

# BOONE'S LICK HERITAGE QUARTERLY



Historic Sappington Cemetery near Arrow Rock in Saline County. Photo by Don Cullimore

## **The Wooing and Winning of Lavinia Sappington** *Architectural Gems in the Boonslick: The Nivert Garage*

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VOL. 14 No. 1 — SPRING 2015  
BOONSLICK HISTORICAL SOCIETY PERIODICAL

# Marmaduke Love Story, Architecture, and Bingham Burial Mystery

"ECLECTIC" WOULD BE THE BEST ADJECTIVE TO DESCRIBE the offerings in the Spring issue of the *Quarterly*. We place before our readers a view of early nineteenth-century matchmaking, move on to early twentieth-century architecture, and throw in an invitation to attend a mystery story that would pique the interest of Hercule Poirot, Agatha Christie's intrepid and fastidious private detective.

Our love story (page 4) tells of the wooing and winning of Lavinia Sappington, daughter of renowned Arrow Rock medical doctor John Sappington, self-taught pharmacist who developed the quinine pill so vital to the quelling of malaria. Lavinia was one of seven daughters of the good doctor and his wife, Jane Breathitt, three of whom were claimed by Claiborne Fox Jackson. Meredith and Lavinia were married in 1826 and themselves produced a large brood (three daughters, seven sons) during their thirty-eight-year marriage, which ended with his death in 1864. The selection is an excerpt from a chapter of a biography on Meredith Miles Marmaduke being written by Missouri author Lee M. (Marmaduke) Cullimore. And spring is indeed the signature time for telling love stories.

Historian Brett Rogers offers readers another in his series of articles on architecturally significant dwellings and other historic structures in the Boonslick (page 8). The current article details the building of a unique structure in downtown Glasgow in the years just after WW I – the Nivert garage, which, among other purposes, served as an automobile dealership and repair garage.

The Bingham mystery story will be the highlight of a meeting April 17 in New Franklin being hosted jointly by the Boonslick Historical Society (BHS) and the South Howard County Historical Society (SHCHS). Missouri historian and educator Maryellen Harshbarger McVicker will be the featured story teller at the meeting, which will be held at the South Howard County Historical Society Museum, 110 Broadway, in the New Franklin business district square. It begins at 7 p.m. The general public is invited and there is no fee. For more information, contact Cindy Bowen at 660-273-2374 or by email at [gbowen@socket.net](mailto:gbowen@socket.net).

The title of McVicker's presentation will be "Where is

Lizzy Bingham?" According to McVicker, "Every single book and publication written about the nineteenth-century artist, George Caleb Bingham, states that his first wife (one of three), Sarah Elizabeth Hutchinson Bingham, is buried in Arrow Rock, in Saline County. Actually she is buried in Sunset Hills Cemetery in Boonville."

Meeting attendees will be invited on a journey of discovery as the speaker sets out to find who is buried underneath a weathered tombstone in Boonville and discovers that it is Bingham's wife. If she is buried in Boonville, then who is the person buried in Arrow Rock? Poirot may have well met his match at detective work in the intrepid Doctor McVicker.

McVicker is a native of Boone County and currently lives in Boonville. She became fascinated by George Caleb Bingham when doing her own family genealogy of the Sappington family (her paternal grandmother Harshbarger's family) and learned that the land that is now Arrow Rock was donated by John and Mary Harshbarger Bingham. There were many family names in this mix and she was intrigued.

For the past 40 years she has pursued the life of Bingham and the family of Bingham. She wrote the catalogue for the exhibit on Bingham at The Ashby-Hodge Gallery of Art

in Fayette in 2011, the Bicentennial of Bingham's birth. She has also presented papers on Bingham at national professional meetings, including the Organization of American Historians and the Association of Gravestone Studies.

McVicker served as executive director of the Friends of Historic Boonville for a number of years. The Society works with cultural heritage and preservation issues in Central Missouri. In 1992, she became a member of the Missouri Humanities Council.

McVicker earned her Ph.D. in Art History from the University of Missouri with a specialty in historic preservation. She taught art history and was executive director of the Stephens Museum at Central Methodist College (now University), Fayette, for eight years. Currently, she teaches American History and Art History at the Columbia campus of Moberly Area Community College.



**Artist George Caleb Bingham's house in the village of Arrow Rock**  
Photo by Don Cullimore

— Don B. Cullimore



**Boone's Lick Heritage Quarterly** is published four times a year by the Boonslick Historical Society, P.O. Box 426, Boonville, MO 65233.

**We encourage our members** and others interested in history to contribute articles or other information of historical interest, including family histories, pertaining to the region. Please address all contributions and correspondence related to the periodical to the editor, Don B. Cullimore, 1 Lawrence Dr., Fayette, MO 65248, or email to: don.cullimore40@gmail.com, phone: 660-248-1732. Editorial guidelines may be obtained from the editor. Publication deadlines are February 1 for the March (Spring) issue; May 1 for the June (Summer) issue; August 1 for the September (Fall) issue; and November 1 for the (Winter) December issue.

**The Boonslick Historical Society** was founded in 1937 and meets several times a year to enjoy programs about historical topics pertinent to the Boonslick area. Members of the Society have worked together over the years to publish historical books and brochures and to mark historic sites. They supported the founding of Boone's Lick State Historic Site, marked the sites of Cooper's Fort and Hanna Cole's Fort and have restored a George Caleb Bingham painting on loan to The Ashby-Hodge Gallery of American Art at Central Methodist University, Fayette.

**Membership dues** are \$15-Individual, \$25-Family, \$50-Sponsor, \$250-Patron, \$500-Life. The dues year is January through December. Receive our publication, *Boone's Lick Heritage Quarterly*, and attend annual Society events highlighting the region's history. To become a member, send a check made out to the Boonslick Historical Society, P.O. Box 426, Boonville, MO 65233.

