

Before the Civil War, a number of Southern plantation owners built beautiful and spacious homes on their lands. Madison County, Alabama was no exception to this practice. At one time, the County was dotted with majestic dwellings belonging to the prosperous farmer, merchant, or doctor. One such structure, known as the Laughinghouse-Sisco Mansion, was built north of the old Bell Factory Road in the northwest quarter of section 6, township 3, range 2-East.

The property was first purchased from the United States Government by Stephen Kenemer on September 18, 1809.¹ In 1817, he and his wife, Rebecca, sold the 160 acres to Richard Haughton.² Haughton was a well-known personality in the vicinity, for he was once the operator of the Bell Cotton Factory.³ In 1828, Haughton sold the northwest quarter of section 6 to Joseph Laughinghouse, a farmer and neighbor of Haughton. Laughinghouse built an impressive mansion on the grounds, in 1830, with the support of slave labor.⁵

The Laughinghouse home was constructed of red brick, made on the homestead ~~of~~ ^{by} the slaves. It was built in the usual two-story Federal manner with exterior wood trim.⁶ The shutters and porch were added much later.⁷ A brick kitchen and den complex was added to the rear of the house in the 1940's.⁸ The interior of the Laughinghouse home had walls made of plaster with wainscoting trim in hand-carved pine.⁹ The floors were constructed of yellow pine.¹⁰ The staircase was unadorned but practical for the large Laughinghouse family.¹¹

Laughinghouse probably migrated to Madison County from eastern ^N North Carolina, for that was the only area where the Laughinghouse surname was listed in the United States Census of 1790. In the census, it was recorded that Andrew, John, and Thomas Laughinghouse lived in Beaufort County, North Carolina. Moreover, a Ripley Laughinghouse lived in Craven County as well as a John Laughinghouse being listed in Camden County.¹² All three of these coastal counties were in close proximity, the first two of which had common borders. Both John and Thomas rendered service with the North Carolina Line in the Revolutionary War.¹³ In 1810, the Laughinghouse family still lived in the eastern counties except for a J. Laughinghouse who had moved to Cabarrus County, in the middle of the state.¹⁴ J. Laughinghouse was probably the Joseph who migrated further west into the mountains of North Carolina, Tennessee and Georgia, before he finally settled in Section 31, Township 1, range 2-east, just north of Lickskillet Creek near Big Hill.¹⁵ ~~Huntsville~~¹⁵

LAUGHINGHOUSE
SISCO, c. 1830

In 1826, Joseph Laughinghouse married Martha G. Hughton or Haughton and had six children whose names were John E., Mary Jane, Leonard, Thomas, George W., and Joseph. He also had slaves some of which whose names were Sophia, Hannah, Sylvia, Robin, and Joseph.¹⁶

Around 1835, Joseph Laughinghouse lost his mental ⁴facilities and was sent to a lunatic asylum in Kentucky, probably at Lexington.¹⁷ On August 30, 1839, he died at the asylum without a will, but letters of administration were issued to his neighbor, Richard Haughton. William Clopton became the guardian of the younger Laughinghouse children.¹⁸

On December 26, 1843, Martha Laughinghouse, Joseph's widow, married Minor ^SCannon, but they separated in 1853 due to "unhappy differences..."¹⁹ Cannon gave Martha and her two sons, John E. and Joseph, the rights to the old Joseph Laughinghouse property that included the brick mansion.²⁰

The Children of Martha and Joseph Laughinghouse were, to a degree, outstanding. For example, John E. was an important elder in the Cumberland Presbyterian Church in Meridianville as well as a prosperous farmer.²¹ George W. Laughinghouse was a planter whose income was more than adequate.²² Furthermore, he was a successful Justice of the Peace.²³ Difficulties though were encountered by the Laughinghouse family concerning the younger Joseph, for, in 1863, he was declared a non compos mentis or lunatic. His brother, John, was appointed guardian.²⁴ This situation complicated matters because Joseph owned 1/6 of the estate. Furthermore, the land by the late 1860's was worn and poor, and the fences on the land were also in need of major repair.²⁵

In 1869, John Laughinghouse and his mother sold the home to Eliza Watkins.²⁶ Subsequently, in 1870, her husband, James, sold it to Virginia P. Robinson.²⁷

Eventually, the old Laughinghouse mansion was sold to Joseph A. Emert who ^{deeded} sold it to Thomas George in 1886.²⁸ In 1889, George ^J sold it to Luther M. Payne who ^{TRANSFERRED} sold it to Saluda A. Schaudis in 1902.²⁹ In 1914, Schaudis sold the home to Maggie E. Weiss.³⁰

