

IF THE WALLS COULD TALK:
WHITE PLAINS HOLDS A LOT OF LOCAL HISTORY

by Laura Gwinn

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*Read more about the History of Putnam Co., TN at: <http://www.ajlambert.com>

ALGOOD -- Nestled in the developing residential area around Algood School is a large piece of Putnam County history -- even though just a little bit of the historic aspects still exist.

This area is still known as White Plains, an antebellum plantation house that sits right outside the Algood city limits. It was a little city of its own.

"It is one of the most significant historical resources we have left in the area, considering the family and their connections," Randal Williams, cultural resources management director with the Upper Cumberland Development District, said. "From the connections the family had with Andrew Jackson, James K. Polk



and Andrew Johnson to Mark Twain and U.S. Congressman Adam Huntsman, there's a lot of history."

(Pictured: The White Plains house sits on 15 acres down the street from Algood School. Photo by Ty Kernea).

With the recent passing of property owner Martha Willis, there is some concern about the future of the property.

History

The plantation, which featured many acres -- along with a different location of the original house -- was established in 1809 by William Quarles, a Revolutionary War veteran who had migrated to the area from Virginia.

The settlement literally was a city. It featured a general store, school, church, post office, blacksmith shop, inn and numerous other buildings -- buildings that are no longer in existence now. White Plains now consists of houses and a golf course.

According to family tradition, Quarles named the land "White Plains," as he saw the waves of prairie grass as being white in the winter sunlight as he looked out over the land.

The establishment of the Kentucky Stock Road -- which went from Huntsville, Ala., to Danville, Ky. -- intersected with the Walton Road at White Plains, allowing the settlement to grow, as it became a popular stopover for travelers along the road.

Three U.S. presidents are known to have lodged at that inn.

The original house -- located about a quarter of a mile from the current house -- is rumored to have burned prior to the Civil War.

Quarles was murdered by William Phillips in April of 1814. His wife, Ann, continued to manage the land until she died in 1844, when it was then passed on to Burton, their grandson. He built the current house around 1848.

"We're finding documentation that it may have been built earlier than that," Claude Ann Burton, direct descendant of Stephen Decatur Burton, said.

Burton also built a two-story schoolhouse for the community's children.

It is also rumored to be the place where Cookeville almost began.

Where the flagpole is on the property is where three counties met -- Jackson, Overton and White -- prior to the formation of Putnam County.

The first court ever held for many miles was convened on the lawn, with Judge Quarles presiding. Court for White, Overton, Jackson and Fentress counties was held there until a permanent site was established.

The community eventually fell apart in the latter half of the 19th Century, but the farm and house remained in the hands of the Quarles-Burton family.

The family eventually sold the house and farm to Harvey Draper, Martha Summers Willis' grandfather. But the two family cemeteries are still deeded to the Quarles-Burton families, who maintain it to this day.

"There are three generations of my family that grew up here," Martha's daughter, Chrissa Shanks Goin said.

Draper bought the property in 1958. He raised his two children in that house -- Martha and her brother, Harvey Lewis Summers.

And Martha raised her only child -- Chrissa -- in that same house. And it certainly holds a lot of memories for her and her young son.

Draper/Summers restoration

Upon purchase of the property, Draper immediately began the restoration project. Among the improvements made were bricking of the outside, the addition of wings on both sides of the house, and the double front porch replaced with a portico with full-length columns and recessed second story balcony.

Before all these restorations, there were nine rooms, four upstairs and five downstairs, each room featuring a unique fireplace.

The original poplar hardwood floors are still in existence on the second floor, showing wear and tear from the many years of existence. The original windows, wallpaper and fireplaces are also still in existence. The original floor is still downstairs, but is covered with modern hardwood.

Another unique feature is the built-in gun cabinets found on the west and east walls of the hall, adjacent to the entry sidelights and entrances to the parlors, which were opened up into one room in 1958.

The sitting room in the back was added in 1925 and is covered in wood paneling. There is a fireplace with colonettes, oversized mantles shelf and a tile hearth. There are two bedrooms and a bathroom in the west addition and a bedroom, bathroom and kitchen in the east addition.

The kitchen was brought inside from an outside building.

All the remodeling was conducted while keeping the historical aspects of the original house.

Other historical features include two family cemeteries and a slave cemetery.

Also of historical note is what is dubbed the "Well of three presidents." It is rumored that the three presidents who visited White Plains -- Andrew Jackson, Andrew Johnson and James K. Polk -- all drank from that well.

Two additional buildings are also on the property -- the smokehouse and corn crib.

Martha's legacy

Described as a "true Southern hostess," Martha Summers Willis passed away following a brief illness this past March at age 63. She had started the process of scaling down her possessions prior to her passing, including trying to garner interest among community members to preserve the property.

"She was such a remarkable person," Old Walton Road Daughters of the American Revolution member Eunetta Jenkins said.

Martha was a member of the DAR for more than 30 years and is described by fellow DAR members as an energetic and vibrant woman.

