. Brick foundations or cracked concrete steps are hidden beneath vines and layers of pine needles; a deep cistern yields up broken Havilland china or rusted remnants of a wrought-iron fence. Pecan orchards end abruptly at an unplanted field, or daffodils reappear each spring in long rows, outlining a phantom house which hasn't been seen in more than a century. A barn or corn crib with an added touch of architectural details stands isolated, far from existing houses, reminding the visitor that once there was something extraordinary nearby.

This book is filled with houses which are gone, nearly gone, or, in rare instances, being rebuilt as replicas. The oldest, Laurel Hill, was likely occupied years before the first steamboats docked at Natchez in 1811. Its site is ringed by

three existing outbuildings, arrayed like guardians over their lost nucleus. Its neighbor to the south, Salisbury, was already a home during the War of 1812. It can only be reached now with all-terrain vehicles and GPS trackers. Lonewood and Linden somehow survived the turmoil of war in Warren County; the former exists only as one remaining room and a plantation office, and the latter as bits and pieces in a rubble garden. Montebello witnessed an almost comical standoff between inept Union soldiers and an infuriated father-and-son team hidden beneath a blanket and the dining room furniture. For years, its burned-out columns stood in a Natchez clearing, but now all that marks the site of Montebello is a heavily altered kitchen building. Nothing whatever remains of Kirkwood, Mount Hermon, Eagle's Nest, or the Shipp House except their graveyards. The O. J. Moore House was rebuilt to almost identical standards after the original house burned, and Gulfport's Grasslawn will possibly be authentically re-created as it was before Hurricane Katrina obliterated it. But just down the beach, there will never be another Tullis-Toledano Manor. Its fate was sealed when a wave-borne casino barge smashed into its ancient walls, erasing almost every trace of its existence. In the inconceivable wreckage of the post-Katrina Gulf Coast, that particular loss seemed to symbolize the random cruelty of nature's force.

Most of the houses described in these pages date back to the golden era of Mississippi architecture, the decades between 1810 and 1860. A few, such as the Turner Lane House, Skipwith House, and Eagle's Nest, were built shortly after the Civil War, and they represent unusually fine examples of domestic architecture which is totally missing from many Mississippi towns that didn't recover from wartime doldrums. All of the original houses have vanished completely, leaving only faded photographs or eyewitness drawings. Two of the inclusions in this book, Prospect Hill and Kirkwood, are not visually documented in any medium, and are illustrated by old photos of existing structures or other buildings on those plantations.

Styles included here vary from the classic Mississippi Valley planter's manor, like Laurel Hill and Salisbury, to later Greek Revival homes such as Glenwood, Three Oaks, and Mount Hermon. Italianate influence is seen in Colonel Moore's Hernando mansion and Charles Dahlgren's Llangollen. Size is a variant as well, ranging from the relative simplicity of the Allen-Morgan House to the almost inconceivably spacious Eagle's Nest and Montebello. Some were always homes and only homes; others were put to alternate uses, such as the Delta Psi fraternity house and Turner Lane's State Normal School for Negroes.

The variety of these homes is boundless, and each has a distinct story to tell. Most were not as well known or as well documented as the houses in *Lost Mansions of Mississippi*, which leaves us with fewer details, floor plans, and layout descriptions. But their lack of notoriety makes these lost mansions all the more exciting to rediscover and revere.

LOST MANSIONS OF MISSISSIPPI

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Laurel Hill was one of the oldest existing houses in the Natchez region when it burned in 1967. Photo courtesy of Mississippi Department of Archives and History.

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Laurel Hill

Nothing remains of the main house at Laurel Hill, only an empty, rolling field rimmed by three dependencies, each an architectural achievement in its own right. Even the Mississippi River, which originally lured Richard Ellis to this far-flung corner of a young America, has wandered away, shifting from its eighteenth-century bed just a mile or so west of the house to a point four miles distant. When Laurel Hill burned on a dusty November afternoon in 1967, the oldest existing residential structure in the Natchez region disappeared, taking with it the remarkable legacy of seven generations.

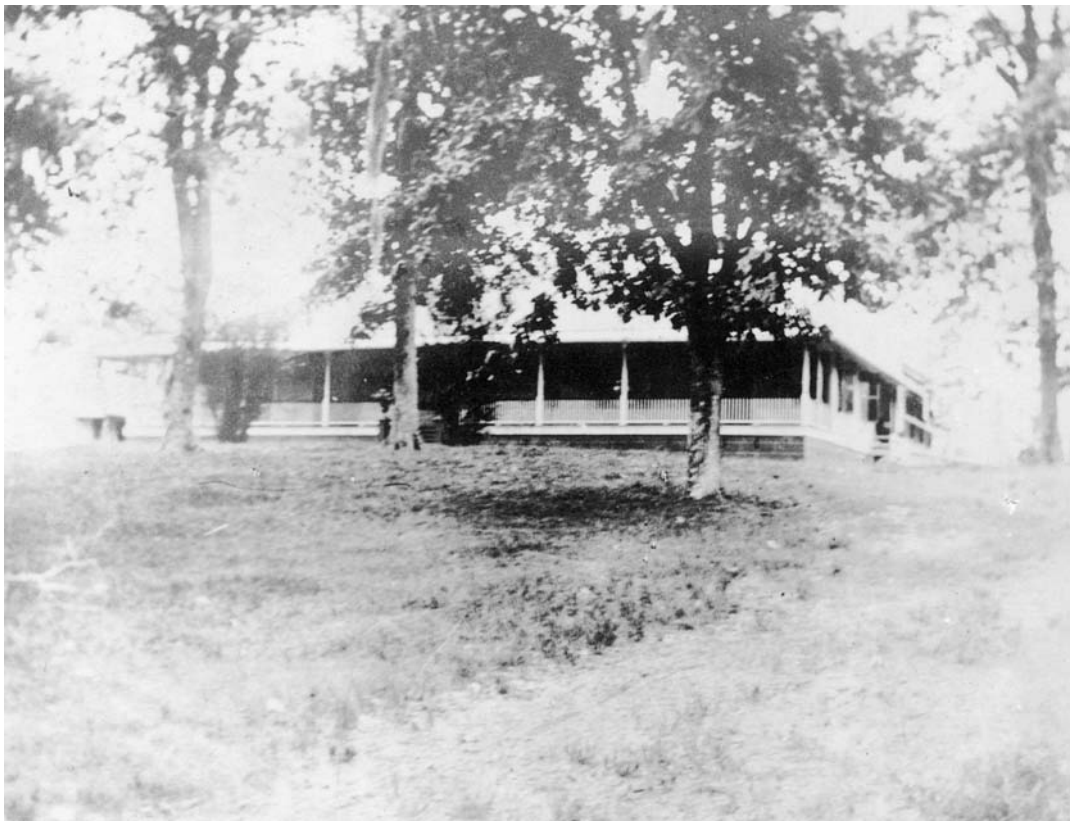
Laurel Hill's outbuildings have each been sympathetically altered to serve as modern homes. The billiard hall, wash house, slave quarters, and carriage house form a U shape around the old house site, serving as stark reminders that there should be a long, low-slung plantation house to tie them all together.

The most haunting and evocative remainder from Laurel Hill's past is St. Mary's Chapel, hidden away a quarter mile from the house site. It is probably the oldest Gothic ecclesiastical structure in Mississippi, a forgotten treasure that exudes the isolation of another century. One of Laurel Hill's last owners, Pierce Butler, described the church in 1948, more than a century after its consecration:

> I do not know who designed the building, but the builder of the Chapel was a competent, and very eccentric, carpenter and contractor, old Mr. Hardy of Natchez. It is a brick building, stucco covered, about fifty by twenty-five feet, with a Gothic spire capped with iron. The window frames and all the woodwork are beautifully made and the tall, pointed windows filled with glass of excellent quality, the one at the back over the chancel being an oriel window about four feet in diameter, of lovely stained glass. The floor is of tessellated black and white marble squares about a foot in size, and in the chancel stand white marble statues with tablets. There is an alabaster christening font, standing on a lofty pedestal, about two and a half feet in diameter. There are no pews, but a congregation of possibly one hundred might be seated in chairs according to the European custom. There were rows and rows of these comfortable wooden chairs, some of them a fine Dutch make, with rush bottoms. At the back there were two rows of wooden benches. The chancel floor, of dark wood with a heavy carved railing separating it from the nave, is raised about eighteen inches above the common level of the nave, and under the chancel is a brick vault in which the bodies of the family have been placed.[1]

The story of the chapel and Laurel Hill is an intertwined tale of perseverance and

Numerous additions to Laurel Hill left it with an enclosed courtyard, paved with flagstones. Photo courtesy of Kathy Moody.



Over nearly two centuries, Laurel Hill grew to encompass twenty-seven rooms. Photo courtesy of Mississippi Department of Archives and History.

Several outbuildings survive on the site of Laurel Hill and have been converted into private homes. Photo courtesy of Mississippi Department of Archives and History.

The oldest dependency may date back as far as the late 1700s. Photo courtesy of Mississippi Department of Archives and History.

This two-story wash house with double-tiered front galleries has been extensively restored. Photo courtesy of Mississippi Department of Archives and History.

Laurel Hill included a rare 1830s carriage house with a stepped parapet façade. Photo courtesy of Mississippi Department of Archives and History.

Another extant outbuilding at Laurel Hill is the two-story billiard house, which dates to the mid-1800s. Photo courtesy of Mississippi Department of Archives and History.

tragedy spanning more than two hundred years, stretching back to the time before this region was even a part of the United States. In the late 1700s, Richard Ellis was awarded a twenty-thousand-acre land grant from the British government. The land he initially chose was in the region that would later be Pointe Coupee Parish, Louisiana. That was a mistake, as he discovered during the first sticky, humid mosquito season near the swamps. He set out up the Mississippi River in search of a more hospitable homesite, and twenty miles below Natchez, he found it. Towering cliffs lined the east side of the river, providing a floodproof access to the water and vast acres of virgin land and timber. He brought his family and possessions north on flatboats to the site, which still bears the name Ellis Cliffs. The foundations of the first home he built there were visible at the beginning of the twentieth century. Within a few years, he had decided to move further away from the cliffs, and he chose, as his final house site, a broad field with fourteen towering magnolias. This would be the site of Laurel Hill, which began with three large rooms. Future generations would alter and enlarge that core until it was a huge hollow square around a central courtyard, encompassing twenty-seven rooms in all. Pierce Butler described it as he knew it in the mid-1940s:

The original house had no architectural pretensions but was constructed after the general fashion of many other plantation houses in this part of the

All of the dependencies were in advanced states of neglect before their renovation. Photo courtesy of Mississippi Department of Archives and History.

country: three large rooms, the central one twenty-five feet square, with galleries all the way around—north, west, south and east. The front gallery on the north side of the present house is 82 feet long and twelve feet wide. There were buildings for the servant's [*sic*] to the south and east . . . In the course of time Laurel Hill expanded in a most extraordinary fashion to meet the needs of the growing population and without regard for any artistic or architectural design . . . With the need of another room it was perfectly natural to enclose the gallery to the east and, later, the gallery to the west. To this day one can see, especially in the western end, that the rooms there were made-over galleries, for the builders did not have the skill necessary to correct the slope of the floors, which have a definite pitch in these rooms. The gallery rooms were probably added very early, for the beams under these sections of the house are still largely the old, rough timbers, some hand-hewn but mostly hand-sawed.[2]

Richard Ellis was one of the first permanent settlers in this part of what would become southwestern Mississippi, and his family connections through his descendants would become enmeshed with almost every notable family in Adams County. He and his wife had three children: Mary married Captain Benjamin Farar; Jane married Major Rapalje; Abram married Margaret Gaillard. Abram and Margaret died early, and their two daughters, Margaret and Nancy, were raised by "Aunt Farar," as they called Mary. Margaret married Stephen Duncan, the master of Auburn and one of the richest

The Laurel Hill carriage house features large arched doorways and steeply sloping rooflines. Photo courtesy of Mississippi Department of Archives and History.

gentlemen of the Natchez region. Her jealous younger sister, Nancy, scribbled a note on the wall of Laurel Hill sometime around 1810: "Sister Peggy have had Mister Hunt for a sweetheart and Mister Elliott and Mr. Simson." The childish scrawl was discovered a century later when repairs were being undertaken in the east wing of the old house. Nancy went on to marry Colonel Thomas Butler and become the mistress of the Cottage Plantation in Louisiana.

By 1812, Laurel Hill had grown from its simple origins into a comfortable plantation house, furnished with imports from New Orleans and Philadelphia. The extended family of Richard Ellis's descendants traveled widely, including trips to the Mississippi Gulf Coast. It was on one of those trips that the first of many family tragedies struck. A yellow fever epidemic swept along the coast and claimed five members of the family. Only Richard Ellis's granddaughter, Anna Farar, survived to return to Natchez. While recovering on the coast, she was tended by a young naval surgeon, Dr. William Newton Mercer. When she headed back to Adams County, Dr. Mercer followed, and they married soon afterwards.

Captain Farar, devastated at the loss of most of his family, moved to a nearby plantation and left Laurel Hill in the hands of William and Anna Farar Mercer. As Pierce Butler noted years later, the house was always a work in progress, with each generation of the family enclosing galleries and building wings. A dining room was added to the southeast corner and a bedroom wing on the southwest slope. Two more rooms on the south side formed a completed box with a spacious courtyard. Dr. Mercer paved it with

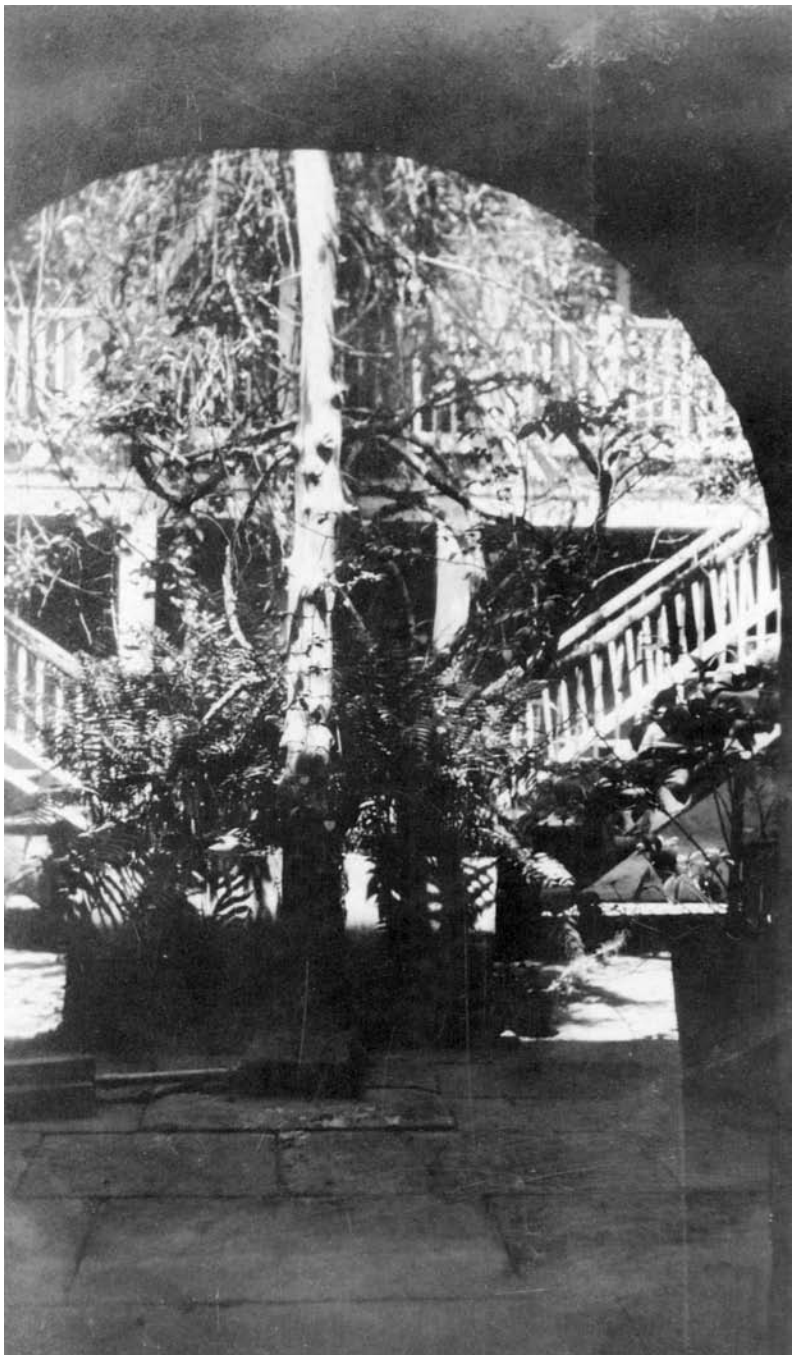
This rear view of the main house at Laurel Hill shows the double galleries which were added decades after the original home was built. Photo courtesy of Kathy Moody.

flagstones, and over the years it served as a welcoming outdoor room.

Several nearby outbuildings complemented the main house. Just west of the house was a two-story, four-bay brick dependency. It featured a gabled roof, brick belt course, and quarter-round windows in the gable ends, a detail that was rarely found in the Natchez area. This building probably dates to the late 1700s, and it is now attached to the 1835 carriage house with a stepped parapet façade, pigeon house, and arched carriage openings. On the east side of Laurel Hill was a two-story, four-bay brick wash house with double-tiered front galleries. On the south side was a smaller brick structure with a billiard room downstairs and two servants' rooms above.

Dr. Mercer may have molded Laurel Hill into its most recognizable form, but his most outstanding contribution to Mississippi's architectural history was his sponsorship of St. Mary's Episcopal Church. He hired the builder of St. Mary's Cathedral in Natchez to come down and build this tiny Gothic chapel in the woods near his house; it was to serve as a memorial to his wife's family. The quaint but elegant brick church was covered with stucco and topped with an iron spire. The National Register of Historic Places nomination captured the details of this valuable building:

St. Mary's Chapel is a stuccoed-brick church building with one-bay façade and three-bay side elevation. A single, center, cast-iron spire is inset in the ridge of the gable roof, and the buttresses are each surmounted by cast-iron crockets. A crennelated parapet once extended along all elevations of the building



This is another view of the elaborate courtyard and exterior stairs which graced the main house at Laurel Hill. Photo courtesy of Kathy Moody.

St. Mary's Chapel at Laurel Hill was consecrated in 1839 but was only active until the early 1850s. Photo courtesy of Mississippi Department of Archives and History.

but was obscured on the side elevations during earlier renovations. The façade features a one-story, enclosed entry porch with crennelated parapet, and the rear elevation features a one-story, gabled-roof vestry wing. A single, tracery, Tudor-arched window with label hood mold is located on the façade above the enclosed entry porch, and a rose window of stained glass lights the rear elevation above the one-story rear vestry. Gothic-arched window openings with label hood molds are located in the side elevations and are closed by original shutter blinds. The interior features a marble floor, raised chancel, elaborately detailed wooden chancel railing, and a molded base with two fascia. The coved ceiling and elaborate cornice molding were removed in an earlier renovation. To the rear of the chapel is a small plantation cemetery.[3]

Tennessee bishop the Right Reverend James Hervey Otey traveled down to the Natchez District to consecrate the tiny church on April 28, 1839. The first rector, Daniel H. Deacon, described his main mission as "visiting throughout the week, the servants on the estates."[4] He baptized 188 slaves in 1842 and later described his "principal and most important charge, the colored people."[5] Perhaps due to the isolation of the chapel, there was never a large or active

congregation, and Reverend Thomas Savage was probably the last rector in 1845. The diocese records no parochial activity after that time, with an 1854 church history reporting that "the parish has been for nearly five years unoccupied."[6] How much the Gothic parsonage built by Dr. Mercer was used is unknown.

Dr. Mercer, his wife, Anna, and daughter, also named Anna, divided their time between Laurel Hill, Natchez, and New Orleans. After both wife and daughter died, Mercer turned the active management of the plantation over to Wilmer Shields, an old navy friend. The doctor sealed off the portion of the mansion where his wife and daughter had their rooms, and these chambers would remain locked for nearly thirty years. Clothes were left hanging and instructions given to family members to destroy them at the time of Dr. Mercer's death. His will left the property to Wilmer Shields and Nancy Ellis Butler, his wife's nearest relative. The Butlers bought out Shields's share and would own the home for the remainder of its long existence.

The turmoil of the Civil War only tangentially touched Laurel Hill, inflicting no significant damage. Union gunboats patrolled the nearby Mississippi River, and when a local man with poor judgment fired down on one from the bluffs at Ellis Cliffs, the sailors lobbed shells back up the cliffs. Some of those shells would be uncovered near Laurel Hill more than eighty years later.

Wilmer Shields had allowed the gardens of Laurel Hill, once famed for their landscaping and orchards, to fall into disarray, and much work had to be done by Pierce Butler before he could move into the century-old house in 1875. Forty trees had to be cut down, and the billiard house had disappeared from view of the main house by the overgrowth of cane and foliage. Repairs were also needed on the house itself, and Butler rounded up an aged James Hardy, "even more crotchety than of old but still a very fine workman. The difficulty was he was so exacting and apt to be so profane when the work done did not suit him that it was difficult to keep an assistant for him."[7]

The repairs were made, and Laurel Hill was home to several more generations of the Butler family throughout the late nineteenth and twentieth centuries. The chapel, badly deteriorated from lack of use, was restored in the early 1960s, but soon afterwards the graves beneath the chancel were robbed. Fearing further vandalism, the Butlers had the crypt entrance sealed.

The chapel and three of the outbuildings remain at Laurel Hill, hidden deep in the forests of southern Adams County. Tragically, the house itself didn't survive to see its third century. The *Natchez Democrat* of November 19, 1967, carried the story:

> The twenty-seven room Butler house, conceded to be the oldest plantation house in the old Natchez district, was destroyed by fire Wednesday afternoon. Little remains standing but a chimney or two and the completely charred walls at the front of the house. Fire has been the nemesis of nearly all of the historic houses of the Natchez region. A blaze which once gains headway in the dry old timbers of an ancient house is hard to extinguish and cross ventilation, a boon for cooling during the summers, in the days before air conditioning, is always an ally to fire.
>
> Firemen were called to Laurel Hill at two o'clock in the afternoon, but due to the fact that the plantation house was situated in a rather remote section of Adams County, well away from the main highway, fire fighters were delayed in reaching the scene. When they arrived, the firemen found further difficulty, being hampered by the fact that there were no water lines. It was only by laying 1000 feet of hose to a nearby pond, that even a small stream of water could be obtained. To add to their problem, the Laurel Hill area, like the

rest of Adams County, was exceptionally dry at the time of the fire. By the time water was available, part of the roof and walls were already falling in, and fast burning timbers left little doubt as to what the fate of Laurel Hill would be. Not only was the manor house completely destroyed, but with the twenty-seven room dwelling went the furnishings—some of the oldest and finest antiques in the Natchez area, where fine antiques are almost commonplace. Also destroyed was the Butler library which would cause a bibliophile to cast longing and covetous glances at almost every one of the hundreds of volumes on the shelves.[8]

Photos following the fire show a plantation bell and several isolated walls of Laurel Hill still standing. Those were knocked down and the rubble was hauled away, leaving the cluster of outbuildings and St. Mary's Chapel as enduring reminders of a house that could never be replaced.

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Salisbury

The term "lost mansion" has many connotations. Most of the homes described in this book have vanished, with only minimal evidence, photographic or structural, that they ever existed at all. But a few remain, lost in the sense that they are uninhabitable and have long since surrendered their status as human shelter. A classic example was Windy Hill Manor, just east of Natchez, which rotted away, room by room, as its last inhabitants descended into dementia and genteel poverty. The cabinetmaker who disassembled the remnants of the house pushed its rubble into a bayou. Just a few years later, returning to the site, he could not be sure of the exact location of the house. Nature had reclaimed the spot.

Salisbury still exists, in principle, but it is very much a "lost" house. The road to this two-hundred-year-old structure has long since reverted to an overgrown path, and the vines and ferns have crept over the skeleton of the home. The walls stand and portions of the roof are intact, but after a century of abandonment the house is, as a family member described it in 1992, "uninhabitable and unrestorable." In its time, though, it was of such fine quality that an entire room was taken apart and reconstructed in Louisiana State University's Museum of Anglo-American Art. What was left behind is slowly melting back into the forest.

Wilkinson County was a wild outpost at the far western edge of the young United States when Captain Moses Hooke arrived at Fort Adams in 1805. These high ridges above the Mississippi River attracted fortune seekers and shady characters as well as those looking to carve plantations out of the untouched soil. Vice President Aaron Burr would roam this part of the country just a few years later, perhaps plotting to overthrow the nation which had cast him aside. Captain Hooke operated at the other end of the spectrum, bringing his Harvard degree, a sterling reputation, and a distinguished army career to the fort west of Woodville.

He met and married Harriet Butler, daughter of one of the area's pioneer families. Her brother, Richard Butler, was buying up vast quantities of land in south Mississippi and Louisiana, perhaps foreseeing the fortunes soon to be made in sugar, indigo, and cotton production. In 1811, the Hookes began work on Salisbury, named for the captain's hometown in Massachusetts. It would never be mistaken for one of the later elaborate Greek Revival mansions of Natchez; rather, it was a very functional one-and-a-half-story "Carolina style" planter's house with rounded columns that stretched from roof to ground level. The roof extended out over the front gallery and was pierced by one central dormer. Two interior

Salisbury dates back to the earliest territorial days of Mississippi. Photo courtesy of Keith Bush Gammon.

chimneys were seen on the gable ends, and there were tall shuttered windows and oversized doors throughout.

The Hookes had six children at Salisbury before Moses died in 1821. Harriet's brother Richard, master of Woodstock Plantation, had died the year before, and she was left with two very complicated estates to manage along with a house full of children. Within five years, she married Frederick Avery Browder of West Feliciana Parish, wisely demanding a prenuptial agreement before the wedding.

A tangled family grew even more complicated when Harriet's daughter Margaret Ann married Charles Moses Shepherd of Golden Grove Plantation in St. James Parish. So now the extended family was involved with two Mississippi plantations and one in Louisiana. Margaret Ann and Charles moved to Golden Grove. Harriet died a few years later, followed by her second husband, who may have been murdered by pirates. Two of Harriet's sons also died young, and the three properties began to be sliced and divided among the interlocking heirs. The stakes were significant, as Golden Grove was producing barrelsful of sugar and Salisbury and Woodstock were turning out quality cotton in high demand. Through a convoluted and nearly impenetrable series of deaths and marriages, all three wound up in the hands of the four surviving Hooke children, and then in the hands of Francis Henry Hooke. He lived at Salisbury while maintaining control of the others.

Francis Hooke died at age forty-seven in 1863, leaving an estate of more than four thousand acres and three hundred slaves. His will stirred up a scandal, as it provided a fifty-thousand-dollar bequest to three illegitimate mulatto daughters in New Orleans and only ten thousand dollars to his niece, Harriet Hooke Shepherd. The bulk

Captain Moses Hooke was stationed at Fort Adams and stayed to build his family's home west of Woodville. Photo courtesy of Keith Bush Gammon.

Salisbury was noted for its "Carolina style" columns, which were placed in front of the gallery and stretched from roofline to ground level. Photo courtesy of Historic American Buildings Survey/ Library of Congress.

The interiors of Salisbury were remarkably elaborate for a frontier home. Photo courtesy of Keith Bush Gammon.

of the estate passed to his nephew, Richard Butler Hooke Shepherd, who wound up owning the largest shares of Golden Grove, Salisbury, and Woodstock.

Richard B. H. Shepherd, at the time of his inheritance, was a Confederate cavalryman. He was paroled from service in May 1865 at Meridian and set out walking home to Woodville with the servant who had accompanied him throughout the war. The 1870 census lists him as living at Salisbury with his invalid brother, Abraham, as well as his sister and brother-in-law. That same year, he married Virginian Kate Berry Morson and brought her back to Salisbury, where she railed about the primitive conditions until her death. A descendant who had endured Kate Shepherd's rants recalled her as "having been a Tartar who never got over being a Richmond belle and whose annual summer departures from Salisbury to the more salubrious climes of Virginia elicited cheers, celebrations, and the day off for those left behind. She considered the rural plantation country of Mississippi as an 'abomination of desolation.'"[1]

Perhaps in an attempt to mollify this hard-to-please woman, Richard had Salisbury enlarged with a four-room addition. He died at Salisbury in 1878 at the early age of thirty-nine, leaving the unhappy Kate with three small children to raise. The interlocked family holdings had been simplified somewhat by the loss of Golden Grove Plantation to back taxes. The demise of Golden Grove is a fascinating story in itself. Twenty-five years after it passed out of the Shepherd family, it had come into the hands of Felicien Waguespack. The magnificent Greek Revival house on the property sat immediately behind an inadequate section of Mississippi River levee, which by 1902 was dangerously inadequate. Disaster was imminent.

It was the custom of the younger members of Felicien Waguespack's family, who lived in New Orleans, to take a steamboat from the Crescent City each King's Day (Epiphany, January 6) up to Golden Grove. In 1902, they arrived at mid-morning to find the place in an uproar. The government officials responsible for the Mississippi River's levees had

This parlor in Salisbury was removed and re-created in a Louisiana museum. Photo courtesy of Keith Bush Gammon.

The remains of the parlor in Salisbury are seen here, in an advanced state of deterioration which mirrors that of the entire house. Photo courtesy of Keith Bush Gammon.

just told Felicien Waguespack that the levee in front of the house was too weak to withstand the spring floods. As soon as the Holidays were over, they were going to erect another levee behind the house to prevent the river from flooding the cane fields behind it when the front levee crevassed. Over the next several months the Waguespacks removed the contents of the house and stripped it of its architectural embellishments—the gallery ironwork, pediment, "widow's walk," woodwork, and anything else salvable—storing the whole to be reused later for the construction of a new home. When the spring floods came, the front levee held, but by then the Golden Grove house had been reduced to a shell. What was left of it sat in a lake. Once everything possible had been stripped away for reuse, the front levee was blown up and what little was left of the house went "to the river."[2]

Golden Grove died a quick and dramatic death. Salisbury's demise was slower and more painful. As Golden Grove slipped away into the river, Kate Shepherd and her son, Arthur Morson Shepherd, were laboring to maintain the plantation in spite of erosion and an infestation of boll weevils. Arthur was a well-respected planter and supervisor in Wilkinson County, but when he was killed by a lightning bolt at Salisbury, the fate of the old place was sealed. Daughter Kate Berry Shepherd recalled the hard times many years later: "Our father managed all 5000 acres of Salisbury . . . As was the custom, money was borrowed each year to finance the crops and paid after the crops were sold. Father borrowed everything in his name, so when the boll weevil came [in 1910] there was no crop so he was left with the entire debt which 'cleaned us out' . . . They didn't think the pests would cross the Mighty Mississippi [River], but they did. Mother said they went out to see the crops and there wasn't any crop! $20,000 gone, and *that* was money then."[3]

To add insult to injury, the family's long-lost "black sheep" cousin, Kenner Shepherd, materialized to run Salisbury and make a play for Arthur's widow. A worried servant placed himself outside Mrs. Shepherd's bedroom door each night to keep this interloper away. He eventually took the hint and left, wandering north to Pennsylvania in search of more hospitable relatives.

