

The Battle-Friedman House & Gardens



This house was built in 1835 by Alfred Battle and his wife, Millicent Beale Battle. Alfred was from North Carolina and Millicent was from Maryland, but they met in Georgia. In the 1820s, the northern parts of the Old South were filling up and unless you were the oldest son, you had to make your own way in the South. The oldest son would inherit the family plantation and property, while the second and third sons moved away to begin their own plantations. Alfred was not the oldest son, so he moved further south to Georgia, where he later met Millicent. Soon afterwards, their family decided to move to the territory of Alabama.

Alabama, like other large territories, was open and readily available after the Creek Indian sessions and the War of 1812. The Battles settled in Greene County, Alabama, where they started their “rags to riches” story. They started living in a simple cabin, but by the end of their lives they had a beautiful plantation home. From 1826 to 1846, Tuscaloosa was the capitol of Alabama. Alfred, rising in status, due to his agricultural and later business interests, wanted to be closer to the “scene” so they built this townhouse in 1835.

Originally the house consisted of a foyer, a cross hall, two parlors, the dining area, and a small staircase. It did not have the monumental portico out front. It was a very simple,

Federal style home. The Battles used the home for weekend retreats and entertaining until 1844, when they decided to move in full-time. That's when the Greek Revival style monumental portico was added, a very stylish look in Tuscaloosa during the mid-19th century. Millicent hired on an English landscape architect to design the infamous gardens, more on them later. The house has been opened up more than you would have originally seen in

the 19th century. There were originally paneled doors on each side of the foyer enclosing each parlor and a tight return staircase in this cross hall. However, the Friedman's opened up the place in the 1920s. That's when they put in narrow plank oak floors seen throughout the front part of the house.



The Ladies' Parlor



As we enter the house, the front foyer borders two parlors, one to the left and one to the right side of the house. We'll begin our tour in the left parlor, the Ladies' parlor. On the right wall hand portraits of the home's original owners, Mr. & Mrs. Battle.

(1) Alfred Battle shared ownership of a very successful shipping business, which shipped very fine, expensive fabrics. The Battles were quite wealthy but also very generous with their fortune. Alfred started The Bible College Depository in town, which helped house and distribute bibles for missionaries. He also gave money through various philanthropy efforts around town.



(2) Millicent Battle was a borderline Puritan. She wasn't much for the elegant lifestyle and was rather cheeky as well. When the "Stars Fell On Alabama" in 1833, many people thought that the end of the world was at hand due to the meteor shower. A story is told of Millicent coming out to the street and telling her neighbors what she really thought of them and their beliefs. As we now know, the world did not end that day, but I'm sure a few friendships with Millicent did.



- (3) The parlor furniture is set up much like it would have been for the Ladies parlor. Here we have the Chaperon sofa. You can see that two people can sit comfortably on either side but the person in the middle does not have a headrest or much back support. They would be sitting bolt up the entire time. That would be the chaperon. The dating pair would be positioned on both ends and would be separated by the chaperon. This old yellow parlor came from the Dearing Swaim House, here in town. A majority of the furniture located at the Battle-Friedman House are pieces from historic Tuscaloosa families that no longer have a home anymore, and we are honored to showcase many of them here in the Battle-Friedman Home.
- (4) This lady in the portrait on the left wall is Alfred Battle's mother, who came down to live with them in her later years. She later moved down to Mobile.

Gentlemen's Parlor



Across the foyer from the Ladies' Parlor is the Gentlemen's Parlor.

(1) The Gentlemen's Parlor features a magnificent set of Renaissance revival furniture. This blue velvet, 12-piece, double parlor set was commissioned for the Fitts family, who were big in banking and industry in Tuscaloosa. You can still see their names on businesses



throughout Tuscaloosa. The furniture was commissioned for them at the firm Mitchell and Rammelsberg in Cincinnati, Ohio and it was such a large and expensive order that the owner of the firm actually rode down on the steamboat to meet the family and personally thank them for the order. You can see its use of mythical and classical faces carved into the set. Again, this is not an original furniture set to the home, but their home is gone so we're happy to showcase these historic pieces in the Battle-Friedman Home.

(2) The Pier mirror on the left wall is a Friedman family piece.

