

Maury Christmas

Historic Home Tour
Vol. 8, No. 1

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PRESENTED BY

MAURY COUNTY
APTA



features

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Volume 8, Number 1
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Cover Photo



Above, the Athenaeum. Below, the Shoemaker Loft.



Welcome to Maury County

As President of the Maury County Association for the Preservation of Tennessee Antiquities (APTA), it is my distinct privilege to welcome you to Maury County, Tennessee for our annual tour of homes!

I'm thrilled to announce we have another amazing tour lined up for 2024! This tour will feature three of our favorite sites— The Athenaeum, the Polk Home, and Elm Springs. The tour will also feature a few sites that have never been on tour before, including our first downtown apartment, or loft.

Remember to shop with our local merchants and visit our locally-owned restaurants while taking the tour. Your tourism dollars make a difference in our local economy— thank you for deciding to spend your time, and money, with us.

I think you're really going to enjoy this tour, and I hope to see you along the route!

Kayla Southern
Maury County APTA, President



Maury County APTA President Kayla Southern while touring a historic home in Georgia

About the tour

The Maury Christmas Historic Home Tour is a Maury County tradition. The tour began in 1951 as the “Majestic Middle Tennessee Tour of Homes” and was held each year in the Fall. Since that time, the tour has evolved into a two-day event taking place annually on the first weekend of December.

Here's how the tour works:

1) Purchase tickets. Tickets may be purchased at Tour Headquarters (the Athenaeum) or at any of the other ticket locations (the Maury County Visitor's Center and Elm Springs).

2) Go tour! This tour is geared towards YOU. Once you have your ticket, you can go to whichever participating site you please. You can visit just a few of the sites or go to all— the choice is yours.

Tour tickets are \$25.

For more information about the tour, call Tour Headquarters at (931) 797-3316 or visit the tour website, www.MauryChristmas.org.

The Maury Christmas Home Tour is the annual fund-raiser of the Maury County Association for the Preservation of Tennessee Antiquities (APTA). Proceeds from this event go toward the operating costs and continued maintenance of the historic Athenaeum. The Maury County APTA and the Maury County Visitor's Bureau are proud sponsors of the 2024 Maury Christmas Historic Home Tour.

Elm Springs

Elm Springs is a Greek Revival mansion built in 1837 by master builder Nathan Vaught. It is situated on the old stage road that led from Pulaski to Franklin. James and Nathaniel Dick, wealthy cotton merchants of the N & J Dick Company of New Orleans had the house built for their sister Sarah Todd and her husband Christopher, formerly of Virginia. During the War Between the States, the Todd's youngest daughter Susan and her husband, attorney and Tennessee State Senator A. M. Looney occupied the home. He commanded the famous Company H of the Maury County Grays.

Looney was an outspoken Southerner, and this almost resulted in the loss of Elm Springs. In November of 1864, Confederate Units of the famed Army of Tennessee began the march north for Nashville in what would be known as the Franklin-Nashville Campaign. The Federal Army, which had occupied Maury County for several months, was preparing defensive positions ahead of the oncoming Confederate troops under Gen. John B. Hood. Their line of defense extended from the Mooresville Pike to the Mt. Pleasant Pike. As Union forces under the command of Major-General John M. Schofield began their hasty withdrawal from Columbia, many of Maury County's majestic antebellum homes fell victim to the torch. Many houses were burned during those days and Elm Springs was slated to be destroyed also. In an act of retribution, the historic home of Confederate Lieutenant Colonel A. M. Looney was selected to be destroyed by fire as the last Union troops left Columbia. Re-

sponding to pleas of assistance from local citizens, Confederate Brigadier General Frank C. Armstrong dispatched a squad of mounted infantry to insure the safety of Lt. Col. Looney's home and property. A Union soldier placed a burning broom under a stairwell, but a servant removed it before it could do any major damage. Fires were started that might have burned the house except for the opportune arrival of Confederate troops who extinguished the flames.

A family cemetery is located south of the house, where the last burial was in 1994. Confederate Naval Lieutenant Simeon Cummings was laid to rest in Southern soil after being buried in South Africa for over 130 years.