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*By Brett Rogers*



Architect Ludwig Abt  
designed the modern-  
looking Nivert Garage in  
Glasgow, which was built  
in 1920 and used for a car  
dealership.

### **Howard County Library Celebrates 100th Year**

The Howard County Public Library in Fayette is celebrating its 100th year. A series of events is planned for the month of April by the Library and Friends of the Library. The Howard County Library is one of 33 lending libraries built across Missouri with money from the Carnegie Corporation. Fayette received a \$10,000 grant to build the Library in 1915.

#### **EVENTS**

April 1: Centennial Celebration on Library Steps and Open House,  
3 p.m.

April 9: Children's Story Hour, led by Bonnie Potter, 4 p.m.

April 16: Movie Night at Library: Andrew Carnegie, 7 p.m.

Children's Coloring Contest

April 23: Birthday Dinner and Friends of Library Annual Meeting,  
4th floor, Central Methodist University Inman Student Center.

All events are free except the dinner, which is \$10 a person. Tickets may be purchased at the Library or call 660-248-3348. Reservations deadline, April 18.

# Finding a Partner for “Hymoon’s Alter”

## *Meredith Miles Marmaduke’s search for a wife in the Booneslick, 1823-1826*

By Lee M. Cullimore ©

DURING THE WINTER OF 1823-24, AT THE FRONTIER VILLAGE of Franklin, Missouri, and planning a trading expedition to Santa Fe the next summer, Meredith Marmaduke was also looking for a wife. Thirty-two years old, a bachelor, marriage held high in his mind. He had left a sweetheart in Virginia the previous summer, probably because she wasn’t interested in marrying someone whose plans included moving to the “wild West.” Meredith was somewhere between Lexington, Kentucky, and Missouri when his brother wrote to tell him “Sarah Hunter has not been in our neighborhood *since you left her* [emphasis added]. She is at Mr. Jenkins as I am told.” His brother again made a point of telling Meredith about Sarah’s welfare in a letter written in early November (after Meredith had arrived at Franklin), saying “Couzen Nancy Jenkins has a fine sone since you left us. Sally [Sarah] Hunter has been with her ever since *she left you* [emphasis added] and has been sick as I have heard.” And in October of 1824, Meredith’s nephew, Vincent McClanahan, wrote him (at the time in Santa Fe) saying that Sarah Hunter was soon to be married to Thomas Omohundro.

Any romantic interest between Sarah and Meredith faded when he left Virginia, but he didn’t give up the idea of marriage. In early December of 1823 he wrote to Frances Porter, a cousin in Westmoreland County, asking if she knew of anyone who might be interested in marriage. Her response told him of several recent marriages in her neighborhood, then answered his query about prospective brides. “From your letter you rote [sic] to us,” she replied, “I am apt to suppose that providence has not as yet directed you to the little girl you thought might be in reserve for you in your wild country. As you requested me to inform you who wish to marry, I believe there are many among us that would have no objection to stand before hymoons alter [Hymen, the God of Marriage, from Greek mythology] provided they would meet with persons that would suit.” Evidently Meredith didn’t “suit,” since no young ladies’ names were put forth for his consideration.

Another letter inquiring about potential brides went in the

mail at Franklin the first week of December addressed to Richard Payne at Westmoreland Court House in Virginia. Payne responded early in the new year telling his “Dear Friend” that there were “no important marriages that I recolect [sic] of worth mentioning. The young ladies you mention are all single as yet & recvd. of me your respects with smiling faces.” Smiling faces, yes, but again no particular young lady declared her interest in joining Meredith in Missouri.

That the women Meredith had so far seen in Missouri failed to come up to his expectations is apparent in a letter written early in 1824 by his cousin Samson Porter, in Virginia, whom Meredith had earlier written entreating him to come west and join him. At the time Samson was himself searching for a wife, telling Meredith that he had “been at three weddings this year and hoped to be at more than a half dozen, but I am none the better for it, I only look on.” As for joining Meredith in Missouri and finding a wife there, Samson, whose spell-

ing left much to be desired, ventured “but when I reflect on your contry & what sort of ruf French girls you have to make choice of I feel sorry for you, & you for yourself, particularly when you think of Westmoreland and the adjoining counties where Beauty with all its variety of good qualities resides, I hope their is one apiece for us yet, tho the bucks are thining [sic] of them very fast. I have a pretty good notion of one, and she will have to say yes or no this year, depend upon it. Let this suffice on this score respecting your contry and the probability of geting their. My notion has well nigh vanished, tho last fall I had a great desire. . . . If I was to leave this part of the country I should be so much lamented, it might cause the death of many, so I must stay till I can get my conjugal affairs fixed.”

Meredith’s search in Virginia for a mail-order bride failed to produce the hoped-for result, but fortunately someone new came into his life. Prior to going to Santa Fe in the summer of 1824 he met Lavinia Sappington, the second-born of Dr. John Sappington’s seven daughters. The date of their meeting isn’t known although it is believed to have been May 16, 1824, when Meredith – then on his way to Santa Fe – camped a few miles beyond the Arrow Rock landing and called upon the doctor at his home to obtain quinine powder. The beauty of dark-haired sixteen-year-old Lavinia, seen in her father’s home that night, was not lost on Meredith. While no likeness of her at that age exists, a portrait painted eight years



Meredith Miles and Lavinia Sappington Marmaduke  
Portraits by George Caleb Bingham

Editor’s note: The manuscript presented here is an excerpt from a chapter in a forthcoming biography on Meredith Miles Marmaduke that is being researched and written by Lee Cullimore. A previous chapter was published in the Winter 2013 issue of the *Quarterly*.



later by Missouri artist George Caleb Bingham shows a woman of slender build with piercing dark eyes, high cheek bones and a straight, firm mouth – unsmiling yet pleasant in appearance, her black hair parted in the middle above a high forehead. A newspaper editor who visited Bingham at his Columbia, Missouri, studio in 1835, after viewing “a collection of well finished portraits,” (among which may have been those of Lavinia and her parents) commented that “the pencil of our artist, might be permitted occasionally, a stroke or two more of flattery, with advantage. In some instances too faithfully a copy of features is unfavorable in effect.” Despite Bingham giving Lavinia a stiff, almost chiseled appearance (a result of his style of composition during that period of his development as an artist), her beauty is apparent in the painting.

