

NOTES ON SPRINGHOUSE AND OTHER DAIRY BUILDINGS ON WOODCROFT IN  
THE GLADSTONE PLACE DEVELOPMENT

During the week of May 30-June 4, 1994, several people with an interest in and a knowledge of the history of the site of Gladstone Place toured the remains of the stone buildings on Woodcroft and discussed with some homeowners the historic value of the area and possible ways to preserve it.

Buddy Chapman, who grew up on the property; Dorothy Scott Johnson, a professional genealogist who has researched the history of the neighborhood since moving into the Chapman farmhouse on Dairy Lane in 1971; Suzanne O'Connor, President of the Historic Huntsville Foundation; Elise Stephens, a history professor at A & M and the editor of *The Historic Huntsville Quarterly of Local Architecture and Preservation*; and Dee Gilbert and Diane Ellis, Gladstone Place homeowners, met informally twice near the springhouse to discuss the historic value of the springhouse area and what might be done to preserve it while meeting the needs of the neighborhood.

On Saturday, June 4 preservation architect Harvie Jones of Jones & Herrin Architects came to the site to evaluate it and meet with Jim Hayes, President of Gladstone Place Homeowners Association, and several other homeowners gathered there to clean out debris and underbrush.

Harvie Jones noted that the cooling house, with its ashlar stone, appears older than the restored barn behind the McDonald house. He believes it is likely the oldest agricultural structure in Madison County. Jones suggested restoring the springhouse with the remaining original stones, and stabilizing the cooling house by 1) clearing the vegetation growing from the mortar, 2) repointing the stonework with a lime-based (not Portland cement) mortar, and 3) constructing a random cement (not metal) cap to stop further weather deterioration. He will give us the phone number of Robert Irving, a mason familiar with this type of pointing who has done work for the Burritt Museum. Jones gave a top-of-the-head estimate of what it would cost to rehab the two structures as between \$5,000 and \$10,000. Since, at this point, no one knows for sure what the original buildings looked like, to do any work beyond this plan of restoration and stabilization would be conjectural and costly.

Landscaping the area and enhancing the spring and stream were also discussed. Jones complimented the association on the appearance of the barn and picnic area behind the McDonald house and offered the suggestion that landscaping be kept simple and rustic in keeping with the style and age of the buildings and in order to keep maintenance costs low. (Pea gravel rather than crushed limestone is a more appropriate ground cover, for example.)

Harvie noted that once the area is cleaned and restored,



vandalism and similar mischief is likely to decrease.

Jim Hayes mentioned the problem of run-off from the storm drain in the street affecting the stream, and Jones said that was something that should definitely be corrected.

Everyone agreed that this lovely area has even greater potential to be a beautiful, safe, and historically valuable corner of our development.

The site and the larger neighborhood is rich in geological, archeological, and historic interest. The entire Spring 1989 issue of **The Historic Huntsville Quarterly** was devoted to the area. With this in mind, the group discussed where we might get help to support our restoration and preservation efforts. Harvie noted that brick-and-mortar grants are hard to get but not planning grants. The following ideas emerged:

- \* seek a historical marker for the area. You do this through application to the City Council. The markers are expensive, about \$2,000, but if the city accepts the application it pays for the marker. Harvie Jones said our council representative, Jimmy Wall, strongly supports these efforts. He suggested that we might not want to broadcast widely information about the site in the interest of keeping it protected for the neighborhood.
- \* seek recognition and help from the Alabama Historical Commission
- \* seek inclusion on the National Registry of Historic Sites if it will include ruins. We would then be eligible for planning grants.
- \* seek help from local groups such as the Huntsville Land Trust, the Huntsville-Madison County Historical Society, the Historic Huntsville Foundation, the Botanical Garden, garden clubs, Eagle Scouts, etc. for landscaping or maintenance
- \* see if a local archaeological group is interested in doing a dig on the site
- \* reproduce the 1884 plat for inclusion with the historic marker

Elise Stephens said residents of Monte Sano realized what a historical area they inhabited and formed a group to research and preserve their treasures. We already have a group in place. Diane Ellis will call Jean Barr of Monte Sano to find out how they proceeded in their preservation efforts. She will also get



a list from Suzanne O'Connor of historical and preservation agencies that may help us.

The group agreed that we need to develop a master plan before proceeding, but that there is some urgency to prevent further deterioration, vandalism, and theft of the stones. Perhaps we can put up a chain to protect the area while we make our plans for restoration.

6/4/94  
Diane Ellis  
2004 Brandy Circle