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## Warren County Historical Tidbits

### Oakley Hall...A Rescued Jewel of Warren County

How would you like a train running RIGHT in front of your house day and night seven days a week?! Well apparently one local family thought that was just great...more about this home, the train tracks and the families that have lived in it in this week's Warren County Historical Tidbit...



For several months after we moved to Warren County in 2014 I remember driving south on US 1 through Ridgeway and noticing a magnificent home back in the woods, but very close to the train tracks running in front of it. My first thought was that that the original owners must have been upset to have to deal with all of that noise and smoke when the train tracks were installed. Little did I know how wrong I was!

The home to which I'm referring is Oakley Hall. If you think you've seen that name in Warrenton, you're correct...the current owners, Don Arnold & Ernie Fleming, bought the home in 1992 and restored it, took the name and dubbed Warrenton's first antique store with the Oakley Hall moniker.



*Dr. William J. Hawkins*

Built in 1855 by renowned builder Jacob Holt, the home was originally owned by Dr. William Joseph Hawkins, his descendants, and later by Dr. Charles Peete. Often called one of the "jewels of Warren County North Carolina," this home is much more ornate than most of Holt's homes in Warren County. Dr. Hawkins commissioned its building at a time where he was transitioning from practicing medicine to business. One of his early business ventures was to lead the Raleigh-Gaston Railroad as President. He chose to build this fine home near the train tracks so that he could see his investment as it passed by and also to have the gratification of knowing that passengers would know Oakley Hall as the home of "the man who owns this train." So that answers the question as to why the trains didn't bother the owner of Oakley Hall.

Beyond the railroad, William Hawkins founded the Citizens' National Bank in Raleigh in 1870. This endeavor meant most of his time was spent in Raleigh. By 1877 his son Marmaduke acquired Oakley Hall and became the central figure there until 1920.

Also of note in the history of this home is the legacy and importance of the Hawkins family of Warren County. They were among the premiere families in North Carolina in the 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> centuries, including wealthy planters, noted political families and astute businessmen. The Hawkins dominated Warren County affairs and were part of 40 of the 48 NC General Assemblies from 1779 to 1835. Among notable founding fathers of NC include Governor William Hawkins (uncle to the builder of Oakley Hall) who led the state during the War of 1812; Dr. Joseph Hawkins who opened the first medical school in the state and Benjamin Hawkins...an expert French interpreter partially responsible for the excellent relationship between George Washing and Lafayette during the American Revolution.

There is plenty more history to this Warren County treasure! Stop by Oakley Hall Antiques in Warrenton and I'm sure Don and Ernie will be glad to tell you even more stories while you shop. Wherever you turn in Warren County we have a jewel!