### Courtship Delayed

Upon leaving the Sappington home the evening before he started for Santa Fe, Meredith had to set aside his feelings about Lavinia. Any thoughts of courtship and marriage would await his return from the west, and if he wrote to her during his fourteen-month absence from Missouri, the letters are lost. When he did return, however, he wasted no time in knocking on Dr. Sappington’s door with his heart in his hand, asking if he could court Lavinia. Southern tradition required a father to assure that his daughters were well provided-for in their marriages, and prospective sons-in-law were carefully examined to determine their moral values and probable economic prospects. Meredith must have speedily met with Dr. Sappington’s expectations for he and Lavinia married on January 4, 1826, barely five months after his return from New Mexico. Unfortunately, the drama of their courtship can only be surmised since no letters or family an-

ecdotes survive to tell the story. Courtship and marriage customs among American families during the early nineteenth century were different than today. If a man received permission to court a family’s daughter, and if she consented to be courted, he could then begin to visit her, usually in the confines of her home. Community social gatherings such as picnics and camp meetings focused on church and school, where a couple could meet away from home, would have to await the establishment of those institutions – there were no public schools in Saline County in 1825 and the only church in Arrow Rock Township at the time had nine members who

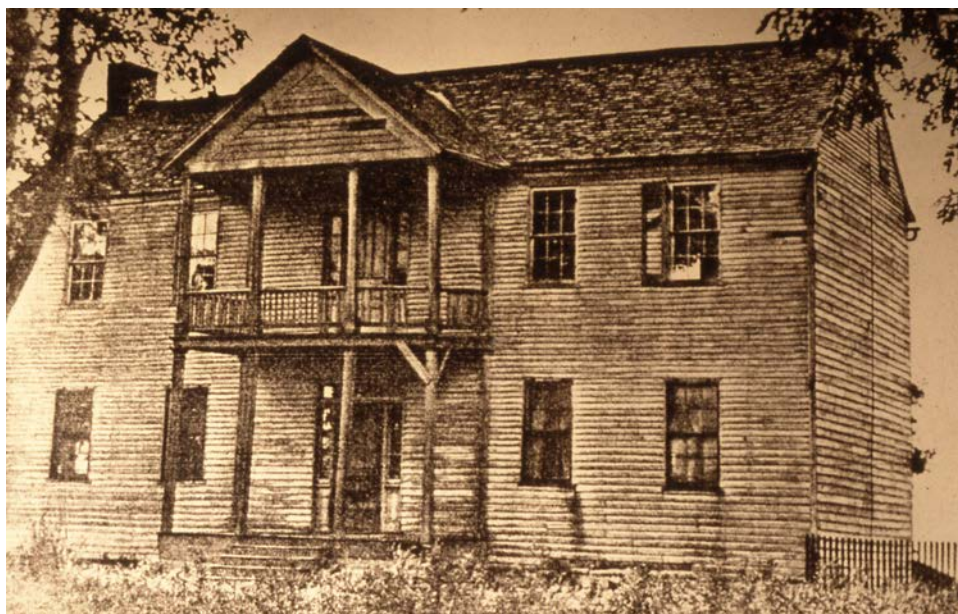
would gather occasionally in someone’s home for worship. There was no such thing as a “date” in the modern sense that allowed prospective lovers to be together un-chaperoned for a lengthy period of time. Such strict oversight, however, was no guarantee that a couple would abstain from romantic activities, even sexual activities, for where there is a will, a way will be found. Consequently, engagements were usually short-lived in the belief that it was better to consummate the marriage than to prolong a courtship that may result in a child conceived out of wedlock. Also, in colonial and post-revolutionary America long engagements were not practical in localities where an itinerant preacher was expected to perform the ceremony; the engaged couple had to be ready to take their vows when the preacher came by.

With nothing to tell us about Meredith and Lavinia’s courtship, questions arise that need answering. Were they in love, or did one or both marry with the belief that – over time – a deeper affection would develop between them and that their children would be the adhesive holding their marriage together? Certainly, Meredith was smitten by the youthful Lavinia, but nothing tells us he was a romantic suitor. Evidence of his personality during these years can be deduced from his actions, and letters that have survived,

and these show him to be pragmatic in his approach to life. He had left his home and family in Virginia in order to carve out a future for himself in the West. A wife and children figured into that future and now, at age thirty-four in September 1825, nearly twice Lavinia’s age, he knew it was time for him to marry and start his family. She, now aged eighteen, was still able to look around for a suitable husband, perhaps one nearer her age, however not many more years could

pass before she would be considered a candidate for spinsterhood. There is every reason to believe that Lavinia was looking for a husband and the security that the right man could provide. If love accompanied, so much the better.