(3) This table is a rare, special item. We call it the Titanic table because it was owned by Isidor Straus, the founder Macy's in New York, who, along with his wife, were unfortunately killed on the Titanic ship. They had a fabulous 5th avenue mansion in NY. They were first generation Swiss immigrants. Their children were appalled by their elegant lifestyle and feel that this led to their own demises. They felt their parents only went on the



Titanic to spend money and show off their wealth, and they believed their parents should have never been on the Titanic. After the tragedy of the sinking, the children wanted nothing to do with the American side of their parent's life. The servants, of course, could not afford to take care of a house that large and elegant so they sell the house, but many of them took pieces of furniture with them and passed them down to their descendants. Unknown to us, this piece somehow ended up in Tuscaloosa and was verified as a Straus piece. Once again, although not an original piece to the home, we are happy to have this furniture piece displayed in the Battle-Friedman home.

Dining Room



From the front parlors, we follow the foyer straight into the dining room at the back of the house.

(1) As we step back in the dining room, you'll see the wide plank, heart pine floors. We've gone up two steps because below once housed an English, or daylight, basement. Being partially underground, the second dining room in the basement stayed a little bit cooler in the summer. In the hottest days of the year, you could retreat down there and still have

light and air moving and it was much cooler. Up here is the formal dining room and this is where you would entertain in the grand manner.



(2) Along with that high style entertaining, we have the Battle family silver service. This is silver on copper.

(3) This mirror here was donated from a Tuscaloosa art collector. It is from the 1850s, but is not original to the house. Although beautiful, it is not something that someone from the deep south would have really been interested in.



The Second Floor

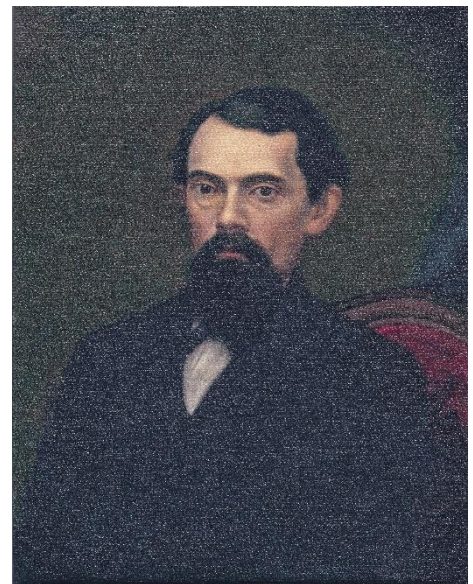
From the dining room, we'll move back into the cross hall, and go up the stairs to the second floor. On the second floor, we'll learn more about the home's second family, the Friedmans.



Friedman's Parlor



(1) This is Bernhard Freidman, the business and commercial man who bought the house in 1875. Bernhard Friedman was a Hungarian immigrant. He came over to the states in 1844, ironically to escape the warfare in Europe and only 20 years later he's caught up in the Civil War here in the United States. He came over through Ellis Island in New York, basically with just the lent in his pockets. He bought up enough supplies to fill up a backpack, went out to the country, sold that and came back with the profits and bought a wagon, sold that, came back and bought a horse and wagon, and so on. That cycle continued until he opened a shared store. He even opened his own store in Atlanta. After the Civil War and after Atlanta had burned, he moved to Tuscaloosa and opened a store called the Atlanta Store and he and his family bought this house. The house was passed down to Bernhard's sons after his death. The Friedman family loved the home and took care of this house until the 1960s when his Bernhard's youngest son, Hugo Friedman, died and left the house to the city.



- (2) In this room we also have pieces of the Friedman's parlor set. They originally had these downstairs, but since we interpret more of the Friedman's story upstairs, they are in this space.
- (3) These two paintings are family pieces. We have heard one version that they were just pieces that the family owned and one version that their daughter Emma painted these, but we still

are not sure.

- (4) The Friedman installed these cast iron mantels. As they get warm, they radiate heat throughout the whole room.
- (5) This instrument is a little melodeon. It's a wonderful, horrific little thing. You would have to pump the petals the entire time to make it's sound, like an accordion. It's very quiet. It's actually used to practice music before you play on the piano. With an expensive instrument like the piano, you wouldn't want a child learning to play by banging on the piano. Plus it wore out children, which the parents must have liked. The music displayed are lyrics created by the poet Robert Loveman, who was Bernhard Friedman's nephew He wrote his famous poem "April Rain" at this house. It's believed that his poem was inspired by looking out the window at his aunt's beautiful gardens.