Maggie Weiss, whose maiden name was Plemons, married Charles E. Weiss. They had five children whose names were Lula, Mary, Karl, Robert, and Adah.³¹ One of Mary's children, Thomas Allen Sisco, purchased the Laughinghouse mansion from his grandmother, Maggie, in 1929, but the final deed settlement did not occur until 1948.³²

Thomas Sisco and his wife, the former Miss Neva Stone, had three children: Charles, T. L., and Ruth.³³ In later years, Charles helped his parents with the homestead, for they were becoming too old to manage it themselves.³⁴ On March 2, 1978, Thomas Sisco died, and left the old Laughinghouse place to his wife, Neva.³⁵ Shortly thereafter, a daughter, Ruth Sisco Powell, moved into the old house with her mother, and initiated plans to restore it to its former grandeur.³⁶

The Laughinghouse-Sisco Mansion witnessed much of the history of Madison County from the early Indian Period to the Space Age. With such a background, it was, indeed, worthy of restoration.

FOOTNOTES

1. Tract Book, p. 212. Probate Office. Madison County Courthouse. Huntsville, Alabama.
2. Deed Records, Deed Book H, p. 400. Probate Office. Madison County Courthouse. Huntsville, Alabama.
3. James W. Bragg, "Frontier Entrepreneurs of Madison County, Alabama; The Bell Factory Enterprise, 1819-1842 (M.A. thesis, University of Alabama, 1958), p. 174.
4. Deed Records, Deed Book M. p. 201. Probate Office. Madison County Courthouse. Huntsville, Alabama; Bragg, "Frontier Entrepreneurs," p. 138.
5. Frances Roberts, et al. A Preliminary Historical-Architectural Survey of Sites and Structures in DeKalb, Jackson, Limestone, Madison, and Marshall Counties (Huntsville, Alabama: Top of Alabama Regional Council of Governments, 1974), p. 155; Interview with Mrs. Ruth Powell, daughter of Thomas A. Sisco, Bell Factory Road, Madison County, Alabama, 3 February 1979.
6. Ibid.
7. Roberts, Survey, p. 155.
8. Interview with Mrs. Powell, 3 February 1979.
9. Roberts, Survey, p. 155.
10. Interview with Mrs. Powell, 3 February 1979, Roberts, Survey, p. 155.
11. Ibid.
12. U. S. Department of Commerce and Labor. First Census of the United States, 1790: Heads of Families, North Carolina: 16, 126, 133.
13. Gertrude Sloan Hay, Roster of Soldiers From North Carolina in the American Revolution (Durham: The North Carolina Daughters of the American Revolution, 1932, reprint ed., Baltimore: Genealogical Publishing Co., 1967), p. 81 and p. 142.
14. Ronald V. Jackson, Gary R. Teeple, and David Schaefermeyer, eds. North Carolina 1810 Census Index (Bountiful, Utah: Accelerated Indexing System, Inc., 1976), p. 79.
15. Kathleen Paul Jones and Pauline Jones Gandrud^{AJ}, eds., "Alabama Records," Vol. 155, p. 98. (Typewritten.)
16. Probate Book 10, p. 36, 387, and Marriage Book 3, p. 147. Probate Office, Madison County Courthouse. Huntsville, Alabama.
17. Records of the Chancery Court. Record Book Q, December 1849-June 1851, p. 1. Probate Office. Madison County Courthouse. Huntsville, Alabama; Lewis Collins, History of Kentucky (Cincinnati: J. A. W. P. James, 1847; reprint ed., Lexington: Henry Clay Press, 1968), p. 267. *and*
18. Probate Record Book 10, p. 36. Probate Office. Madison County Courthouse. Huntsville, Alabama.
19. Marriage Book 4-A, p. 502 and Deed Book Z, p. 203. Probate Office. Madison County Courthouse, Huntsville, Alabama.
20. Deed Book Z, p. 203.
21. Cumberland Presbyterian Church, Meridianville, Alabama, Session Minutes, 1858. (handwritten); Pauline Jones Gandrud, ed., Census of 1850, Madison County, Alabama, recopied by Kathleen Paul Jones, in Huntsville, Alabama, 1955, p. 1.
22. Gandrud, Census, p. 3.
23. Jones and Jones, Vol. 71, p. 8. *GANDRUD* (TYPEWRITTEN.)
24. Probate Record Book 10, p. 520. Probate Office, Madison County Courthouse. Huntsville, Alabama.

