

2133 South 16th Ave.
Birmingham 5, Ala
April 17, 1955

Dear Frances:

Your suggested outline for research on homes AAUW book reached me two weeks ago.

I wrote to Reuben giving him the information which you wanted on the house. I thought he would telephone you. From his last letter I would conclude that he has not done so.

I would have to have the court(?) records to know the owners. The only thing I know about the people is what I told you. Cousin Ellen White Newman was my informant. She said the place was purchased by Mr. Woodson (I do not know his Christian name) for a wedding present for his daughter, Mary. He built the house. She married Mr. Withers. When she received word that her son was ill with fever during the War Between the States she went to Texas to nurse him. When she brought him home the Union soldiers were burning what furniture they did not want in the front yard. They were preparing to burn the house, but were stopped by an officer who had just arrived. He made them return the furniture they had taken. Mrs. Withers' daughter, Ellen, married Sandy White son of our great-great uncle Thomas White, one time Mayor of Huntsville. He owned the home on Eustis Street in which Mary and Jack (?) now live.

I wish you would verify the Woodson name, as Cousin Ellen said her great-grandfather built a house for himself on the adjoining place, to be near Mary. She may have meant the old Wiley(?) Place, which is similar to ours, but the Underwood Place is contiguous to our land on the East.

I do not know to whom the Withers sold it. The story is told of him that planters in that area raised eyebrows over his using his slaves to build a rock wall between his land and the Underwood Place during the war.

Afterwards he said, "They all thought I was crazy to build that wall, but I notice it is still there, and all of their rail fences are burned by the Yankee invaders."

The wall is still there in 1955. It is loose stones piled up like the field stone walls of New England, only it is broken limestone.

Another interesting spot on the hill below the house seems to have been an Indian arrowhead shop. When we were children and since we have found arrowheads in all stages, from partly in the flint, like a frieze, to the finished artifact.

Back of the house there is a flat shelf of rock from 14th street to the spring in almost unbroken line. The water was piped from that spring to the house when Mr. and Mrs. William E. Matthews lived there. The house back of the main building was built for Mr. Matthews' office, and for a room for his sons.

The old smokehouse was there originally. It had no floor but the earth. Its rafters were the hanging places for hams, shoulders, side meat, and beef to cure from smoke from hickory chips. The time was not less than two years. The hams were rubbed with (**molasses?**), saltpeter, salt, brown sugar, and plenty of black pepper before being hung. The other meat was salted and smoked.

There was a log house with garden on top of the hill behind the house. One between that and the spring is a little lower down the hill. One beyond, but on a line with the spring is a larger house. (?) log house is on a line with the cow barn. Each had a garden. These were the slave quarters.

There was an old graveyard a little above a wet weather brook nearby on the Underwood line. I never remember(?) a burial there.

The house is colonial. There are four large rooms opening into a central hall with a staircase leading to a half storey with two bedrooms, a hall, and a large closet. The west room has two closets; the east room none. Both have fireplaces.

Originally the hall ended onto a small square porch. A brick walk connected it with the kitchen porch which is really a dogtrot. The kitchen is alone. Its porch turns at right angles on the east. Another small porch is south of the bathroom. It was where wood was piled for open fires, or coal for grates as time went on. It now serves as a sleeping porch. The front porch is about a half storey above ground. It is almost square. Its roof is supported by four

white columns. The pediment is plain. There are two square half columns at the back of the porch against the wall. There used to be a railing around the porch between the columns and down the steps. The blinds have shutters. The chimneys are large and high above the roof. They are brick. The roof was then(?) painted red.

The boxwood border to the front walk has been killed twice in the last few years. It is only a remnant of what it was.

The distinctive feature of the house is the folding doors between the dining room and the parlor. They fold back instead of sliding into the wall. The china cabinet in the dining room was added about 1898 or thereabouts. That mantelpiece was put up then, too. It does not go with the other plain woodwork.

The Venetian blinds were also added about that time.

