

1035 20/8001

**ISOLA BELLA**

**MR. AND MRS. DAVE ALEXANDER**

**1112 FRANKLIN ROAD  
BRENTWOOD, TN 37027**

**373-0374**

UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR  
NATIONAL PARK SERVICE

NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES  
INVENTORY -- NOMINATION FORM

FOR NPS USE ONLY

RECEIVED

DATE ENTERED

CONTINUATION SHEET

ITEM NUMBER 10 PAGE 1

Having no grid markings on the map, the latitude and longitude co-ordinates are:

Latitude

Longitude

35°59'47"

86°48'34"

# 8 SIGNIFICANCE

PERIOD	AREAS OF SIGNIFICANCE -- CHECK AND JUSTIFY BELOW			
<input type="checkbox"/> PREHISTORIC	<input type="checkbox"/> ARCHEOLOGY-PREHISTORIC	<input type="checkbox"/> COMMUNITY PLANNING	<input type="checkbox"/> LANDSCAPE ARCHITECTURE	<input type="checkbox"/> RELIGION
<input type="checkbox"/> 1400-1499	<input type="checkbox"/> ARCHEOLOGY-HISTORIC	<input type="checkbox"/> CONSERVATION	<input type="checkbox"/> LAW	<input type="checkbox"/> SCIENCE
<input type="checkbox"/> 1500-1599	<input type="checkbox"/> AGRICULTURE	<input type="checkbox"/> ECONOMICS	<input type="checkbox"/> LITERATURE	<input type="checkbox"/> SCULPTURE
<input type="checkbox"/> 1600-1699	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> ARCHITECTURE	<input type="checkbox"/> EDUCATION	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> MILITARY	<input type="checkbox"/> SOCIAL/HUMANITARIAN
<input type="checkbox"/> 1700-1799	<input type="checkbox"/> ART	<input type="checkbox"/> ENGINEERING	<input type="checkbox"/> MUSIC	<input type="checkbox"/> THEATER
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> 1800-1899	<input type="checkbox"/> COMMERCE	<input type="checkbox"/> EXPLORATION/SETTLEMENT	<input type="checkbox"/> PHILOSOPHY	<input type="checkbox"/> TRANSPORTATION
<input type="checkbox"/> 1900-	<input type="checkbox"/> COMMUNICATIONS	<input type="checkbox"/> INDUSTRY	<input type="checkbox"/> POLITICS/GOVERNMENT	<input type="checkbox"/> OTHER (SPECIFY)
		<input type="checkbox"/> INVENTION		

SPECIFIC DATES c.1840

BUILDER/ARCHITECT James Johnston

## STATEMENT OF SIGNIFICANCE

The beautiful home built by James Johnston about 1840, or perhaps a few years earlier, was originally part of the lands belonging to David Johnston of Mecklenburg County, North Carolina, whose earliest real estate transaction was recorded in Nashville in 1792 when this section was a part of Davidson County in the Territory South of the Ohio. James and his brothers were among the earliest settlers in the French Lick area, now the site of Nashville, and one of his brothers was killed there by the Indians in 1780. The family of James Johnston's mother had also been among the earliest arrivals in the Cumberland.

When David Johnston died in 1829, he willed to his grandson, James, the land upon which James built his home, which has remained an important landmark in the area for over a century and a quarter. It is located in an area which is rapidly developing as a thickly settled residential area. The house is significant architecturally because it is an excellent example of the type of houses built by those who had acquired positions of wealth and prominence. It is also important because it was the home of an early settler in the region that is now the Nashville area.

Since the house was built on the pike from Nashville to Franklin, it was in an area that saw considerable action during the Civil War. Cannon and wagons being moved from the Battlefield of Franklin in preparation for the upcoming Battle of Nashville in December, 1864, crossed the yard of the Johnston house. Family tradition has it that during this time, Confederate General John Bell Hood and his subordinates met in the Johnston house to discuss battle plans.

The house remained in the hands of Mrs. John Oman, Jr., whose husband did the restoration work in 1945, until her death last year at the age of 97. The present owners are intensely interested in the preservation of this important landmark.

Built ca 1840-53

SOURCE: Nashville newspaper

**9 MAJOR BIBLIOGRAPHICAL REFERENCES**

Bowman, Virginia McDaniel Historic Williamson County, Old Homes and Sites (Nashville: Blue and Gray Press, 1971.)

