

MANSIONS AND POTBELLY STOVES

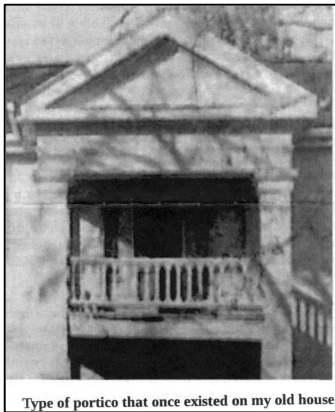
By John F. Hall

One would never suspect, that the old farm house where I live, was once a small Antebellum mansion. It once had an 18-foot wide portico with two Greek-type columns.



The second story section of the portico had railings on the front and the two sides. In 1985, I recorded an interview with Mrs. Curry Vinson. She is the mother of my late good friend, Tom Vinson. She told me that when she was nine years old, she would walk the mile or so from her house to play with her friend Lula Jackson. She said that she felt safe playing on the second story portico, because it had strong railings. Lula's parents, Kate and Pete Jackson, in 1907, owned the farm and the Antebellum mansion. She told me that the Jackson's were not good farmers because the fields were all grown up with sassafras trees. The house had two interior chimneys, one on the east side of the house and one on the west side of the house. There was a third chimney in the kitchen addition on the backside of the house. That chimney was on the exterior of the house. The Jackson's sold the house to the Flood family. Rain water was their main source of water. In 1919, the Flood family tore down the portico, to add a 54-foot by 8-foot front porch. This allowed them to catch the rain water from the front 'side of the mansion roof, and from the front porch roof. Gutters from the two roofs diverted the rain water by two pipes into a deep cistern on the right side of the front porch.

Rain water from the back side of the roof, and from the kitchen roof, was saved in the cistern by the kitchen porch. In 1985, because the two interior chimneys became a fire hazard, I tore the two, 29 feet crumbling chimneys down. I gutted the walls on the first floor, except for the walls in the two-story foyer. The only significant architectural features that remained, from the original Antebellum mansion, was the front entrance with the five window panes above the door, and the four window panes on both sides of the entry door, and the staircase.



Type of portico that once existed on my old house

Next to my old house is a concrete block house that was built in 1947. At that time, Johnny Downs owned the farm, the Antebellum mansion, and the small concrete block house. His wife, Floria Downs' name and palm print can be found on the 4 feet by 6 feet door porch, concrete slab in front of the block house. There is also the date of April 23, 1947, below Floria's name. The 18 feet by 16 feet building has a submersible water pump that goes down 160 feet. A rope was tied from the pump to a rafter to keep the pump from falling into the well. When Johnny Downs son, Burwick married, he slept in the block house with his wife, Merle. The block house has two windows, and a wooden front door. At one time, there was a small potbelly stove in the block house. They did their cooking and washing in the mansion. The electricity to run the submersible pump, and for lights in the block house, came from two overhead wires from the mansion's fuse box. There was a water line from the block house to a kitchen sink in the mansion. They cooked and heated the water, for taking baths, in the kitchen fireplace. Everyone had to use the wooden

outhouse to go to the bathroom. Johnny Downs moved out of the mansion and built a house next to the Canton Pike (Highway 68/80). He rented the mansion to the Calhoun family, they have five daughters. The girls slept in the second story bedroom on the east side of the house. They had a small potbelly coal stove that vented into the chimney on that side of the house.

J.L. Dupont wrote the poem, "Ode to a Potbelly Stove." These are his words: "They were cold days, those old days; when we braved the Winters in short pants, knee- high socks, mittens snowball soaked. Swiping at our frosty snot, knowing our mother kept the potbelly hot. And soon we'd warm ourselves with fresh boiled milk, rich with honey; skimmy off the creamy froth with spoons as good as gold. Those were cold days, those cold-days of two sweaters thick, double blankets, windowpanes thick with frost, cause coal came with a cost. Only her kitchen kept potbelly hot. Knowing, always knowing she'd be there to warm her heart. They were golden days, those olden days, when we believed ourselves forever young, forever loved. And she forever there, keeping the potbelly hot."

A distant memory comes to mind from the Winter of 1965. Billy Oakley ran a small convenience that was attached to the Sunset Inn Restaurant in Golden Pond, Kentucky. He had a good size potbelly stove in the store. I came in one day, dressed in construction coveralls. It was bitter cold outside and it felt good to stand next to that potbelly stove. In 1978, my wife Paula, my son John and I moved into the old Antebellum mansion. It was during a snow storm. I had just one day off to make the move.

At that time, only the living room, the kitchen, and a small bathroom, that was installed in 1964, was livable in the mansion. Time had taken its toll on the mansion that was built in 1861. One person told me a story about how bad the Winter winds would blow up the hill and slam into the house. He said: "When they opened the front door, it blew out the fire in the fireplaces."

Thanksgiving Day is two weeks away. The Harvest Display in my front yard still looks good. I've been watering the mums every other day. I was surprised when I was watering one of the yellow mums. A small yellow Sulphur butterfly was feeding on one of the yellow flowers. It flew away as I began to water the mum. I suspect that it might have been hibernating in the nearby old maple tree. The unseasonably warm temperature might have made the butterfly come out from its hiding place. I'm hoping that the mums will last until the family gathers for Thanksgiving Day. Clay Harrison wrote a short piece called, "How Blessed We Truly Are." These are his words: "November is a treasure chest of precious memories, a month when counting blessings can bring us to our knees. Thanksgiving makes us stop and think how blessed we truly are. How God's the wind beneath wings. When we're not up par. November is a respite, too from Summer's searing heat. In her coat of many colors, her beauty can't be beat. Delightful days of drifted gold put troubled minds at ease. Her ever-changing pageantry is guaranteed to please. Every day's a Rockwell painting of happy days gone by, when we were young and in our prime and hopes were always high. November always reassures us there are better days ahead, as we gather around the table and everyone is fed."

My son, John, and grandson, Cole came over to mow my yard and do some clean up by my old 1989 Ford pick-up truck. My son's zero-turn mower can do more in 20 minutes, then I can do in a half a day of push mowing. My other grandson, John-John got off work, called my wife, Paula to see if she would cook his favorite pancakes with bacon. They help me keep the yard around my old mansion well manicured. In John, Chapter 14, Verse 2, are these words: "In my Father's house are many mansions; if it were not so, I would have told you. I go to prepare a place for you." As for me, after reaching the ripe old age of 78, and having lived in a dilapidated Antebellum mansion, for the past 45 years, a small inconspicuous room, in Heaven will do me just fine. I'll end this story with a song Called, "I don't need a Mansion." It was written by Kara Dioguardi, Rich Harrison, Nicole Scherzinger, and Vanessa Brown. These are some of their lyrics: "I don't need a mansion on a hilltop, just a home in Gloryland's gonna suit me fine. I don't need a fancy car to drive there, just a set of wings to soar the Eastern sky. Some people work so hard for material things, things down here that just don't satisfy. But I'm laying up my treasures in Heaven above, and I found peace that money just can't buy. Now you may criticize me for the way I sing and shout, I'm on my way to Heaven and that's what it's all about. There'll be a lot of praising for those who make it through, through the pearly gates in the skies of blue. ...".

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