Lavinia was popular with the young men of the Booneslick region. Suitors undoubtedly called upon the family with a view toward courting the daughter of the wealthy and influential Dr. Sappington. In fact, one young man thought he had already won Lavinia’s affection. During Meredith’s absence in New Mexico, John Hardeman’s twenty-year-old nephew, Seth, a college student



**Meredith Miles and Lavinia Sappington Marmaduke built a second home in the 1840s in Saline County west of Arrow Rock and lived there the rest of their lives.**

*Image courtesy of Jim Denny*



**Meredith Miles and Lavinia Sappington Marmaduke were buried in the Sappington Cemetery, now a State Historic Site, west of Arrow Rock. Photos by Don Cullimore**

at Franklin, Tennessee, visited his uncle in Howard County the summer of 1825 and while there fell in love with Lavinia Sappington. She responded by flirting with him. Their brief romance, with promises implied if not formally made, became a concern for Lavinia after her marriage and she must have said something to Meredith about it. He, wanting to avoid any difficulty with the Hardeman family (John Hardeman handled Meredith's affairs while he was in Santa Fe), wrote to Seth and informed him of the marriage. Responding to Meredith's letter, the somewhat naive Seth (not a good speller) could not hide his disappointment at being jilted.

"Dear Sir, I recd your letter of the 11th June last. . . . On seeing [sic] its contents I was much astonished to hear of the manner in which the marriage of Miss L. was conducted. altho I knew she was very anxious to marry I did not think she would have married so, soon & so secretly after promising she never would marry any but me as no one. I did not consider her under obligation to wait for me, nor did I promise her to return though I was to have written which I did & from that I understand she did not wait the arrival of my letters. To be short her conduct has proven her to be a different kind of girl from what I had taken her to be & I assure you I think myself extremely fortunate in getting off as well as I have done." After reproving Lavinia for her "conduct," and believing Meredith blameless in the matter, Seth related in his letter news about the tobacco and cotton harvests in Tennessee and a duel fought in Nashville – the amicable tone indicating his desire to maintain a friendship with Meredith. Four years later, Seth Hardeman drowned while attempting to swim the Mississippi River.

### A Grand Affair

Doctor Sappington's "commodious" two-story log house at Pilot Hickory, his plantation on the Saline County prairie, was the site of Meredith and Lavinia's wedding. Peyton Nowlin, a "Gospel Minister" of the Baptist faith described in later years as a "sedate, formal old gentleman, dry as to manners and sermons, but with a kind heart," performed the ceremony. He had been marrying couples in Saline County since 1821. Guests at the wedding included Sam McClure (Meredith's partner in the Santa Fe trade), a "Miss Collins, of Howard county, and members of the family of Mr. Nowlin." Some of Dr. Sappington's nearby neighbors, per-

haps the McMahan and Brownlees, residents of the neighborhood known as the "Sappington Settlement," were probably also at the wedding, and maybe some of the Hardeman family crossed the river to be there. But few came from any distance, a lack of accommodations limiting attendance to those who lived no more than a buggy-ride away, and the size of Dr. Sappington's house – although "commodious" – further restricting the number of guests.

The event was an important time in Dr. Sappington's home. Much like today, there would have been weeks of preparation beforehand. Guests had to be invited, attendants chosen, and the bride's wedding dress ordered – probably coming from a merchant in St. Louis or perhaps Philadelphia. While it was not uncommon at frontier weddings for the bride and groom to be dressed in "home-spun apparel – buckskin, jeans, cotton and linsey," Lavinia and Meredith undoubtedly enjoyed a better quality of dress, their higher economic and social status permitting (even requiring) an appropriate costume. One can only speculate about happenings at the wedding itself, but reflecting the couple's southern roots, traditions transplanted from Virginia and Tennessee would have ruled the day. The vows spoken, the party would begin. Frontier families, starved for entertainment, made the most of every opportunity that came along. Tables would be laid with a feast of cured and fresh meats, hot and cold dishes and soups prepared with vegetables retrieved from a cold cellar, fresh breads, cakes and pastries – all prepared and served by Sappington plantation slaves. An abundant supply of wine, brandy and whiskey (some ordered from Philadelphia) served to toast the bride and groom, and stimulate appetites, and invigorate all who partook. Later, those who had brought a musical instrument – a violin, generally – would be called upon to play familiar English or Celtic reels and jigs, perhaps even a minuet, and dancing might last until dawn. Eventually the festivities would end, guests would leave, and the exhausted newly wed couple could gracefully begin married life.

After the wedding Lavinia and Meredith lived in Dr. Sappington's home, staying there until their own house, being built less than a mile away, was completed. They lived in that house for eighteen years before replacing it with a larger home which stood for more than 135 years. In a span of twenty years following their marriage Lavinia gave birth to ten children – three daughters and



seven sons – nine of them living beyond infancy. She was nineteen at the birth of her first child, aged thirty-eight when the last was born in 1846.

### A Booneslick Holiday

Lavinia's role as a wife early in her marriage is partially illustrated in a letter written in January 1831 to her brother, William Beathitt Sappington, who was attending Cumberland Presbyterian College in Princeton, Kentucky, at the time. After explaining why she hadn't previously written, "Father had frequently to [do so] on business," and writing about the weather, "We have had an exceptionally hard winter . . . The ground has not been clear of snow for 5 or 6 weeks . . . I believe they have been driving loaded waggons across the Missouri for weeks," she told William about his family's activities during the recent holiday season:

"We have had a very merry Christmas. The Miss Sappingtons have had beaus in profusion. Mr. Shackelford of our family, gave a splendid Ball Christmas Eve. Jane, Louisa, Susan, Marry Ellen, and Darwin, attended. They went up Friday and returned Sunday evening attended by a host of gallants, too numerous to mention," (however, in a side note she names 'young Mr. Shackelford, Doct. Penn, who now lives with your father, Jackson [Claiborne Fox] of Franklin, Thos. Conway, Mr. Wetmore, brother of the Capt. of Franklin') "and on Monday evening they had a party at father's house. I believe they danced and played cards all night. Would you believe me when I tell you that Father not only played cards, but actually danced several sets, and was amongst the merriest of the company? The young ladies and gentlemen all went up to Jonesborough the next morning, got through the day there; came here in the evening, had a card party, which lasted till about 12 o'clock. The principal part of the company went to Father's, and Judge Tuckers [Nathaniel Beverly Tucker] the next day which was Wednesday. They were all invited to dine at Judge Tuckers, but the day was so exceedingly bad, that man nor beast dared venture out. So it was a disappointment, however Thursday was a better day, and Judge Tucker gave notice that the party would be expected that day, and accordingly went, dined, suped, and danced till day. By this time there were some sore feet, and heavy eyes, but would not flag. They noded [sic] all day Friday until evening; commenced dancing at Father's and danced till about midnight. Next morning which was New Year's morning, Jane recollected was her birthday, so they must try it again, and danced till Sunday dawned upon them, and so they were compelled to break up & go home, and sleep a little before Monday. And now what do you think of such a Christmas for Saline?"

A note of wistfulness is detected in Lavinia's pleasing narrative of the holiday season. Twenty-three years old, the mother of two and six months pregnant, she watched from the sideline while the younger, unattached merry-makers went off to the parties that began Christmas Eve and carried through until the new year was two days old. Seeing her sisters, "the Miss Sappingtons," flirting with "the host of gallants" must have evoked memories of when she was not married and was free to dance, dine, and play cards until dawn. Only on Monday, two days after Christmas, did she attend a party – at her father's home. Even there she was an observer, noting his uncharacteristic behavior – playing cards, dancing – as he got caught-up in the festive mood of the season, but evidently

not dancing with her. The roving party reached Lavinia and Meredith's home Tuesday evening for card playing which ended at midnight, definitely a more subdued activity than the revelry that characterized the week-long celebration. As a wife and mother Lavinia had to deal with social constraints and responsibilities that limited her activities during the holiday season. Meredith's presence at these festivities is not revealed by Lavinia, though he surely was at his home on Tuesday evening. He is mentioned only briefly (and then by title) at the end of the letter when Lavinia tells her brother that "Col. Marmaduke proposes to start to the East in a week to be gone 3 or 4 months." Although married couples in the early nineteenth century were more willing than their parents to demonstrate affection for each other and for their children, there remained a reluctance to express such feelings too openly, thus it was "Col. Marmaduke" instead of Meredith. However Lavinia and Meredith addressed each other in their home, outside of there – and in correspondence among family members and others, the intimacy conveyed by the use of first names remained a private matter. Throughout their lives they were always addressed as "Col." and "Mrs." Marmaduke.

### Author's Note

His trip to "hymoon's alter" in 1826 ended Meredith's anxiety about his posterity and, as he must have known it would, his marriage into the influential Sappington family gave him access to people and resources that otherwise might never have come his way. By 1829 he was positioned to become a trusted associate in his father-in-law's business interests. For Lavinia, the change from care-free young maiden to the wife of an ambitious older husband, the mother of five (in the decade following her marriage), and the mistress of a nascent plantation that over time would encompass more than 8,000 acres, brought challenges that she sometimes struggled to manage. These dual duties, mother and mistress, governed her life as her husband's business and political influence expanded.



# Architectural Gems in the Boonslick: Ludwig Abt's Nivert and Son Garage

By Brett Rogers

IN A PROLIFIC CAREER THAT SPANNED OVER A HALF CENTURY, German-born architect Ludwig Abt designed some of the most important and recognizable landmarks in central Missouri. Between 1912, when he first opened his office in Moberly, until his formal retirement in 1965, Abt designed well over 200 buildings, most of them in central Missouri.<sup>1</sup> In Howard and Cooper counties alone, Abt designed at least seventeen public and private buildings, many of which have survived and are still regarded as local treasures.<sup>2</sup> His understanding of changing architectural styles and tastes throughout his career is apparent in his ability to incorporate and adapt a wide range of styles—from various revival styles to depression-era Art Deco to postwar functionalism. Extant ex-

mark elements of classical form. The result was one of the area's first modern commercial buildings, and like many of Abt's other commissions, it would at once blend in to and stand out from the surrounding vernacular cityscape.

Ludwig Abt was born on March 6, 1882 in Hoechst, A-M, Germany, and was educated at the Technicum Hildburghausen in Thuringen.<sup>3</sup> He relocated to the United States in 1902 and worked in various architectural firms throughout the nation. Most notably, after the San Francisco earthquake of 1906 he designed buildings that contributed to the rebuilding of that city. He returned to Germany in 1908 and the following year made his way back to the United States, where he took a job with an architectural firm in

Kansas City. In 1912, Abt opened his own office in Moberly; with the exception of the years 1941-1947, he would remain in business there until his retirement in 1965.<sup>4</sup> Abt's advertising motto was "Ludwig Abt, Architect, Ideas Furnished," and he did just that, in profusion. He became recognized regionally for his designs of churches, theaters, schools, hospitals, lodges, residences, and other types of public and private buildings throughout small-town Missouri.

Although his career and oeuvre certainly span the history of twentieth-century "high style" architecture, he seldom if ever lost sight of the classical form that defined practically all of his designs, especially in his most prolific years, between 1915 and 1940. Indeed, it has been suggested that the classical academic form that constituted the inspiration for much of Abt's work is not necessarily removed from the community and lives of the people, but is actually *of the people*. That the seemingly

stark dichotomy thought to exist between classical architectural elements—those derived principally from the Greeks and Romans in particular—and the architectural vocabulary of small-town Missouri, does not necessarily exist.<sup>5</sup> In this light, one might see how elements of Abt's seemingly academic designs were vernacularized over a long period of time and actually fit into the architectural landscape of communities like Boonville and Glasgow. Monumental scale aside, the visual differences between rural and small town Greek revival churches, halls or I-houses and Abt's columned facades are not as great as one might think.

