

WILLIFORD HOUSE

CAMPBELL — OBEAR — BACOT — ELLIOTT — LUMPKIN
WILLIFORD — McMASTER

The WILLIFORD HOUSE is one of the more familiar of Winnsboro's ante-bellum mansions. It is located on Congress Street, just one block removed from the business district, fronting on the main north-south highway. Its patrician appearance and character give the passing traveler a very good impression of the town.

The main body of the house is a large, three-story, rectangular building, covered with a gable roof containing three enormous dormer windows for the third-story rooms. The roof extends over a wide, two-story porch, supported by six colossal square columns which rise from the ground and extend upward to the eaves of the roof.

Large granite blocks are used in the construction of the walls of the first floor. The floor of the lower porch is laid with the same material. Wide clapboards are used on the second story as an outside cover while the gable and dormers of the third are covered with small, hand-hewn shingles. This contrast in the use of materials gives a pleasing effect.

The windows are large and well arranged, and wide entrances are encased in sidelights and transoms. On the first floor the porch is open, but on the second it is enclosed with heavy, beautifully turned bannisters.

A stone wall extends across the front of the lot.

When the house was originally built, there were two flights of outside steps leading up to a landing between the two center columns of the upstairs veranda. In recent times these have been moved, and the inside stair is now used exclusively.

The house was built by a Mr. and Mrs. Campbell. In 1856 it was purchased by the Reverend Josiah Obear. The Reverend Mr. Obear first came to Winnsboro in 1841 as rector of St. John's Episcopal Church. He was a native of Newberry, Vermont, and was of French descent. The name was originally spelled Aubert. He was a highly educated man and worked with several churches before coming to South Carolina for his health. He served at James Island and at Wilton before locating in Winnsboro. While he was here, the old church was built on the lot where the present Episcopal Cemetery is located.

He was married in old Saint Phillip's Church in Charleston. Soon after the completion of the church in Winnsboro, his health was much improved, and he and his family moved back to Vermont.

His old illness returned and he was advised to move south again. This time he came to Virginia for a short stay, then to Edenton, North Carolina, and finally back to Winnsboro where he and his talented wife planned to open a school.

He leased a house for three months from his old friend, Hugh McMaster, and later bought the Campbell property on Congress Street for the school. Before the building was ready for occupancy, the family resided with the DuBose family on their plantation, "Roseland," which was on the outskirts of the town.

The school proved quite successful and was filled with teen-age girls from out of town as boarding students and with girls and boys of Winnsboro as day students. Some of the Mount Zion students also took special courses such as music and French. Miss Susan Ann Finney, also from Vermont, was added to the faculty. She was a gentle woman and an excellent teacher. The reverend Mr. Obear's daughter Emily also assisted with the school.

During the first years of the Confederate War the institution continued to flourish but towards the end pupils, money, and educational interest began to wane. Miss Finney went to another school.

By this time Winnsboro was becoming a haven for war refugees. The family of W. Perroneau Finley came to Winnsboro from Aiken about the time that Miss Finney left. They numbered five in family and brought five servants with them — a driver, a butler, a cook, a maid, and a girl of twelve to help with the children.

Mr. Finley, a signer of the Ordinance of Secession, asked the Reverend Mr. Obear for lodging. His family was given Miss Finney's classroom, the family living room, kitchen privileges, accommodations in the third-floor dormitory, and servants' quarters.

Later, as Sherman's army drew nearer, the trains out of Columbia were loaded with refugees. On February 15th, 1865, Miss Hattie Gibbes, a daughter of the highly respected Dr. Robert Wilson Gibbes, arrived, having been loaded on the train by her father. She found refuge in Winnsboro with the Obears. (Dr. Gibbes was at that time Mayor of Columbia.)

