

THE ANTE BELLUM YEARS

1849 - 1860



OW THE MURPHY WAGONS that creaked up the hill, and the stagecoaches that rumbled over the Town Creek, were beginning to wear the road down. The hill was made of sand!

Gold had been found out there in California. One of the roads to the west came "by way of the old Spanish Trail that leads to Santa Fe through the Red River Valley and Texas" — and the Golden Army of '49 was singing as it came:

The pilot bread is in my mouth
The gold dust in my eye
I'm bound for Californ-ya
Susannah, don't you cry!

Day after day the wagons rolled through Washington; sometimes they had to camp for a week on the banks of the Red River, waiting their turn to be poled across.

The years following the Mexican War were golden years for life around the hill, too. Cotton was king! The plantations were prosperous. There were buggies and carriages in the streets of Washington, and dinner lists in the hotels, with wines from the east.

Soon there were five hotels in town: the taverns had become saloons. Traveling theatrical groups came to play in the courthouse and there was talk of building an opera house.

Advertisements for the store of Brittin & Andrews bespoke:

Just received from New York, Boston and New Orleans, an extensive and well selected stock of DRY GOODS.

GENTS CLOTHING: COATS — sup'r French black cloth coats.

Do do paletots. **PANTS** — Sup'r French black cashmere, doeskin, French cassimere.

FOR THE LADIES: French ivory fans, French kid boots, Valenciennes lace, corsets, doeskin gloves, watered silk, mousseline de soie

The second generation had come of age on the hill. The older sons had fought in the Mexican War, while the younger sons clerked, or read law, or finished their schools on the other side of the Mississippi, and now they all began to marry the girl next door.

There were fox hunts in the moonlight, there were balls being given in the houses on the plantations — more balls being given in the houses of Washington — there were hoopskirts and candlelight, shining silver dishes on the sideboards of rosewood and mahogany, and the song of the mockingbird in the crepe myrtle bushes around the doorways.

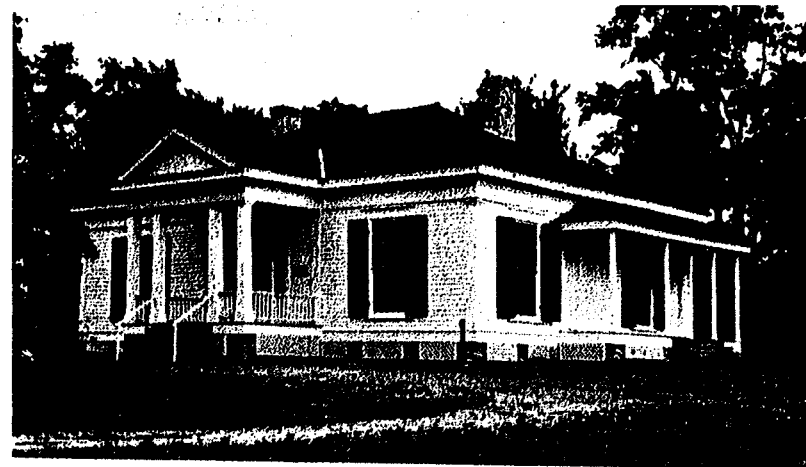
The new houses in Washington were small, of the Greek Revival architecture. It was the big house on the plantation that had the tall columns at the front, and the winding carriage drive past the magnolia and catalpa trees that had been planted among the pines and oaks.

Grandison Royston had gone walking around the hill with a pocketful of magnolia seeds one day in 1840, and planted magnolia trees in the yards of his neighbors. One magnolia tree that he had planted in the front yard of the home of Dr. Isaac Newton Jones when Daniel Webster Jones was six months old, was growing tall — and so was Daniel Webster Jones.

James Black still made a few things in copper and brass at his forge at the back of the Dr. Jones home: little boys were told to go pump the bellows for him when they were too much underfoot. "Go on over and visit with Uncle Jimmy," their mothers would say, "He's a lonely old man and he needs company."

Many of the families made a trip to the east now and then. They would board the stagecoach at the livery stable in the middle of town and be gone for months at a time.

When Pauline Gratiot married Major Bernard Hemp-



The home of General Grandison D. Royston, built in 1855 by a local builder, is located at the top of a grassy knoll at the edge of Washington.

stead, they went to New York for their honeymoon, and made a boat trip up the Hudson River. They visited the home of Washington Irving, where he gave them clippings of the ivy from the stone walls, and said the first clippings had come from the castle of Sir Walter Scott, in Scotland. Pauline Hempstead had brought the ivy clippings back with her and planted them around her new home in Washington. Soon it became a tradition to give a clipping of Sir Walter Scott's ivy as a marriage blessing to every new bride in town — and there were many new brides in town.

