

A Long, Busy Life

Stewart Helped Bring Winthrop College to Rock Hill

March 3 1991

William Howard Stewart (1847-1926) was born in Lancaster County, son of John Pickney Stewart and Elizabeth Howard. All his long, active life, W.H. Stewart was to be a "doer."

As a redheaded, blue-eyed boy, he was full of mischief and very bright. At 15 he joined the Confederate army as a private.

After the war he went to Davidson College to become a lawyer and was valedictorian of his class in 1869.

His father's death caused him to set aside law as a career. He became a farmer in Fort Mill township and married Antoinette Adelle Cureton in 1874.

Stewart was one of Wade Hampton's Red Shirts in the election of 1876. Four years later Stewart was elected a state representative, serving three terms between 1880 and 1890.

The Stewarts had three daughters and a son. When three of the children were in Fort Mill Academy, William Banks, the esteemed headmaster, left to head Presbyterian High School in Rock Hill. (Presbyterian High School's main building is now the auditorium area of the Withers Building on the Winthrop College campus.) Stewart moved his family to Rock Hill.

Stewart built a home, which he subsequently lost to fire. He determined to build a house farther out in the Oakland Park section being built by Rock Hill Land and Town Site Co. His new house, built in 1891-92, was at the corner of Oakland and Aiken (now Stewart).

A year after Stewart moved in his new Queen Anne Victorian house, he helped negotiate the successful bid to bring Winthrop to Rock Hill. His home sat on the corner of the tract of land donated for the Winthrop campus.

Stewart, an enthusiastic supporter of the college, promptly donated his home and lot to the college as a residence for the college president, D.B. Johnson.



Nearby
History

**Louise
Pettus**

In 1916-17 the president's house was moved from the corner to its present location and completely renovated, inside and out, so that the current house has little resemblance to the original one.

Stewart, who by now had personal experience as a home builder and had done some contract work for others, took on the task of supervising the construction of Winthrop's main building (now Tillman Hall).

To cut costs, convict labor was used in the construction of the building.

One of his daughters later recalled that he persuaded his eldest daughter, an art graduate of Converse College, "to climb a tall scaffolding he had carefully built up around the top of the

inside of the Auditorium in order that she might decorate the beautifully carved columns with the Arts so as to cut the expense."

Stewart built himself another house, even closer to Presbyterian High School. The house, long called the Stewart House, sits on the corner of Oakland Avenue and Eden Terrace and now houses the Winthrop College Admissions Office.

The Stewart house has been described by an architect as "a tasteful vernacular adaptation of the classic revival style to southern living." Stewart sold this house with its lot to Winthrop in 1912 for \$10,000.

From 1894 to 1908 Stewart served as reading clerk for the S.C. Senate. He resigned that post after breaking a tooth, which caused him to lisp. He said he would rather resign than go to a dentist.

He was promptly elected by York County to serve a four-year term in the S.C. Senate.

When the Southern Power Co. (forerunner of Duke Power) was formed in 1904, Stewart bought up the land on both sides of the river for the right-of-way.

When Stewart was 74 he took on the last work of his long and vigorous career. He became superintendent of the Confederate Home in Columbia, a job considered a political plum. He served from October 1921 until his death on March 9, 1926.

He is buried at Unity Cemetery in Fort Mill.