

## LATTA HOUSE

James Latta, Irishman, came to America in 1783, the year the Treaty of Paris ended the American Revolution. For a dozen years he came to Yorkville whenever court was in session with his pack of needles, thread, scissors, combs and sundry items. Near the courthouse he spread his wares on planks under the trees before there was ever a store in the village.

James Latta prospered and when his son Robert, who was 3 years of age when they came to America, was old enough to clerk, Latta built a store in Yorkville. The Lattas worked hard and their store filled a need.

In 1799 the Lattas began building a combination home-business building in the style of many Charleston merchants. There would be a business or offices on street level with the family living above and a lovely piazza with an iron "lace-like" railing on the side overlooking a garden.

The house, still standing, was intended to be of a grand design. A nearby quarry furnished 36 inch wide granite for the foundations. The brick was made in England, coming to America as ship's ballast. The estimated 750,000 brick came to Yorkville from Charleston up unpaved, rutted roads. It is estimated that it took between 2 and 300 ox cart trips to haul enough brick to build the house. The walls are 7 bricks thick.

Originally there were 14 fireplaces which performed a double-duty. In the summer, the chimneys were covered with wire mesh to keep out birds and left open to allow air circulation through the high-ceilinged rooms.

The timber joists measured 3 by 12 and every third joist was 6 by 12. The floor boards were 6 inches wide, 1 and 1/2 inches thick and tongued and grooved. All timber was heart pine, even in the attic which was completely floored. The nails were hand made.

The building was finished in 1803. The first floor was used as a store, office area and kitchen. The family lived on the upper two floors.

In 1810, Robert Latta visited England. When he returned he established three stores independent from his father's in Yorkville, Camden and Columbia. He broadened the scope of his business and sold stocks and bonds. He prospered and became known as Yorkville's "Merchant Prince."

Robert Latta built a large home in Columbia (burned by Sherman's troops in 1865) and spent the winter in Columbia and the summer in Yorkville. He was twice married, the first wife the granddaughter of Col. William Hill, the Ironmaster.

Robert Latta's health was not good. He tried the various "cures" of springs such as Virginia Springs and finally went to France where his health was restored. He died of tuberculosis, August 25, 1852, at the age of 73 and was buried in the graveyard of the First Presbyterian Church in Columbia.

Robert Latta's son William successfully continued the business, living in both Columbia and Yorkville as his father had done. William C. Latta was instrumental in the building of the Kings Mountain Rail Road and was its first president. Begun in 1851, the section that connected Chesterville and Yorkville was completed in 1852. Ox carts were no longer necessary for long-distance hauling.

The grandchildren of the Irish emigrant could afford to live in a grand style. William Latta heard an Italian singer, Torriani, the soloist of an opera company on an

American tour, in Charleston. He persuaded Torriani, for the princely sum of \$1,000 a year, to leave the company and serve as music teacher for Latta's children in Yorkville.

Torriani stayed in Yorkville several years, giving daily music lessons to the daughters. Old accounts praise his work, saying that Miss Annie Latta, later Mrs. W. B. Wilson, a coloratura, developed an excellent voice worthy of any opera singer.

A son, William A. Latta, became the conductor the Lilliputian Band, a collection of 10 or 12 slave boys who were musically talented. The band went to fairs in Columbia and Charleston. One of the group, Dick Latta, was a famous fiddler who performed at dances and picnics until the great earthquake of 1886. He quit playing because his preacher told him it was wicked.

In July 1931, the Latta House passed out of family hands to Mr. Thomas C. Adams of Gastonia, N.C., a descendant of a York County family. The house became known as the Latta-Adams House. Later the building was bought by the Cody family.

By Louise Pettus