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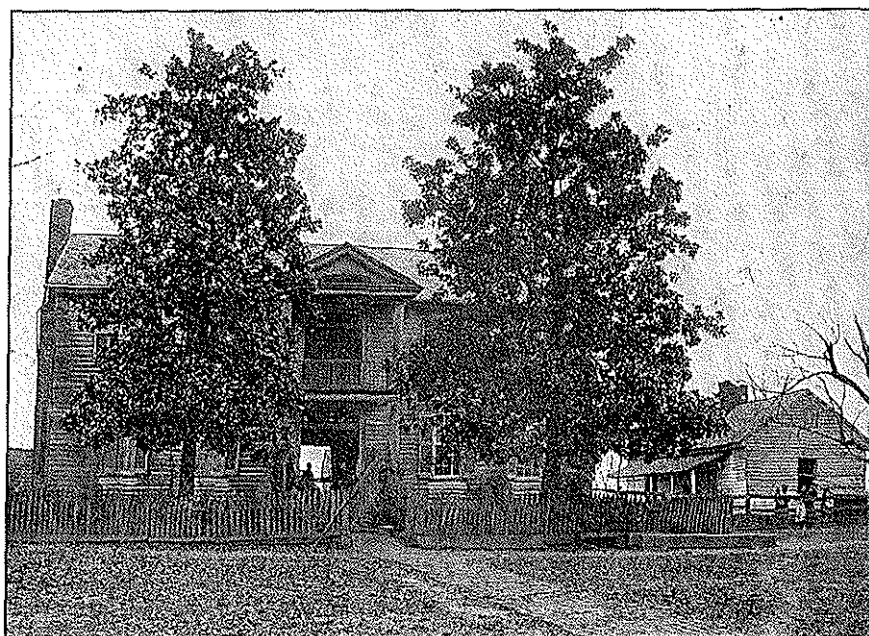
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Meadow Woods Plantation, Oktibbeha County, Mississippi  
and the Nannie Herndon Rice Papers  
at Mississippi State University Library

by  
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Meadow Woods is one of the oldest standing homes in Oktibbeha County. This traditional antebellum home in the Oktoc area is on the National Historic Register, but is privately owned and not open to the public. The house has been owned by members of the same family since 1848, can be definitely dated to 1841, and is known to have been built a few years earlier. While Meadow Woods is certainly remarkable as one of the fewer than ten antebellum homes remaining in Oktibbeha County, the existence of the Nannie Herndon Rice Family Papers, a nearly complete set of documentation of the plantation and the families connected with the house, is even more remarkable.

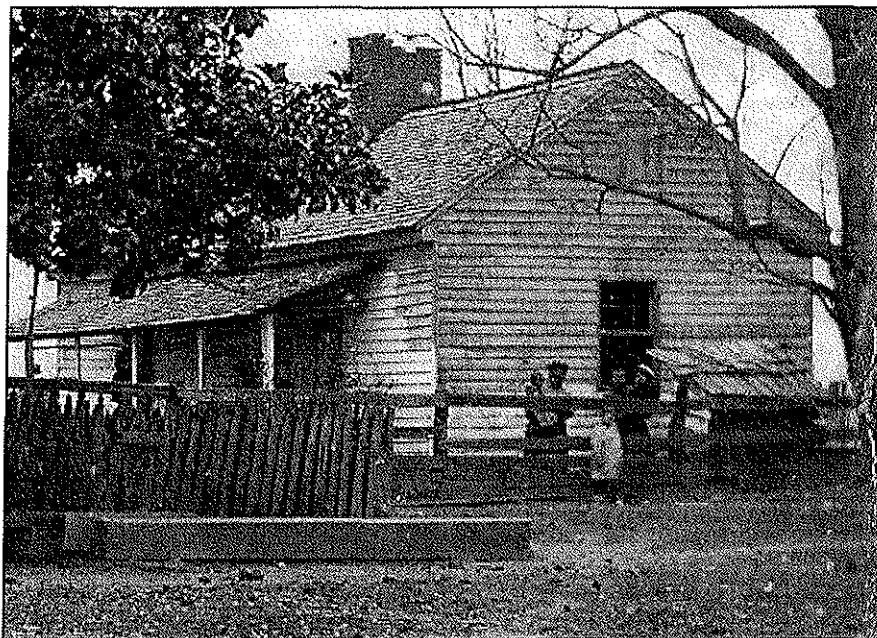
Meadow Woods was the early residence of Honor Shaw (d. 1846) and was inherited by Shaw's daughter Elizabeth and son-in-law John P. Thompson. A two-storied portico residence with Doric columns, Meadow Woods was built of native hardwoods and has three brick chimneys with six fireplaces. In its early life, the cypress exterior of the house was whitewashed only when the family could afford it, but is today painted white. An interesting story that has been handed down is that the same crew of builders built a nearby antebellum house known as The Cedars or the Outlaw House. The L-shaped plans of the two houses are identical, except that Meadow Woods has double doors at either end of the first story center hall, so that the house can be completely opened for ventilation, or it can be closed with the heavy board which fits into iron brackets on either side of the door. Lending credibility to the story about the connection between Meadow Woods and The Cedars is the existence of a brick kiln located equidistant between the two houses.