Southwest Wilkinson County was not a hotbed of agricultural or educational opportunities in the early twentieth century. The Shepherd family moved to Greenville, leaving Salisbury furnished but empty of life. Gradually, the cotton fields receded into the overgrowth and the elements gnawed at the house. Photos taken eighty years after the last family members left show a sea of ferns with a sagging but proud Salisbury nearly invisible behind the foliage.

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Linden

East of Highway 61 and south of Interstate 20, a sunken road cuts through the heavily wooded hills of Warren County, carrying the traveler miles and years away from the twenty-first century. The roots of ancient oaks are at eye level, their trunks soaring up and meeting in a dense canopy that filters out all but a few rays of sunlight. The road twists and turns and leads up to a pair of brick posts and an open gate. If the timing is right, a drive through those gates carries the curious visitor into a blaze of spring color, courtesy of 750 azaleas in full flower. Beyond the azaleas is a circle of four magnolias, planted more than a century and a half ago by the same family which has endured war, occupation, soil erosion, boll weevils, and fire in its quest to hang on to this quiet, lovely corner of Mississippi. A 1990s Louisiana Creole cottage now stands where the antebellum mansion, Linden, housed them for more than a century. Linden burned in 1956, leaving only a pile of rubble, and most of the outbuildings disappeared in the subsequent decades. But evidence of their existence remains, in the form of "ruins gardens," carefully sculpted collections of bricks and mortar, chunks and pieces of melted iron, shattered crockery, and old bolts. In the midst of one is a stone marker, inscribed as follows: "Here amidst the ruins of the original Linden, we dedicate this house to the glory of God and to the memory of Capt. Bryan Willis Brabston Sr., whose great personal sacrifices kept Linden Plantation in our family. 1996."

The Brabston family can trace their ownership of Linden back to the earliest days of Warren County and a fortuitous marriage. Newet Vick, a Methodist minister from Virginia who followed his brothers to the Mississippi territory in its prestatehood years, built a small church at Open Woods, near the Mississippi River bluff village of Walnut Hills. Land speculation seemed an easier path through this life, if not the next, and Vick began accumulating large tracts of land both along the river and further inland. He died of yellow fever before his dreams of a town could be implemented, and it would be up to his thirteen children and their spouses to develop Vicksburg and Warren County.

John Wesley Vick was the second of Reverend Vick's offspring, and he chose the eleven-hundred-acre swath of forest and rolling pastureland that would come to be known as Linden Plantation. His marriage to Ann Marie Brabston of Washington, Mississippi, ended tragically with her death in childbirth. Vick moved back to the growing community of Vicksburg, where he built a notable house, a two-story gabled mansion with double galleries. He developed an improved cottonseed and owned several of the earliest Delta plantations, including Anguilla.

Linden Plantation, which may have already included the house that would be known by that

Linden Plantation burned in 1956, but much of its rubble has been incorporated into the gardens of a newer home on the site. Photo courtesy of Bryan and Joy Brabston.

name, passed into the possession of Ann Marie Brabston Vick's brother, James, and his wife, Roche, around 1840. Their home was similar to the one John Wesley Vick enjoyed in Vicksburg, a two-story frame structure with upper and lower galleries on both the east and west façades. It was described a century later by Vicksburg historian Eva Davis:

> It is built of frame and plaster construction inside and out and is painted a light tan outside. Much of the plaster is still intact after one hundred and ten years. The plaster of paris ornaments in the ceilings of the first floor are still unmarred by time. Two wide verandas, upstairs and down, extend across the entire front and back of the house, supported by square wooden columns. Entering the front door a wide hall extends the full length of the house, from front to back, with rooms on either side. To the right on entering the front door, the double parlors are separated by tall folding doors and are furnished in the manner of the early Victorian period.[1]

James and Roche Brabston planted the magnolias which still shelter the home at Linden, and she transformed twelve acres of the plantation into formal English gardens and flower beds. The years before the Civil War were full of parties and neighborhood mingling from Vicksburg to the Big Black River. It all came to an abrupt end with Grant's march into Mississippi in 1863.

Ulysses S. Grant had been stymied for months in his attempt to take the only remaining Confederate stronghold on the Mississippi River, Vicksburg. New Orleans, Baton Rouge, Memphis, and Natchez had all fallen with little or no effort on the Union part, and only

Vicksburg prevented complete Federal domination of the river. Admiral Farragut's foray up the river in 1862 was fruitless, as was Grant's ill-fated Chickasaw Bayou expedition and his comical gunboat slog through the Delta's river and streams in early 1863. By spring 1863, thousands of Union troops were marching south through Louisiana, massing for a crossing at Bruinsburg, just below Port Gibson. Gunboats would ferry them across the river, and they would skirmish and battle their way through Port Gibson, Raymond, Jackson, and Champion Hill. As the outnumbered and discouraged Confederate troops retreated into heavily fortified Vicksburg, the outlying plantations were left to fend for themselves. The Union troops were not yet in the "slash and burn" mode that would come to be William T. Sherman's signature across the Atlantic Coast states, but they were short of supplies and turned to the Warren County and Hinds County plantations for their needs.

The tranquility at Linden was over. A northern schoolteacher, Emilie McKinley, was tutor to many of the young people in the Mount Albans and Bovina area, including those at Linden. Census records for 1860 show five children below the age of nine in the Brabston household, and there was actually a schoolhouse on the grounds of the plantation. Miss McKinley kept a diary from May 1863 through March 1864, chronicling one of the most difficult periods ever experienced by the residents of an American community. Before the seven weeks of siege had ended, Vicksburg residents were living in caves, eating domestic animals and surrounded by scenes of unspeakable carnage. Many had fled to the countryside to the shelter of plantations such as Linden, but even that solution was rife with danger. As McKinley describes in her diary, each day brought intrusions and threats from Federal soldiers. At Linden, storehouses were raided, the cotton gin was dismantled for its lumber, the farm animals were systematically stolen, and the house itself was commandeered for the use of a Union physician, Dr. Joyceline, and his wife. The plantation schoolhouse had been turned into a field hospital, and the Brabstons, like all their neighbors, struggled along as best they could.

The July 4, 1863, entry in McKinley's diary captures the shock that echoed through Warren County that day: "Report says Vicksburg has fallen, but I cannot and will not believe it. That hateful lieutenant at Mrs. Brabston's wrote Miss Rebecca a note—'Glorious fourth! Vicksburg has fallen. What do you think of it? Where is the illustrious Johnston? Why don't he come?' We were very indignant and wrote in answer what we thought of Hooker. We hear that Pemberton had been out to Grant last evening, had agreed to surrender it [the city] and this morning at ten o'clock they are to march in."[2]

Roche Brabston's problems did not end with the "hateful lieutenant" and the surrender of Vicksburg. Two months afterwards, word came that her husband was ill in Madison, Mississippi, which was still considered Confederate territory. Traveling to retrieve him required special permission from Union officers, so this indomitable matron set out for Vicksburg:

> On Sunday Mrs. James Brabston went to Sherman's headquarters to get permission to go visit her husband and bring him home. When she reached the camp accompanied by a Dr. Joyceline whose wife had been sick at Mrs. Brabston's they found that the General had gone to town, was expected any time. She thought in the meantime she would pay a visit to Mrs. Sherman's tent. She found her with one of her children very ill with temp. Mrs. Sherman received her very coolly—did not know when the General would return. He soon after arrived . . . He came in with a very red face and coarse manner, took a drink, a preliminary. Mrs. Brabston stated her errand, that she wished to see Mr. Brabston. He said he did not believe it, that the ladies around here had told him more lies. They would pretend that they wanted medicine for

their sick families and go straight and give it to the Rebels. Said she could not go. She must make up her mind to stay on one side or the other of the river.

She remained all night. The next morning she had another interview. Gen. Sherman was rather more polite but still unwilling for her to go. Dr. Joyceline had to go [*sic*] her security in writing that she meant no harm. . . . Under the circumstances His Majesty concluded to let her go.[3]

Linden and Warren County would continue to suffer the indignities of an occupied country until the war's end. The postwar period brought such new demands as insurrection taxes($33.54), which were necessary in order for James Brabston to reclaim his property, and loyalty oaths. Roche Brabston submitted a claim to the Federal government for damages incurred during Union raids. Hers was one of twenty-two thousand such claims, totaling more than sixty million dollars, submitted to the Southern Claims Commission. This agency was created by the Reconstruction Congress to handle the onslaught of testimony and paperwork; claimants had to prove that their loyalties had always been with the U.S. and that they had indeed suffered physical losses at the hands of Federal troops. Of the thousands of claims submitted between 1871 and 1873, less than one-third were approved and only four million dollars was ever disbursed. Mrs. Brabston's claim was denied.

That denial was one of the first hard blows to land on Linden in the decades following the Civil War. James and Roche's son, William, took over management of the plantation. His death in 1889, at age thirty-two, left his widow, Agnes Willis Brabston, in charge not only of Linden but also of another Warren County plantation and one in distant Bolivar County. Agnes was a native of Raymond, educated and artistically trained at Hillman College and the Tennessee State Female College in Memphis, but she took to plantation management and pursuit of the long-denied reparations with a vengeance, while also raising five children and caring for the aging Roche. Soil erosion and the arrival of the ravenous boll weevil nullified her efforts, and by the time she died in 1943, all of the acreage of Linden Plantation was gone, leaving the Brabston heirs only a heavily mortgaged mansion.

Over the next thirteen years, the old house was unoccupied and repeatedly vandalized. Agnes and William's son, Bryan, worked as a rural mail carrier and struggled to pay off the enormous debt on the house. The formal gardens went to ruin and the twentieth century left Linden behind. When it burned in 1956, only a few pieces of furniture and some silver and glassware were recovered. The rubble was pushed into a deep cistern. One by one, the outbuildings caved in as well.

For forty years, the site of Linden was all but forgotten, except by Bryan's son and daughter-in-law, Bryan, Jr., and Joy. In 1996, seeing what no one else had been able to visualize at the end of that sunken road, they began building a new home on the footprint of the original Linden, utilizing the site but designing a more modern home which would serve their needs better than the old layout. In the process of building this house, the Brabstons uncovered mounds of debris, bits and pieces of the history which had been Linden's. Rather than have it carted away, they incorporated old skillet handles and garden tools and chunks of masonry into the flower beds and botanic gardens which now grace eight acres of the site. They have followed in the tradition of generations of Brabston family members, who have felt such a deep and immutable connection to this land that they will not give it up. The old house is gone, but the legacy of Linden has been revived and honored for generations to come.

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Lonewood

A stark black-and-white photograph of Lonewood, taken just before or during the Civil War, justifies the name of this plantation house. The massive double-galleried home is surrounded on all sides by endless cotton fields and trees, with no indication of nearby neighbors in any direction. Its placement was fortunate when the war roared into this edge of Mississippi, for Lonewood was outside of the siege lines and south of the battered city of Vicksburg.

Although it was scarred and conquered by that siege, Vicksburg recovered remarkably quickly, and by the end of the decade it had grown around Lonewood. The house's cotton fields and plantation purpose were gone, but it would shelter several remarkable individuals and families before its loss in the 1930s.

As with almost every piece of property in the region, the site of Lonewood was originally a part of the Vick empire. Reverend Newet Vick's son William held the title in 1836, and he was likely the one who sold it to the Finney family by 1848. The Finneys were carriage makers by trade, and they lived at Lonewood for thirty-one years, riding out the battles around Vicksburg without serious damage.

One of the men who would come to be most closely associated with Lonewood was swept into Warren County by those battles. Frederic Speed had signed on with the U.S. Army as a twenty-year-old Maine private in 1860; his military career would soon take him to Bull Run, Port Hudson, and battlefronts along the Gulf Coast. When the war ended in 1864, he was reassigned from Mobile to Vicksburg, where an almost forgotten chapter of that tragic conflict was developing.

As the carnage that had engulfed America finally ceased in the spring of 1865, exhausted soldiers on both sides began their long treks home. Thousands were released from abysmal prison camps, the most notorious being Georgia's Andersonville and Alabama's Cahaba compound. Many of these men were from such far-flung states as Vermont, Michigan, and Ohio, and delivering them safely back to their families was a logistical nightmare. After months or years of deprivations, many were sick and all were malnourished and unkempt. The U.S. Army's solution was to carry them west to Vicksburg and herd them into one last encampment, a makeshift tent city deemed Camp Fisk.

In his book *Sultana*, Alan Huffman summarizes the nature of Camp Fisk. "[It] was a vast, potentially dangerous holding pen . . . with unique, pressing demands made not only by the prisoners . . . but [also] by the representatives of the steamboat companies hired to transport them home."[1] A devil's compact quickly developed between the overwhelmed army

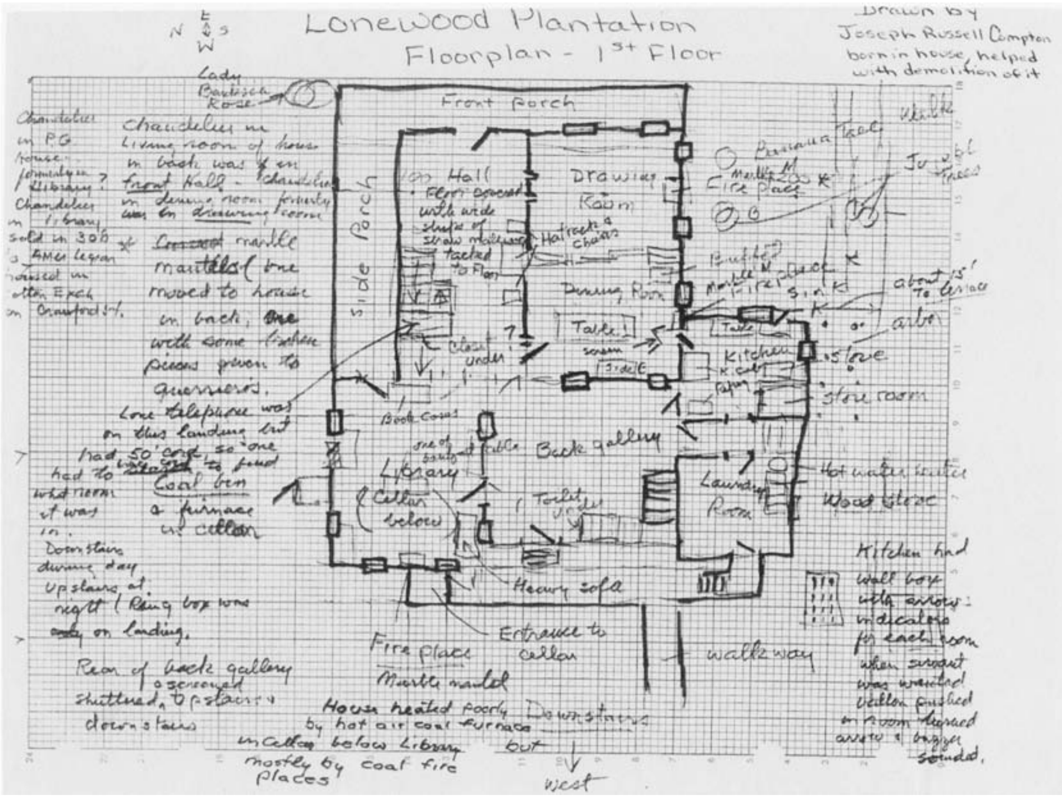
Lonewood Plantation was situated outside of the siege lines during the Battle of Vicksburg. Photo courtesy of Dannie Weatherly.

commanders and the steamboat captains lined up along Vicksburg's wharves a few miles west of Camp Fisk. Those boats were headed north and were desperate for cargo, even if that cargo was human, homesick, and in no position to argue. The army leaders were under pressure to move as many men out as quickly as possible, and the scene was set for tragedy.

Captain Frederic Speed, still just twenty-five years old, found himself nominally in charge of emptying Camp Fisk by any means possible. Unfortunately, the most readily available boat was the sternwheel *Sultana*, captained by J. Cass Mason. *Sultana* had limped into Vicksburg with 180 passengers and a leaky boiler. The boiler was hastily patched even as the regulation limiting the ship to 376 passengers was quietly ignored. Captain Mason and Captain Speed, possibly with the input of other commanders, agreed on a "price per head" of three dollars per soldier, and the wagons began rolling from Camp Fisk toward the waterfront.

Accounts vary, but there may have been as many as two thousand Union soldiers herded up the wooden gangplanks onto the *Sultana*. Huffman describes the vessel they encountered:

> The *Sultana* was not a particularly luxurious boat, but it was, under normal circumstances, commodious: Two hundred sixty feet long and forty-two feet at its widest point. A wide stairway led from the bow to the second floor deck, where a long hallway or saloon led to the staterooms. The saloon was finely appointed with glass chandeliers, elaborate woodwork, and stylish carpets and furniture. There were both a bar and a ladies' lounge. The panels of



Joseph Compton sketched out elaborate floor plans of Lonewood before its demolition. Sketch courtesy of Dannie Weatherly.

the stateroom were embellished with distinctive oil paintings, but most of the staterooms were small—about eight feet square, furnished with bunk beds and a chair, wash basin, and chamber pot, with a second door leading onto the deck, where Windsor chairs and cuspidors invited passengers to view the passing scenery.[2]

Even packed in as they were, this was inconceivable luxury to the former POWs that Frederic Speed was urging onto the boat. By the time it pulled away from Vicksburg at 1 a.m. on Tuesday, April 25, 1865, the *Sultana* was likely carrying almost twenty-six hundred crew, passengers, and soldiers on board.

They made it as far as Memphis. Forty-nine hours after their Vicksburg departure, the damaged boilers reached critical mass and exploded, hurling men into the dark, cold waters of the Mississippi. At least seventeen hundred died in the river, and another two to three hundred died within days in Memphis-area hospitals. A nation that was still coping with the unimaginable toll of war and the loss of President Lincoln demanded a scapegoat. Frederic Speed was the logical choice, and in June 1866, a military tribunal found him guilty of negligence and ordered his dishonorable discharge. He appealed and the judge advocate general reversed the decision. Speed retreated home to Maine.

Within months, he had made his way back to Vicksburg, where he shrewdly entered the lumber business and worked his way into financial stability. He also studied law and was appointed a criminal court judge. Coveted inclusion in a Masonic lodge and, ironically, marriage to a Confederate general's daughter sealed his social status. In 1879 Speed and his wife, Esther Adelle Hillyer, purchased Lonewood from the Finney family. Vicksburg had, by that time, completely surrounded the once-isolated mansion and transformed it into a suburban estate.

Frederic Speed died in 1911, having been for almost fifty years a respected and revered citizen of his adopted city. Nine years before his death, he had sold Lonewood to fellow judge Harris Dickson, a man noted more for his exuberant literary creations than his legal expertise.

"He was elected judge of the Municipal Court of Vicksburg, by the influence of a so-called reform movement about that time. While occupying this position, Judge Dickson 'hewed to the line' in his decisions, striving for real reform and reaped, as a reward for his laudable efforts—official decapitation. His judgeship was marked by a drastic tone that . . . seemed too radical to those in authority. As an author, the distinguishing feature of Mr. Dickson's career is his remarkable versatility, with voluminosity a close second."[3]

Judge Dickson churned out such turn-of-the-century potboilers as *The Black Wolf's Breed*, *The Siege of Lady Resolute*, *She That Hesitates*, and *Duke of Devil-May-Care*, none of which have stood the test of time. He was writing in the comfortable rooms of Lonewood, which was approaching its seventy-year mark. Dickson would pass the house on to the Compton family for its last thirty years, and they were the family most closely associated with the great home.

Joseph Russell Compton sketched elaborate floor plans of Lonewood, illustrating downstairs a large hall, drawing room, dining room, and library in the main building, with a kitchen and laundry room in an attached wing. His notes mention chandeliers, marble mantels, and a back gallery with shutters to block out the afternoon sun. He also describes the lone telephone, whose bell was housed on the stair landing but whose handset was only located by someone following its fifty-foot cord. The kitchen included an ingenious wall box with arrows indicating to which room a servant was being summoned. Compton noted, as well, that the house was difficult to heat, even with a "hot air coal furnace" in the cellar. Upstairs were another large hall and four or five bedrooms. Notation is made that the screened porch on the front of the house had six cots and "all children slept outside even in winter unless sick." He wrote that in the rear wall fireplace of a corner bedroom "paneled brick work on this wall showed where a cannon ball entered."[4]

Caroline Compton was born in this remarkable home in 1907. Her studies took her from Vicksburg's All Saints High School to Sweet Briar College and then to New York City, where she attended Grand Central School of Art. She returned to her Vicksburg home and spent her notable career painting local scenes, many of which are in private collections and the permanent collection of the Mississippi Museum of Art. Miss Compton also served as the WPA's state art director in its last years, 1939–1940.

Caroline's studio was in the old Lonewood library, the only part of the mansion to survive the Great Depression. Throughout Mississippi, these century-old antebellum manor houses were aging financial drains on the families that cherished them, and the added strain of the 1930s dealt a fatal blow to many. The Comptons tried valiantly to save Lonewood, but economic reality made it impossible. The marble mantels, chandeliers, and some of the staircase were removed and placed in the plantation office behind the house, where the family moved. When the house

was razed, the one-story block that contained the library remained, and Caroline created her artwork there until her death in 1987. A newspaper reporter commented on the arrangement in the 1940s:

That curving walk up the lawn from the southwest corner of Drummond and Speed has always led up to talent. Years ago it was the Longwood [*sic*] plantation house now mostly gone. Later it was to the home of Harris Dickson who has since become Vicksburg's man of letters. For a long time it was the home of Judge Frederick Speed, Federal siege-time soldier and Masonic leader. But for long successive decades now the walk has led up to the Compton home . . . Until a few years ago the spacious lawn there held a central residence—an old-time, two-storied brick house with long galleries up and down. It had originally been Longwood [*sic*] plantation house when that neighborhood had in early years been so far outside the city it was the beginning of the country. A few years ago, its owner, Mrs. Kate Russell Compton, had the ante-bellum home razed and built an apartment house closer out to Drummond Street on the southeast lawn. The Compton family moved into the plantation-office building to the rear of the original residence . . . But a small portion of the old main residence was left standing just so, on the central lawn, and it still remains. You may have glimpsed it in passing along Drummond or Speed. It is a decapitated, square remains in its original brick. A banistered step leads up from the front walk—with some of the old original banisters still there. From Drummond Street it looks very small on such a big lawn. But once inside it, you'd be surprised at the amount of room and its contents. For it is the workshop of an artist, and at the moment holds several priceless masterpieces.[5]

Members of the Compton family lived on in the plantation office until it was sold in 1987. The plantation office and library building remain, reminders of Lonewood and its memorable occupants.

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Allen-Morgan House

Charles Clark is buried under a simple obelisk atop an Indian mound in rural Bolivar County. This site on the old Doro Plantation carries no hint of his two-year term as Mississippi's governor or the tumultuous events that marked his administration. The only information carved into the grave marker are the names of Clark and his wife, along with their birthdates, place of birth, and dates of death.

One has to traverse the width of the state to find the field where Clark's gubernatorial residence stood. The empty field near Macon is one hundred and fifty miles east of the Mississippi River bend which slips by Doro Plantation. To find a connection between the Delta burial mound and the Noxubee County pasture requires the exploring of an unusual sidelight of the Civil War.

Jackson was a city in ruins in the summer of 1863. Before and after the siege of Vicksburg, Federal troops had ransacked and decimated the capital, leaving a trail of burned buildings, both public and private. Governor John J. Pettus, deferring to the advice of Confederate generals John Pemberton and Joseph Johnston, had ordered essential government officials to flee with the state papers as Ulysses Grant's men approached. The William Nichols–designed Governor's Mansion was abandoned as the chief executive and his administration alighted first in Meridian, then Enterprise, and later Columbus. Behind them, central Mississippi was falling to Federal forces, but miraculously, the Governor's Mansion and Old Capitol were not destroyed.

Still, there was no returning to Jackson at this point. Despite the chaos in a state under full attack, elections were held in 1863. Delta planter Charles Clark was elected governor and inaugurated on the steps of the Lowndes County Courthouse in Columbus. It was apparent in his speech that day that he had yet to grasp the inevitable outcome of the war.

> There may be those who delude themselves with visions of reconstructed Union and a restored Constitution. If such there be, let them awake from their dreaming. Between the South and the North there is a great gulf fixed . . . filled with bitter hatred of our enemies and the memories of our wrongs. It can be passed only with dishonor, and in reconstruction we shall reach the climax of infamy . . . Rather than such base submission, such ruin and dishonor, let the last of our young men die upon the field of battle, and when none are left to wield the blade or uphold our banner, then let our old men, our women and our children, like the remnant of the heroic Pascagoulas, when their braves were slain, join hands together, march into the sea and perish beneath its waters.[1]

Major Charles Allen built his two-story Greek Revival farmhouse outside of Macon in 1853. Photo courtesy of Mississippi Department of Archives and History.

Governor Charles Clark was in residence at the Allen home when word came that General Lee had surrendered at Appomattox. Photo courtesy of Mississippi Department of Archives and History.

Governor Clark obviously had no intention of gracefully conceding his embattled state to overwhelming Union forces. He could not safely return to Jackson, so he accepted the offer of a home from an old friend, Major Charles Allen of Macon. It was a convenient match, as Macon also had an empty girls' school available that would house the legislature. The mobile government was once again loaded into wagons and carried down to Noxubee County.

The house which temporarily became the center of power in Mississippi had been built by Major Allen in 1835. He was the surveyor for the little town of Macon and had been given the choice of lots for his efforts; rather than claiming a place in town, he chose a hilly site just east of the city limits and built this large but simple Greek Revival home there. The two-story frame structure was fronted with galleries on both levels, each with an elaborate railing. There were five bays, probably indicating the usual central hall plan with two rooms on each side of the hall upstairs and down. The house had at least two formal parlors and a music room with floral wallpaper. The main stair rose from the center hallway, but there was another, smaller stair that led from the downstairs master bedroom to the girls' room upstairs, a not uncommon arrangement in these heavily chaperoned days.

Governor Clark and his family had some personal furniture shipped over from Doro Plantation to supplement the Allens' pieces and the odds and ends that had been rescued from the Jackson mansion. The governor's office was set up in one of the parlors, and the legislature moved into Calhoun Institute, one of the most unusual and elaborate education buildings of antebellum Mississippi. This three-story frame block building with a commanding square cupola and

The Allen-Morgan House was lost to demolition in the 1970s. Photo courtesy of Mississippi Department of Archives and History.

Gothic chimneys was one of the shining architectural achievements of the antebellum era. Its success as a boarding school for young women came to a halt with the onset of the war, but it provided the ideal setting for the house of representatives, who met in its salon. The senate met in an outbuilding known as the Red House.

Governor Clark was home at the Allen House when word of Robert E. Lee's surrender at Appomattox Court House reached Mississippi. Tensions were running extremely high in Macon; just days before, state treasurer M. D. Haynes had stepped outside of the Allen house and shot himself. The state government was teetering and the Confederacy vanishing. The governor's young daughter Annie recalled the arrival of the news many years later: "Pa handed Ma a telegram to read. I could see by their faces that something dreadful had happened and I ran to the porch where the telegram was being handed around for all the family to read. Yes, it was all over. General Lee had surrendered at Appomattox! Like a thunderbolt it fell upon us. We were stunned. I remember feeling astonishment that we were not all dead."[2]

The northern commanders had known for some time that Mississippi's government was sequestered in Macon, and before long the Allen house was surrounded by hundreds of Union soldiers. As Governor Clark was placed under arrest, he addressed union general E. D. Osband with one last defiant diatribe: "General Osband, I denounce before high heaven and the civilized world this unparalleled act of tyranny and usurpation. I am the duly and constitutionally elected Governor of the State of Mississippi, and would resist, if in my power, to the last extremity the enforcement of your order. I only yield obedience because I have no power to resist."[3]

Clark was sent to Fort Pulaski, Georgia, but was released before the year's end. The state government limped back to Jackson, only to enter a prolonged period of turmoil throughout Reconstruction. Mysteriously, the Governor's Mansion furnishings that had been hauled all over the state never made their way back to Capitol Street. Whether they were destroyed, sent north by Federal soldiers as spoils of war, or accidentally shipped off to Doro Plantation remains an unsolved puzzle.

The Allen family moved back into their house late in the 1860s. Mrs. Allen sold the property to Theodore Cole in 1878. Mrs. John Morgan inherited it, and it stayed in that family until

the mid-twentieth century. Time did not treat it well, and by its final decades it was empty and forlorn. Vandals had ripped out all of the mantels and pried up floorboards, perhaps looking for the lost Confederate treasury. By 1977, demolition was the only option, and the accidental Governor's Mansion came down.

As the Allen-Morgan House was being dismantled, Charles Clark had been dead for exactly a century. In the quiet corner of Bolivar County where he is buried, no one would ever suspect that the obelisk atop the Indian mound memorializes Mississippi's most beleaguered leader.

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Bellevue

The earliest and most famous antebellum homes in Mississippi were built largely along the Mississippi River, reflecting the population centers near Natchez, Woodville, Port Gibson, and Vicksburg. But after the state capital was moved to Jackson and treaties with the Choctaw and Chickasaw tribes cleared the way for extensive land sales, newer counties developed their own architectural traditions. Holly Springs, Oxford, Aberdeen, Corinth, Columbus, and Meridian are filled with outstanding examples of Greek Revival, Italianate, and Victorian-era homes.

Madison County had an especially strong history of plantation manors. Annandale and Ingleside, built by members of the extended Johnstone family near present-day Madison, were two of the finest Italianate houses ever seen in America. Margaret Johnstone's Annandale was a three-story, forty-room house with arched galleries and heavily bracketed eaves. Nearby was her daughter's home, Ingleside, an unusual one-story Italianate with long front galleries and a central tower.

It was probably the Johnstone family who brought New York architect Jacob Larmour to Madison County. Mrs. Johnstone contracted with him to build Chapel of the Cross, an existing Gothic chapel that is considered one of the era's most outstanding ecclesiastical buildings. Larmour stayed on in central Mississippi and was responsible for such notable structures as Grace Episcopal Church in Madison, Governor McWillie's Kirkwood, and Mississippi College's Provine Chapel.

Larmour was the designer and builder of at least one other grand plantation home in Madison County. His patron was Benjamin Sherrod Ricks, a North Carolina physician who began to accumulate land in the area around 1830. County records show that Ricks would buy seventy-five to a hundred acres at a time, slowly putting together an operation that would eventually encompass almost seven thousand acres and require the work of 150 slaves.