The Nivert Garage is one of Abt's more interesting and unusual commissions. William J. Nivert was a blacksmith of German descent who developed a prosperous business distributing farm implements in the small river town of Glasgow before the turn of the century. His business card, dating to the 1890s reads: "W. J. Nivert



**Architect Ludwig Abt's modern design for the Nivert Garage combined a functional interior space housed in a building with elements of classical form outside. The Glasgow structure, completed in 1920, housed a Chevrolet and Ford dealership.** Photos by Brett Rogers

amples of his architectural genius and varied stylistic range in the Boonslick include the classically inspired First Christian churches of Boonville and Fayette; the imposing Knights of Pythias façade and Johnston Gymnasium in Boonville; the simple yet monumental Art Deco of New Franklin High School; the distinct Prairie style of Boonville's Jacob Hirsch House; and the functionality and visual austerity of Bunceton's Dunbar School, among others. But one of the most unusual and often overlooked structures in Abt's local repertoire is Glasgow's Nivert Garage, a work that merged modern design, functional interior space, and the architect's trade-

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Brett Rogers is an architectural historian with deep roots in Little Dixie. He teaches history at area colleges and lives in Boonville.





Design elements include distinctive off-white terra-cotta tile trim and cornices. Original architectural sketch is shown below.

twenty-two, and the operation then became "Nivert and Son Farm Implements." In 1917 the Niverts took a bold step in opening one of the first automobile dealerships in the area, the Nivert Motor Company, Ford and Chevrolet Agency, but retained the locally familiar Nivert and Son name.<sup>8</sup> At first, the Niverts were likely operating their new automobile dealership at their former location, but they soon made plans for a modern building aptly suited for a dealership. Around 1918, the Niverts procured four adjacent lots at the southern end of the city's commercial district on the corner of 1st and Howard Streets.<sup>9</sup> It was an ideal location for an automobile dealership: the showroom would be visible to passersby on the city's main street, and the Glasgow spur of the Wabash railroad ran just off the western (lower) edge of the property, parallel to the river, which would make for easy delivery and unloading of automobiles.

At this point the Niverts were undoubtedly looking to hire an architect, and Ludwig Abt was overseeing the building of his St Mary's School, just two blocks west. Nivert was an active member

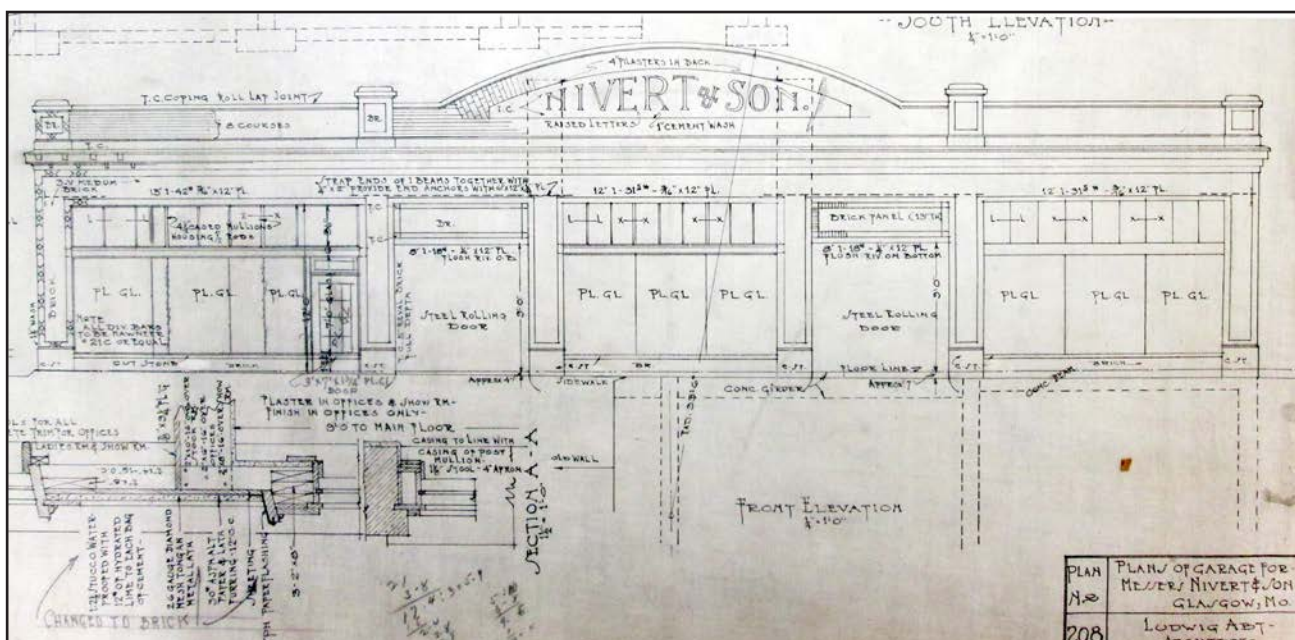
General Blacksmithing, Plows, Cultivators, and machinery of all kinds."<sup>6</sup> An advertisement in the *Chillicothe Constitution-Tribune* in 1909 stated very simply: "W. J. Nivert, Implement and Blacksmith Man."<sup>7</sup> His son, William B. Nivert, joined his father's business in 1908 at age

of St. Mary's Parish and certainly familiar with Abt's design for the school, if not other examples of the architect's work in the area.<sup>10</sup> In early 1919, Abt was commissioned to draft plans for the Nivert Garage. The result was a modern structure that would stand out architecturally against the vernacular buildings of the city's commercial district built before the 1920s, practically all of which were the product of local architect/builders and constructed by area masons in a typical mid-Missouri, vernacular German tradition. Against this backdrop, the Nivert building, though not radically modern in design, was distinctive both then and now. It was an era of industrial and commercial efficiency, and the car was fast becoming a symbol for the new age. The first automobile dealership in the area needed to stand as a brick-and-mortar symbol for the transformation that was taking place in Glasgow and the rest of small town America.

