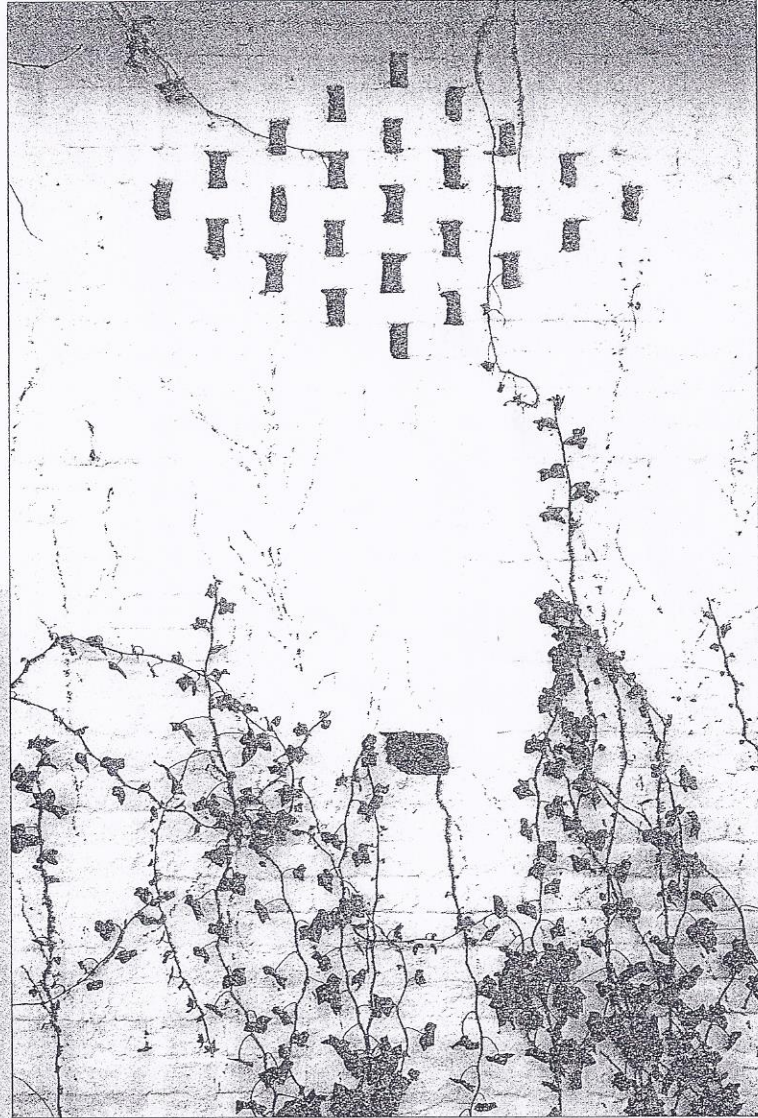


Historic Huntsville Quarterly

OF LOCAL ARCHITECTURE AND PRESERVATION

19th-Century Dependencies



*The brick wall of an old
smokehouse on Adams
Street becomes an
abstract canvas for the
21st century. Photograph
by Doug Brewster*

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SIX DOLLARS

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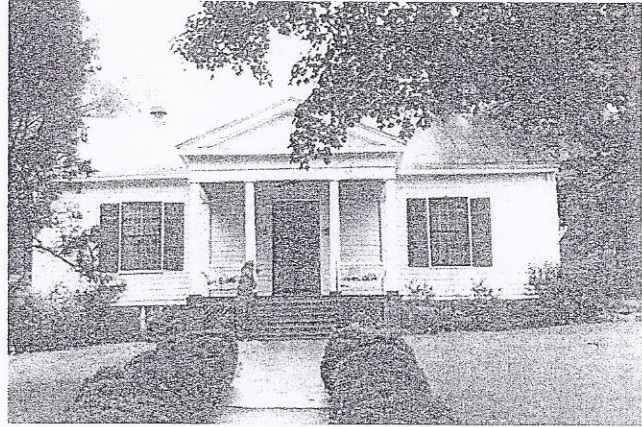
Northeast Huntsville Neighbors: The Chapman-Johnson and Robinson-Jones Houses

Amid familiar elements of modern life—increasing traffic, road expansion, real estate development—the Chapman-Johnson house on Dairy Lane, and Quietdale, the Robinson-Jones home on Quietdale Drive, survive as important examples of 19th-century Madison County homesteads.*

The older of the two properties, the Chapman-Johnson house, was built sometime in the late 1830s to 1840s, according to preservation architect

Harvie P. Jones, who based his conclusion on the house's Greek Revival mantels and doors, as well as saw marks and nails. The builder was an early settler named Allen Christian. At one time it was co-owned with another settler, Lemuel Mead, and was surrounded by more than 800 acres of land.¹

