

HISTORIC BACKGROUND

Some of the following historic background information was taken from the nomination papers for the National Register of Historic Places.

The Cedars, formerly known as Cedar Grove Place, reflects a transition from a small-scale vernacular farmhouse to a classically inspired Greek Revival form and provides an explicit representation of the stylistic evolution that occurred in Mississippi between 1820 and 1860. The house also attests to the increasing prosperity of the Church Hill area in the period before the Civil War. The property acquired additional significance during the twentieth century as the residence of author Josephine Balfour Payne from 1938 to 1972, and as the residence of actor George Hamilton. It is included on the National Register of Historic Places.

The Cedars was originally one of several parcels of land in a 1,087 acre tract known as Plains Plantation. This tract was owned by Joseph Dunbar, an attorney from Church Hill (Jefferson County, MS, Deed Book F, page 312). The house was said to have been constructed by Colonel James Gillam Wood for his daughter, Mary Louisa Shields (Rosa Johnston Miller, genealogical sketch of the James Gillam Wood family, Statewide Survey of Historic Sites, Oak Grove, Jefferson County, Mississippi Department of Archives and History, Jackson). The one-story farmhouse was built around 1830 and a porch was added around 1840. David Hunt, one of the founders of Oakland College (1830) and a wealthy landowner and planter of the region, acquired Plains Plantation in 1846 (Jefferson County, MS, Deed Book F, page 780). He sold the entire tract in 1854 to Benjamin D. Beavin (Jefferson County, MS, Deed Book I, page 21). Beavin owned the house for nineteen years and was responsible for the

construction of the front section around 1855. This addition was described in a later deed transaction as the "new upright part of the house" (Jefferson County, MS, Deed Book OO, page 92). After Beavin's death in 1873, the 120-acre parcel called Cedar Grove Place and described as a portion of Plains Plantation was sold to Adaline N. Balch of Church Hill (Jefferson County, MS, Deed Book BB, page 163).

In 1938, The Cedars was purchased by Earl W. and Josephine Balfour Payne (Jefferson County, MS, Deed Book 4-I, page 210). Josephine Payne wrote children's stories, for which her daughter Joan drew illustrations. Mother and daughter collaborated on the publication of The Little Green Island (1942), Once There Was Olga (1944), The Last Giant (1947), all published by Putnam, and The Stable That Stayed (1952) and The Journal of Josiah Talltatters (1953), both published by Ariel Books. Josephine Balfour Payne sold Cedar Grove Place to Jane A. Warren in 1972 (Jefferson County, MS, Deed Book 5-Q, page 72). The property was later owned by George Hamilton, the famous actor. In 1992, Richard and Glenda S. Robinson purchased the property (Jefferson County, MS, Deed Book 7-H, page 189) and undertook the process of extensively restoring the property. In January 2000, the Robinson's sold the property to David and Betty Paradise. Since this purchase, the Paradises have done further restoration to the property. An elaborate pool, three pergolas, and a cabana were added about five years ago. At this time, the property was extensively landscaped with moonlighting and an irrigation system.