

The Meginnis-Munroe House

Housing LeMoyne Arts Galleries, Shop and Administration Offices

The Home that Grew with Tallahassee

Long before North Gadsden Street became part of a bustling capital city, this Colonial Revival antebellum house stood on Florida's frontier.

Beginning construction in 1852, on the corner of East Call and North Gadsden streets, merchant George Henry Meginnis and his future wife, Louisa Gatlin, built a home reflecting the optimism of Tallahassee's earliest settlers. Originally from Kent County, Maryland, Meginnis (also spelled, Megginnis, Meginniss) journeyed south in 1836 with other adventurous families seeking opportunity in the newly established state of Florida. After arriving by ship at St. Marks, they completed the final miles to Tallahassee by horse-drawn coach. Once in Leon County, Meginnis met Gatlin and married in 1853, with the house being completed in 1854.



The Meginnis-Munroe house in 1885.

From Florida Memory: State Library & Archives of Florida.

Like many historic homes, these walls have witnessed both celebration and hardship. During the Civil War, the house was commandeered for use by Confederate troops and, following the Battle of Olustee (Lake City, FL) in February 1864, served as a temporary hospital for wounded soldiers. As Tallahassee was directly connected to the battlefield by

the Florida, Atlantic, and Gulf Central Railroad, and had a hub of doctors – Tallahassee was the most logical place to take heavy casualties away from the front lines in Lake City.

After the Civil War, George Henry and Louisa raised four daughters in the house—Jessie, Maria Therese, Hollie, and Bershe—and the family's story became intertwined with Tallahassee's own growth as George was a wholesale merchant selling lime, plastering materials, cement, coal, and oil. When Maria Therese married Charles Munroe in 1896, the family faced a practical question: where would the newlyweds live?



Charles Munroe & Maria Therese Meginnis at their wedding in 1896.

From Florida Memory: State Library & Archives of Florida.



Meginnis-Munroe House circa 1903. Before second floor renovations.

From Florida Memory: State Library & Archives of Florida.

In 1903, to make room for another home, the entire Meginnis House was carefully rolled southward across the property using large logs, to make room for a second residence to be built. The following year, in 1904, Charles and Maria moved into the elegant Queen Anne-style with Colonial Revival influences, Munroe House on the SE corner of East Call and North Gadsden Streets. It contained Tallahassee's first indoor bathtub with running water –

an example of the city's gradual embrace of modern conveniences. In 1942, Mrs. Munroe moved to smaller quarters on Call Street and divided the house into apartments.



Charles & Maria Therese's children in front of the Munroe House, circa 1910.



Charles & Maria Therese's children In front of the Munroe House, circa 1916.

From Florida Memory: State Library & Archives of Florida.

Soon after relocating the Meginnis-Munroe house, it was "Victorian-ized", including a second story expansion, windows flanking the entrance door altered into French doors, and two airy sleeping porches added, creating much of the appearance visitors see today. The front (west) façade was also altered to include a Serliana Venetian window, a tripartite window, in the pediment. The house eventually passed to the Meginnis' eldest daughter, Jessie Copeland Meginnis, who never married.

Jessie shaped another chapter in the home's history. She often rented rooms to legislators for their biennial sessions. Following the death of Lewis Lively's parents when he was just five years old, Jessie adopted him and raised him in this house. He would later become a successful businessman after acquiring the first Coca-Cola franchise, eventually building it into a thriving bottling company. Today, his name lives on through Tallahassee's Lewis M. Lively Vocational-Technical School, a nod to his dedication and love of education.

In 1994, LeMoyne Art Foundation acquired the Munroe House. It was used as a gift shop, permanent collection storage, and apartments. During this time LeMoyne renovated the exterior of the building through a State of Florida grant. LeMoyne sold the Munroe House in 2015 to a descendent of the Munroe's.



Raney Whaley and Lewis Lively at the grand opening of Dale Mabry Field.

From Florida Memory: State Library & Archives of Florida.

For generations, the house remained filled with family life. During the home's 100th anniversary in 1954, George Meginnis's great-granddaughter, Betty Ann Munroe Skelton, remembered discovering forgotten bottles of communion wine in the basement which were made in the early 1900s by the women of St. John's Episcopal Church.

"One sip cured us from wanting anymore," she laughed.

She also recalled she and her sister, Jett, frequently invited their Leon High School (and later FSU) cheerleading squad to practice in the living and dining rooms.

"It shocked Daddy so to have all those energetic young girls jumping up and down in the house that he actually had special supports put under the floors."

Those supports remain beneath the house today.

The Munroe family also helped Tallahassee take to the skies. Charles Ivan Munroe became known as the city's "Father of Aviation." Owner of Tallahassee's first private airplane, he served as the first manager of Dale Mabry Field when it opened in 1929 and taught many of the area's earliest pilots. Local sculptor Sandy Proctor fondly recalled seeing Munroe park his airplane in the backyard, where neighborhood children eagerly climbed aboard and imagined adventures beyond the horizon.



Ivan Munroe with student Betty Wynn

From Florida Memory: State Library & Archives of Florida.

After more than a century in the hands of one family, the Meginnis-Munroe House entered a new chapter. In 1968, the Ivan Munroe family sold the property to the LeMoyne Art Foundation, which was established just five years earlier in 1963. Today, the house continues to serve the community—not as a private residence, but as a place where art, history, and the stories of Tallahassee's earliest citizens come together under one roof.



The Meginnis-Munroe House in 1970. Two years after LeMoyne Arts moved in.

From Florida Memory: State Library & Archives of Florida.

More than 170 years after its construction, the Meginnis-Munroe House remains a remarkable survivor—its story woven into the history of Tallahassee itself.

Over the years, the Meginnis-Munroe House was maintained and operated through the labor of numerous African American domestic servants. The United States Federal and Florida State Censuses list among those known to have served in the house and possibly resided on the property: US 1860 - thirteen unnamed enslaved persons (1-60 years old); US 1880 - Mary Williams (cook), Mary Smith (house servant), Ben Williams (preacher), Sara Josh (waggoneer); FL 1885 – Lizzie Kelly and Mary Dickerson (house servants), Archie Dickerson (7 yr. old schoolboy) and Thomas Woodford (chore boy). Their labor, skill, and daily care sustained the household and contributed significantly to the home's history.