**10 GEOGRAPHICAL DATA**

ACREAGE OF NOMINATED PROPERTY 6  
UTM REFERENCES

See continuation sheet

A	<input type="text"/>	<input type="text"/>	<input type="text"/>
	ZONE	EASTING	NORTHING
C	<input type="text"/>	<input type="text"/>	<input type="text"/>

B	<input type="text"/>	<input type="text"/>	<input type="text"/>
	ZONE	EASTING	NORTHING
D	<input type="text"/>	<input type="text"/>	<input type="text"/>

VERBAL BOUNDARY DESCRIPTION

LIST ALL STATES AND COUNTIES FOR PROPERTIES OVERLAPPING STATE OR COUNTY BOUNDARIES

STATE	CODE	COUNTY	CODE
STATE	CODE	COUNTY	CODE

**11 FORM PREPARED BY**

NAME / TITLE

Gail Hammerquist, Architectural Historian

ORGANIZATION

Tennessee Historical Commission

DATE

1/76

STREET & NUMBER

170 Second Avenue North

TELEPHONE

(615) 741-2371

CITY OR TOWN

Nashville

STATE

Tennessee

**12 STATE HISTORIC PRESERVATION OFFICER CERTIFICATION**

THE EVALUATED SIGNIFICANCE OF THIS PROPERTY WITHIN THE STATE IS:

NATIONAL  STATE  LOCAL

As the designated State Historic Preservation Officer for the National Historic Preservation Act of 1966 (Public Law 89-665), I hereby nominate this property for inclusion in the National Register and certify that it has been evaluated according to the criteria and procedures set forth by the National Park Service.

STATE HISTORIC PRESERVATION OFFICER SIGNATURE

*Herbert E. Hays*

TITLE

Executive Director, Tennessee Historical Commission

DATE

1/29/76

FOR NPS USE ONLY

I HEREBY CERTIFY THAT THIS PROPERTY IS INCLUDED IN THE NATIONAL REGISTER

DATE

DIRECTOR, OFFICE OF ARCHEOLOGY AND HISTORIC PRESERVATION

ATTEST:

DATE

KEEPER OF THE NATIONAL REGISTER

**ISOLA BELLA**

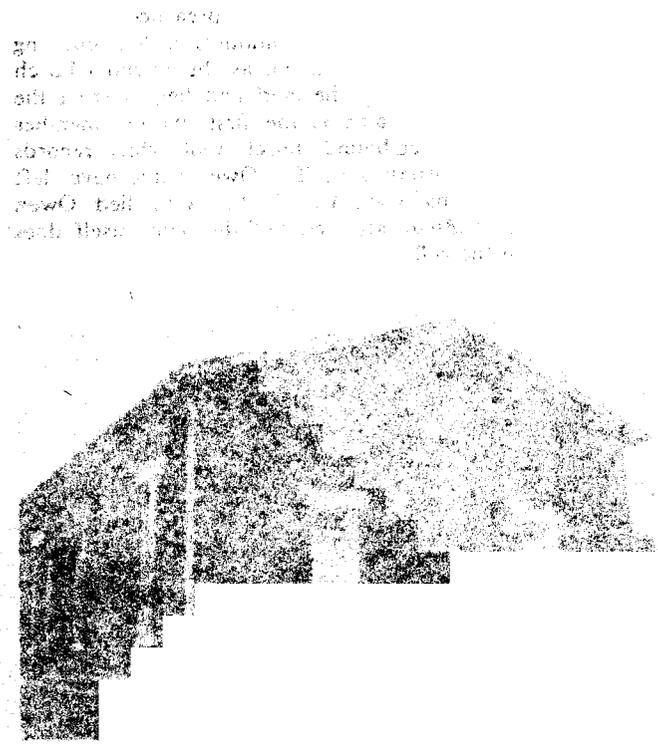
Isola Bella was built around 1840 by James and Narcissa Merrit Johnston. The property originally belonged to David Johnson, grandfather of the builder. During the Civil War the lawn of Isola Bella was traversed by both Confederate and Federal cannon, wagons and marching soldiers between battles at Nashville and Franklin. General John Bell Hood and his staff met here before the Battle of Nashville. It served as a hospital after that battle. The mantle in the parlor is said to have come from the Paris home of Victor Hugo. After the house went out of the Johnson family it stood vacant for many years and was used to store hay and strip tobacco. It fell into a serious state of disrepair. It was bought and restored by Mr. and Mrs. John Oman, Jr., and it is now the home of Mr. and Mrs. Dave Alexander.