"She touched many, many people," Chrissa said. "I am blessed to have had her in my life."

Martha and her husband, the late Dr. Thomas W. Willis, had history at heart. She had an open door policy, even allowing students from nearby Algood School to tour the house, along with anyone who rang the doorbell.

Not only was she a member of the Old Walton Road DAR, she was a member of the state DAR, where she served as the state regent and the National Society of the Daughters of the American Revolution where she was elected to the office of vice president general. She also was a member of the Colonial Dames of the XVII th Century, United Daughters of the Confederacy and the Southern Dames.

In addition to her passion for history, she also had a love for horses. She was an active member of the Upper Cumberland Walking Horse Association, having won numerous awards and ribbons in that field.

Possibilities

Old Walton Road DAR members -- some of whom also are descendants of the Burton and Quarles families -- are eager to see the property preserved.

But how to go about it is the big question. Grant funding is tight. And it's difficult to have a governmental entity commit funds when a new fiscal year is right around the corner. Priorities are also in line, as a number of improvements, such as equipment upgrades and sidewalk and road repairs around Algood, are needed.

The house was placed on the National Register of Historic Places in 2009, being denoted as "significant in American history, architecture, archaeology and culture. Properties deserve to be preserved by their owners as part of the cultural heritage of our nation."

The possibilities for preserving it are endless. Ideas tossed around include making it a stop on the quilt trail to making it a museum for those who travel the in-development Walton Road Scenic Byway.

"It could be the Hermitage of the Upper Cumberland," Chrissa noted. "There's so much history here."

Anyone interested in preserving it can contact Kathy Dunn at 931-265-4575.

FRIENDS OF WHITE PLAINS TO HOST CHRISTMAS OPEN HOUSE

By Ben Wheeler

Herald-Citizen, Cookeville, TN: Wednesday, 6 November 2019

COOKEVILLE — The Friends of White Plains, a non-profit group dedicated to the preservation of the historic White Plains property, will host an open house in December for the public. The free two-day event will be held at the White Plains mansion from 10 a.m. to 4 p.m. on Saturday, Dec. 7 and from 1 to 5 p.m. on Sunday, Dec. 8. The event will serve as a fundraiser for the group's preservation efforts.



Dudney, Sarah Johnson, Jeff Jones and Chuck Womack).

The White Plains property, located at 2700 Old Walton Road in Algood, enjoys a distinguished history. Listed on the National Register of Historic Places in 2009, White Plains was one of the earliest settlements in the region and served as a temporary seat of government during Putnam County's initial founding.

(Members of the Friends of White Plains, from left, are Charlene Dickinson, Chuck Johnson, Jackie McMurray, Tracey Duncan, Judy Roberson, Eunetta Jenkins, Mona Copeland, Mark

Virginia Revolutionary War veteran William Pennington Quarles arrived with his family there on Christmas Day in 1809. Quarles named his new land "White Plains" because, as he surveyed it from an escarpment of the Cumberland Plateau, the now extinct prairie grass that once thrived in the area appeared white in the winter sun. The property's location along the Old Walton pioneer road enabled entrepreneurs like Quarles to establish thriving businesses, which grew along with the area. The well at White Plains is known as "the well of three presidents," due to the tradition that Andrew Jackson, James K. Polk and Andrew Johnson all drank from the well.

The Friends of White Plains will provide hot cider and light refreshments for guests and local vendors will furnish antiques, quilts and Christmas decorations for sale. Friends of White Plains membership information will be available and donations are welcome.

Parking for the event will be at the Algood Middle School parking lot and shuttle services will be provided. Visitors will enjoy Christmas music as they tour the stately antebellum mansion and learn more about its rich history.

"We are so excited about this event," said Friends of White Plains President Mona Copeland. "We invite everyone to join us for some hot cider and learn more about preserving this incredible cultural resource."

WHITE PLAINS HOUSE SUBJECT OF GRANT TALKS

Herald-Citizen, Cookeville, TN:

The White Plains Historic Home may be getting some upgrades.

A state historic grant for \$50,000 would help improve weather preservation efforts on the historic home.

"This would be with a 40 percent match. This would just be to apply for it," Algood City Administrator Keith Morrison said. "If we get it, we would have to match it.



"Grant would be applied to improving the condition of the outside of the house," Morrison said. "Needs work on windows, columns, paint repair and storm windows to protect the house."

Morrison told the Herald-Citizen that there were no major issues with the house other than weather wear on paint.

The home and 2.27-acre property was purchased by the last city council for \$250,000 and has been used as a history museum for the city, particularly for things such as the Quilt Festival.

The property, which is on the National Register of Historic Places, has recently been used to show off part of the Eads Collection of antiques, art and quilts through a partnership with Tennessee Tech.

Attendance at events held in the White Plains Historic Home has been good according to Morrison, with a number of attendees heading to the site for the quilt festival. An area school recently brought students for a tour of the historic site.

Algood City Council members will vote Tuesday, Nov. 12, on whether to apply for a state grant to help weatherproof the White Plains Historic Home.