



# A RIVERSIDE TREASURE FOR 176 YEARS

Written by **LOYD MCINTOSH**  
Photographed by **BOB CRISP**

I'm standing in the hallway of what is believed to be the oldest house in St. Clair County, chatting with three generations of ladies who have called this place their home: Shannon Cochran; her adult daughters, Maddie Staples and Breanna Macon; and sisters Cynthia Cochran, grandmother to Maddie and Breanna, and Beth Jones.

They are giving me a tour of the house that has been added onto over the years since it was first constructed in the 1840s, the first house in the new town of Riverside. Although the family has remodeled some parts of the house over the years, they have done a fantastic job maintaining its original character. The original wood floors may not be terribly level in most places but they are stunning to look at and are as sturdy as the Brooklyn Bridge, a testament to the home's ingenious design.









Shannon and Chad Cochran

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“We’ve had to pull up some floors because it was sagging in some places. The house is over 170 years old,” say Shannon. “The house sits on rocks and tree stumps, and the floor joists are literally trees that were squared off with saws and they are this wide,” she explains while holding her arms a good two feet apart to indicate the size of the joists.

Just spending a few minutes walking through each room, you realize quickly how well-built the house truly is and its importance to the area’s history. The Coleman House could be summed up as a living museum with a lot to say about the last 170 years. For instance, there is a bullet hole on the front porch made during the Civil War, and the family also uncovered a Civil War-era rifle during a recent renovation.

Beth, a retired English teacher for the Pell City School System, took the occasion of my visit to write a short history of Coleman House. “You can use whatever you’d like for your story,” she says. A writer’s dream. Thank you for the head start, Mrs. Jones.

The Coleman House was built in 1848 by W.A. Coleman shortly after settling in Riverside with his family. The house was built with six rooms in a dog trot style with an open-ended breezeway through the center of the house with enclosed living



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spaces on either side – the cooking and dining rooms on one side and the bedrooms on the other. Each room emptied into the dog trot, providing a covered sitting area with a cool breeze to help take the edge off the summer heat long before Willis Carrier invented air conditioning.

Coleman's youngest grandson, T.S. Coleman, and his wife Cecil, inherited the house in 1906 and, soon thereafter, made the first series of renovations and additions. First, he enclosed the dog trot with glass and wooden doors, added a new kitchen and dining room to the back of the house, and added the house's first bathroom.

Beth explains that her great-grandfather, also named W.A. Coleman, inherited the house in 1955 and began more renovations two years later.

"To me, the most interesting fact of the second renovation was the tearing down of the traveler's room from the rest of the house," she says. "In past years, a traveler's room was available for guests that were traveling because there were no motels!"

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The Coleman House has been under the ownership of the Coleman family - now Cochran, but the same family lineage - for almost 200 years. The home's current occupants, Shannon and Chad Cochran, moved into the house on December 1, 2016, after Cynthia used it as a rental property for several years. The last renovations had been made in the 1960s and 1970s, making the interior a time capsule dating back to the Nixon administration.

"There was a gold chandelier, the walls were light blue, the carpet was light blue," explains Sharon, still in a state of shock that the home's original floors had been covered with 70s shag carpeting. This room," she says while standing in the family room, "was a formal living room that nobody ever came in."

After their first Christmas in the home, the entire family started restoring the home to its former





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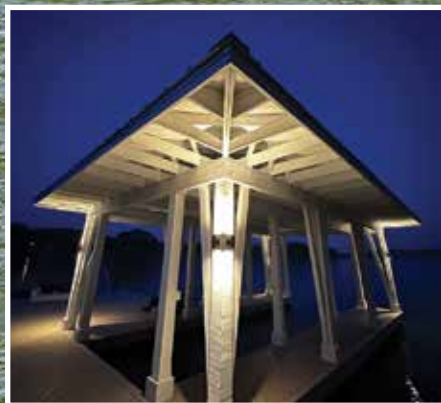




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glory, a process Maddie, who was 15 at the time, says wasn't ideal.

"We renovated while we lived here. It was terrible," she admits. "There was carpet in every single room of this house except for the kitchen and bathrooms, and so we had to pull up all of those tack strips. That was a nightmare."

Almost a decade later, the Coleman House is as stunning as ever. With its white exterior shining in the late summer sun, it has withstood the test of time and is a testament to a family that has cherished this historic home for almost two centuries.

Here's to another 176 years.



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