Bellevue was the center of Benjamin Ricks's empire. Larmour's design was a two-story square frame house with galleries wrapping around three sides. A center gable jutted from the second level, and elaborate dentil molding followed both the main eave and the edge of the porch roof. Inside, the main floor featured a parlor, master bedroom, library, and dining room. Every room had full-length windows which opened out onto the verandas. Above were five bedrooms centered around a wide hallway, accessible by a grand stair in the main entrance hall or a servants' stairway off the back hall. An annex connected the kitchen and another bedroom to the main house.

Benjamin Sherrod Ricks, Jr., was born at Bellevue in 1843. He left his studies at Princeton in 1861 to return south and serve in the Twenty-eighth Mississippi Cavalry. He was elevated

Bellevue was one of several outstanding Madison County homes designed by architect Jacob Larmour. Photo courtesy of Mississippi Department of Archives and History.

to a generalship in the state militia and for the remainder of his life went by the title of "General Ricks."

After the war, he elected to strike out on his own agricultural venture in Yazoo County rather than returning to his father's plantation. Young Ricks's place, near the crossroads of Crumps, Mississippi, was a vast, eighteen-thousand-acre Delta farm that he called Belle Prairie. Ricks also built his own compress and cotton warehouses and was influential on the local levee board, a vital position in this flood-prone corner of the world.

In 1873, Benjamin Ricks, Jr., married the indomitable Fanny Jones in Geneva, Switzerland. The far-flung ceremony was an indicator of the lifestyle these two would live together for the next quarter century. They were fabulously wealthy and well traveled, but also deeply involved in local philanthropy. The Ricks House in Yazoo City was a Victorian castle on Main Street; nearby was a development of more modest homes known as Ricksville.

Following the general's death in 1899, his widow hired New York architect Abraham Zucker to design a library for Yazoo City. The Ricks Memorial Library is an altogether unique Beaux Arts gem with a striking semicircular portico. In its elegant main room, life-size portraits of Benjamin and Fanny Ricks gaze over the patrons, as they have for more than a century. The library was one of the few buildings still standing after Yazoo City's famous 1904 fire, which swept away the downtown business district and hundreds of homes. One of those lost that day was the Ricks House.

Bellevue, the mansion that Benjamin Ricks, Jr., turned his back on in favor of Yazoo County, was inherited by Vivian Quarles Ricks, who lived there until 1945. It had fallen on hard times long before that; in 1935, WPA historians had described the house as "beautiful setting and furniture within; tawdry exterior." It was torn down after the property passed out of the family in the late 1940s.

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Etania

Natchez is one of the most extensively photographed and visually documented cities in America. Its era of architectural dominance, exemplified by such famous houses as Dunleith, Stanton Hall, and Longwood, coincided with the first years of widely available photographic equipment and artists who were eager to use it. As a result, images of most of Natchez's remarkable mansions are extant, even though many of the structures themselves are long gone.

Two families are largely responsible for the extensive photographic record of antebellum and postbellum Natchez. Henry and Earl Norman, father and son, operated the premier studio in the region for almost a century. Thomas and Joan Gandy rescued and preserved their negatives and the work of other photographers, oversaw the production of prints, and then shared them with Mississippi and the world through exhibits, books, and tours. Without the work of these four individuals, much of our visual memory of Natchez and Adams County would be lost forever. One of the houses which has disappeared was Etania, home to the Norman family for many years and known now only by those images.

As the era of popular photography dawned, Natchez was reaching its peak as an architectural mecca. Melrose, Monmouth, Rosalie, Windy Hill Manor, and dozens of similar mansions lined the streets bordering the downtown district and dotted the adjacent countryside. Newly minted photographers were naturally attracted to such sites, not only because of their visual impact but because the wealthy men who built them also had money to pay for expensive pictures. Even when the subjects were people, they were often grouped together on the verandas of these homes or lined up in the yard with the house as a backdrop.

Until the late 1800s, there was no such thing as an amateur photographer in towns like Natchez. The required equipment was expensive, massive, and difficult to obtain, and the art of capturing images in the era of daguerrotypes and glass plates was tedious and time-consuming. No one knows who took the earliest photos of Natchez citizens or homes, but the first documented professional photographer there was a Colonel Bennett, who advertised his Side-Light Gallery as early as 1846. Within five years, he had competition in Gibbs and Gurney and their Sky-Light Daguerrean Portrait Gallery. Little is known about Gibbs, but brothers Marsh and Henry Gurney were well-known area photographers who stayed in business for at least thirty years. One of their specialties was "gem pictures," pocket-sized tin-backed photos that sold for twenty-five cents each. Many of the stark visages in Civil War documentaries are reproduced from such affordable mementoes.

Natchez photographer Henry Norman documented his own home, Etania, in many of his family scenes. Photo courtesy of the Thomas H. and Joan W. Gandy Photograph Collection, Louisiana and Lower Mississippi Valley Collections, Louisiana State University Libraries, Baton Rouge, Louisiana.

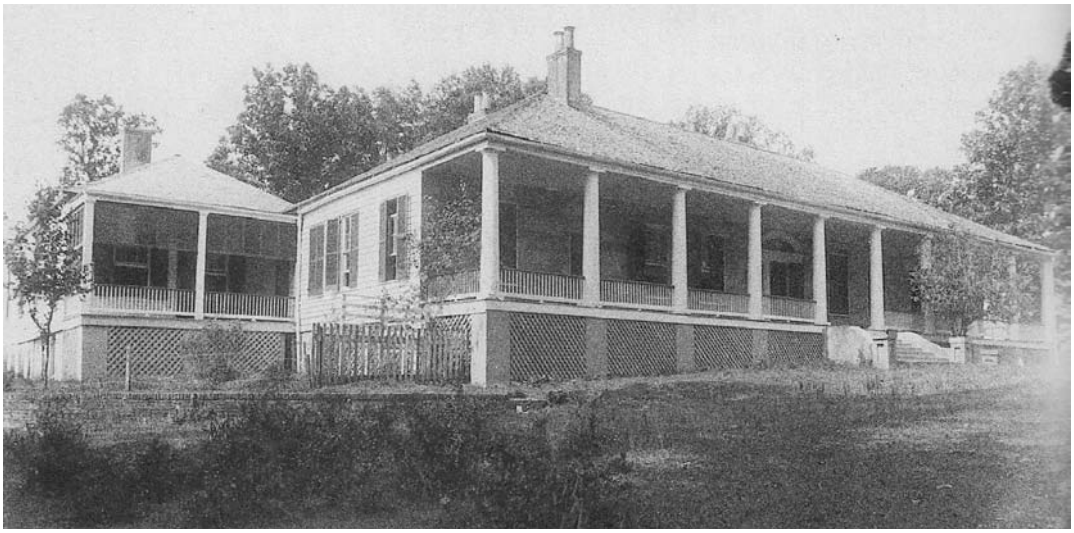
Marsh Gurney died of yellow fever in an 1858 epidemic, and Henry carried the business alone through the Civil War. He would be joined in the postwar years by an ambitious Georgia native, Henry Norman. The partnership would endure for several years before Henry Norman ventured out on his own, opening Norman Studios with his wife, Clara. Their working space was located in the 100 block of Main Street, above a bookstore, and if portraits taken over the ensuing decades are any indication, the space was crammed with Victorian bric-a-brac and background scenery. It would also seem that every soul in Natchez, black and white, rich and all but the poorest of the poor, at one time or another made his or her way up the stairs to Norman Studios for a formal portrait.

Henry wasn't confined solely to the studio. In 1880, somehow manhandling the bulky tools of his trade, he scaled the steeple of St. Mary's Cathedral and the dome of First Presbyterian Church to shoot a sweeping panorama of Natchez. The end result was a remarkable bird's-eye view of the city and surrounding estates, invaluable for its architectural details.

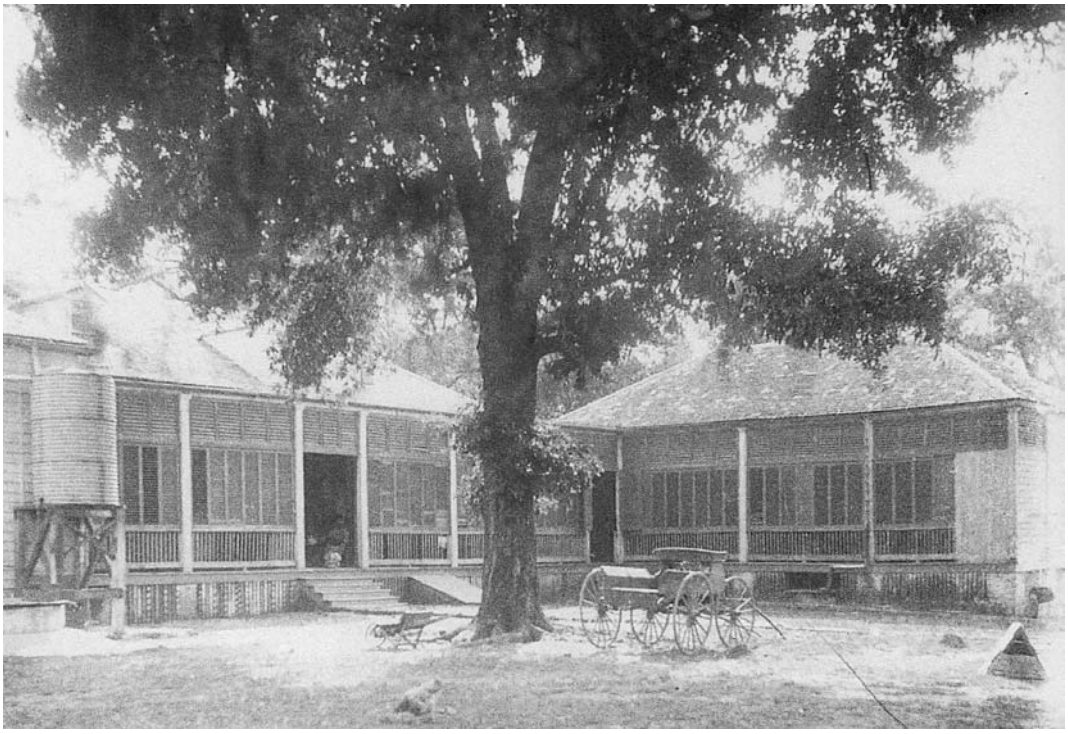
The Normans' work was widely admired, as evidenced in this anonymous contemporary's account:

> Natchez can turn out pictures, in photography, equal to those produced in galleries of the very widest reputation. A young lady glancing over an album, was much struck with a picture of the beautiful hostess, and turning to the lady, observed, "You had that taken when you were at New York, I'll wager." Withdrawing the imperial, however, to take a peep at the back, she discovered the label, "Photographed by H. C. Norman, 111 Main Street, Natchez, Miss." Mr. Norman is happily endowed with the instinct of art, as well as chemical genius. As a positionist, he has accomplished all the successes of Sarony and Gurney. His productions are not merely likenesses, but in every sense, pictures . . . A diligent art student, he keeps abreast of his wonderfully progressive art, and in India ink, crayon, water and oil, produces the most superb effects.[1]

Henry and Clara's talent and success enabled their purchase of Etania, a one-story house on the northeastern edge of Natchez, near Oakland



Etania featured an extremely long nine-bay façade on its front elevation. Photo courtesy of the Thomas H. and Joan W. Gandy Photograph Collection, Louisiana and Lower Mississippi Valley Collections, Louisiana State University Libraries, Baton Rouge, Louisiana.



Three of Henry Norman's sons who grew up at Etania went on to photography careers of their own. Photo courtesy of the Thomas H. and Joan W. Gandy Photograph Collection, Louisiana and Lower Mississippi Valley Collections, Louisiana State University Libraries, Baton Rouge, Louisiana.

and Monteigne. The original builder of Etania is unknown, but there is documentation of the house's presence before 1839. It was purchased that year by John Sanderson, who hired contractors Montgomery and Keyes to add a room at each end of the long veranda. The altered façade was an unusual nine-bay plan (window-door-window-window-door-window-window-door-window). Broad steps led up to a deep veranda, and the main doorway had a graceful Federal-style fanlight. A wing led back from the main house and created an L-shaped rear configuation. The porches on that side of the house were shaded by wooden louvers.

At Etania, the Normans raised their four children, three boys and a girl. All of the sons would follow in their father's profession. Henry, Jr., set up shop in Lafayette, Louisiana, and Burdette wound up in Baton Rouge. The youngest, Earl, stayed in Natchez and worked for his father. He inherited the studio from his parents and continued the family tradition of immortalizing the people and sights of Natchez with his wife, Mary Kate Foster. She was an artist in her own right, taking Earl's black-and-white photos and meticulously tinting them with subtle color. The Normans had no children, and the studio shut down after Earl's death in 1951.

By the time of the studio's demise, Etania had been out of the Norman family for decades. Its best days were documented in Henry Norman's Victorian-era photos, often with the entire clan posed on the front steps. Through the course of the twentieth century, it deteriorated and was finally demolished in the 1960s. The studio was gone, as were all descendants of the Norman family, but one lasting treasure remained.

In 1960, Dr. Thomas H. Gandy, then busy in his medical practice as a specialist in internal medicine, purchased from Earl Norman's widow, Mary Kate Norman, a large group of deteriorating boxes which he knew contained at least the remains of old photographic negatives. Knowing little about photography but loving history, Dr. Gandy began the slow and tedious process of sorting, cleaning, and assessing his new possessions. With each box he opened, his astonishment grew. Thousands of images of Natchez in the 19th and early 20th century remained intact. The city and its people of long ago came alive as he held the old glass plates up to the light to glimpse the content of each one. For the next 10 years, he continued the cleaning and sorting. He purchased darkroom equipment and learned how to make prints from the fragile old plates. He began to share the pictures and to get in return many identifications of otherwise unknown people, places and events.[2]

The Gandy collection eventually encompassed more than twenty thousand images, which became the nucleus of several books and award-winning worldwide exhibits. It has provided researchers and history buffs not only with images of the Normans' life at Etania, but with an irreplaceable chronicle of Natchez across two centuries.

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Glenwood

The flood of cotton money that swept Natchez up in a frenzy of mansion-building for five decades preceding the Civil War vanished as quickly as it had come. The years of Reconstruction, soil erosion, and economic doldrums took their toll on the once-grand homes, saddling many a family with a money pit that could never be sated. By 1930, these houses were marked by unpainted façades, sagging shutters, and rotting porches. Two-by-fours held up galleries that had once boasted finely turned columns, and the town as a whole seemed to have seen its last days of glory.

An atmospheric fluke and the creativity of one indomitable lady turned the sinking ship that was Natchez around. Katherine Grafton Miller, the presiding officer of the Natchez Garden Club, had lined up her members in preparation for the 1931 Mississippi State Confederation of Garden Clubs annual convention. These women and their yardmen had invested hours of time and talent in tending the azaleas and camellias that distracted visitors from the sad state of the antebellum mansions. When a late March cold front swept across the Mississippi River and froze the blossoms in their nascent stages, the garden club was facing a public relations disaster. Katherine Miller caught lightning in a bottle when she decreed that the members would spiff up their houses and throw the doors open for the conventioneers. She threatened and cajoled and finally convinced her friends that the world was just waiting to view "the Old South" through the prism of Natchez architecture. The pilgrimage began as a tentative venture, one which caught the imagination of a Depression-weary nation eager for diversion. It was a rousing success, and soon homeowners were lining up to get on the list of tour stops.

After a year of people painting and scraping and dusting, the 1932 pilgrimage was eagerly anticipated. Ancient hoopskirts were dragged out of attics, and twenty-six homeowners agreed to smile and perform for almost a week as tourists trooped through their hallways. The effort paid off, as visitors poured in from thirty-seven states, pumping fifty thousand dollars into the strained Natchez economy. Katherine Miller's dreams had succeeded beyond her wildest hopes.

But if the revitalization of Stanton Hall and Dunleith and Melrose was her dream, the other "tourist attraction" in Natchez must have been her darkest nightmare. Just four months after the 1932 pilgrimage ended, Natchez was rocked by a sensational murder, unfortunately involving four oddball members of the city's most prominent families. Lurid headlines flashed across the wire service teletypes, sending the entire country into a voyeuristic frenzy over "Goat Castle" and its dissipated owners. The proud old mansion,

Before its infamous days as "Goat Castle," Glenwood was an elegant Natchez mansion. Photo courtesy of Mississippi Department of Archives and History.

formally known as Glenwood, had descended into a parody of Natchez's proud antebellum tradition. A garden club member authored a book of Natchez sights a few years after the murder, and she sniffed at Dick Dana and Olivia Dockery's promotional efforts: "Conditions at Glenwood are not conducive to pride in the hearts of Natchez people . . . as all things are good or bad by comparison; it may not be amiss when depicting the glory of Natchez to glimpse the other side."[1]

A northern tourist was noted by the same writer to have scratched his head after a Glenwood tour, muttering, "Well, I don't know whether to cry or swear."[2]

The cause for all this consternation was the condition of Glenwood, a once-fine home built before the Civil War. In its prime, it was a two-story frame house with double galleries on the front. Slender Tuscan columns were joined by a delicate railing and rose to a parapeted roofline. Dormers and chimneys were carefully balanced, and a finely arched Federal doorway led into the main hall.

Next door to Glenwood was Glenburnie, another of the city's antebellum jewels. Dense woods separated the two properties on the south side of Natchez. Both houses were into their second century when the world's eyes turned to them in horror and fascination.

Four outrageous characters were the principal players in the transformation of Glenwood from a quiet, gracious Natchez manor into a media circus. In 1932, it was occupied by two of the most unusual personalities ever seen in a town that was not known for the sanity of its inhabitants.

The animals who roamed freely through the halls of Glenwood destroyed furniture, draperies, and hundreds of books. Photo courtesy of Mississippi Department of Archives and History.

Dick Dana was born in Natchez in 1871 while his father, Charles Backus Dana, was the rector of Trinity Episcopal Church. He graduated from Chamberlain-Hunt Academy in Port Gibson, went on to study at Vanderbilt University, and then headed for New York City and a career as a concert pianist. That dream ended when a heavy window sash crushed his hands, leaving them bent and crippled. Friends claimed that Dana's slow slide into insanity began at that point. He returned to Natchez in 1890 and moved into Glenwood, which he had inherited from his parents. Reverend and Mrs. Dana had been close friends of General Robert E. Lee, and Glenwood was filled with books and furniture which had once been owned by the Lee family.

Octavia Dockery's path to Glenwood was more convoluted. The great-granddaughter of

Thousands of curious sightseers paid to tour the decrepit conditions at Glenwood. Photo courtesy of Mississippi Department of Archives and History.

Mississippi's territorial governor Cato West, she was born on a southern Arkansas plantation to General Thomas Paine Dockery and his wife. When she was twelve, her family moved to New York City, where she was educated and pursued a literary life. When her older sister married a man from Fayette, Mississippi, Octavia was sent south to live with them. There must have been issues with her sanity even then, for her dying sister felt compelled to beg Dick Dana to take her in at Glenwood at age twenty-eight. The jobless, reclusive Dana, six years Octavia's junior, agreed, and their strange odyssey at Glenwood began around 1893. Dick wandered the grounds while Octavia puttered about, raising chickens and cows and cooking meals in the vast open fireplaces. Their clothes were usually refashioned gunny sacks and their doors were left open to the livestock. In the hands of two mentally challenged eccentrics, Glenwood slipped into filth and decay.

Through the woods, Glenburnie was a bit more stable architecturally, but inhabited by yet another Natchez nabob with mental challenges. Jane Surget Merrill, who carried two of the oldest and most revered Natchez names in her signature, was born in 1864 to Ayres Phillips Merrill, Jr., and Jane Surget Merrill. "Jennie" Merrill's father was the master of Elmscourt, a wedding present from his fabulously wealthy

father-in-law, Francis Surget. Mr. Merrill was a Harvard graduate and Union sympathizer who packed his family up and moved to New York City during the war. Jennie was born there and grew up in Manhattan, Newport, Rhode Island, and the courts of Europe after her father was appointed U.S. Grant's minister to Belgium. When ill health forced his resignation from that post, they returned to Natchez and Elmscourt.

Upon Ayres Merrill's death in 1883, Jennie inherited Elmscourt, but found it was heavily mortgaged and wound up selling it to James Surget. She briefly lived at Glenwood and then Gloucester and bought seventy-one-year-old Glenburnie and the forty-five-acre estate surrounding it in 1904. She was undoubtedly aware that on the other side of the woods around her house were Dick Dana, Octavia Dockery, dozens of domesticated beasts, and a failing house.

An uneasy truce prevailed between the neighbors for three decades. Jennie became increasingly strange and reclusive, dressing in clothes that were fashionable a half-century before and refusing to electrify her mansion. A sign on her gatepost read, "No admittance. Merrill. Inquire elsewhere for persons of other names." Coal oil lamps lit the hallways and a Model T Ford gathered dust in the driveway.

She welcomed only one guest, who appeared every night at dusk. Her second cousin through the Surget line, Duncan G. Minor, also carried one of Natchez's most revered names as the great-grandson of Stephen Minor, the governor-general of the town during Spanish occupation and owner of one of the town's first great houses, Concord. Duncan had inherited much of his family's wealth and another mansion, Oakland. He had allowed that house to fall into near ruin, moving his bed from room to room as floors progressively rotted away. Every evening for years, he would mount his horse and ride through the woods to Glenburnie, where he would disappear into Jennie's home and reemerge the next morning for the trip home.

As Jennie and Duncan carried on their mysterious relationship, the odd couple at Glenwood was creeping deeper into madness. Dick Dana could occasionally be found camped on the roof of the barn or wandering about talking in riddles, and his damaged hands banged the piano keys deep into the nights. The goats and chickens came and went through the mansion's bedrooms, parlor, and library, nibbling on books and furniture. Disgusted at this squalor if not that at Oakland, Duncan Minor claimed the house in a 1917 tax sale, but before he could evict Dick and Octavia, she blocked his plans by having Dick declared insane and incompetent.

The Roaring Twenties and its excesses passed this strange foursome by, but tensions were increasing with each year. Jennie Merrill was incensed when Dick's goats crossed the property line and decimated her flowerbeds. When her threats to put a stop to this were ignored, she pulled out a gun and shot one dead. That incident may have led the authorities to suspect Dick and Octavia when Duncan Minor made a frightening discovery on the evening of August 4, 1932.

Minor rode up, as usual, on that sultry night, expecting nothing out of the ordinary. He found Jennie gone and Glenburnie ransacked, with blood spattered throughout the bedrooms and hallway. Sheriff C. P. "Book" Roberts was joined by the mayor, the county prosecuting attorney and district attorney, the editor of the *Natchez Democrat* and the county coroner, along with dozens of curious citizens, in combing through the dense underbrush around Glenburnie. Bloodhounds were brought in, and early the next morning they led the way to Jennie's lifeless body, hidden in the woods a hundred yards from the house. She had been shot multiple times.

Bloody, deformed handprints were noted at Glenburnie, which immediately cast suspicion toward Jennie's crippled neighbor and nemesis,

Dick Dana. Sheriff Roberts arrested the pair and settled them in the Adams County jail. While they protested their innocence, Jane Surget Merrill was buried in a service at Trinity Episcopal Church, where Dana's father had once been rector.

The headlines riveted a nation which had just rediscovered Natchez and its antebellum mansions. Reporters, photographers, and newsreel producers flocked to Glenwood, which Natchez newspaper editor Ned Smith had dubbed "Goat Castle." Even hardened newshounds were challenged in describing the squalor they encountered. Mountains of moldy newspapers, tarnished and dented silver services, and clouds of dust swirled through the house as various goats, chickens, and the occasional duck wandered about, bleating and quacking and covering the carpets and hardwood with their excretions. Stained, shapeless mattresses were stretched between broken chairs to serve as beds. Fleas and mites coated every surface, and skeletal leather rectangles were all that were left of priceless books. Chairs and sofas were riddled with holes, their springs gnawed into limp coils by the ravenous goats.

The case would take another bizarre turn when a drifter was shot to death in Pine Bluff, Arkansas, on the night of Jennie Merrill's funeral. He was carrying a .32 caliber handgun, and the local sheriff instantly made the connection with the Merrill murder. Ballistics tests matched the gun to the bullets found in Natchez, and the dead man's mutilated hand explained the strange handprints at Glenburnie. A Natchez boardinghouse owner admitted to being part of a robbery attempt at the house, and she was eventually sentenced to the state penitentiary at Parchman. Dana and Dockery were set free and went home to find their decrepit mansion enmeshed in a media frenzy.

They may have been crazy as road lizards, but not so insane that they couldn't recognize profit potential in their newfound notoriety. By the time the 1933 pilgrimage season rolled around, Natchez was dotted with printed flyers inviting visitors to "Historic Glenwood: Famous Goat Castle. Dana and Dockery Museum. Open to Pilgrimage Visitors. Piano Recitals. Round trip fare 20 cents." A quarter bought a ticket onto the grounds of Glenwood; fifty cents would gain the curious access to the house itself. Dick dug up a white planter's suit and settled in at a borrowed piano, pounding away at the keys while Octavia sat beside him and read her dramatic poetry. The crowds ate it up.

This went on for more than a decade, and Dick and Octavia managed to hang on to the house with the income from their Goat Castle tours. The garden club ladies were not amused. "Goats roam in undisturbed joy; chickens roost. Dick plays his old piano . . . Miss Dockery tells stories . . . Glenwood is falling."[3]

The surviving members of Natchez's weirdest quartet were not getting any younger or any more socially acceptable. Duncan Minor had died in 1940. Dick Dana contracted a fatal case of pneumonia in 1948 and passed away at the age of seventy-seven; ironically, his funeral was held at Trinity Episcopal Church. Octavia died a few months later. The derelict remains of Goat Castle were auctioned off, including valuable hand-carved furniture, oil paintings, steel engravings, and the rare books which had survived the goats' voracious appetites. More than seven hundred people crowded in for the event, which netted thirteen thousand dollars. The empty and uninhabitable house stood for a few more years before being demolished. It was replaced by a modern subdivision, bearing street names like Glenwood Drive and Dana Road. Jennie Merrill's Glenburnie and Duncan Minor's Oakland are frequent inclusions on the continuing Natchez Pilgrimage tours.

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Kirkwood

Madison County is noted for the beautiful antebellum houses of Canton and for its lost mansions, Annandale and Ingleside of the old Mannsdale community, now encompassed by greater Madison. But there was another cluster of homes and wealthy plantations in the far northeast corner of the county, close to the spot where Madison, Attala, and Leake counties merge. The closest town, Camden, is barely a crossroads, and the houses are all gone, most without a trace. Only Kirkwood, the home of Governor William McWillie, is traceable by the existence of its cemetery.

William McWillie was already fifty years old when he arrived in Madison County with his household in 1845. A graduate of the University of South Carolina, he had practiced law in Camden, South Carolina, and served several terms in the legislature of that state. Married twice, he had a son in 1821 and then a remarkable string of daughters, twelve in a row, before moving to Mississippi. He established himself as a successful planter in his adopted state and by 1860 owned a large plantation and almost two hundred slaves.

During the fifteen years between his arrival and the onset of the Civil War, McWillie transferred his political skills to Mississippi. He was successful in his first political undertaking, running for the U.S. Congress and serving there from 1849 to 1851. In 1857, he was elected governor of Mississippi and served through two of the most tumultuous years in the state's history. An ardent states' rights promoter and secessionist, he helped lead Mississippi out of the Union and into war.

McWillie's career at the state capitol was eventful, but his home out in the quiet corner of Madison County was a retreat. His mansion, Kirkwood, was probably built in the late 1840s or early 1850s; no photos exist, but there are several eyewitness descriptions that capture it as "a colonial pile with broad halls, large rooms, conservatory, gardens and wide lawns extending on one side to the church and churchyard . . . on the other side to the rectory."[1]

Kirkwood likely mirrored the usual Greek Revival pattern of four large downstairs rooms, floor-to-ceiling windows, and folding or pocket doors which allowed the formal rooms to be turned into one large social spot. Conjectural drawings show a two-story portico with Doric columns and a central gable, but the fact is that no one now knows exactly what the house looked like or who designed it. Several accounts of its history mention a New York architect, most likely Jacob Larmour. Larmour was a New Jersey native who worked in New York City during the 1840s. In the years between 1850 and 1860, he was responsible for Chapel of the Cross and its rectory, Annandale and Ingleside, Canton's

Bishop William Mercer Green consecrated St. Philip's chapel at Kirkwood in 1851. Photo courtesy of Episcopal Diocese of Mississippi.

Grace Episcopal Church, and the Old Chapel at Mississippi College. He also built the Boddie Mansion, which became the initial home of Tougaloo College. With that kind of track record, it would be logical to assume that he was the architect of William McWillie's home as well.

Kirkwood was renowned for its social schedule and hospitality, playing host to Jefferson Davis and other prominent politicians. Of equal importance, at least to Mrs. McWillie, was the accompanying chapel, St. Philip's. This Gothic Episcopal church was built within a stone's throw of Kirkwood and consecrated by Bishop William Mercer Green in 1851. It was a frame structure, thirty-six feet deep and twenty feet wide, with seventeen-foot ceilings. A rectory was constructed next door for the first rector, E. H. Downing. The number of communicants in the farm community around Camden was never more than a few dozen, if that, but a parochial school was established for girls and was quite successful. Boarders stayed in the rectory. A note from Bishop Green in 1860 states that he was "gratified, not only in finding this rural parish in

No trace of Governor William McWillie's Kirkwood remains except for the family cemetery. Photo courtesy of Mississippi Department of Archives and History.

a healthy condition, but at witnessing the prosperous state of the rector's school."[2] During the trying years of the Civil War, almost every parochial school in Mississippi was forced to close, but St. Philip's somehow managed to hang on.

Governor McWillie served only one term as the state's chief executive, for which he was probably grateful as war bore down on the region and the government went into exile in 1863. During his tenure, he improved the levee systems, oversaw the growth of the railroads, and advocated for a statewide public school system. He was particularly adamant about education for women, possibly because of those twelve daughters. In promoting normal schools for women's teacher training, he noted, "In my opinion this is asking little in aid of female education, to which, so far as I am informed, not one dollar has ever directly been appropriated by the State, though we have expended hundreds of thousands of dollars for the benefit of thieves and murderers in the erection of a penitentiary."[3]

The impending rift with the northern states consumed much of McWillie's years in the Governor's Mansion. John Brown's raid on Harper's Ferry electrified the country just before the governor's final address to the legislature in November 1859. The presidency, he observed, was "the last and only department of the government from which we have any hope of protection."[4] He retired to Kirkwood during the tumultuous year 1860 and was there when war began. His first son, Adam, would die at Manassas, and his second son left for Confederate service only three days after his wedding in the St. Philip's chapel.

