

REMAINS OF MASS MURDER HOUSE FOUND

SITE OF AX MURDERS OF NINE VICTIMS VISITED, PHOTOGRAPHED

The most atrocious mass murder in the history of the state of Georgia occurred in 1887 when Tom Woolfolk (pronounced WOOL-FORK) killed nine members of his family with an ax. After two trials and two appeals, Tom Woolfolk was publicly executed on the gallows in 1890.

Although they occurred near Macon, the Woolfolk murders have close connections to Athens. Tom Woolfolk's mother, Susan Moore Woolfolk, who died in 1860 shortly after Tom's birth, was an Athens native. One of the victims, Tom's father Richard Woolfolk, was an 1854 graduate of the University of Georgia. Tom Woolfolk himself had been raised in Athens for the first seven years of his life, and made the last of his frequent visits to Athens just two months before the crimes. A sister of Tom's, as well as his aunt, resided in Athens. (The aunt is buried in Oconee Hill Cemetery.) Tom's chief defense lawyer was an Athens lawyer.

The Woolfolk murders were committed inside the Woolfolk family farmhouse on what was then an 867-acre plantation in rural Bibb County, west of Macon and south of what is now State Road 74 (popularly referred to as the Thomaston Road), then known as the Culloden Road. After the terrible event, the farmhouse appears to have been unoccupied for a time, and then to have been sold. In 1909 it appears the house was briefly occupied and used as the offices of an automobile club. Thereaf-

ter the house was again vacant and appears to have been damaged by fire in the 1920s.

In 1964, legendary UGA history professor E. Merton Coulter visited the site of the Woolfolk murder house and found only "two large piles of brick and stones, marking the chimney places; a depression, appearing to have been the cellar; a well nearly filled up

out to me the general location where she thought the house had been situated.

Although I spent several hours laboriously searching through hundreds of square yards of thickly wooded and brush-filled hilly terrain, I failed to find any sign of the murder house. I even published an article that year flatly stating that the remains of the house had vanished forever into bosom of the earth.

In 1994, historian Kathryn Gray-White visited the old Woolfolk plantation to look for the murder house and reported that "nothing whatsoever remains of the now infamous site."

In fact, however, the remains of the murder house still exist, and I recently visited them.

Thanks to the kindness of several persons — and they will remain anonymous, out of respect for their privacy — who are familiar with the history of Bibb County, I was conducted to the ruins of the murder house Saturday, Feb. 10, 1996. On my visit, I was accompanied by Mr. Ed Green Jr., an expert authority on crime history who has extensively researched the Woolfolk case.

During my visit I discovered that since Coulter's visit over 30 years ago, the site remains recognizable, but that the ruins have generally deteriorated and that the woods and vegetation and the ravages of time are steadily erasing all traces of the house.

The accompanying photographs, which I took during my visit, are now published for the first time.

Donald E. Wilkes, Jr.



The Woolfolk farmhouse well. On Sunday, Aug. 7, 1887, bloody clothing belonging to Tom Woolfolk was fished out of this well.



Prof. Wilkes standing in the depression marking the site of the former cellar of the Woolfolk farmhouse.

near a cedar tree, some shrubbery, and a large holly tree, marking the site where Susan M. Woolfolk, Richard's first wife, was buried."

Twice — in August 1990 and October 1990 — I drove to Bibb County, attempting to locate the site of the murder house. On the second attempt, I was taken to a wooded area near State Road 74 by a descendant of the Woolfolk victims who had graciously offered to point

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