

# The Turnpike Record

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## McKownville's Hidden Houses Link University To Local Past

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To the North and East are the sparkling concrete towers, the crisp green athletic fields and the essential parking lots of the State University campus. To the South and West stand the comfortable colonials and bungalows and the more recently built ranches and split levels of the venerable suburb of McKownville. Tucked in between on a wooded knoll, virtually unknown to most Guilderland residents, are four houses. Albany County's past and the University's future are linked, in the present, by this tiny settlement.

At the "Dead End" of Waverly Place, a McKownville side street, a sign warns "Private Road, — No Thoroughfare." The driveway winds up a steep grade past a rambling brown shingled house with red trim. Although the house was built in 1949 its style is "turn of the century country." It is the home of Albany Traffic Court Judge John E. Holt-Harris, Jr., his wife and two children.

The Holt-Harris are currently the "oldest" residents of the enclave and the judge is its unofficial historian. Before building the house they now occupy, they lived in the next house down the private road. It was built by Albany attorney Thomas Francis Wood from bits and pieces of Old Albany and is now owned by the Faculty and Student Association of the University and rented to Associate Dean of Students Lois Gregg.

As youngsters the Holt-Harris had often visited the most spectacular and historic of the structures, the brooding stucco and dark wood lodge at the top of the hill, where the road ends.

When the judge and the girl who was to become his wife visited the lodge it was the home of the John Perkins family who acquired it in the late 1920's. The house had been built, around 1905, by William Barnes Jr. the mentor of the "Barnes machine" which ran Albany County until the present Democratic regime began over forty years ago.

Barnes built the place as a hunting lodge but often used it as a residence. He was married twice and had two sons by his first wife. One of the sons, Thurlow Weed Barnes, now lives in Vermont.

An astute and powerful political leader, Barnes did his work as Albany County Republican Chairman in an office in downtown Albany. He was the editor of two city daily newspapers, the Morning Express and the Evening Journal, in addition to being county, and for a time, state Republican chairman. He was also an influential member of the Republican National Committee.

Barnes' grandfather was an even more prominent Republican politician. Thurlow Weed, "King of the Lobbyists," was a member of the Seward-Weed-Greeley political combine which included Secretary of State and presidential hopeful William Seward of Alaska purchase fame and Horace Greeley who inaugurated the New York Herald Tribune and is remembered for advising young men to "go West."

Thurlow Weed established the Albany Evening Journal but sold it during the 1860's. Barnes bought back the paper shortly after his graduation from Harvard in 1888.

The lodge is now owned by the Capital Area Council of Churches which purchased the building from Donald Noord. It is used as a student work center. Protestant and Jewish services are held there. The University's Roman Catholic chaplain said Mass in the main hall until the Newman Club acquired its new headquarters nearby in McKownville.

The Reverend Frank Snow, one of the campus ministers, lives in the house. His bedroom is in an octagonal wing at the building's south-

east corner. Below the bedroom is an eight-sided dining room. Both rooms have fireplaces.

The house is everyone's idea of a baronial hunting lodge. The two-story high main hall is flanked by staircases leading to the bedrooms. White plaster walls are outlined with dark stained wood. The wide-board, pegged floors are of teak. A massive fireplace takes up one side of the room.

An occasional tapestry decorates the walls. The one over the fireplace is obviously a new addition in a liturgical Pop manner. The hanging on the wall of the oblong porch looks like it must have come with the place.

Campus minister William Small, once the Vicar of St. Boniface Episcopal Church at McCormack's Corners, calls the house a "charming building." A good deal of its charm lies in the contrast between the sleek, impersonal new campus which it overlooks and the old-fashioned but, somehow, warm and dignified relic which symbolizes the human qualities that the modern university is often accused of ignoring.

(To be continued next week)



NESTLED IN A WOODLAND SETTING on the edge of the State University campus in McKownville, the former hunting hideaway of William Barnes is now used for the religious services of many denominations for University students. (Photo by Jim Lund)