

Sunny Slope Update

Written by Bill Brown, OLLI Member

Sunny Slope, an historic plantation home on South College that once faced the prospect of demolition, has a new purpose, and the Osher Lifelong Learning Institute at Auburn University has a new home. That happy circumstance can be credited largely to Ann B. Pearson, who bought and restored the home and made it available to the university. Parts of the house dates back to 1857.

In one sense, Sunny Slope has come full circle. While owner William Flewellyn Samford pursued his political interests, his wife, Susan Dowdell Samford, conducted a school for girls at the home. Now it is home to an organization providing learning opportunities for older adults.

Built in 1857, Sunny Slope was located on a 2,500-acre plantation. It is a single story Greek Revival raised cottage originally consisting of only four rooms, modest in comparison to the grand antebellum mansions across the South. It sits well back from the road at 1031 South College Street, just south of the Jule Collins Smith Museum of Fine Art.

It was the childhood home of Gov. James Samford, for whom Samford Hall at Auburn University is named. The elder Samford was a newspaper editor, Methodist minister, teacher and politician. He was an ardent supporter of secession, and the 14th and 18th Regiments of Alabama Volunteers were formed at the home. The plantation was used as a camping ground for Confederate troops in 1861.

Sunny Slope was purchased by the Emrick family in 1888 and remained in family hands until Pearson purchased it several years ago. It had stood empty for about a decade and there was talk that it might be razed. Pearson said she bought the historic structure because she thought it should be saved. She and her cousin, William Dean, supervised the yearlong project that was carried out by local contractor Michael Schumacher. In addition to restoration of the original house, the project included the redesign of rooms that had been added to the back of the house before the Emricks' ownership.

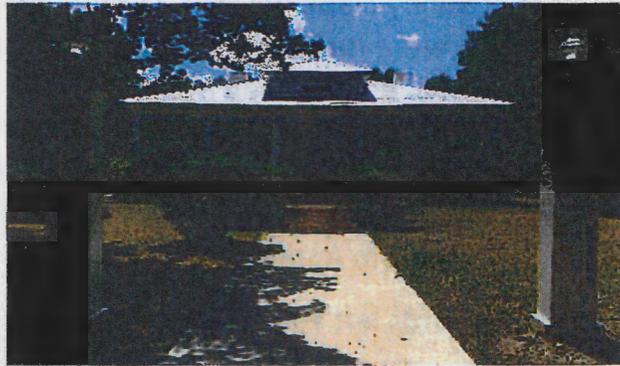
In its new life, Sunny Slope now houses OLLI's offices, which have moved from O.D. Smith Hall on the Auburn campus, and will be the location of some classes. There are four rooms that can be used for classrooms. The former dining room off the newly renovated kitchen will be a great location for OLLI's art classes. For the 2017-2018 academic year, some classes will be held at the Clarion Inn & Suites. Two days a week classes will also be held at the JCS Art Museum.

The house is furnished with period art on the walls and some period furniture where appropriate. In addition, some historically appropriate furniture was obtained from Pebble Hill.

Sunny Slope is listed on the National Register of Historic Places and on the Alabama Historical Commission's Register of Landmarks and Heritage.

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Sunny Slope Home

written by Ann Pearson, donor

Built circa 1857, Sunny Slope was originally the center of a 1,700-acre plantation. Its 700 cultivated acres were worked by 65 slaves. The house is a typical antebellum Greek revival cottage whose original three rooms and porch have been enlarged over a period of time by various prominent occupants. In 2009 it was placed on the National Register of Historic Places by the Auburn Heritage Association.

The most well-known owners were William Flewellen and Susan Dowdell Samford. She is known as the first "Mistress" of Sunny Slope, and he became known as "the Penman of Secession" for his numerous essays in newspapers, several of which he owned. William Flewellen Samford named the property Sunny Slope.

They had 13 children, one of whom, William James, later became Governor of Alabama (1900-1901) and died in office after only serving one year. Samford Hall on the Auburn University campus is named in his honor.

Previously, his father had run a front porch campaign for the office, and lost, but garnered a surprising number of votes because of his newspaper notoriety. A frequent visitor to the house was William Lowndes Yancey, known as the "Orator of Succession." Just before the Civil War, close friends, their frequent conjunction at Sunny Slope soon made the plantation known nationwide as the center for Southern sentiment.

William Flewellen was known for his personal eccentricities and numerous illnesses, mental and physical. One of his granddaughters reported that at one time he weighed 300 pounds and slept on several large chair cushions with soft pillows. In this pillowy recline he imbibed three belts of corn whiskey a day.

was his faithful nurse as well as being an unheralded woman before her time. She was
e for female education, running a small school for young girls that she taught in the
r. She came from a prominent, wealthy family and brought a large inheritance to the marriage
that enabled her husband to concentrate his limited energies on his political and writing endeavors.

In 1861, an area adjacent to the right of Sunny Slope became a Confederate conscription center. The
14th and 18th Alabama Infantry Regiments were formed there. On August 1, 1861, the voluntary
Alabama 14th Infantry Regiment was formed. It encamped at Sunny Slope until early October and
suffered seriously from various diseases, such as measles and typhoid. During the War it mustered
1,317 men, losing 250 men in battle and 350 to disease. It fought fiercely at several significant battles,
including Antietam and finally at Gettysburg, where 8 were killed and 40 wounded out of 316 men
engaged. The 14th surrendered at Appomattox in April of 1865.

Overrun by conscripted soldiers, the Samfords left Sunny Slope.

On September 4, 1861, the voluntary 18th Infantry Regime was formed. While in encampment for a
few weeks it also suffered the ravages of disease. It engaged in numerous battles all during the War.
The 18th Infantry fought the first day at Shiloh, where 420 engaged, 125 were killed or wounded. At
Chickamauga they were virtually mutilated. The regiment lost nearly half its numbers during the War
and surrendered on May 4, 1865, in Meridian, MS.

Following the War, several locally prominent families lived at Sunny Slope, including E.A. Heard, who,
in 1880, sold the house and remaining acres to J.A. Cullars and J.T. Alvis. Through marriage the Verl
Emerick family later owned the house and in 2013 sold the house and remaining 5 acres to Ann B.
Pearson.

Dr. Pearson renovated the house and in 2015 donated it to Auburn University for the home for OLLI
(Osher Lifelong Learning Institute). OLLI is currently using the home for classroom, meeting and office
space.

**SUNNY SLOPE IS A PRIVATE PROGRAM SPACE AND IS NOT CURRENTLY AVAILABLE
FOR LEASE.**

For more information, call 334-844-3105.