

## COLLEGE HILL STORE

Our first big challenge after the Heritage Foundation was formed was to "Save the Store." The College Hill Store dating to the 1800s was badly endangered, almost to the point of being impossible to save. It had served the community for many years as a source of their everyday supplies, social meeting place, community center for voting, and later as a workshop for Jimmy White. Upon his death Jimmy's widow, Betty, donated the building to the University. Finding no practical use for the building, the University turned it over to the Heritage Foundation. This organization did not have funds to restore the building, and someone came up with an idea to let it be used by someone who would restore it. The Durham family had known and loved the store for many years and offered to stabilize and literally save the store if they could use it as an antique/gift shop and possibly a tea room. As a labor of love they have saved the original ambiance of the building while making it safe and comfortable. They also landscaped the grounds. It is a most interesting and valuable example of a small country store that, could it talk, would reveal many historical facts. Because of some unforeseen personal problems, the Durham family has not been able to fulfill their dream of using the store for the purpose they originally desired. The store has been used for some private gatherings catered by the Durham sisters. According to Nita Durham Thomas, the sisters hope to have more events in the near future. A piece written by an old-time College Hill resident says of the store: "The store at one time was a two story with a doctor's office. After a fire it was scaled down to one story. Judge Galloway added the back room for his wife, Miss Nellie, to sell sandwiches to the students at the agricultural high school next door. (This was a boarding school for county men and women to attend and finish high school as there were not many schools in the county that went higher than 8th grade.) The store served many purposes in the area in early days. It was impossible to make frequent trips to Oxford in wagons for supplies. You could find most needed articles at the store from plow lines to material. It was also a gathering place for farmers to visit on rainy days, a place to vote, and made famous when *Intruder in the Dust* was filmed there."

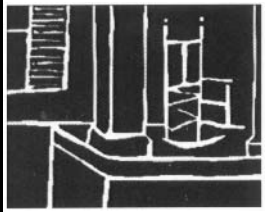
The Oxford-Lafayette County Heritage Foundation is a nonprofit membership organization dedicated to the preservation, restoration, and stewardship of the Oxford-Lafayette County historic environment, both natural and manmade. The environment includes historic and important buildings, cemeteries, personal property, and other culturally significant sites and byways.

Graphic Design by: Heather L. Chappell

## **OXFORD-LAFAYETTE COUNTY**

Heritage Foundation

Box 622  
Oxford, MS 38655



# OXFORD-LAFAYETTE COUNTY

## Heritage Foundation Newsletter

WINTER 2003

# Burns Church Building

John Grisham's donation of the Burns Church building to the Heritage Foundation is one of the most important projects this organization has had an opportunity to undertake. Our treasurer, Jim Pryor, learned that since Grisham no longer needed the building for office space, he would likely dispose of it. Pryor and several other Foundation members thought that this would be a wonderful acquisition, and Gerald Walton, our former president, wrote to Grisham asking if he would agree to donate the building to the Heritage Foundation with an agreement that we would in turn donate it to the Oxford Development Association. Grisham promptly answered Walton's letter, agreeing to the proposal and stating that he did not want the building to be demolished.



James Pryor

The Oxford Development Association is an African American organization that was founded to further the welfare of the community. ODA does not yet have tax-exempt status, and for this reason the Heritage Foundation is taking possession rather than they. Long-time promoter of racial reconciliation in Oxford, Susie Marshall has wanted the ODA to have this church ever since Grisham vacated it several years ago. The church was built in 1910 by an African American congregation, one of the first to be formed after the Civil War and made up of many former slaves. ODA will use the building for community multicultural gatherings, their meeting place, a tutorial center, and museum.

The building is in bad condition and preservation measures are needed immediately to save it. A grant of \$100,000 was recently received from the Mississippi Department of Archives and History with the understanding that the Heritage Foundation provide \$20,000 (20 percent) matching funds. We

plan to launch a major fund raising campaign soon. (See the article and form below.) Architect Tom Howorth estimates that a full restoration will require at least \$600,000. We hope to find private foundations to help provide some of this money.

The Burns Church congregation vacated the building because they needed more space, especially for parking. At that time, the pastor's home was located on the site of the present parking lot. The building

was bought from the Burns Congregation in 1974 by Jerry Gafford, who in turn sold it to Dot and Roscoe Newton. They named it "The Belfry" and converted it to office space. It had another owner or two before being purchased by Grisham, who used it as his office until he relocated to Virginia. This historic old building has served Oxford and our county well for many years, and it is hoped that its restoration and ownership by the ODA will prepare it to serve our community again for many years to come and in even more ways than its original purpose. It will be a tourist attraction as well as a forward step in racial reconciliation.

### MATCHING FUNDS FOR GRANT

Last September author John Grisham donated the historic Burns Church Building (Belfry) on Jackson Avenue to the Oxford-Lafayette Heritage Foundation, an IRS (c) nonprofit organization.