William McWillie died in 1869, leaving the house to his wife and children, and was buried in the churchyard at St.Philip's. An associate said of McWillie that he was "a man of plain and practical sense…personally honest and upright but like most political partisans…somewhat warped by the intrigues incident to long political life."[5] By the early twentieth century, his little chapel had burned and only the gravestones were left to mark the site. McWillie's inscription reads as follows: "He was gathered unto his fathers, having the testimony of a good conscience in the communion of the Catholic Church; in the confidence of a certain faith; in the comfort of a reasonable, religious and holy hope; in favor with Thee, our God, and in perfect harmony with the world."

Kirkwood itself was still standing when Mrs. Deupree described it in 1902, but it was later demolished by the family.

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Austin Moore House

Marshall County was the epicenter of the land rush that followed the transfer of six million acres of Chickasaw land from that tribe to the U.S. government. On October 20, 1832, the signature of Chief Ishtehotopa was barely dry before settlers and speculators from the old Atlantic Coast states rushed pell-mell into north Mississippi, frantic to scoop up the available plots that were going for a little more than a dollar an acre. The younger sons of old-line planters, too far down the line of primogeniture to hope for a reasonable stake in their home states, pulled away from their families and all that was familiar to head west to this new world.

They found a wide-open wilderness with no towns and no social structure to speak of, and opportunities abounded for those clever enough to visualize the most promising sites. Whitmel Sephas Randolph and Samuel Ramsey McAlexander were two of the first entrepreneurs to recognize the attributes of a large holly grove and its nearby spring. By October 1835, Mississippi newspapers were advertising the sale of lots in the brand-new town of Holly Springs, touted as offering "more advantages . . . and inducements for the locations of a town than any other place now known in the Chickasaw Nation."[1] More than eight hundred square miles would be carved into Marshall County, and within two years, it would boast the largest white population in the entire state, growing from fewer than four thousand settlers to almost fourteen thousand. Holly Springs itself claimed more than fifteen hundred citizens in 1837, making it the third-largest town in Mississippi, trailing only Natchez and Vicksburg. Schools for boys and girls were chartered, churches were organized, and the first of the elaborate mansions that have characterized Holly Springs and Marshall County ever since were beginning to appear.

Austin E. Moore's home northwest of Holly Springs was never the grandest of the antebellum structures that dotted the Marshall County map, but it was built with the profits from the great building boom of the 1830s and 1840s. Austin and his older brother, Henry, relocated with their families from North Carolina to north Mississippi and initially built simple log houses. Austin's sawmill on the Coldwater River planed the lumber and boards that went into the new homes, churches, schools, and public buildings that were springing up in Holly Springs, Red Banks, Wyatt, and Galena.

The permanent homes which Austin and Henry Moore eventually built were very similar, according to family lore. Esther Cannon, a descendant of Austin Moore, described his house 150 years after its construction:

Austin Moore's sawmill provided the lumber for his Greek Revival home northwest of Holly Springs. Photo courtesy of Frances Buchanan.

The house had four large rooms with a wide hallway through the center downstairs and the same upstairs, plus front porches about 12' x 12'. As usual in those days the kitchen was a small building in the back yard. In my day a kitchen had been built on the northwest corner of the house. There were four tall brick chimneys providing wood fireplaces for each of the eight rooms, two tall windows in each room, both hallways closed in in my day, and two stairways—one from downstairs hall to upstairs hall, the other from northwest downstairs room to room above. There were no doors from upstairs rooms on the west to the upstairs hall, separating boys from girls. The original building provided no closets, wardrobes being used for storage. It was years before electricity was provided through the country. Kerosene lamps gave light, a brick cellar served as refrigerator, a cistern and wells provided water, and wood fires were used for heat and cooking. The parlor, east room downstairs, was carpeted, as was the "company" bedroom upstairs. Painted shades—very fragile in my time—were at the parlor windows, a mantel painted to resemble marble inside. The large front yard and half of the backyard had tall cedar trees planted in rows, like the trees in the William Faulkner yard in Oxford.[2]

The home which Mrs. Cannon describes was typical for a prosperous Marshall County merchant or farmer of the mid-1800s. Census records from 1850 indicate that Austin E. Moore had nine living children and owned fifteen slaves, hardly enough to elevate him into the elite planter status but nevertheless a sign of financial stability.

The flush years for Marshall County and Holly Springs didn't end abruptly with the onset of the Civil War in 1861. Until the spring of 1862, schools stayed open, houses were built, and business as usual continued on the square. But when the conflict edged closer, as battles were fought at Shiloh and Corinth, Holly Springs could not

escape the coming upheaval. The town would find itself in the midst of Union and Confederate troop movements for much of the period from 1862 to 1863, as General Ulysses S. Grant roamed about north Mississippi in search of a backdoor to Vicksburg. General Earl Van Dorn's daring dawn raid on the Union encampment in December 1862 was a Confederate high point, but it wrought havoc on Holly Springs. Before dashing back out of town, Van Dorn's men packed the three-story Masonic Temple with munitions and ignited it, sending the entire structure barreling above the square like a bottle rocket, crashing into the north side, igniting numerous other businesses. The heart of the town was destroyed, and Grant and Sherman roared back in with a vengeance, laying waste to the surrounding countryside and its homes, perhaps even in the vicinity of Austin Moore's property.

Moore survived the war, and his real estate was valued at ten thousand dollars in the 1870 census, indicating that his fortune had been saved as well, or that he was benefiting from a postwar rebuilding boom as he had from Holly Springs's first incarnation. His home remained in the hands of descendants until 1924 and was torn down in 1964.

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Prospect Hill

Jefferson County is a remote and hauntingly quiet region of southwest Mississippi, an almost forgotten land tucked between Natchez and Vicksburg. A few large plantation manors can still be found near Church Hill and Fayette, but for the most part there are few traces of the cotton fortunes which were once made here.

This county was the site of one of the most mysterious and troubling sagas to emerge from the state's antebellum past. Facts are hard to come by and legend has outpaced certainty with the passage of time. It is known for certain that Isaac Ross's Prospect Hill burned on the night of April 15, 1845, and that a six-year-old girl died in the fire. She is buried within sight of the house, which now bears the name Prospect Hill. But the cause of the fire and the consequences of it are shrouded in the vague mists of time, and the whole story will almost certainly never be known.

When Isaac Ross sat down to write his final will, he initiated a chain of events that culminated in the fiery destruction of his mansion, legal wrangling that seemed endless, and actions that would have repercussions on two continents. He had fought in the Revolutionary War and then followed his older brother from North Carolina to the Mississippi Territory in 1808. The land Ross chose would eventually encompass a five-thousand-acre plantation in Jefferson County. It was a wild and untamed place when Ross claimed it, but he gradually cleared the forests and woods and built a large house which he called Prospect Hill. Alan Huffman described the mansion, based in part on descendant Thomas Wade's reminiscences: "Prospect Hill [was] a monument to style and substance, built of poplar milled on the plantation, with wainscoting throughout the downstairs, bookcases that rose to the ceiling of the parlor, and a finely executed stair rail, all crafted of cherry wood. The book cases in the parlor were filled with the best books obtainable at that time and among them was a complete file of the *National Intelligencer*, a weekly paper, published at Philadelphia."[1]

By 1820, Captain Ross and his wife, Jane, had two sons and three daughters, 128 slaves, and several plantations. Financial security in those days did not guarantee good health, and Ross lost his wife, a daughter, a son-in-law, and both of his sons within the space of a few years. At some point, traveling to escape the sadness at Prospect Hill, Ross encountered the founders of the American Colonization Society, a group devoted to establishing a "homeland" for freed slaves on the west coast of Africa. He returned to Mississippi inspired by the possibility of ending the curse of slavery in his adopted state and founded the Mississippi Colonization Society with such notable counterparts as Stephen Duncan, John

Prospect Hill was the site of a fatal fire in 1845 which destroyed the original house. Photo courtesy of Mississippi Department of Archives and History.

The two-story mansion which Isaac Ross had built in Jefferson County was replaced with a smaller one-story Greek Revival cottage. Photo courtesy of Mississippi Department of Archives and History.

Ker, Jeremiah Chamberlain, and Edward McGehee. Between them, these men owned thousands of slaves whose labor had allowed them to accumulate unheard-of wealth. They realized that the institution was not sustainable and hoped that the colonization effort would allow it to be brought to a graceful end.

Isaac Ross was one of the oldest in the group and the first to take definitive action to insure that his slaves could return to Africa. He rewrote his will to stipulate that following his death and the death of his daughter, Margaret Reed, Prospect Hill Plantation would be sold and the profits used to send any of his slaves who so desired to live in the newly created Liberian colony, "Mississippi in Africa." Any who chose not to go would be sold as family units and the money donated to a school for freed slaves in Liberia.

Ross died on January 19, 1836, and Margaret Reed and Ross's grandson, Isaac Ross Wade, were named executors of his will. At that point, all hell broke loose. The family quickly descended into angry factions, and Margaret rewrote her own will to mirror her father's wishes. Young Isaac Wade, however, had no intention of seeing his inheritance and labor force evaporate in the fulfillment of his grandfather's last will. Margaret fought Wade in the courts for two years before her own death. At that point, Wade moved into Prospect Hill and began the long legal battle to retain the 5,000-acre plantation and 225 slaves.

He filed suit in probate court, followed up with appeals courts, took on the American Colonization Society, and petitioned the legislature in an attempt to make manumission illegal under any circumstances. The enslaved souls at Prospect Hill must have been aware that their fates hung in the balance between this determined young man and the Mississippi courts, and they watched their older members die, new children being born, and year after year pass with no resolution. Court after court turned Wade's pleas down, and approximately 129 of the slaves managed to leave for Africa between 1844 and 1848.

No one knows the mindset of those slaves who were still trapped at Prospect Hill on that night in April 1845, nine long years after Isaac Ross had tried to free them. Thomas Wade, the son of Isaac Ross Wade who chronicled the events in a letter to the Port Gibson newspaper fifty-seven years later, related only the Wade family's side of the story. He described the house as "commodious and most substantial old plantation home with all the handsome furniture, valuable books, and beautiful pictures, the accumulation of a lifetime by wealthy, educated and refined people," which "was burned on April 15, 1845, at 1 a.m., by Captain Ross' slaves more than nine years after his death."[2]

Wade's account enumerates eleven family members (including a number of young children) and one friend who were staying at Prospect Hill on that night. He weaves a lurid tale of a trusted family cook spiking the evening's coffee with a sleep-inducing herb, laying the groundwork for fellow slaves to torch the mansion and trap the entire family inside.

"The house was a large, two-story house, and Dr. Wade, Mr. Bailey, Mrs. Richardson and children and Miss Girault occupied the rooms in the second story. Dr. Wade was the first occupant to discover the fire, and immediately set to work to arouse the family . . ."

Mrs. Richardson was "dazed and stupefied" and left the house without gathering up her six-year-old daughter, Martha. "When this was discovered, Mrs. Richardson, terror-stricken, frantically appealed for assistance and volunteers to go with her to the second floor to save her child. To this appeal, a brave and faithful slave, Thomas, responded, and started with her up the steps to the second story, but before ascending far the steps sank under them into the fire. They were both rescued from the flames, but badly burnt. Mrs. Richardson was pulled out by her hair. The next morning the child's heart was found and buried in the family graveyard, only a few paces from the spot where she met her tragic death."[3]

The tragedy wasn't finished. One of the slaves, identified only as "Esau," was lingering outside the burning house with an axe, supposedly to kill Isaac Wade as he ran out. Thomas Wade stated that "Esau, with six or seven other leaders, were burnt or hung. This was all done by the neighbors without my father's knowledge, as he was then with his mother, Mrs. Ross, at Oak Hill, two miles away."[4]

With no other existing eyewitness accounts of that night's events, only Thomas Wade's secondhand version purports to document the horrific scene. What is known is that Isaac Wade dug in, built a new Prospect Hill, and plunged in with renewed vigor to challenge the offending wills of his grandfather and aunt. He was not successful. Four years after the fire, the last 142 of Ross's slaves boarded the barque *Laura* at Natchez and headed off on the arduous journey to Africa. Their descendants are there today, caught in the chaos that has engulfed that place in the last few decades, as so graphically and meticulously chronicled by Alan Huffman in his book *Mississippi in Africa*.

By the onset of the Civil War in 1861, Isaac Wade's fortunes had dwindled to his rebuilt house, the land, and a few family items that were rescued from the first house. All of his efforts were negated when Grant's troops marched through Jefferson County and slavery vanished into the collective guilt of a reunited nation. He lived at Prospect Hill, struggling with the challenges of the sharecropper system, until his death in 1891. The house and land were inherited by his brother, B. H. Wade, who lived in the rambling house for the remainder of his life. When the last Ross descendants left Prospect Hill in 1956, the kitchen, slave quarters, smokehouse, and barns had all rotted and collapsed,

and the house itself was in a precarious state, which only worsened after the last occupant left in 1968. Until the 1940s, it was heated by the century-old fireplaces, and kerosene lamps lit the dark rooms, which had yet to be wired for electricity.

The second Prospect Hill still stands, looking, in Alan Huffman's description, like "a grand, weathered barn with six monumental chimneys," with "the appearance of a ruined stage set floating in the air."[5] Cedar trees have crashed through the gallery roof and into the cemetery, close by the massive marble monument dedicated to Isaac Ross. The Mississippi chapter of the American Colonization Society used money from the disputed estate to place the marker in the midst of the court battles. The inscription reads: "His last will is graced with as magnificent provisions as any over which philanthropy has ever rejoiced and by it will be erected on the shores of Africa a monument more glorious than marble and more enduring than Time."

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Mount Hermon

Mississippi College is the oldest existing collegiate-level school in the state, tracing its roots all the way back to Hampstead Academy in 1826. The citizens of Mt. Salus, frustrated in their attempt to claim designation as the capital city, made a conscious corporate decision to emphasize education and hope for a later designation as Mississippi's university center. With that purpose in mind, Hampstead was opened as a school for young men and soon had its name changed to Mississippi Academy. Only the approval of the legislature was necessary for its transformation into the University of Mississippi.

Unfortunately for the ambitious leaders of this tiny town which would soon be known as Clinton, they weren't unique in their scheme. When the legislature at last passed an 1841 bill to charter the state university, forty-eight communities lined up for the honor of hosting it. The list was narrowed to seven sites, and Clinton was once again snubbed. Mississippi Academy dwindled, only to be revived by the Presbyterian Church and eventually the Baptist Convention. The name was subsequently changed to Mississippi College, and only the Civil War has disrupted classes since 1850.

A stone's throw northeast of Mississippi College, Central Female Institute was opened as the women's equivalent in 1853. Run by Dr. and Mrs. Walter Hillman for almost fifty years, this Baptist-affiliated school grew to include several huge academic and dormitory buildings, most of which were still standing when the renamed Hillman College merged with Mississippi College in 1945. Twenty years later, the Clinton Lions Club launched a campaign to convert the site into a city park, and the remaining buildings were demolished. As late as the 1980s, concrete foundations and half-buried bricks could still be found throughout Hillman-Berry Park.

These were colleges that are revered and fondly remembered, documented in photographs and memorialized in roadside plaques. But not too far from Mississippi College and Hillman College, just beyond the old Clinton Depot, there was another school, one that struggled every day of its existence and whose founder lies buried in a weed-choked graveyard which has long since been reclaimed by the woods. Mount Hermon Female Seminary was the culmination of one woman's dream and gritty determination, an oasis of education in a former planter's mansion that has been almost completely forgotten in the eight decades since its closure.

Sarah Dickey was an Ohio native, born in the 1840s into a family who limited her educational opportunities as effectively as the slave girls she would someday teach. At the age of thirteen, Dickey was just learning to read; it would be three more years before she found someone to

Mount Hermon served as a school for freed slave women in the years following the Civil War. Photo courtesy of Mississippi Department of Archives and History.

teach her to write. She was determined to take up teaching as a profession, and in those less structured times she managed to collect a teacher's certificate of some authenticity. She also joined the abolitionist Church of United Brethren in Christ, one of several mission-minded northern denominations who took it as their sacred cause to educate the masses of freedmen wandering the ravaged South with no skills and no hope.

Leaders of the United Brethren had been searching for an appropriate site to open a school for emancipated slaves when word began to trickle north of General Pemberton's surrender at Vicksburg. Thousands of "contraband" blacks were filling the streets, suddenly adrift with no masters, no education, and no direction. Two United Brethren preachers scouted out the situation, located an abandoned church building, and sent word back to Ohio to ship three new teachers to Mississippi. One of those rookie educators was twenty-five-year-old Sarah Dickey.

Miss Dickey stepped off a steamboat at the Vicksburg waterfront on December 11, 1863. Facing her was a recently devastated town which was just beginning to recover from the shock of a forty-nine-day siege, when many of the citizens holed up in dank caves and subsisted on rat and mule meat. The muddy streets were clogged with soldiers and wagons and hopeful blacks, three hundred of whom had scraped up fifteen cents each as tuition for the promised United Brethren school. They were not discouraged by their schoolhouse, a bloodstained Baptist church with smashed windows at the corner of Crawford and Walnut streets. Within six months of their arrival, Sarah and her two fellow teachers were inundated with more than seven hundred pupils. Most were recently freed slaves but some were Union soldiers, eager to learn the simplest of academic skills.

Recognizing the overwhelming numbers of illiterate workers roaming the South, the U.S. government established the Freedmen's Bureau, which took over educational development in the states of the collapsing Confederacy. The Vicksburg church school closed and Sarah reluctantly headed north again, this time to Massachusetts and Mt. Holyoke Female Seminary. She studied

there for four years but never managed to shed her memories of Mississippi; by graduation, she was announcing her intent to return to that troubled state and open a "seminary like [Mt. Holyoke] for the colored girls."[1]

This was an altogether unrealistic and potentially dangerous plan. Four years after the Civil War ended, Mississippi was still gripped by interracial tensions and was struggling to develop a new constitution under the contentious leadership of old-line Confederates, carpetbaggers, and scalawags. The Ku Klux Klan would soon emerge as a powerful symbol of resistance to any and every attempt to achieve racial equality, and by 1875, the entire state was on the brink of renewed bloodshed and open warfare. It was no place for a young, idealistic college graduate with no money and no apparent grasp of reality to claim as her mission ground.

Dickey was not to be deterred. She signed on with the American Missionary Association, an amalgamation of northern religious groups dedicated to opening black colleges throughout the South. Many of these schools were "colleges" in name only, as their potential students couldn't read or write, much less attempt university-level matriculation. One of the first and most enduring of the AMA's projects was Tougaloo College, opened in 1871 in a planter's mansion just north of Jackson. That school would later be ironically intertwined with Sarah Dickey's Mount Hermon Institute, but her first assignment in Mississippi was to a short-lived college in Raymond. She was appointed as a teacher under a stern Bostonian, Miss H. C. Bullard. This headmistress was not impressed with her assignment, describing Raymond as "one of the worse places for its size I was ever in."[2] Sarah, ever the optimist, recalled a different impression. "When I landed in Raymond in January, 1870 . . . I did do all that I could, and now whenever I visit Raymond I feel that I am perfectly lost in the meshes of love."[3]

The Raymond experiment was short-lived, and by late 1870 Sarah had moved a few miles northwest to Clinton, where a new free public school for blacks was being opened. After decades of broken educational promises and legislative inertia, public education was slowly becoming a reality, spearheaded by the reviled Reconstruction coalition of blacks and carpetbaggers. Clinton claimed one of the initial schools, largely through the influence of Dr. Walter Hillman and his wife, Adelia. These two New Englanders had shepherded Mississippi College and Central Female Institute through the chaos of war, successfully deflecting Union soldiers' schemes to torch the campuses by appeals directly to General Grant. While rebuilding their own schools in the years following the war, they also became advocates for accessible, tax-supported preparatory schools for both black children and white children.

Sarah Dickey was recruited from Raymond to take on the challenging task of organizing and opening this bold venture. It would have been a daunting undertaking even if the entire community had wholeheartedly supported her efforts, but that was hardly the case. Many whites bitterly resented being taxed to pay for the schooling of children they considered ineducable, and the concept of a single woman lowering herself to work in such a situation was an almost intolerable insult. No one would rent a room to Miss Dickey, and she quietly moved into the home of Charles Caldwell, a black legislator. The Klan was not subtle in its threats, and she felt overwhelmingly ostracized and isolated, in spite of the support of the Hillmans and a handful of others. After a few months, she poured out her fears and concerns to a Mt. Holyoke classmate:

> At this place since January, 1871, I have labored under greater difficulties. Oh, the trials, through which I have passed can never be told. Even yet, when I look back over the last twelve months my heart grows

sick. Just before the last term closed I made up my mind that I could do nothing better than to shake the dust of Clinton from my feet, but just at the time when it seemed to me I was completely developed in Egyptian darkness, the blessed Lord sent a comforting angel. My school closed most triumphantly. Several of the best class of the white people were present at the examination. Two of them addressed the school expressing themselves highly pleased with the exercises.[4]

More than likely, her "angel" was Walter Hillman. A tiny light was seen at the end of the tunnel, and Miss Dickey wasn't the only one who noticed it. The *Hinds County Gazette* reporter was impressed with the progress of this free public school: "We had the pleasure of attending the examination on Thursday of last week of this school taught by Miss Dickey . . . We were greatly delighted with the astonishing progress and thorough educational training of colored children . . . we can safely say that her pupils are 'educated not polished' merely . . . If Miss Dickey continues to devote herself in this field it may not be many years before her pupils will be critics at the commencement exercises of our high schools and colleges."[5]

In a state which less than a decade before had enslaved black children and forbade their education by law, this was a remarkable observation. There was no longer any doubt about Sarah's talents at teaching and school administration, but she had even more ambitious plans. Since college, she had felt that she was divinely destined to establish a southern Mt. Holyoke for the training of black women. In an 1872 letter to a friend, she commented, "I am fully convinced that the people *need just such an institution*, and that they are ready for it *now*. I also fully anticipate the difficulties which I shall have to encounter."[6]

Those difficulties would have scared away almost anyone except Sarah Dickey. Obviously, the potential student body was a deep pool and eager for an opportunity. But community support was essential, as was a physical site for such an enterprise. There would be no tax dollars and no guarantee of success, or, for that matter, safety.

A strong governing board was the first step toward academic and financial legitimacy. Miss Dickey turned to a diverse group of men, weaving together a remarkable biracial coalition of advisors. Her landlord, Charles Caldwell, agreed to serve, as did Senator Hiram Revels, Judge E. W. Cabaniss, and Absalom Madden West, a Confederate general who was rebuilding the Mississippi Central railroad. West persuaded the legislature to grant a charter for the new school, and now all Sarah had to do was find a spot to set up shop.

The ideal spot emerged right there in Clinton. The Rice family had operated one of several private preparatory schools in the area before the war, but were forced to close it during the turmoil of the 1860s. Their home, built in 1847 for the Calvert family, was a thirteen-room mansion set in the midst of 160 acres just northwest of the town's train station. The red brick Greek Revival structure with the usual white columns was not sensational by Mississippi's antebellum standards, but it was in a lush setting, surrounded by gardens and woods. As the Rice school had come to be known as Mount Hermon Female Institute, the house took on that title as well. It was large, it was available, and somehow the board and Miss Dickey would come up with the six-thousand-dollar asking price.

The 1874 deed to the property was transferred to Charles Caldwell and A. M. West, secured by a down payment of ten dollars. Some historians have speculated that Mr. Rice was counting on a default and the return of his property, but he had seriously underestimated Sarah. She hit the fund-raising circuit with a vengeance, traveling all over Mississippi and speaking at black churches. Picnics and barbecues brought in more than one thousand dollars. A trip north led to the office

of Mt. Holyoke's president, who handed her a check for fifty dollars. Old classmates, many of whom were probably not at all surprised to see Sarah tackling this impossible task, chipped in. The startled Mr. Rice received a three-thousand-dollar payment on the real estate transfer in the summer of 1875, and final plans were laid to open Mount Hermon Female Institute.

Sarah's timing was usually impeccable, but she could not have ventured into this scheme at a more inauspicious moment. As the state elections of 1875 approached, racial tensions in Mississippi were reaching a dangerous climax. Riots had swept through Vicksburg, Yazoo City, and Meridian. Carpetbag governor Adelbert Ames's threats to bring in Federal troops were being met with fury by the Democrats, who were intent on using whatever means necessary to throw off the last shackles of Reconstruction. Just a few weeks before the planned October opening of Mount Hermon, a political rally and barbecue in Clinton, planned by Sarah's friend, landlord, and board president, Charles Caldwell, exploded into a violent melee. Sarah and her niece were caught in the crossfire and barely escaped to the safety of Mount Hermon. Two white men died, and the next four days witnessed a horrifying escalation of vigilante justice and guerilla warfare. By the time order was restored, at least thirty blacks were dead and feelings were raw.

In spite of the troubles, the school opened in October 1875 with a large number of boarding students. The semester was well under way when Sarah sat down with Charles Caldwell for advice in late December. It would be their last session. Caldwell was murdered that night, along with his brother. Sarah took in his niece and raised the child to adulthood, as she would do with many of her needier students over the years.

For three decades, Mount Hermon would limp along, struggling to survive and fulfill Sarah's dream of quality education for black women. Clinton's black public school closed, and Mount Hermon absorbed many of those students. Yellow fever epidemics swept through the crowded mansion, and financial setbacks, time and again, threatened the always-precarious bottom line of the school. Enrollment continued to grow, drawing girls from at least nine Mississippi counties, and gradually the buildings were expanded to house them. Rooms were added to the original house and a four-story wing was completed in 1880, providing a chapel, kitchen, dining room, and dormitory rooms for sixty boarders. A combination laundry and dormitory was added later, along with a small roominghouse for the handful of male students whom Sarah just could not turn away.

As much as possible, the campus was self-sufficient. Beyond classroom work, the students helped care for a menagerie of hogs, chickens, and turkeys and tended the vegetable plots and fruit orchards. Their weddings were held in the main house, as were the funerals of those who died and were buried in the small graveyard in the woods. Mount Hermon seemed to have succeeded beyond anyone's wildest dreams, but no one, other than perhaps the board of directors, knew the whole story of sacrifice involved.

As Sarah Dickey's life drew to a close in 1904, it became increasingly apparent just how tissue-thin her dream had been all along. Of the hundreds of students who had passed through Mount Hermon's doors, only one had managed to earn a true college diploma, although many completed a one- or two-year course that qualified them as teachers. They were well trained and much in demand for the black public schools in Jim Crow–era Mississippi. Few had ever paid anything resembling tuition, and after Miss Dickey's death it was discovered that she had secured numerous mortgages against the property, was drastically overdue on teachers' salaries, and had only enough food and animal feed on hand for a few days' use. She had been running on a slender, frayed shoestring since 1875, ever

optimistic in the face of overwhelming odds. At her death, she was eulogized in the Mount Hermon chapel, the service led by the presidents of Tougaloo College and Mississippi College.

Mount Hermon would not survive without her leadership. The board, still miraculously biracial in 1904, persuaded the American Missionary Association to take on the failing school, and that decision was a fateful one. The administration at Tougaloo was not at all interested in supporting a rival institution, but was just as adamantly opposed to selling it to a local Clinton group. In 1924, Dean Cobb of Tougaloo stunned the black community in Clinton with his decision to close the seventy-year-old school, which had brought so much pride and hope to them. Rallying to the cause, the Mississippi State Federation of Colored Women's Clubs raised the funds to buy the property and opened the Margaret Murry Washington Home for Delinquents on the campus.

The respite was only temporary. Four boys were housed at the Washington Home, with plans for more to join them as funding and need increased. During their first semester in the new school, they set fire to the mansion and the dormitory building, destroying both. The venture was abandoned, and over the next few years, the remaining structures of Mount Hermon disappeared. Ironically, Clinton's preintegration black high school, Sumner Hill, would later be built on the site. Most students completed their time there never knowing that one of the state's most courageous civil rights pioneers was buried deep in the woods behind the school.

✦ ✦ ✦

O. J. Moore House

In 1938, the Works Progress Administration issued a series of extensive guides to individual states, including Mississippi. The time period during which these books were being compiled coincided with the last days of many of the state's antebellum mansions, and often a brief reference to a house in the WPA guide is the only remaining clue that such a structure ever existed. Almost every community in Mississippi rates a mention, no matter how small or seemingly inconsequential. The entry on Winona includes a paragraph on the town's most imposing home, described by the authors as "the oldest house in Montgomery County":

> [It's] a two-story, rambling, white frame home, set far back from the street in a grove of willow, elm and oak trees. Six thick columns reach to the roof from the front gallery. On the upper floor is a small balcony. The original log structure built nearly a century ago has been added to and remodeled, but the general outline of the original house has been retained. The two large front rooms have walls of sheathed logs; these rooms lead into a large hall from which rises a stairway; in the rear are the dining room, kitchen, and servants' stairway. The house was built by O. J. Moore, who owned the land upon which the town was built. It was here that Miss Ella Moore, his daughter, gave Winona its name.[1]

The guide also mentions the site of old Middleton, barely a memory even in 1938. It connects the rise of Winona with the demise of Middleton, but doesn't tie O. J. Moore into the story. He may not have been around to take blame for the first fatal error that Middleton's leaders made, but he definitely benefited from their second (and fatal) miscalculation.

Carroll County was one of sixteen government entities created by the Mississippi legislature after the 1830 Treaty of Dancing Rabbit Creek. Land there was abundant and incredibly cheap, if not particularly fertile. But its western edge dipped down into one of the more accessible and flood-free sections of the Delta, allowing landowners to reap the profits of the dark alluvian soil and build their homes in the healthier hills to the east. Settlers arrived from other parts of Mississippi, Georgia, the Carolinas, and Virginia and founded communities such as Carrollton, Blackhawk, Coila, Shongalo, and Middleton. Carrollton claimed the honor of being the county seat, but Middleton was a faster-growing and more cosmopolitan community, boasting almost three thousand citizens at its peak.

Middleton was officially incorporated in 1840. It soon gained a reputation as an educational and cultural center, home to Middleton Literary and

O. J. Moore's decision to allow the railroad through his property doomed the town of Middleton. Photo courtesy of Historic American Buildings Survey/Library of Congress.

Theological Institute and People's Academy. The town square bustled with two doctors' offices, a furniture maker, taverns, general stores, and a clock shop. The Middleton Hotel was a large two-story structure that housed a photographer's studio upstairs and an auditorium for traveling shows on the main floor. A carriage shop turned out customized vehicles, and just outside of town were mills that handled woolens, cotton cloth, and flour. Several lawyers opened practices in Middleton and there was even a short-lived local newspaper.