Over the years the plantation home has been known by a several names: the Withers House; Woodgreen; Monte Sano Cottage; Gladstone Place. The property passed through various hands until 1873, when Reuben Chapman II, Alabama's 13th governor (1847-1849), bought it. Known locally then as the Withers place (see



*The Chapman-Johnson house "...is a good example of the smaller house constructed in North Alabama during the early 19th century and is one of the few known intact Madison County examples of a one-and-one-half story frame cottage of the period."*² The house is seen here in a 1970 photograph by Harvie P. Jones, FAIA. Courtesy Architectural Collection of Harvie P. Jones, Department of Archives, M. Louis Salmon Library, University of Alabama in Huntsville

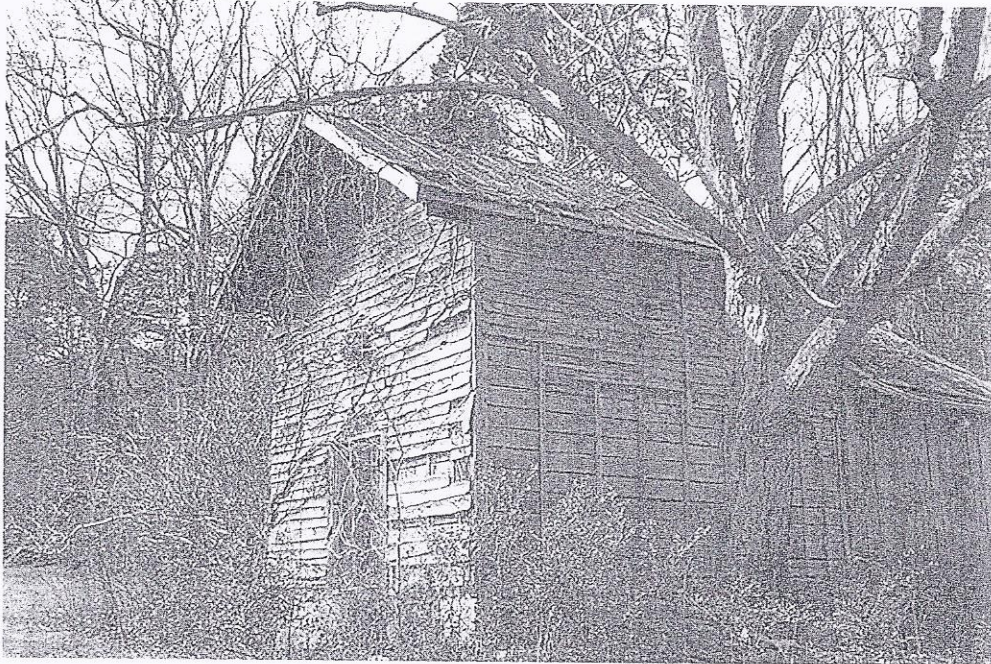


The servants' quarters, described in the National Register nomination as a "c. 1870 saddlebag" structure, is situated slightly northwest of the main house. The clapboarded building has a side-gabled roof continuous over an inset porch with chamfered posts. The house rests on limestone piers and features a central limestone chimney between two rooms. There are two four-panel doors in front, and one window bay each on the east and west end walls.³ It is possible that Allen Christian's family lived on a nearby site in an early version of this 1870s structure. Dorothy Scott Johnson understood Harvie Jones to say that the building's two fireplace mantels date from the early 19th century, years before the presumed c. 1830-1840 construction of the main house. Moreover, the Chapman family told the Johnsons that the servants' quarters had been moved from "The Grove," an area east of the main house. The move to the present site would have come sometime after 1884 as the plat of that date shows a structure in The Grove location, but not one on the present site.⁴ Photograph by Diane Ellis, 2006

plat p. 38), it had been owned for 24 years by Philip Woodson and occupied by his daughter and son-in-law, Mary and Augustine Withers, who called it Woodgreen.