Fund raising has begun to obtain matching funds for a Mississippi Community Heritage Preservation Grant of \$100,000. The grant and matching funds will be used to preserve this historic landmark and turn it into a multicultural community center, African American museum, and headquarters for the Oxford Development Association. Formal fund-raising efforts will kick off early in 2003. If you want to make a donation before then, please use this form. Donations can also be made direct to the Burns-Belfry Preservation Fund at the Union Planters Bank. All donations are tax deductible.

We appreciate the donations already made and will welcome any amount. If you have questions about the Burns project or donation procedures, please telephone Jim Pryor at 234-4087.

Cynthia Parham  
President, ODA

Maralyn Howell Bullion  
President, OLCFH

### BURNS/BELFRY PRESERVATION FUND

I (WE) \_\_\_\_\_

enclose a tax-deductible donation to the  
BURNS/BELFRY PRESERVATION FUND in  
the amount of \$\_\_\_\_\_.

MAIL TO THE OXFORD-LAFAYETTE  
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**Q: WHERE IS THE BIRTHPLACE OF WOMEN'S RIGHTS?**

**A: TOCCOPOLA IN LAFAYETTE COUNTY, MISSISSIPPI**

Married women today have protected property rights thanks to a Lafayette County Chickasaw Indian Princess who married a white man named John Allen in 1830. He brought to the marriage a huge load of debt, likely knowing his new wife had considerable wealth. Allen's creditors sued the princess, Betsy Love Allen, for her husband's debts, expecting them to be paid as was legal and expected under the common-law marriage ruling at that time. But the Indian Princess was brought up under Chickasaw tradition that allowed married women to own property in their own right, so she took the matter to court. This legal battle reached the Mississippi Supreme Court, which ruled that since Love and Allen were married in a Chickasaw ceremony she had a right to own property free and separate from that of her husband. Her personal property could not be attached or sold to settle her husband's debts.

Two years later, in 1839, the lawmakers of Mississippi passed the first law in this country giving married women the right of their own free and separate estate. Other states followed. Several years ago there was a marker on Highway 6 East at the Toccopola exit dedicated to Betsy Love Allen, but it was taken down when the highway was made a four-lane road. The Heritage Foundation is currently working on having this marker located and replaced. There is a marker in the Toccopola Village at the high school where the Indian Princess is allegedly buried.

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## DEPOT RESTORATION



**A**fter sitting and waiting for years, the old Oxford Depot is being restored and has promise of a good future. It won't be the same as Dr. Chester McLarty remembers when students arrived in droves with all of their possessions in a trunk. They paid a man with a wagon and mule 50 cents to take the trunk to their dorm rooms. There was a tunnel that ran under the railroad for students to use as they walked from the depot to the campus. Later, Dr. McLarty used the train to take him to Tulane University Medical School and home again. It was a trip of more than 14 hours, but with many other students on the train it was not a long and boring ride. The old depot in those days was divided into a waiting room with a ticket counter and a clicking telegraph machine, a baggage and mail room, and a storage area. One could mail a letter to someone in Grenada in the morning, and it would be delivered in the afternoon. Mail sorting was done as the train sped along.

The railroad serving Oxford was a trunk line, the Mississippi Central Railroad, that connected with the Illinois Central. It was built in 1860 and destroyed along with the original depot during the Civil War. The line ran through Water Valley, a bustling railroad town with a roundhouse to repair trains. The legendary Casey Jones was an engineer who often brought a train into Water Valley. A prototype of the old depot can be found in several of William Faulkner's novels. Passenger service was discontinued in the late 1930s; however, "Specials" continued to come to Oxford for several years more to take Old Miss students to football games in New Orleans. Students who took this trip claim it was a truly memorable experience.

The restored depot will provide meeting space for groups of 50 to 60 persons, and its proximity to the new Gertrude C. Ford Performing Arts Center is an added advantage. Gloria Kellum, vice chancellor for university relations, spearheaded this project with the help of Ann Abadie, associate director of the Center for the Study of Southern Culture, and Gerald Walton, retired provost. Construction is funded by a federal grant with matching funds provided by the University of Mississippi Foundation, First National Bank, and private individuals. The restoration should be completed by April 2003.

## PRESERVATION ORDINANCE

Several months ago the Oxford City Aldermen voted to amend the Historic Preservation Ordinance that allowed Oxford to have Historic Districts the same as many other towns the size of Oxford have had for some time. It is the opinion of many Oxford citizens that our Square should be protected under a historical preservation shelter and there are other districts in Oxford that also desire such protection. Preservation Commission Chairman Goodloe Lewis announced recently that the Burns Church Building (the Belfry) has been nominated to be the first local building to be granted Landmark Designation under the revised ordinance. This building was granted State Landmark status by the Department of Arts and Archives in Jackson in August, and it has been hoped that it could soon have the same recognition under the local preservation ordinance.