Meadow Woods is pictured almost totally without whitewash and with the first floor hallway doors open, resembling a two-story dogtrot, 1897.

The Meadow Woods plan features three rooms on each floor. The first floor has a parlor, dining room, downstairs bedroom, and a kitchen which were originally a storage and butler's pantry. Of the three upstairs bedrooms on the second floor, one was designed as the typical "Virginia Room" with the single access stair, which was traditionally occupied by the daughters in the family. The present owners have added a door between this room and another bedroom.

Most of the interesting original features of Meadow Woods remain the same today. For example, most of the diamond-shaped panes in the front door transom are of the original handmade glass. The Bullfinch carving on the stair-ends adds interest to the main staircase. Perhaps the most interesting tradition about the house is that the convict slave Cooper crafted the hand-carved mantels for the six fireplaces in both Meadow Woods and The Cedars. Attempts to find additional documentation concerning the slave named Cooper have failed to date. It is possible that he either had his own cabinet shop, or may have worked for another cabinetmaker. Still extant next to the house is the two-room dependency called "The Cook's House" containing a kitchen and the sewing room. While "The Cook's House" is now a residence, it still has the original brackets for hanging pots on the brick fireplace<sup>1</sup>.



A close-up of the Cook's House, 1897.

The second owner of Meadow Woods was John Saunders Rice, who purchased the house and 1442 acres in 1848 and died in 1849. His widow Nannie Coke Rice sold the land to her son John Washington Rice. John Washington Rice (1815-1857) and his wife, Augusta Hopkins Rice (1831-1906) were the third owners of the property. John Washington Rice was a lawyer from Chester, South Carolina who migrated to Talladega, Alabama. Augusta Hopkins was from Mobile. John Washington Rice built the

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<sup>1</sup>Information on the house is from Doy Payne Longest. *Historic Homes and Buildings in Oktibbeha County*. [Mississippi State]: Mississippi State University, 1977, 5-8.

plantation which surrounded Meadow Woods into a working, self-sufficient cotton plantation which was among the most profitable in Oktibbeha County. Until the death of John Rice in 1857, the young couple lived at Meadow Woods in the summer and in Mobile during the remainder of the year, employing an overseer to manage the plantation which provided income for the newlyweds. At his death, Rice owned 6000 acres, much of it in Oktibbeha County, including the contiguous Oktoc lands of "Home Place", "Lower Place", "Middle Place" and "Agency Tract". John J. Walker, brother-in-law of Augusta Hopkins Rice administered the estate of John W. Rice, paying off the \$94,000 debt and selling land, slaves and other property to provide an inheritance of land and other assets for Augusta Rice and her children Arthur Hopkins Rice (1852-1921) and Nannie Herndon Rice (1854-1921). The remaining plantation consisted of Meadow Woods and the "Home Place" of 1750 acres, and the "Lower Place" of 1760 acres. After his administrative duties were finished, John J. Walker remained as guardian of the minors Arthur and Nannie and advisor of Augusta, and with his help the "Rice" Plantation continued as income-producing property for the family, to be handed down to future generations<sup>2</sup>.