**Brentwood Brochure**

The beautiful home of Mrs. John Oman, Jr. was originally part of the land belonging to David Johnson of Brentwood, Nashville, Tennessee, whose estate was purchased by James and Narcissa Merrit Johnston in 1840. The property was used as a hospital during the Civil War. The house was built around 1840 and was used to store hay and strip tobacco. It fell into a serious state of disrepair. It was bought and restored by Mr. and Mrs. John Oman, Jr., and it is now the home of Mr. and Mrs. Dave Alexander.

**Isola**

The beautiful home of Mrs. John Oman, Jr. was originally part of the land belonging to David Johnson of Brentwood, Nashville, Tennessee, whose estate was purchased by James and Narcissa Merrit Johnston in 1840. The property was used as a hospital during the Civil War. The house was built around 1840 and was used to store hay and strip tobacco. It fell into a serious state of disrepair. It was bought and restored by Mr. and Mrs. John Oman, Jr., and it is now the home of Mr. and Mrs. Dave Alexander.



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The old brick kitchen is still in the yard; the log smokehouse was reconstructed from materials found in cabins about the place. Bricks, foundation stones, and the remnants of chimneys reveal the former location of the quarters down by the spring.

Distinguished by its beautiful furnishings, fragrant gardens, and graceful landscaping, Inglehame ranks with the most outstanding of Williamson County's historic homes.

## Owen's Chapel

Few churches in Williamson County can equal Owen's Chapel Church of Christ in rich and colorful history. Located on U.S. 31 south of Brentwood, it has long been a beloved and honored landmark in the area.

It had its beginning July 24, 1859, when Tolbert Fanning, noted educator and minister, preached the first sermon in the old Euclid schoolhouse, a log building which stood nearby. It was known as the Euclid Church until James C. Owen gave the land and helped erect the present building. His name is the first charter member listed in the old leather bound church book which records services from the earliest days. The Owen name never left the roster until 1969 when Mrs. T. L. Owen died. Owen descendants still attend services, but the name itself does not appear on the roll.



*Owen's Chapel Church of Christ*

Tradition says that the bricks in the thick walls of Owen's Chapel were made from clay cut from William Owen's property which was east of the church. The Negroes used by the Owen men to kiln brick and erect their homes and the chapel were especially trained as masons in Maryland. All of the original roofing brought from England is still in place and, except for damage by a tornado in 1869, the building has stood the years well.

Changes to the interior have been in keeping with the times. Softly glowing oil lamps replaced candlelight and then gave way themselves to electricity. Wood, coal, and gas stoves have warmed the congregation over many bitter winters, but the old pews with a middle partition

dividing the men from the women in years past remain in place.

Once, long ago, the men and women were divided by more than a wooden partition. Back when chewing tobacco was much in vogue the male members, at a considerable expense, had forty wooden spittoons made and ranged them along the aisles for the convenience of those who chewed. The noisy skill of their expectorating so annoyed and outraged the ladies, the gentlemen had to destroy their newly-installed conveniences before peace could be restored.

In well over a hundred years the church has failed to meet on Sunday only a few times. One of those times the Yankees were raiding and another a flood prevented their gathering. Its mission work included helping the Indians some ninety years ago, and a continuation of charitable deeds since its beginning has characterized its benevolent activities.

Nearly all of the stalwarts of the brotherhood have preached at one time or another at Owen's Chapel. Following the name of Tolbert Fanning were those of Lipscomb, Sewell, Sowell, McQuiddy, Srygley, Elam, Smith, Scobey, Boles, Dorris, Calhoun, Pittman. On and on reads the list of the giants of Israel who have proclaimed the gospel from this historic pulpit.

Many old churches have a tendency, with the passing of years, to be relegated as shrines and to lose their usefulness as instruments to promote the faith. But Owen's Chapel has valiantly striven to keep abreast of the times yet not forsake the old paths.

For generations the Little Harpeth River on the Calender place was used for baptizing, but in 1957 a baptistry was installed in the church. Green shutters against the mellow brick walls, fresh paint, new rugs, air conditioning, and gas heat make the edifice beautiful and comfortable.

