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Antebellum Homes of the "Untouched City"

by

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During the American Civil War, Union troops were driven away from Columbus at the Battle of West Point by General Nathan B. Forest. Consequently, over 200 antebellum structures, most of these homes, were saved the destruction similar to that of so many homes in so many other Southern cities and towns. Columbus is luckily the "Untouched City." The antebellum homes bespeak a grandeur not seen in many communities of its size today. Unfortunately, few primary source records survive to tell the stories of these homes and the people who lived and live in them. Some home owners, curious about their old houses, have salvaged the family papers of the house builders and occupants and either donated them to the Billups-Garth Archives of the Columbus-Lowndes Public Library or kept them in the home.

The Lincoln Home was build about 1838 by the Love family of Columbus and sold to Horatio Lincoln around 1840. The Lincoln Family lived in the home for over 100 years. Cicero Lincoln was a Civil War and Spanish-American War soldier, attorney, county circuit clerk, and Columbus mayor. His son, Lonnie Lincoln, was a World War I soldier and attorney. When the house was purchased by the current owners, Sid and Brenda Caradine, some of the family papers were added to the Lincoln Family Papers already in the possession of the library archives. This accretion was donated to the Caradines by family members from out-of-state. They include photographs of the home and the people who lived there. Whereas the first donation of family papers, made in the early 1990s, dealt primarily with Cicero and Lonnie Lincoln, the Caradine accretion spans a wider time frame and covers more people, including some of the Lincoln women.

Right next door to the Lincoln Home (and also owned by the Caradines) is the Amzi Love Home. The Love family built the home in 1848 and descendants of the builders have lived in the house up to the present day. Sid Caradine is a descendant of the Love family. This second family home houses the Love Family Papers, a collection of every sort (diaries, letters, photographs, newspapers, scrapbooks), telling the story of the family from its beginnings. Among the Caradine belongings are letters to and from family members who fought in the American Civil War and World War I. One of the first women to care for disabled soldiers lived in the Amzi Love Home. Careful negotiations are underway to conserve the family papers, possibly as a donation to the archives.

Throughout Columbus' twentieth century, as many of the antebellum homes were being restored, contractors and architects would haul out hundreds of years of family papers and take them to the county dump. One such case was the Temple Heights, a home now owned by Carl and Dixie Butler. Three separate families lived in the home before the Butlers: Brownrigg, Harris, and Kennebrew. When the Butlers moved in the house in the 1970s, they were able to salvage papers from all three families which had fallen between rafters in the attic as the rest of the family treasures were thrown away. Included here are documents from the 1790s that came from the Carolinas with the Brownriggs. The Butlers will someday donate this important collection to the archives. The collection becomes more important as Mr. Butler's "Block Studies" classes discover the importance of the Brownrigg family to early Columbus. When the papers are donated, they will not be processed as four records groups of four sets of family papers. Instead, the papers will become one record group, the "Temple Heights Papers," with four series, one for each family that has lived in the house.

Because few of the antebellum homes of Columbus have manuscript collections associated with them, homeowners and teachers have begun to research their houses. The current owners of Shadowlawn, a Greek-revival structure with Italianate designs, have researched the families who have lived in the house well enough to discover that the man thought to be the builder was not and that the house thought to have been build in 1860 was actually built before 1855—five years can make a lot of difference when telling the history of a house. The owner of Bryn Bella has discovered that the builder of her house

was not James Lull, as had been thought for over a century, but instead W. H. Oneal. This discovery was due in large part to the discovery of the estate file of the original owner of the house, who still owed money to the builder, bricklayer, and plasterer when he died.

Independent research apart from the homes themselves also yields much information. The owner of Errolton (formerly the Weaver Home) has discovered that a Confederate soldier died in the house sometime in 1863. The Haven, long thought to have been built by free men of color brothers may not have been, but stories about the lives of these men and their families have come to light as the homeowners dig into the historical record of deeds, wills, and minutes of county and city governments.

Some houses still have a story to tell. To assist in this project, the Billups-Garth Archives, along with the Columbus Historic Foundation, is embarking on a multi-year project to employ a history graduate student to come to Columbus and do primary source research on the antebellum homes. The first student, Amanda Herbert from The Johns Hopkins University in Baltimore, will spend eight weeks researching both antebellum and Victorian homes, with concentration on houses for which little or no factual information is known. The archives and foundation staffs will be working to obtain grant funding for subsequent summers, hopefully to employ more than one graduate student. By the end of the project, the students will have documented most of the 200 antebellum structures and many of those homes built after the Civil War.

Although Columbus residents have lost or destroyed much of the historical documentation of the antebellum structures, movements are underway to discover the history of the city's buildings through private and student research. Endeavoring to discover the truth or falsehood of legends and dramas set out each April at the annual Columbus Pilgrimage, these researchers are providing a history for the future of Columbus.

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