- Records of the Chancery Court. ^{OUR} .Book-AA, p. 56. Probate Office.
Madison County Courthouse. Huntsville, Alabama.
26. Deed Records. Deed Book MM, p.p. 499-500. Probate Office. Madison County
Courthouse. Huntsville, Alabama.
27. Ibid., p. 501.
28. Deed Records, Deed Book WWW, pp. 391-392. Probate Office. Madison County
Courthouse. Huntsville, Alabama.
29. Deed Records, Deed Book RRR, p. 92 and Deed Book 89, pp. 605-607. Probate
Office. Madison County Courthouse. Huntsville, Alabama.
30. Deed Records. Deed Book 109, pp. 279-280. Probate Office. Madison
County Courthouse. Huntsville, Alabama.
31. Louis K. Sisco, "Sisco Family History," Huntsville, Ala. n. d. (Handwritten
and typewritten)
32. Deed Records. Deed Book 139, p. 234 and Deed Book 185, pp. 316-317.
Probate Office. Madison County Courthouse. Huntsville, Alabama.
33. Sisco, "History."
34. Interview with Lewis K. Sisco, Member of Sisco family, Huntsville, Alabama,
5 February 1979.
35. State of Alabama, Certificate of Death of Thomas Allen Sisco, #082682,
Huntsville, Alabama, 10 March 1978.
36. Interview with Mrs. Powell, 3 February 1979.

House No. 3.

The Laughinghouse - Sisco Home

Old Bell Factory Road

Traditionally this house has been called the Laughinghouse Place. I do not know the connection with this family and the one who owned the Jones (first place seen). However, I think that there was a connection. This place has had very little research as to its history.

The exact date of this house is unknown, but judging from some that have similar features, this house was probably built around 1822.

The brick is one of the prettiest colors seen. The foundation, made of brick goes two feet into the ground.

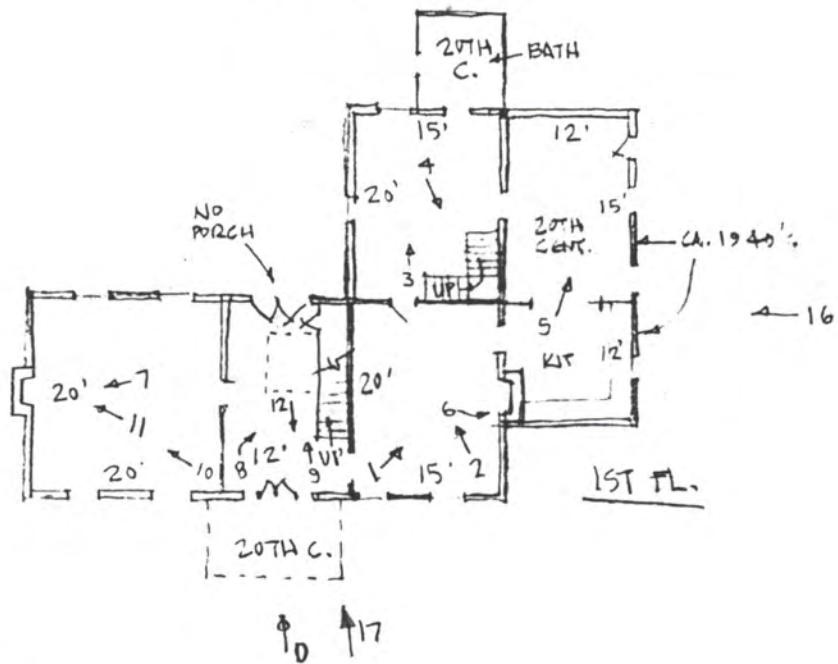
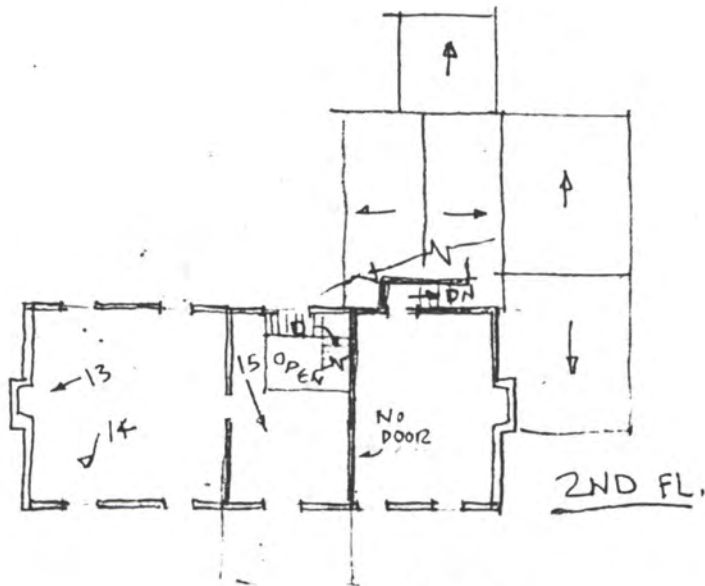
It is a two story house containing two rooms above and two below. There is a one story el at the back.

