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S.C. - Homes, Historic - York County

# Spratt House Fine Example Of Up-Country Architecture

## HOMESTEAD WAS BUILT IN 1810

BY ELIZABETH REED

Valued in York county's architectural heritage is the old Spratt house about one fourth mile south of Fort Mill. And the history of the old house is a history of the first white family to settle in this area.

The Spratt house was built in 1810 by James Spratt, the son of Thomas Spratt, II, to whom the Catawbas gave the name of Kanawha, as a mark of their love for him. James was born in 1770 and married Margaret McCree. He died in 1843 at the age of 73 and is now buried in the old family burying ground just a few hundred yards from the Spratt homestead.

### Kanawha

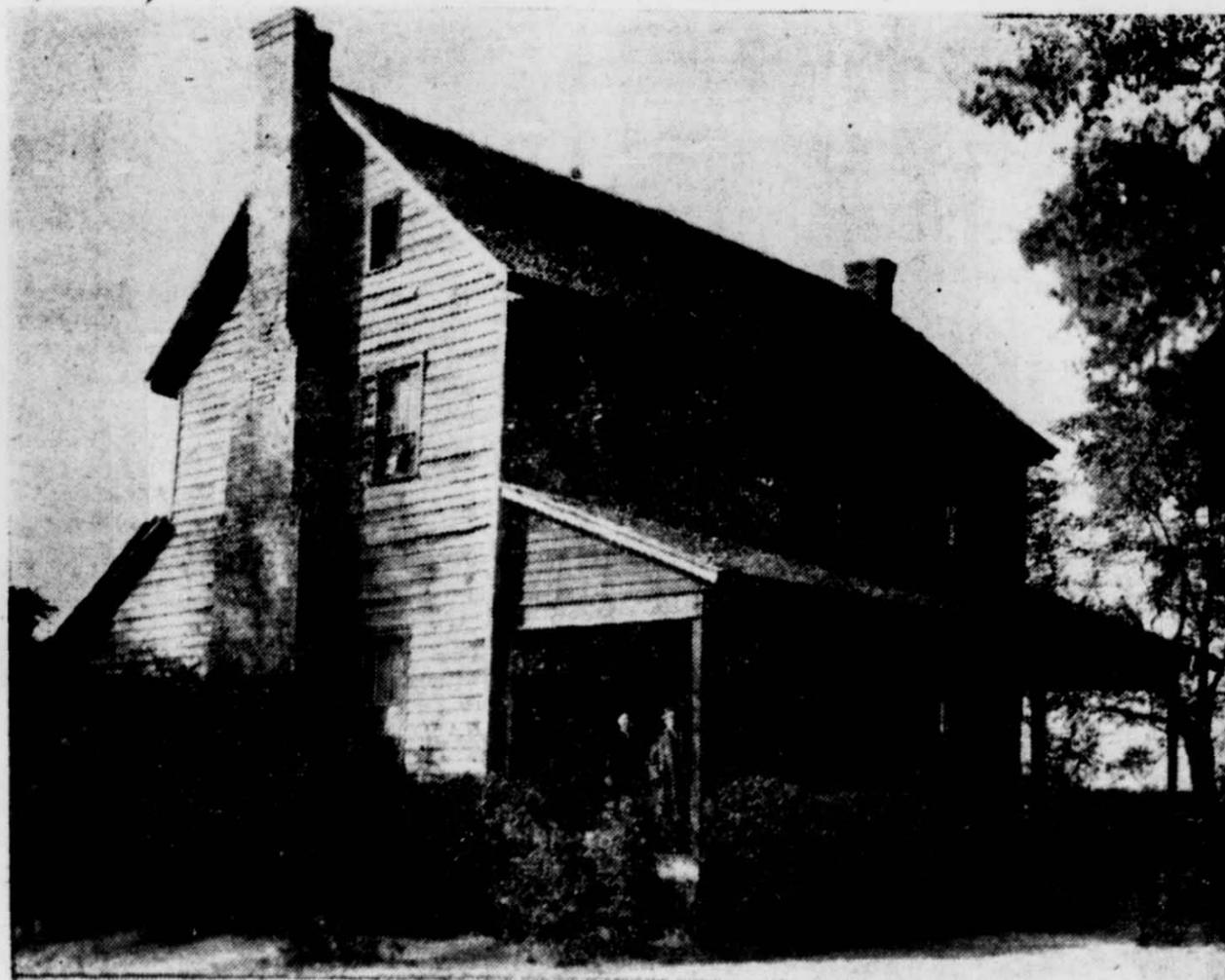
Thomas Spratt, II, was born in 1730 on shipboard as his parents were making their way to America from County Down, Ireland. After living for a few years in Pennsylvania, Thomas, I, settled down in what is now the City of Charlotte. He built for his family a house which was later the seat of the first court held in North Carolina.

After the death of Thomas Spratt, I, his son, Thomas Spratt, II, his wife, Elizabeth Bigger Spratt and their three children started to emigrate to Abbeville. This was in 1762. They reached the Catawba river and found its banks so flooded that they camped under some trees at a spring not far from the banks and just across the road from the present house. Within a few days they had made friends with the Catawbas, who proved to be of amiable disposition. And they seemed to forget they were bound for Abbeville. For they liked the Catawbas and the country around what is now Fort Mill so well, that when the river went down they dismissed the idea of going on. Thomas erected a log house for his family near the spring and they settled down for keeps.