Old atlases of Mississippi are strewn with towns that just never quite made the leap to stability and legitimacy. Most of their stories are unknown and their decline can usually be traced to better opportunities elsewhere, luring away their residents until no one was left to keep the flame alive. Middleton, on the other hand, had successfully passed that tipping point and should have grown into one of the state's premier cities. Instead, two major missteps by its leaders led it down the path to oblivion.

The first came in 1840, soon after state representative James Alexander Ventress of Woodville pushed through a bill to locate and fund a true state university. The legislature authorized a joint session to come up with a list of seven prospective sites for the new college, and Middleton was one of the towns nominated. It already claimed two legitimate and well-respected academies and had absorbed Raymond's Judson Academy into its own schools. Each had an enrollment of several hundred students. Mrs. O. K. Gee, Sr., described the colleges' offerings in her history of Middleton: "The curriculum of the two schools was splendid, including the classical language, English composition, chemistry, mathematics, Astronomy, history, philosophy, and physical education. Each school had an excellent music department of voice, piano and harp as well as other instruments, violin and flute. A very fine dancing school was conducted by a dancing master by the name of Strickland."[2]

This commitment to education allowed Middleton to make the first cut from forty-eight possible university sites (including such noteworthy towns as Cud-de-Hunk, Mount Pleasant, Redbone, Barefoot, and Sweet Water) to the final seven. Oxford, Kosciusko, Mississippi City, Monroe Missionary Station, Louisville, and Brandon were also on the final list. The legislature appointed three commissioners to accompany state architect William Nichols on a tour of all the prospective towns. They filed a report that was complimentary of each site, based on geographic accessibility, water and building material supplies, healthy environments, and general cost of living and quality of the population. They even acknowledged Middleton's self-proclaimed title as the "Athens of Mississippi" and described it as "a flourishing country village, with a Literary Institution, and two academies with male and female departments, containing in all about 200 pupils."[3]

Six of the towns pled their cases before the legislature and lobbied hard for the honor of hosting the University of Mississippi. The people of Middleton, however, were persuaded by their short-sighted school authorities that the arrival

of a state college would ruin their business. They effectively slammed the academic door in the legislature's face, and the university went to Oxford, a much smaller and less centrally located site.

O. J. Moore missed Middleton's first major misstep. A Virginia native, he had married into the Gee family and followed three of his brothers-in-law when they relocated to Carroll County, Mississippi. In partnership with Peter Gee, Moore opened a large establishment known as The Big Store in Middleton in 1844. Within four years, he had prospered enough to acquire a large amount of land several miles east of Middleton and began building a house there. It was probably originally just a simple dogtrot cabin, as later descriptions of the final mansion suggest that the original house was enveloped by additional rooms and siding. Regardless, the end result was an imposing Greek Revival structure fronted by a long veranda and six fluted Doric columns. A doubleleaf front door was surrounded by rectangular sidelights and flanked by four floor-to-ceiling windows. The classical entablature was deep and heavy and outlined with numerous carved dentils.

Mr. Moore was solidly established when the townsfolk of Middleton again made a major miscalculation. In the years leading up to the Civil War, the Mississippi Central Railroad was laying track as fast as the ties could be laid and the bolts hammered into place. Crews labored north from Canton and south from Holly Springs, and a final leg of the route had to be secured in Carroll County. The logical path took the railroad through Middleton. Once again, the townspeople failed to recognize the future as it barreled in behind a hissing steam locomotive, and they said "no" to the Mississippi Central.

O. J. Moore must have thought his neighbors had lost their minds. He stepped forward, offering his own plantation for the right-of-way and depot location. The deal was signed, tracks were laid well east of Middleton, and the final spike was driven into place at Winona, named by Moore's daughter, Ella. One by one, the businesses of Middleton relocated to capture customers arriving by train. Middleton's stores closed and, one by one, caved in on themselves or burned. Homeowners bought plots in Winona and pulled up stakes. Their new houses ran along the railroad tracks and took up O. J. Moore's pastureland, until "Colonel Moore's residence, which once stood isolated and alone, is now surrounded on every side, the town gradually growing up around it."[4]

The Moore House stayed within the family for several generations and was later owned by the O'Cain family. It burned in the 1960s, but many of the architectural elements were salvaged and incorporated into the existing house, which is nearly identical to the original.

The only evidence that Middleton ever existed is a cemetery. The WPA writers managed to locate the nearly inaccessible site and found a compelling irony there:

> [Here] are the slight remains of Old Middleton, the town that preceded Winona. On the site are a house and an old cemetery enclosed by a dilapidated brick fence. When the cemetery was laid out, Middleton citizens dug a deep ditch around it to keep wild animals away from the graves; traces of the ditch are still visible . . . The town was almost deserted when the railroad established the station of Winona; the remainder was destroyed in a Federal raid during the War between the States.[5]

The good folks of Middleton built moats around their graveyards to deter wild animals. But they also built walls of insularity around their town and, in the process, destroyed its future.

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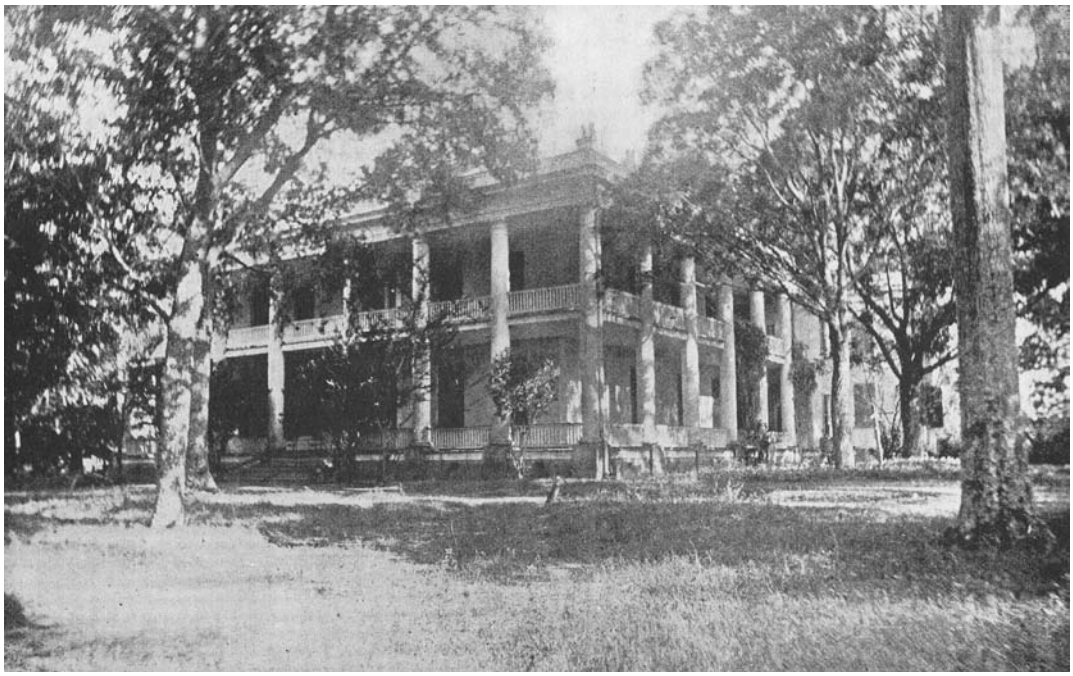
Montebello

Among the treasures of the Gandy collection is an 1891 map labeled "Map of the City of Natchez and Suburbs." It resembles a patchwork quilt, with pastel rectangles, trapezoids, and oddly shaped parcels of land. Each is meticulously hand-lettered in tiny script with the names of the landowners, resonating like a roll call of the antebellum nabobs. On the left side of the map lie the geometric squares and grids of downtown Natchez, rising high above the bluffs and squalid Natchez Under-the-Hill. The street names are familiar, and that part of the map would be recognizable to someone navigating his or her way around town today. But filling the areas which are now dotted with convenience stores and ranch houses are the great estates of Natchez, most of which were associated with a grand house. Melrose's great lawn is evident, as are the gardens of Monmouth. Arlington is a fat L-shaped patch in the middle, a particularly poignant reminder of the grandeur that has now been reduced to a burned-out, vandalized shell. The fields of Duncan Park are still labeled as Stephen Duncan's Auburn, although he had long since returned to the North and left his mansion empty.

Most fascinating in this map are the "lost" plats, dim reminders of the vanished estates of this town which at one point boasted the greatest concentration of millionaires per capita in America. Homewood, Somerset, and Fatherland ring the edges of the map. Filling in the vast spaces between extant Melrose, Monmouth, Auburn, Elms Court, and Arlington are forgotten names like Woodlands, Sunnyside, Etania, and Montebello. The latter rivaled Dunleith in its use of encircling columns, some of which stood for decades after an 1899 fire destroyed the house. Leaving crumbling ruins as a reminder of what came before seemed to be a Natchez tradition; a wall of Sunnyside stood in Duncan Park for many years, as did the lonely steps of Concord on the edge of town.

Gabriel Benoist Shields, the master of Montebello, was one of those individuals fortunate enough to be born into great wealth and to accumulate more through marriage. The story of the Shields family, which extended through several generations before and after Gabriel, is a veritable "who's who" of Natchez society, incorporating the family trees of everyone who was anyone and merging multiple plantations and mansions. But it's also a sad tale, filled with the indignities of war and occupation and the long, slow economic decline that seemed to be the case with so many Natchez clans in the latter part of the 1800s.

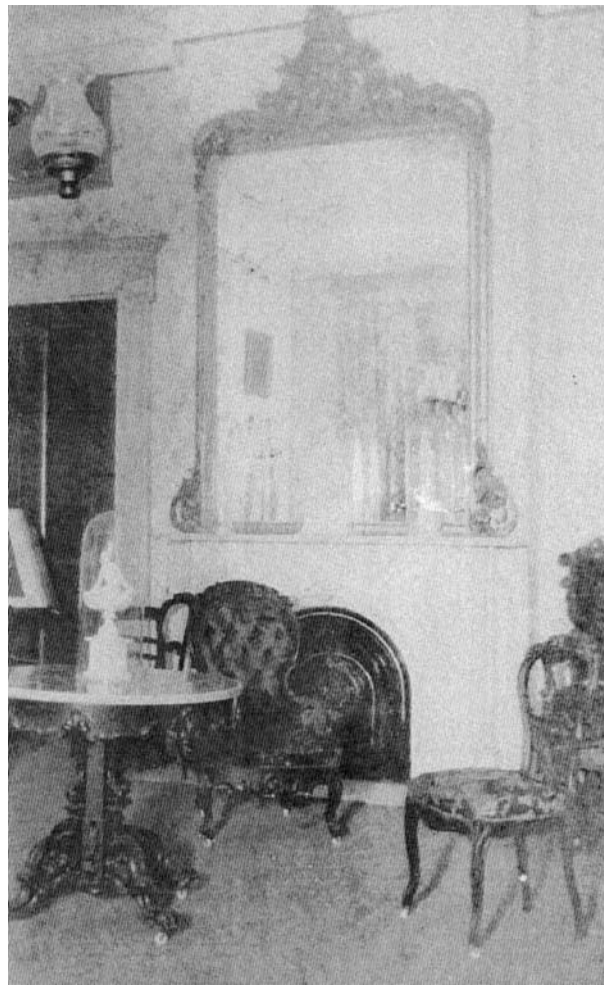
Gabriel's father, William Bayard Shields, arrived in territorial Natchez in 1803, accompanying President Thomas Jefferson's judicial appointee, Thomas Rodney of Delaware. He married into the Benoist family and its fertile



Montebello was the scene of a standoff between its homeowners and Union soldiers. Photo courtesy of the Thomas H. and Joan W. Gandy Photograph Collection, Louisiana and Lower Mississippi Valley Collections, Louisiana State University Libraries, Baton Rouge, Louisiana.

lands in the Fairchild's Creek area along the Adams/Jefferson county line. His third son, Gabriel, was born in 1812, just a few years before Mississippi achieved statehood. Gabriel Shields grew up to marry Catharine Surget. That 1838 wedding merged the north Adams County Shields family with the extraordinarily wealthy Second Creek Surgets, whose patriarch, Francis Surget, owned numerous plantations in Mississippi and Louisiana and fifty thousand acres in Arkansas. Mr. Surget presented the bride and groom with Claremont, a Louisiana sugarcane plantation in Concordia Parish, but insisted that they avoid the disease-plagued summer months there. Catharine was his only daughter to survive a nightmarish epidemic, possibly of yellow fever, in 1826, leaving this powerful planter understandably wary of the miasmal effects of the Louisiana swamps.

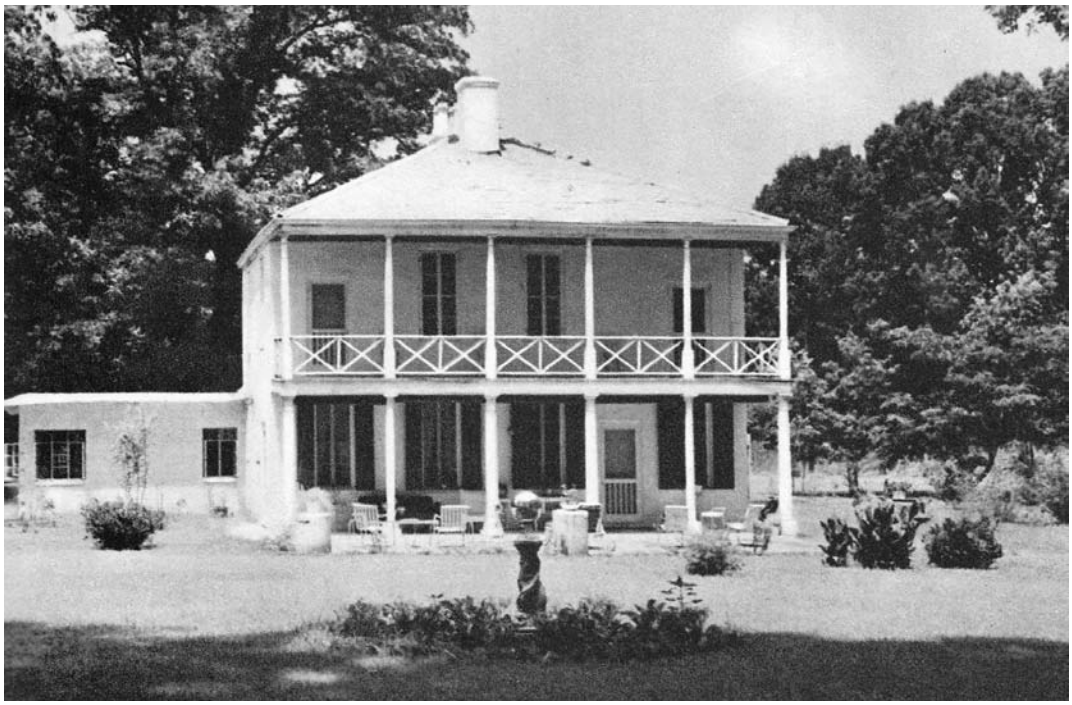
Gabriel and Catharine took their time moving into Claremont. A Paris honeymoon stretched into two years. When they finally made their way back to America, it was with a young daughter, Kate. She would have thirteen siblings over the next twenty-three years. As the family grew on an almost yearly basis, time was split between Claremont and Richland, another of the numerous Surget plantations. Patriarch Francis continued to add to his holdings, and he bought the old Fisk mansion, Inismore, with plans to tear it down and build a true Natchez mansion for the young couple. Ellen Shields recalled the transition fifty years later: "[Mother] drew the plans for both the dwelling and the kitchen; drew them with my Father sitting beside her, he making suggestions and she asking advice." One assumes that Francis Surget was likely looking over their shoulders.



The interior of Montebello was elaborately furnished by the Shields family. Photo courtesy of Surget Sanders.

Inismore was demolished and the columned façade of Montebello rose in its place. Vintage photos show a house that in many ways resembles Dunleith, although on a more modest scale. The house is square with a multitude of tall windows and doorways. Two-story Doric columns rise from ground-level plinths and are connected with delicate wooden banisters. Several chimneys are visible above the classical entablature. In many ways, Montebello is reminiscent of the one extant drawing of The Forest, the home of Catharine Surget Shields's grandparents, and it could be speculated that she may have based her design on her impressions of that house, which burned in 1852.

The Shieldses, with their nine children, moved into Montebello in 1852; five more children would be born in the mansion. The family enjoyed the privileges accorded the upper echelons of Natchez society throughout the

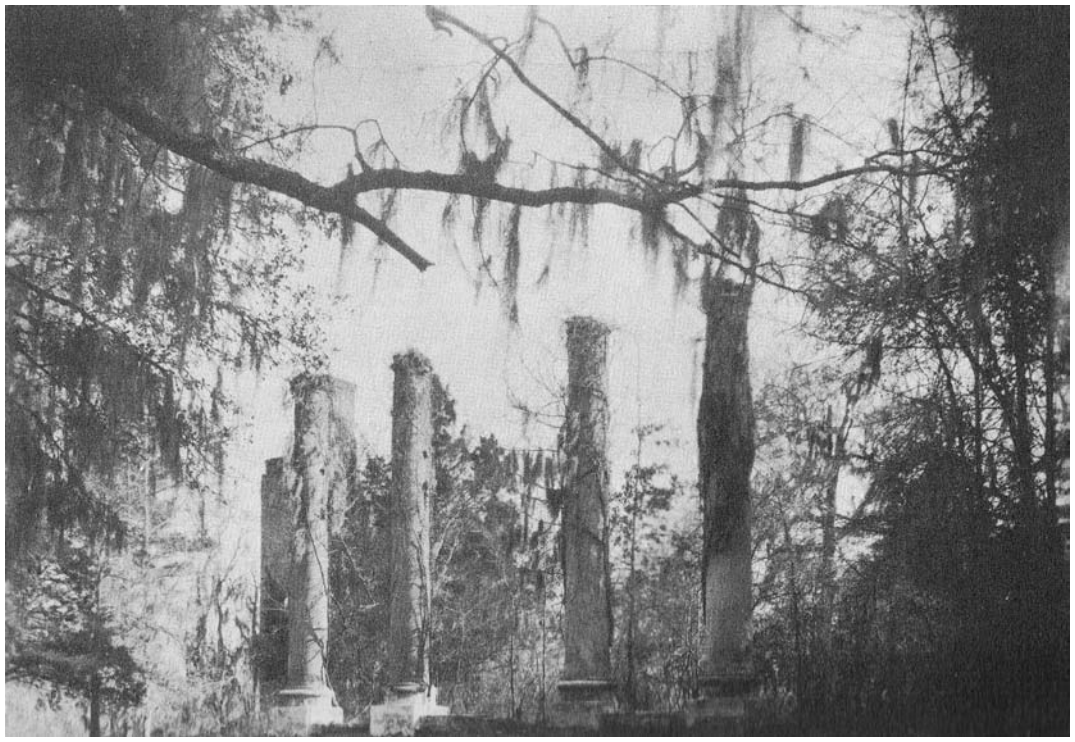


Montebello was destroyed by fire in 1899, leaving only this kitchen dependency to mark the grounds of the mansion. Photo courtesy of Mississippi Department of Archives and History.

next decade, despite the death of the indomitable Francis Surget in 1856. The estate in town was extensive but didn't involve any agricultural production. That was handled at one of the family's nearby plantations, Aventine, an eleven-hundred-acre operation a few miles southeast of Natchez. Gabriel Shields oversaw both sites, sending messages from one to the other regarding the daily details of a large agricultural enterprise. Former slave Charlie Davenport recalled his opinion of Mr. Shields in the 1930s: "He was one of the richest and highest quality gentlemen in the whole country; we didn't belong to no white trash. The master was the Honorable Mister Gabriel Shields himself. Everybody knowed about him. He married a Surget . . . The master had a town mansion what's pictured in a lot of books. It was called 'Montebello.'"[1]

Davenport didn't regard Mrs. Shields's lineage with as much respect, referring to them as "devilish Surgets."[2] He did not elaborate on his negative feelings.

The elegant life of Gabriel and Catharine Shields was not to last. Natchez surrendered without a fight when Federal troops entered the city in May of 1862; the only true skirmish was a ridiculous incident that involved drunken revelers taking potshots at the gunboat *Essex*. Tragically, the sailors returned fire and managed to kill a seven-year-old girl fleeing up Silver Street. By summer 1863, Natchez was fully occupied, and Union officers had taken up residence in many of the city's mansions. Montebello was not taken for Federal occupation, but it was the scene of one of the more egregious acts of the occupation, as described by Ellen Shields in her memoir. She



The remaining columns of Montebello stood for several decades after the fire. Photo courtesy of Mississippi Department of Archives and History.

was twenty years old at the time and was obviously still quite angry about the incident forty years later.

The Yankees took possession of Natchez at 3:00 p.m. on Monday, July 13th, 1863 . . . The Commandant at that time was Brig. Gen Brayman, a demon in human form . . . Montebello was in easy reach of three picket stations. Consequently, no matter what the weather, windows and doors were never locked downstairs. We lived behind bolts and bars, vacating the lower floor entirely, save when the few friends who could get to us came, or when we were at meals. The reason for this barricading was that, whenever the hour for change of pickets came we were sure of some sort of attack for plunder or to annoy, and between times, too, we were often attacked, especially at night.[3]

Union troops known as "bushwackers" were living in the house next door to Montebello, and Ellen described them as "the lowest, vilest folk one can imagine; ignorant, with no sense of either common decency or truth, a number of them deserters from both armies."[4] Apparently many of these troops had their families with them, and the Shields family had seen to it that their sick children were tended to and even buried should they die. In apparent gratitude, one of the bushwackers alerted Gabriel Shields that a raid was planned on Montebello for the next day.

[My father] got out of hiding three guns: one for himself, one for Surget [Shields, age seventeen] and one for Wilmer [Shields, age fifteen]. Our hall furniture was of massive oak. He put some of the settees across the middle of the huge hall. On these

he placed chairs at regular intervals. Over these he spread small rugs, leaving loop holes through which he and his boys might take aim. [Father] bade me watch from upstairs and give him any warning should any Yankee appear in the distance. He said he did not believe in any coming attack and could not longer leave the animals to suffer for want of attention. The Yankees had still left us in possession of two or three old cows, two very old horses, and a vicious pony which they had failed to catch.

Lieutenant Earle and his band were the terror of the whole country for miles. They spent their time in committing atrocities on the defenseless. My father had not more than reached the stable when I descried down the road, galloping at full speed toward "Montebello," four men, none of them in full uniform and two of them mounted on mules, with ordinary saddles. It was the affair of but a few seconds for my Father to be at his post behind "his fortifications," along with his boys, Surget and Wilmer. He deputed me to parley, from the upper gallery, with the Yankees. And so I went back and forth with demands and answers. Thereunto these Yankees demanded to be "let into the house" and that "all the men be given up" to them. And they said that if these demands were not complied with they'd "storm the house." My Father's answer was: "Even in the laws of the United States, every man's house is his castle and I mean to defend my castle."[5]

The whole scenario would be comical if it hadn't had the potential of turning deadly in moments. Here was a young lady, raised in the lap of luxury with servants, trips to Europe, and all the finery of Natchez, jawing back and forth with renegade soldiers while her father and two teenagers crouched beneath the hall furniture and a collection of rugs. A servant was dispatched to the nearest picket station with request for uniformed officers to come and correct the situation. They did, but as soon as they left, the four original soldiers returned with ten cohorts.

These ten men were properly dressed and mounted as U.S. soldiers, but the original four, who seemed to command . . . made the same demands. If possible their threats, their oaths and their frenzy had increased in violence in proportion with the increase in number . . . My Father's answers were the same as before, coupled with the information that the U.S. officers had approved of his course. After a few minutes these marauders, too, galloped away.

But in an incredibly short time, down the road, tearing toward Montebello, all of them yelling and shouting there came twenty men led by the country's terror—Earle himself! [He] made the same demands as the others had made—men surrendered to him and house thrown open. My Father's answers were always the same. Then Earle divided his men, placing one half at the front hall door and the other half at the back hall door. I saw one of Earle's men go behind a tree in the front yard and take there from two of our axes and two stout oak staves, once part of a worn fence . . . Earle gave to each of two men an ax and to each of the two others he gave a stave . . . At the word "Fire!" from Earle, the ax-bearer and the stave-bearer, back and front, battered at the exceedingly thick oaken doors. And all the rest of the squad fired, at the same time, into the glass surrounding the doors. After nearly two hours of this (my Father and Surget returning fire at long intervals), the locks, bolts and hinges of these massive doors were nearly in two and the doors themselves were splintering.[6]

It was hardly a fair fight. A neighbor with Union connections slipped in and convinced Gabriel and Surget to surrender. Mr. Shields insisted that the troops stack their arms before they entered Montebello, which was just as well since, according to Ellen, "the rage of the Yankees when they found that they had had but 'one man and one boy' to oppose them is beyond all description. Earle made a lunge at my Father's throat, uttering a terrible oath. I sprang forward, saying: 'You promised behavior becoming an

officer and a gentleman.' With an oath, he said, 'So I did and I'll not again forget.'"[7]

The Shields men were arrested and jailed for several weeks. Ellen and Kate, fearing for the health and safety of their frail mother and younger siblings, followed the procession into Natchez and pled for their release, to no avail. Their trip back home was harrowing.

We had agreed to meet on a certain corner. [Kate] found me there indeed, under the guard of eighteen men, who were abusively ordering me to leave town and threatening . . . Then the band of terrors surrounded us, whooping and yelling and cursing and beating our broken down team. And so we went tearing to "Montebello" . . . We had left my poor Mother as pale as a sheet, and as if turned to stone. Her little ones pattering after her, were likewise pale and mute, following her, clinging to her, as she attended to her duties, which she never, under any circumstances, neglected. The servants, too, followed her around dazed.[8]

Gabriel and Surget were imprisoned for several weeks, but their troubles were hardly over. Within the space of a few days, three of the four youngest Shields children died, probably from typhoid fever, but Ellen forever blamed their deaths on the invasion of Montebello. "Their illness and consequent death was the result of terrible fright induced by the Yankee atrocity . . . Amelia was the first to go. Alice, Lenox and I were each desperately ill at the time . . ."[9] The war would be over in a few months, but Montebello and its family never recovered. The older sons, who had survived service in the Confederate army, were sent off to school in Europe (as were many of the young men in Natchez during these uncertain times) and the entire Shields family, except for recently married Kate, soon followed. Montebello was shuttered for several years. Gabriel lived until 1881 and Catharine until 1888, but Ellen, looking back, saw the war as an irreversible turning point in the affairs of this great estate. She reminisced a few years after her cousin, Jimmy Surget, purchased Montebello at auction in 1897.

This large beautiful and commodious home was sold by auction, together with Aventine, and everything we possessed—the library, the paintings, the silver, my Mother's diamonds—everything. And this to meet plantation debts. These debts were incurred through no fault of anyone, simply caused by one terrible misfortune after another—quick succeeding overflows, epidemics of charbon, etc. The auction took place Dec. 1897. Everything sold for a mere song—"Montebello" inclusive. Jimmy Surget bought both this place and "Aventine" for a mere song. "Montebello" was destroyed by fire on the 9th or 10th of February, 1899.[10]

Ellen was off by a day or two. The *Natchez Democrat & Courier* of February 9, 1899, included this article about the fire:

The fire was caused by a defective flue. The house was occupied by Mr. B. D. Guice . . . The house was a magnificent structure and was owned by the late Mr. Shields and remained in the family up to a few years ago when the property, 200 acres, and the houses were sold to Mr. James Surget. The appointments of the house were complete in all respects. There was a perfect system of water works for hot and cold water and all conveniences. There were fifteen rooms in the house . . . At the time of its construction (1849) the building material was at a low price and the main building was erected at a cost of $28,000 . . . Mr. Shields died in 1881 and his family resided at Montebello until 1885 when Mrs. Shields, who is now dead, removed to New Orleans. A few years ago the property, 200 acres of rich bottom land with the mansion and outbuildings were sold to Mr. James Surget for the sum of $8750. At one time Mr. Shields carried a $20,000 insurance policy on the house and later

the insurance was reduced to $16,000. The policy expired last December and was not renewed.[11]

A few of the two-story columns that fronted Montebello's galleries stood for decades, and they were mentioned by Charlie Davenport as still existing in the late 1930s, almost forty years after the mansion burned. They were finally taken down, probably in the 1940s, leaving only a kitchen dependency remains to mark the site of one of Natchez's most noteworthy homes.

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Tullis-Toledano Manor

The antebellum homes which lined the beach boulevards from Bay St. Louis to Pascagoula weathered a number of hurricanes before Katrina decimated their numbers in August 2005. Those concentrated in the counties which allowed casino gambling had also survived the encroaching sea of asphalt and neon that followed that industry. Tullis-Toledano Manor, one of the most unique of the coastal mansions, stood for a century and a half before being obliterated by a hurricane-driven gambling barge.

The Mississippi Gulf Coast was the summer haven for rich New Orleans and Mobile families throughout the nineteenth century, and it was primarily their homes that came to symbolize the estates along Highway 90. Pierre Pradat of New Orleans purchased a large plat of land in 1832 for eight hundred dollars. He then opened the coast's first legal gambling resort, the Green Oaks Hotel, which stood for the next forty years.

Pradat's youngest daughter, Matilde, was engaged to marry wealthy New Orleans cotton broker Christopher Sebastian Toledano. They chose the land just west of the Green Oaks complex for their homesite and hired Matilde's uncle, Jean Marie Pradat, to design and build it. Construction began in 1854 and was completed by 1856.

Christopher Toledano brought seven children to the marriage, and he would father five more with Matilde. The house they built was not large, at least by the standards of antebellum Mississippi, but it was ingeniously designed to minimize the negative aspects of life in the South. It was a two-and-a-half-story, five-bay red brick home with upper and lower galleries front and rear. The original ground floor featured just three side-by-side symmetrical rooms. Smaller rooms were tucked in at the corners of the east and west rooms; the northeast room held a spiral stair and the northwest room housed servants' space. The main access to the upstairs bedrooms was a turning stair on the east end of the front gallery.

The Toledano House was ideally oriented to catch the gulf breezes through its floor-to-ceiling windows and aligned doorways. Fourteen-foot ceilings allowed the heat to rise above the living space, and a large attic trapped even more of the heavy summer air. Thick shutters with iron fasteners closed tightly over the windows and doors in case of storms. The front galleries were fronted by six brick Tuscan columns on the ground level; above were chamfered wooden posts. Connecting the posts were balusters in an "x" pattern.

One hidden innovation, a complicated arrangement of inverted subterranean brick arches, was obviously the work of a trained and skilled architect, most likely Jean Marie Pradat. These arches served to spread the weight of the

Tullis-Toledano Manor was destroyed by Hurricane Katrina in 2005. Photo courtesy of Mary Rose Carter.

columns above them and provided a more stable base should wind or rain threaten the house. This arrangement would stand the house in good stead through decades of hurricanes.