Its preaching rests in the able hands of Wayne Poucher, nationally known evangelist and minister who, with the faithful, keeps the church on the strong and sure foundation so carefully laid in the long ago.

## Thurso

The beautiful home of Mrs. John Oman, Jr. was originally part of the lands belonging to David Johnston of Mecklenburg, North Carolina, whose earliest real estate transaction was recorded in 1792 in Nashville when this section was a part of "Davidson County in the Territory South of the Ohio." It is located south of Brentwood on U.S. 31 on the east side of the highway.

David Johnston's son Robert married Rachel Johnston in 1798. Her people were among the earliest to arrive in the Cumberland settlement. John and Mary Patterson Johnston had moved from Pennsylvania to Caswell County, North Carolina in 1773. Four of their sons—Daniel, William, Alexander, and James—captivated by the roseate descriptions of the rich new lands migrated to this area.

Daniel and William came to French Lick where the former was killed by Indians in 1780. When it was safe to leave the protection of the forts, William moved on to



*Thurso, built by James Johnston*

the Red River district where he settled near the present site of Port Royal. The other two brothers came here in 1800. Alexander built a log cabin at Haysboro above Nashville while James went to be near William on the Red River.

William Johnston had married Martha Scott in 1776 and among their children was the daughter Rachel who married Robert Johnston. No doubt they were relatives since it was often the custom for families to inter-marry in early days.

When old age crept up on David Johnston he conveyed his property to his son Robert thinking that in the natural course of events the younger man would long outlive him. However, a capricious fate willed otherwise and Robert Johnston died in 1827. When he realized that death was imminent he immediately set about through his will to make certain his parents would be well cared for. He left his wife Rachel one third of the plantation where they were residing and made fair bequests to their six children. Then, when David Johnston died in 1829, he willed the whole of his estate to his grandchildren—David, Robert, William, James, Lancelot, and Martha.

In the settlement James Johnston was given the home-place while Lancelot's land was west of Nashville Pike except for one field on the east side. James Johnston, who married Narcissa Merritt in 1834, is credited with building this house around 1840. Old pictures show it having a one-story veranda with low bannisters on the ground level and around the roof of the porch which was supported by eight slender one-story columns. It lacked the pediments and tall pillars which distinguish the north and west sides today, although there was a doorway and uncovered stoop on the north side and a second story front doorway identical to the main entrance on the west.

Since the lawn ran to the Nashville Pike it was often traversed by both Federal and Confederate forces. Its fields were rutted by heavy cannon and wagons and trampled by the feet of marching men and cavalry horses as the armies advanced and retreated between Nashville and Franklin. No home in the neighborhood escaped marauding Yankees and women were often forced to nurse and feed wounded enemy soldiers as well as Con-

federates.

After the house went out of the Johnston family, it fell on evil days. For years it sat forlorn and dejected by the roadside with wisps of hay hanging from its paneless windows. It seemed doomed to destruction when, happily, it was bought by Mr. and Mrs. John Oman, Jr., who restored it to its former elegance and named it after the Oman ancestral hometown, Thurso, in Scotland.

With beautiful landscaping and tasteful remodeling it is one of the most outstanding landmarks in Williamson County.

## Ashlawn

Late in the spring of 1780 the socially starved pioneers at Fort Nashborough were treated to a wedding—that of Captain James Leiper and Susan Drake. As the young people repeated the age old vows before James Robertson, they became the first couple to be married in this section of Tennessee. It was a time when the Indians were exerting their utmost efforts to wipe out the new settlement precariously clinging to life along the forest-bordered bluffs of the Cumberland. During that first year only one man died a natural death; the other heavy loss of life was caused by savage raiding parties.

Within the year James Leiper had fallen their victim during the Battle of the Bluff, April 2, 1781, and died of his wounds some days later. A sad commentary on his death was "that could he have had a good surgeon he would have recovered." Little is known of James Leiper save that he was with Captain Ben Logan during the Revolution and that he was a seasoned borderer and an experienced woodsman. He came to Fort Nashborough from Kentucky and was a signer of the Cumberland Compact.