Nivert was likely concerned with an efficient use of available space. Because of the inclined property and the location of the railroad, the first level was to be at least partially used for automobile storage. The 1st Street façade had to be designed to highlight their merchandise and draw customers into the showroom. But organization of the remaining interior space was left up to the architect, with input from the client. In preparation for building, Nivert wrote to at least two national automobile trade magazines asking for suggestions as to how the interior should be laid out for maximum efficiency:

*Send us a sketch of garage for corner lot 75 x 90, extending through the block, the rear being 18 or 20 foot lower than the front of the lot. The rear of the lot is on railroad track. We will have about five mechanics and workroom downstairs, expect to have battery equipment, acetylene welding, and vulcanizing. The office, salesroom store and toilets will be on the main floor. Do you advise putting stockroom of parts on basement floor? Expect to store about twenty-five cars on top floor and some in basement. Think we will find an electric elevator necessary.*

*Nivert and Son, Glasgow MO.<sup>11</sup>*





**1920 Ford Model T Centerdoor Sedan, left, and 1922 Chevrolet Series 490 Touring Car, cars that likely were sold by Nivert Garage in Glasgow.** Courtesy BHS Photo Archives and Jim Steele

*Motor Age and Motor World for Jobbers, Dealers and Garagemen* responded by publishing their “ideal” floor plans, based on the information provided, and offered several professional suggestions for the Niverts. *Motor Age* emphatically insisted that an elevator was not necessary at all, since there was already a natural ramp, and agreed that the repair shop should be located on the basement floor but that it should be connected to the stock room since “saving steps is saving money.”<sup>12</sup> *Motor World* noted that it was important that shop be located on the main floor with an adjoining parts store. They too did not view Nivert’s elevator as necessary, since they omitted it in their plans.<sup>13</sup> It is notable that both publications suggested the placement of a single automobile entrance on both floors.

Abt’s design was probably not on paper by the time Nivert’s query was answered by the industry experts, and Nivert doesn’t appear to have taken the advice very seriously. And although generally considered modern in form and function, it too reflects Abt’s penchant for historical tradition. Dated August 15 of 1919, Abt’s final plans called for a 90’ x 87’ block building sheathed in brick veneer with a symmetrical three-bay brick façade. It featured decorative pilasters and plate-glass windows with vertically segmented transoms highlighted by distinctive off-white glazed terra-cotta tile trim and cornice, and capped with Abt’s distinctive design of “Nivert & Son” in raised tile letters within a central arched cartouche. A heavy tile cornice extends the length of the façade and around the Howard Street corner. The tile is almost identical to that used by the architect in his contemporaneous Knights of Pythias facade in Boonville, and is distinctive in both cases. Two large rolling steel doors and a pedestrian entrance were also incorporated into the front wall, as were two large sections of sidewalk prisms, probably the only such features in town, which unfortunately have not survived.<sup>14</sup> While the stark geometric form and plate glass is twentieth century, the pronounced brick pilasters, present in so many of Abt’s buildings of the 1910s and 1920s, and the inclusion of the arched central bay, are rooted the classical form that is nearly omnipresent in Abt’s art.

On the inside, the main floor plan included a tile-floor showroom on the southeast corner with plate-glass windows on two sides, taking full advantage of the corner lot in highlighting merchandise. Offices and a parts room were located behind the showroom on the southern edge of the building, with entrances from

both Howard and 1st Streets. Contrary to advice of industry planners, Abt included an 8 x 18 electric elevator, designed to transfer cars directly to the showroom from basement storage. His plan also placed the repair shop, vulcanizing machinery, and welding shop in the basement, in addition to new automobile inventory. This particular arrangement of space, planed by both architect and client, aimed at what they believed was optimal efficiency.

Construction of the Nivert Garage probably began in 1919 but was actually completed in early 1920. It is possible that the “xx” motif that is repeated throughout the glazed ornament (and was not included in Abt’s elevation drawings) was a last minute change that was intended to indicate construction date as well. *The Accessory and Garage Journal* notes that in May, 1919 the Simon Construction Company was contracted to build a 90’ x 90’ building and install all heavy tools and equipment for the sum of \$33,000.<sup>15</sup> The structure itself made extensive use of steel reinforced concrete, a material that Abt had used in many of his previous structures and that he was becoming increasingly fond of. This is especially evident in in beams, girders, columns, footings, and floors, where the tremendous weight of the automobiles on the main floor was taken into consideration. Piers, however, were to be of solid brick. The walls were constructed of hollow ceramic tile block with 4” brick veneer and commercial steel casement windows on the west and south walls to provide ample light. A close study of Abt’s working plans note a number of changes that were made as the building was erected. Some interior features were revised, and stone window ceils on the south wall were scratched in favor of more economical brick, and window configuration was slightly altered.<sup>16</sup>

Over the years, Abt’s interior design was radically changed. Many of the interior features—built-in cabinetry and interior trim in particular, have vanished in successive renovations. Additionally, the building has undergone several changes in fenestration. The segmented transom windows above the plate glass have been removed, and the southernmost entrance door has been replaced with a plate-glass window and brick added to blend with the rest of the façade. The building is no longer situated on a corner, since in more recent years, Howard Street between 1st and Water Streets is no longer accessible and has been backfilled, covering Nivert’s south entrance and several sections of windows.

