

Cedarwood History

The Yarbrough House at Cedarwood, circa 1910



Whites Creek Historic District
National Register of Historic Places



Whites Creek Historic District

Listed on the National Register of Historic Places, Whites Creek Historic District is the best representation of an architecturally and historically significant rural community in Metropolitan Nashville-Davidson Country. Settled in 1780, Whites Creek is one of the first areas settled in the county seat of Tennessee, and has been continually used for agricultural purposes ever since. While Whites Creek has lost many of

its historic buildings, there remains a good concentration of surviving buildings dating from 1830 which reflect the character of a rural community that has evolved over two centuries, yet has never lost that character. The buildings represent a wide variety of architectural styles, ranging from nineteenth century Tennessee Vernacular styles to the revival styles of the early twentieth century. **The Yarbrough House at Cedarwood** is an excellent example of a Tennessee Vernacular structure. Built in 1835, the house is a two-story, weatherboard, double-pen plan with each room opening onto a double gallery across the front.

Whites Creek a Tribute to one of Nashville s Earliest Settlers

In the spring of 1779, James Robertson led an exploration party of nine to the part of Middle Tennessee which would become the city of Nashville. Among these men was Zachariah White, part of the group left by Robertson at French Lick to plant corn in anticipation of future settlers. One discovery made by Zachariah White during his early explorations was the body of water named after him, Whites Creek. White was killed April 2, 1781, in an Indian raid on the French Lick station where he was serving as school teacher. He was survived by his wife, Granny White (Granny White Pike, officially Overton Lane) namesake of another of Nashville s early historic sites.



Christmas Eve, 1779

Fredrick Stump is the earliest known settler on Whites Creek, arriving with his family on Christmas Eve, 1779. By 1785, Stump had acquired a land grant of 640 acres on Whites Creek. At that time he co-signed a note for the establishment of a ferry (the second across the Cumberland River) which would connect Nashville to a road leading through his land to Clarksville, opening the way for the settlement of the area. Other settlers began acquiring land in Whites Creek after 1785 and the area quickly developed into one of Nashville's earliest communities.

Stump is a key figure in the history of the region due to his extensive land ownership and his role as businessman, farmer, master miller, distiller, and tavern keeper (Frederick Stump House.) The elder Stump left a valuable estate when he died in 1820 at the age of ninety-seven, and his property was divided among his younger widow and several of his children and grandchildren. Eighty-nine acres on the east side of White's creek was inherited by his grandchild, Tennessee Stump. This track of land would become the future site of Cedarwood.



Cedarwood, the Legacy of James Yarbrough

When he came to Tennessee from Warren County, North Carolina as a two-year-old child in 1802, the neighborhood into which James Yarbrough and his family moved had, like much of the South, only recently been a wilderness. With the opening of former Indian lands and the heavy migration into the state, the period from 1806-1819 was one of prosperity and rapid development in Tennessee.

In 1827, young James Yarbrough and his wife Margaret, paid \$120 for seven acres located just east of Whites Creek on the road from Nashville to Clarksville from Catherine Stump, the widow of Frederick Stump, one of Whites Creek's wealthiest families. The Yarbrough family lived on this small piece of land, while James Yarbrough rented a larger tract of nearby farmland to earn his livelihood.

The 1820s heralded the arrival of Steamboats to the Cumberland River, opening new markets for crop commerce and fueling a frantic period of business prosperity for land owners who grew cash crops like tobacco, cotton and corn. James Yarbrough prospered, and in 1834 he was able to pay \$700 for 89 acres, which Tennessee Stump inherited, from his grandfather. Soon after the larger tract was bought, Yarbrough built a two-story frame house, which served as the new family residence. Other adjoining tracts were purchased during the years which followed, and by the close of the 1840s, as he became increasingly affluent, James Yarbrough also emerged as a community leader.