During the Revolutionary War Kanawha was a lieutenant in the 19th North Carolina regiment. At the battle of Hanging Rock in Lancaster county he suffered a broken leg. It is said that he participated in the Battle of Huck's Defeat at Brattonsville. James

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The Spratt House Near Fort Mill



Typical of early up-country architecture, the two story Spratt house is not today in a very good state of repair. Seen on the porch are Miss Zoe White and Mrs. George Bacot of Fort Mill, great granddaughter and great great granddaughter of James Spratt, builder of the house in 1810.—Herald Staff Photo.

Spratt was one of his sons.

At the time of the signing of the Mecklenburg Declaration of Independence, Thomas Spratt became so exhilarated that he found himself in the Charlotte jail. The Catawbas true to their white friend came in a body and took him from prison.

James Spratt, builder of today's house, was 10 years old at the time Cornwallis decided to move from Charlotte to Winnsboro. He was moving because of the "hot-headed nature of the Whigs," and because he hoped to find better foraging for his horses in the Winnsboro section.

Just as old Thomas Spratt before him had found the river swollen Cornwallis had to stop at the banks of the Catawba. So he made camp at the same spring where old Kanawha had camped years before. Luckily, for the Spratt family—and the livestock—the mature animals were being tended by old Harry, a Negro, at the Cabin Branch place. However, Cornwallis' men fell upon and slaughtered 19 calves that were in a pen at the house.

The British also consumed a pile of Spratt owned corn that had been gathered and was lying in the yard. While encamped at the Catawba a soldier by the name of Frazier died and was buried under a locust tree. Another, a deserter, was hanged and his body left hanging when Cornwallis left the section. A patriot named Alexander is credited with shooting one of the British sentinels.

The river finally went down and Cornwallis took his departure. However, he did not cross the river at the point of encampment but went down stream to Land's Ford.

Thomas Spratt's friendship with the Catawbas is shown in the person of Peter Harris. Harris was left an orphan when his parents died of small pox and so Spratt took the youngster and reared him in his home. His grave is seen today in the Spratt family burying ground.

A page from the past may be read in the still legible inscriptions found on the tombs.

Of Kanawha "In memory of Thomas Spratt, Kanawha, who died July 21, 1807, aged 76 years. Born on shipboard coming to America with his parents. In friendship he was ever true, his heart sincere, like him but few; his blood was spilt in Freedom's cause, rather than submit to British laws."

The stone placed by James Spratt over the grave of Indian Peter Harris reads, "The body of Peter Harris, Catawba Indian, buried here in 1823, aged 70 years. Left an orphan he was raised by Thomas Spratt. For his endeavor in our war he was granted a pension by the State of South Carolina."

Although the body of old Thomas Spratt is buried within the Charlotte city limits, a stone to his memory stands today in the old burying ground.

### The House

The old two story house, built according to the mode of early up-country architecture, is now in need of repairs. About 1886 the double portico was torn away and the long front piazza extending the width of the house was erected.

A good feature of the old house is the very wide paneled front door. The present tenants of the home take pride in the door and keep it resplendent with fresh varnish. An odd feature of the front is the narrow window, both downstairs and upstairs. It is one pane narrower than other windows on the front.

In the Spratt home the builder hit upon an ingenious scheme to give a foundation for the inside plaster and at the same time insulate the home. The studs and purlins (wooden pieces placed at an angle to keep the studs from spreading) were nailed in place. The stout weatherboarding was nailed on in the usual fashion. On the inside of the weatherboarding and fitted between studs and purlins, hand-made bricks were placed to form a background for the plaster.

Some bricks were made in unusual shapes such as a T to fit in the spaces. The plaster was then applied directly on the mud bricks to save the builder the long job of making hand hewn lathes for the house.

Inside is beautiful panelling with the patina that only age can give. A good feature, too, is the walnut mantle. The hinges on the doors are as wide as the doors themselves and are of hand forged iron. Very little of the other hardware has been left. In recent years the large front room has been cut into two rooms.

Ceilings are of wide smooth pine boards. The floors are of wide boards, but these have been patched and replaced with other newer materials.

No member of the Spratt family has lived in the house since 1903. Today the home belongs to a great, great grandson of James Spratt, I, John McKee Spratt, a York attorney.

(Over)

A few pieces of furniture belonging to James Spratt, builder of the house, are still in existence. One is a secretary belonging to Mrs. Hester White Burgess of Rock Hill, great grand daughter of the builder, another is an old haircloth sofa, belonging to Miss Zoe White, Mrs. Burgess's sister. Information regarding the Spratt family history was furnished by Miss Zoe White and Mrs. Eleanor Spratt Bacot, a sister of the owner.

York county — particularly the Fort Mill area, contains many families that are descended from old Thomas Spratt, known affectionately by the Catawbas as Kanawha. Among them are Whites, Spratts, Hokes, Nims, Hutchinsons, Campbells, Adams, Witherspoons, Erwins and McCorkles.

This is one of a series of stories on older York county architecture. Next week's story will describe the Roach home in the Oak Ridge community, now the residence of Mr. and Mrs. John Roddey.