The next day Chancellor Carroll, his wife, and three daughters arrived by carriage from the South Carolina capital en route to Abbeville but, on reaching Winnsboro, they learned that they had been cut off by the enemy. The Reverend Mr. Obear heard of their plight. By now everything in the little town was overflowing with refugees, and so the good rector made room for them. Chancellor Carroll was also a signer of the Ordinance of Secession from his section of the state.

On the evening of February 17th some of the many occupants of the grand old mansion noticed a reflection in the sky. With saddened hearts and low spirits they realized that their beloved Columbia was burning.

On Sunday Wheeler's men entered the town and told the people that the dreaded enemy was close behind. Mr. Finley and Chancellor Carroll took to the woods for safety before the Yankees arrived. All the Sunday dinners in Winnsboro, including the Obears', were consumed by the troops, and the inhabitants of the town did without their food.

The fires started as Wheeler's men left. Woodward's Gin House, the freight depot, and all the cotton in town were burned.

Monday, when the Yankees came, the stores were looted and fired. When the Obear household saw nearby McMaster's store in flames, they bolted their doors and took refuge in Mrs. Finley's room (the former living room) where her son was ill. There was no doctor. The child was covered with a crimson rash; it was not known whether the malady was scarlet fever, smallpox, or the measles.

In due time the Yankees arrived and broke into the house. On reaching the sick room in which the women and children were barricaded, they swarmed in with shouts and threats but on seeing the sick boy, limp with fever and



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covered with the scarlet rash, their leader halted them and ordered them out, shouting that the house was contaminated. This, perhaps, saved the grand old building from the torch, for a guard was posted around it to see that no one entered or left the place.

When things quieted down, the beautiful Lilla Carroll, dressed in her best, strolled out onto the piazza. She sang several popular Confederate songs but when she began singing OH, YES I AM A SOUTHERN GIRL, she was stoned by the Federal troops. Fortunately, she made a quick exit before any harm befell her. One rock was hurled so forcibly that it shattered a window and sent glass flying across the sick boy's bed and all through the room. Luckily, no one was hurt.

The household had no food that day. The Yankees took it all. Mrs. Finley was astonished almost to the point of fainting when she learned that her servants, including her treasured cook Rose, had left with the enemy. The next day the butler and the carriage driver returned of their own accord but the females had "jined up with the yankees."

In 1870 the Reverend Josiah Obear sold this house to Eunice A. Bacot, the wife of Pierre Bacot. She continued to own it until it was sold to Thomas K. Elliott at a Clerk's sale in 1887. The following year, 1888, Thomas K. Elliott conveyed it to Susannah A. Lumpkin.

Ten years later, in 1898, Mrs. Lumpkin sold the property to Quay D. Williford. Since that time the place has become known as the WILLIFORD HOUSE and has been retained by the Willifords and their descendants. The widow of Quay D. Williford (Mrs. Addie R.) lived here until her death.

The handsome old mansion is now owned by Mrs. Williford's grandson, Quay McMaster, but he does not occupy the place. It now houses suites of doctors' offices.

WOODLAND

JORDAN — TRAYLOR — CRAWFORD — LYLES

The WOODLAND house has not yet reached its century mark but that date is so near and WOODLAND is such a lovely home, so typical of those built during the ante-bellum period, that it is worthy of mention.

The house is beautifully located on a large, wooded lot and is shaded with spreading oaks and large, waxy magnolia trees that perfume the entire neighborhood when they are in bloom. It was built in 1870 by Samuel Johnson, an architect and builder, who designed and erected several outstanding homes in Winnsboro, for Captain W. G. Jordan.

Graceful, fluted columns support a classic portico on the front; this is the focal point of the building. The windows and doors are well proportioned and artistically spaced. A handsome, colonial-type stairway with delightfully carved bannisters dominates the interior.

In 1945 the property was acquired by Mr. and Mrs. Ernest Crawford from Miss Leila Traylor. They restored it in minute detail, retaining all its old-fashioned splendor. They lived here until after Mrs. Crawford's death. Several years ago it was purchased by J. M. Lyles, Jr., the present owner.