

"TIDEWATER COTTAGES" IN THE TENNESSEE VALLEY

(Thematic Group)

Owner: Theodore Gerber
444 N. Wood Ave.
Florence, AL 35630

Historic name: William Koger House
Common name: William Koger House

Location: Lauderdale County, approximately four miles northeast of Smithsonia, Ala. on the south side of the Smithsonia-Rhodesville Rd.

Acreage: 85
UTM: A-16/419/980/3853/550
B-16/420/510/3853/510
C-16/420/420/3852/740
D-16/419/990/3852/740

Date of Construction: c 1830

Statement of Significance:

Criterion C - Architecture:

The William Koger House is a very fine example of one of North Alabama's Tennessee Valley "Tidewater cottages." It is the only example in this thematic group of double pile brick construction. The dimensions of the house, like three others in the group, are based on the "double cube" formula.

Criteria A & B - Exploration/Settlement

The Koger House is significant for its associations with William Koger and his wife Martha, both of whom were natives of Virginia. William was from northern Virginia and his wife was from southern Virginia. Martha's family migrated first into Tennessee c 1810 and later into North Alabama where she met and married William in 1821. Their route of migration into Alabama via Tennessee was a common pattern during the early 19th century.

Integrity:

The Koger House has retained its integrity of location, setting, design, workmanship, materials and feeling. The exterior "double cube" dimensions and the interior double pile floor plan are unaltered. While the interior has been to some degree cosmetically altered with modern prefabricated paneling the primary woodwork (doors, mantels, baseboards, architraves, window sash, etc.) is virtually all intact. Some features, however, (wainscoting, chair rail, stair railing etc.) have been lost.

Description:

The William Koger House is a story-and-a-half, three-bay, brick "Tidewater cottage" with a gable roof flanked on either end by two exterior brick chimneys. Until recently destroyed by fire, there was a frame cross gable ell which extended approximately 40 feet from the back of the main house. In the angle of the ell and the main block there

was a porch. The facade has Flemish bond brickwork while the remainder of the house is laid in common bond. Both the front and back entries have original double-leaf paneled doors surrounded by sidelights and transoms. At the second floor level in the left gable end of the house is a large arched window opening between two chimney stacks. There is no glazing in this window which is currently boarded up. It is unlikely that the window is original and may have been added in the late 19th century. There is no evidence that the facade ever had a porch over the main entry - a stylistic feature common in "Tidewater cottages" of the Chesapeake Bay area.

The interior has most of its original woodwork including mantels, doors, baseboards, chair rails etc. The original plaster walls have been covered with modern prefabricated paneling. The floor plan is one of only three in the thematic group that features a double pile arrangement with a central hall. Access to the second floor is via a stairway, now partially enclosed, running from the back toward the front of the house. This stair orientation was not unusual in many Alabama houses of the early 19th century.

At the back of the house is a small board and batten outbuilding (see photo 7) which appears to be early. In a field approximately a 1000 yards from the back of the house is a family cemetery which was originally surrounded by a cut stone wall. Adjoining the original plot is a later burial ground probably of the Victorian era surrounded by a cast iron fence. Both of these plots have been heavily vandalized with tombstones and surrounding walls completely decimated (see photo 5).

Historical Summary

This house was built for William and Martha (Westmoreland) Koger. Stylistic details would seem to place the date of construction around 1830-35.

William Koger (1792-1858), like his wife, was a native of Virginia. The date of his arrival in Alabama has not been determined. However, Martha Westmoreland Koger (1803-1892) was the daughter of Jesse and Elizabeth (Ingram) Westmoreland, who left their home in Southside Virginia's Brunswick County about 1810. Settling first in Giles County, Tennessee, just north of the Alabama boundary line, the Westmorelands moved into neighboring North Alabama about 1820.¹ A year or so later, on April 12, 1821, Martha Westmoreland and William Koger were married in Lauderdale County. During the same decade, they settled west of Florence, in the fertile region on the north side of the Tennessee River known as the "Colbert Reserve" or "The Bend."² The tract on which they settled was first patented by Christopher-Strong on October 20, 1820.

It is conceivable that the brickwork for their story-and-a-half plantation home built by the Kogers was executed by Nathaniel Harrison Marks, a respected local builder who is linked with the construction of other brick dwellings in the area. (Born in Surry County, Virginia, Marks was active in the Florence area between 1825 and 1840. He was responsible for the brickwork of both "Ardoyne" and "Woodland," a pair of two-story brick houses some miles east of the Koger place which date from the 1830s.) A Koger descendant would later recall the Koger plantation home itself as "an early Virginia type house, handsomely furnished."³

¹The Rev. Hiram Kennedy Douglass, My Southern Families (Gillingham, Dorset, England: The Blackmore Press, 1967), pp. 234-36.

²Kathleen Paul Jones and Pauline Jones Gandrud, Alabama Records, vol. 43 (Lauderdale County), p. 22 (unpublished typescript, State Department of Archives and History).

³Douglass, My Southern Families, p. 236.

In the 1850 census, William Koger is classified as a "Farmer," with personal property valued at \$11,550. Besides 480 acres of land in the Colbert Reserve area, Koger had under cultivation a rich 150-acre island in the Tennessee River known as Koger's island.

Upon his death, most of William Koger's estate was equally divided between his seven children--two sons and five daughters. His widow, however, received the plantation house as well as his carriage and horses.⁴ Martha Westmoreland Koger managed the farm for another three decades, until shortly before her own death in the spring of 1892.⁵ The elder Kogers, along with several other family members, are buried in a small plantation cemetery southwest of the house. Remnants of a cut stone wall which formerly enclosed the plot, together with the broken remains of a number of tombstones, are still visible.

Mr. Theodore Gerber of Florence now owns the property and farms the acreage adjacent to the house, which is currently occupied by tenants.

⁴Lauderdale County Probate Minutes, Book B, p. 397.

⁵Douglass, My Southern Families, p. 236.

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Verbal Boundaries: T.3.S.R.13W. E. $\frac{1}{2}$ of S.E. $\frac{1}{4}$ of S.2, includes house and outbuilding located on original plat still in possession of current owner.

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Statement of Significance:

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