

316 East Third Avenue
Rome, Georgia 30161
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Victorian Homes
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Dear Carolyn Flaherty,

It is difficult to know or even begin to imagine the changes that will occur in our lives with the passage of time. I last wrote to you in November of 1986. At that time I was divorced and shared with you feelings my daughter, Cathy, and I had had upon leaving our home and the sense of pride we then felt upon completion of our new smaller Victorian home across the lane. You printed a picture of our lovely home in your "Reader's Corner" spring 1987. Your response letter to me was warm and open, and I have felt since that I have a friend, though we may never meet.

Many things have happened in the lives of myself and those close to me. I married again my previous husband, Ray; we had a Victorian wedding on the lawn of my Spring, Texas home. Again, there was sadness when I left that home. Ray's job took us to Massachusetts, and Cathy was accepted at Boston University. Our dogs and cats, antiques and dreams traveled from the Southwest to New England where we were sure we would establish home and security again. We moved into a long bright blue building, Camp Friendship, Remme Recreation Area's dining hall, in West Wareham, Massachusetts. I arranged my things and hung lace curtains from the ceiling to separate areas into rooms. This was to be our temporary home. In exchange for design and survey work performed by my husband, we were to receive a lot on one of the three lakes within the property. City approval was to come within six months. A year and a half later, we were still waiting for approval by the planning commission. We endured a winter of harsh cold in that uninsulated dining hall with twenty-six windows, the wind ripping across the lake and through. We waited, and, in the meantime, I planted old-fashioned roses, lilacs, and peonies on what was to be our property. Our wait continued and compounded with my inability to find a teaching position, Ray's decreasing job security, and other negative factors.

A decision was made to move south, to return to Georgia where Ray and I had first met and where Cathy was born. Ray was offered a position as Chief of Surveys for the Rocky Mountain Pump Storage Project in Rome, Georgia. We flew there so that I could interview for teaching positions and to locate a home. We had previously talked to David Terrell of Trinity Real Estate. I described the home I would like via telephone. When we arrived, the first home we were shown, sitting atop Old Shorter Hill, is the home that is now ours.

I know I've just written a lot of preliminary. After all, my purpose is to tell you about this home. But you can't begin to feel what I felt, without knowing what preceded. When Mr. Terrell opened these doors, Ray and I knew that this was the reason for all the delays. This was to be our home. I have smiled quietly inside when I think what the driver must have thought when he packed us up and moved us from that ugly cold dining hall to this home. I don't call it a mansion; it is a stately home, nearly five thousand square feet and one hundred-ten years old, a true Victorian. I accepted a position as teacher of the gifted with Rome City Schools and thoroughly enjoy my work. Cathy returned to Texas, graduated from the University of Texas, and has completed her first year at the University of Houston's School of Optometry. Our lives have meaningful direction again.

✓ Rome is a picturesque city in Northwest Georgia, 65 miles northwest of Atlanta, rich in history. Historians theorize that DeSoto's men summered in this area in 1539. In the 1830's the Cherokees were driven from here after gold was discovered in nearby Dahlonega. Rome's founding site in 1834 is just two blocks from my home. Rome became important to the Confederacy as a rail and manufacturing center. Much of the city was destroyed by Sherman's troops as he here first began his march to the sea. Ellen Axson Wilson, wife of President Woodrow Wilson, met her husband here on this street and is buried nearby in Myrtle Hill Cemetery. Margaret Mitchell was a close friend of Agnes Fahy who lived just two homes away and came from Atlanta to spend many weekends in their house. Our Town Clock, built in 1871, is the official symbol and sits atop another of Rome's seven hills. Our most famous statue, the "Capitoline Wolf," was a gift by Mussolini from old Rome to modern Rome presented in 1929. Downtown was the heart of Rome, called the "Between the Rivers" District because of the confluence of the Etowah and Oostanoula to form the Coosa River.

✓ While Rome is rich in history, it has not become stagnated. Here you will find superior medical facilities including

two hospitals. In addition, there are three colleges and a vocational school the most famous of which is Berry College founded by Martha Berry with generous contributions by financier and philanthropist Henry Ford who visited often. Rome is a wonderful place to raise a family; it's a caring community where friends and family are valued.

