

"TIDEWATER COTTAGES" IN THE TENNESSEE VALLEY

(Thematic Group)

Owner: Annie Wheeler Estate  
Henry Long, Trustee  
AmSouth Bank  
Birmingham, AL

Historic name: "Bride's Hill"  
Common name: "Sunnybrook"

Location: Lawrence County, on the south side of Lock Road, one mile north of  
Wheeler, Ala.

Acreeage: 156 UTM: A-16/477/390/3837/120  
B-16/477/805/3837/120  
C-16/477/805/3835/505  
D-16/477/405/3835/505

Date of Construction: c.1830

Statement of Significance:

Criterion C - Architecture:

"Bride's Hill" is an excellent frame example of an Alabama "Tidewater cottage." The overall original form of the house is typical of Virginia Tidewater prototypes. It is the only frame example, in this thematic study, constructed on the "double cube" formula. It is the only known house in Alabama to have two cantilevered chimney pents. "Bride's Hill" is also one of only three houses in this group to have an original full basement.

Criteria A & B - Exploration/Settlement:

"Bride's Hill" is significant for its associations with the establishment of large, slave-based cotton plantations in the Tennessee Valley area of North Alabama by the descendants of a leading planter family of Virginia. The original owner of the property, Robert H. Dandridge, was one of the descendants of a wealthy King William County, Virginia planter. Dandridge and his wife migrated to North Alabama and purchased the "Bride's Hill" land in 1820. Unlike many of their Alabama neighbors, the Dandridges remained on the site instead of continuing on into Mississippi when it opened for settlement.

Integrity:

"Bride's Hill" has retained its integrity of location, setting, design, workmanship, materials and feeling. Its form, based on the "double cube" construction formula and closely allied architecturally to Virginia Tidewater houses, is very little altered. Outstanding features still extant include two cantilevered chimney pents, virtually all interior woodwork (with exception of a portion of the stair rail), and a full basement.

One 20th century addition at the back of the house, a recent front porch and a metal roof covering appear to be the only alterations. Modern farm outbuildings at the rear of the house do not add to the historic character of the setting.

Description:

"Bride's Hill" is a one-and-a-half story frame, five-bay house with a gable roof with three cross gabled dormers across the facade. At either gable end of the house is a brick, exterior, fireplace chimney whose stacks break several inches away from the main wall plane. There are also two cantilevered chimney pents which are the only known examples in Alabama. The front has a small portico which is not original, and the back also has a 20th century shed roofed frame addition. One interesting original feature is the cornice molding (see photo 6) found on many houses of this period. "Bride's Hill" very much resembles the exterior of "The Shelton House" at Buffalo Springs, Virginia (see attached illustration).

The interior of the house is single pile with a center hall (see attached plan). Most of the original woodwork is intact including baseboards, mantels (one Federal and one Greek Revival), doors, window sash and architraves. One unusual surviving feature is a Federal bifold door (see photo 7) at the interior basement entry. A dogleg stair in the central hall is original, but only the upper portion of its original railing has survived (see photo 8). The fireplaces on the second floor, like those downstairs, exhibit one Federal and one Greek Revival mantel. The full basement divided by one brick and one frame partition has both interior and exterior access (see plan). The basement windows have original vertical wooden bars on the exterior and early hinged sash on the interior (see photo 14). One basement room has a fireplace, and the other room has an arched chimney support. It is reported by a former resident that the basement once had a wooden floor and was used as a dining room.

Historical Summary:

The tract where Bride's Hill now stands was originally part of the vast acreage on either side of the Tennessee River conveyed by the Federal Government to the State of Alabama in 1828 for the "River Improvement" fund. (By the resale of these lands, the State sought to implement the construction of a canal around the treacherous Muscle Shoals on the Tennessee River.) A year later, on December 2, 1829, Mrs. Elizabeth T. Dandridge purchased 160 acres, encompassing the house site, in Section 26 of Township 4 South, Range 7 West.<sup>1</sup> It is unclear why title to the land was conveyed to Elizabeth Dandridge instead of to her husband, Robert. But this parcel would become the first of several in the area owned by the Dandridge family. The "Bride's Hill" house was evidently built soon after the 1829 conveyance.

Robert H. Dandridge was one of the numerous descendants of Col. William Dandridge of "Elsing Green," King William County, Virginia. He and his wife were already middle-aged when they and their children settled in Lawrence County, northeast of Courtland, and became part of the local cotton-planting gentry. In 1838, nine years after the purchase of the Bride's Hill property, Robert Dandridge died. His widow

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<sup>1</sup>Lawrence County Tractbook, pp. 70-71 (Lawrence County Courthouse, Moulton, Ala.).

continued to occupy their house and oversee the general management of the family planting interests until her own death in the summer of 1845.<sup>2</sup>

An inventory of Mrs. Dandridge's estate at that time itemizes, besides stock, slaves, and plantation tools, one "carriage and harness" and dozens of household objects including a china press, thirteen "painted chairs," several bedsteads, silver service, a decanter, and other objects that give a very good idea as to how the story-and-a-half Dandridge dwelling house was furnished.<sup>3</sup>

After Mrs. Dandridge's death, Bride's Hill was sold to Philip and Sarah Pointer, natives of Halifax County, Virginia. When Philip Pointer died in the late 1850s, his widow remarried to Thomas Harrison Jones (1820-1889), son of Colonel Richard Jones of "Caledonia," three miles north of Bride's Hill, and brother-in-law of Confederate General Joseph Wheeler.<sup>4</sup> No children were born of Sarah Pointer Jones' second marriage and Bride's Hill was eventually sold in the 1900s by the heirs from Mrs. Pointer's first union to Bynum and Cortner, a Lawrence County farming corporation. During the first decade of this century, the house served for a time as the residence of the Cortner family. A daughter of the household, Carolyn Cortner (later Mrs. Wilburn Smith of Mountain Brook), would become Alabama's first licensed woman architect.

About 1912, the old Bride's Hill tract was purchased by Miss Annie Wheeler, daughter of General Joseph Wheeler whose home, "Pond Spring," still stands a mile and a half to the south. Miss Wheeler renamed the tract "Sunnybrook."<sup>5</sup> For more than half a century, the house at Sunnybrook served as a residence for one of the managers of the Wheeler estate, which at Annie Wheeler's death in 1956 numbered over 16,000 acres. Although abandoned in 1982, the house still remains part of the Wheeler holdings.

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<sup>2</sup>Wilson Miles Cary, "The Dandrighes of Virginia," William and Mary Quarterly (Series 1), vol. 5 (1896-97), pp. 30-32, 82; also ibid., vol. 14 (1905-06), pp. 267-268. Lawrence County Orphans Court Book (1835-40), pp. 420-21 (Lawrence County Courthouse, Moulton, Ala.).

<sup>3</sup>Lawrence County Inventory Book F, pp. 5-6 (Lawrence County Courthouse, Moulton, Ala.).

<sup>4</sup>Letter, Roger H. McNeese, Muscle Shoals, Ala. to Robert S. Gamble (10 July 1959); Early Settlers, p. 220.

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Verbal Boundaries: T.4S.R.7W. E.  $\frac{1}{2}$ s of N.W. and S.W.  $\frac{1}{4}$ s of S.26, includes house and  
outbuildings located on original property plat in possession of  
current owner.

Date of Construction: c 1830

Statement of Significance:

Criterion C - Architecture:

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Cantilevered chimney pent  
on Bride's Hill



"Sunnybrook" ("Bride's Hill")