Susan Drake lived on at the fort after her husband's death, and in October of that year bore him a daughter, Sarah Jane. When barely twenty Mrs. Leiper was killed when a gun fell from a rack above the door and exploded. On their wedding day no thought of slashing tomahawks, hissing arrows, stampeding horse and snarling dogs marred their happiness. At the end of that spring day in 1780 no noise louder than the night sounds in the dark forest and the quiet murmur of the Cumberland disturbed them. All too soon there was nothing but the silence of death.

Those who died in the effort to establish a new nation are no less worthy of praise than those who lived to contribute long years in its behalf. Countless young men and women, though early dead from the exigencies of frontier life, were the ancestors of families whose abilities for two centuries have been of inestimable value in America's development into a world power.

Sarah Jane Leiper was reared by the Drake family until her marriage in 1798 to Alexander Smith, the son of Robert and Sarah Clemmons Smith. They settled on the 640 acre grant in the Little Harpeth Valley near the present site of Brentwood which had been given her father posthumously for his Revolutionary service. The Smiths were the parents of seven children, one of whom, Mary Emeline, married Richard Christmas in 1832. Her father gave them 200 acres from the Leiper grant where they

# Two markers erected at historically significant sites

*Journal Nov 28, 1990*

Two new historical markers have been erected in Brentwood by the Williamson County Historical Society, while seven others have been authorized to mark historically significant sites in the area.

The markers have been erected at Isola Bella, the home of Mr. and Mrs. Dave Alexander on Franklin Road, and Johnson Chapel United Methodist Church on High Lea Road.

The criteria for a site to designated as being historically significant include the age of the structure, its architectural style and its association with a historic person or event.

Other sites authorized for markers include Forge Seat on Crockett Road; the Frost House on Old Smyrna Road; Owen's Chapel Church of Christ on Franklin Road; the Midway mansion at Brentwood Country Club; Ashlawn on Franklin Road; Ravenswood on Wilson Pike; and Mountview on Franklin Road, according to Ridley Wills, chairman of the Williamson County Historical Society marker committee.

"Brentwood has probably the highest number of historic sites concentrated in so small an area in the county," said Robert Hicks,

president of the Williamson County Historical Society.

Markers are erected by the property owners or can be erected by the state of Tennessee. The state has erected two markers in Brentwood. One of the markers commemorates early settler and Methodist leader Green Hill, while the other honors the Civil War battle of Brentwood. The Green Hill marker is on Franklin Road at Concord Road and the Battle of Brentwood marker is on Franklin Road at Maryland Way.

Isola Bella was built in the 1840s by James Johnston, the grandson of one of Brentwood's earliest settlers. The grounds of the home were crossed by cannons and troops of both armies during the Civil War. The house served as a headquarters for commanding generals and as a hospital after the Battles of Nashville and Franklin.

It stood vacant for many years, but was beautifully restored in the 1940s by the Oman family.

Johnson Chapel was established in the early 1800s as a community church for all denominations. It was located on land purchased by early settler Maj. John Johnston from Col. Thomas McCrory, who received the land as a



Brentwood Journal Photo by Gill Traughb

Admiring the new marker at Isola Bella are Ridley Wills II, David Alexander, Dave Alexander, county historian Virginia Bowman, WCHS president Robert Hicks, Brentwood Mayor Joe Sweeney and Wendell Edison, Brentwood Historical Commission member.

Revolutionary War land grant.

The first church was a log structure, which burned in 1850. The present building, built in 1825, is

the third on the site.

Three other markers have been erected in Brentwood after designation by the Historical Society. The

markers are at Sneed Acres on Smyrna Road; Mooreland man on Franklin Road; and the Bo Springs site on Moores Lane.

