

Three Historic Chatham County Houses A Feeling for Place 1787 – 2006

Part III: The McClenahan House

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Part III

The McClenahan House



1975 NC Archives

Near the Yellow House are two much more modest homes. Also on the National Register is the McClenahan House and across South Street from it is the Terry-Taylor House.



North side, McClenahan House

The McClenahan House is one of only four houses that date from the settlement era, before development in the 1830s, and it reflects the frontier character of the early community as well as later periods as it was remodeled. The paucity of records for these early years makes it difficult to describe the history of its construction or occupants. The lot was first bought by Thomas Owen of Bladen County in 1786 and sold to Mary White in 1803. It may have been one of 21 improved lots that were listed for taxes in 1815. Over the years the property changed hands many times, and one researcher speculates that the house was probably rented out most of the time.



Northwest, original parlor



Floorboards show where house was enlarged



Open stringer stairs with square newel post

While many houses become known by the name of the person who built them, this one takes its name from Margaret "Miss Maggie" McClenahan, daughter of Dr. Spence McClenahan, a wealthy Pittsboro physician, politician, and businessman. Following the death of her father and in the general impoverishment after the Civil War, Miss Maggie bought the house for herself, her mother (Sarah Ann Taylor McClenahan), and her brother, and she continued to live in it until her death 55 years later, in 1927.

Like other early homes, this was probably a one-room dwelling, built to shelter the family of an ordinary citizen of modest means. Clues to remodeling and enlarging the original house are found in distinctly different floorboards, windows at different levels, unmatched molding, and the dormer windows. The surviving simple newel post probably dates from an expansion that raised the roof and saw the second floor finished with wide pine sheathing, horizontal on outside walls and vertical on interior walls. Accommodation to the low roof was made by cutting the board-and-batten door to fit. Elsewhere, modern paneling may hide original wide-board pine.

The last owner of the house was Emily Taylor Brower, who grew up in the house across the street. Mrs. Brower inherited the property from a cousin and lived in it from 1940 until she purchased and moved the Patrick St. Lawrence House to the end of South Street, restoring and living in it until her death in 1993.



Southeast room, upstairs

President of the Chatham County Historical Association in 1965 and 1966, Mrs. Brower had a commitment to the preservation of two of Pittsboro's finest old homes that should not go unnoticed.



Door into southeast room

[Author's note: This article draws heavily from the 1982 nomination to the National Register (copies at Wren Memorial Library, Siler City, and State Historic Preservation Office, Raleigh). Details are also found in The Architectural Heritage of Chatham County, North Carolina, 1991.]

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