Everyone had become a matchmaker.

Grandison Royston was talking with a colleague in the State legislature one day, and chided Harris Flanagin for still being a bachelor. "I know the right wife for you," he said, "Her name is Margaret Nash, and she lives in Washington."

The next day, Harris Flanagin had saddled his horse and come down the Southwest Trail to Washington. He knocked on the door of the Nash home, presented his credentials, and asked permission to court Margaret. He dined with the family that evening: at nine o'clock he proposed: he was accepted. Three weeks later there was a fabulous wedding

years.)

When there was the trip to the east that Simon Sanders made when he decided that his two daughters, Virginia, sixteen, and Zenobia, fourteen, needed to see more of the world. They stopped off on the way, in Culpepper county, Virginia, to visit a sister of Mrs. Sanders — Mrs. Albert Gallatin Simms — and when the Sanders family returned to Washington, the girls had brought their cousin Zenobia Simms, to spend the winter.

Now there was even more of a social whirl around the hill: there were many Sanders cousins to draw from. Mrs. Sanders had another sister in Washington — Mrs. Ephraim Myrick — and another sister had been the wife of Dr. James Walker, so there were balls in the plantation home of the Walkers at Columbus — and musicales in the parlour of the Myrick home out on the Southwest Trail, and literary readings in the library of the Sanders home in Washington.

In February of 1852 there was a double wedding: Zenobia Simms of Virginia, had married Robert Walker, son of Mr. and Mrs. James Walker of Columbus — and Isabelle Walker had married Rufus Garland, son of Judge and Mrs. Thomas Hubbard of Washington.

The two daughters of Simon Sanders, Virginia and Zenobia, had been the attendants for their cousin; Augustus Garland had been the best man for his brother. Within a year, Augustus Garland, not quite twenty-one, had married Virginia Sanders, not quite eighteen. (Virginia Sanders will be the wife of another governor of Arkansas in the days of reconstruction.)

But to pause for a moment at the year 1852.

There was not a foot of railroad tracks west of the Mississippi at this time. In 1852, the Cairo & Fulton Railroad was incorporated, with Daniel Ringo as the vice president, and Edward Cross as one of the promoters. A preliminary survey was made for the railroad to come from Cairo, Illinois, to Fulton on the Red River, with the line of the tracks to follow the line of the Southwest Trail. Nothing happened for a few years and then it was time for the Civil War.

town, three blocks behind the Southwest Trail, and the Rev. Samuel Williamson, president of Davidson College in North Carolina, came to be the pastor at a salary of \$800 a year.

The Temperance Society flourished in different ways: the Society had persuaded the township to abolish the retailing of spiritous liquors in quantities of less than a quart, and Peter Cox sent for Henry Cheatham to set up a Blind Tiger in his saloon. The bar was boarded up, leaving one hole with a revolving wheel behind it that had compartments labeled "Whisky Straight" "Whisky Toddy" etc.: by placing a dime in the compartment of his choice, the customer could turn the revolving wheel, the proper drink would appear, and Peter Cox told his friends that people who had never taken a drink in their lives before became so fascinated that his profits doubled.

On still nights the sound of the steamboat whistle could be heard from the Red River: bale after bale of cotton was going downriver to New Orleans. Everyone owned cotton-fields: everyone owned slaves.

Now and then one of the young female house slaves would be sent to New Orleans on one of the steamboats, to attend a special school where they were taught the art of hairdressing, and the secrets of French cuisine.

Out on the plantation of Captain Matthew Moss there was an ancient black man with an interesting story: he had come wandering into town one day, saying his name was Stephen Washington, and he had been George Washington's body servant during the campaigns of the Revolutionary War. Capt. Moss had taken the old, old man in and made him the overseer of his slaves.

There was a young black man on the plantation of David Block who had an even wilder tale to tell. His ancestor had come with Hernando de Soto on that first exploring party through Arkansas in 1541!

This ancestor, said young Bob Samuels, had been one of the fortunate few who had returned to Spain after that adventure. Then, several generation later, another ancestor had joined another party of adventurers coming to America,

somewhere in Texas, Nick Trammell had murdered the men, and then the women into hiding. The woman who became Bob Samuels grandmother, had been forced to marry a half breed Mexican, or Indian, or black — and a generation later, when Nick Trammell bought some land of David Block after the Mexican War, David Block had received Bob Samuels mother, his small brother and himself, in the trade.

