

"THE OAKS"

The original deed to this place was burned in a fire which destroyed the Culpeper Clerk's office many years ago. We do know, however, a Mr. Reid owned a large tract of land through this area. He deeded six hundred acres, more or less to his son, who later sold the property to Mr. Aaron Halley of Charlottesville. My great-grandfather Reuben Slaughter bought the property known as "Mt. Airy", but he named the place "The Oaks".

When he bought the place, everything indicated the small four room cabin had been made from material taken from the place. They had cut only enough oak trees to make room for the small structure. It was built on a stone foundation set in a grove of some forty old oak trees, fifteen of which now stand in the yard today.

Some indications of the age of the old home could date back to 1749. The four room log cabin was made of huge hand hewn locust logs, with large stone chimneys on each end, these chimneys, as well as the logs were daubed with mud reinforced with hog hair. There are plain high mantels, a steep flight of stairs leading to two upstairs rooms. The doors are tongue and grooved, some having four panels and some having six. These doors have huge old locks with small brass knobs and iron keys six inches long.

The rafters are fastened with wooden pegs and in the stairway, one closet and one room there are hand made wooden pegs for hanging clothes.

The window sashes are small with six over nine mouth blown wavy window panes, one still bearing the initial A.S. carved in the glass.

The floor boards are wide and still in wonderful condition, but many of the door sills are worn very thin due to the many steps that have been taken across the threshold. All the outside steps are made of long smooth stones.

Each room was heated by shallow fireplaces made of stone, and the hearth stone is usually just one big stone.

When they were digging the basement for this cabin they found several remains of coffins, so they walled up this one room and made it into a root cellar.

There was an Episcopal Chapel located not far from the house and evidently a church cemetery had been made around this chapel as was the custom in those days.

The cabin was later covered with wide beaded weather boarding put on with shop made nails with half inch heads. At this time two Dwarf Gothic porticas were added one at the front entrance and one at the back.

When my grandfather Frank Slaughter inherited "The Oaks" he built a large dining room with two big pantries. This addition made a split level on to the old cabin part.

At one time the out house kitchen caught on fire and "The Oaks" almost went up in the flames. The dining room was badly damaged by water and after we bought the place we decided to restore the place if possible, not changing anything from its original state. When we tore the falling plastering off the dining room walls, we found ten inch wide virgin pine tongue and grooved paneling running twenty feet length wide of the room. On these perfect conditioned boards, oilcloth papering had been tacked to the wall, hand riven laths had been nailed over this and heavy hog hair plaster over this. The ceiling showed the plane marks of many hours of labor.

All we did was to clean the boards and leave them just as we found them. No doubt all this had been done to the walls to keep out the cold.

There was a huge fireplace in this room and we had it covered with some lovely stones taken from the remains of the terrace gardens.

Since we were so elated with this find we took the plaster from the walls in the cabin room adjacent to the dining room and we found the original three walls made of the wide hand hewn logs, where the fourth wall was panelled with the wide pine running down the wall rather than across, like it was in the kitchen.

In this room there were chair railings and over head were large beaded beams. The ceiling to this room had tongue and grooved boards between the beams also. The ceiling of this room was actually the floor of the half story upstairs room.

Before my grandfather bought his bride Sue Motley, from Caroline County, he added more on to the house. He removed the Greek portico and put a long porch running the length of the cabin part. This was supported by four solid white pillars with a deck porch above with smaller pillars topped with hand carved acorns.

This porch connects the newer part of the house to the old, and all the new rooms were for sleeping quarters. Like so many homes of this era, one had to go across a long cold porch to get to the bed rooms.

One enters a large hall with random wide boards, a hanging stairway that has a turned walnut newel post and handrails.

All the doors in this part of the house are Holy Cross ones made of heavy timber with white glass knobs.

The mantels are of heavy timbers, plain, painted white. The original cornices are over the large windows, since these rooms are 20 feet square with 12 foot high ceilings. These windows have panes 18 inches by 10 inches.

This part of the house is the new part only one hundred years old.

To the left was the master bed room with two huge walk in closets which is rather unusual. This room and the one above are the same size and were heated by large fireplaces with brick hearths.

There is a small bed room at the head of the stairs with only one large window.

We go down two steps from the big room into a medium sized cabin room. It is high in the middle, but slopes down on either side. This room does not have a window, but it does have four steps that lead up to a dormer door that goes out on the deck porch. This door has twelve wavy glass upper panes, with the lower part made of wood. There is a morticed lock with a brass knob. On each side of the door there are four pane side lights.

From this room we go into a half story room with two very small windows. It too has sloping sides. Between these two small rooms there is a nice big closet. Four of the side light panes, light this small passage way that leads down the crooked stairs to the main floor. These walls are also panelled with beaded boards.

The homes is painted white with green trim. There are heavy shutters at all the windows. They are in perfect condition. Around the cornice of the newer part of the house there is a most unusual decoration made by hand with the acorns on it too.

At one time there were four terraced gardens edged by old English boxwood, the flower garden in the upper one the small second was small fruit, the third large and tall vegetables and the fourth led into the apple orchard.

A long grape arbor led down stone steps on both sides of these terraces.

All the walks were made of crushed white flint made here on the place by heating the stones and beating them up with a mallet. These walks led to the houses found on all old farms, the outside kitchen of course, as no respectable Southerner must ever get the order of cooking food in the main house.

The the meat house or smoke house near the kitchen where hung hams, sides of beef, meat grown, butchered and cured on the place. The stone spring house where all milk products and food were kept cool. Then the spring that furnished water for the house.

There was one long lilac walk way that led from the five slave quarter houses to the barn. This was made to keep anyone who was sitting on the front porch from seeing the slaves coming and going to work.

Out from the barns there was a lovely knoll overlooking Rush River where all the slaves were buried. Each grave has a field stone marker.

When the Chapel stood on the property one of the Queens of England presented the congregation with a silver dipper. They hung this dipper by a long chain on an oak tree near the spring. This tree still stands and it has always been known as "The Dipper Oak".

There are many old shrubs and perennials here at the "The Oaks". My grandfather always stated, "I like a flower that will hoe its own row", and so they have, up to the present time.

We no longer cross Rush River seven times to come three miles to the "The Oaks", nor do we come by the same entrance to leave our horse and buggy at the barn, but what was once the back of the house is now the front and we always welcome our friends and relatives to one of the few places left in the county that is still owned by one member of the original family.

Anne Slaughter Keyser

*Mr. Reid, Mr. Reid's son, Mr. Aaron Halley, Mr. Reuben Slaughter, Mr. Frank Slaughter, Mr. & Mrs. Keyser.