# The Review Appeal

Wednesday, November 28, 1990



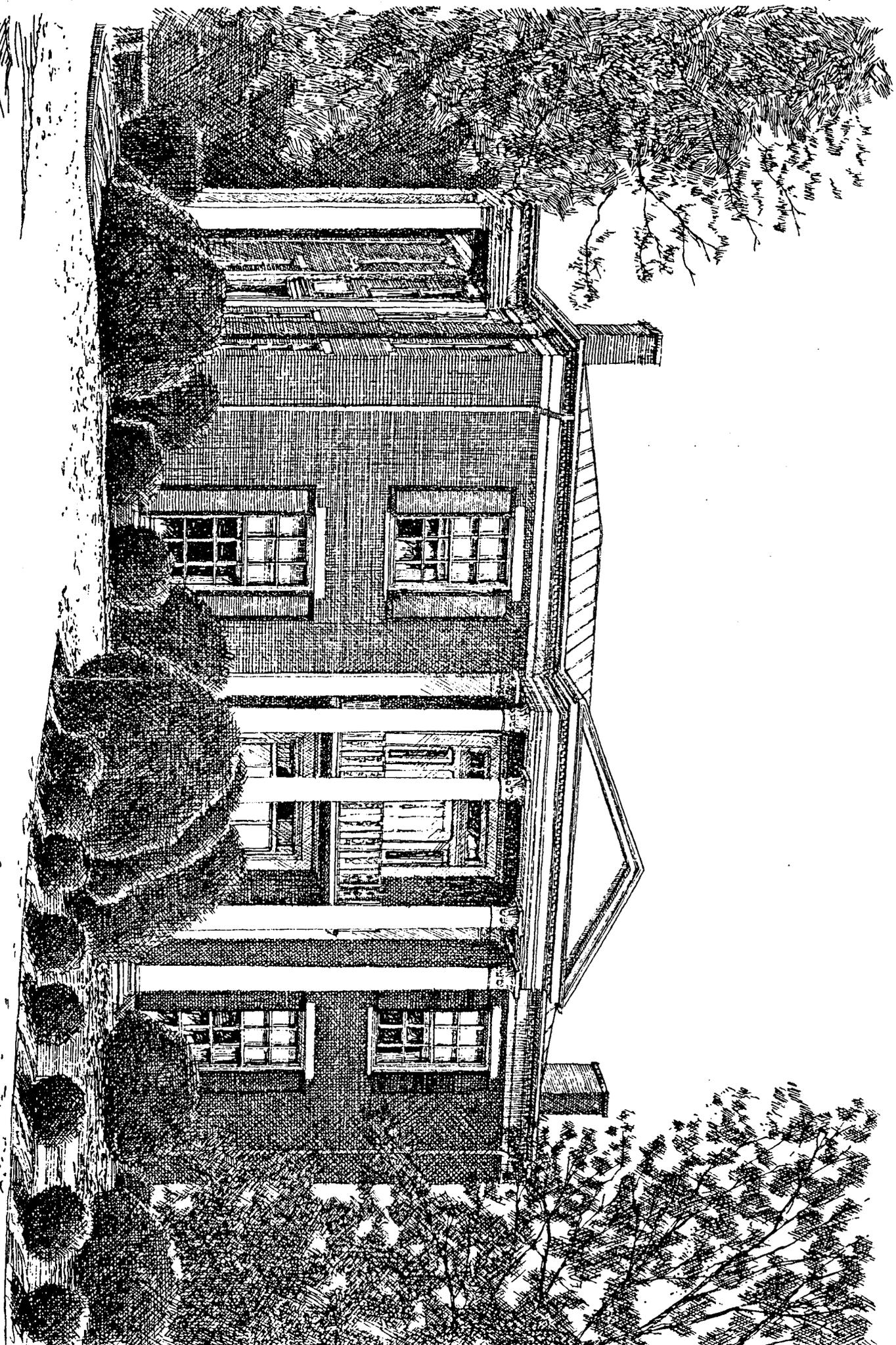
## Hometown heroes

By Lauren Lexa  
Staff Writer



### Marker points out historic property

On Friday, the Williamson County Historical Society erected a marker at Isola Bella, the Franklin Road home of Dave Alexander (third from left). On hand were (l-r) David Alexander, Brentwood Mayor Joe Sweeney, Williamson County Historian Virginia Bowman, Williamson County Historical Society President Robert Hicks, Ridley Wills and Brentwood Historic Commission member Wendell Edison. The home was built around 1840 by James and Narcissa Merritt Johnston. The historical society also plans to erect markers at Centennial Hall, Meeting of the Waters, Johnson Chapel Methodist Church and Midway.