The Akin family acquired the property about 1910, and in 1985 the Gillham family purchased it and restored it to near-original state. The house and property were purchased in 1992 by the Sons of Confederate. The house now serves as headquarters for the SCV. In 2020, a room-by-room restoration project began. The farm office/study and the dining room have been returned to their near-original appearances. Work has also begun on the grand entry hall of the home, so if you have not been to Elm Springs in a few years, be sure to visit!

The National Confederate Museum will also be on tour. Built on the grounds of Elm Springs, the museum takes visitors through the founding of America, the War Between the States, and through the Reconstruction Period.



Elm Springs

President James K. Polk Home

James Knox Polk was born in North Carolina in 1795, and when he was ten years old, his family moved to Maury County. A historical marker on Highway 31 indicates the site a few miles north of Columbia. While young James was attending the University of North Carolina in 1816, his father built the only residence in existence today in which the eleventh president lived other than the White House. Old accounts indicate that the structure was the first brick residence built in Columbia.

Sarah Childress of Murfreesboro married James K. Polk in 1824, and the following year, he was elected to the first of seven terms in the U.S. House of Representatives. He was the only President who ever served as Speaker of the House. In 1839 he returned to Tennessee and served a two year term as governor. Under his leadership as president, the United States was extended from the Atlantic to the Pacific Oceans. The Polks had no children, and Mrs. Polk often served as her husband's personal secretary.

The house is a museum of Polk's life, as the furnishings are those used by him and Mrs. Polk in the White

House while some were used in his law office. Several portraits are on display throughout the house, in addition to china, silver, crystal, and candelabra used for state dinners. Other buildings include the kitchen and Polk's Sister's house serves as the site's visitor center with a museum and a shop.

The museum at the "Sisters House," or welcome center, has been recently updated to include new exhibits and storyboards, so be sure to visit and see the changes!

The gardens features the fountain from Polk Place, the Polks' Nashville home. There are also statues representing the "Four Seasons." These are original to the Columbia Institute—a girls' school that burned in 1959.

* * *



The Ancestral Home of President James K. Polk

Pisgah Church & Cemetery

As early as 1808, the grounds of Pisgah Methodist Church and Cemetery were used for services. The first services here were good, old camp meetings. Congregants would travel to the grounds, attend church services, and camp for the night or, sometimes, the week.

A log structure was built on this property in 1810 and was used not only as a church, but also as a school. This was replaced by a frame structure in 1850.

Unfortunately, the 1850s building burned around the turn of the century. That's when the building standing now was erected. The building is estimated to be 124 years old this year.

Very little has been done to the building in-terms of modernization. When church services ceased being held

at this building, it became a meeting house in 1953. It was probably around this time that new flooring was installed.

The cemetery, or graveyard, near the old church building dates back nearly 200 years and includes over 350 graves. Many graves are unmarked, so an exact count cannot be made.

One interesting grave in the cemetery is that of young Jacob Biffle. Biffle was only 21 years old when he died at the hands of Federal soldiers during the War Between the States. The headstone reads that Jacob was "shot by Federals 5 times after surrendering." Late County Historian Jill Garrett supposed that placing this on Jacob's headstone was the only way his father could voice his hardened feelings of resistance to the Federal Government and their mistreatment of his son.



Jacob's grave shares just one of the hundreds of amazing stories just waiting to be discovered in the cemetery on Pisgah Ridge Road near Mt. Pleasant and Hampshire. The church building will be open for tour-goers and there is the possibility of local craftsmen (and women) setting up a small vendor fair during the tour at this location.

Pisgah Church and Cemetery are on the tour this year to help raise awareness to their little cemetery. The cost of maintaining the cemetery is nearly \$8,000 a year. Donations for the upkeep of the cemetery have been declining for a number of years, so the caretakers are raising awareness in a number of ways. Please visit the church and grounds. A donation jar will be onsite should you like to help their cause.

The Old Pisgah Methodist Church & Cemetery. Image by Steven Dycus.

ROSE HILL Cemetery



Rose Hill was founded in 1853 and is Columbia's largest cemetery. It also needs your support.