The interior of the house was plastered throughout with a lime-based plaster and painted in intense colors. The downstairs floors were covered with inlaid bricks. In 1857, not long after the family had moved in, New Orleans painter Jules Legrand was hired to cover the walls and ceilings with murals. These weren't the usual pastoral scenes found in numerous ante-bellum and Victorian manors. Legrand created a variety of strange, even eerie, scenes, described years later by a young observer.

On the east wall, over the fireplace, was painted a group of seven women in garments of the period—some in bonnets, some in veils. On the large west wall, several gluttonous men were depicted. Hunters in costumes were beside the doors in the north wall, but what the pictures on the south wall were, no one seems to know.

One of the things that I remember about the house was when I was a small boy and use [*sic*] to lay on my back in the living room and look up at the

ceiling on which was painted faces—some smiling, some sad, and some looked insane.[1]

The house was not seriously threatened during the Civil War years. Christopher Toledano died in 1869, and his widow sold the thirty-five acres east of the house to Mary Crawford and Theodosia Jane Crawford in 1871. Matilde Pradat Toledano would spend the remainder of her life primarily in Memphis, returning to the Biloxi house each summer until her death in 1902. She had sold off the portion of the property containing the house in 1886, deeding the title to her niece, Carmen Valle, for twenty-one hundred dollars.

Louis Valle was a New Orleans cotton broker, as Christopher Toledano had been, and he and his wife enjoyed the manor for twenty years before selling it to Dr. Thomas Osborne Hunter. Dr. Hunter was a Como general practitioner who relocated to the rapidly developing Gulf Coast in 1906. He tooled around Harrison County in one of the first automobiles to be seen there, speculated in real estate, planted a vast fruit and pecan orchard, and raised cows on the Toledano property.

Dr. Hunter was not one to stay still for long, and after a year, he sold the house to his sister-in-law, Vinnie Philbrick. The house which the Philbricks purchased was lacking in electricity and gas, and they set about modernizing it. A dining room and kitchen were added and the old brick floors disappeared beneath new hardwood. The original central hallway was converted into a living room. Tragically, the Philbricks also covered the unusual murals, instructing the workers to erase all sign of the disturbing paintings.

The Philbrick family lived in the Toledano house until the Great Depression destroyed their finances in 1930. Ownership of the property passed on to John B. Campbell, a horseracing impresario who didn't hang around for long. The house found its last private owner when Garner Tullis purchased the estate for sixty-five hundred dollars in 1939. Tullis was president of the New Orleans Cotton Exchange; he really wasn't looking for a Mississippi beach house when Biloxi's mayor approached with his fears that a proposed road would go right through the house. Over the years, Mr. Tullis came to cherish the site and updated his home, even pulling down Mrs. Philbrick's moldy plaster in hopes of finding the Legrand murals.

By the time Garner Tullis died in 1965, his name had been added to the accepted title of the house. Four years later, the howling winds of Hurricane Camille slammed into the Mississippi coast, driving five feet of water across the parquet floors of Tullis-Toledano and rendering it essentially uninhabitable without massive repairs. For six long years, it sat empty and ruined, until the city of Biloxi purchased the property for $375,000 and converted the house into a welcome center and museum.

The next threat to Tullis-Toledano came with the influx of gambling businesses and their insatiable appetite for land and parking lots. As nearby property was consumed by the casino industry, the city of Biloxi held out and refused to sell off their historic welcome center. Aerial views of this stretch of Highway 90 taken in early 2005 show a stalwart cluster of ancient trees sheltering the house site, just north of the hulking Grand Casino barge.

As Hurricane Katrina approached, worried city officials watched the radar and hoped that Tullis-Toledano would be spared the blows that Camille had brought. Camille's winds were stronger than Katrina's, but what Camille lacked was a wall of water that Katrina hurled toward Biloxi and the floating debris fields generated by the barges. When the surge hit the moorings of the Grand Casino, the structure floated free and was propelled across several hundred yards of beach and highway. It slammed full-force into Tullis-Toledano, shattering its famous red bricks in a thousand directions. When the barge was finally removed, there was almost no evidence that the house had ever existed.

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Stephenson-McAlexander House

North of Holly Springs, just a few miles up Highway 311 toward Mount Pleasant, the road takes a sweeping curve to the east for no apparent reason. There are no visible obstacles or natural barriers that would explain this detour, and it just appears that the highway engineers were having a bad day when they laid out this section of road. What is not evident is that there was once a vast fruit orchard on this very spot, numbering ten thousand trees. When the first road was surveyed from Holly Springs toward the Tennessee state line, that orchard was valuable enough to swing the lines just a bit to the east. The orchard is only a memory, as are the families and house connected with it, but the mysterious curve has endured as dirt paths gave way to gravel and asphalt and concrete.

Josiah Patrick Milledge Stephenson, a Georgia native, had arrived in north Mississippi in 1836, aged thirty, with his wife, Eliza Mitchell. He bought this land north of the new county seat, built a two-room dogtrot cabin, and began planting fruit trees. By the time the road to Mount Pleasant was being surveyed four years later, he had such a prosperous and extensive orchard that the county governing board agreed to dogleg around his property. A November 1846 edition of the *Holly Springs Gazette* noted that "Major Stephenson has our thanks for the handsome present of some of the finest and best flavored apples we have ever tasted. Those apples were raised by Major Stephenson, who has upwards of ten thousand fruit trees of every quality, variety, and description for sale."[1]

Stephenson's plantation also included the requisite cotton acreage, and he was successful at both that and his nursery business. By 1850, he was ready to replace the small dogtrot structure with a finer Greek Revival house. It closely resembled several other homes scattered throughout Marshall County, all of which were story-and-a-half frame dwellings with four square columns supporting a front portico. The Stephenson house was raised above ground level and featured intricately detailed cast-iron oval ventilators beneath the main floor. Inside, the four main rooms were separated by a wide central hallway and staircase. Upstairs were two rooms with long windows and corner fireplaces. Storage spaces known as "cuddies" were tucked underneath the eaves.

While the Stephenson House did not feature intricate plasterwork or fine detailing, it did have doors that were painted to resemble oak on one side and mahogany on the other. The baseboards were also grained to resemble fine woods. The parlor mantelpiece was marbleized, while the other rooms were paneled and stained. Originally, there was a frame kitchen behind the dining room, which may have been part of the first

The Stephenson-McAlexander House was a landmark just north of Holly Springs. Its plantation office was moved to Strawberry Plains Audubon Center. Photo courtesy of Hubert McAlexander.

dogtrot house. Within a few years of the house's completion, Major Stephenson replaced it with a brick wing that featured a separate dining room and kitchen with a huge open brick fireplace, all connected to the main house by a breezeway.

Local carpenters George W. Snow and James Hail were the contractors for the project; their brick kiln can still be seen across Highway 311 from the house site. The brick molds were discovered underneath the house in later years. These same builders may have been responsible for the utilitarian collection of outbuildings, including a brick smokehouse, a weaving house, wellhouse, barn, corn crib, and the office, which is the only surviving structure.

The two Stephenson sons died in 1861, leaving Milledge and Eliza with their two daughters, Eliza and Mary. The latter scandalized her parents and the community by marrying local rake David McAlexander. Eliza did a bit better, marrying James Benton Potts, a large landowner. That wedding took place just a year after her father died defending his property. In December 1862, following Earl Van Dorn's infamous predawn raid on Union encampments in Holly Springs, Kansas Jayhawkers came barreling into the yard of the Stephenson home and began pillaging the outbuildings. Major Stephenson ran outside, clad only in his nightshirt, desperately trying to stop the marauders. Three

weeks later, he was dead of pneumonia at age fifty-seven.

Eliza Mitchell Stephenson soon remarried, to a man twenty years her junior. It was a short-lived marriage, but she did come through the divorce with even more acreage. Her daughter and son-in-law, Mary Stephenson and David McAlexander, had both died by the 1870s, and Eliza took in their four sons to raise. Her own death would come a few years later with a fall into one of the home's fireplaces. By then the Stephenson and McAlexander families were inextricably linked together, both in lineage and in the name of their home.

Edward Lee McAlexander bought the property after the death of his grandmother Eliza. He had grown up there and attended Chalmers Institute, a private boys' school in Holly Springs. In 1894, he secured a post office designation for the old plantation office with the postmark "Mack, Mississippi." He enlarged the store and took in the teachers of the Mack School as boarders, including the three Ingram sisters: Dora, Essie, and Bessie. The telephone he installed in the store was for years the only one for miles around, and his baseball field was a natural gathering place.

E. L. McAlexander took great pride in the Stephenson House and maintained it and its grounds meticulously. The best photo of it was taken on Christmas Day, 1913, and shows several family members grouped on the front porch. After his death, the house passed to his son, John Irving McAlexander. As the century wore on, the family moved on and the house was slowly abandoned and vandalized. It was still standing in the first decade of the twenty-first century, but all the mantels, doorknobs, and hardware had been stripped away. In 2008, the current owners of the land pushed what remained of it down, leaving only the curve in the road to mark the site of Milledge Stephenson's labors.

The plantation office, in use as a store until 1932, is one of the few existing examples of such a nineteenth-century structure. Fortunately, it was carefully preserved and moved to the Strawberry Plains Audubon Center for use as an educational center.

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Three Oaks

Most of the seven million acres that comprise the Mississippi Delta region were still uninhabitable when the Civil War began. Snake-infested bayous and sluggish creeks provided some limited transportation, but their predilection to jump their banks in the spring made the surrounding farmland more trouble than it seemed to be worth. From the time this area opened up for development in the early 1800s until the post-Reconstruction era, a farmhouse was a rare sight, and a plantation manor even rarer.

A few intrepid Kentucky settlers did build homes around Lake Washington, just south of the town of Greenville. Some ventured too close to the Mississippi and saw their efforts washed away as the river changed course. Others despaired of the yearly mosquito infestation, the oppressive heat, and the lack of cultural resources and moved on. Absentee landlords in Natchez and Vicksburg owned much of the tillable land, but left the actual work of growing cotton to their overseers and slaves. On the eastern edge of the Delta, planters built their fine homes in the hills around Carrollton, Yazoo City, and Charleston.

It has been estimated that at the end of the antebellum era, only 10 percent of the Delta had been cleared, drained, and rendered inhabitable. Part of that small percentage encompassed the banks of Deer Creek, a quiet, slow-moving stream ten miles east of Greenville. One of its first settlers was Judge James Rucks, a Tennessee native who left his home state in 1842. His son-in-law, Judge William Yerger, was an associate on the Mississippi Supreme Court, and he probably convinced his father-in-law to venture south in search of cheap, fertile land.

Judge Rucks first tried Lake Washington, farming land that his wife had inherited from her parents. Following her death, he packed up his younger children and moved to the east bank of Deer Creek, where he built one of the few antebellum mansions in the Delta. Old photos of Three Oaks show a two-story frame house with double galleries supported by pierced columns. There are five bays and possibly a gallery on the rear as well. One contemporary description states that there were originally galleries on all sides, with the gable end porches removed in later years.

Other families, including the literary Percys, soon moved to the area, and the tradition of a never-ending Delta social season followed. One of James Rucks's daughters reminisced for the Washington County Historical Society in the early 1900s:

> My father bought the Cuningham place . . . Mr. Cuningham was one of those men who gave reputation to the South at that time. He raced hard, gambled hard, drank very hard, fought duels, one, I believe, across a pocket handkerchief; but, with it all, he had mild and pleasant manners.

Three Oaks Plantation occupied the site of present-day Leland. Photo courtesy of Mississippi Department of Archives and History.

My father's places were carried on like the farms in Kentucky, from which state he imported his fine stock. One would be astonished now at the lavish style in which the Southern planter lived. At Three Oaks, there were never less than twenty-five cows milked night and morning. There were several hundred head of Southdown sheep, several hundred goats wandered around, and there were enough hogs raised to [supply] three plantations . . . Raspberries and strawberries were gathered by the water bucket, and well they might be, for our family used to congregate at Three Oaks for the summer. Sometimes, there would be as many as twenty-five of us there all summer. Southern hospitality has often been spoken of, and I have known many instances of it, for my father was a most generous-hearted man. I remember that when I was a child, one of my brothers-in-law, who was spending the winter at home, invited a cousin to come to Judge Ruck's [*sic*] and stay until his house on a plantation on Fish Lake was ready for his family. He came with his wife and six children and stayed until he rebuilt, which was about six months.

These were not isolated cases, for Mrs. Walker Percy told me of an old lady who came to her father's to take dinner and stayed the rest of her life. I knew a gentleman who was invited to stay a few weeks at the Percy's [*sic*] and stayed eighteen months; he probably would not have left then, if the war had not broken out.

Deer Creek was a wilderness when I first went there to live, but later it was most delightful place. We had Judge Dixon, Major Lee, the Percys, Judge Shall Yerger, Judge William Yerger, my three brothers, all in a short distance of each other and all charming, educated people.[1]

Captain W. W. Stone tried to unravel the remarkable Rucks/Yerger genealogy for the Historical Society in 1912:

Now we approach a grand central home, Three Oaks, from which it radiated, as it were, several smaller

homes in which dwelt the children of the founder and builder, Judge James Rucks. Three portions of the original estate were the homes of his three sons, Arthur, James T., and Hal T. Rucks, and his two daughters, Mrs. Alexander Yerger . . . and Mrs. James Yerger. Please permit a comment here touching the marital alliances of Judge Rucks' children in coupling themselves with the Yergers. Four of Judge Rucks' daughters married Yergers. Malvina Rucks married Judge William Yerger . . . Bettie Rucks married Mr. Alexander Yerger . . . Maria Louisa Rucks married James Yerger, a nephew of William and Alexander Yerger . . . Another daughter, Henrietta Rucks, married William Swan Yerger, another nephew of the older set . . . Arthur Rucks married Mary Margaret Yerger . . . Thus it appeared that no one was good enough for a Yerger but a Rucks, as the Yerger boys went a-courting among the Rucks girls rather than the reverse.[2]

Judge Rucks's home was the social center of the Deer Creek community in the 1850s. But war was just around the corner, and it didn't spare this isolated corner of Mississippi. Greenville was put to the torch, and many of its citizens and the plantation families along Lake Washington fled east to Deer Creek. They found there that some traditions would continue in spite of war and deprivation:

A thrilling incident occurred at one of these dances that was being given at my uncle's house [Three Oaks]. The piano was in the hall, and everything was illuminated with tallow candles. A great deal of ingenuity was used in handling these candles. Long boards were procured and holes bored in them just the size for the candles. These boards were fastened across the windows and doors and could be covered whenever it was necessary. On the occasion to which I refer, the dancers were all on the floor, and in the crowd were many Confederate soldiers. There was a knock on door, and Miss Mal Yerger opened it, expecting to welcome other soldiers in gray, but there stood a Yankee. My aunt fortunately saw him at the same time, and gave the alarm as quickly as possible. The lights were immediately extinguished, and in the confusion and darkness, the Confederate soldiers managed to make their escape.[3]

Three Oaks survived the war, but the Rucks fortune did not. In October 1875, six hundred and forty acres and the house were auctioned on the steps of the Washington County Courthouse at Greenville. It was purchased by a Kentucky bank, which turned around and sold it to Captain James Alexander Ventress Feltus, a native of Wilkinson County who had relocated from the worn-out lands of southwest Mississippi to the rapidly developing Delta. Levees had been built, the railroads were coming, and Feltus pictured Washington County as a good bet. He purchased twenty-five hundred acres of Deerpark Plantation and added the acreage of Three Oaks, including the house itself.

Captain Feltus and his sister, Martha, moved into Three Oaks just as new houses and businesses were appearing along Deer Creek. By century's turn, Leland was a true town and the plantation era along the stream was all but gone. The Washington County Historical Society noted its passing in a 1912 meeting:

For many miles up and down Deer Creek, Three Oaks house is the only one now standing to mark its era, and that has been shorn of some of its dimensions. Originally, as I first knew it, it was a large structure, with large rooms and an extremely wide hall; broad galleries completely surrounded it, and it was two stories in height. As I have stated, it still stands, shorn of its galleries at either end. It is well preserved and is owned and occupied by Mrs. J.A.V. Feltus. A goodly portion of the home place of Judge Rucks is now the site of the city of Leland.[4]

Eleven years later, Three Oaks burned, erasing the last remnant of Deer Creek's antebellum culture.

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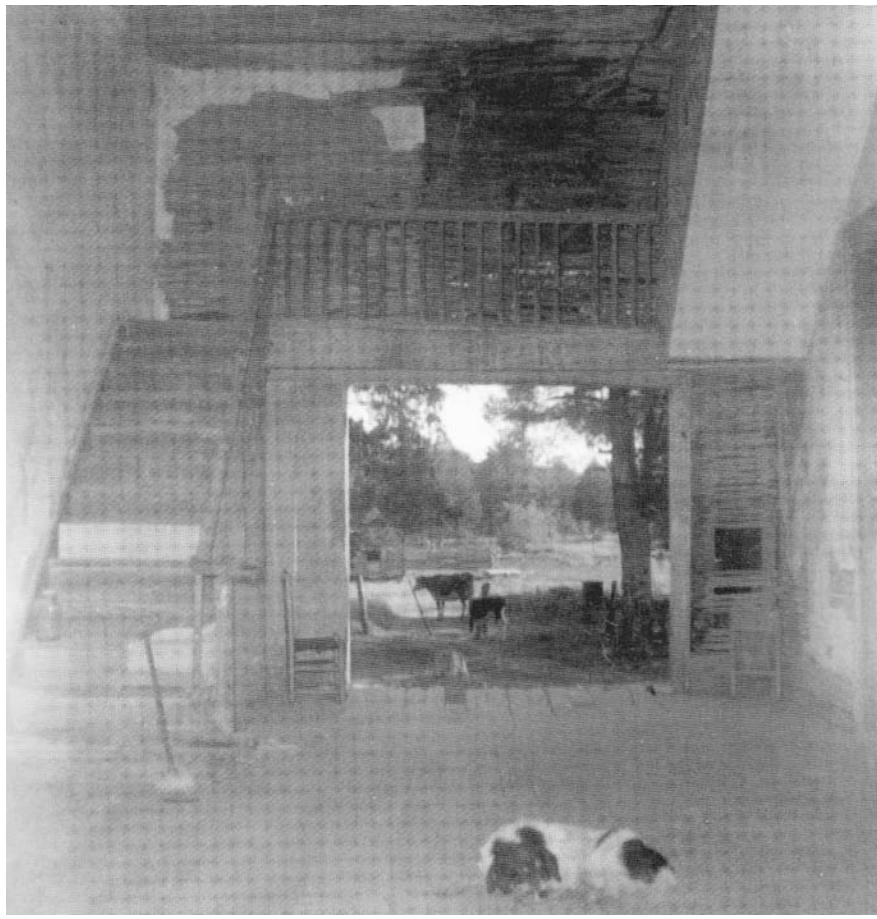
Valleyside

Holly Springs is a hidden trove of outstanding antebellum architecture, rivaling Natchez and Columbus in quality if not in publicity. This was a town that grew out of the wilderness in the mid-1830s and within ten years was producing more cotton and money than any other county in the state. Most of its original communities, bearing names like Slayden, Mount Pleasant, Hudsonville, and Lamar, have vanished or dwindled to just a crossroads on the highway, and only the county seat of Holly Springs remains to demonstrate the wealth that once existed here. The 1938 WPA Mississippi guide captured the fate of most of the county's fine houses. "North of Red Banks US 78 passes through some of the most eroded land in the state . . . Except for occasional cotton patches, little land is under cultivation . . . A great many crumbling mansions, built during the flush times of the 1830s and 1840s, desolately face the encroaching gullies. These houses, gradually moldering away as the earth slides beneath them, are unpainted, with sagging porches and rotting pillars."[1]

One of the houses they might have been describing was Snowdoun, built in the 1830s by Andrew Robinson Govan near the community of Lamar. Mr. Govan had served in the North Carolina legislature before pulling up stakes and relocating to the booming northern edge of Mississippi. He and his wife, along with their six sons and two daughters, came to dominate the social strata of northern Marshall County. Although Govan lost his fortune in the 1837 financial collapse and died bankrupt in 1841, his resourceful widow tapped into her own family's fortune and kept the plantation.

She must have been handy with matchmaking as well as finances, for her numerous children married into prominent families and most acquired their own land and houses. Daniel Chevilette Govan married Mary Fogg Otey, daughter of Bishop James Otey, the first Episcopal bishop of Tennessee and provisional bishop of Mississippi, as well as the founder of the University of the South. Daniel would head for California during the 1849 gold rush, become sheriff of Sacramento, and return to a successful career as an Arkansas planter and Confederate brigadier general. Another son, George Morgan Govan, served in the postwar state legislature and was subsequently elected Mississippi's secretary of state.

The eldest Govan son, Eaton Pugh, built Valleyside, a galleried story-and-a-half house near Lamar. The only existing photos of this house show a deep veranda stretching the full length of the front façade, with tall shuttered windows and a Greek Revival doorway and sidelights. A large center hallway is dominated by a stair which rises off the left wall, turns onto a long



Valleyside was home to the Govan family, some of whose members would encounter Mrs. Ulysses Grant during the war years. Courtesy of Hubert McAlexander.

landing, and then continues up the right wall. It figured prominently in Mary Pugh Jones Govan's description of the huge wedding celebration which was given for her daughter, Sallie, and Christopher Haynes Mott in late 1854:

The 21st of December, 1854, a very large company assembled at Valleyside (my son, Pugh's home). I think there were 350 invitations sent out, at least, and I never heard anyone attempt to guess how many accepted, for every room, passage, piazza, nook, etc., at Pugh's seemed crowded. So many children and servants occupied the staircase, that we felt some uneasiness lest it should break down.

About nine o'clock (I think) the folding doors opened, and there stood the bridal party. Col. Mott and Sallie, in the back parlor, Rt. Rev. James A. Otey near them, in his imposing Bishop's robes, the groomsmen and bridesmaids, 14 in number were arranged on either side, as follows, Walter A. Goodman (who felt pretty bad, I guess) and Bettie, John Govan and Pidge Arther, William Govan and Fannie Hutchins, Henry Craft and Elenora Harris, Edward Walthall and Lou Burton, James Autry (badly hurt, I

tell you, for he says he never expects to love again) and Sallie Moore, Henry Williamson and Mary Thomas.[2]

That wedding party included several of the most prominent families in 1850s Marshall County. Their partying days would soon end. Sallie Govan's new husband, Christopher Mott, would be killed at Williamsburg less than ten years later. The war hit this region of Mississippi particularly hard, and Mary Govan was forced to flee Snowdoun and Valleyside when the houses were commandeered as hospital space following the battles at Shiloh and Corinth. She took her daughter and daughter-in-law to Walter Place, one of the largest homes in Holly Springs. Colonel Harvey Washington Walter had relocated his own family to Huntsville, so the huge Greek Revival/Gothic manor was empty and available for the Govan women. They brought their family silver with them and had the servants bury it under Walter Place's long brick sidewalk. The war was about to move right in with them, in an altogether unexpected fashion.

Union general Ulysses Grant, like many other Civil War officers, kept his family as close to his military postings as possible without endangering them. As he maneuvered around Holly Springs and Oxford, desperately searching for a way down to Vicksburg, he moved Julia Grant and their young son into Walter Place. The Govan ladies were not pleased, but were in no position to argue. They watched nervously out the upstairs windows as the Federal guards marched up and down the sidewalk, passing right over the recently hidden silver.

Tempers and manners were strained inside the mansion. Julia Grant related her side of the story in her memoirs:

Jesse [her son] was with me and Jule, my nurse and maid, a slave born and brought up at my old Missouri home. Colonel Bowers of the General's staff had secured very nice quarters for us in a fine house belonging to Mr. Walker [*sic*], who, I think, had formerly been a cabinet officer at Washington. It was occupied by the wife of a Confederate officer. Her husband, son, and brother-in-law were with the Southern army. She was a fine, noble woman, as so many of these Southern women were. The ladies set up late to receive me, which was very kind, and after being refreshed by a light supper, I was conducted to my apartment by Madam ——— . . . I did not realize for a moment that I was actually in the enemy's camp until, arising from the table with the family, we entered the hall, and I naturally, or thoughtlessly, turned towards the door of the drawing room where I had been received the night before; when suddenly the hostess stepped forward, and placing her fair hand on the doorknob, said: "Excuse me, Mrs. Grant, but I have set aside a drawing room for your use." Only imagine my chagrin and mortification. I realized instantly my mistake . . . I never after entered their apartments except by special and very pressing invitation . . . My hostess had a dear little boy and he soon made friends with Jesse. They played amiably together as warm friends.[3]

Valleyside had slid into irreparable ruin by the time these photos were made in the 1960s. Courtesy of Hubert McAlexander.

The Govan and Grant families worked out an awkward truce, necessary since they were all under the same roof while their husbands were trying to kill each other. But it couldn't last, as war raged from Holly Springs to Oxford, where Julia Grant was relocated. She recalled the scene after Earl Van Dorn's troops routed the Union forces in a predawn raid:

> The next morning, before we were fairly awake, a knock at our door announced important telegrams. Holly Springs with 2000 of our troops had surrendered; hospital and commissary stores burned; my carriage burned and horses captured . . . Before leaving Holly Springs, I was told, some of [Confederate general] Van Dorn's staff officers rode up to the house of which I had lately been an inmate and asked for me. My hostess [Mrs. Govan] assured them I was not there, that I had gone the previous evening to visit General Grant. They demanded my baggage, and this also the kind and noble lady protected by her earnest and personal requests. The loss of this baggage, little as there was of it, would have entailed endless annoyance.[4]

One of the Govan ladies recalled, forty years later, that the elder Mrs. Govan had actually faced down the Confederate officers on the stairs of Walter Place, icily reminding them that gentlemen, particularly southern gentlemen, would never invade a lady's bedroom, even if she was the wife of the hated Yankee commander. Her resolve sent them skittering back down the stairs and out of the house; as it happened, when this incident caught Grant's attention, he placed an order of safety around Walter Place, likely saving it for posterity.

Walter Place, Valleyside, and Snowdoun all survived the chaos and destruction of the Civil War. In the political upheaval of Reconstruction and the 1873 financial panic, Valleyside passed out of the Govan family and into the hands of the Treadwell family of Lamar. The Treadwell name would come to be well known in Memphis business circles, but the house at Valleyside slid into ruin.

Photos of Valleyside from the 1960s reveal a doomed house. Like so many of the decaying plantation manors, it was occupied by desperately poor sharecroppers and had become nearly uninhabitable. The hallway which had once hosted hundreds of wedding revelers was empty except for a sleepy dog and a broom. The plaster was gone from the walls, exposing the ancient wood lath beneath. The back doors had disappeared completely, leaving a gaping vista to the pasture where cattle feed just behind the house. Within a few more years, Valleyside had completely collapsed and joined a long list of lost Marshall County landmarks.

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Grasslawn

The Gulf Coast of Mississippi developed as an antebellum playground for the elite families of New Orleans and Mobile, providing a relatively healthy haven from the heat, mosquitoes, and crowded urban conditions that prevailed in those cities each summer. The famous "Six Sisters" of Bay St. Louis, Pass Christian, Mississippi City, Biloxi, Ocean Springs, and Pascagoula grew as steamboat stops peppered with beachside hotels and mansions of wealthy Louisianans and Alabamians. New Orleans was a city of 168,000 in 1860, fourth largest in the nation, and Mobile was a notable metropolis of 30,000. The entire Gulf Coast had a year-round population of only about 12,000, but those numbers would double or triple as the yellow fever months crept into the neighboring states' cities.

Resorts such as Pass Christian's Lynne Castle and Mexican Gulf and Biloxi's White House were separated by waterfront estates that stretched for hundreds of acres north of the Gulf. The houses that went up on these enormous lots were specially adapted for the climate. Raised basements, high-ceilinged rooms, and deeply shaded verandas optimized the sea breezes and allowed the occasional hurricane waters to pass underneath the living areas with minimal damage. Decorative elements such as double stairways and elaborate balustrades marked the beach road homes from Bay St. Louis to Pascagoula in a unique parade of Greek Revival excess.

During the pre–Civil War decades when the Gulf Coast mansions were being built, there were vast fortunes created in the cotton-growing regions of inland Mississippi. But for the newly minted millionaires in Holly Springs, Aberdeen, and the Delta, the coast was too distant for practicality. South of Jackson, the Piney Woods region stretched endlessly with few roads, and railroad service was almost nonexistent. Only a handful of Mississippians built summer homes in Harrison and Hancock counties, but two of those were among the most notable examples of coastal architecture. Beauvoir was all but destroyed by Hurricane Katrina, and Grasslawn vanished with nothing left but a concrete slab and the steps to mark its existence.

Madison County planter James Brown built the house originally called Orange Grove sometime between 1848 and 1852. Each summer until the early 1860s, the Browns would load up their eleven children and embark for a three-month sojourn in Biloxi, far from the swampy backwaters of the Big Black River. Their destination was "a large and commodious home, with a frontage of sixty feet and a depth of seventy feet . . . It fronts the south and the sea, where the placid waters roll lazily over the white sands or

Grasslawn was built by Dr. Hiram Roberts of Port Gibson as a summer retreat on the Gulf Coast. Photo courtesy of Historic American Buildings Survey/Library of Congress.

the great waves chased by the storm king break over the beach with the sound of distant thunder. Twenty-five broad steps lead up to the wide verandas which extend along three sides of the house . . . The whole structure is upheld by brick pillars."[1]

Mr. Brown died soon after the end of the Civil War, and the house passed into the hands of Frank Johnston, who then sold it to Sarah Ellis Dorsey. This daughter of an old Natchez family and friend of Varina Howell Davis invited Jefferson Davis to use this idyllic setting to write his memoirs. He spent his last decade at the renamed Beauvoir, which was turned into a soldiers' home and shrine after his death.

A few miles west of Beauvoir, another inland planter constructed a home which would come to be symbolic of the Mississippi Gulf Coast. Grasslawn was the summer retreat of Dr. Hiram A. G. Roberts, a Port Gibson surgeon and planter. Roberts had been goaded into buying beachfront property by his sister-in-law, Sarah Cowden Calvit, whose late husband, Samuel, had sunk much of his cotton profits from Jefferson County and Hinds County plantations into a large Mississippi City home. The Roberts family outdid their cousins by erecting a thirty-six-hundred-square-foot Greek Revival showplace just to the west of the Calvit House in 1836. The original house probably closely resembled its description in 2005:

> Grass Lawn's distinctive appearance was primarily derived from its elegant two-tiered gallery, which originally encircled the body of the house. Slender two-story box columns supported a well-proportioned

The Milner family of Gulfport purchased Grasslawn in 1904 and owned it until after Hurricane Camille damaged it in 1969. Photo courtesy of Mississippi Department of Archives and History.

classical entablature and low hipped roof and were linked together on both stories by a delicate geometric balustrade, locally referred to as an "accordian balustrade." The spacious porches shaded the building from the intense sunlight, caught the refreshing Gulf breezes, and provided comfortable places for its residents to seek respite from the region's often oppressive heat. The galleries were for all practical purposes out-door living rooms whose "walls" were mostly composed of columns and balustrades.