## JACOB THOMPSON

The Oxford-Lafayette County Heritage Foundation is planning a historical marker in honor of Jacob Thompson, a distinguished 19th-century resident of the town and county. The marker will be placed on Old Taylor Road on the Thompson Home Place site, now the property of Dr. and Mrs. Beckett Howorth, Jr.

Jacob Thompson, like many other young men in 19th-century America, sought his fortune on the western frontier. In 1835 the Chickasaw Cession in northern Mississippi offered wonderful opportunities to this well-educated, ambitious young lawyer from North Carolina. He lived several years in Pontotoc along with his older physician brother James Young Thompson, doing a brisk business in land conveyances, helping set up circuit courts in the 10 Chickasaw counties, and riding the circuit.

In December 1838 he wed Catharine Ann Jones of Woodson Ridge, near Oxford. Shortly after the momentous month of November 1839, during which Thompson was elected U.S. Representative and their only child, Caswell Macon Thompson, was born, the family moved to Panola County.

Thompson early on took into his household young relatives of lesser means, and he made their education his mission. Thompson's lively interest in the welfare of his extended family resulted in the emigration to Oxford, where he lived by 1844, of his siblings Ann Eliza (Wiley), John, William, and Sarah (Lewis). The Thompson family appeared as valued citizens in contemporaneous news accounts, and some of Sarah's descendants serve on the Heritage Foundation board today.

In addition to strong support of his family, Thompson devoted time and money to the Episcopal Church and the education of both males and females in the Oxford community. He was a founding member of St. Peter's Episcopal Church, attending to vestry duties and participating in diocesan meetings; he donated a section of land for the cemetery.

Thompson was a founding board member of the University of Mississippi, serving from 1844 to 1857. He delivered the Opening Day address for the Board of Trustees November 6, 1848, serving as board president until his resignation in 1857. Thompson drew on his experience both as a student and tutor



Jacob Thompson

at his alma mater, the University of North Carolina, in helping to draft the rules and curriculum for the University of Mississippi. He was instrumental in developing the institution's library and law school. Thompson also served as a founding trustee for the Oxford Female Academy, which offered a rigorous academic curriculum in the late 1840s.

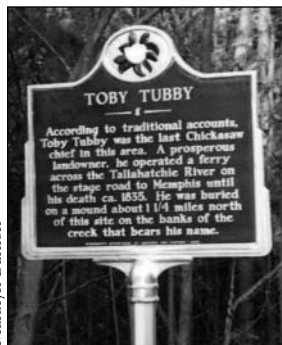
Thompson served six terms as a U.S. Congressman, 1839-1851. A staunch Democrat, he served as a delegate to the Democratic presidential conventions and arduously canvassed Mississippi for Franklin Pierce and James Buchanan in their successful bids for the presidency. At age 47 he became Buchanan's Secretary of the Interior, where his administrative skills were praised by politicians of both parties.

When Mississippi seceded from the Union in 1861, Thompson resigned his U.S. Cabinet post and became a citizen of the Confederate States of America. He served as a soldier, as a member of the Mississippi legislature for one term, and as head of the Confederate Commission to Canada.

Thompson became a target for propaganda by the Federal government and was forced to live abroad until 1869, when amnesty allowed him to return home to Oxford. There he saw his ruined mansion on Old Taylor Road, built in 1853 and lavishly furnished over the ensuing years, which had been burned by Federal soldiers in 1864. Heartbroken, Thompson had a house made by incorporating his brick office and adjacent brick servants' quarter into a rectangular structure with an attractive front section. He and his wife gave the home to their son and moved to Memphis. Thompson lived in Memphis for 16 years, until his death in 1885. He continued to care for young relatives, was active in Calvary Episcopal Church, and also served for 13 years as a trustee of the University of the South in Sewanee, Tennessee.

CAROLYN J. ROSS

## TOBY TUBBY MARKER



For several years, Will Lewis, former president of the Heritage Foundation, has done research on the Indian Chief Toby Tubby with the hope of having a marker placed near the site of his burial place. There were conflicting stories as to just where the old chief was laid to rest, but Lewis said that his research indicates that the marker on Old Sardis Road near Toby Tubby Creek correctly locates the burial mound, which is usually under the water of Sardis Lake.

This Chickasaw chief owned a vast amount of land, and many deeds of early settlers in Lafayette County came through him. He was the last Chickasaw chief in this area and at one time operated a ferry across the Tallahatchie River on the stage coach road to Memphis.

A marker commemorating him was approved by the Mississippi Department of Archives and History. The Rotary Club provided funds for the marker, which the Mississippi Department of Transportation recently installed. A dedication ceremony is being planned, and the date will be announced in the near future.