

TRAPNALL HALL

Ante-bellum Showplace

Trapnall Hall, located at 423 East Capitol Avenue, is one of Little Rock's oldest buildings. At the time of the first large influx of settlers to Little Rock in 1819, the land on which the house stands was the property of the Quapaw Indians, being a short distance east of the Quapaw Line. It was conveyed by the United States to the Territory of Arkansas on November 2, 1833, as a part of the 1,000 acre grant for the purpose of building a capitol building and certain other public buildings.

It was included in property sold by the Territory to the Rev. William W. Stevenson on March 3, 1835, as Tract 14 of the 1,000 acre grant. Stevenson was a Presbyterian minister who had switched to the Christian denomination in 1831 (see Review, Vol. II, No. 1). He platted that is now called Stevenson's Addition to the City of Little Rock, on the land which had been previously designated as Tract 14 of the 1,000 acre grant. On June 12, 1843, he sold to Frederic W. Trapnall the property on which Trapnall Hall was built, probably in that same year. This block is unique in that it has never been given a number. The deed refers to it as lot 4 of Stevenson's Square, but town plats give it no number, and its legal description as shown in the records today is simply "Trapnall's Block."

Trapnall owned a great deal of land in Pulaski County, and at various times after he built his home, he acquired property adjacent to it for several blocks. However, his residence was always entered on the tax books as twelve lots, which was about the size of his original purchase from the Rev. Stevenson.

The house stands in the middle of a long block, on the south side of what is now Capitol Avenue (originally Orange Street, later Fifth Street, changed to Capitol Avenue with the erection of the present state capitol building.) Commerce Street dead-ends directly in front of the house. In its early days it was the only house in the vicinity, and was surrounded by huge native trees.

Trapnall Hall is said to be almost identical in architecture to two other famous homes of early Little Rock, the Robert Crittenden home (most commonly called "the old Johnson place") and Curran Hall. The Crittenden home, built about 1826, was the earliest of the trio, and was called the finest home in the city at that time. It stood on the block bounded by Seventh, Eighth, Scott, and Cumberland Streets, facing Seventh Street. Crittenden's wild extravagance in building the house is often given as the cause of his financial downfall, although his adventures as a land speculator cannot be overlooked. After his death Judge Benjamin Johnson bought the house, and later Governor James P. Eagle lived there. It was razed to make room for the Albert Pike Hotel, which now occupies the site. Curran Hall, the other house that matched Trapnall Hall, was also built in 1843, by Col. Ebenezer Walters for his young bride, Mary Starbuck. But before she ever actually occupied the house, Mary died in childbirth at the home of Chester Ashley, whose wife was a relative of Mary's mother. Mary's death occurred July 15, 1843, and her husband later sold the house to James M. Curran, who gave it the name Curran Hall. A part of this house still