The structure was of frame construction with hand-hewn timbers of longleaf pine and hand-planed cladding of cypress. The original floor plan on both levels consisted of three 20-foot-square rooms placed side-by-side on a single axis in the French *enfilade* manner. The house well illustrated the cultural fusion of the then-current American architectural fashion with older French Creole building forms.[2]

As the summer heat soared each year, Dr. Roberts would send his servants overland with provisions and supplies in wagons. The family would board southbound steamboats on the Mississippi River, headed for New Orleans. In the Crescent City, they would change to boats which took them across Lake Ponchartrain and Lake Borgne and into the Mississippi Sound. They would disembark at the piers fronting Mississippi City, settle into the large, comfortable rooms at Grasslawn, and plan their activities. Their summers were filled with fishing, boating, and the social whirl that revolved around the seaside resort hotels.

Dr. Roberts was the father of three sons; after his death, the oldest, Percy, bought out his brothers' shares and became the sole owner of Grasslawn. Percy Roberts was a lawyer by training,

Huge windows in Grasslawn offered sweeping views of the Gulf of Mexico. Photo courtesy of Historic American Buildings Survey/Library of Congress.

The rear façade of Grasslawn revealed a home which had been repeatedly altered and expanded throughout its first century. Photo courtesy of Mississippi Department of Archives and History.

Hurricane Katrina destroyed Grasslawn, leaving only the brick foundation, the front sidewalk, and two sets of concrete steps. Photo courtesy of Historic American Buildings Survey/Library of Congress.

educated in Virginia and Germany and practicing in New Orleans. He lived for many years at Grasslawn with his wife, Mary Skipwith, and niece, Mary Percy Roberts.

In 1896, the long-anticipated Gulf and Ship Island Railroad was finally completed, linking Mississippi's capital city with the coast. A deep water channel was carved out at the southern terminus of the railway, and within a few years, the newly christened town of Gulfport was shipping millions of board feet of yellow pine lumber from the Piney Woods region. Governor Anselm McLaurin had to appoint a mayor of the fledgling city, and his first choice was Mary Percy Roberts's husband, Finley B. Hewes. Mr. Hewes found the call of battle more enthralling than

city government and headed off to the Spanish-American War. He returned safely and lived with the Roberts family at Grasslawn through the early years of the twentieth century.

Gulfport was a rapidly growing boomtown, bustling with huge ships in its harbor and massive hotel developments like the Great Southern Hotel. The old estates along the waterfront were being carved up for real estate promoters, and in 1904 Grasslawn's 235 acres was sliced into numerous lots. The acreage that included the home was bought by Alabama land broker John Kennedy Milner. A partner with the famed Mobile Bellingrath family, Mr. Milner came to Mississippi with a sizeable fortune, which was soon supplemented by his acquisition of the coast Coca-Cola franchise. He enclosed the north galleries of Grasslawn before his death in 1916. The house was handed down to his eldest son, Joe Milner, who served as Gulfport's mayor from 1925 until 1950. A maiden sister was the last Milner family member to live at Grasslawn, weathering the windswept damage of Hurricane Camille in 1969.

Real estate values along the coast escalated in the years following Camille, and developers saw Grasslawn as an expendable obstacle to profits. Determined to preserve the aging mansion for future generations, the Milners sold it to the city of Gulfport. It was lovingly restored as a house museum and served as the setting for innumerable parties, wedding receptions, and civic celebrations. The official logo of the city was redrawn to include an image of the iconic home. Just as Beauvoir was the most celebrated of Biloxi's string of antebellum beach houses, Grasslawn was the architectural pride of Gulfport.

Both of these mansions were boarded up and felt to be secure when Hurricane Katrina surged into the Gulf of Mexico in August 2005. Curators at the houses left for higher ground with plans to clean up the usual fallen limbs and debris after the storm passed. But like so many of the seemingly indestructible ancient homes along Highway 90, Beauvoir and Grasslawn were hammered mercilessly by walls of tidal surges and relentless winds on that summer morning. When the storm passed, Beauvoir was almost unrecognizable, its porches stripped away, the roof peeled back, and all of its outbuildings destroyed. Local workers and architectural historians camped out on the property and spent the next few months securing the home from further damage. It has been meticulously restored and reopened in 2008.

Beauvoir was salvageable. At Grasslawn, Gulfport natives who had known the gracious old house their entire lives were stunned to find nothing left but the foundation, the front brick sidewalk, and two sets of concrete steps. Debris from the shattered house was scattered across a massive area, and efforts were quickly under way to salvage as much as possible that could be identified as part of Grasslawn. Those elements were stored away and will be incorporated into the rebuilt house.

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Carter-Tate House

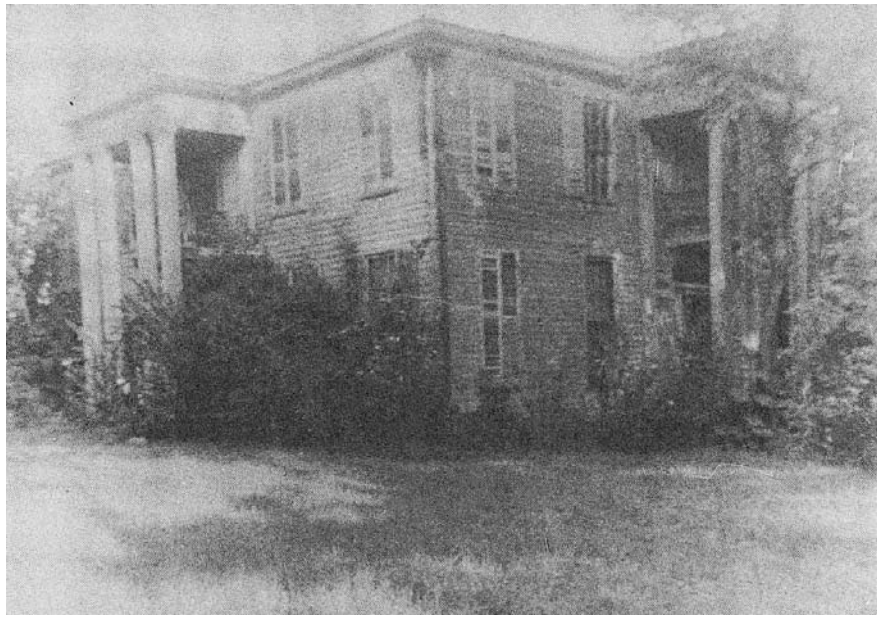
Many, if not most, of the antebellum mansions of Mississippi were built by carpenters who arrived with little or no formal architectural training. There were exceptions, especially in the more populated areas such as Natchez and Jackson. Levi Weeks left a thriving New York practice after being accused of murdering his girlfriend; his legacy in Natchez includes Auburn, Gloucester, and some of the earliest buildings at Jefferson College. Jacob Larmour, another native New Yorker, came south to build Madison County's Annandale and Chapel of the Cross and Clinton's Provine Chapel. William Nichols, architect of the Old Capitol, Governor's Mansion, and University of Mississippi Lyceum, was an artist who left a deep and lasting imprint on Mississippi history.

Most builders, though, were armed with nothing more than tools and perhaps a copy of Asher Benjamin's *The American Builder's Companion* or Benjamin Latrobe's detail sketches. Some pulled designs directly from pattern books such as Andrew Jackson Downing's *Architecture of Country Houses*, stocked with Gothic and Italianate cottages and rural homes. The disparity in talent among builders is most dramatically illustrated in the contrast between Oxford's Ammadelle, designed and overseen by famed architect Calvert Vaux, and its mirror-image twin, Washington County's Mount Holly, the product of a less-experienced craftsman.

The most prolific builder in 1850s Lafayette County was William Turner, a North Carolina native who moved to Mississippi with his parents around 1840. It is very unlikely that he had any formal architectural training, but his designs for two-story porticoed Greek Revival mansions dominate the town and county. Thomas Hines described the style in his 1996 book, *William Faulkner and the Tangible Past*:

The most typical regional form of the neoclassical house was a nearly square or rectangular one-or-two storey box with a relatively small four-columned porch on one or more sides. Above the front door, and sometimes a side door, there was usually another door in the second story leading onto a small balcony. Window shutters, usually painted dark green, were functional screens against sun and weather as well as decorative counterpoints to the standard white walls. Other ornaments on the generally chaste buildings might include a wrought-iron railing for the second floor balconies. On either side of the central hall lay the parlor, library, dining room, and, in one-storey houses, bedrooms. The central stairhall in two-storey houses led to upstairs bedrooms. In the middle third of the nineteenth century, this mode was especially popular in Mississippi, Alabama and Tennessee. Oxford and Lafayette County, during [William] Faulkner's lifetime, contained over a dozen extant examples of this type of house, as well as several houses of even grander

The Carter-Tate House was one of the finest examples of William Turner's unique Lafayette County designs. Photo courtesy of Mississippi Department of Archives and History.



The Carter-Tate House was a weatherbeaten shell by the time it was torn down in the mid-twentieth century. Photo courtesy of Mississippi Department of Archives and History.

pretensions, marked by a six- or eight-columned portico extending across the entire front.[1]

William Faulkner used some of his first writing royalties to buy one of these Turner houses, a rundown hulk known as the Old Shegog Place. Faulkner labored for years to add electricity and plumbing to the home he renamed Rowan Oak. Just a few blocks away, the Thompson-Chandler House fit the Turner blueprint exactly with its full-height, four-columned portico, although it was always a bit off balance by the attachment of an older house to the rear façade. This house is believed to be the inspiration for the Compson house in *The Sound and the Fury*.

The Neilson-Culley House still stands on South 11th Street, meticulously maintained through several generations by the Neilson, Culley, and Lewis families. Its identical twin, a perfect match right down to the front and side porticoes and floor plan, was the Carter-Tate House, which Thomas Hines described in its last days as a "picturesque ruin." Both houses were built around 1859, in the last burst of prosperity and construction that Oxford would know until after the war.

Dr. Robert Otway Carter came by his penchant for fine houses naturally. His great-great-grandfather was the legendary Robert "King" Carter of colonial Virginia, who managed to amass over three hundred thousand acres and one thousand slaves before his death in 1732. His fortune was diluted down through the generations, but it still provided a nice start for Dr. Carter, who relocated to Lafayette County soon after the 1832 Chickasaw cession. He settled first in Wyatt, a town which virtually disappeared with the financial panic of 1837, and then moved to Oxford. The source of his continued wealth was his Fairview Plantation, fifteen miles west of Oxford on the Tallahatchie River.

Carter died in 1874, leaving a widow who would survive him by forty years and at least five children. One son, Robert, was a well-known local character, a lifelong bachelor who lived west of Oxford but roamed the square with a holstered pistol and shocked the locals by living openly with a black woman who may or may not have been his wife.

The mansion passed into the Tate family, residents of Oxford since the mid-1850s. The house was never maintained, and by the 1930s it was a paintless wreck of a shell. Shutters broke away from their hinges, doors buckled, and columns rotted away at their bases. It may have been picturesque but it was also dangerously alluring and unstable, and in midcentury it was torn down.

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Llangollen

Charles Dahlgren built two houses. One is instantly recognizable as a symbol of Natchez and the Greek Revival era. The other was an odd mishmash of Italianate and cottage styles, long forgotten and known only to the most avid students of antebellum architecture.

Dahlgren was an intense and volatile character, a Pennsylvania native who mastered the banking trade with financier Nicholas Biddle. He was sent south to the booming new state of Mississippi in 1835, charged with overseeing a branch of the Bank of the United States. This was heady territory for a twenty-four-year-old young man. He quickly figured out that the most reliable entry into the upper reaches of Natchez society was through marriage vows, and before his thirtieth birthday he had married widow Mary Ellis Routh. With Mrs. Routh came her family mansion, Routhlands, ownership of several Louisiana plantations, four children, and sizeable debts.

The Dahlgrens' home had been built by Mary Ellis's father-in-law, Job Routh, in the 1830s. No photographs exist of this house, but it was described in contemporary accounts as one of Natchez's grander structures, with two stories and galleries on at least two sides. The setting was a seventeen-hundred-acre estate near the southern edge of the city. Charles and Mary Dahlgren lived there with their ever-increasing brood of children for more than a decade. They were vacationing in Saratoga, New York, when word came that Routhlands had burned to the ground. Charles was quick to lay blame on a whim of Mary's: "[The house] was struck by lightning and destroyed, in consequence of my wife desiring terra cotta chimney tops placed, which were elevated above the surrounding china trees, and so affording an object for the electric fluid."[1]

The family returned to Mississippi to find their home a pile of bricks and ashes. Fifteen stuccoed steps marked the site of the main entrance, and a variety of interesting Gothic outbuildings had survived as well. A two-story brick barn and stable, a garage and kennel with a hexagonal columbary, a greenhouse, and a servants' lodge all bear witness to what must have been a sensational home, its visage apparently lost before any photographs were taken.

Those outbuildings and the orphaned steps remain on the grounds of the house which Charles and Mary Dahlgren built to replace Routhlands. The original house was most likely an impressive sight, but the home that builder John Crothers fashioned has come to be an iconic symbol of Natchez and the Old South. Completed in 1856, the new Routhlands (renamed Dunleith by later owners) is a massive cubical structure, completely encompassed

Llangollen was built by Charles Dahlgren, who also built Dunleith in Natchez. Photo courtesy of the Thomas H. and Joan W. Gandy Photograph Collection, Louisiana and Lower Mississippi Valley Collections, Louisiana State University Libraries, Baton Rouge, Louisiana.

by two-story Tuscan columns and an elaborate connecting balustrade. This peripteral column arrangement was so expensive and difficult to balance aesthetically that only two other houses in Mississippi featured it. The Forest was built just south of Natchez by Sir William Dunbar, one of the most innovative of the area's early settlers. It burned in the 1850s, leaving only three columns. Windsor, near Port Gibson, was the state's largest house during the three decades that it existed. The fire that destroyed it in 1890 left an outline of Corinthian columns, most of which are still standing. Louisiana had several peripteral Greek Revival homes, including Ashland and Greenwood, and Alabama's most famous example was Forks of Cypress.

Charles Dahlgren, an ambitious transplant from Pennsylvania, had created the ultimate southern mansion, a jewel of symmetry and refinement that has been widely acknowledged as one of America's finest Greek Revival masterpieces. The family took possession sometime during 1856; Mary would die there of heart disease in March of 1858. Within days, Charles was making plans to leave the mansion behind. His advertisement in the *Natchez Daily Courier* was small and discreet. "For Sale. My residence Routhlands, including 50 acres of land. Apply on premises. C. G. Dahlgren." Within months, Alfred Vidal Davis had purchased the property. Erasing all connections with the Routh family and its famous homes, he renamed it Dunleith.

Dahlgren moved on with his life, waiting only a socially acceptable time before marrying nineteen-year-old Mary Vannoy of Nashville. Mary was taking on a large collection of Routh and Dahlgren children, and another large house was going to be a necessity. Land was purchased southwest of the Dunleith property and work begun on Llangollen. The name was Dahlgren's

Llangollen was based on a design by famed architect Andrew Jackson Downing. Photo courtesy of the Thomas H. and Joan W. Gandy Photograph Collection, Louisiana and Lower Mississippi Valley Collections, Louisiana State University Libraries, Baton Rouge, Louisiana.

Dahlgren's home burned in 1932, and the site is now covered by the Natchez Mall. Photo courtesy of the Thomas H. and Joan W. Gandy Photograph Collection, Louisiana and Lower Mississippi Valley Collections, Louisiana State University Libraries, Baton Rouge, Louisiana.

tribute to his first father-in-law's Welsh hometown, but the house was as dissimilar to either the first or second Routhlands as possible. Its design was taken from a popular pattern book of the day, Andrew Jackson Downing's *The Architecture of Country Houses*. Downing was a proponent of Romantic styles, Gothic and Italianate villas that conformed to the natural world around them. His "Design XIII: A Cubical Cottage in the Tuscan Style" was a "very simple and unpretending modification of the Tuscan or modern Italian architecture—the roof rising six feet in the centre and projecting two and a half feet at the eaves, the window-dressings simple and bold in character . . . to execute this design according to the plans . . . of brick and stucco, with a cellar under the whole, would cost about $1300."[2]

Downing's thirteen-hundred-dollar design was a modest cottage. Charles Dahlgren didn't build modest cottages. He took the basic cubical format with verandas and wide overhanging eaves, multiplied the scale and added decorative brackets and a rectangular cupola. The result was a strange, multilayered concoction unlike anything Natchez had ever seen. Like Dunleith, the primary body of the house was a cube, but there was not a classical column to be found at Llangollen. A one-story gallery wrapped around at least three sides, supported by square columns and topped with bracketed eaves. Heavier brackets lined the eaves of the second story, and the entire pile was topped with a hipped roof and a rectangular cupola. Multiple chimneys clustered on the edges of the roof.

Llangollen appeared around the same time that Haller Nutt was breaking ground on his bizarre Moorish odyssey at Longwood. Natchezians, preoccupied with the impending threat of civil war, neglected to record their impressions of these two new homes, but they must have been taken aback at this dramatic shift from the white columns and tradition of the city's Federal and Greek Revival houses.

The Dahlgren family had scant time to enjoy their new home before that war ensued. Charles quickly assembled a group of volunteers and left to defend the unthreatened Mississippi Gulf Coast. His brother, John, would rise to an admiral's position in the U.S. Navy and invent a ship's gun that gave the Union forces a superior edge in naval warfare. Dahlgren happened to be home in Natchez when the city surrendered to Union gunboats, and he decided to move his family to what he perceived as safer territory near Atlanta. Loading his wife, stepson, two small sons, and several servants into wagons, he led them east to Georgia. Llangollen was left empty and was soon occupied by Union officers and troops.

As Sherman's troops swept toward the sea, Atlanta proved to be a less than optimal refuge, and the Dahlgren caravan fled back to Tensas Parish, Louisiana. The war ended, but Reconstruction brought new problems for the family. Conflicts over cotton, damaging spring floods, and their inability to reclaim Llangollen led to an economic downhill spiral, and they eventually lost the house to foreclosure.

Llangollen passed through several families in the last six decades of its existence. Prominent Natchez lawyer T. Otis Baker lived there for a number of years before the house burned in 1932. Sadly, it was lost just as the pilgrimage tradition in Natchez brought a new emphasis on historic preservation to the city. Had Llangollen survived, it would be a fascinating example of the architectural diversity that was beginning to develop in the late antebellum era. Instead, the house site now lies beneath the asphalt of the Natchez Mall.

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Colonel Thomas White House

Lost houses are not a rarity in Mississippi. The antebellum townhouses and plantation mansions that dotted the landscape in the mid-1800s were not valued in the early twentieth century, and those that didn't burn were frequently torn down with no controversy. At the sites, even decades later, a foundation may be hidden under weeds, or a pile of discarded bricks will mark the spot where there was once a home. In other instances, all traces of a house will have vanished under asphalt or redevelopment. Regardless, documents and records show that the house was there for a certain length of time and then it was gone, reverted to the history books and often forgotten.

Two notable exceptions to that rule were the Colonel Thomas White House of Hernando and Flynnwood of Columbus. Separated by the width of the state, these two homes are forever linked together, both figuratively and literally, as their architectural elements were dismantled, labeled, and stored away in a now-forgotten corner of DeSoto County, awaiting a resurrection that never happened. Their fate is one of the enduring mysteries of historic preservation in Mississippi.

The ten counties carved from the six million acres of the 1832 Chickasaw Cession attracted hordes of land-hungry settlers and untold speculators into the region, eager to scoop up this fertile land for $1.25 an acre. Many were soon successful and built Greek Revival mansions to flaunt their wealth. In towns like Holly Springs, Red Banks, Como, and Oxford, that was the prevailing architectural style. Colonel Thomas White followed a different path, contracting for an Italianate home in Hernando which stood until progress pushed it aside.

Thomas William White was a Georgia native, born in Elbert County in 1824. When his family relocated to the burgeoning northwest corner of Mississippi in 1845, Thomas came with them, although some accounts say he was enrolled at Harvard during this time. Whatever his academic background was, his adult life would be spent practicing law in Hernando, and his career led to financial well-being and community respect. He served one term in the pre–Civil War state legislature and was president of the Delta levee board, a position of extraordinary power as that region began to open up for development.

In the years immediately preceding the war, White began building his Italianate manor just east of the town square. Old histories record that the house's components were shipped downriver from Cincinnati, which raises the possibility that White may have been familiar with the Hinkle Guild catalogue of architectural designs. The finished product was by far the finest house in the region, encompassing twenty-eight rooms

Colonel Thomas White, a prominent Hernando lawyer, built the town's most notable mansion in the years preceding the Civil War. Photo courtesy of DeSoto County Museum.

Columbus's Flynnwood was demolished with the intention of merging its architectural elements with those of the Colonel White House. Photo courtesy of Mississippi Department of Archives and History.

The White home was taken apart and its elements stored for a proposed house which never materialized. Photo courtesy of DeSoto County Museum.

and an imposing three-story square tower. Elaborate grillwork outlined the front gallery and heavy carved brackets shadowed the deep eaves. Shortly after the house was torn down, its interior was described in a local historical brochure:

In the hall of the house was a beautiful curving staircase with handsome mahogany handrail. On the left side was the drawing room. And at the side of the chimney were cords that were pulled to ring bells on the back veranda to summon certain servants. Behind this room were a parlor, dining room and kitchen. Between the rooms were massive doors approximately 12 feet high. They were constructed so high to contain the summer heat in the upper parts of the rooms. On the right side of the entrance hall was the fine library of Colonel White . . . In the front rooms there were fireplaces of fine marble imported from Italy. The walls and ceilings had beautiful designs painted by J. Lemser, an artist brought here from France for this purpose, whose work was exquisite. His name and the date, 1861, were clearly discernible 105 years later at the base of one of the painted columns in the entrance hall.[1]

At the outbreak of the Civil War, Thomas White was chosen as first lieutenant of the DeSoto Irrepressibles, a volunteer infantry unit which saw action at Shiloh. Little is known of "Colonel" White's military career, except that he survived and returned home to practice law and become a civic leader in the growing community of Hernando. The town had been ravaged during the conflict, its courthouse destroyed along with much of the downtown district in an 1863 Union raid. For the next seven years, all county business was conducted in the one room of the courthouse which had survived. In 1870, White's friend Felix LaBauve returned from his native France with an outrageous set of courthouse plans based on a Norman castle. White and two other men were the commissioners appointed to approve the design, and the forceful LaBauve won them over to his romantic ideal. For seven decades, the DeSoto County government building stood as the most unusual in Mississippi, dominating the square with its massive mansard-roofed central tower and battlements.

Hernando thrived after the war, attracting vibrant stores to the square and legal practitioners to the courthouse. Thomas White was one of sixteen lawyers who paid a yearly privilege tax of ten dollars to open their offices. He was also remembered for hitching his stallion, Kennesaw, to a two-wheeled racing cart and giving rides to Hernando children at Sunday afternoon gatherings on the courthouse lawn. One observer noted that the horse's pedigree "was considered better than could be produced by most of the citizens."[2]

Colonel White and his wife raised their children in the Italianate mansion, just off the square. Two of their daughters inherited the home after White's death in 1889 and his widow's death in 1899. "Miss Corinne" and "Miss Nellie" lived well into the middle of the next century, but after they passed on, the house began to sag. Its location, which had once been in the midst of elaborately manicured lawns and gardens, had gradually come to be surrounded by commercial development.

In a familiar scenario, the White House was bought by a Southaven developer in the mid-1960s. His workers dismantled the tower, galleries, staircases, and windows, labeling each piece and hauling them away to an unspecified barn near Horn Lake. Simultaneously, across the state, the fire-damaged Flynnwood was being demolished in Columbus. Rumors circulated of a planned lakeside mansion, an odd hybrid of Flynnwood's Columbus Eclectic columns and arches with the Colonel White House's Italianate tower and wrought-iron details.

Four decades have come and gone, and all trace of the two dismantled homes has disappeared. Local historians suspect the barn was destroyed in a tornado or burned, but it may still be tucked away somewhere south of Memphis, packed with the remains of two outstanding homes from another time.

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Shipp House

There is a haunting photograph in Martin Dain's 1964 Random House book, *Faulkner's County: Yoknapatawpha*. In sterile black-and-white, the Shipp House seems to stare from the page, its ruined front door framed by a long line of perfectly spaced cedars which appear to march right through the portico and into the empty hallway. Faulkner scholars surmise that this bleak house was the inspiration for the writer's "Old Frenchman's place," described in *The Hamlet* as "a tremendous pre–Civil War plantation, the ruins of which—the gutted shell of an enormous house with its fallen stables and slave quarters and overgrown gardens and brick terraces and promenades—were still known as the Old Frenchman's place . . ."[1]

William Faulkner had grown up with the last remaining Shipp children, and he was undoubtedly aware of this stark shell of a house and its dark history, so it is reasonable to speculate that this was, indeed, the model for the mansion in his stories. Generations of Oxford and Ole Miss students trekked through the woods between Oxford and Water Valley in search of the old place, and Faulkner must have known the house in its last days of inhabitability and its slow decline.

In the real history of the Shipp House, there was no Frenchman. Dr. Felix Grundy Shipp was a Tennessee physician who, for reasons unknown, left his successful Nashville practice and relocated to Jackson, Mississippi, in the early 1830s. When Chickasaw land was opened for purchase in the northern half of the state, Shipp and his father bought up large tracts. They built an inn on the primary road between Water Valley and Oxford, then used profits to purchase even more land. By 1850, they were "gentleman farmers" and men of wealth. The next natural step, as Faulkner so masterfully illustrated in his stories, was to flaunt their success in bricks and mortar.

The Shipp House was similar to other homes around Oxford and Lafayette County which have been attributed to builder William Turner. There were definite similarities to such known Turner houses as Rowan Oak, Shadowlawn, and the Carter-Tate House, including the rigidly symmetrical square main block and the full-height porticoes with double columns on the front and side façades. Inside, a wide center hall served as a receiving room and divided four large rooms on the ground floor. Plaster ceiling medallions were patterned after those in Nashville's Hermitage. A graceful curved stair led to the second floor, where the usual four-room arrangement had been altered for Dr. Shipp's purposes. One long chamber served as a meeting space for the local Methodist church and Masonic lodge members. Across the hall, the "medicine room" held pill and potions which Dr. Shipp dispensed to his patients.

The Shipp House was built near Water Valley by a Tennessee physician, Dr. Felix Grundy Shipp. Photo courtesy of Mississippi Department of Archives and History.

The Shipp family moved into their new house at Christmas in 1857. Four of the Shipp boys would leave for service in the Confederate army just over three years later, but all returned home safely. They found the house and plantations ransacked but intact. Reconstruction took its toll, and Dr. Shipp's fortune had already declined with the collapse of Confederate currency. Again reflecting (or inspiring) Faulkner, infirmity and insanity crept into the story, as Shipp's son Cadmus took over the house and cared for his paralyzed brother, Cletus. Only one servant, Aunt Sylvia, lived in the long room upstairs, her days spent at a quilting frame.

By 1920, all the Shipp descendants had died or moved on, and the house was abandoned. The woods crept in around it, and doorways and windows rotted away. College students found it strikingly eerie and atmospheric. The further the portico sagged and floorboards gave way to gravity, the more enticing it became for those with morbid curiosity or a sincere reverence for some long-dead builder's talents. By the time Martin Dain turned his camera toward the Shipp House, it was a skeletal shell. Not long afterwards, someone's carelessness or cruelty sent the house up in flames, and no serious attempt was made to extinguish what must have seemed a merciful end to a sad shadow of a home. Only the Shipp family cemetery remains to mark the site.

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Turner Lane House

At the end of the Civil War, Mississippi was overwhelmed with problems. State government was crippled, the economy had collapsed, and thousands of Confederate veterans were limping home with serious injuries to face fields that hadn't been worked in years and businesses that had vanished.

Education had never been a top priority in the state, which didn't even have a rudimentary public school system until 1870. In that fateful year, a Reconstruction legislature rammed through a universal education bill that mandated free schools for all children, black and white. Illiteracy was endemic, and it would take decades for Mississippi to undo the damage of abandoning generations of its citizens academically.

One of the most pressing problems to be faced was the abysmal condition of the freed slaves. Few knew how to read or write, and the northern missionary groups who arrived with good intentions soon realized that their "colleges" would have to function as remedial high schools for at least a few years. Some were successful: Alcorn A&M was chartered as the first black land grant university on the old Oakland College campus, and Tougaloo College fairly quickly outgrew the plantation mansion where it had begun. Natchez College was relocated to Jackson and eventually developed into Jackson State University.

Shaw University was founded in 1866 in Holly Springs by one of these missionary groups, and one of its primary goals was the training of black teachers who could head out into the state and staff the new public schools. This "normal" department, as educational theory and practice programs were known at that time, was so successful that the legislature requested its transfer to state control. On July 20, 1870, an act was passed to fund the purchase of this division from Shaw, and it was quickly renamed the State Normal School for Negroes.

SNSN officially opened that fall on the Shaw campus, which would later become Rust College. Four thousand dollars was appropriated for teacher salaries, equipment, and furniture, and each legislator was allowed to sponsor one pupil, who agreed to teach for a minimum of three years in state schools in exchange for their education and a fifty cent per week stipend.

The attendance figures for that first semester were disappointingly small. But by January 1871, sixteen potential teachers were enrolled and the next summer there were fifty. Within a year, enrollment was up to sixty-five students. They were outgrowing the crowded quarters at Shaw, as noted in the 1873 annual report. "The pressing need of the normal is room. For two years this need has been felt. How much more successful it might become if permanently

Turner Lane built one of the finest post–Civil War homes in Holly Springs. Photo courtesy of Ferris Minor Hall.

The State Normal School for Negroes took over Mr. Lane's foreclosed house in 1874 and occupied it for thirty years. Courtesy of Ferris Minor Hall.

After the normal school was closed, the Turner Lane House became the director's home at the agricultural experiment station. Courtesy of Ferris Minor Hall.

The Turner Lane House was bought and demolished by the Catholic Church. Courtesy of Ferris Minor Hall.

located in a convenient building with necessary appliances."[1]

The trustees began to search for a suitable location to house the expanding school. They found it just northeast of Holly Springs, in a recently completed mansion whose owner had been ruined in the Panic of 1873. Turner Lane first appeared on the rolls of the Presbyterian Church as an elder in 1865, and this merchant was well respected enough to be one of those chosen to oversee the repairs to the church following its desecration by Union troops. Though almost nothing is known of Lane, he must have had considerable resources at one point, for he hired one of the region's premier architect/builders to design and construct his new house. Gustavus Adolphus Palm was a Prussian native who had married a Holly Springs girl, gone off to serve in the Confederate army, was promptly wounded, and returned to build his father-in-law's house at Hudsonville. His talent was evident, and before long he was working on several large homes and the Presbyterian Church. It may have been through the church connection that he came to Turner Lane's attention, for before long he had signed on to build Lane's mansion, an unusual hybrid of several styles that defied easy classification.

