



## History of Wooldridge Place

Wooldridge Place, Truman, Miller, Blackley, Richard House, circa 1870, in Pewee Valley is the 1995 Designers' Show House of the Bellarmine Women's Council. For many years the house had the address of 500 LaGrange Road. Now, newly remodeled, and part of a residential subdivision, its address is 104 Wooldridge Place.

The construction of the house reflects the history of its nineteenth century origins. Rapid industrial and urban expansion in this era led city residents to yearn for the fresh air, peace and simple life of the countryside. The development of rural retreats was made possible by the construction of railroads such as the line between Pewee Valley and Louisville built in the early 1850s.

In September 1869, Orville Truman, a Louisville dry goods merchant, born in New Hampshire, bought five and a half acres of land from Charles Cotton, a Pewee Valley resident who practiced law in Louisville, and an adjoining, just under five acres from the Gallagher family. In 1870, when Pewee Valley was incorporated by an Act of the Kentucky Legislature, Orville Truman was elected as one of the first trustees. Mr. Truman, age 48, was commuting from his business on

Louisville's Main Street, Truman Brothers and Swan, wholesalers in hats, caps and straw goods, to his Pewee Valley home where his wife, Kate, and six children were sheltered.

The original two and one-half story house, built in the popular Queen Anne Victorian style, had a parlor, reception room, dining room and kitchen on the first floor, four bedrooms on the second floor, with three small rooms above. Sheathed in five-inch painted poplar clapboard, with decorative areas of cedar shakes and fish-scale shingles, the house had a cross-gabled shingle roof with a dominant front gable and an octagonal tower in the rear. Overhanging eaves were ornamented with dentil molding. Summer breezes were captured with sleeping porches on each side of the second floor and by the roofed wrap-around porch attached directly to the parlor which also had doors on each side leading to, and catching the fresh air, from the porch.

In October 1892, Kate Truman, then a widow, sold the property to Samuel Adams Miller, a 53-year old manufacturer and one of the foremost civic minded business men of Louisville. Mr. Miller was very instrumental in construction of a

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bridge between Louisville and Jeffersonville. Mr. Miller and his wife, Henrietta Long, had several children, one of whom was Eleanor, who married Robert Worth Bingham in 1896. The Bingham for much of their married life lived with the Millers who also owned a large home on Louisville's fashionable Fourth Street. Both Robert Worth and Barry Bingham, their son born in 1906, would become owner and publisher of The Louisville Courier-Journal and The Louisville Times. An addition to the house possibly made by the Miller family, was a porte-cochere on the southwest side of the house.

The house was sold by the widowed Henrietta Miller in August of 1915 to Dr. J. B. Alexander of Louisville, and his wife, Ella, who owned it until March 1919. During the next four years the property was owned by G. S. and Sallie Forwood, E. E. (a Louisville broker) and Lillian Howard, Charles F. (Louisville insurance broker) and Cordele McDevitt, and Coleman McDevitt (also an insurance broker).

The property was bought from Coleman McDevitt by Gregory Taylor and Ophelia W. Blackley in March of 1923. During a period of the eighteen years of the Blackley ownership, a school composed of grades one through six was operated by Ophelia Blackley in the back room of the second floor. The last classes held in the school were in May 1933.

When the house was purchased from the Blackley heirs in April of 1941 by William S. and Gertrude Richard, it was to be considerably altered. The wrap-around Queen Anne porch was removed and a two-story Neoclassical porch with terrazo floor and steps was constructed on the front of the house. A rathskeller was built under the porch and in part of the existing basement. Mr. Richard, from the Eastern Parkway area of Louisville, was an executive of the A. L. Hinze Distillery and also had worked as an Oil broker.

The house was occupied by a member of the Richard family until 1993 when the Richard daughter, Billie Marie, known as Missy, died. Her heirs sold the property in December of 1993 to Donald R. Henson who with his wife, Karen, transferred the property to the Henson Development Co., Inc., a few weeks later.

The Henson Company began an extensive remodeling of the home in 1994. Sonny Whittle, an architectural artist (who also is well known for his series of prints and Derby Festival posters), was employed by the firm to design and oversee the renovation. The porte-cochere, added after the original construction, was taken down. Using care to match style, materials, and trim with those of the original house as closely as possible, a one-story rear wing was designed and constructed. A master bedroom, bath, large closet, vestibule and half-bath are in the new southwest section and a large kitchen, a great room and foyer are in the new northeast section. Back porches, a terrace and a story-and-a-half carriage house were added. The carriage house, which holds three automobiles and has living space above, is adjoined to the house by a pergola and drive-through breezeway. With its new Wooldridge Place address, the house has 1.38 acres of land.

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(Information and research assistance: Joseph Roberts and Jeff Baker, Title Examiners; Virginia Chaudoin, Pewee Valley Historian; Sue Locke, Louisville Free Public Library; Dorothy Rush and Staff of the Library of The Filson Club Historical Society; and Sonny Whittle, Architectural Artist.)