The floors have their original wide board floors and the wainscotting around the rooms and up the stairwell is hand done of heart of pine. The mantels have been well done and in one room is carved in an "Adam's fashion".

The shutters and porch should be ignored as they are not original.

It has been in the Sisco family since the early 1900's.

by Miss Alice Thomas
c. 1972



N
↑

LAUGHINGHOUSE - SISCO HOUSE - 1930
 BELL FACTORY, MADISON CO. AL.
 PLAN SKETCH = $\frac{1}{2}$ " = 20' FROM
 ROUGH PLAN BY PAUL SCHUPPENER
 IN SPRING 1982. DIMS. = APPROX.
 NOS = P.S. PHOTOS

HP Jones, FAIA
 June 1982

approach road
 looking north from gate
 (house is in background)



WINCHESTER RD

N
 ↑
 ↓

BELL
 FACTORY
 RD.

note modillions 17
 on front cornice,
 not on rear cornice

"shutters"
 = modern,
 inappropriate
 "portico"
 = modern,
 inappropriate
 (corr.)

note "ghost" of Victorian
 porch

S. FRONT



0



16

E. SIDE

c. 1940's add'n →



c. 1830 Laughinghouse - Sisco
 Place, S.E. of Bell Factory, Al.
 photos 1982, Col. Paul Schuppenher

1 of 6

12

inside entry
- all looks orig.



8

→ wainscot
probably orig.