The cedar closet in the back bedroom was added by Josephine.

I do not know anything about the Withers except what I have told you.

The William B. Matthews moved here about 1891. Mr. Matthews was the man who raised Lily Flag. John Matthews his son, tells me that she was brought from their place in the country—the farm which Jimmie Lou Cooper owns now—to Gladstone Place to be tested(?). She won the world record for her butter production that year. She was bought by the Hood Dairy for \$10,000 at the World's Fair at Chicago.

Mr. and Mrs. Matthews were charming people. He had the keenest sense of humor and loved practical jokes. She was small, quiet, and domestic, a lovely friend, and a wonderful mother. She had nine children. Eight lived to maturity. Five are still living. One of her daughters, Lucile, who is Mrs. Hugh Stubbins, was born at Gladstone Place.

We moved in again when the Matthews left. Mother went there as a bride. She moved to The Barracks (Waltham Place) when the Matthews came. On her(?) return she was a widow with three children. Her claim to distinction was a fine voice. She was trained in New York City but chose marriage instead of the concert stage.

When the Spanish American war veterans returned from Cuba there were hundreds of them (? ?) here. Many of them became her friends. She took Col. and Mrs. Hiram Chittenden and Capt. and Mrs. Fountain to board. They lived in the half storey. Col. Chittenden was there when he explored the source of the Big Spring. Captain Fountain later became Brig. Gen. Fountain of the First World War. Lieutenant Douglas MacArthur visited them at Christmas. He was then a beau of Captain Fountain's daughter, Adele.

Later the Fountains spent an assignment in the Philippines.

Charley Ninninger, son of a friend of mother's was detailed to guard Gladstone Place. One day he was sitting on the front porch reading, with his belt thrown onto a chair across the porch, when one of the children said, "Charley, what is this coming up the road?"

Looking, he recognized the general and his staff almost at the gate. Grabbing for his belt, he pulled it toward him upside down. The cartridges scattered in all directions. Everyone tried to help and the front ones were in place and his gun in position as he went down the walk to stand at attention as the general and his staff came in.

Another day we looked up and a whole company were crowding the yard. The major and his officers came to the porch where Mrs. Reuben Chapman was and handed her his sword. The other officers were visibly embarrassed.

There have been some faithful Negroes who served on this place too. When mother came here as a bride papa's body servant was a former slave of Governor Reuben Chapman's Oscar (Green? Greer?). Mother taught him to read and write. He studied and became a Methodist minister. His church was in McAlister's Alley. After mother left the place, he went to work for other people, but in 1918 he heard that we were all sick with flu and came to Birmingham to nurse us. When Reuben Chapman returned here, he came back to help him. His wife Mattie kept house for Reuben until he married.

Our Mammy was Margaret Robertson former slave of Dr. (?) Robertson. She knew all the medicinal herbs. Going through the woods she pointed them out to us so that we recognized them. She taught us the names of all the trees on the place. In the fall she took us nutting. In spring we gathered mustard, lamb's quarters, and pepper (greens?) from the fields. In the

summer horhound, catnip, dittany, (?), pennyroyal, plums, and other fruits and berries were brought in for use.

When Josephine came her mother Mrs. Joseph A. Gaboury came too. She was the wife of the Canadian engineer who laid the first electric streetcar track in Montgomery, Alabama. Among other of his works were levees on the Mississippi. There she met William Alexander Percy. When he published *Lanterns on the Levee* she wrote him. He answered, and sent her an autographed copy.

Reuben Chapman served as Sergeant in Company C Rainbow Division on the Border against Villa.

Reuben Chapman V was a Lieutenant at Fort Benning at the end of his service in the Second World War. He volunteered for Air Force. He was trained at Lackland and Brooks, Texas then transferred to the Army at Fort Sill. From there he was sent to Officers Training at for Benning.

John Humes Sheffey who lived at Gladstone for a while was graduated from Virginia Military Institute. He was a col. in the Spanish American War.