



The Magness Home

Built around 1835 in a late Federal style, the house was remodeled in the Greek Revival fashion in the 1850s. The home was built on the McMinnville and Sparta Stage Road, providing a direct route from east of the Alleghenies to Alabama and Mississippi, the same route used by buffalo and Indians before the white man settled in this area. Located across the road is the famous "birthing tree", a place where women could give birth, or where migrants could rest along the trail. The home was named Oakham, because of the huge oak trees found on the property. Oakham was a gracious center of a large plantation built by one of McMinnville's leading citizens, Willam Black. Originally a federal-type building of four rooms and central hall, the actual construction is attributed to Phillip Hoodenpyl, a building contractor who erected many early buildings in and around McMinnville. William Black and his family moved to Arkansas in 1840s. Philip Marbury became the second owner of Oakham. He was married to Rebecca Mercer. Evidences of business associations between Alexander Black and Philip Marbury are numerous, including running a hotel on Main Street, purchase of numerous tracts of land, and buying and selling of slaves. Rebecca Marbury died at Oakham in 1848 and is buried in the family cemetery. She was survived by her husband and seven children. Philip Marbury's visionary project, the McMinnville and Manchester Railroad, began in 1850 with a Charter from the Tennessee General Assembly. Forty thousand shares of stock were sold to some of McMinnville's most prominent citizens: William White, William e. Smartt, George Smartt, Stokley Rowan, L.D. Mercer, R.A. Campbell, J. Woodlee and Alexander Black. Two locomotives, the "William Moore" and the W.e. Smartt", brought for the first time supplies never before accessible to market for the area's products. During the late 1850s, he is attributed with building the pavilion wings on Oakham. He married Mary Scott on October 14, 1858. They had two children, Nellie and John Grundy.

On the eve of the Civil War, in 1859, Marbury's good friend and business associate, Alexander Black, died unexpectedly. He had executed a trust deed to Sam Henderson to secure debts. Marbury was administrator of the estate, which had insufficient funds to pay the outstanding debts. McMinnville exchanged hands seven times during the Civil War, resulting in the capture and recapture of the McMinnville and Manchester RR and the burning of "depot bottom". Marbury lost three sons in the Civil War as well as the death of his wife. Marbury endured many threats to Oakham, as well as financial losses. By 1890, Marbury deeded his home to W.T. Blue, who brought his wife and five children from Henry County, Ohio, to McMinnville around 1890. Oakham became known as "The Blue Place" and was again full of life. The Blues were farmers of wheat and corn and also introduced the Angus breed to Warren County. The railroad line ran through their land and a stopping place called "Blue's Crossing" made access easy for visitors. After W.T. Blue died on April 7, 1926, the home and property ended up in foreclosure and was sold publicly February 13, 1932 at the Warren County Courthouse to the highest bidder of \$7,000 to E.W. Walling, husband of Lila Blue Walling.

William H. Magness, Jr., a prominent McMinnville financier and philanthropist, recognized primarily for his contributions to the public library, died in 1936 and left funds earmarked for establishing and maintaining the Elizabeth I. Magness Home for the Aged and Indigent, as a memorial for his mother. Governmental care of the poor is a concept of English origin, dating to the Reformation and was implemented in America in 1826. The home was operated as a farm for several years, making it generally self-sufficient; however, the County Court sold portions of the tract for industrial development in 1958. The home served the poor and aged for nearly 45 years. Today only 2.72 acres surrounding the house exists. In 1981, the Court authorized conveyance to the Warren County Historical Society. Today the home is owned and has been preserved by the Barnes family, owners of B&P Lamp Supply, Inc.

The data for this historical account was summarized from a report, dated 1982, prepared for the Warren County Historical Society, and prepared by the Historic Preservation Program of Middle Tennessee State University.

Thank you to the Barnes family for allowing McMinnville Breakfast Rotary to host the annual Gala fundraiser in this historic home, once the center of important history of McMinnville and Warren County. May this account serve as an appreciation of the men who were civic-minded and deeply involved in our community and to the Barnes family who have saved this legacy for us. It is hoped that you will leave with a renewed pride in this valuable historic resource which, as a physical link to the community's past, can never be replaced. Thank you for attending the 2009 Breakfast Rotary Gala Fundraiser and may this be forever a memorable event, knowing that you helped Breakfast Rotarians to serve our community for another year with projects that exemplify the Rotary International motto of "Service Above Self".