Please donate today!

www.RoseHillColumbia.com

*Rose Hill Cemetery
P.O. Box 1511
Columbia, TN 38402*

Wishing You
Peace And Joy
This Holiday
Season

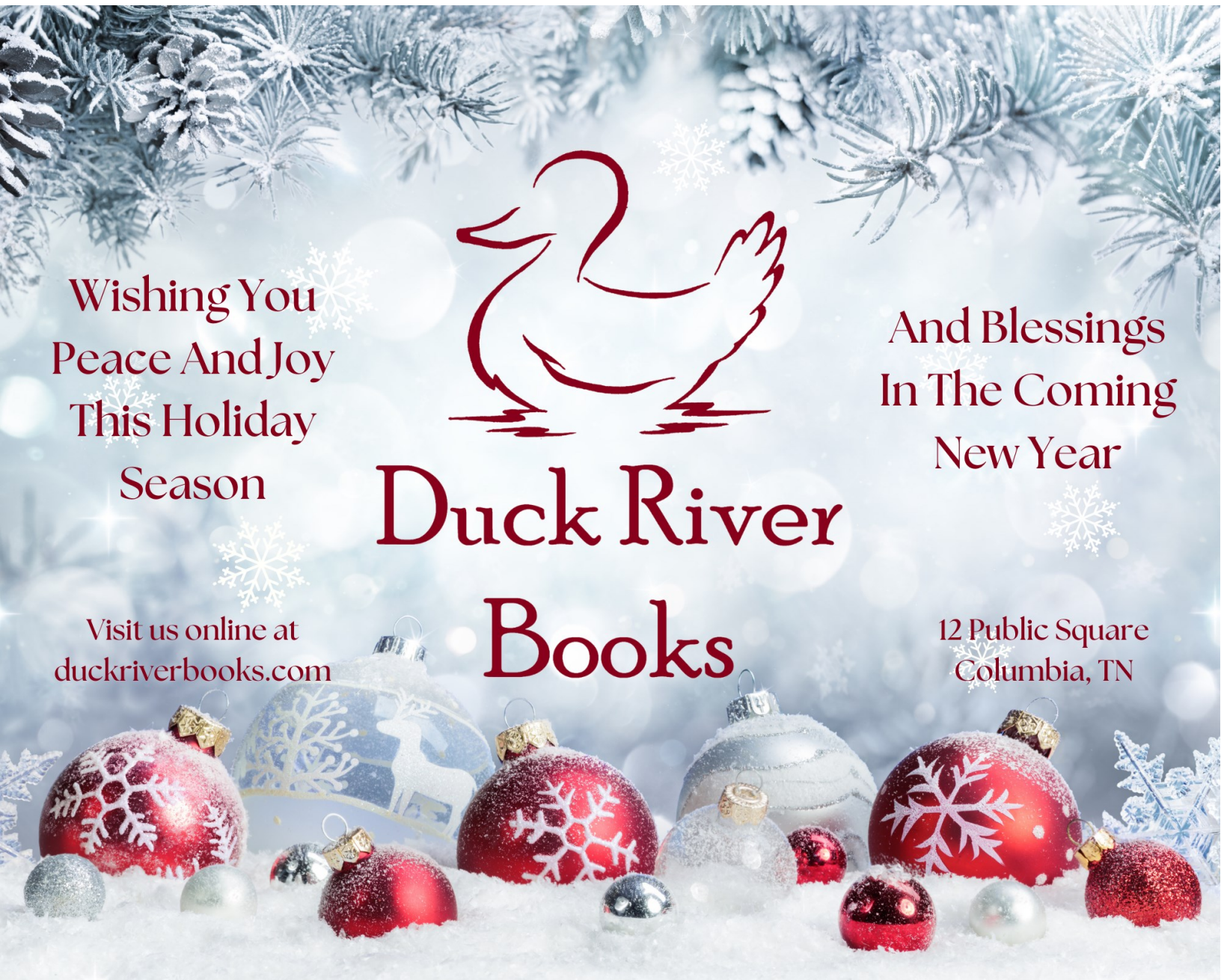


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Smiser-Ganser Home

James A. Smiser built the home at 801 West Seventh Street in 1896. The home was built as a “transitional Victorian” and was considered very modern for its time. Originally, the home would have been entirely lit by gas-powered fixtures. The home also was built with fire fireplaces for heat (three of which are still in use today.)

