

Family heirloom donated to HSC Historical Society

By Ronna Pennington
Special to the MDR

It's been passed around and hung on many walls in the homes of descendants of Paralee (Lee) Maddry since the late 1880s, but in September 2016, a painting of "The Rockport Mill" found its new forever home — the Hot Spring County Historical Society's Heritage House.

Family members say the painting was made from a photograph that was taken in the 1860s. The mill was on the east bank, where the Tanner Street Bridge crosses the river, according to information provided by the HSC Historical Society. Mary Overton-Petrarca, the painter's great-granddaughter, and her son Frank Petrarca, the painter's great-great grandson, joined family members on Monday, Sept. 12, 2016, to donate the painting to the historical society.

Mary and her cousin remembered seeing the painting during their childhood. It hung in Willa Maddry-Chamberlain's ("Aunt Will) for many years and was passed on to Elizabeth Chidester. Elizabeth passed her home (where Sonic is now) and all its belongings to Mary's cousin, Marjorie Nowalk (Cooper). When she sold the property and moved to Texas, she gave the painting to Mary.

Mary was in possession of the painting for a while before her son, Frank, noticed it in her garage. He moved it to a safer place

and began asking questions about it. Mary told Frank the painting was "old and ugly and nobody wanted it," he said. But he quickly realized the art was a piece of his family's history and something bigger — a part of Malvern and Hot Spring County history. It was damaged by years of soot and smoke from hanging in houses heated with coal and wood fires, he said.

Frank luckily found someone near his home in Carmel, Ind., to restore the painting. "Long story short — it was beautiful," he said. His mom wanted him to have the painting, but he realized that no one in his Indiana town, or his mother's home in Springdale, would appreciate the artwork's significance to Hot Spring County history. The family decided to donate it.

As it turns out, donating the painting was an idea that had been discussed for some years. Elizabeth requested that Marjorie donate the painting to the Malvern/HSC library, but she procrastinated. "It's a good thing because the library burned and we would not have this painting," Frank added.

Frank said a family connection to the local historical society just made the donation seem right. Mary Evelyn Lawrence, a board member for the HSC Historical Society, was his grandparents' neighbor for more than 40 years. "She is like family to us so everything about donating this painting is just right. I feel



Photo Submitted

Friends and family members join the Petrarca family as they donate a family heirloom, a painting of "The Rockport Mill", to the Hot Spring County Historical Society. Present for the donation were (front, from left) Betty Ingram, Marjorie Nowak and Mary Petrarca; (back, from left) Gerald Williams and Mary Evelyn Lawrence (HSC board members), Frank Petrarca, Kelsey Irwin and Karen Petrarca.

we took the painting 'home' where it belongs," Frank explained.

Gerald Williams, Heritage co-editor and historical society board member, did a lot of valuable research about the painting, Frank said. Coordinating the donation with Gerald, Frank stopped by Malvern during a business trip to Dallas so he could make the donation in person. Several family members joined him at the Heritage House for the donation. After the event, several members of the family went to see the site of the original lumber mill. "The rock formations are there just like Gerald said they were," he added.

"It gives our family great pleasure and pride to bring this painting home, and I hope many people take the time to come see it. It is truly a piece of family and Malvern history. Everyone has gone through a lot of trouble to bring this painting home and I hope they get some traffic and donations their way," Frank said.

Community members who would like to see the painting are invited to drop by the Heritage House, 118 West Second Street in Malvern, any Friday, 10 a.m. to 2 p.m. The public is also invited to all meetings of the HSC Historical Society. The next meeting is Monday, Nov. 7, at 7 p.m.

PROVENANCE OF THE LEE MADDRY PAINTING

The following information is Provenance of the Lee Maddry Painting of the sawmill that stood on the east bank of the Ouachita River at Rockport, Arkansas.

This information was provided on September 2nd & 5th, 2016 by Mary Alice Overton-Petrarca and Marjorie Cooper-Nowalk, through correspondence between Mary's son Frank Petrarca and Gerald W. Williams, a Board Member of the Hot Spring County Historical Society and Co-Editor of the Society's annual publication, "The Heritage".

