



# *A Cinderella Story...*



*The Ashley Slater House*



*Every  
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Has  
a  
Story  
to  
Tell*

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Whether it's your own house, or the home just around the corner, every one has a story. The Ashley-Slater house is no different. Perhaps what is different is the ghostly tales that serve as the basis of tours to those who visit.

Are there ghosts? Who knows? What I do know is the original owners remain as a testimony to the spirit of leadership for Douglas-Coffee County, Georgia. They continue to haunt us with examples of business and industry success that have continued for more than a century.

If the walls could talk, they could share stories of the business deals that transpired in the parlor or around the table in the stately dining room during the early to mid 1900's. They would also tell the story of the spirit of leadership that created the opportunity of public ownership for this unique example of historic architecture as we entered the 21st century.

Every home has a story. This one began in 1907 with John Marshall (J.M.) Ashley. The chapters of the Ashley-Slater house have continued to unfold for a century and there is no end in sight for this beautiful mansion.

J.M. came to Coffee County in 1907, but the story of the home began in 1914 during construction of the house. Only one "lady of the house" occupied the home until 1972. The house was sold at auction and underwent the tender care and strong-arm renovation of Betty Mullis. As we neared the 21st century, the home was placed on the real estate market. Historic preservation touched the heart of local business leaders who brought forth private funds to purchase the house. Private partners with the public good in mind delivered the purchase. Investors encouraged a public/private partnership for the restoration of the house as a public-use facility. The City of Douglas acquired the property, obtained federal grant funds for restoration, and the rest is history.

It is a century of history, and it's a good story. You might say a Cinderella story-- one that started with a chapter of wealth and prosperity, underwent times of struggle and despair, and ended with the presentation of a glass slipper-- a historic treasure for the local community.

Many characters are among the pages of history. Perhaps there were none more prominent than the original owners of the home -- a farm boy with a desire for city life, a strong willed wife eager to overcome heartbreak, a baby who never reached childhood, and a lawyer slated to be Georgia's Governor prior to his tragic death. It is a story worth telling.

J.M. Ashley was born in 1861 on large plantation on the Ocmulgee River. His father died when he was only a child. His uncle recognized the void in the young man's life and decided to include him as a partner in business. They later made their way to Coffee County and cast a mark in business.

J.M. founded the first bank in Douglas, Union Banking Company. He was responsible for the construction of the bank facility that now stands as BB&T on the corner of Peterson Avenue and Ward Street. His commitment to unique architecture still gazes over the city through the eyes of gargoyles atop the historic three-story building.

As a real estate developer, J.M. participated in the construction of the Doucuff Hotel that was once located on the grounds now occupied by Douglas Asphalt in downtown Douglas. That building was destroyed by fire in 1954. The Tanner building was also a project of Ashley's. Demolition of the building took place in the late 1980's to allow for the expansion of the Coffee County Courthouse.

His business ventures reached beyond real estate. He was involved in the Douglas Wholesale Grocery Company, Douglas Oil and Fertilizer Company, Douglas



*Mrs. Ada married J.M. in 1908, He was 20 years her senior*

Realty, and the Empire Construction Company. Ashley also served in many volunteer leadership roles. He spearheaded the development of the Coffee County Fair Association and efforts to improve transportation in the region by encouraging the installation of rails that lead to Douglas for the Georgia-Florida Railroad.

Apart from his business life, he did take time for his wife, Ada. Ada Clements was born in Alamo, Georgia, in 1881. She met J.M. in 1907 while visiting her sister in Douglas. She married J.M., twenty years her senior, in 1908 and lived in the hotel for several years before planning the construction of their home.

Ashley had plans to build a home near his business operation in Upton, Georgia. Ada had other plans. Her desire was to reside along Gaskin Avenue. They purchased the property located on the corner of Gaskin Avenue and Sycamore Street – now known as Ashley Street (imagine that).

Construction began in 1914 and completed in 1916. J.M. hand-selected lumber for the construction and the exterior brick was fired onsite. Interior treasures in the home include the intricate plaster molding that adorn the ceiling in the dining room. A restored original Quezal American art nouveau glass globed chandelier drops from the decorative ceiling. A band of original art serves as the dining room cornice and is thought to be the work of a European artist who resided in the home for a couple of years after construction was complete.

J.M. and Ada had one child, John Marshall Ashley, Jr. He died in 1916 shortly after they occupied their new home and before his second birthday. The day of the child's death, J.M. sought comfort on the north porch of the home. Neighbors remember his cries of distress. That same afternoon, he suffered from a stroke and died only a few days later. He left behind a grieving wife in a lonely home.

At 35, Ada was left with an Italianate mansion and an empty heart. She found refuge by taking an active role as a manager/owner in the many businesses she inherited. While seeking legal advice for the Doucuff Hotel, she met John R. Slater.

Captain Slater (U.S. Army) served in WWI. He attended the UGA school of law and later entered in his father's law firm in Valdosta. He served as U.S. assistant Attorney General until



*Tregedy for Mrs. Ada: Her son John Marshall, Jr. died before his second birthday. On the day of the baby's death, J.M. suffered a stroke and died a few days later.*

he returned to Georgia in 1921 to marry Ada. Their courtship had been short but John was smitten by the strong-willed Ada, nearly twenty years his senior.

After their marriage, John served as President of Union Bank, Chairman of the local Chamber of Commerce, Director of the G&F Railroad, Trustee of the A&M School, and served as Mayor of Douglas before becoming President of the Georgia Democratic Party for Alfred E. Smith's Presidential campaign in 1928. He suffered from mental illness after Smith's defeat. In 1930, at the age of 38, he died at the end of a self-made noose in the stairway leading to the attic of their home. An Atlanta newspaper reported his death and honored his accomplishments in Georgia. The report stated John Slater, if he had lived, would have been the next Governor of the great state of Georgia.

Once again, Ada was left with an empty home and bro



*Mementos of days gone by: Mrs. Ada's Treasures*

ken heart. At the age of 49, she rekindled her strong spirit and moved on. She became President of the Presbyterian Women's Association, took an active role in state initiatives, and enjoyed extensive travel. She died at home in 1972 at the age of 91; however, that's not the end of the story.

J.M., Ada, baby John Marshall, and John Slater all died in the home. Their legacy is deeply infused with community spirit. Maybe this is why local leaders were driven, perhaps haunted, by the desire to preserve and protect the property for public use.

In 1999, restoration was completed and the facility is now home to the Douglas Area Welcome Center, Douglas Main Street Office, Douglas-Coffee County Chamber of Commerce, and the Economic Development Authority. Owned and operated by the City of Douglas, the facility is best known to locals as the Ashley - Slater House. It is recognized as one of Georgia's finest regional welcome centers and opens its doors to thousands

of visitors each year.

This home does have a story. It began as a story of a family with a vision for business success and community growth. The stately dining room is still a location where people meet to discuss the future growth of Coffee County. Economic development initiatives permeate deeply in the walls, and the spirit of community leadership fills every nook and cranny in the home. The home is oftentimes the first stop for visitors looking for a place to invest in business or as a tourist.

The Ashley-Slater House is open to the public daily during regular business hours and is available through lease agreements for private events. The facility serves as host for receptions, weddings, business meeting, and many other events.