

# **The Williams House**

## **Originally Constructed South of Fayette**

## **Now A Home East of Boonville**

This is a guest newsletter by Dr. Mary Ellen McVicker

Colden Williams and his three brothers, John, Willoughby, and William Williams, left their home in Maryland and served in the Revolutionary War. Upon their return home, they learned that both their parents had died during their absence.

At the close of the Revolutionary War, the Kentucky Territory was opened for the benefit of veterans. Grants of land were given to veterans who desired a homestead. So, Colden Williams left Maryland forever and obtained a land grant in Madison County, Kentucky, which is where Daniel Boone and his family originally settled. On 22 March 1787, Colden married Mary Short in Madison County, Kentucky. The couple had 9 children: Uriah, Sarah, Mary (nicknamed Polly), Nancy, Elizabeth, Charity, John C., Willoughby, and Mahaly.

The family had been brought up in the "Hard Shell" Baptist faith and soon Colden became a Baptist circuit riding minister. The family eventually moved westward to Cape Girardeau, Missouri Territory and in 1816 arrived in Howard County where Colden continued to preach and the family bought land for \$1.25 per acre south of present-day Fayette, Missouri. This farm remained in the family for almost two centuries.

While Colden was busy spreading the Gospel, Mary ran the farm and raised the children. The family constructed a one-story dogtrot log cabin by a nearby creek. She died in 1823 and Colden followed her to the grave in 1832. Their youngest son, Willoughby Williams, and his family moved into the dogtrot cabin. Willoughby and his wife, Susan Turner, had a 4th of July party in 1838 and their two-year-old toddler son, Colden Williams (named for his grandfather), drowned in the creek that day. The distraught parents took apart the dogtrot log cabin and moved it away from the creek onto the top of a nearby hill where there was a clear view of the landscape and youngsters could be seen. They added a second story and a one-story rear ell to the house. These additions were built by mortice and tenon construction. The entire exterior of the dwelling was then weatherboarded with walnut lumber which was also used for the woodwork and the floors. The dogtrot logs are all made of walnut except for one which is hickory wood. The interior was then plastered and wallpapered in the latest style.

The Williams family lived in the house for several generations until 1965. During the Civil War all the men who lived on the property (both free and enslaved) fought for the Confederacy. The final Williams family member to own the farm was John Williams and his wife, Eva Williams. He was an only child and the couple had no children. They did not live on the farm, but owned a house in Fayette so nobody lived on the property after John's father died in 1965.

Although numerous people attempted to purchase the house and property, John Williams always refused to sell as he had livestock in barns close to the house and felt there would be issues with the smells found on an active livestock farm.



The house deteriorated over the years and in 1992, John and Eva Williams gave the house to Wiley and Mary Ellen McVicker on the condition that they move it off the property. Wiley was his veterinarian for the livestock and Mary Ellen had fallen in love with the house the first time she was inside it. Fayette Retired Superintendent of Schools, Bill Clark, had taken her and Jim Denny from Glasgow who worked in the State Office of Historic Preservation on a tour of the house. She was smitten in spite of the raccoon feces and the derelict condition.

Being a veterinarian who was on emergency duty all the time, the couple had some unusual requirements. They were living in Boonville at the time. Remember it was 1991 so some things are different from today. They needed to find:

1. Farm property
2. The land had to be on a blacktop road for emergency duty in the winter
3. The land had to be on the Boonville phone exchange for emergencies
4. The land had to be within 10 minutes of their animal hospital for midnight emergencies.
5. The McVicker children were already attending Boonville public schools and they wanted to remain in their current school system



It took 6 months but the requirements were met with the purchase of a farm on Highway 98 east of Boonville. Ridgewell and Ridgewell Construction (R & R) of New Franklin began disassembling the Williams house in November 1991 and spent the next 13 months putting it back together east of Boonville.

There was brief talk about trying to move the entire house in one piece, but the Boonville Missouri River Bridge in 1991 was not the current bridge and was too narrow.

Thus, each piece in the entire two-story house was numbered and labeled and taken apart, hauled to east of Boonville and then re-assembled. Even the walnut weatherboarding was put back in place. The original front step was brought as were the door knobs, hinges, and shutters along with the logs and hand cut lumber rafters, etc.

The cleaning, disassembly, marking each piece was a huge job and one that the Ridgeways had to develop techniques for "on the fly" as they were very experienced carpenters, but had never done this type of reconstruction. The reassembly was even more demanding, but the Ridgeways clearly accomplished it beautifully.

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The interior woodwork, ceilings, and floors were totally restored. The fireplaces and brick work required special attention, as shown below.

For safety reasons, new brick was used for chimneys, but original materials were able to be used for almost all of the house.



Of course, the house was modernized with plumbing, electricity, and a modern heating and air conditioning system. Now McVicker grandchildren race up and down the stairs as a home built by a Revolutionary War veteran and his wife remains an active residence over 200 years later. Hopefully it will still be functional 200 years in the future.