William T. Maddry married Mary E. Young in Rockport, Arkansas January 1, 1863. He was a postmaster in Malvern Junction.¹ Their three children were: Daniel Davis Maddry, Fannie Maddry and Willamina (Willia) Maddry.

Daniel Davis Maddry married Paralee (Lee) C. Buckner (the artist) January 6, 1891.

Willia Maddry married Percy Chamberlain, a druggist in Malvern. They had one child, Elizabeth Chamberlain who married Henry Baker. After Henry died Elizabeth married John Chidester of Malvern.

Fannie Maddry married Rufus W. Williams. Their children were: Mary Williams, who married Clyde Cooper; Linnie Williams, who married Harold A. Overton; Frances Williams and Rufus Williams. Mary and Clyde Cooper had two children: Betty Cooper, who married Bruce Ingram (living in Hot Springs, Arkansas) and Marjorie Cooper, who married Paul Nowalk (living in Plano, Texas). Betty and Bruce Ingram had one child, Allison Ingram. Marjorie and Paul Nowalk had one child, Mary Elizabeth Nowalk. Linnie and Harold Overton had two children: Harold Franklin Overton and Mary Alice Overton. Franklin was killed in the war. Mary Alice Overton married Lee Petrarca. They had three children: Karen Petrarca of Springdale, Arkansas; Franklin Petrarca and wife Theresa of Carmel, Indiana; and Michael Petrarca of South Chicago Heights, Illinois.

The family's understanding is that the painting was made from a picture taken in the 1860s.² It was handed down in the following order:

1. The artist, Paralee (Lee) C. Buckner-Maddry moved leaving the painting in possession of her mother-in-law, Mary E. Young-Maddry.³
2. Mary E. Young-Maddry died on September 21, 1919 leaving the painting to her daughter, Willamina (Willia) Maddry-Chamberlain.
3. Willia Maddry-Chamberlain died July 21, 1951 leaving the painting to her daughter, Elizabeth Chamberlain-Baker-Chidester
4. Elizabeth Chamberlain-Baker Chidester died in November 1980 leaving the painting to her cousin, Marjorie Cooper-Nowalk, daughter of Mary Williams-Cooper and granddaughter of Fannie Maddry-Williams who was a sister-in-law of Paralee (Lee) C. Buckner Maddry.
5. In 2011 Marjorie Cooper-Nowalk gave the painting to her cousin, Mary Overton-Petrarca, daughter of Linnie Williams-Overton and granddaughter of Fannie Maddry-Williams who was a sister-in-law of Paralee (Lee) C. Buckner Maddry.

After Mary Overton-Petrarca's husband died her family moved her from Bismarck, Arkansas to Springdale, Arkansas. During the move her son, Frank Petrarca saw the painting in a closet, which led to Frank having the painting restored and plans were made by Mary and her family as to the painting's future. Frank also had the painting appraised and a professional photo taken of it by Mike Maxwell of Carmel, Indiana.

It is with heartfelt honor and gratitude that they have chosen to donate the painting to The Hot Spring County Historical Society on Monday, September 12, 2016.

1. William T. Maddry's name appears on postmaster lists for 1885-1888. (Gerald W. Williams)

2. Based on the artist's birth (September 17, 1872) the painting was probably done in the latter half of the 1880s or in the early 1890s. (Gerald W. Williams)

3. Lee Maddry's family moved from Malvern, Arkansas to Little Rock, Arkansas between 1900 and 1910. She is listed on the Malvern, Hot Spring County, Arkansas 1900 Census and on the Little Rock, Pulaski County, Arkansas 1910, 1920 and 1930 Censuses. She died in Pulaski County on July 26, 1938 and is buried in Oak Ridge Cemetery, Malvern, Arkansas. (Gerald W. Williams)



Signing of the transfer papers. Left to right: Noreen Houpt, society president and grants coordinator; Frank Petrarca and Mary Overton-Petrarca.