



A home with history

Celebration, open house held to reflect on 185 years

BY MARGARET HOBBS
Lifestyles Editor for the Southern Standard
(McMinnville, Tennessee)

The Magness - Oakham home was built as a private residence, used as a rest stop for travelers, served as a community farm and home for the poor, survived the Civil War, and placed on the National Register of Historic Places.

The home is thought to be built in 1835 by prominent citizen William Black, constructed in the Federal style, and remodeled in the Greek Revival fashion in the 1850s. It was built across from the historic Birthing Tree, and named Oakham for the large oak trees on the property consisting of hundreds of acres. It was also on the McMinnville and Sparta Stage Road, providing a direct route from West Virginia to Alabama and Mississippi, the same route used by buffalo and Native Americans before settling the area.

In 1890, the home was deeded to Ohio transplant W.T. Blue. Oakham House became known as "The Blue Place," and was full of life. The Blues were farmers of wheat and corn, and they introduced the Angus cattle breed to Warren County. The railroad line ran through the property, creating the stop called Blues Crossing, becoming a place for visitors.

In 1936, prominent philanthropist William H. Magness passed away and left funds to maintain and support the home. It was to serve the community as a home for the poor and operate as a farm to serve those in need. He dedicated it to the memory of his mother, Elizabeth J. Magness. The home was operated as a farm for several years, making it generally self-sufficient, but as costs became greater, portions of the land were sold for industrial development.

In 1981, the Warren County Court authorized conveyance to the Warren County Historical Society.

The home was purchased by the Barnes family at B&P Lamp Supply in 1981. Under the direction of Ann and the late Paul Barnes, extensive renovations were made to the home. It was restored and well maintained throughout the last 30 plus years in respect to its age and historical importance to McMinnville.

B&P Lamp president Barry Barnes and son of Ann and Paul said, "When the place was purchased, it was in bad shape, and my parents spent a lot of money and time restoring it. Oakham still means a lot to my mother."

Recently, a 185-year celebration and open house was held on the grounds, with the public invited to visit and relive the history related to the property. Visitors toured the home and grounds, and were able to take a ride on a horse-drawn vis-a-vis carriage provided by Jack Adcock.

"There is lots of history surrounding the home and grounds," said Barnes. "It's my hope someone will love it and purchase it and hopefully make it their home or business."

The home survived chaotic conditions during the Civil War when McMinnville changed hands several times. Areas around the county were burned, with Oakham in constant threat. The home's wooden front

porch was set on fire, but the blaze was extinguished before it could consume the house.

In fact, three sisters Brenda Martin, Nancy Mitchell and Mary Rigsby were born in the house, and have seen the charred rafters resulting from the Civil War fire.

The girls are the daughters of the late Lawrence and Stella Hoover, who were caretakers at the home when it was the Elizabeth J. Magness Home for the Aged and Indigent.

"This was a wonderful place to grow up," said Mitchell. "We had a huge farm to run around on, and we helped take care of hogs, chickens and grew corn and other crops. At that time, there was about 20 people here to take care of, plus our family."

Open house visitors could receive information and/or make a donation to the Hope Center of Warren County.

"We chose the Hope Center because of the great benefits Warren County's population receives from the organization and its services," said B&P Lamp representative Laura Ghesling. "Just like the Oakham home did at one time by serving the people of the county with shelter, food and services to better their lives."

The historic home is for sale, with the hopes a new owner will continue to love it as it has been in the past. Another open house will be held July 19 from 5 - 7 p.m.

Margaret Hobbs photos
The Magness - Oakham home was built around 1935 by William Black, and has survived many trials throughout the years. The renovated home was available for tours recently, with guests able to tour the grounds and take a ride on a vis-a-vis carriage. The experience was described as awesome by passengers Barbara Madewell and Linda Richardson.



Barry Barnes, at left, welcomes Texas transplants Cecilia and Rick Murphy to the open house. The Murphys conveyed their thanks to the family for the preservation of the home, which is listed on the National Register of Historic Places.



The lovely multi-colored, glass-paneled ceiling is the highlight in one of the home's rooms, with visitors awed by its beauty.



Ladies, from left, Mary Rigsby, Brenda Martin and Nancy Mitchell were all born at the Magness home, when it was the Elizabeth J. Magness Home for the Aged and Indigent. Their parents Stella and Lawrence Hoover were caretakers of the property. They enjoyed sharing stories with B&P Lamp representative Laura Ghesling, at right.



Photo provided
This photo was taken by Dad Lively (circa 1890), with the people thought to be members of the Blue family, who were owners at that time. The photo was found in the attic of Helen Elkins, and was given to Ann Barnes in 2012.