Life in the agricultural South was largely devoted to raising or making the goods necessary to sustain the needs of the family and little time remained for cultural diversions. All able bodied men were subject to militia duty, and the militia musters served as festive social occasions for the whole country. Yarbrough, who held the rank of captain in the state militia, became a justice of the peace in 1841. He was active in politics, and candidates for public office made campaign speeches at his home, which was a center of neighborhood activity.

The pace of life on the Yarbrough's 330 acre farm quickened in 1845 when the Whites Creek Turnpike was completed, replacing the old road to Clarksville. The Yarbrough House, in the spirit of Frederick Stump, served as a tavern and inn to accommodate the additional number of travelers coming through the area.

In his rise to wealth, James Yarbrough was a fair reflection of the section in which he lived. While his father, and then Yarbrough himself worked the land, countless others were also helping to transform the Whites Creek Pike region into a land rich in agricultural production. The political issues which were being discussed on the Yarbrough place, as they were by many of the controlling class throughout the South,

gradually intensified during the 1840s and they grew more ominous during the 1850s as the schism widened between the slaveholding and the non-slaveholding sections of the country.

Although several of the Yarbrough children had married and left home, a son and daughter were still in the household when Abraham Lincoln was elected president of the United States in 1860. In February of 1861, the month after Lincoln's inauguration, the voters of Tennessee chose to remain in the Union, but in early May, after the bombardment of Fort Sumter, the state established a military connection with the Confederacy. As Tennessee prepared to leave the Union, both James Yarbrough and the way of life which had developed on Whites Creek and across the South were in their final days.

Less than two weeks before formal secession, as a huge public demonstration was being planned in Nashville to show support for the Confederacy, Yarbrough died at his home. The next day, only a few hours after his funeral and burial on his beloved farm, the church bells of the city rang for half an hour signaling some 25,000 men, women and children to gather for the parade and for speeches which would continue into the evening. The first battle of Manassas occurred less than two months after Yarbrough's death, and the following February, Nashville fell to Union forces; bringing the old style of life in the area to an end.



A Century of Change

The Yarbrough House and a portion of the surrounding land were inherited by young James H. Yarbrough, but in 1873 the property was sold out of the family. In 1894 the house was purchased by Nannie Williams, and after its sale by her heirs in 1929, it was the property of Turner and Katherine Williams and underwent a major renovation in the 1940s before becoming the property of Earl Bates in 1981.

On September 10, 1984, The Yarbrough House at Cedarwood was placed on the National Register of Historic Places as part of the Whites Creek Historic District. In 2000, the Yarbrough House underwent a major restoration and renovation by new owners Joseph and Leann Kelly. Cedarwood was purchased by Karen, Nathan and Linda Wright in 2006 and zoned as a Historic Event House.



Bill and Jane Kelly at Cedarwood, July 21, 1951



Jane Pridemore Kelly at Cedarwood, July 21, 1951

Cedarwood Today

Preserving the charm, beauty and dignity of a simpler time, Historic Cedarwood now serves as a magnificent site for wedding ceremonies, receptions and special events.

With a history that spans 171 years, Cedarwood is a landmark anchored in the Whites Creek Historic District that has long offered motorists along this north Nashville highway a connection with its pastoral roots, despite the development springing up around it. The picturesque estate exudes the country charm once taken for granted on the fringes of Davidson County and is now a preserved parcel of the past for gatherings amidst the tranquil setting of an antebellum lawn or country meadow.

Cedarwood's beautifully appointed and impeccably restored historic Yarbrough House can host up to 75 guests for an elegant indoor setting, and the expansive pavilion, terraces and grounds create enchanting sites for outdoor events for up to 200 guests. For those immersed in the hustle and bustle of daily life, Cedarwood offers a breath of fresh air yet the convenience of being just eight miles north of downtown Nashville, one mile off Briley Parkway.

Excerpts from the book by Paul Clements, *A PAST REMEMBERED: A Collection of Antebellum Houses in Davidson County*, Volume 1, the National Register of Historic Places, and the Tennessee Blue Book.