This was a very social house, and the Smisers enjoyed hosting dinner parties. To help serve the guests, an electric buzzer was installed in the dining room underneath the table, so that with a tap of their feet, servants could be beckoned to bring more food or clear away the empty dishes. The back-issues of Columbia’s local papers highlight the many parties held in the home.

James A. Smiser was from a prominent Maury County family and became prominent by his own talents. He served as Columbia City Attorney, the Maury County Attorney, a Columbia Councilman, and even served for three months as Mayor of Columbia. He had been a classmate of Edward Ward Carmack’s and the two became close friends. Smiser gave a beautiful eulogy at the former U.S. Senator’s funeral.

President Woodrow Wilson appointed James A. Smiser as the U.S. Attorney for the District of Alaska in 1915. This was still a wild territory at this time, and Smiser even had to authorize a posse to capture an escaped convict at one point during his stay.

Upon returning to Columbia, the Smisers sold their West Seventh Street home. The next owner was a doctor. He and his wife raised eight children in the home. The doctor’s widow continued to live here until 1973.

The home has recently been purchased by Ron Ganser and his wife Suzanne Bonifas-Ganser. The couple has meticulously restored the home to Smiser-era grandeur.



The Smiser-Ganser Home

St. Peter's Episcopal Church

St. Peter's Episcopal Church, 311 W. Seventh Street, was formally organized June 16, 1828 and held worship services in the Columbia Masonic Lodge until the beginning of the construction of its own building in 1831. Construction moved slowly and the building was not complete when the first rector, the Rev. Daniel Stephens, resigned to become a missionary to the western part of Tennessee.

Leonidas Polk became the second minister and the church was consecrated on April 17, 1835. James Hervey Otey, who was elected the first Bishop of Tennessee in 1833, played a considerable role in the history of St. Peter's. He moved to Columbia in 1835 and was the co-founder of the Columbia Female Institute, Ravencroft Seminary, and builder of Mercer Hall. He later served as rector of St. Peter's from March 18, 1839 until January 1, 1842 and, again, from June 3, 1844 to January 1, 1848.

James K. Polk, 11th President of the United States, was known to have attended services in the original church.

By 1860, church members decided a new church was needed. On September 5, 1860, the cornerstone of the present church was laid. The church was completed enough for the first worship services to be held in June 1861 just three months after the start of the War Between the States.

A year later, the church was being used by the Federal Army as a provost marshal's office. The church continued to hold services until December 1863 when it was closed by military order and did not open for 18 months. In addition to being used as a provost marshal's office, it was also used as a hospital, tending to sick and wounded Federal soldiers.

After the war, the church was restored. On June 4, 1871, the present church was finally consecrated. A parish house was completed in 1924. A two-story Sunday School and parish office was added in 1964. The site was placed on the National Register of Historic Places in 1979.



St. Peter's Episcopal Church on West Seventh Street in Columbia, Tennessee

The Shoemaker Loft

This attractive loft apartment is a first for the Maury Christmas tour. The tour has featured events in Columbia’s business district before, but has never had a residence from that district on the tour. The Shively Loft is a welcomed addition to the tour, and one tour-goers will enjoy seeing, offering a peak at a different kind of living space.

The upper floors of downtown buildings were originally built to be offices or living space, but, over the years, most were turned into storage areas. That is changing now. These upstairs rooms are in high-demand and give an urban-feel to downtown Columbia.

The building located at 107 West Seventh Street in Columbia’s downtown was built in the 1920s. For many years, this was Smith Shoes, then White’s Camera Shop, and, around 2017, it became a split live-and-work space. A gallery was located on the ground (business) level and an apartment was on the second floor.