Our home was built between 1883 and 1885 by Dr. Eben Hillyer who was the son of Junius Hillyer, Congressman and Judge of the Superior Court between 1851 and 1855 and Solicitor of the U.S. Treasury until Georgia's secession. Dr. Hillyer was the great-grandson of Asa Hillyer from Granby, Connecticut who served in the Revolutionary War. Before Ray and I had closed on the sale of our home, we began research on its history and the history of its family. We spent hours in the office of records and at the library going through old deeds, newspapers, city and telephone directories.

I have included along with information regarding Rome's history and present day attributes and information regarding the Civil War as it affected Rome, the results of our research of the family and those who have since lived in our home. We know that it was occupied by Eben Hamilton Yancey, great grandson of Eben Hillyer, until 1942. We know, too, that Judge Claude Porter, husband of Eben's granddaughter, lived in the home until 1964. During the early 1930's portions of the home became apartments. Much of it was divided in this way until about 1980 when it was again returned to a single family dwelling. It was, however, Dr. Jeffrey Crews who labored to restore it to its present state. He painstakingly removed layers of paint from several of the burl walnut mantels, from woodwork, and the entire heart pine staircase. He, too, remodeled the small divided areas in the back of the home into a magnificent kitchen by removing several walls and a fireplace to create a grand gourmet kitchen, a kitchen nearly as large as my first home. He shared with us pictures of the home before restoration was begun. It was difficult for us to identify, without careful study, just where in our home many of the pictures had been taken. We owe a great deal of thanks to Dr. Crews. Ray and I dearly love this home. We have worked ourselves to continue restoration. We have had the back stairway, which had been walled off, reopened. We designed and created stained glass windows ourselves for the back stairway, kitchen, and master bedroom. Both bathrooms have been remodeled. In addition, we have repainted and wallpapered much of the house, and we have spent countless hours working to clear the jungle of kudzu in the backyard to reveal the original five terraces. We have continued the work, but it is Dr. Crews who should always be given credit for the difficult restoration process.

Our home's design is wonderful for entertaining. Several of Ray's company and my school's Christmas parties as well as our "Between the Rivers" holiday have been held here. It's a warm and friendly home, made so, I'm sure, not alone because of it's open and airy design, but also because of those who lived here before. Eben Hillyer's gravestone reads:

"Oh! How we loved him."

"As he lived, so he died.

True to his friends, whom he cherished from youth
to old age.

Devoted to his family, whose well being was his
constant care.

Faithful to his church whose service was his
soul's delight.

Loyal to his country, which he served as soldier
and surgeon.

Obedient to his God, whom he adored and worshipped.

And could say with the Apostle,

'I know whom I have believed and am persuaded.

He is able to keep that which I have committed
unto Him against that day.'

We've been told that his granddaughter, Maude, was a lady in every sense, cultured and artistic. One of Rome's judges, a relative of the family, has a portrait by her in his home.

People often ask how many rooms we have. The number is remarkably small: the size of the rooms is not. Our entry and upstairs hall are each 42 feet by 12 feet. Most of the rooms are 18 by 18 or larger. There are six fireplaces, four separate heating, and four air conditioning units. Unique original tile was found under layers of paint in our living room fireplace. Burl walnut mantles and extravagant moldings are in many rooms. Our dining room chandelier was brought by Maude Yancey from Italy.

✓ It's a home that needs to be shared. I have brought children from my school here to tour the home and learn about our Victorian furnishings. We have hosted young adults from Japan and Belgium, and there have been adult guests for extended periods from Japan and Brazil. It's a pleasure for us to share with others the history of our home and our city.

In addition to creating stained glass windows, Ray and I have also completed three Tiffany style lamps. Two of these we put on antique bases. While I was in Massachusetts, I

worked in an antique shop in Pembroke. The owner, David Hutton, would often allow me to quickly exchange my pay for antiques; often I would need to add an "I owe you" to the drawer as well. I seldom left with money. Our piano lamp base and iris base were acquired in this way. So, too, were a banquet lamp, fainting couch, wicker planter, 1840's sofa and many, many small treasures.

