

This Old House: Appendix 1

Letter from Janice Meek Fritzmeier June 2008

Following her visit to Bowling Green and our conversation at Honeyshuck in October 2007, I wrote to Janice Meek Fritzmeier, whose parents bought This Old House from the Clarks in 1944, subdivided it into four apartments and maintained it as an income property until they sold it in 1957. I was preparing a history of the house and asked for her recollections. TJ:02.14.10

Hi, Ted:

I hope that this is not too late for your talk. I have been putting it off for so long!

I was 8 or 9 years old when my Dad bought the old Champ Clark house, Honeyshuck, directly from the Clark children. I am thinking that it was probably Senator Bennett Clark now that I think of it. (My grandfather, Guy Robert Meek, who had the Blue Oak Handle Company in Bowling Green, was a friend of Champ Clark. His daughter, Helen Meek (Bankhead), worked for Senator Bennett Clark in his St. Louis office, then later moved to Washington, D.C. to work for him there. It could have been this connection that prompted my Dad to buy the Clark house. In 1940 my mom and dad and I went on the train from St. Louis to Washington, D.C. to visit my Aunt Helen and to visit Sen. Clark's office and meet all her political friends.) It was also my mom and dad's plan to make apartments to accommodate some of the new families that were working at the Hercules War Plant near Louisiana.

When my dad bought Honeyshuck, it was full of the Clarks' furniture, clothing, books and dishes. My dad offered to mail the books to Senator Bennett Clark, but he told my dad that there was nothing that he wanted. My mom and dad and I moved from our house at 217 North Main Cross (a house that was still there the last time I was in B.G.) to Honeyshuck for about 2-3 years and they worked very hard taking out the staircases going upstairs—one in the very front and one curvy one in the back—scraping off wallpaper and painting walls, tearing out some walls and putting walls in other places in order to convert the house into four apartments. First we lived in the right side, then we moved to the left apartment which had the marble fireplace and many shelves full of Clark's books. We rented the two apartments upstairs—one to my mother's sister, Maurine Scott, and her daughter, Mary Lou, while her husband was in the Army in Italy. Mary Lou and I spent many hours each day playing in the big "coach house" or garage, playing house, and dress up. I remember a black beaded cape and a large black hat with an ostrich feather and some beaded purses. There was a tall, windup record player and many records—some by Al Jolson and other artists of his time. There was a well on the right side of the house. My friends and I spent many hours playing in the ravine and skating up and down the sidewalk in front with its many small steps and across the bridge. I remember that there was a mulberry tree on the ravine side, a lilac bush in front, and in the early spring, there were tulips, crocus and hyacinths coming up through the snow next to the front sidewalk.

My mom didn't care much for old things, so she sold many of the antiques, including the dishes: over a hundred pieces of Haviland china—the Bluebird pattern—which you now have recovered. There were many beautiful vases with china or porcelain flowers on the sides. We did keep some very ornate monogrammed silverware—the knives had large handles—and I still

have a couple of pieces but have not been able to find them. I remember a massive oak desk in one of the rooms on the right side. I used a bedroom set with laminate wood that was beautiful—bed, chest and dresser—for about 10 years. There was a loveseat and two matching chairs that had clawed legs—my mom refinished and recovered them and we had them in our house for many years. I also had a dresser set made of tortoise shell with the C monogram, but it finally just crumbled with age.

I didn't care much for antiques either, but I did love one very tall, cut glass vase. My mom gave me that vase and I still have it. I also have a rocker from the Clark house. At one time I had a dark wood secretary that folded down to write on, but my mom gave it to her sister in Arizona. When we had finished the renovation, we moved back to our house on North Main Cross (which we had rented to Robert Bond, retired journalist out of St. Louis who wrote for the B.G. Times for many years, and his artist wife, Mary) and then we had a long list of renters. I remember the Brewsters, Mrs. Minnie Motley, the Watkins—their son, Perry, was a basketball star when I was in high school in the '50's.

After World War II, there was not as much need for rentals. My dad sold the Blue Oak Handle Company in the early '50's to someone in southern Missouri because the timber supply in this area was dwindling. He bought a corncob pipe factory which he had across from the movie theater for a short time. He also was trying to find someone who might be interested in the history of Honeyshuck to buy it. But the time was evidently not right. We were neighbors with the Hungates—Bill's parents—and I think that my dad tried to get him interested in it. I do remember that my dad divided the land that was next to the house and several new houses were built on it. I don't know to whom he sold Honeyshuck.

My dad, Kenneth Meek, served two terms as mayor of Bowling Green sometime in the late 40's. It was during that time that the "White Way" was installed on Main Street—a whole row of tall lights—and I remember that I was given the honor of officially flipping the switch to turn them on.

My mother, Juanita Wright Meek, attended a florist design school in 1950, then opened the Bouquet Florist Shoppe on the enclosed front porch of our home on North Main Cross. It turned out that she was very talented and we were pretty busy with weddings, corsages and funeral pieces. I was her assistant while I was in high school.

My dad was a real estate broker, but he also was an accountant and kept the books for many businesses in town and he also did income taxes in the law office of Mr. Haley. But then he decided to go to Houston, Texas in 1953 to be a realtor during the land boom there, I left for college in Illinois, and my mom eventually sold her florist shop to Marjorie Williams and moved to Quincy, then Canton, Mo.. They both finally ended up here in Bradenton to be close to their two grandchildren.

My dad was very interested in history and he would be so happy to see all the interest in the restoration of Honeyshuck. I am sorry that I don't know any real details about the purchase and sale of the house. This is all from a memory of 60-64 years ago! I do have one other thing to tell. My dad's younger sister, Martha Meek (Parker) was 10 years younger than her sister, Helen. She lived near to us here in Florida and she just passed away in 2006 at the age of 91. She told

me a wonderful memory that she had as a little girl in Bowling Green. The Meek family home was a large house just behind the Staley Garage on the north side of the square. She said that their house, built in the early 1900's, was the first house to have an indoor bathroom. She said that when Champ Clark died, many dignitaries came for the services. Martha's Dad put her up on his shoulders as the procession passed by the house on their way to the cemetery. He told her "I want you to remember this day when many important men came to honor Champ Clark." It was a very long and solemn procession. It impressed her greatly.

My mom had a piece of monogrammed stationery in her papers and I have lost it. It was written either by Genevieve the wife or the daughter and since there was one word crossed out, I am guessing that she copied it over before she sent it. It was to President Woodrow Wilson and the gist of it was that she congratulated him on his victory as President and something about woman's suffrage. If I should find it, I will send it.

This is all that I can think of. Hope it helps a little.

/s/ Janice Meek Fritzmeier