

Fond Recollections

Upcountry Heritage

Our independence is a gift
From fathers strong and bold
Who for love of God and freedom
Their lands and chattels sold;

They left the old world for the new
Of virgin forest lands,
From wilderness they carved their homes
Defying savage bands;

They brought their Bibles, plows, and seeds,
Their wives and children dear,
They looked to God for all their needs
And felt His presence near;

But when the British drums were heard
On wooded hill and field
They took their guns in steady hands
To fight for woe or weal.

The women left to feed the stock
And bring the harvest in
Lived their lives of solitude
In sound of battles din;

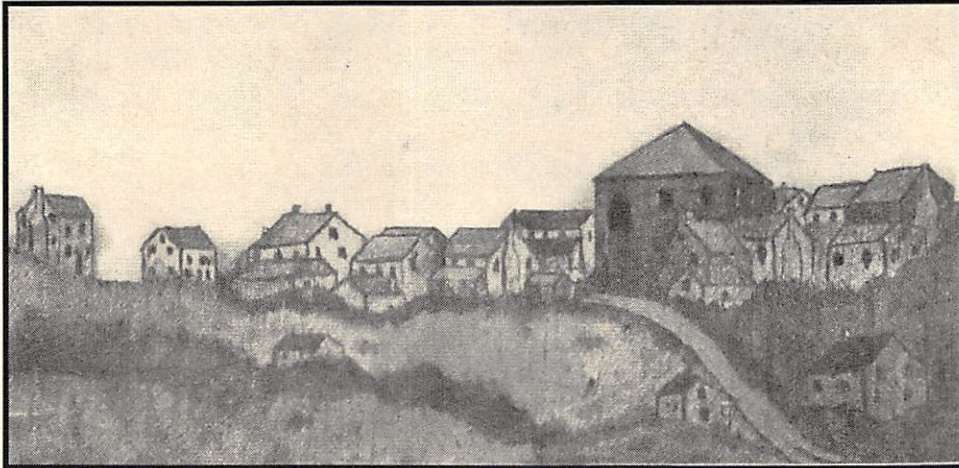
They nursed the wounded, buried the dead
And pierced the enemy line
As they rode to warn endangered troops
In weather foul or fine;

Our forefathers' God is living still
The declaration holds,
May mighty moral leaders rise
To exceed the ancient molds!

Harriet H. Stringfellow

Chester and The Hill

The city of Chester stands on part of a Land Grant obtained by James Steward in 1788 from Thomas Pinckney, Governor of South Carolina. Half of this seven to eight hundred acre tract was sold to William Lacy in 1795 for \$100. The original Chester Court House in the city of Chester was a small house on the present Peoples Furniture Store lot, a site that proved to be the center of town activities for the next seventy years. When the Court House was moved to a new location about 1797, the old lot was sold in succession to Peter and Judith Corbell, to William Johnstone, to Alexander Quay, and finally to George Washington Gore in 1820. When Gore died in 1824 John

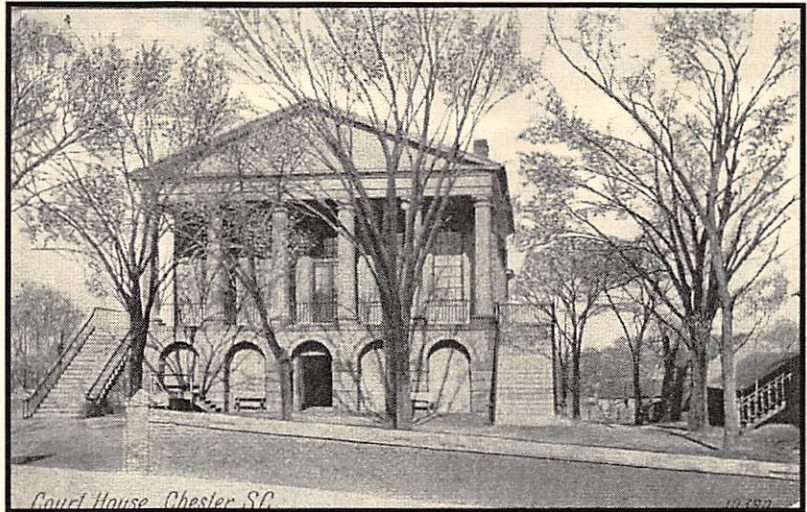


Dunnivant, in the process of administering his estate, sold this lot to Robert Robinson in 1835. A hotel was known to be on this site as early as the 1830's. First known as the Robinson Hotel, it appears at that time to have been located on the west side of the lot with Sam

McAliley's office on the east. In 1854, 1868, and 1872 a building on this site was referred to as "McAliley's brick building on the square." When Sam McAliley died in 1870, the lot and hotel were sold as part of his estate. The second Court House of Chester County in the city of Chester was built possibly in 1797. A jail (brick) stood just behind it at the east end of the Public Square. A third Court House close to the second was built 1819-1820, and it appeared to have been a brick building, square, large and imposing standing at the apex of the hill. During the thirty-four years existence of this Court House, the hamlet grew to a village, and we can look back with nostalgia to those days when, at the crown of the hill, there stood the Court House and around it the small plot called the Public Land.