*Isola Bella*

P. CHURCHILL '87

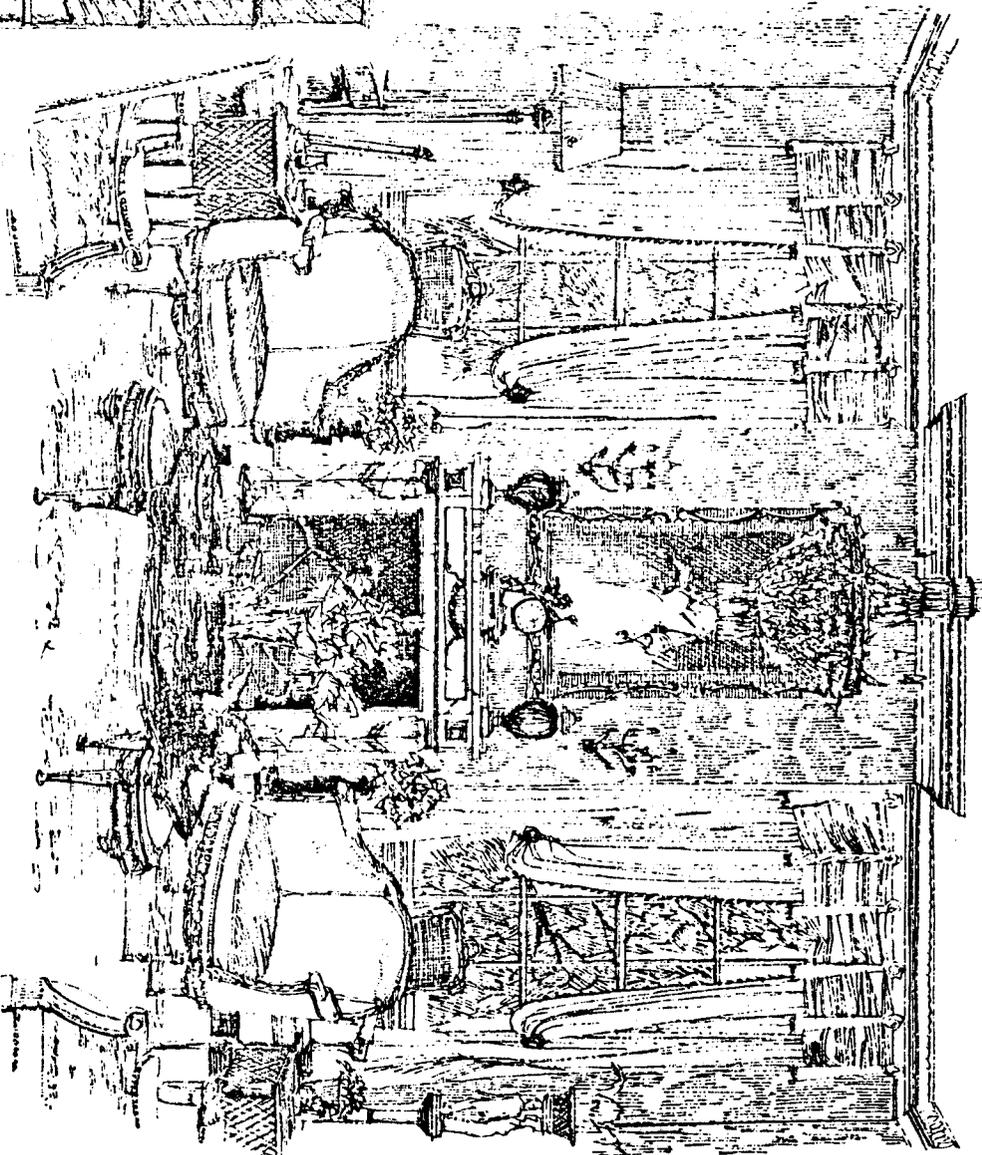
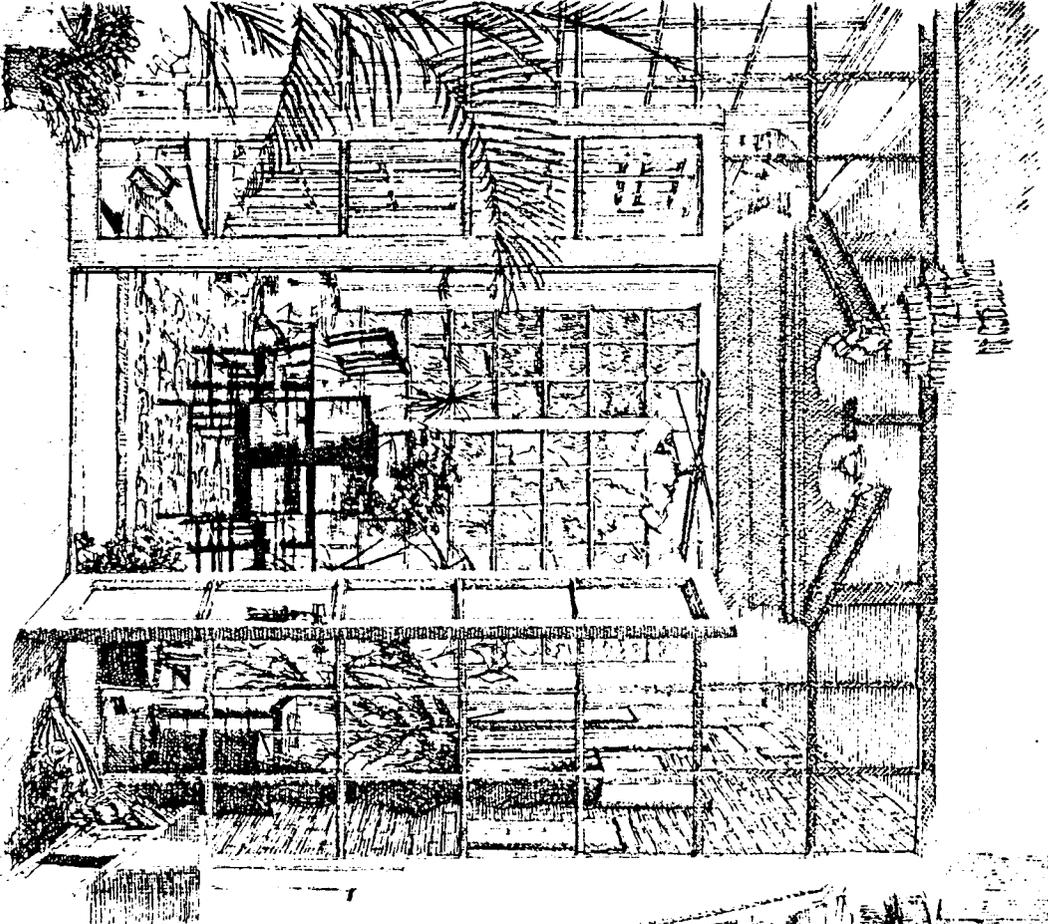
**Isola Bella (Formerly Thurso)**  
 the Manor House and Gardens of Mr. and Mrs. Dave Alexander  
 Franklin Road, Brentwood, Tennessee

