

THE J.P. VAN CLEAVE COTTAGE: 1905-1992

1302 Government Street

The Van Cleave Cottage is well named since the land and building were in the possession of this family for twenty-three years (1889-1912). This Queen Anne cottage was most likely built by Junius Poitevent Van Cleave in 1905. Architecturally, the Van Cleave Cottage has been described as: *a one-story, wood frame, L-shaped building which rests on low brick piers and has a cross-gable roof. The facade consists of a projecting chamfered bay flanked by a shed-roofed porch which features turned posts, sawn brackets, and a spindle frieze. The gables are clad in imbricated shingles. The two-over-two double-hung sash windows are set in simple architraves as is the transomed door which has a large glazed panel.*

In 1889, R.A. Van Cleave (1840-1908) acquired lands from Edward W. Clark of Philadelphia, Pennsylvania which included Lot 3 and Lot 4 Block 30 of the Culmsee Survey.⁽¹⁾ These lots measured two hundred twenty-five feet on County Road (Government Street) and one hundred sixty-five on Van Cleave (Russell), and were the future site of the Van Cleave Cottage.

R.A. Van Cleave (1840-1908) was a founding father of the Town of Ocean Springs (1892). He arrived here in 1867, from Yazoo County, Mississippi with his new bride, Elizabeth R. Sheppard (1842-1912). She was the step-daughter of George A. Cox (1812-1887). With Mr. Cox, who was an early pioneer and entrepreneur at Ocean Springs, arriving here in the early 1850s, Van Cleave established a store at Bluff Creek in 1868. This commercial venture didn't last long, but Van Cleave was so respected in the area that the U.S. Post Office there was called Vancleave's. The name stuck and is used today to refer to a large area in south central Jackson County primarily in T6S-R7W.

By 1890, R.A. Van Cleave was operating a hotel on the corner of Washington and Robinson across from the L&N depot. His, R.A. Van Cleave & Son, mercantile store just south of the Van Cleave Hotel occupied a two-story building. Their slogan was "Best Quality and Honest Quantity". The Van Cleave home was adjacent to the store on the northeast corner of Desoto and Washington. This store burned in October 1926.

Seven children were born to the Van Cleave family. They were: Fannie V. Covington (1866-1893), George A. VanCleave (b. 1868), Robert A. VanCleave Jr. (b. 1869), William S. (1871-1938), Richard S. VanCleave (b. 1875), Sarah Reid Westbrook (1874-1934), and Junius P. VanCleave (1878-1945+).

Among the many accomplishments earned during his life time, Van Cleave was appointed the first provisional Mayor of Ocean Springs in 1892, served as Postmaster here from 1872-1882, and was appointed from 1885-1889 as Special Agent of the U.S. Land Office to protect public timberlands.

In 1894, R.A. Van Cleave conveyed Lots 3 and 4 of Block 30 to Eliza R. Van Cleave, his wife.(2) The land was passed to son, Richard S. Van Cleave of Chicago, in 1902.(3) Richard Van Cleave conveyed it to June P. Van Cleave in 1904.(4)

From a search of the Jackson County Land Rolls, there is no evidence of a structure on these lots until 1906. At this time, a building is reported on Lots 3 and 4 of Block 30. From this information, it could be deduced that the edifice now standing at 1302 Government was built in 1905 or 1906. June P. Van Cleave was the owner at this time, and he is the most probable builder of the Van Cleave Cottage.

June Poitevent Van Cleave was named for Captain Junius Poitevent (1837-1919). Poitevent was of Huguenot descent being born at Gainesville on the Pearl River in Hancock County. He was active in the lumber trade, ran steamboats, speculated in land in Texas and Florida, and farmed in Mexico. Poitevent settled his family at Ocean Springs in 1877, building a Victorian Italianate home of unusual design on the Bay of Biloxi. The Lover's Lane location of the Poitevent home is believed by some historian to be the site of Fort Maurepas (1699-1702), the French beachhead in the Lower Mississippi Valley. R.A. Van Cleave held Captain Poitevent in deep respect, and honored him by naming his youngest son, Junius Poitevent Van Cleave.

After a childhood and adolescence at Ocean Springs, June Van Cleave left Ocean Springs circa 1898, for Hammac, Alabama where his sister, Sallie Van Cleave Reid, lived. She had married Dunkling Felix Reid in December 1897. Here he worked in the mercantile business. In May 1900, VanCleave returned to Ocean Springs and on September 16, 1902, created a partnership with his brother, W.S. Van Cleave (1871-1938) to form the Van Cleave Brothers, a mercantile business, adjoining the residence of their father on Washington Avenue near Desoto.

Junius Poitevent Van Cleave married Minnie Clayton Richardson (1879-1952+) at the Methodist Church at Ocean Springs in August 1904. She was the daughter of William Richardson (d. 1888?) and Mary Witt Richarson (1849-1927). The Richarsons were farmers in the Fort Bayou area and both served as postmasters there. Mrs. Richardson was buried at Lynville, Tennessee. The Van Cleave-Richardson union created two daughters: Mary Witt VanCleave (b. 1909) and Mildred VanCleave (b. post 1910)

In January 1906, the Van Cleave Brothers liquidated their stock. They then purchased land on the northeast corner of Washington and Porter, and built a store, the Van Cleave Brothers Store, in August 1906, which lasted for fifty-eight years.

J.P. Van Cleave purchased the Switzer Cash Store on the southeast corner of Washington and Porter in May 1906, from Owen Switzer.(5) He remained here until February 1909, when he moved to Philadelphia to work with his brothers, Richard and Robert Van Cleave. They were building contractors there. June Van Cleave returned to Ocean Springs about a year later in poor health. He had lost over fifty pounds of weight in the east.