Ray and I had begun collecting antiques over ten years ago in Texas. We refinished many pieces ourselves including two that were particularly difficult, both painted white, a five-stack oak bookcase and a Hoosier cabinet. In Texas, we found a beautifully hand-carved sofa and two matching chairs which had been brought to LaGrange from Europe by the owner's grandfather. We often attended auctions in Texas. There we found our oak dining table, chairs, server, and buffet. We also brought our S curve roll top desk, an oak crank phonograph, Murphy bed, and high back oak bed from Texas. I had had a few pieces before, things from my home, my room when I was growing up. There, I was surrounded by older things and, as a young girl, I was at times a bit envious of my friends who had new homes and new furniture. My birdseye maple dresser, my rocking chair, and oak nightstand, though, were treasured, and, when I married, they became a part of my home. Cathy has grown up with those pieces, too, and they remain cherished. I'm sometimes amazed at lack of appreciation for heritage in adults. I wouldn't think of ever giving up those pieces that were part of my childhood. We have, though, purchased things from people who know that they have been in the family for generations and have willingly, and not because of a hardship, wanted to be rid of them. A loveseat, one of our seven sofas, was acquired this way.

What I am is a combination of all that has come before; so, too, is my home a combination of all that preceded. Everywhere I look are memories. I have nearly one hundred century old bottles dug from a cistern at my childhood home. A fur muff brings memories of a trip to Maine. I remember clearly bringing home our dining room pieces and inviting our dear friends and neighbors in immediately to see them. I've brought back keys from Sicily and France. I love keys and have over 200. I can only imagine the story locked away with each one. Ray brought me once a lovely silver beaded bag, a gift, then, of love.

We have continued to add. In nearby Cave Spring we purchased our ornate hall tree and here in Rome an antique carpet before we finalized the sale of our home. We knew exactly where they belonged. Everything we brought found its place in our home as though each piece had always been here.

Our dining room over the mantle piece, purchased at Master's Antiques, matches exactly the mantle. The paintings hanging above the fireplace in the living room and Cathy's room appear to be related although they arrived from two separate areas of the country. We've been told they were part of a theatre's stage background. We have also learned that the model for each may have been that found on the White Rock water bottle. The six piece red velvet parlor set purchased from a friend who is a dealer at Cotton Patch antiques, here, complements our other pieces and our sitting room, an extension of the entry hall.

Our home looks not like a museum, but rather as though one had stepped back into time. A real family lives here. The pieces we have are used. There is detail. Everywhere, is Victorian. I have tried to complement furnishings with the Victorian crafts I have created. Ribbioned garland is left on the mantles throughout the year. Moire hanging hearts decorate the walls. Victorian frames and jewelry boxes sit atop oval tables and dressers. There are lace and ribbioned fans and posies. At Christmas, a twelve foot tree is decorated almost entirely with dried flowers, lace, velvet, and ribbioned decorations Ray and I have made.

Our home was one of those selected for inclusion in the "In The Shadow of the Clock Tower" downtown tour. An unedited draft of this is being sent to you so that you might better picture our "Between the Rivers" area and its history. Since this is a rough draft, I would hope that the information provided might be useful in a general way. I called just last week to inquire if publication on a finalized tour booklet has begun. It has not. When completed, I will send you, if you are interested, a copy that then might be quoted. I have no idea how much of this will be printed. The Convention and Visitor's bureau was kind enough to allow me to use this preliminary draft for my school tours.

I do truly love this home, and I'm very happy here in Rome. I want to share this feeling with you. I'm proud that Ray and I are able to have become a part of this history. I encourage you to one day visit Rome. There is so much here to see.

And we are just one hour away from Atlanta and the 1996 Olympics.

Thank you for your kind attention.

Your friend,

Bonnie Cormier

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Wednesday, February 23, 1994

Dear Bonnie,

It was so nice to hear from you -- I remember our original correspondence well. I am pleased to hear about you and your family and sounds as if you are truly back where you belong.

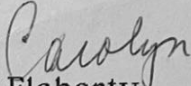
I have been keeping your packet on my desk wondering what to do with it. These are my problems: I have been very, very overstocked with articles, 2-the slides are not good enough for reproduction in the magazine--I'd have to have a professional photographer do the photography.

I now have an association with a couple who travel extensively and photograph for many magazines, including ours. (That is how we can afford them because we do not pay expenses.) I am going to pass on the information about you and your lovely home and they can see if they will be able to fit in a trip to Rome in the year or so. I will let you know as far in advance as I am able to.

Meanwhile, I have thoroughly enjoyed reading all the material you sent me. I don't actually get a chance to travel and so it was like a visit to Rome. I returning all but your letter.

Thank you for thinking of us and I do hope we will be in touch again soon.

Best personal regards,


Carolyn Flaherty