

The John T. Harris, Sr. House in Harrisonburg, Virginia

That was once a “twin” to the Warren-Sipe House next door

Research compiled by Rosemarie Palmer, July 2016

Long since demolished, this house was between the Warren-Sipe House and Asbury United Methodist Church at 275 South Main Street. Built in 1840, it pre-dated both structures. Architecturally resembling the Warren-Sipe House next door, but on a much smaller scale, it oftentimes is referred to as its ‘twin’.

The following is quoted about growing up in the house from the autobiography of son John T. Harris, Jr. (1859-1936), *“Some Recollections of my Early Life”*:

“While my father John T. Harris, Sr. was at the 36th Congress in Washington, DC in December 1859, having been elected in May 1859, my mother negotiated a sale of the old stone residence to Mr. W.A. Conrad, in exchange for the house immediately north of the George E. Sipe residence and now owned by Mrs. Lineweaver, the lot on which the same was situated being 62 feet front, extending through about 250 feet to the alley. In addition to the consideration of the old stone residence, my mother agreed to pay \$2,500 in gold. My father moved into the property in the late winter or spring of 1860. In 1863, he purchased from Mr. M. Harvey Effinger about 120 feet front on South Main Street, extending to Bruce Street, thus giving him about 180 feet front on the street. In this house was born on April 1, 1862, my younger brother Hatton, who became a surgeon in the United States Navy, and a brother, Clement Clarkson, in September 1864, who died when a little over a year old from diphtheria, my sister Emma Clarkson, then my sister Virginia Overton, and lastly my sister Edith. So there were eight children born to my father and mother. Four were boys, and four were girls. Seven were raised to maturity.”

“I can only say that I recollect with distinctness a few incidents that occurred during the war. At its close, I was five and a half years old. I remember going to the front part of the residence and seeing a torchlight procession coming over the hill at the Shacklett’s, now the corner, in celebration of the surrender of General Lee’s army, and I recall the desolation that permeated the entire community at that time.”

“I also recall being taken with my older brother and my sisters on the rear porch of the South Main Street residence at night and observing the conflagration which swept over the Valley of Virginia under General Early’s orders directing its devastation.”

“I remember, too, when soldiers under General Hunter’s orders in the summer of 1864 searched the house for so-called arms, and the fact that I was clinging to my mother’s skirts,

and that she told me that she said to them at the time that if they desired arms they need only go to the battlefield of New Market, where they had been thrown away by thousands by the Federal troops.”

“I also recall in the summer of '62, my father, of course, being absent throughout this period, that my mother had placed the sole milk cow in the smokehouse---a building then on the premises of residences the type of my father's, usually about fourteen or fifteen feet square, in which was cured the supply of meat---and that she, with the woman servant, Lucindy, stood in front of the door and forbade the soldiers from entering it, saying that there was nothing in it but the cow which could not be removed, as her little children were dependent upon it for their support.”

“The South Main Street residence was my home until the 2nd of December, 1888, when, with my wife, then a bride of four days, I moved into my present residence, which I had purchased in the spring of 1888, in anticipation of my marriage, and upon which I made slight improvements during the summer and fall of 1888.”

NOTES:

This property was originally owned by Thomas Harrison by a 1700 grant. His sons Reuben and Robert then owned it by inheritance from their father.

According to the “*Works Project Administration*”, the date of the house is given as “about 1840”. That would make it 16 years older than the Warren-Sipe House next door (built in 1856). During that time, between 1835 and 1846, the property was owned by Mary Kyle who may have built the house.

Judge John T. Harris, Sr. died on October 14, 1899, having owned the house since 1859. In March 1904, the house was sold to T. C. Firebaugh. After two more owners, the house was sold by Henry J. Sanger to Katherine R. Lineweaver on April 12, 1922.

In May 1926, Mrs. Lineweaver operated the *Lone Pine Tea Room* in this house.

In August 1937, Mrs. Lineweaver still owned the house, the name had changed to the *Stage Coach Tea Room*. Photos of it, now in the HRHS archives, were taken by Lupton Kaylor.

In June 1911, the Asbury United Methodist Church began construction of their church building just north of the former John T. Harris, Sr. house. The church's address is 205 S. Main Street. Sometime after 1937, the church must have bought the former John T. Harris, Sr. house from Mrs. Lineweaver, and demolished it. There is no mention of this on the church's website. Now an empty space exists between the church and the Warren-Sipe House.

When it was demolished, two of the wooden fluted columns from the front porch of the John T. Harris, Sr. house are thought to have been incorporated onto the front porch of the Warren-Sipe House, now the *Virginia Quilt Museum*.

John T. Harris, Jr. was in law practice with George E. Sipe for 31 years, until Sipe retired in 1918.

John T. Harris, Jr. was a pupil of Virginia Magruder Warren, his neighbor, in the old Rockingham Female Seminary building for two sessions in 1867 to 1869.