

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

Parts I and II: Patrick St. Lawrence or Yellow House

by Jane Pyle
2006

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Part I

Patrick St. Lawrence or Yellow House



Yellow House 1975*



Yellow House 2006



Annie Bynum's Pittsboro
Painting: St. Lawrence House at
lower left

The Patrick St. Lawrence house, known as the Yellow House from its original color, was built in 1787, and has been called by an architectural historian "an outstanding rural example of Georgian/Federal architecture. Ten years later its owner, deeply in debt, had fled North Carolina and the house was sold at public auction. Built on lot 50 at the northwest corner of courthouse square, the house changed hands over the years, serving as an inn and tavern, as a boarding house for students at the Pittsboro Academy, and as a residence of wealthy businessman Aaron Headen. In the early 1900s the house was sold and moved south of the jail to the location of today's Agriculture Building, where it was again used as a residence until 1955 when the county bought the property and sold the house, which was moved to the end of South Street and restored.

The Yellow House is remarkably well-preserved, the major losses from two moves being the fireplaces and chimneys. Their replacement might well be the major expense of restoration. The present entry porch is a reconstruction based on a painting by Annie Bynum, whose paintings depict Pittsboro as she remembered it from the early 1900s.

The striking and unusual interior feature is a moveable wall that, when raised, opens up the main room to include the entry and staircase and connect directly with two parlors. The staircase with its elegant newel posts and balusters is said to be fashioned from imported wood. Other handsome



Ballroom 1975*

features are the window moldings, similar inside and out, and elaborate chair rails. The massive sills and joists that support the two-story structure are beginning to show deterioration from insect damage.

The Patrick St. Lawrence House was placed on the National Register of Historic Places in 1984. – Jane Pyle

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.

-Jane Pyle



Ballroom 2006

Part II Patrick St. Lawrence



Windowsill and molding 1975*

We do not know where Patrick St. Lawrence was born or where he died. He shows up in western Chatham County in 1783 as husband of the rich widow Elizabeth McCarroll, builds a house so grand – a house still standing in Pittsboro – that he bankrupted himself and his contractor, fled to Mississippi, and died (according to an obscure 1804 report) on his way to the West Indies.



Windowsill and molding 2006

That we do not know much about Patrick St. Lawrence is not unusual. We don't know much about Dr. James McCarroll, either, who bought 500 acres on the stagecoach road just east of today's Siler City. He operated a store there, and Patrick St. Lawrence took that over, too, for his name is attached to a post office installed at the store in 1830. St. Lawrence may have brought his own money; we really don't know. He started buying land in 1786, and when the town of Pittsboro was laid out in 1787, he bought six lots, covering his bets for development in several directions. On lot 50, on the northwest corner of the courthouse square, he built a house for his new bride, perhaps using her money.



Newel 2006



Sills & joists 2006

St. Lawrence figured as a man of influence as well as a man of means. He was appointed as one of the first town commissioners, served as a trustee for the Pittsborough Academy, and was an early member of the Masonic Order.

But fifteen years after his arrival he was in debt to his stepson and to Robert Donaldson, a merchant from Fayetteville, who bought the house and lot for 720 pounds when it was put up for public sale in 1798. An inventory taken at the time of sale lists a billiard table, two dozen chairs, a clock, a buffet, desk and bookcase, twelve pictures, a settee, and four beds, among other things.

Two years later, Elizabeth St. Lawrence was granted a separation from her husband (which back then took an act of the state assembly). That year (1800) the federal census listed her as head of household, with seven children under the age of 15 and three sons between 16 and 25. Her 1823 will left property to three McCarroll grandchildren, three Prince grandchildren, and a cousin Charity Gee. The name St. Lawrence appears only in her signature.

– Jane Pyle

Author's note: This article is based partly on "Patrick St. Lawrence in Chatham County, 1783-1797" by Wade Hadley in the Chatham Historical Journal, December 1988. See also an article about St. Lawrence by Fred Vatter, in The County Line, Winter 2004, and a fanciful story by W. B. Morgan in the Chatham Record of September 1962.

*NC Archives

Note: [Click here](#) for a 2016 update on the Patrick St. Lawrence House.

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