The Nannie Herndon Rice Family Papers, 1824-1995 and undated, consisting of about 28 linear feet of materials, are a remarkable collection that has been one of the most well used of the more than 600 manuscripts collections housed in the Manuscripts Division, Special Collections Department, Mississippi State University Library. While many collections of this nature experience a decline in use after they have been used for a dissertation such as Thomas Cockrell's "*Meadow Woods*", 1839-1989: *A Mississippi Plantation*, use of the Rice Family Papers actually increases each year. This is partly due to the variety of subject matter documented and the depth of documentation of the papers. It is also testimony to the great value of the collection as a teaching tool for students learning to do historical papers. While the great amount of use of the collection is in itself a good thing, it also creates a preservation challenge for the staff members who curate it. Because of the volume and character of the Rice Family Papers, it will only be possible to comment in this short paper on the strengths and highlights of collection, as well as the subject areas with potential for research use.

The Nannie Herndon Rice Family Papers are named for Nannie Herndon Rice (1886-1963), MSU Librarian and collector of the papers, and the granddaughter of John Washington and Augusta Hopkins Rice. The papers would be remarkable even if they only contained documentation of the third owners of Meadow Woods and their descendants. However, the papers are also notable for the breadth of the documentation of the extended family of Augusta Hopkins Rice. Augusta's parents, Judge Arthur Francis Hopkins (1794-1865) and his wife Pamela Moseley Hopkins (1800-1853), had thirteen children, of whom eight survived. After the death of Pamela Moseley Hopkins, Judge Arthur Francis Hopkins married Julia Opie Gordon, the "Florence Nightingale of the Confederacy", whose picture appears on two Alabama Confederate bills. In addition to documenting the Hopkins family, the papers contain correspondence and other materials of the families of six of the eight siblings of Augusta Hopkins Rice: Arthur Moseley Hopkins who married Eliza Bibb, daughter of Alabama Governor Thomas Bibb; Mary Moseley Hopkins who married William Barnewall of Mobile; Louisa Hopkins who married George P. Blevins, a Selma lawyer; Kate Erskine Hopkins who married Starke H. Oliver, Maria Hopkins who married John J. Walker, son of the first U.S. Senator from Alabama; and Cornelia Hopkins who married Henry Allen Lowe, a cotton merchant from Mobile. The Rice Family Papers have primarily

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<sup>2</sup>Information on the plantation itself has been taken from "*Meadow Woods*", 1839-1989: *A Mississippi Plantation* by Thomas Cockrell (PhD dissertation, Mississippi State University, 1989), the Guide to the Nannie Herndon Rice Family Papers, and the Papers themselves.

been arranged to reflect these family groups. Some special series were created to highlight documents in some subject areas. A few series serve to separate special formats, such as visual materials.

As one might expect, agriculture and plantation life in Oktibbeha County, 1849-1955, are richly documented in the Rice Family Papers, with the bulk of the materials falling in the period 1848-1911. Included are farm diaries and ledgers, maps of farm land, cotton production materials, tenant records, deeds, rent agreements with tenants, horse breeding materials, and other documents. Thomas Cockrell's dissertation gives a comprehensive look at the operation of Meadow Woods as a plantation, providing insight into the larger context into which this Mississippi plantation fits.

The papers also chronicle to some degree political matters in Alabama and Mississippi. Alabama Supreme Court Judge Arthur Francis Hopkins was prominent in Alabama Whig politics. Materials documenting the political career of Dr. Arthur Hopkins Rice in the Mississippi House of Representatives include speeches, letters from Stephen D. Lee, John Sharpe Williams, Leroy Percy, H.D. Money, John Allen, Elihu Root and E.S. Candler, and other related items, 1892-1917.