On the edge of the said land were the homes and businesses of the early residents. Also flowing down the hill was the Court House spring branch running down in the vicinity of Gadsden Street. On reading the old deeds one is able to catch a glimpse of the ancestors of so many Chester residents: Pinchback a cabinetmaker from London, England where the Wingate Candle Co. is today; John McKee, banker, merchant and clock maker from Rathfriland, Co. Down, Ireland, house and store - main entrance Peoples Furniture Store; Josiah Gore, a tavern keeper just east of Mr. Pinchback - Wylie building; John Kennedy, landowner, public officer and publican - corner of Columbia and Main Street; George Kennedy, Postmaster 1789, Notary Public, and Tavern Owner from Ireland - corner of Columbia Street and West End Dr. John Dunnivant who had a store where Dr. Pavese is today; John Combest, a blacksmith, and Jimmy Adair, the brickmaker both at the East end of the square near the Court House. James Adair sold his property in 1805 to William Curry and part of the description was as follows "Lot contains house and mill and cotton machine." I feel that the view from the Court House must have been excellent, quite a vista on all sides, in

summer a beautiful sea of green. I can imagine the early nineteenth century homes, some brick, some wood with "drystone dykes" surrounding the properties. Yes, life was sleepy in Chester until 1850, when a major change occurred. It was in the 1850's that the railroad came to town, and immediately the effect was felt. The town activity started to spread out and move down Gadsden Street towards the new depot. The Court House was pulled down



and the new Court House had a new location, this time no longer "on the hill," and northeast of the old structure. A new hotel was built at the depot and another opposite the Court House.

The new money in the fifties saw a new building on what had been the Curry old homestead at the corner of Gadsden and Main Street. In the 1860's the war came, and Chester met the challenge. Towards the end it became a safe haven for those fleeing from persecution. It almost seemed that everyone came to Chester; the small town was bursting at the seams. Afterwards, around 1868, there came a wave of bankruptcies; also a lot of fires. Chester and the South drooped and almost died. In the 1870's new money and new names came to town. Major John Kennedy died, and his



property was sold. It was at this time that the Nail Building was built, also the Melton and Heyman properties, the Wilson building too. Mr. John McKee died shortly after his house, which had stood on the hill from 1820-1874, burned. On the corner of Center and Main the old Cotton Hotel was built - now Western Auto Parking Lot. McAliley's brick building still stood, changed hands and changed hands, Peoples Furniture Store

today. The Davega Building on the east of Peoples Furniture was built around 1860, and next door the Agurs Building at the beginning of this century. Next to the present Court House the Graham Building in 1850. At the foot of West End on the old George Kennedy homestead lot, the City Hall and Opera House was built in 1891. It was destroyed by fire in 1929, but partially restored, the City Hall we know today. At the end of the square we have the Balsar Building, the Masonic Hall and the Marion Building all built probably in the 1890's. The hill remains today much as it was in

1875, with one exception the Confederate Monument unveiled in 1909. Yes, the hill remains much the same, a little tired and weary perhaps, but basically the same.

Dorothy Scott Mayes

2004 Update

About twenty-seven years later, the "hill" has been revitalized, and is now a pleasant area with many flowers and shrubs. Although the Wingate Candle Company burned and was pulled down, many of the old buildings have been attractively repainted and restored.



About The Author

Dorothy Scott Mayes moved to Chester in 1969 with her children and her husband Frederick Oliver Mayes, who was Quality Control Manager of Campus Sportswear Company.

Daughter of the late Peter Scott and Helen Mary Fairbairn Scott of Hawick, Roxburghshire, Scotland, Dorothy found in Chester a community which retained many of the customs of its Scottish Irish founders. She felt herself at home and because of her expertise and diligence we in Chester gained a clearer picture of our early history.

Dorothy who had worked with the law firm of Haddon A. Turnbull, W.S., in Hawick, applied her knowledge of legal research to her hobby of reconstructing the past through the use of deeds and titles. From dusty, long neglected ledgers in the Chester County Court House she began to map the town and county from revolutionary times. "Chester and The Hill" is the result of her research.