The house that Palm built was a massive two-story brick structure with porches, carved balustrades, tall arched windows, and Italianate window surrounds. An octagonal tower rose above the second story and a bay window was placed between the front and side porches. It incorporated some of the Italianate elements seen in prewar houses of Holly Springs, but with a Victorian twist toward the Queen Anne style. Without a doubt, it was the most ambitious and pretentious residence going up in the early years of the 1870s.

Mr. Lane didn't get to enjoy his fine house for long, if at all. He went bankrupt in the financial crisis of 1873, and his name disappeared from the census rolls after that. His house was left empty, probably in foreclosure, and it was available when the SNSN trustees came for a look. Having considered all the available property in Holly Springs and nearby, they authorized ten thousand dollars to purchase the building and five accompanying acres, and in 1874 the normal school left Shaw's campus and moved to the Lane house.

It was a smart move. Hundreds of students applied for admission to the normal school, and for the next twenty years it would average eighty-three men and forty-three women per semester. Despite the resumption of power by the Democrats in 1875, the school was fully funded and turned out graduates who were highly prized by local school districts. No tuition was ever charged, except for a five cents per month fee in 1880, designated for library books. Holly Springs supporters chipped in with contributions, and the library finally increased to three thousand volumes.

An 1891 summary of education in Mississippi described a still-vibrant school which offered math, mental and moral philosophy, government, astronomy, natural sciences, rhetoric, reading, and elocution. The grounds were described as well:

> The building, purchased by the $10,000 appropriation of 1873, is a beautiful brick structure, two stories high, having a length of about 85 feet. It has a fine veranda on a level with each floor. The lower story is 14 feet high, with windows extending almost the full height, affording excellent light and ventilation. The edifice, although constructed for a private residence, has been arranged so as to suit most admirably for school purposes. It contains a large chapel furnished with an excellent organ, a mathematical recitation room, a ladies' dining room, and a gentlemen's dining room on the first floor; on the second, a large science room, laboratory and a library. It is well heated by means of stoves in each room. The grounds consist of a beautiful tract of nearly 5 acres, situated in the northeastern part of the city, on a hill commanding a fine view of the surrounding country. It includes both croquet and baseball grounds.[2]

Despite its apparent stability and undeniable utility, the normal school's days were numbered. As Jim Crow laws gained momentum and rights for blacks began to vanish, educational opportunities diminished. By the time James K. Vardaman was elected governor in 1904, the die was cast. Annual appropriations for SNSN had dwindled to two thousand dollars, barely enough to open the doors. The house and senate passed an appropriation bill in the 1904 legislative session, but Vardaman vetoed it. In his characteristic populist manner, he railed in the New Capitol about what he perceived as money wasted: "Literary education—the knowledge of books—does not seem to produce any good substantial results with the negro, but serves rather to sharpen his cunning, breeds hope that cannot be fulfilled, inspires aspirations that cannot be gratified . . . creates an inclination to avoid honest labor, promotes indolence and in turn leads to crime."[3]

The legislature caved in to Vardaman and the veto stood. All funding for the normal school evaporated, leaving Alcorn A&M as the only state school open to blacks.

Vardaman was not concerned in the least about the loss of this much-needed teacher training site. He covered his political base in Holly Springs by awarding the town one of the state's two new agricultural experiment stations. In 1906, the legislature transferred all the property of the old normal school, including the Turner Lane House, to the station. The house once again became a home, this time for the station's director. It would serve in that capacity for a number of years, during the tenure of Charles Tilton Ames and William Ferris. When the agricultural station closed, the house was purchased by the Catholic Church for a convent school. It was finally torn down and the site used for the Cadet School.

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Skipwith House

On the eastern edge of the Ole Miss campus, just where it merges seamlessly with Oxford, the Mary Buie Museum is a quiet oasis of culture, history, and art. Nearby are the Stark Young House and Memory House, two of the city's finest Victorian homes and reminders that an equally great house was lost in the creation of the Buie Museum. The Skipwith sisters left an admirable legacy to Oxford and the university, but at the cost of an architectural debacle.

Oxford was caught in the crosshairs as war raged across north Mississippi in the early 1860s. The state university was transformed into one huge hospital, first for Confederate troops and then for Union soldiers. General A. J. Smith swept through in 1864, torching the square and several of the more notable houses, leaving one observer to note that this was the most completely demolished city of any in the South.

When peace finally came and the college reopened, Oxford recovered. The square was rebuilt, and homes sprang up along Lamar and University avenues for professors, lawyers, businessmen, and the town's old elite. Their wealth was reflected in High Victorian Gothic, Second Empire, and Queen Anne–style homes, rare sights in a state that would never be economically ascendant again.

Houses of this era required complex architectural and carpentry skills, and Oxford was fortunate to have the talents of Swedish immigrant G. M. Torgerson throughout the 1870s and 1880s. Mr. Torgerson was a master of the intricate shinglework and complicated towers and rooflines of the times. One of his masterpieces was built on acreage whose ownership could be traced all the way back to Lafayette County's earliest days. Speculators Martin, Chisom, and Craig bought this section of land from the U.S. government in 1836 and immediately sold it to J. A. Stockard, who would donate one square mile of it to the state for a university campus in 1846. Banker W. L. Archibald, first president of the Bank of Oxford, acquired five of the acres in 1876, including Memory House, and then promptly sold the house and hired Torgerson to build a High Victorian Gothic home for his family.

Torgerson pulled out all the stops for Archibald. Multiple gables and wooden brackets surrounded a central tower, and an arched front porch stretched across most of the front façade. Inside were three spacious bedrooms, an everyday sitting room, a parlor and solarium downstairs, and additional bedrooms on the second floor. A long breezeway extended off the rear elevation, connecting the house to a dining room and kitchen.

Mr. Archibald fell ill and died on a European trip in 1886. His wife and children stayed on in the home until her death in the early 1900s. At

Miss Kate Skipwith was an Oxford legend; her house stood just beyond the eastern edge of the University of Mississippi campus. Photo courtesy of Mississippi Department of Archives and History.

Despite attempts to save it, the Skipwith House was demolished by the university in 1974. Photo courtesy of Mississippi Department of Archives and History.

Many of the elaborate architectural details from the Skipwith House were salvaged for use in other Oxford homes. Photo courtesy of Historic American Buildings Survey/ Library of Congress.

that point, the house was acquired by John Adair Skipwith, eldest son of successful cotton broker Peyton Skipwith. John Adair had two sisters, Mary and Cornelia, and two half-siblings, Kate and Frank. John bought the house primarily for his sisters and his half-sister. Cornelia died soon afterwards, and Mary married and moved away to Chicago, where she utilized her considerable artistic talents as a Marshall Field's designer.

Kate Skipwith became the mistress of Skipwith House by default. Both she and Mary were women of vast intellect, acquisitive tastes, and stubborn personalities. Mary stayed on at Chicago's notorious Hotel Lexington even after it

The interior of the Skipwith House was as drenched in detail as the exterior. Photo courtesy of Historic American Buildings Survey/Library of Congress.

was taken over by gangster Al Capone, who was rumored to be terrified of the indomitable Missisippian. Kate evolved into an Oxford institution, delighting local children with her elaborate Christmas decorations, rooftop black cat, and raucous parrot, Jock. After Henry Buie's death, widowed Mary returned to Oxford and, along with Kate, laid out plans for a museum to be built next door to their home. Her will stipulated that "a strong brick room" on a family lot would be "given to Oxford as a beginning for a museum . . . and anything of mine of any value to be put there." She further directed that the city was to "set up a trust or foundation to be known as the Adair-Skipwith Memorial Foundation. The primary purpose of such foundation shall be to enlarge the building of the Mary Buie Museum."[1]

The Mary Buie Museum opened in 1939, run by the city of Oxford but fussed over by Kate Skipwith. Miss Kate would live for another twenty-two years, continually collecting and filling her house with a significant milieu of artwork and memorabilia. She was an indomitable presence in Oxford, willful and opinionated but widely respected. The reading of her will in 1961 set off a family furor, as she had left her nieces and grandniece only a token inheritance, with the bulk of the sizeable estate directed to the museum trustees and St. Peter's Episcopal Church. The family contested the will, citing mental incapacity, and prominent Oxonians were swept up in court cases and hearings. One testified from Alaska that "[a]nybody who knew Miss Kate knew when she signed that will and codocil she knew what she was doing as well as

anybody. She was perfectly sane. As for influence, I would like to see somebody just try to influence Miss Kate about anything."[2]

The suit was eventually decided in favor of the museum, which was fortunate for arts' sake but not for the house. As the unique home neared its century mark, the museum and surrounding acreage were transferred from the city to the university, and plans were announced to raze Skipwith House, described in a 1974 *Oxford Eagle* article as "the fading yellow house with the falling picket fence."[3] Historic preservation advocates and the local garden club mounted a campaign to save the house, even if it had to be moved to another lot. Files in the Mississippi Department of Archives and History are stuffed with letters and proposals and last-ditch attempts to find a solution that would save Kate's cherished house.

The estimated thirty-thousand-dollar cost of relocating it could not be raised, and in 1974 the tower came down and bits and pieces of the elaborate Victorian interior were carted away to be used in other homes and businesses. The museum was expanded to include the site of the house, and one outbuilding was saved for relocation to the Oxford Square, where it now serves as a visitor's information center.

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Eagle's Nest

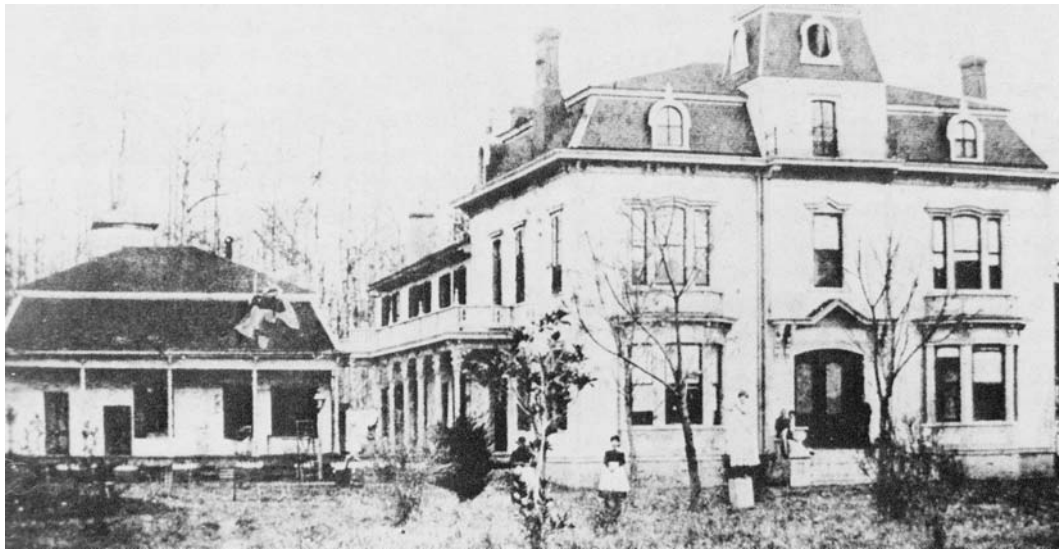
Swan Lake is a long, narrow oxbow, curling in on itself like a reclining snake. Just above its northern tip, not far from the tiny community of Jonestown, an Indian mound breaks the flat horizon of the Delta. And atop that burial mound is a marble image of a stout gentleman, gazing toward the lake with a sheaf of vital papers in his left hand.

The marble man on the mound is James Lusk Alcorn, a larger-than-life figure even in death. He commissioned the statue himself and had it placed on the front lawn of Eagle's Nest, where it served as a notice to the Delta's elite that he held the political reins of the region and had emerged from the storms of Reconstruction with his fortune intact.

Alcorn was a native of Illinois, raised and educated in Kentucky. His political career began in that state, but even as a young man he was keenly aware that greater opportunities lay in the rapidly developing states of the South. He uprooted his wife and four children and headed downriver in 1844, in search of virgin land and a place to build his budding legal practice. Friars Point, Mississippi, was his unlikely destination, and he soon acquired several hundred acres along the Yazoo Pass and settled in as a planter and lawyer. There weren't many neighbors and practically no political competition, and his first race for the Mississippi House of Representatives was an easy win. He took office in 1845, barely a year after his relocation to the state which he would eventually lead.

For the next fifteen years, Alcorn expanded his political base, his plantation, and his legal practice. The Delta was ripe for economic development, but only if the unpredictable network of streams, bayous, and rivers could be harnessed. While raking in legal fees from new landowners and speculators, Alcorn hammered away at his fellow legislators on the need for improved levees. His own Mound Place Plantation was situated along the Yazoo Pass, a narrow neck of water that connected the Mississippi with Moon Lake and the intertwined maze of waterways that twisted all the way down to Vicksburg.

By 1860, Alcorn was a well-established planter with a significant cotton operation and added financial stability from his second marriage to Amelia Glover, heiress to Alabama's Rosemount Plantation. Like most of the large planters throughout Mississippi, he realized that the increasing tensions between North and South could only decimate his livelihood. He fought the secession movement until its blockage was futile. As a delegate to the January 1861 Secession Convention, Alcorn used every stalling tactic he could muster, begging the delegates to hold off until Georgia, Alabama, Florida, and Louisiana had committed to joining South Carolina in this

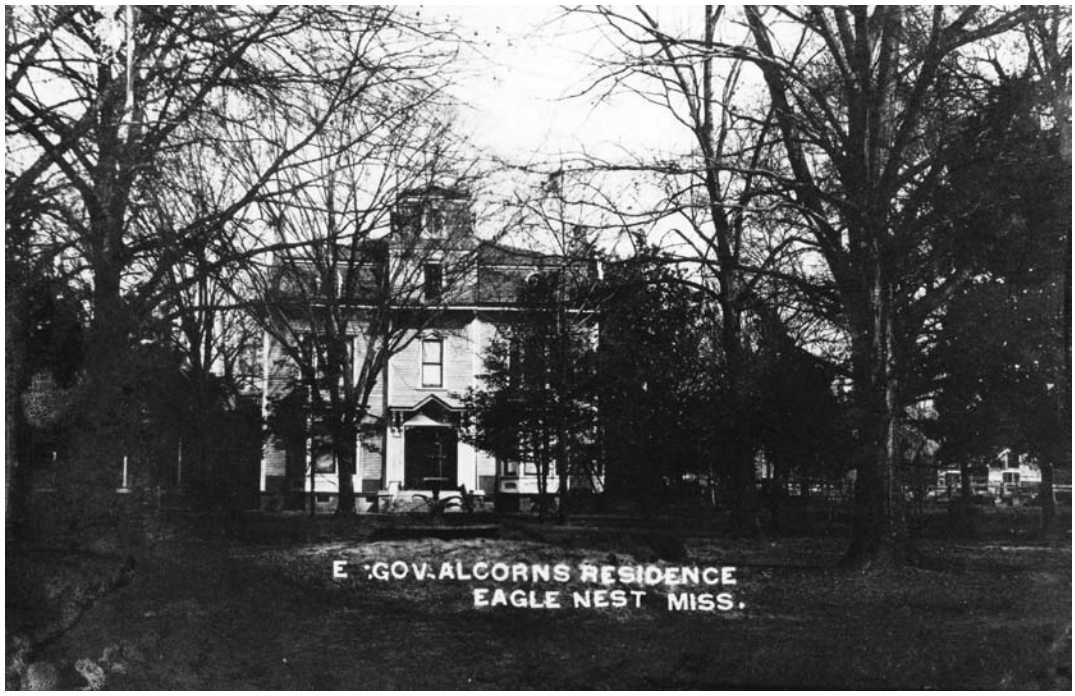


Eagle's Nest was a rare Second Empire–style home, which stood on the northern edge of Swan Lake in Coahoma County. Photo courtesy of Mississippi Department of Archives and History.

rush to disaster. His proposal was defeated, and ironically, because of his name, he rose to cast the first vote for the ordinance. Always the dramatic orator, he addressed his fellow Mississippians with these words: "The die is cast—the Rubicon is crossed—and I enlist my self with the army that marches on Rome."[1]

He actually did enlist with the Confederate army, serving as an ineffective general and providing the backing for a regiment of real soldiers. Both of his older sons died in the conflict, and the war found its way to his front door by 1863. General Ulysses S. Grant was desperate to take Vicksburg, the last remaining obstacle to Union dominance of the Mississippi River. Its bluffs couldn't be attacked directly, so Grant's advisers developed a strange scheme of floating gunboats from the Mississippi into the Yazoo Pass, past Alcorn's Mound Place Plantation and into Moon Lake. From there, according to the ill-conceived plan, they would wend their way down through the Delta's treacherously convoluted rivers to Yazoo City and then on to Vicksburg. They got no further than Greenwood, where the luxury steamer *Star of the West* was scuttled to block their progress. But during the weeks when the boats were heading south and then back north in retreat, Mound Place was occupied and raided. Alcorn's cattle were slaughtered to feed the troops, his fences were knocked down, and his carriages were rolled off into the pass. The fuming Alcorn was steadily feeding information to the Confederates and selling his cotton through the blockade with the help of smugglers.

Alcorn's actions during the war, effectively protecting his own interests by questionable means, were a foretaste of his Reconstruction career. In the tumult of the immediate postwar period, he was reelected to the state legislature and appointed by that body as a U.S. senator. Congress was evolving into a radical camp and refused to seat southern representatives, so Alcorn returned home to Coahoma County. This keen observer of human nature and political winds aligned himself with the Republican Party and worked his way up to an



Governor James Alcorn's Eagle's Nest was torn down in 1930. Photo courtesy of Mississippi Department of Archives and History.

1869 gubernatorial nomination. His partial term from 1870 to 1871 was noted for his educational emphasis and the purchase of the old Oakland College campus as the site for the nation's first black land-grant university, Alcorn A&M. He left office in 1871, having finally been successfully chosen as a U.S. senator, a position he held until 1877. Throughout Reconstruction, he challenged the more radical wing of the Republican party, including Governor Adelbert Ames.

Mississippi was under control of the southern Democrats again by 1875. Alcorn served out his term in the Senate and headed home to the Delta. During the three decades since his arrival at Friars Point, he had accumulated vast holdings throughout Coahoma County, and he was ready to retire to a long-planned estate on Swan Lake. That oxbow is rimmed with ancient cypress brakes, and one towering tree held a massive eagle's nest that would provide the name for Alcorn's plantation.

The house which Governor Alcorn built was a drastic contrast to the antebellum Greek Revival mansions of Natchez and Columbus. The three-story Second Empire house was topped by a mansard roof and a central tower. Bay windows, brackets, dormers, and numerous chimneys broke up the visual lines, and inside were twenty-two rooms. An outside entrance led to the second floor and a breezeway connected the main house to the kitchen and storerooms. Inside, no expense was spared in the details:

[Eagle's Nest is] a large modern frame structure. The lumber was cut from forests on the plantation, and dressed by hand under the supervision of Governor Alcorn. The house has five wide halls, twenty-two

large, high-ceilinged rooms, made homelike and cheerful by ingle-nooks, cozy corners and numerous broad windows. Three bay windows open on the blue waters of the lake on which the home fronts. Broad verandas extend around three sides of the house; the whole surmounted by an observatory commanding a view of beautiful Swan Lake, the park, and the broad fields of corn and cotton, the whole making a picture never surpassed in natural beauty. Mrs. Alcorn tells the following interesting story as to the way the lake received its name: "In the early days it was a feeding ground for numbers of wild swans. A huntsman one occasion shot, and broke the wing of one of these graceful birds. It could never again leave the lake; year after year it welcomed the coming of its fellows with glad cries, and pined in sorrow when they plumed their broad wings and took flight for new feeding grounds; it was pitiable to see its efforts to follow. Since then the pretty sheet of water has been called Swan's Lake. Upon the shore of this lake stands the tree in which the great eagle mentioned above built her nest. She showed both judgment and taste in the selection of a home; for the waters of the lake furnished an abundance of food for her young, and the view is one of unsurpassed beauty."

The axmen were directed to leave that tree untouched when the field was enlarged by clearing the southern part of the park; but the careless, thoughtless, destroyer of the forest, regardless of orders belted this monarch of ages. The grounds immediately about the house are shaded by large oak, magnolia, holly, and varnish trees. The gardens are gorgeous with bloom from the coming of the dainty snowdrop and purple violet of spring to the asters of the late autumn.[2]

Eagle's Nest was the social center of the northern Delta until Governor Alcorn's death in 1894. The house was noted for its Italian marble mantels, crystal chandeliers, and walnut flooring, but it was never electrified or updated with plumbing. By 1902, only Amelia Alcorn lived in the great house, which Mrs. Deupree described, in her florid Victorian style, as "silent, and deserted by all save the widowed mother."[3] Her son could not arrange a loan for the yearly expenses, and Eagle's Nest faced foreclosure. A Clarksdale lawyer stepped in and set up a life estate for Mrs. Alcorn; after her death, the house passed out of the Alcorn family. It was torn down in 1930.

Another house now occupies the site of James Alcorn's postwar mansion, but two symbols of his wealth and power remain. One is the graveside statue near Jonestown, documented in the 1890s as "a first class Italian marble statue on a seven foot base for $2200 a good likeness."[4] The other is a silver plantation bell, cast in Pennsylvania during the 1876 U.S. centennial celebration. This one-ton bell was brought to Eagle's Nest by Alcorn and placed near the house. A servant left it upside down during a winter storm, and the frozen water cracked the surface. Alcorn shipped it off to the Buckeye Bell Foundry in Cincinnati, Ohio, to be repaired. He included five hundred silver dollars with the bell, with instructions to have them melted into the final product. The result was a "frosted" effect, and supposedly the clapper could be heard for twenty miles. After the demolition of Eagle's Nest, the big bell was moved to Lady Land Plantation and later donated to the Mississippi Department of Archives and History.

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Delta Psi House

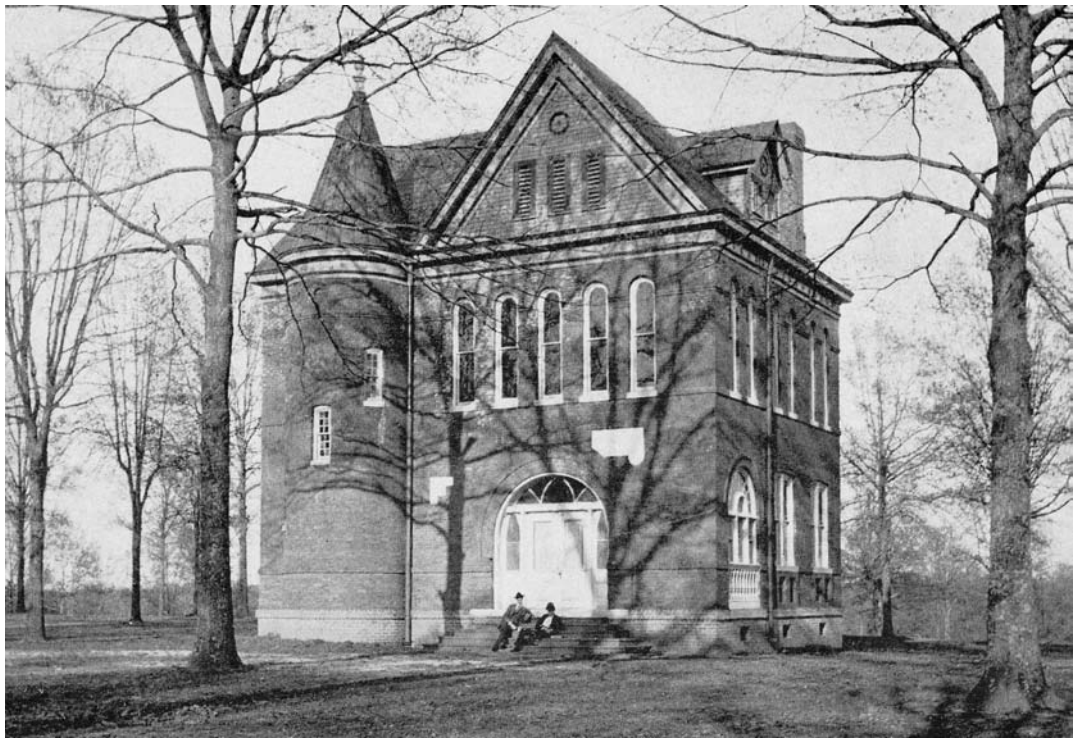
One of the most unusual and historic buildings on the Ole Miss campus occupied the site on the edge of the Hilgard Cut, just beyond the bridge that connected the campus to the city of Oxford. The dramatic Delta Psi House, destroyed by fire in 1943, was temporarily the home of William Faulkner, his parents and brothers. Before and after that strange interlude, it housed the Delta Psi fraternity.

The fraternity house was part of the second wave of academic buildings at the college. William Nichols, the architect responsible for Mississippi's Old Capitol and Governor's Mansion, was commissioned to design and create the original structures for the 1848 campus. Of those, only the Lyceum remains. The entire campus had been threatened with destruction when Union troops torched Oxford, but some convenient connections between faculty and officers saved the Lyceum and the other buildings. Unfortunately, their historic value was not recognized over the next half century, and one by one they were pulled down and replaced with more modern creations.

By the late 1880s, enrollment was growing, and the campus stretched beyond its early boundaries. Two of the most exuberant buildings of that era were Ventress Hall and the Delta Psi House. Ventress Hall remains, revered for its slender tower, Tiffany stained-glass windows, and red roof. The Delta Psi House was strikingly similar and likely designed by the same architect, but its purpose was dramatically different. Ventress Hall was intended for library and academic space; the fraternity boys who moved into Delta Psi were probably not particularly concerned with either.

Ventress Hall was the creation of Memphis architect C. G. Rosenplanter, who incorporated red bricks, round stone arches, scattered gables, and a four-story tubular turret between the two primary wings. It was completed in 1888, a year before the Delta Psi House, which would lend credence to the theory that Rosenplanter's success with the academic building led to his hiring for work on the fraternity house. Delta Psi was likewise a dark red brick building, three stories with a windowed tower at the corner. A series of tall round-arched windows must have poured light into the second story, and the main doorway was framed by an arched fanlight. The steeply pitched roofline was broken by several gables.

Delta Psi was the third fraternity on the university campus, established in 1855. Thirty-three years later, it must have been quite successful socially and financially, as it built the first fraternity house on campus. The brick edifice would be filled with young men until 1912, when the Greek system was abolished.



The Delta Psi House served as Murry Falkner's home during the years when fraternities were banned on the Ole Miss campus. Photo courtesy of Mississippi Department of Archives and History.

Friction between Greeks and non-Greeks had been rising throughout the school's first decades. It reached a peak during the tenure of Chancellor Andrew Kincannon (1907–1914). The faculty was fed up with childish shenanigans that distracted from the academic atmosphere, and they found a willing ally in state legislator Lee Russell. He had been snubbed by all the clubs during his freshman rush, and he carried the grudge into adulthood and down to the capitol. Somehow, Russell cajoled his fellow legislators into an outright ban on Greek fraternities, and in 1912 they were shuttered campuswide.

College boys may be high-spirited, but they are also resourceful. Underground clubs developed to replace the formal groups, and the pranks continued unabated. In 1920, eight years after the ban, twenty-five of Mississippi's future leaders were expelled after burning an effigy of Lee Russell, who had risen to the governorship.

While all this commotion was going on, Murry Falkner was struggling just to make a living. The father of four boys had never lived up to his own father's standards and had failed miserably at one venture after another. When his hardware business collapsed in 1918, he applied for a job as an administrator at the college, and, through the clout of his father, he was hired. The job came with campus housing, and by Christmas of 1919, all six of the Falkners were living in the former Delta Psi House. William, the second son, had returned from his Canadian Air Force adventure and was establishing his reputation as "Count No 'Count" around Oxford. He

submitted an occasional article to the *Oxford Eagle* or *Daily Mississippian*. Home was more or less a corner room of the Delta Psi tower. His father assigned him various campus jobs, including the painting of the interior of Ventress Hall's tower, where his name can still be seen scrawled on the walls.

In December 1921, William Falkner grudgingly accepted the job of campus postmaster and set up his own little dictatorship in the post office. Joel Williamson described the atmosphere in *William Faulkner and Southern History:*

> Faulkner promptly hired two friends as his assistants and turned the post office into a private club in which they played cards, talked, and delayed delivery of the latest magazines to the addressees, sometimes for days, while they read them . . . Often customers would come to the window to find Faulkner sitting in a rocking chair, to one arm of which he had fixed a wide board for writing. The postmaster would continue to write while they waited, perhaps tapping a coin on the counter. Finally, grudgingly, he would rise to serve them with a minimum of conversation or none at all. One of the professors later remembered a confrontation between the postmaster and a freshman. "What do you want?" Faulkner demanded. "A book of stamps," the student answered. The postmaster flung the book of stamps across the counter at the boy, and the boy flung a quarter across the counter at the postmaster. Mail came and went, usually slowly and sometimes not at all. One patron found his mail in the trash can behind the building. Amazingly, Faulkner held this job for almost three years.[1]

Tension must have run high in the Falkner fraternity house as well. Murry held the job as business manager for the university until 1930, by which time William had seen some success with short stories and used his earnings to acquire the dilapidated Shegog House, which he would rename Rowan Oak. The legislature had finally allowed fraternities to be reestablished on campus in 1926. Delta Psi reclaimed their towered chapter house and used it until it burned in 1943.

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2. Mary Govan, as quoted by Hubert H. McAlexander in *A Southern Tapestry*, 46.

3. Julia Dent Grant in John Y. Simon, ed., *The Personal Memoirs of Julia Dent Grant*, 105–106.

4. Ibid., 107.

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2. Project description for "Reconstruction of Grasslawn" in Mississippi Department of Archives and History files, n.d.

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Llangollen

1. Charles Dahlgren, quoted in the *Daily Democrat*, January 24, 1886.

2. A. J. Downing, *The Architecture of Country Houses*, 131.

Colonel Thomas White House

1. Pam Ivy, ed., *Our Heritage: DeSoto County, Mississippi*, 54.

2. J. B. Bell, *Hernando Historic Windows, 1836–1986*, 27.

Shipp House

1. William Faulkner, *The Hamlet*, 7.

Turner Lane House

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2. Ibid., 269.

3. James K. Vardaman, as quoted in William F. Holmes, *The White Chief: James Kimble Vardaman*, 122.

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2. David G. Nelson, Jr., in an August 27, 1962, letter in University Museum collections.

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