There is in the papers a variety of materials documenting travel abroad, as well as European, British, Australian and Canadian life during several periods. For example, Augusta Hopkins Rice wrote five diaries which describe an extended wedding trip to Europe with her new husband, 1852-1856, of which four diaries are extant. The Rice children were schooled in Europe after the Civil War and there are numerous letters etc. of Arthur and Nannie's life and friends in Europe, 1867-1871. A few related pieces are interesting: a Paris Exposition Bird's Eye View printed in 1878, possibly rare but in not very good condition; a French comic from the period; and an oversize handwritten permit for unnamed members of the American Legation to travel, given by the Sultan of the Ottoman Empire, 1857. The Lowe Family series is particularly rich in foreign materials. Included are diaries kept by Cornelia and Henry Allen Lowe during their vacation trips to Canada and extensive correspondence with family cousins in England, Scotland, Wales and Australia. Finally, an interesting twentieth century series is the correspondence of Ernest J. Cramer, 1941-1955, a German refugee student who lived with Nannie Rice while studying at MSU in 1941.

Several small groups of materials deal with military matters. A small group of letters of William Memorable Walker, brother of John J. Walker, 1839-1947, includes five letters written from Camargo while serving in the Mexican War. John J. Walker's Civil War letters to his wife Maria and quartermasters' journal (1862-1863), letters from General Braxton Bragg (1863), and letters from the Rice plantation make up a small Civil War series.

Documentation of African-Americans in the papers is directly related to the slave holdings of the Rice family. Some of the Rice plantation slaves were inherited from the Moseley, Hopkins and Rice families, and some of them were purchased later by John Washington Rice. As discussed by Thomas Cockrell, the Rice family was fairly unusual in that they kept their slaves and the records documenting them in family groups. When it was necessary to sell slaves upon the death of John Washington Rice, slaves were sold in family groups to other slave owners in Oktibbeha County and Lowndes County<sup>3</sup>. This circumstance has made it somewhat easier for African-Americans who know they have a connection to the Rice plantation to trace their ancestry,

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<sup>3</sup>Cockrell, Thomas D. "Meadow Woods", 1839-1989: A Mississippi Plantation. PhD. dissertation, Mississippi State University, 1989, 65-69.

especially if first names and approximate ages of the slave ancestors are known. There is also an unusual group of materials concerning slave membership in Salem Baptist Church. Wills and genealogical materials are useful for assisting African-Americans in determining pre-Rice plantation ancestry. Other African-American materials include letters from former slaves, settlements with slaves who were hired out or paid for farm goods, agreements with freedmen, and tenant agreements and other documentation of African-American life and production during the sharecropping period. Finally, as African-Americans have researched their connection to the Rice plantation, publications, letters and other materials have been added to an African-American genealogy series in the papers, a series which is small but of great assistance to African-American researchers.

Another major topic of the papers pertains to the lives and activities of women, 1824-1962. Most of the content about women's lives takes the form of diaries and correspondence between friends and family members. However, there are some household accounts, poems and stories, school materials, and ephemeral materials such as calling cards, invitations and recipes. By far the largest group of materials on a single woman is that documenting the activities of Nannie Herndon Rice. A librarian and writer, Miss Rice attended the Mississippi Industrial Institute and College (now MIW) and Vassar College. Her extensive correspondence with family members and friends such as Pauline V. Orr, Mary Herbert Gay and Emma May Laney, concerns woman=s suffrage activities, controversy at the "W", her education and travels, family matters, and life at Meadow Woods. Miss Rice is perhaps best known for her essay "Mississippi", which appeared in the *American Mercury* in 1926, and was written in response to H.L. Mencken's comments about the backwardness of the state.<sup>4</sup> Nannie Rice's literary materials include short stories, articles, essays, correspondence with H.L. Mencken and others.

