



MOUNT HOPE

CEDAR TREE remained in the Palmer family for many years, and since their ownership it has belonged to the DesPortes, Bulows, and Van Exems. Local tradition has it that one of the early owners was quite a gay and reckless sportsman and that he lost this lovely old place in order to pay a gambling debt.

The Bulows were Charlestonians engaged in the mining of phosphate. They purchased the place in the early years of this century. The property passed from them to Mr. Van Exem whose widow now resides here.

Mrs. Van Exem is one of South Carolina's charming great ladies. After the death of her first husband — a distinguished lawyer and statesman, who was Congressman from the Sixth District — Honorable Allard H. Gasque of Florence, South Carolina, she was the first woman from this state to be elected to Congress. Mrs. Van Exem is also a writer, dramatist, and patron of the arts.

MOUNT HOPE

THOMAS

by

CHARLES E. THOMAS

MOUNT HOPE, in lower Fairfield District about one mile west of the village of Ridgeway, was built by John Peyre Thomas, M.D., between 1835 and 1840.

The three-story brick-and-frame house is described as "plantation style," its first or ground floor of brick sometimes referred to as the "summer floor." The second and third floors of the house are entirely of locally grown heart-of-pine timber. Steps from the ground lead to the front and back porches of the main or second floor of the house. Each floor has halls or "passageways" running the full length of the building, with four large rooms on each floor, with two smaller rooms on the main or second floor at either end of the back or north porch. As was the custom at that time in order to take full advantage of the prevailing summer breezes, the house faces the south. It was presumed that the morning and evening breezes that generally were from the south to north would thereby cool the house through the long hallways.

The oversize bricks throughout the two-foot-thick walls of the ground floor, including not only the four exterior walls but the inside partitions between the ground floor rooms and along the open passageway underneath, were all baked in kilns erected on the plantation for the purpose of making bricks and tiles for the house. The ground floor is paved with square, red clay tiles, and all the hearths throughout the house are of the same tile. The four outside forty-foot-high chimneys are of the same large-size brick, most of which are in a good state of preservation after 125 years. There are no fireplaces in the ground or summer-floor rooms, as these rooms were designed for summertime use only. Each of the four rooms on the main or second floor and three of the four third-floor rooms have fireplaces. There is no fireplace in the "boys' room" on the theory that no fire in the winter mornings would make for faster dressing on the part of the boys of the household who slept in the dormitory-like top-floor room. The only other brick baked in

the MOUNT HOPE kilns is said to have been that for Saint Stephen's Church at Ridgeway, referred to as the "Chapel" by Dr. Thomas, in his Diary, when it was built in 1854.

The pine timbers for the house were cut by slave labor with broad axes and crosscut saws. The irregular strokes of the axes and saws can be seen in the larger timbers supporting the second floor. These beams are spliced with a particularly interesting interlocking joint and fastened with round wood pins running through the twelve-inch-square timbers. The pine flooring throughout the ten rooms and long, wide hallways of the two upper floors is in continuous boards with none that do not run the width of the room or hallway. Another interesting feature of the flooring is that the boards of the hall floors run crosswise rather than lengthwise as in modern halls. This gives the effect of the floors of the rooms running through the hall into the opposite rooms, as only the thresholds of the hallway doors break this continuous pattern of the wide pine flooring.

Another architectural feature of the plantation-style house is the simplicity of the pine mantels. Above each of the large fireplaces is a high mantel of the simplest lines and undecorated design. The same lines are carried out in the doors and window frames, and in the chair-rail height wainscoting in each of the main floor rooms. The design is again repeated in the two large "presses" or wardrobe closets built in the master bedroom and in the top-floor hallway. These double presses were built in the house, for they are wider than the doorways.

All of the hardware used in the construction of the house, with the exception of the Carpenter English-made door locks, was handmade in the local blacksmith shop. Even the square nails used throughout the house were beaten out by hand, as were the door and window hinges, window-holds and latches. The large locks with their six-inch brass keys and brass knobs on each door, inside and outside doors, bear the English coat of arms of the lion and the unicorn. The same Carpenter lock was patented in the United States in 1840, and these bear the United States shield and eagle design. However, all of the MOUNT HOPE locks bear the English patent.

Dr. Thomas came to Fairfield in 1835, seeking a healthful climate for his family after the deaths in the lowcountry of two of his children and in Greenville that summer of his wife. The following year, 1836, Dr. Thomas married his wife's younger sister. Before his own death at MOUNT HOPE on January 1, 1859, Dr. Thomas had become the father of eighteen children, fourteen of whom survived him. When he was buried at Saint Stephen's Church, Ridgeway, his was the first grave in the newly opened churchyard. His second wife and thirteen of his eighteen children are buried there with him.

Dr. Thomas' carefully recorded "Diary of Weather and Occurrences," which covers the years 1827 to 1856, has been presented by his family to the South Caroliniana Society Library at the University in Columbia. Dr. Thomas had graduated from South Carolina College in 1816 before taking his M.D. degree at the College of Physicians and Surgeons in New York City in 1819. He interned at Bellevue Hospital, New York, before returning to South Carolina. His license to "practice Physic and Surgery in all their branches," signed by five members of the Committee of the Medical Society of South Carolina, Charleston, on October 2, 1821, is said to be one of the earliest

medical licenses. At MOUNT HOPE are still Dr. Thomas' pharmaceutical scales, mortar and pestle, lancet, and other medical pharmacopoeia and instruments.

MOUNT HOPE was visited by many of the bummers, stragglers and soldiers of General Sherman's Union Army when the Federal troops sacked Fairfield County in February 1865. Everything that could be taken away by the foraging troops was hauled off in MOUNT HOPE wagons and carriages. The house was constantly pillaged and ransacked throughout that harrowing week following the burning of Columbia. Although the barns were set on fire and the house was frequently threatened, faithful slaves and brave women saved all the buildings from destruction. The four older sons of the family were away in Confederate service, Army and Navy; only women and children and frightened slaves were at MOUNT HOPE throughout the raids of February 1865. The family barricaded themselves in the parlor, cooked meagerly in the fireplace, and slept on the floor, fully dressed for several days and nights.

After the War, when there were no schools in South Carolina, the eldest daughter of Dr. Thomas, Miss Henrietta Eleanor Thomas, opened the MOUNT HOPE SCHOOL. Boarding students came from Columbia, and great numbers of day pupils from the area. It was the only school in the southern part of the county for twenty years before the state's public schools were reopened in 1885. Many local girls and boys received their entire education there, while others were prepared at MOUNT HOPE SCHOOL for colleges throughout the country, including the Southern boys to be admitted to the United States Military Academy at West Point following the War.

MOUNT HOPE is still owned by the descendants of Dr. Thomas, and is occupied in the summer by the sixth generation of the family to have occupied the 125-year-old plantation house.