

—Photo by Ann Moss Betts
This house was first built to replace Granny White's tavern in southwest Davidson County and was made from the logs of a historic Dickson County inn. Today, it stands in Cheatham County. Below, the owner, retired East Nashville educator Robert G. Neil shows off the workmanship of the stairway.

House Filled With Miles Of History

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Many a great tree must have fallen for logs to build such a frontier palace. But the old lady did not live to enjoy it for long.

In the years after her death in 1816, the big logs sagged and settled back to earth, weather and time turning them into an overgrown ruin. Only the giant cedars remained, planted by Granny White when they were seedlings.

More than a century went by. In 1942, Mr. and Mrs. Everett Beasley were owners of the Granny White property. They took an interest in preserving the historic site, but the original inn had long since vanished.

They couldn't reconstruct an authentic 1812 tavern without logs and, by great good fortune, the logs they found couldn't have had a more appropriate history.

Even earlier than 1812, there was a frontier inn in Dickson County, on the Old Post Road between Charlotte and Dickson.

Through the years, weary travelers held out cold hands to its broad hearth, and negotiated the twisting steps of its enclosed stairway, just as others did two counties away, at Granny White's.

According to local folklore, one Dickson County guest was at least as colorful as anyone Granny ever entertained, future U.S. presidents included.

The fellow, they say, called himself "Mr. Howard," and purported to be a "gentleman lumberman."

Mr. Howard appeared to be the ideal guest; he seemed to have plenty of money, and it was understood by the locals that he was in the neighborhood to purchase large tracts of Dickson and Humphreys County timberland. There was just one thing...

Sometimes, Mr. Howard disappeared. "Business trips," he called them.

At first, no one noticed a connection between the star boarder's absences and a series of daring bank



robberies in the Midwest.

When the revelation came, the old log inn must have reverberated with the news: "Mr. Howard" was no lumberman at all, he was the era's most audacious outlaw, Jesse James.

Though the episode is its best known tale, the inn already had a rich tradition when James hid out there. So in 1942, when its logs were dismantled and reassembled in the Overton Hills, history was layered on history.

But that was 33 years ago. As time passed, the fine old logs of the Dickson County replacement began to sag, just as Granny White's original had done.

This summer, construction began on the property where Dukes and Duke's developers plan to build single family homes on 43 one-acre lots. The subdivision to be known as Inns of Granny White.

Robert Neil had a longtime interest in the cabin, he recalled, beginning with a childhood spent "riding ponies over Granny White Pass on the way to the South Harpeth." But when he first inquired about removing the logs, he had his doubts about success.

"It's a strange thing about logs," he said. "A lot of people would rather keep them and have them

rot, than to have someone touch them."

But get them he did. And, during the 1983 Christmas holidays, the Neils and VanderLinden loaded the logs on trucks and began transferring them to Cheatham County.

"We also found two pens in Logan and Todd counties, Kentucky," Neil said, explaining that "pen" is the term for a standard size log room.

After disassembling and transporting all the logs came the task of reassembling them. "To lift the logs and get them in place, decide which log fits where, that's like a jigsaw puzzle," Neil laughed.

Having previously reconstructed two old log homes in northern Williamson County, the three had some experience to draw on, Neil said.

"My son came up with a floorplan that allowed us to use all the logs and not overbuild. We had the roof on by the summer of 1983."

Chinking was the tedious work in building an old fashioned log house, he said. "They had to fill in the cracks with mud plaster, then cover that with strips of wood — sometimes scraps, or whatever came to hand. Then they'd sometimes whitewash over that."

A contractor chinked the reconstructed two-story log house with contemporary cement, almost as tedious a job as the old way. Chicken wire is placed to set the cement which, while wet, must be troweled at an angle to deflect rain.

In addition to Granny White-Dickson County logs, other Middle Tennessee materials used in the Pleasant View home included a stone chimney from an old home in North Nashville and huge stepping stones.

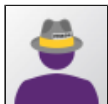
"Someone told us where the stones were, near Sevier Park on 12th Avenue," Neil said. "We had to dig them up, they were almost completely buried."

Outside, a country lane follows the contours of the Cheatham County hills, strangely reminiscent of the shady old pike that still bears Granny White's name.

The log house looks as comfortable as if it had always belonged there, on a road much like the one where men like Houston, Polk, and Jackson would come riding through the night, to knock at the old inn door.

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