The Arthur Hopkins Rice series is strong in documentation of medicine and the medical profession, 1871-1916. Rice was educated at Alabama Medical College in Mobile and graduated from the New York College of Physicians and Surgeons in 1874. Before coming to Oktibbeha County in 1876, he interned at Presbyterian Hospital in New York, and then practiced for a time in Lauderdale, Mississippi, and St. Louis. For a brief period, 1885-1886, he was on the staff of Alabama Medical College and attempted to establish a medical practice in Mobile. Among Rice's medical materials are letters, reports, notes, correspondence, accounts, school materials and ephemeral materials. Also included in the medical series are professional correspondence, reports, notes and accounts concerning the mental illness of Rice's daughter Augusta and Dr. Rice's efforts to find treatment for her.

Because Meadow Woods was built before the Rice family purchased it, there is scant documentation of the actual home. However, there are some inventories, accounts and photographs which document both the house and its furnishings at various periods.

The involvement of members of the Rice Family in the collection and curation of the Rice Family Papers has proved to be a fortunate circumstance for users. After her retirement in 1958, Nannie Rice worked tirelessly on transcribing the many letters in the collection. Another descendant, Arthur Rice Harned, spent months filing, cataloging (calendaring) and putting the collection in order before presenting it to the library. After the papers were in the library, the 4<sup>th</sup> generation of descendants began to work on an organized effort to transcribe those papers which had not been done by Nannie Rice. This project has required the making of many photocopies by the library, all of which have been returned by the donors, along with transcriptions and some digital copies as the transcriptions were completed. In 1992,

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<sup>4</sup>Nannie H. Rice. "Mississippi". *American Mercury*, Vol. 7 (January, 1926), 77-82.

transcriptions of excerpts from the four journals of Henry Allen Lowe, Jr. were published by the family.<sup>5</sup> These journals are particularly interesting for the information on Henry Lowe's time spent on the plantation in Oktibbeha County.

Since 1989, when this archivist began her tenure as Manuscripts Librarian at MSU, the intensive use of the collection has mandated new preservation, arrangement and description solutions for the Rice Family Papers. In spite of the extensive calendaring of the papers, retrieval was difficult because there was no folder level inventory. The papers were suffering from mechanical damage in their original housing in handmade acid free folders and filing cabinet drawers. Consequently, in 1991 a second processing project was undertaken. At this time, oversize materials were unfolded and separated to appropriate housing, all materials were removed to standard acid-free folders and boxes, and a folder level inventory was created. This additional work was adequate for the preservation and access issues for about ten years.

However, by 2001, a number of additions to the Rice Family Papers had accumulated due to the collecting and transcription activities of the family. These additions included more recent farm materials from the 1930s-1950s, the transcriptions, photocopies and digital materials collected by the family, oral histories, African-American materials, and a whole new series of photographs. By this time, the papers were also in need of additional preservation because of the growing research and exhibit use of the collection. About this time the library also received a request for information on the Mobile materials in the collection. Consequently in 2001, the new Manuscripts Assistant was given a triple assignment: 1) Create a separate calendar of the Mobile materials; 2) Create an arrangement solution to add the new materials, photocopies and transcripts for easy findability and use; 3) Transfer the folders into lignin free boxes and begin sleeving of all at-risk materials. The first two items and the transfer to new boxes are completed and all materials are now accessible. Instead of totally rearranging the papers to accommodate the additional materials, three new series were created. Within these new series, the photocopies and transcripts were assigned the same folder numbers as the originals with a letter (a) to designate photocopies and (b) to designate transcripts. This arrangement has facilitated retrieval and user education and should make it easy to add materials in the future. Although sleeving of the papers is proceeding at a slower pace as there is time, the collection is currently probably the best-preserved manuscript collection at MSU, a condition properly befitting its value and usefulness for scholars.



Meadow Woods, 1989.

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<sup>5</sup>Hill, Jeannette Bartran. *The Journals of Henry Allen Lowe, 1869-1877*. [Lakeland], Fla., 1992.