Many new white faces had come to the hill.

Thomas Simms had come from Virginia to visit his sister, Zenobia Simms Walker, and decided to stay and marry Lucie Moss. Thomas Simms sent for his brother Montcalm, to visit, and Montcalm decide to stay. They sent for their parents, Mr. and Mrs. Albert Gallatin Simms and they decided to stay.

Henry Moses, of Virginia, came at the same time, with his bride, Susan Raleigh, great granddaughter of Sir Walter Raleigh.

A few Hatfields came from Tennessee but the McCoys went on into Texas —

John Eakin opened a law practice in Washington: he was a Yale graduate, a Greek and Latin scholar: his brother in law, Alchyny Deloney followed — another Greek and Latin scholar.

The five young Carrigan brothers arrived, in two long journeys, after Alfred Carrigan, newly graduated from University of North Carolina had come on an exploring trip first, and bought acres and acres of land for himself, his father, his brothers, and aunts and uncles and cousins.

Sixty thousand dollars in gold had come in two black iron washing pots in those nine-week journeys from North Carolina. The gold was placed in the bottom of the pots, cottonseed tucked over the gold, blankets tucked around the cottonseed, and the little babies of the slaves placed in their cradles of the big black pots as they jounced over the old Wilderness Road through the Cumberland Gap and down the Southwest Trail into Washington.

Now there were Holts and Allens and Bensons and

and Nelsons and Muldrows, in those plantations that stretched far to the south in the Prairie de Roane where once there had been only canebrakes where bears and panthers roamed.

Everybody was beginning to be related to everybody.

In the very first journey that had come by pack mules down the Southwest Trail, there had been a Clark married to a Stuart: then the Clarks and the Stuarts had married Fontaines; then the Clarks and the Stuarts and the Fontaines had married English's and Ellis's and Cheathams and Johnsons — and the black slaves took the names of their white masters, so that the black Johnsons married the black Cheathams and the black Cheathams and Johnsons married the black Stuarts and Conways and Greens and Sanders and Nash's —

And everybody — black and white — was raising everybody's children — black and white.

On Sundays, when the families attended services in the Baptist church with the four squared pillars, or the Methodist church with the tall spire, or the Presbyterian church with the hand carved pews, the black slaves sat in the balconies with the little children of their white masters — and there was a special time in the service for the special song of the slaves — a humming and a crooning of the song called a "spiritual" — which was all part of that greater picture of the receipt that would pass from one white hand to another, bearing the words, "Received ...one thousand and fifty dollars, for Henry, Negro boy, sound, sensible, and healthy and a slave for life.

It was 1860.

The main street of Washington was called Franklin Street: it was nothing more than the old Southwest Trail become town-conscious. A few of the oldtimers with the white beards could be seen there occasionally, walking up the boardwalk to pay their taxes at the courthouse, or offering an arm to the pretty granddaughters of their old friends when they needed help across the muddy street.

Daniel Witter had retired: he had taught many a child of

James May was where he had always been — grafting fruit trees on his orchard near Ozan and making wines in the little brick shed behind the outdoor kitchen.

Dr. Nathan Smith had also retired; he was the Fontaine cousin who had built a circle of little cabins for a hospital when the hill was brand new.

Dr. Smith had become the first weatherman of Arkansas: for the past twenty years he had kept a journal of weather conditions on his farm where the mulberry trees were growing for his silkworms, and in 1859, the Smithsonian Institute had sent blanks to fill out, and asked if they could publish his Meteorological Observations. He answered:

Secretary of the Smithsonian Institute
Dear Sir:

The blanks I have lately received from the Institution I shall only be able to fill up in the manner I have done during the last few months; nor can I make observations at night, for myself and family always retire before 9 o'clock. I live on my little farm, three miles out from Washington, supported by the personal labor of my children, on the farm I scooped out for them from the forest, so many years ago. I am necessarily at leisure, for I am in my sixty ninth year..

As for the field of politics, Washington is still proving to be a star-crossed hill for young lawyers: Alfred Carrigan is serving in the Senate of the Twelfth General Assembly: Rufus Garland has served a term in the House of Representatives. So has his brother, Augustus Garland.

The little town will outdo herself in this last year of the antebellum days — she will send Edward Gantt to Washington D.C., as United States Congressman from Arkansas. She will send Dr. Charles Mitchel as United States Senator.

In May, 1860, the Republican National Convention, meeting in Chicago, nominated Abraham Lincoln, of Illinois, as their candidate for President of the United States.