



OXFORD-LAFAYETTE COUNTY

Heritage Foundation Newsletter

Graphic Designer: Heather L. Chappell

FALL 2003

L.Q.C. Lamar House

The Oxford-Lafayette County Heritage Foundation will take possession of the L. Q. C. Lamar house on North 14th Street in December and begin the process of restoring the National Historic Landmark early in the new year. A purchase agreement has been signed with the current owners to acquire the home of one of Oxford's earliest and most distinguished leading citizens. Lamar, who served as secretary of interior, senator, and an associate justice of the U.S. Supreme Court, lived in the house from 1868 to 1888.

Funds have been made available from several sources to support the purchase and begin the restoration process. The extensive stabilization and rebuilding required for the project will be supervised by Howorth and Associates architectural firm. Patricia Young and Sarah Davidson will chair a committee to oversee furnishing the home.

The L. Q. C. Lamar International Advisory Committee, including part of the Heritage Board and other interested individuals, meets quarterly to consider a strategic plan for the property. The Board, along with the Committee, have planned for the acquisition, then the engineering and stabilization necessary for the property and the house, and finally the restoration and use. This process is an ongoing one.

The Board has hired former Mississippi Heritage Trust director Stella Gray Sykes to advise and suggest strategies and plans for this extensive undertaking. Her work will consider how to best make the house and its three-acre site accessible to the public, how to structure its long-term management, and how to



Lamar House

promote it to visitors.

Fund raising will continue to seek additional support that will be needed beyond the grants that have been received. Furnishings will be needed, and anyone who has something owned by the Lamar family when they lived in the house is urged to consider donating the item at the appropriate time. All donations are fully tax deductible.

The most recent grant, \$390,000 from the National Park Service's Save America's Treasures program, was announced by Senator Trent

Lott's office in November 2003. This award comes on the heels of a \$300,000 grant from the U.S. Department of Interior appropriations budget. An additional \$425,000 was secured in April by state Senator Gray Tollison and Representative Jay Eads through the Mississippi Department of Archives and History's Community Heritage grant program.

"When we signed an option agreement with the Houston family, owners of the Lamar house, we had no idea of how we would be able to raise funds to purchase it, much less do the restoration," said OLCHEF president Maralyn Bullion. "We only knew the house had to be restored and somehow we would manage to do it. Beginning with our local congressmen, people began to take an interest in this project and, with the help of our congressmen in Washington, we received funds for the acquisition and for beginning preservation work. The money we have been promised is not adequate for the completion of the entire project, but we feel sure more will be donated as time goes on. It is truly a dream coming true."

ELIZABETH SHIVER

THOMPSON MARKER DEDICATED

OLCHF has placed and dedicated a historical marker commemorating Jacob Thompson and his home place. His house, burned during the Civil War, was situated on Old Taylor Road across from Rowan Oak on property now owned by Dr. and Mrs. M. B. Howorth, Jr. Their home incorporates two brick buildings thought to have been Thompson's office and house servants' quarters.

The October 26 event was attended by about 30 including Macon Kirkman, of Collierville, Tennessee, a direct descendant of Jacob Thompson's son Macon. Carolyn Ross, OLCHEF vice president, has researched Thompson's life extensively.

During the event she read an account written by the Union officer sent to burn the mansion in 1864. He commented that it was the hardest order he had to carry out during the entire war. Ordered to burn the University buildings as well, he refused to carry out the order.

Dr. Howorth then read a letter Thompson had written seeking word of his wife and family after he had heard of the destruction of their home. He was in Canada at the time. OLCHEF board member Will Lewis, who also traces his lineage to the Thompson family, brought a portrait of Jacob Thompson he inherited from his parents.

Thompson served six terms as U.S. Congressman before being appointed Secretary of the Interior by President James Buchanan. While he lived in Oxford, Thompson was involved in the founding of the University of Mississippi and of St. Peter's Episcopal Church. He headed the Confederate Commission to Canada, lived in exile in Europe, and finally settled in Memphis.

As local preservationists continue to piece together his life story, community members who have inherited documents or artifacts related to the Thompson family may share them by contacting Ross at 238-2679.

ELIZABETH SHIVER

OXFORD DEPOT MUSEUM OPEN FOR BUSINESS

The restoration of the Oxford Depot Museum was finished in October 2003, and the building is available to community groups of 50 to 60 persons who wish to use it for meetings. Use of the building has already begun with the meetings of several groups, including the Mississippi Heritage Trust, the Oxford-Lafayette County Economic Development Board of Directors, the Mississippi Department of Environmental Quality, the Oxford Homeschool Network, and the United Way Board of Directors.