Hugo Friedman's Bedroom



- (1) This rug is an authentic antebellum rug. Again, not a piece of the house but a piece from the era.
- (2) This room is Hugo Friedman's bedroom. This is set up much the way he had it set up when he lived here. He didn't have his trophies up on the wall; he was a very humble individual. He gave generously to many organizations. Hugo was a founding member of Rotary, and helped many students finish college. It was sort of widely known around town that if you had good grades but simply couldn't afford to pay tuition, you could ask Mr. Hugo, and then you would go back to school your tuition would be paid for. It wasn't a scholarship, he simply took care of it out of the kindness of his heart. He loved music and football. He always sat in the press box at Crimson Tide football games. He was close friends with Paul Bear Bryant, who spent a good amount of time here. Toward the end of his life, he was in a hospital bed in the downstairs parlor, but members of the football world would still stop by and spend time with him.
- (3) On the mantel here, we have images of what the room looked like in the 1920s, when Hugo went to school. Here you have all the nice furniture in the big, fine house, but it was still a kid's bedroom. There still pennant flags, posters of girls on the wall. He was a kid.

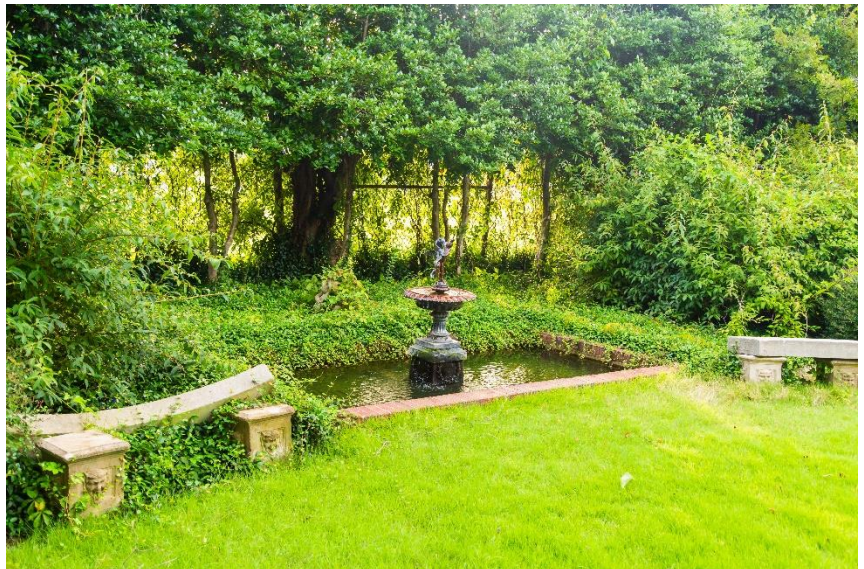
Side Lawn



From Hugo Friedman's room, we go back down the stairs and exit the house through the side door onto the side lawn.

(1) This little building is the only antebellum greenhouse in the state of Alabama, built by the Battles.

(2) The pond was put in by the Friedman's.



(3) The Friedman's put in a gazebo in the side lawn similar to this one, but this one is not the original.



(4) You can see on the side of the house where the original part of the house is, with the dark red brick on the right/front of the house. The addition to the house is shown where the brick gets a little lighter and the windows are topped with arches. The federal style of the house was very popular in Philadelphia and Washington DC. You can connect the styles with this home as well. The Battles also covered the front bricks of the house with plaster and painted it to look like rose marble.

The Gardens



(1) These gardens are the oldest documented gardens in the state and, as you can see, are filled with many geometric box patterns and designs.

Millicent Battle commissioned Peter McArthur, an English landscape architect, to design these very gardens. Peter had also worked as Lord Ashburden's landscape architect at a house called Lagrange in England. Peter came to Alabama, working on multiple

state projects, such as the capitol building in Tuscaloosa and other grand gardens, doing landscaping. Millicent convinced him to do the gardens here before he left town on his next assignment. In 1997, through a generous gift by Mrs. Anne Boyd Russell, who remembered hearing Robert Loveman's poem as a child, the gardens were restored to their original design.



2. Originally this house and its property possessed the entire city block. Before his death, Hugo Friedman gave the back yard to the YMCA (which has since relocated). He also bought the Jemison Mansion and deeded it to the library, a huge reason why the mansion has been saved from destruction.

Questions:

- 1) When was the house built?
- 2) When was Tuscaloosa the Capitol of Alabama?
- 3) When did the Battles move into the home full-time?
- 4) What type of sofa is in the Ladies Parlor?
- 5) What style of furniture is in the Gentleman's Parlor?
- 6) Why are there stairs leading to the dining room?
- 7) Why is there a basement in the home?
- 8) When did Bernard Friedman buy the home?
- 9) Where is Bernard Friedman from?
- 10) Who left the house to the city of Tuscaloosa?
- 11) What poem was written in the house?
- 12) What famous person was friends with Hugo?
- 13) What type of rug is in Hugo's bedroom?
- 14) Why is the greenhouse important?
- 15) Who designed the gardens?