The Niverts operated their dealership until 1935, when they sold the business to Reuther Chevrolet, which continued in busi-



ness into the 1980s. The Garage was placed on the National Register of Historic Places as part of the Glasgow Commercial Historic District nomination in the early 1990s.<sup>17</sup> A local landmark, the Nivert Garage has managed to retain much of its architectural integrity, and remains today as an impressively modern building within Glasgow's historic townscape—another enduring reminder of Abt's art and architectural genius in small-town Missouri.

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## NOTES

<sup>1</sup> The figure here is a conservative estimate based on an informal tally by the author. I have taken into consideration confirmed structures only. The total includes commissions for additions to existing structures and buildings designed by Abt and his partner from 1952-1965, J.K. Cleavinger (1927-2012). There are many more buildings designed by Abt that have yet to be positively identified.

<sup>2</sup> Buildings in Cooper and Howard Counties designed by Ludwig Abt include (in chronological order of dated plans): St. Joseph Hospital, 1st

Unit (1916) (razed), and 4 story addition (n.d.) (razed), Boonville; St. Joseph School (1917), Pilot Grove; St. Mary's School (1919), Glasgow; Nivert Garage (1919), Glasgow; Knights of Pythias (façade) (1920), Boonville; Jacob Hirsch Residence (1920), Boonville; New Franklin Bank (c.1920-1925), New Franklin; Daily School and Auditorium (1923), Fayette; Johnston Gym (1923), Boonville; Swimming Pool—Kemper School (c.1924), Boonville; Hospital—Kemper School (c.1924), Boonville; St. Peter and Paul School (1924), Boonville; St. Peter and Paul Sister's Quarters (c.1925), Boonville (razed); Jewett Apartments (c.1925-c.1930), Boonville; Lincoln School (c.1925), Fayette; First Christian Church (c.1930), Fayette; First Christian Church (1933), and addition (n.d.) Boonville; R.S. Price Residence (1935), Glasgow; Bunceton School (1937), Bunceton; New Franklin School (1939), New Franklin; Dunbar School (c.1954), (Abt and Cleavinger), Bunceton. Additionally, Abt drafted plans for the Cooper County Courthouse, but he did not receive the commission.

<sup>3</sup> Howard Wight Marshall, "Milestones and Stumbling Blocks, Continued," *Journal of Cultural Geography* 15 (Fall/Winter 1994): 54.

<sup>4</sup> "Ludwig Abt Dies: Noted Architect," *Moberly Monitor-Index* 12 (January 1967) 1-2. Abt maintained his office in Moberly from 1911 to 1941. During World War II, he worked for the New York engineering firm of Sanderson and Porter, in the construction of the Pine Bluff, Arkansas Arsenal, and then practiced in Kansas City, before returning to Moberly and reestablishing his firm in 1947.

<sup>5</sup> Marshall, 54.

<sup>6</sup> Neal E. Danielson, "Don't Sweat the Small Stuff," *Wichita Stamp Club Newsletter* 80, no. 7 (July 2012): 8.

<sup>7</sup> "W.J. Nivert, Implement and Blacksmith man," the *Chillicothe Constitution-Tribune* (October 9, 1909): 9.

<sup>8</sup> "W.B. Nivert," *The American Catholic Who's Who*, 1946-1947, vol. 7 (N.p: n.p, 1947) 332.

<sup>9</sup> The Sanborn map of the business district from 1910 notes a shed on the southernmost lot and a small machine shop on the lower level of one other lot; the others had been vacant since the mid-1890s. The 1922 map documents the new building. Glasgow, Missouri [map], 1910, "Sanborn Fire Insurance Maps for Missouri," University of Missouri Library Systems Digital Library.

<sup>10</sup> Nivert's connection to St. Mary's Church mentioned in: "W.B. Nivert," *The American Catholic Who's Who*, 1946-1947, 332. Catholic school buildings in mid-Missouri were fast becoming Abt's bread and butter; in the previous five years, Abt had designed St. Joseph's School in Pilot Grove (1917) and Sacred Heart in Columbia (1914), in addition to St. Mary's.

<sup>11</sup> "No. 59: Garage with Natural Ramp," *Motor Age* 35, no. 23 (June 5, 1919): 27.

<sup>12</sup> Ibid.

<sup>13</sup> "Plan #4: Garage on Corner Lot, 75 x 90," *Motor World for Jobbers, Dealers and Garagemen* 62, no. 5 (July 30, 1919): 27.

<sup>14</sup> The descriptive information here is based on examination of the extant structure and Abt's original floorplan and elevations. Ludwig Abt, Plans for Nivert Garage, #040-03, Ludwig Abt Collection, State Historical Society of Missouri, Ellis Library, University of Missouri, Columbia, Missouri.

<sup>15</sup> "Record of Building Operations for November: Contracts made and Plans Contemplated for Alterations or Erection of Garages, Repair Shops, Service Stations, or New Plants," *The Accessory and Garage Journal* 9, no. 7 (November, 1919): 62.

<sup>16</sup> Plans for Nivert Garage.

<sup>17</sup> National Register of Historic Places, Glasgow Commercial Historic District, Glasgow, Howard County, Missouri, National Register #82003141.

## Boonslick Historical Society

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**The Howard County Public Library in Fayette is celebrating its 100th year. A series of events is planned for the month of April by the Library and Friends of the Library (see page 3). The Howard County Library is one of 33 lending libraries built across Missouri with money from the Carnegie Corporation. Fayette received a \$10,000 grant to build the Library in 1915.**  
Photo by Don Cullimore