With its magnificent soaring columns forming porticoes on two sides, this splendid Greek Revival mansion is rendered quite distinctive even in an area long renowned for its careful preservation of antebellum homes. Formerly Thurso, now christened Isola Bella, it is every inch an Island of Loveliness in a rapidly changing world which all too often threatens the great and the beautiful.

Built around 1840 by the James Johnson family, whose title to these spreading acres (1792) antedates Tennessee's admission to the union, the house is unique in that the entire original portion survives.

The breakup of the southern economic structure following the Civil War brought sad changes in the splendid estate and it gradually passed out of family hands.

It was rescued from decay in the 1940's by the John Oman family who lovingly stored it to splendor. The grand formal gardens, exquisite plantings and numerous painted mouldings all date from the Oman restoration and are the work of the late A. Herbert Rodgers.



Acquired in 1975 by the Dave Alexanders, its former elegance has been retained and its Italianate feeling has been reinforced.

Inside the great manor house, the ambience subtly changes from Southern Greek Revival to classic European and all is elegance, sophistication, and elan. The feel is patrician with a major portion of the incomparable appointments gleaned from the finest shops both here and abroad.

A continental aura is achieved by the predominant use of authentic French Grey traced in softest white on the lofty walls and ceilings.

Furnishings in the spacious drawing rooms are of antique gilt and the Louis XVI style and period. One of the delicate fluted chairs wears its original Aubusson. Others boast the muted pastels associated with grand salons and titled owners.

Inner columns, classic mouldings of acanthus leaves, and a salatina, floored in black and white marble, project a feeling of grandeur. They form suitable backdrops for pieces of incredible rarity such as the superb onyx mantle, purchased in Paris, which once belonged to the great Victor Hugo.

Wherever one goes on this splendid estate, the air of carefully preserved elegance prevails. Isola Bella — Island of Loveliness — the mansion lives up to its name.

*Henrietta Darr-Johnson, Belmont Tour of Homes*