Cheryl Shively had always dreamed of owning space in downtown Columbia. When this property became available, she purchased it in 2023. Shively had every intention of renting both the business front and the upstairs apartment, but she fell in love with the upstairs space.

Today, this upstairs apartment is like a second home to her. Her children and grandchildren love the space, too, and enjoy watching the Christmas parade from the upstairs windows! They call it the “Shoemaker Loft,” a nod to Smith’s Shoes.

Entrance to the second floor apartment is located at the rear of the building. There are two alleyways that will take visi-

tors to the rear of the building— one by Pie Sensations and Whiskey Alley by Southern Tre’ Steakhouse.

Gallery 48 is on the first floor of the building. While not a part of the tour, please feel free to visit the gallery during their operating hours.

Below, the Shively Loft at 107 W. 7th Street in Columbia



National Confederate Museum

On the grounds of Historic Elm Springs is a modern structure, the National Confederate Museum. Opened in 2020, this museum has grown to become one of Columbia, Tennessee's greatest tourist attractions, garnering guests from not only across the United States, but worldwide.

The museum, owned and operated by the Sons of Confederate Veterans, provides visitors with a Southern perspective of the War Between the States that raged from 1861—65. The museum not only deals with the years of the American Civil War, but also provides the history of the South from the founding of Jamestown through the Reconstruction Period. A written timeline wraps around the walls of the 10,000 square-foot exhibit hall providing this history, while dozens of display cases showcase artifacts from the War.

Outside of the museum, there are several items to see, too. Two monuments have been erected on the grounds, including one of Jefferson Davis that was removed from Confederate Park in Memphis, Tennessee. There is also a monument to General Robert E. Lee, which is replica of the Lee statue that once stood in Statuary Hall in the U.S. Capitol Building. The replica

on display at the National Confederate Museum was privately commissioned and was carved entirely from Texas limestone. There is also an original ambulance wagon captured by General Nathan Bedford Forrest, and the cast-iron loading boom from a blockade runner.

One item of note currently on display at the National Confederate Museum is "Antionette Polk Flag." General Forrest captured Col. Abel Streight's force of 1,500 men with a much smaller squad of 500. When General Forrest was in Columbia in 1863, he presented the flag he captured from Abel Streight to a local girl named Antionette Polk. Miss Polk had made a famous ride to warn Confederates on her farm that the Yankees were coming. Forrest presented her this flag in thanks for her heroics. This flag is currently on loan from the Maury County Archives.

The Sons of Confederate Veterans, Inc. is an hereditary organization made up of male descendants of Confederate Veterans. Since 1992, the Sons have made their Headquarters in Columbia, Tennessee.



The National Confederate Museum at Historic Elm Springs

Tour Headquarters —

The historic Athenaeum Rectory in Columbia, Tennessee is an architectural oddity in Maury County. The style of construction is very unique and is called “Moorish-Gothic.” The home was built to resemble the castle-like Columbia Female Institute that was located next door.

This was very fitting, actually, since the home would go on to house the first headmaster of the Institute, the Reverend Franklin G. Smith and his family, in 1837.

The home was commissioned in 1835 by Samuel Polk Walker, a nephew of President James K. Polk. The design of the home is believed to have come from the architectural firm of Drummond & Lutterloh. The firm designed the Institute. Maury County’s “Master Builder,” Nathan Vaught is given credit for the actual construction of the home.

In 1852, Rev. Smith left his post at the Institute and founded his own school, the Columbia Athenaeum, from which the home derives its name. Smith would operate his school until his death in 1866, at which time, his wife became principal. When Mrs. Smith died, their eldest son Robert became principal and operated the school until 1904 when he sold the property to the City of Columbia for use as a public school.

The family retained the rectory as their private residence. The home was passed from the eldest Smith son, Robert, to his son, Franklin Gillette “Lette” Smith, II. When Lette died without any heirs in 1919, the home was sold at public auction. Lette’s aunt, Clara, came to the auction in hopes of buying the family home. Once Clara raised her hand to bid, no one else bid against her and she was able to buy the



The Athenaeum Rectory

Athenaeum. Clara's daughter, Carrie Smith, lived in the home until her death in the 1970s.

