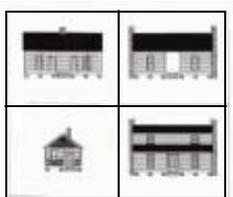


THE MONITOR



A Publication of the Vernacular Georgia Society

Spring 2010



Vernacular Georgia

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SPOT LIGHT: Southeastern Shotguns

Perhaps it's exaggeration to say that the shotgun houses are to southern music as log cabins were to 19th century politics. However, Elvis Presley was born in one, the Neville Brothers grew up in one, and bluesman Robert Johnson is said to have died in one.

Certainly the builders of these simple "poor people's houses" would be amazed at Rice University's "Shotguns 2001", which combined an exhibition of John Biggers' shotgun house-themed paintings, scholarly lectures in a neighborhood of restored shotgun houses, and a speech on "House Art" by feminist icon bell hooks.

And what would they think of the gold shotgun house Christmas tree ornaments for sale in New Orleans or the expensive immaculately-detailed wooden replicas for the HO train layout that encircles the gifts at the foot of the tree?

The shotgun house story is blasted through with ironies, not the least of which is that such a straightforward house engenders such complicated controversies.

First, does anyone agree on what a shotgun house is besides "simple"? The name calls to mind a very plain, small rectangular one story frame house constructed to provide shelter at minimum possible cost. But an internet search on "shotgun houses" also returns images of two-story "over-under" buildings and "double-barrel" structures with side-by-side units under the same roof. And must a true shotgun house have a gabled porch roof or will a flat one do?

And even "simple" becomes a suspect word when we look at what are commonly accepted to be shotgun houses. This Old House recently featured the "renovation" of a double-barrel New Orleans shotgun with six foot tall front windows and ginger



Lincoln Park Shotguns
South of Thomaston, GA

bread-encrusted eaves beneath a pyramidal roof. Perhaps the essence of a shotgun house is its floor plan. A shotgun house is one room wide and at least two rooms deep, with front, interior, and back doors aligned.

It is often said that these houses acquired their name because, if all the doors were open, a shotgun could be fired from front porch to backyard without hitting anything. But even this near-cliché is disputed for reasons beyond the tendency of shotgun pellets to scatter widely.

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Our Readers are Encouraged to Submit Articles Relating to Georgia and Southeastern Vernacular Architecture. All Topics and Opinions Are Welcome.



Typical New Orleans Shotgun House

SPOT LIGHT: Southeastern Shotguns

Since the early 1990s, a widely-accepted theory is that the shotgun house design originated among plantation slaves in the Caribbean, and was carried to New Orleans and disseminated throughout the south by slaves and free African-Americans. It has been claimed that the "shotgun" name is a corruption of several Yoruba words related to

the concept of "house".

An irony is that exterminating shotgun houses was once a progressive goal. Well into the 1970s, shotgun houses were viewed as inherently-substandard, a symbol of poverty like the unpaved streets and outdoor plumbing that characterized the neighborhoods where they stood. Urban renewal relent-

lessly demolished them by the block.



Digitized Rendering of a Georgia Shotgun House

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Mary Ellen Higginbotham

Mike Shadix

Allison Slocum

Chip Wright

Chair's Column



If our first meeting as a new board (January 29th) is any indication,

Vernacular Georgia has every reason to be thankful for its energetic new board members and officers. The meeting was held at the offices of Ecos Environmental Design in Atlanta's Inman Village (the work home of our new Secretary-Treasurer, Allison Duncan), located in a restored and rehabilitated paper goods factory. We got our checking account moved from Savannah (where former Treasurer, Bob Ciucevich had ably kept it for years) to Atlanta. We are solvent, with an account balance of something over \$3,000. We resolved to canvass our current and former members to update membership information and dues, so expect a phone call if you haven't already had one.

Most importantly, we agreed on a schedule of excursions.

New board member, Allison Slocum, will lead us to the vicinity of Cuthbert and Fort Gaines May 1st. Save the date and see the article by Allison elsewhere in this issue of the Monitor. In July or early August, another new board member (and Monitor editor), Chip Wright, will lead us into the Georgia Mountains. And in October or early November, vice-chair and long-time member, Jennifer Dickey, will conduct an excursion in one of her stomping grounds, Bartow County and Cartersville. Excursions in 2011 tentatively include the Madison-Greensboro area (by Allison Duncan); an island off the coast of South Carolina (by Daves Rossell); and something in the Athens area (by Mark Reinberger).

If you've been a member of VGA for awhile, you might notice that the excursion to Cuthbert is listed for May 1, one day instead of the usual two. We are going to try this schedule to better assist

those who have to work for a living. The tours will start Saturday morning and run for most of the day. Some of us will gather the evening before for dinner and fellowship and stay over night, but others can come early the next morning. We'll see how this works and then assess whether to go back to the long-established custom of touring Friday afternoon and Saturday morning.

As you can see by the excursion schedule, the new members will be busy helping to breathe new life into our slightly tired (though by no means comatose) organization. Come out and meet them!

*Mark Reinberger
April 5, 2010*

OUR NEXT EXCUSION

**May 1, 2010
Cuthbert, Georgia
and Environs**

**Call or Email for
more details and to
RSVP**



Chalk Level: Historic African-American Neighborhood Has A Rich History

Standing on Hardaway Street in Newnan, looking at an unassuming row of old homes, you wouldn't think they were anything particularly notable. But the saddlebag double-pen home at 25 Hardaway is—at least by one researcher's reckoning – “the early core” of a community that's been mostly forgotten. Brenda Harden remembers her grandmother Nora Elam, now 99, referring to the old, traditionally African-American neighborhood along Pinson Street as “Chalk Level.” But times have changed and the neighborhood isn't what it once was, she said. “When I grew up on Pinson Street, I remember playing basketball, baseball, and skateboarding,” she said. “Of course our skateboards were just two-by-fours with wheels stuck on each corner. We had to make our own games. “But we had a neighborhood grocery store on the corner of Savannah and Pinson Street, and a YMCA,” she said. “We'd go play ping-pong in there.” Things have “gone from bad to worse” in that part of town, she said, and she never really considered the rich history behind Chalk Level. “I was raised right there on Pinson Street, but it just never dawned on me,” said Harden. She does remember that the neighborhood once boasted doctors and a hospital. Her uncle, Edward Jordan, is the grandson of the late Dr. John Henry Jordan, whose 1908 Queen Anne home at 61 Pinson Street is the crown jewel of the Chalk Level area.

