

Building gone, memories remain of iconic village house

John Lowe The Daily Jeffersonian Published: February 1, 2012 1:00PM

NEW CONCORD -- The George Jones House fell to a backhoe Tuesday but the house will live on in the memories of Bernice McKirahan and her cousins, Jim and Jack Taylor, two brothers who grew up in the house during the 1930s and '40s.

The house stood on property north of Main and west of Comin streets.

"My brother, Jim, and I were born in the house behind the George Jones House," Jack Taylor said.

The Jones house (named after the Welsh stonemason who had built it) belonged to Taylor's grandparents, George and Jane Tom, who had acquired it around the turn of the 20th century. After the death of Jane Tom, Taylor's parents, Kenneth and Hattie Taylor, moved the family into the Jones house, where they lived from 1937 until 1950.

McKirahan, who is older than her cousins, also spent a lot of time in the house.

"Back then, children were expected to do a lot of things that children today would never be expected to do," she said.

For example, when her grandmother, Jane, was afflicted with leukemia, she had caretakers during the day but there was no one to look after her in the evenings.

"She was bedfast in a front room of the house," McKirahan said. "I was in the eighth grade at Bloomfield. I would ride the bus to New Concord and spend the night in the room with her. Then, I would get on the bus in the morning and ride back to Bloomfield."

But not all of McKirahan's memories of the house are sad and the house itself had always impressed her.

"It was big and spacious with oak floors and the woodwork in it was ornate," she said.

Taylor agreed that the house was large with three bedrooms and a bathroom upstairs and both front and back living rooms downstairs.

"It had a winding staircase and I used to slide down the bannister," he said.

"It was a giant staircase," McKirahan said. "The bannister was so shiny and smooth, so there was no chance to get a splinter."

McKirahan remembers her grandmother preparing meals in the large kitchen. That was in the days before the modern refrigerator, so all of the food had to be prepared the day it was purchased.

Taylor recalls the heating system.

"We had a coal-fired furnace with a coal chute," he said. "I can remember the coal truck coming by every now and then to deliver a load of coal down the chute."

Of course, during the winter, tending to the furnace was a daily chore.

In the wintertime, he would join his friends in sledding down the hill from High Street to end the run in the front yard of the house.

From the house, Taylor could see the B&O Railroad south of the National Road (Main Street) and the railroad's water tower.

"The trains would stop there to take on water and the hobos would get on and off," he said. "I can remember them walking up the hill. They would come to the house to ask for food and Mom would give them something to eat."

Closer to Main Street, a local man, John Abbott and his father built one of the first supermarkets where the Dairy Duchess does business today.

"It burned in 1944," Taylor said. "Just west of it was a filling station [where Riesbeck's is now]. A truck was delivering gasoline when a spark set it off. It was a major fire and we thought we were going to lose the whole west side of town."

In another boyhood memory, he can recall road crews widening the National Road after World War II.

"That was a big event," he said, "and that was when they put up concrete retaining walls along portions of Main Street."

A lot of unusual events occurred in the village in its earlier years, McKirahan said, and the George Jones house figured in some of them.

She recalled that her aunt, Ella Thompson, died in the house. McKirahan's father had told her stories about the great influenza pandemic of 1918. Many people in the village and surrounding area died. Her grandfather helped with the burials, using a horse and wagon as a hearse. But he had difficulty finding anyone he could hire to help with lowering caskets into the graves.

"Everyone was afraid of catching the flu," said McKirahan, adding that she has many bittersweet recollections.

The house, as it was, is gone, but in one sense it remains.

"We have lots of good memories," Taylor said.

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