Junius Van Cleave sold his cottage on County Road to Henrietta Veillon in 1912, for \$1000.(6)

The spring of 1914 saw vast changes in the life of the J.P. Van Cleave family. In March, Van Cleave leased his J.P. Van Cleave Store on Washington Avenue to Charles B. Morrison of Louisiana, and sold his interest in the Van Cleave Brothers Store diagonally across the street to W.S. Van Cleave. In April 1914, he and his family moved to Laurel, Mississippi where he went into business as Van Cleave & Green. By November 1915, June Van Cleave was purchasing additional property north of his Laurel store on First Avenue. He planned to erect three cottages on them.

In 1923, Van Cleave joined his brother, R.S. VanCleave, in the construction business. They had a contract to build one thousand houses for the Dupont Engineering Company at Winston-Salem, North Carolina.

The Van Cleaves were living in Philadelphia in 1934, and later at Richmond, Virginia. Vertalee Bradford VanCleave met Junius VanCleave at Ocean Springs in the late 1940s, when he visited here from Virginia. Mrs. Minnie VanCleave was still living in 1952.

The "Big Fire" of November 1916 at Ocean Springs commenced in the J.P. Van Cleave Store building. It had been vacant for a few months before the conflagration. The rapidly moving, gale driven, blaze destroyed several cottages and the Vahle House on south Washington. Only the valiant efforts of the Ocean Springs Fire Company No. 1, Hook and Ladder Company, and volunteers citizens saved other structure in the path of the fire.

Veillon

Henrietta "Cora" Hyde Veillon was the wife of Alceide Anthony Veillon (1862-1949). After her death in 1920, he married Antoinette Haas Forkert (1880-1953). She was the daughter of German born horticulturist, Charles Forkert (1854-1928). Forkert left his mark on local history by developing pecan varieties through cross-pollination research at his Bay View Nursery. Veillon made his livelihood as a hack driver, meat market operator, and later ran a billiard hall on Washington Avenue.

Kotzum

The Van Cleave Cottage was held by Mrs. Veillon for less than a year. She sold it to Joseph Kotzum (1842-1915) in December 1912 for \$1100.(7) Joseph Kotzum like R.A. VanCleave was a pioneer in the local government. He was born in Bohemia (western Czechoslovakia) and came to America probably during the 1860s. Kotzum had that Teutonic work ethic, and entrepreneurial spirit which guaranteed success in life. His vocation was blacksmithing. With his faithful wife, Josephine (1844-1916+), Kotzum acquired valuable real estate throughout the city. In 1895, he established the Kotzum Addition, a subdivision in the east portion of Old Ocean Springs.

As a servant of government, Kotzum was the first elected alderman from Ward 1 (1893-1894), and represented the people of the city as alderman-at-large (1903-1904). He also

served on the first Evergreen Cemetery Commission, and operated the water works in the early 1900s.

After Joseph Kotzum's demise in 1915, Mrs. Kotzum sold the property to her son, Anton P. Kotzum (1871-1916).(8) Anton was called Tony. Like his father Tony Kotzum was a blacksmith. He joined a young Canadian, Orey Young (1868-1938), to establish Young & Kotzum who in 1893 advertised as: ***Machinists and plumbers, horseshoeing and general blacksmithing, repairing of all kinds, makers of fine oyster knives.***

In 1898, Tony Kotzum moved his family to California. They returned to Ocean Springs in 1915 after the death of Joseph Kotzum. Upon his return to the Mississippi coast, Kotzum took control of his father's real estate. He also became an oyster dealer establishing the Eagle Point Oyster Company. Tony Kotzum enjoyed the reputation as a fine musician and led the local band.

In September 1916, Kotzum was found dead in his bed from a fatal gunshot wound to his head. Initially murder was suspected, but his wife, Julia, later related to authorities that his demise was suicide.

O.D. Davidson

In July 1925, the A.P. Kotzum Heirs (Julia Kotzum Bryan and her two children) vended the Van Cleave Cottage to Orin D. Davidson (1872-1938).(9) Davidson was a Justice of the Peace (1916-1938) and town character noted for his wit and humor. Judge Davidson has been called the "Will Rogers" of Ocean Springs.

The Queen Anne cottage remained in the Davidson Family as a rental property being utilized in recent years as a real estate office and health food store. K Realty ye Real Estate Shoppe owned by Jim Kelly and Ruthe Nelson operated here in 1974. Russell's Energy Center moved out in 1991.

Lynn A. Linenberger

In March 1992, Lynn Ann Linenberger bought the Van Cleave cottage from some of the heirs of O.D. Davidson and Iola Y. Faivre: Davida Davidson Hrabe, Patricia Davidson Covert, Joyce Davidson Elliot, and Marco St. John born Figueroa.(10)

Lynn Linenberger in partnership with Ralph Codianne refurbished the building utilizing the carpentry skills of Jeff Williams. They plan to operate a restaurant and lounge on the premises to be called "The Old Blue House". They have done an excellent job in restoring the structure and preserving it for future generations in Ocean Springs to enjoy and appreciate. Business went el foldo circa late 1992. Martha's Tea Room for a few months while refurbishing her Washington Avenue location next to the Bailey Building (Love-lace Drugs).

In December 1993, Maison des Delice opened. Proprietors are Katherine Wooster and Daniel Jouannic. They came from Key West, Florida where they had resided for the past

fifteen years. She a native of Massachusetts. Left the East during the blizzard of 1979, for warmer climes. He is from Auray, which is in the province of Bretagne, France. Came to Key West to visit his best friend and stayed on where he learned the baking arts at Croissant de France. Children: Damien, Kevin, and Delavan.

G. Todd Boswell

Lynn Ann Linenberger sold to Garland Todd Boswell in August 1994.(11) Boswell operates a successful tonsorial parlor here.

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