The remaining Smith descendants, now living in Texas, decided to donate the property to the Maury County Chapter, Association for the Preservation of Tennessee Antiquities (APTA). The Maury County APTA has operated the site as a historic home and museum since 1974.

The APTA has several fund-raisers throughout the year to help preserve the Athenaeum for future generations. The Maury Christmas Tour is one of those fund-raisers.

While in Columbia during the tour, be sure to stop by the Athenaeum Rectory. This tour is one of the many annual fund-raisers which allows the Athenaeum to continue operating.



Historic Rally Hill

An 18-year old man arrived in Columbia, Tennessee in the year 1810. Columbia was only two years old at this time.

His name was James Walker. He became a very influential person in Columbia society. He even established Columbia's first newspaper, the *Western Chronicle*.

He was co-founder of the first bank, was owner of a steamboat on the Tennessee River which transported Maury County cotton sent overland to Clifton. He was a founder of St. Peter's Episcopal Church, was a leader of the Democratic Party in Maury County, and had a contract for a stage line.

He was part-owner of an iron furnace in Hardin County, was a merchant for the Columbia Female Institute, was a member of the County Court and was Mayor of Columbia in 1830 and 1831.

He had real estate holdings in 1830 valued at \$100,000. He was a busy man, but not too busy to fall in love and marry Jane Maria Polk, oldest sister of James K. Polk.

They were married three years after his arrival in Columbia. He was 21 and she was 18. Together, they built the brick house next door to the Polk Home. This is known today as the "Sisters House," for Jane and James lived there along with Jane's sister, Ophelia, and her husband, Dr. Hays.

The Walkers soon built a frame house on the present site of Rally Hill. This house burned and, in late 1848, they started the brick house on the same location. This brick home on West Eighth Street was named Rally Hill, as the knoll the home was built on was a rallying spot for local soldiers as they prepared to march off to fight in the War of 1812. The Walkers needed this larger home, as they had 11 children.

One of their first dinner guests in the new house was Mrs. Walker's brother, President James K. Polk. In his diary he wrote, "April 6, 1849, we dined at Mrs. James Walker's with many of our relations. It was a family dinner, as though the state of my health was such as to prevent me from partaking of the dinner, I was present. In the afternoon, I walked into the lawn and remained a few minutes."

This was President Polk's last visit to Columbia, for he died within two weeks of this dinner.

Of the Walker's 11 children, one son was the builder of the Athenaeum. One son, Lucius M. Walker, became a Confederate General and was killed during the war—killed not by the enemy, but as the result of a duel with another Confederate officer. Another son, Joseph Knox Walker, was President Polk's private secretary and lived with the President in the White House. Two of the Walker's grandchildren were born in the Polk White House.

During the War Between the States, Rally Hill was the location of a military-style wedding when the Walker's granddaughter married Confederate General Frank Armstrong. It was a beautiful event with men in

gray uniforms, trimmed in yellow, and music provided by a military band. (Frank Armstrong also has a connection with Elm Springs, another site featured on this year's tour.)

The house, Rally Hill, is a good example of the transition between the Federal and Greek Revival styles of



architecture. The original brick kitchen is located at the rear of the main house. The floors of the house are still the original poplar. Huge pocket doors separate the parlors and the dining room.

Walker Street was once the carriage drive to the house and, historically, would have made a large circle in front of the home. In the circle were planted twelve trees—one for each letter in Andrew Jackson’s name. (“A” is used twice, but represented with one tree.) “Old Hickory” was a frequent guest at Rally Hill and a family friend

of the Walker’s.

Today, Rally Hill is a private residence owned by Jason and Lauren Whatley. The Whatley’s have painstakingly taken this home back to its original floorplan. Guests will enjoy the superb mix of an old home with modern furnishings found at Rally Hill.





IT'S COLUMBIA'S
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WEEKEND

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HOLIDAY OPEN HOUSES
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Loblolly
Dogwood Lane

food, drinks, and vintage FUN!

IN ASSOCIATION WITH
MAURY CHRISTMAS
HISTORIC HOME TOUR