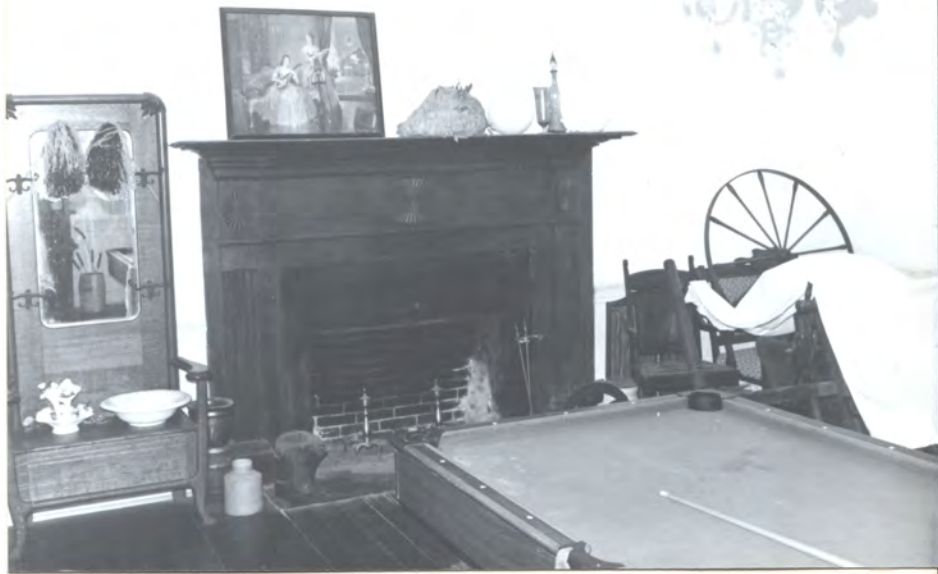
Main stair

9



2

10

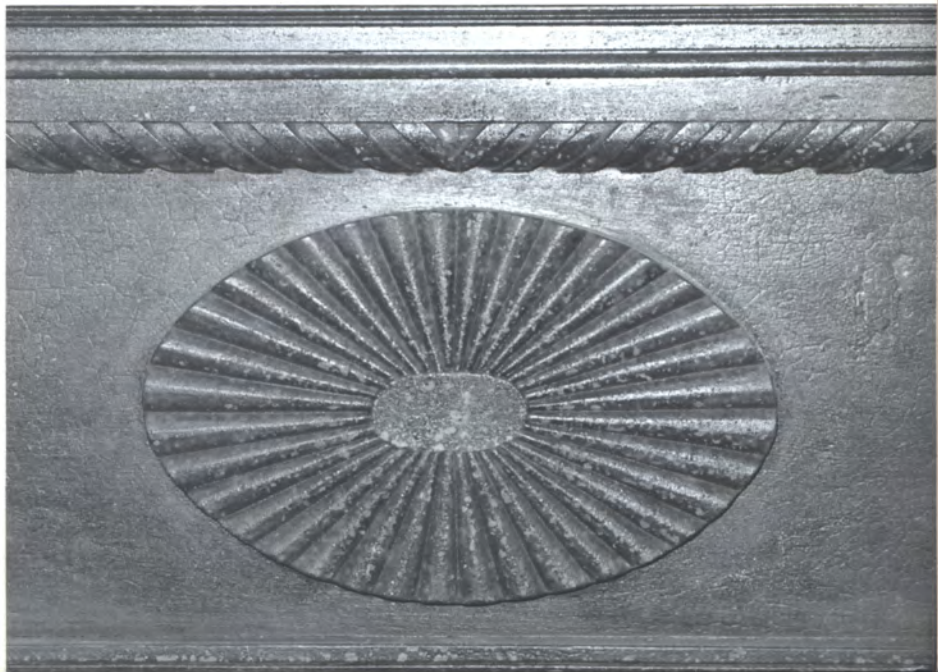


11



Fed. mantel
in S.W. parlor

7



Langhorne - Sisco ca. 1830

3 of 6



1
N.E. corner of
1st fl. east rm.

note wainscot - looks orig.



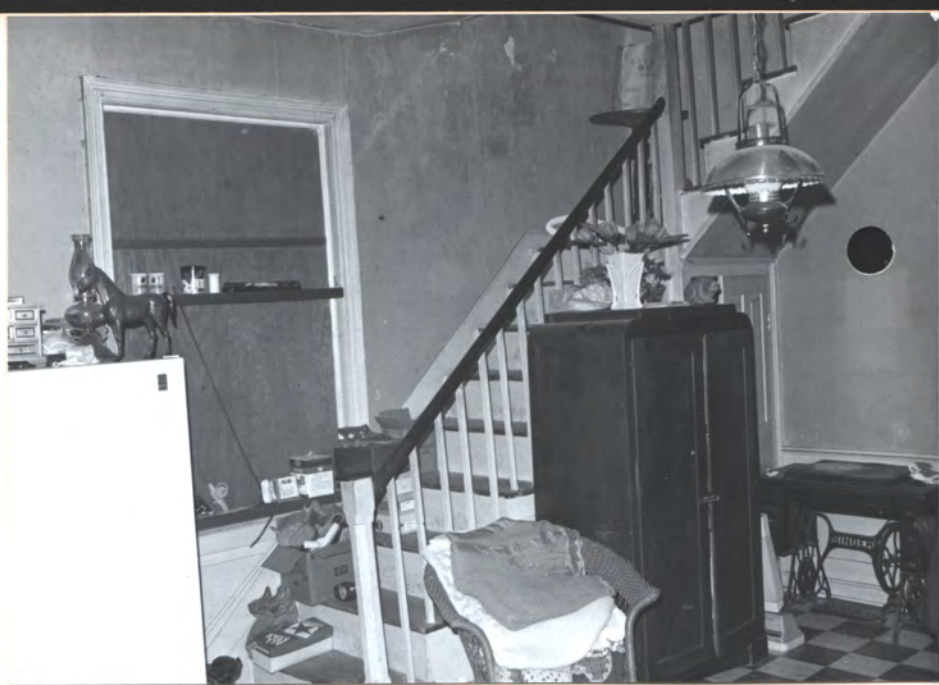
2
N.W. corner of
1st fl. east rm.



6
mantel detail
1st fl. east rm.

4

S.E. corner
1st fl. N.E. Rm
stair appears orig.



note wainscot →
- looks orig.

3

N. wall
1st fl. N.E. Rm.



5

20th. cent. addn
looking N.E. to
rear rms



Langhorne - Sisco, c. 1830

5 of 6

15

2nd fl. hall
looking S. to front



13

west wall
2nd fl. W. rm. →



14

↙ chair rail appears original ↘

S. window
2nd fl. west rm.

Note - access not given to
2nd fl. E. rm.

