

THE WHITE HOMESTEAD

William Elliott White of Fort Mill was twenty years of age when he married Sarah Robinson Wilson in 1824. He was the orphaned son of Capt. Joseph White and Martha (Elliott) White Wallis. Seven years and three children later, William Elliott White decided to build a larger home for the growing family.

White's inheritance included land leased from the Catawba Indians, slaves, and cash totaling more than \$43,000. A contractor from Yorkville, Thomas B. Hoover, was paid \$5,000 for construction, including the stone and brick work. Bricks were made on the site using rented brick molds imported from England.

Architectural historians say that the house is a copy of a manor in Yorkshire, England. The house, as built in 1831, was four stories, counting the basement and attic. Each of the two main floors had four large rooms and a hallway. There were two kitchens, one in the basement and an outside kitchen which was burned by Federal troops in 1865.

During the 1991-1992 renovation of the White Homestead, all flooring and wall covering was removed, thus giving a view of the original construction. This revealed that the house is remarkably sturdy, supported by arches three bricks thick. Hand-hewn oak beams measure 14 x 16 inches and the pine floor joists are 4 x 12 inches.

A conservator made a sophisticated analysis of the original paint, marbling, and wood graining. The result of his work is a reproduction of the original colors. Particularly interesting is the marbling on the mantles and baseboards and the graining of the pine doors to give the appearance of exotic woods.

In 1857 William E. and Sarah White moved to Charlotte, N.C. She died in 1864 and he died the following year. Both were buried in Elmwood Cemetery in Charlotte. Five White sons served in the Confederate Army, two of them dying in the war. The youngest son, David Hutchison White, inherited the house.

Jefferson Davis, president of the Confederate States of America, and his cabinet held their last meeting on the front lawn of the White Homestead, April 27, 1865.

In 1873 David H. White sold the house and 1160 acres of land to his brother, Samuel E. White, for \$500. "Cap'n Sam" White lived in the house for about four years before moving down the street to live in the Victorian house built by his brother, John McKamie White. The John M. White house is now known as the Springs Founder's House. Samuel E. White founded the Fort Mill Manufacturing Company, forerunner of Springs Industries, Inc. in 1887.

Except for occasional use as an overseer's home, as a boarding house, and temporary World War I housing for workers, the White Homestead was unoccupied from 1877 until 1922. In 1921 Capt. Elliott White Springs, grandson of Samuel E. White and his only surviving descendant, began remodeling the White Homestead, adding porches and a brick wing in keeping with the original. One room was transformed into a small replica of the tap room of Princeton's Old Nassau Inn. Elliott Springs and his bride, Frances Ley, moved in following their wedding in 1922. Leroy "Sonny" Springs and Anne Kingsley Springs were the first children to live in the house in nearly fifty years. Miss Tony Dehler, a German-born governess, shared their quarters in the east wing.

In the 1920s and 1930s Elliott and Frances Springs hosted many parties in the White Homestead. Elliott, who had written seven novels and numerous short stories in the 1920s, was a successful author who met and subsequently entertained a number of literary figures. Among the guests were Carl Sandburg, Julia Peterkin, and Samuel Hopkins Adams.

A second wing was added to the Homestead in 1936. In 1953 a combination greenhouse and swimming pool, dubbed a "Nataborium," was added.

Elliott Springs died in 1959. He willed the twenty-eight-room house to his eight grandchildren, the children of Anne and Hugh William "Bill" Close: Crandall Close Bowles, Frances Close Hart, Leroy Springs Close, Patricia Close, Elliott Springs Close, Hugh William Close, Jr., Derick Springsteen Close, and Kathrine Close Trotter. In 1991 they decided to have the White Homestead restored to its original glory.

The White Homestead, now more than 160 years old and listed on the National Register of Historic Places, is undoubtedly the most distinguished example of Late Georgian architecture in upcountry South Carolina.