Betty Mullen White is contributing a historical marker in memory of her late father-in-law, Ralph Reynolds White, who was in charge of the mail car on the Illinois Central run through Oxford. Betty and her late husband, James N. White, were owners of the College Hill Store, which they donated to the University, which in turn gave it to OLCHEF. Betty White is an Oxford native who now lives in Jackson. Her father was editor of the *Oxford Eagle* for many years.

In addition to the marker, donations of artifacts and memorabilia are being sought to enhance the Depot and tell its history.

A formal dedication of the Depot Museum will be held in early 2004 when artifacts and the marker are in place.

ELIZABETH SHIVER

BOARD OF DIRECTORS

2003-2004

Ann Abadie

Allan Alexander

Maralyn Bullion

Martha Cofield

Leland Davidson

Janie Frierson

Mildred Murray Hopkins

Tom Howorth

Suzanne Johnson

Colby Kullman

Goodloe Lewis

Will Lewis

Susie Marshall

Joe Murphey

Cynthia Parham

James Pryor

Carolyn Ross

Bill Russell

David Sansing

Elizabeth Shiver

Preston Taylor

Juanita Thomas

Gerald Walton

Patricia Young

First Historic District

For several years there has been a move afoot to establish historic districts in Oxford. Goodloe Lewis, the Preservation Commission Chairman, was successful last year in getting a revised Preservation Ordinance that made this undertaking possible.

The need for some control became evident as old buildings were being demolished and replaced with new ones that were not in keeping with the general style of Oxford's architecture in a given area. Property owners were wary of giving too much control to the commission, but once its guidelines were understood, the task became easier. Designation of a preservation district gives the Preservation Commission authority to grant or refuse a Certificate of Appropriateness for changes to a building's exterior, excluding

maintenance jobs and paint color.

In late summer residents of North Lamar Boulevard circulated a petition to make their street a historic district and were successful in acquiring the needed majority of signers. Following this step, the proposed designation had to be presented to the Mayor and Aldermen for their approval. This step was successful, and the first historic district was established. It is hoped that other areas will follow with the next being South Lamar Boulevard and the Oxford Square. The old Burns Church was the first building to gain protection under the new local landmark provision in the revised Preservation Ordinance. It already had state landmark status.

MARALYN BULLION

The Burns-Belfry Project

That grand old former church known as the Burns-Belfry Building will soon begin its long journey toward restoration. The \$100,000 grant received last December from the Mississippi Department of Archives and History and matching funds of \$20,000 contributed by Heritage Foundation members and friends will be used to stabilize the exterior. A new grant of \$150,000 from the Department of Interior, recently announced by a representative from Congressman Roger Wicker's office, will be used to begin restoring the building.

The church was erected 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. The building served as John Grisham's office when he lived in Oxford. He donated it to the Oxford-Lafayette County Heritage Foundation with the understanding that it would be restored and then turned over to the Oxford Development Association for use as a general multicultural meeting place, a tutoring center, and an African American museum.

Architect Tom Howorth estimates that an additional \$300,000 will be needed for the complete restoration. "More grant proposals will be made," said OLCHEF treasurer Jim Pryor, "and we will conduct fund-raising campaigns appealing to the general public to help this worthwhile project."

In June OLCHEF joined with the ODA to host a neighborhood social. We shared entertainment, good food, and lemonade and mingled and got to know each other better. Several persons from the African American neighborhood remarked that this was one of the most enjoyable joint community events they had attended in Oxford. This is the kind of thing we hope OLCHEF and ODA can promote more of once the building is refurbished.

An ongoing fund raising project is the "Save a Brick" campaign. For a \$5 donation persons are assured that they have saved a brick in this historic building. Persons interested in contributing in this way to the Burns-Belfry Preservation Fund should telephone Jim Pryor at 234-4087 or Maralyn Bullion at 234-3299. Our mayor, Richard Howorth, recently made a donation to "Save a Brick" in the name of his children, as did other members of our community.

Preservation of this building will benefit our Lafayette County, Ole Miss, and Oxford community in many ways, and the Heritage Foundation and the Oxford Development Association need much help in making this dream a reality.

MARALYN BULLION

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. This environment includes historic and important buildings, cemeteries, personal property, and other culturally significant sites and by-ways.

OXFORD-LAFAYETTE COUNTY
Heritage Foundation

Box 622
Oxford, MS 38655