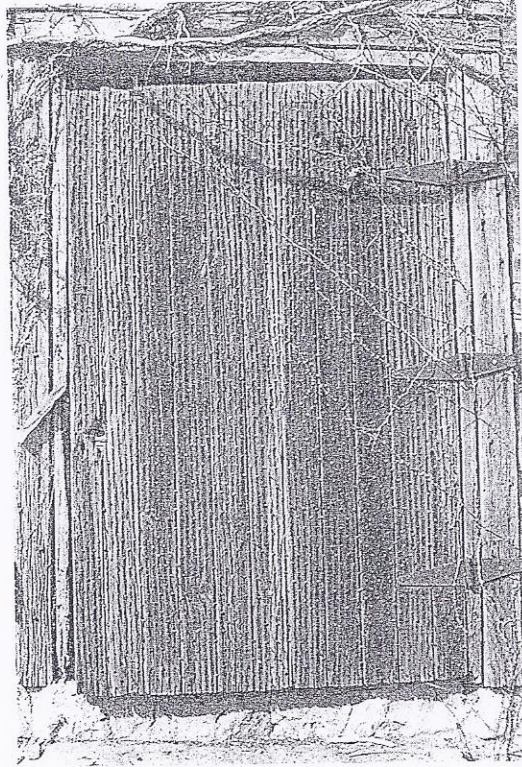
Woodgreen was a 342-acre plantation at the time of Governor Chapman's purchase.

Chapman had owned a plantation nearby, west of what is now Maysville Road, which was confiscated during the Civil War and used by Union troops to billet a black regiment. A Freedmen's Bureau and a prison camp for captured blacks also located there. Barracks were built to accommodate the groups and that area became known as Barracks Place (see plat). Chapman's plantation house on Barracks Place was burned in November 1864. Some years ago, part of the house's foundation was discovered underneath a modern residence on the old property.⁵



The tall one-story frame smokehouse, dated late 1800s by Harvie Jones, with its nail-studded door, is slightly northeast of the main house. It appears in its present location on the 1884 plat. The Johnsons added a stable to the back of the smokehouse for two horses they once owned. A privy is believed to have been located somewhere on the rise of land behind the smokehouse. Photograph by Diane Ellis, 2006

Although Governor Chapman never lived on the Dairy Lane property, the homestead was continuously occupied by succeeding generations of the Chapman family until July 1971, when the house and two acres were sold to Walter and Dorothy Scott Johnson. The house and farm have been the site of some well-known Huntsville history. In 1889, Milton Humes, brother-in-law of Reuben Chapman III, and William E. Matthews** established the Monte Sano Dairy, home of Signal's Lily Flagg, the Jersey cow famous for record butterfat production. The dairy changed owners in 1894 when the Matthews family somehow lost the place, but Rosalie Chapman, widowed since Reuben III's death in 1891, moved back into the house with her children and continued the dairy business.



Batten door of Chapman-Johnson smokehouse. Smokehouse doors were often reinforced to deter unauthorized entry. The nail pattern seen here would have discouraged attempts to saw through the door. Photograph by Diane Ellis, 2006

The foundations of a limestone springhouse, built in the Christian-Mead era and said by a Chapman descendant to match the stonework of Governor Chapman's early Barracks Place plantation house, remain in the modern Gladstone Place subdivision near the Dairy Lane property, along with portions of two Monte Sano Dairy buildings. The Chapman-Johnson property was listed in the National Register of Historic Places in 1978. ⁶

Notes

- 1 Dorothy Scott Johnson, personal communication, 2006; Micky Maroney, "The Withers-Chapman-Johnson House: A Plantation Cottage," *Historic Huntsville Quarterly of Local Architecture and Preservation*, Vol. XV, No. 3, Spring 1989, 10-11; Huntsville Branch, American Association of University Women, *Glimpses Into Antebellum Homes of Historic Huntsville, Alabama* (Huntsville: Completely Revised Ninth Edition, 1999), 71.
- 2 National Register of Historic Places Inventory—Nomination Form, Withers-Chapman Home, Prepared by W. Warner Floyd, Executive Director, and Ellen Mertins, Alabama Historical Commission, Montgomery, Alabama, August 17, 1978.
- 3 NR; Maroney, 8.
- 4 Johnson, pc, 2006.
- 5 Maroney, 14-16; Johnson, pc, 2006, citing Nancy Rohr, *Incidents of the War: the Civil War Journal of Mary Jane Chadick* (Huntsville, AL: Silver Threads Publishing, 2005), 228; Johnson, pc, 2006.
- 6 Johnson, pc, 2006; Maroney, 16; Maroney, 18; Johnson, pc, 2006.

*Former *Quarterly* editor and writer Micky Maroney devoted the Spring 1989 issue of the publication to the Chapman-Johnson house, and a good part of the 1983 Spring/Summer *Quarterly* to the Robinson-Jones home. This writer has relied heavily on Maroney's work for the two brief historical summaries appearing here.

**For information on William E. Matthews and his family's activities in Limestone and Madison counties, see *Historic Huntsville Quarterly of Local Architecture and Preservation*, Vol. 31, Numbers 1-2, Spring/Summer 2005. Copies of *Historic Huntsville Quarterlys* are on file in the Heritage Room of the Huntsville-Madison County Public Library.