

Whitfield Home, "Gainswood"
Demopolis, Alabama

Marengo Co.

ALA
HABS No. 16-211
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PHOTOGRAPHS
WRITTEN HISTORICAL AND DESCRIPTIVE DATA
District No. 16

Historic American Buildings Survey
E. Walter Burkhardt, District Officer
Ala. Polytechnic Inst., Auburn, Ala.

HISTORIC AMERICAN BUILDINGS SURVEY
Drawings of "Gaineswood"
Demopolis, Alabama

Sheet

Subject

- 1 Plot plan.
- 2 First floor plan.
- 3 Second floor plan and third floor plan.
- 4 Roof plan.
- 5 North elevation, plan of north garden, detail of cast iron urns.
- 6 West elevation.
- 7 South elevation, details of cornice, terrace plan at south entrance.
- 8 Longitudinal section.
- 9 Front elevation and plan north portico, balustrade cornice and capital details.
- 10 Elevation and plan of mistress room.
- 11 Elevation plan and details of porte cochere.
- 12 Interior elevation toward dining room, details of wall frieze, ornament on architraves and column capital.
- 13 Interior elevation, stair hall, details of stairway.
- 14 Reflected plan of ceiling, detail of rosettes and beams.
- 15 Elevations and details of ballroom.
- 16 Elevations and details of dining room.
- 17 Elevations and details of library.
- 18 Full size details of plaster friezes.
- 19 Elevations and details of masters bedroom.
- 20 Elevations and details of mistress room.
- 21 Elevations of fireplaces.
- 22 Exterior music pavillion.
- 23 Elevations and plans of slave house, gate house and main entrance gateways.
- 24 Details of plaster work ceilings and cornice.
- 25 Details of plaster work ceilings and cornice.

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"GAINESWOOD", THE WHITFIELD HOME
Demopolis, Alabama

HISTORICAL DATA:

Built in 1842.

Architect: General Nathan Bryan Whitfield.

Ownership:

General Nathan Bryan Whitfield designed and built this home in 1842.

Mrs. Charles W. Dustan (Edith Whitfield), daughter of General Whitfield, bought the place in 1896.

Miss Bessie Dustan of Lakewood, N. Y., owned this home until recently.

Mr. Clarence Kirven, New Bern, N. C., now owns the place.

Present Occupants:

Lieutenant-Colonel and Mrs. W. M. Spencer.

Location:

General Nathan Bryan Whitfield bought the site of the old Indian Trading Post from George S. Gaines, the United States Indian Agent to the Choctaws. Today, the home is just beyond the City limits of the historic City of Demopolis.

General Whitfield called his home "Gaineswood" in honor of George S. Gaines, the Indian Agent.

General Nathan Bryan Whitfield:

Came to Demopolis with his wife in 1818. He was a man of cultured tastes. He was his own architect and took great delight in seeing his plans and designs carried out by his own workmen.

General Leonidas Polk:

This home was the headquarters, at the close of Civil war, for General Leonidas Polk, when his staff was the guest of General Nathan B. Whitfield.

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General Leonidas Polk was a bishop in the Protestant Episcopal Church, and was a General-Bishop during the War. He was in Demopolis in 1863.

Pushmataha Oak:

One of the five large oak trees, under which, it is said, Pushmataha, the great Indian chief of the Choctaws, camped while trading with the whites, is still standing. It grows near the entrance to the house to the right of the porte cochere, "a sentinal guarding the house."

Demopolis:

The little city, the home of this beautiful old building, was founded by a little band of French aristocrats, exiled from the courts of France at the downfall of Napoleon Bonaparte's regime.

They came up the Tombigbee River from Mobile, penetrated the virgin forests and founded the ~~City of~~ Demopolis (The City of the People). Here they attempted to raise olives and grapes, but not being skilled in labor, they did not succeed very well.

After the "restoration of the aristocrates", most of these went back to their native land.

Source of Material:

Old Residents of Demopolis.

George Petrie, History of Alabama, Rand McNally Co., Chicago, 1926.

Revised 1936 by H.C.F.

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ARCHITECTURAL MERIT AND DATA:

This home is one of the most distinguished residences in Alabama and in the South as a whole, not so much on account of its exterior, but mainly on account of its very interesting interior. The exterior suggests Italian villa architecture, with a strong leaning to the Adams style, rather than the pure Greek Revival use of contemporary times. No doubt, when landscape gardens supported this ambitious home, the effect was much greater than it is at the present time. An interesting reminder of the extensive formal garden, which the house had, is that of a small stone bandstand still in existence today. Also, a gate lodge stands some distance from the residence proper.

The interior, as a whole, has exquisite use of Greek motives after the Adams manner. The ball room is perhaps the most interesting of the rooms, employing extensive ornamental plaster and mirrors. The dining room and parlor are rendered unique by the polychrome use of plaster motives and the employment of domical ceiling treatment. The treatment of the bay in the mistress' room is also of very interesting character. The fireplaces and the two stairs are uniformly not treated in the same spirit as the balance of the interior.

Source of Material:

E. Walter Burkhardt, District Administrator, HABS,
Alabama Polytechnic Institute, Auburn, Alabama.

Reviewed 1936, H.C.F.

"GAINESWOOD", THE WHITFIELD HOME
Demopolis, Marengo County, Alabama.

ARCHITECTURAL DESCRIPTION(continued):

Reference to "Gaineswood" in Howard Major's
Domestic Architecture of the Early American Republic, p. 91:

"...Gainswood at Demopolis, Alabama, built
by General G. B. Whitfield. The composition, a
main body with subsidiary wings and porches,
was carefully studied, and the result is success-
ful and interesting from all four sides. The
plan also deviated from the accepted type by em-
ploying a mezzanine floor. Undoubtedly we can
account for this departure as due to the efforts
of one of a party of educated Frenchmen, exiled
from the Court of Napoleon, who sought refuge
on our shores."

H.C.F.