

The Bugle



The Bugle, a publication of the Brentwood Historical Society

HISTORIC ISOLA BELLA-A JEWEL OF THE ANTEBELLUM ERA

BY JOE LASSUS

INSIDE THIS ISSUE:

Pioneer WSM Radio 7 Celebrates 82 years in Broadcasting

Isola Bella is certainly one of the historic crown jewels of Brentwood's antebellum era. During early October, I was provided with a marvelous tour of the current Green residence by Gaius Hill of Chris-

tian Realty. This spectacular home is located on Franklin Road near its intersection with Concord Road.

The property was originally granted to David Johnston of Mecklenburg County, North Carolina in

..James and Narcissa Merritt Johnston passed two prosperous decades on the plantation...

return for his military service during the Revolutionary War. David's grandson James Johnston eventually built Isola Bella on the land grant around 1840. The house was well constructed of heavy timbers and double brick walls resting on coursed limestone foundation walls which form the basement rooms.



The Bugle

-a publication of the Brentwood Historical Society
Post Office Box 788
Brentwood, Tennessee 37024-0788

ISOLA BELLA...(CONTINUED)

This home was built on the predominant mid-Georgian style, providing a geometric system of proportioning. Greek Revival style forms were then applied to the Georgian framework. The original interior was somewhat bare of ornament and detail but made up for it by generous proportion and sturdy construction. The special refinements, carved wood Adam style mantels and decorative woods, are still found throughout the original rooms of the mansion.



James and Narcissa Merritt Johnston passed two prosperous decades on the plantation before the coming of the tumultuous Civil War in 1861. Due to its location on the principal hard-surfaced thoroughfare of Franklin Road, the property experienced

much of the military traffic of the war years. The home served as a temporary headquarters for Confederate General Hood prior to the Battle of Nashville, and sheltered the wounded after that struggle.



Following the war, the property fell on hard times and left the ownership of the Johnston family. By the early twentieth century the structure was in severe disrepair, and had been converted to agricultural storage. At this low point in its existence, the Oman family stepped into the picture. During the 1940's, the John Oman family purchased the property, and began a complete restoration of the home. Marvelous interior details and enhancements were incorporated during this period. This preservation effort was part

The Bugle, a publication of the Brentwood Historical Society (editor: Joe Lassus)

A citizen organization supporting the Brentwood Historic Commission, and dedicated to the study and preservation of the City's history and culture.

For information and membership, contact the Brentwood Municipal Center at 371-0060, Linda Lynch, Community Relations Director, T. Vance Little, City Historian.

We're on the web!! Go to: www.brentwood-tn.org ...click on "history" to find us!

Contributions encouraged.....

Do you have any special historic news or stories of local interest??? Feel free to share them with the membership. Your additions to *The Bugle* are very much welcome and appreciated. Just email them along to lasusj@brentwood-tn.org or mail to Joe Lassus, City of Brentwood, 5211 Maryland Way, Brentwood TN 37027.



Brentwood Ghosts to Celebrate Halloween???

Brentwood's best known ghost is said to reside at Mooreland, the historic home serving as the centerpiece of the Synergy Center office park on Franklin Road. Ruth Moore was born in 1838, a part of the original family at Mooreland. Ruth died at the home in 1858 under mysterious circumstances, and former residents and recent office occupants insist that she remains with us. Some attest to her mischief in hiding keys plucked from pockets and purses, and others report that Ruth has transitioned to the modern era, learning the use of copy machines.....Happy Halloween Ruth!!



WSM BIRTHDAY CELEBRATION (CONTINUED)

scene. The WSM tower was erected in 1932 and began transmission from it later that year. It is still in use today. WSM was one of the first stations to install a Blaw-Knox “Diamond” antenna which is really two self-supporting antennas stacked to create a very tall vertical structure. The resulting 808-foot tower is electrically insulated from the ground, a requirement for AM radio. This is accomplished by resting the tower on porcelain insulators that act as the transition to the foundation. With some 300 tons resting on the



base insulators, the WSM tower is secured by eight guy cables each stressed to 55,000

pounds. There are several towers of similar design still functioning in the United States, including the WLW tower near Mason, Ohio and the shorter WBT tower in Charlotte, North Carolina.

The WSM hospitality was outstanding at this 82nd birthday celebration, and it appears that the radio station will be holding the event now every other year. WSM is a unique and important part of Brentwood’s heritage, and we encourage you to patronize and enjoy the wonderful programming from this station on a regular basis!!



Left—Gaius Hill shows the marble mantel once owned by writer Victor Hugo, and later imported from France by the Oman family.



...ISOLA BELLA (CONTINUED)

of the Brentwood "Renaissance" that saw the rejuvenation of Inglehame, Ashlawn, and Montview, among others.

The Omans named their new home Thurso after the Oman ancestral home in Scotland. Actually, the home would not take on the Isola Bella name until its purchase by the David Alexander family later in the century.

Originally, the home had two formal entrances facing west and north. During the 1945 restoration, the deteriorated façade features and porticos were replaced and accented by the massive columns that we see on the structure today. The main west entrance is enhanced by four free-standing colossal Corinthian columns with fluted shafts and stone plinths. The north entrance is identical in form but reduced in scale and without the Corinthian detail.



The original attached service wing and brick smokehouse are still integral parts of the mansion, and built in the style of the house. Both feature roofs clad in crab orchard slate tile. However, the main roof is traditional standing seam crimped tin.

Isola Bella is an amazing historic structure unlike any other. The current residents of Brentwood owe quite a debt of gratitude to the Oman family who were instrumental in rescuing the home.

PIONEER WSM RADIO STATION CELEBRATES 82 HISTORIC YEARS

BY JOE LASSUS

Recently, I was treated to a most enjoyable birthday luncheon put on by radio station WSM. The event was held right here in Brentwood at the historic WSM radio tower facility on Concord Road. Radio announcers Bill Cody, Mike Terry, Keith Bilbrey, Eddie Stubbs, Jason Tomlin, and Malcolm West were all present to welcome and visit with the midday guests. Providing a break from the unusual heat of the extended summer, Friday temperatures had dropped enough for comfort with a cool breeze blowing across the grounds.

The country music theme was in strong

evidence, with much of the crowd coming from the entertainment business. Many tales were swapped of various musician affiliations with WSM and the Grand Ole Opry. And everyone took credit for the wonderful weather.

WSM opened the doors to their historic operations building at the event. A number of informative displays were set up inside exhibiting the artifacts of this pioneer radio station (see photograph on next

page). Historic photographs of the old days of radio decorated the hallways, affording a glimpse of the station's operations during the early 20th century.

Of course, the great WSM radio tower dominates the



WSM
www.olderadio.com