

Harber's History: Absalom Scales House continues as heirloom

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The name Absalom is translated from a Hebrew origin meaning “father of peace.” Absalom Scales of Eagleville personified peaceful living and is one of my favorite early pioneers, who courageously established a real home in present-day Rutherford County that is still considered extraordinary. He was born in North Carolina on Dec. 3, 1769, to John Scales and Lydia Jane McLeary and had eight siblings. He arrived to Tennessee at a young age and envisioned a permanent and loving home with a large family in a territory still considered wild and unyielding. His focus on a grand house evolved into a structure that was placed on the National Register of Historic Places in 1973 and is one of the oldest homes in the county.

Absalom wed Nancy Dalton (1773-1840) of Albemarle, Va. in 1790. Nancy had an extensive lineage in American history. Her father, the Rev. Samuel Dalton, was a gospel preacher in Virginia; and a tree stump was his favorite pulpit to those passing by. Samuel was bitten by a snake in later years while preaching and never recovered. Nancy's grandfather Samuel Dalton Sr. (of England) was a very wealthy and prosperous man and lived to age 103. He was a close friend to President James Madison; and they were both members of the Loyal Land Co., investing in large tracts of lands in North Carolina and Virginia. James Madison established his historical home Montpelier of Virginia, and Samuel remained an intimate lifetime friend. Samuel was the son of William Dalton, a descendant of Count de Alton, who traveled from Normandy with William the Conqueror.

Nancy and Absalom began a new life in western Rutherford County in present-day Eagleville. His children were Nicholas, John, Charlotte, Joseph, Samuel,

Jane, Noah and Absalom. Son Nicholas was a missionary in Indian territory and wed a Native American wife.

In the 1820s, Absalom erected one of the original structures in Rutherford County. The grandiose design was a four-room frame house of yellow poplar and a limestone foundation built at the hand of his slaves. This Classical Revival home on Rocky Glade Road was constructed of limestone rocks brought in by oxcart onto 600 acres of pristine land. The floors were wide poplar planks, and the walls were finished with wainscoting. The double-fronted country home had seven bays with a two-story gabled wooden façade. The house retains a stone chimney and a handsome wide, Greek Revival doorway.

When Absalom died at age 65 in 1835 in formerly Williamson County, his son Noah and wife Mary Batie Sayers owned and enlarged the home, creating a Federal style. They covered the entire edifice in brick and added two upper and two lower rooms. Noah built a curved stairway with a cherry balustrade and carved scrolls. He also constructed another entrance with a two-story Greek Revival portico and an entranceway with oval walls. The cherry, ash hall was a stunning feature, as well as the walls of brick that spanned 18 inches thick.

Mary and Noah were known in the community as very warm and hospitable to guests. Their children were Nancy, Mary Jane, Absalom Robert and Charlotte.

Noah's son-in-law Elder John Knox Womack, Freewill Baptist minister, and daughter Mary lived in the home during the Civil War. They used their home to entertain and opened doors wide for big gatherings for church members. The home today is often referred to as the "Old Womack Place."

Union troops passed by the home in tense, unnerving movements. Nathan Forrest's Cavalry was on the Womack farm when Union soldiers appeared. Mary Sayers signaled Forrest's soldiers of impending danger, and the Confederates forged an immediate getaway. While Confederates camped near

the Womack home, they dug trenches 6 feet long and cooked their meals on site.

John Womack, a nephew of Brig. Gen. A.P. Hill, served under Forrest and was in Company D of the 8th Tennessee Cavalry. While stationed in Murfreesboro, he hid in a peddler's wagon that was carrying supplies. When they approached Union lines near Eagleville, the Federal sentry examined the boxes with his saber but missed Womack, who narrowly escaped death. Womack then visited his family and returned to his command. He was later captured by the Union and sent to the despicable prison Camp Morton in Indiana.

In 1869, Womack was ordained a Baptist preacher and ministered in the Round Lick Presbytery. When his wife Mary Scales died at age 31, he wed her sister Charlotte in 1873, and they had six children. John died in 1922 and is buried in a family cemetery in Eagleville. Their daughter Nancy and husband Joseph A. Johnston inherited the home, which they remodeled in 1938. In 1973, William Johnston owned the property.