

The (Caine) Whitney House – Another Fayette Landmark Gone

Many of us remember the Whitney House, a large old hotel/boarding house that sat among huge oaks on the property where the Fayette Fire Department and Fayette Police Station now stand.

The house was built by Marion F. Caine, a 50-year-old farmer, who was elected sheriff of Fayette County and served from 1884-1888. Caine purchased the 2-acre plot from Balus E. and Annie E. Grace on June 6, 1884 for \$1,100, a very large amount in those days.

No homes or businesses existed yet in the depot area. The railroad had just been completed the year before (1883). Court was still held in Fayette Court House /Fayetteville and would continue there until the courthouse was relocated to its present site in 1892. However, when the bi-annual circuit court was held, Sheriff Caine was responsible for housing the twelve male jurors as well as witnesses and other citizens from outlying areas involved in the trials. During these court times his home became a free hotel.

It's feasible to believe that after the spring session of court was held in March of 1884, Sheriff Caine's wife, Susan, was not happy with that arrangement.

The original house built by Sheriff Caine was a 6-room one-story structure that contained one very large room that held twelve cots which Sheriff Caine called the "jury room". Etched on a glass transom over the front door were the words "The Caine House".

Although Marion Caine only served one term as sheriff and did not run for reelection, his brother Robert P. Caine was elected sheriff in 1888 and again in 1896. The Caine House continued to be used to house jurors during court seasons. Marion Caine and his wife, Susan, ran the hotel until Mr. Caine's death in 1906. After his death, his heirs, Susan and children, W.P. Caine, Magnolia Williams and S. Lee Caine, decided to sell the hotel.

Meanwhile, down on the Whitney Farm in Newtonville, it seemed like a normal day to 49-year-old Richard Graves Whitney who had been married to his younger wife Paralee Shepherd Whitney, 35, for 16 years. The household included their daughter, Ruby, 13, and son, Aubrey 9, along with Paralee's mother, Margaret Shepherd Menton, age 53. Their daughter, Ruby, who witnessed the scene, told the story of the day her mother decided that she was tired of living on the farm and ceremoniously hitched up the wagon announcing to the family that she was going to Fayette to "buy a house". "Aw," her father said, "she'll be back directly. She don't have any cash money to buy anything!" "Directly" came the next day when Paralee returned home stating that she had purchased The Caine House. When a disbelieving Richard G. Whitley asked what she had used for money, she retorted that she had "made arrangements".

No records show, and descendants do not know, what those "arrangements" were. Did Paralee find someone to loan her the money? Would the banks take the mortgage? In 1906 women were not even allowed to vote so it's doubtful that any bank would let her take out a loan. Paralee must have been very persuasive since the deed is in her husband's name and states that: *...for and in consideration of Fifteen Hundred (\$1500.00) Dollars to the undersigned grantors Susan M. Caine, W.P. Caine, Magnolia G. Williams and S.L. Caine in hand paid by R. G. Whitley the receipt whereof is acknowledged by ... do grant, bargain, sell and convey unto the said R. G. Whitley the following described real estate, to wit:....said parcel of land being all the lands conveyed to F.M. Caine by B.E. Grace, Jr. and his wife A.E. Grace by a certain deed recorded Volume 9, Page 387 &388 of the Deed Records of Fayette, Alabama...*

This deed also conveys the household goods contained in the building which is located on the above described lot, such as is the property of the grantors at this time, such building being known as "The Caine House". In witness Whereof we have hereunto set our hands and seals this 16th day of November 1906.

After the sale Susan Caine moved to Tuscaloosa to live with her daughter Magnolia Williams. She died four years later at 75 years of age.

The Caine House thus became the Whitney House and the Whitneys moved all the family from Newtonville to the hotel. The original status as a hotel was maintained to pay the mortgage. A room and bed for the night was 25 cents and three meals a day were 75 cents. To supplement their income further, Mrs. Whitley made meals for the train passengers who passed through Fayette. She arranged for the railroad to telegraph ahead of time how many passengers were on the train. She would make up meals consisting of biscuits and country ham and other trimmings for the passengers. Mr. Whitley would take the basket-full of food to meet the passengers when the train arrived and collect the money. Mrs. Whitley's cooking became well known from Columbus, Mississippi to Birmingham. AL.

The Whitney House, as a business grew and prospered. In 1910, Mr. Whitney added the second story, which mirrored the first story in every way including the second floor front porch, except for the "jury room". The expanded house had 12 rooms. 1910 census records show that in addition to the family, Manie Humphries and her seven year old daughter, Grace, also lived at Whitney House. Manie was listed on the census as the hotel cook.

The Whitney House survived the March 24, 1911 fire that destroyed all the businesses and four homes in downtown Fayette. The decades passed: World War I, the flu epidemic of 1918, the Great Depression, World War II, the Korean War, and the Vietnam War. The Whitney House stood and sheltered three more generations of family and many boarders over the years. One boarder, Charley Trammell who had come to Fayette from Jefferson County as a master brick mason to work on the Courthouse after the fire of 1911, stayed at the Whitney House and ended up marrying Ruby Whitney, daughter of Richard Graves and Paralee Whitney.

According to, Ina Jeane Lockart-Neilon, the great-granddaughter of Mr. and Mrs. Whitney, "Time changed but the Whitney House stood unchanged – the same huge rooms with their fireplaces and creaky wood floors, the windows with the original wavy glass, the monster wood stove in the corner of the kitchen, trunks full of collected treasures of the century, the same original furnishings still stood in their original places .. it was a constant in a changing world".

Richard Graves Whitney died in 1940. Paralee continued to run the hotel until her death in 1952. Ruby Whitney Trammell who had lived at Whitney House since her mother purchased it in 1906 took over the duties of the hotel/boarding house and continued those duties until her death in 1967.

The aging house could no longer be insured and was so large the cost of renovation was prohibitive to Ruby's daughters, Frances Whitney Trammell and Ruby Jean Trammell Lockhart. They sold the Whitney House in 1969 to Charles Nolen and Dewey Lowery, Jr. The House was subsequently sold to the City of Fayette which began cutting down the massive oak trees and demolishing the old landmark in September of 1977.



Information for this article was acquired from great-granddaughter, Ina Jeane Lockart-Neilon, Beaumont, Texas; Fayette County Historical Society "Sesquicentennial" publication and Ancestry.com