Julie Turner, the former planner for the Chattahoochee-Flint Regional Development Center and currently a fellow at Emory, has been researching Chalk Level for the past year, peeling back the layers of history like an onion. In fact, Newnan's Chalk Level neighborhood—located south of the Cole Town Historic District and made up generally of Savannah Street,

Dewey Street, and Robinson and Pinson Streets—was featured in the Vernacular Georgia group's winter excursion on December 5. Vernacular Georgia is a group whose aim is “to promote and sustain focus on Georgia's historic vernacular architecture and to encourage its preservation,” according to Turner, who led the recent excursion. “My field work has netted surprises and more than one puzzle to work through,” she said. “I will assert with confidence, at this point in my research, that the earliest development of Chalk Level as an African-American community pre-dates the extant structure of streets,” said Turner. Instead the earliest buildings followed the dictates of the creek and the topography of Chalk Level,” she said. The streets seem to follow the boundaries of the early Georgia Land Lottery maps, Turner said. “Unlike most old roads, they just go in a straight line, right along the lines of the land lots,” she said.

The origins of Chalk Level extend all the way back to the time when cotton was still king, before the Civil War. Many of the streets of the Chalk Level neighborhood are actually named for early slave-holding plantation owners—and in a town noted for its early wealth, it took a lot of slaves to generate that output. Many of the slaves who helped build that early Newnan wealth are buried at a forgotten cemetery on Farmer Street, notable mostly for its silence. A single, modest gravestone at the edge of the cemetery speaks for the 269 graves there. “The marked grave was for Charlie Burch, son of A.B. and Eliza Burch,” said Turner. Participant Cynthia Rosers said that Ground Penetrating Radar (GPR) has been done at the site,

confirming the number of unmarked graves. “This was a slave cemetery for these two plantations,” the descendants of whom later became the core of the Chalk Level community, Turner said. She said that at first she had her doubts, but now she's convinced the graves are primarily those of slaves. “I was skeptical,” said Turner. “I thought maybe they were African-Americans from the late 19th-century. But now I am a complete believer.” She notes that Newnan had an unusually large African-American population, from the earliest days of its existence. “In 1860 there was a white population in Newnan of 958. But the African-American population was just shy of 1,600,” said Turner. “That's something you might expect to see in the more rural parts of the county, but not in town.” She reckons that the former slaves began a community centered on Hardaway Street, along a creek that parallels the road, and then branched out to Reynolds Street and later to Pinson and Savannah Street.

The homes at 6 Reynolds Street, 14 Reynolds Street, and 18 Reynolds Street are likely remnants of that early Chalk Level era, she said.

“That's the early core of this historic community, without a doubt,” she said.

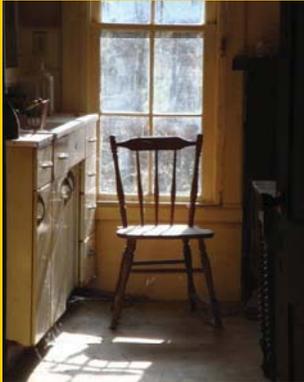
Jeff Bishop, VGA



www.vernacularga.org



J. H. Gordon House 1908
Newnan, GA



Mitchell Farm House
Kitchen

Contact VGA

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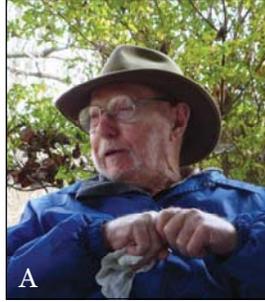
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Photo Log: Winter Excursion Dec. 5, 2010



A



B



C



D



E



F



G

Newnan, Carrollton & West Georgia



H

A. Dr. Bill Mitchell B. Bonner House C. Paul Jarrell
at Farmer Street Cemetery D. Mitchell-Goldworth
Farm E. West Georgia College F. Mitchell-
Goldworth Farm G. Willie Dixon Masonry
Example H. Tom Hunter Commercial Block .

Photos Courtesy of Robert Craig

UPCOMING EVENTS

EXCURSION: Cuthbert, Georgia & Environs

In 1831, Cuthbert became the county seat of Randolph County and was incorporated as a town in 1834. This area was inhabited by Creek Indians until the Creek Rebellion of 1836. As a remote frontier settlement, Cuthbert's first frame buildings did not appear until 1838. The Cuthbert Historic District has outstanding examples of 19th century architecture that ranges from early plantation plain style to Greek Revival and Victorian

Gothic cottages. Highlights of this tour will include: the Randolph County Courthouse, the Muse-Maloof-Gamble House (1850 dormitory for the Bethel Baptist Female College), and a Stagecoach Inn with side trips to downtown Shellman and the Shellman Masonic Lodge.



Allison Slocum

The Grove Motor Lodge (1950's-1960's)

495 Blakely Street
Cuthbert, GA 39840-5322
(229) 732-6529

Days Inn

142 US Hwy 82 East
Cuthbert, GA 31740
(229) 732-5566

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in Columbus, call me for
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(706) 256-2910.*