

PROPOSAL OF  
THE 1848 COUNTY JAIL, DALLAS, N.C.  
TO THE GASTON COUNTY HISTORIC PROPERTIES  
REGISTER  
APRIL 21, 1980



GASTON COUNTY HISTORIC PROPERTIES COMMISSION

Mrs. Richard Penegar, Chrmn.  
Mr. Robert Carpenter  
Mrs. W.N. Craig  
Mr. J.C. Stewart  
Mr. Robert Whitt  
Mrs. H.O. Williams

1. Name and location of the property. The property known as the Old Dallas Jail is located adjacent to the northeast corner of the courthouse square, at 108 East Trade Street, Dallas, Gaston County, North Carolina.

2. Name, address, and telephone of the present owner of the property.

Mr. and Mrs. Harold B. Springfield  
Best Town Road  
Bess. City, N.C. 28016  
704/ 629-3029

3. Representative photographs of the property. Photographs are included with this report.

4. A map depicting the location of the property. This report contains a tax office map and a copy of the original plat for the court square locating the property.

5. Current deed reference of the property. This report contains a chain of title of the property.

6. Historical sketch of the property. This report contains a brief historical sketch prepared by Mr. Robert Carpenter.

7. Architectural description of the property. This report contains a brief architectural description of the property prepared by Mr. J.C. Stewart, Architect.

8. Documentation of why and in what ways the property is of historical importance to the county. The Commission believes that the Old Dallas Jail is significant to the history of Gaston County for many reasons:

Historically, it is the original jail for Gaston County and has been important as a landmark of the government complex, a private dwelling, a fraternal meeting place, a western store, and a restaurant.

Architecturally, it is a sound, restored, beautiful example of brick construction with its parapeted roof ends and mouse tooth cornice band.

Educationally, it is highlighted in the walking tour provided by the Gaston County Art and History Museum giving an overview of what life was like in the original village county seat of government. It is also listed on the National Register of Historic Places.

CHAIN OF TITLE FOR THE OLD DALLAS JAIL, DALLAS, N.C.

1. On February 20, 1847, Jessie Holland deeded a seventy-five acre tract to the County Court of Gaston County as shown in Deed Book 1, Page 19, in the Gaston County Registry, the purchase price being fifty dollars (\$50.00).
2. Gaston County held this property until July 3, 1911, when the County Commissioners deeded the court house lot and the jail lot (66' x 330') to Gaston Land and Manufacturing Company. This deed is recorded in Deed Book 94 at Page 45 in the Gaston County Registry and the purchase price for both lots was seven thousand dollars (\$7,000.00). The purpose recited in this deed for the conveyance was because the county seat had moved from Dallas to Gastonia.
3. On June 18, 1915, the jail lot was deeded to Clay C. Costner for the sum of one thousand three hundred fifty dollars (\$1,350.00) as is shown in Deed Book 105, Page 546, in the Gaston County Registry.
4. Mr. Costner sold the jail to Minnie, M.E., and W.R. Clemmer on October 26, 1916. This deed is recorded in Deed Book 178, Page 616. The consideration for the sale was one thousand four hundred sixty dollars (\$1,460.00) and the lot size continued to be 66' x 330'.
5. W.R. Clemmer purchased the interests of his relatives on January 1, 1924, for two thousand dollars (\$2,000.00) as shown in Deed Book 117, Page 354.
6. On May 31, 1941, Mrs. Mary Kennedy Petty purchased the property for one thousand six hundred fifty dollars (\$1,650.) her deed being recorded in Deed Book 414 at Page 289.
7. Mrs. Mary Kennedy Petty conveyed her interest to Yemassee Tribe N. 134 Improved Order of Red Men on November 30, 1943, for the sum of two thousand two hundred dollars (\$2,200.00). See Deed Book 444 at Page 183.
8. A quitclaim deed appears of record in Deed Book 1132 at Page 880, dated February 21, 1974, which releases any interest that the heirs of Mrs. Martha Holsclaw may have had in a 3.5 foot strip of property along the eastern margin of the jail lot to the trustees of the Yemassee Tribe # 134 Improved Order of Red Men. Apparently this was an acquisition of a small strip of additional property.
9. On March 1, 1974, The Yemassee Tribe reconveyed the old jail lot unto its Trustees, in order to conform to legal title holding. It should be noted that the lot size was described as being 66' x 150' in this deed, Deed Book 1132, Page 883. The survey description was dated February 4, 1974. Both the deeds to the 3.5 foot tract and the reconveyance from the Tribe to its Trustees were recorded on March 5, 1974.

10. One minute after the previous two (2) conveyances took place, March 5, 1974, a deed from the Trustees unto Emil F. Traenkner, Jr. was recorded in Deed Book 1132 at Page 884. Revenue stamps indicate that the purchase price was thirty thousand dollars (\$30,000.00) and the property description increased to 69.5' x 150' in order to include the 3.5 ft. strip. The property description has remained the same since.
11. After Emil Traenkner's death, the property was sold by First Union National Bank, executor of the estate of Emil Traenkner, Jr. and Barbara S. Traenkner, widow, to Urban I. West and wife Patricia T. West (a  $\frac{1}{2}$  interest) and Steve D. Hansel ( a  $\frac{1}{2}$  interest). This deed is recorded in Deed Book 1198, Page 417. Revenue stamps and deed information indicate that a cash sum of ten thousand dollars (\$10,000.00) was paid and an existing loan was assumed by the purchasers.
12. Steve D. Hansel purchased the  $\frac{1}{2}$  interest of the Wests on January 12, 1977 for five thousand dollars (\$5,000.00) and assumed the existing mortgage in Deed Book 1208, Page 107.
13. On June 7, 1977, Harold B. Springfield and wife Peggy H. Springfield bought the entire interest in the property, Deed Book 1220, Page 343. Revenue stamps indicate that the Springfields paid eleven thousand five hundred dollars (\$11,500.00) in cash and assumed an existing mortgage. The Springfields are the owners of the property at this time.

14. *Lucy + Richard Penneaps*

15. *Gaston County Museum given by the Penneaps*

## Historical Sketch for the Old Gaston County Jail in Dallas

On February 20, 1847, Jesse Holland deeded a seventy-five acre tract to the County Court of Gaston County for the purpose of establishing the town of Dallas, the county seat of the new county of Gaston.<sup>1</sup> The County Court selected Benjamin Morris as the first sheriff of the county. Sometime in 1848 Morris took possession of the new brick two-story jail. Abraham Mauney and a gang of slave workers had constructed the new courthouse and jail.<sup>2</sup>

The new brick structure served admirably for Lawson A. Mason and Paul Froneberger, the next two sheriffs. In 1860 James F. White was selected the new sheriff. He had the task of serving the county during the difficult Civil War years. As the war closed White remained as sheriff during the beginning of the turbulent Reconstruction period which saw violence in Dallas and throughout the county.<sup>3</sup>

In 1868 a Republican, G. W. McKee, was elected sheriff as the county swung overwhelmingly Republican. Violence became common place between the rival Union League and the Ku Klux Klan. Homes, barns, and crops were burned. Robbers and burglars using the confusion flourished. Anderson Davis, one such bandit, was finally captured and imprisoned in Dallas. Southern white terrorism and Republican failures in office however sealed the Republican fate. The election of 1870 was a close contest. Republican G. W.

McKee claimed to be elected, but the county commissioners, overwhelmingly Democratic, refused his bond and declared Democrat Robert D. Rhyne as the new sheriff. The year 1870 saw the white conservative Democrats once again seize control of Gaston County politics which they would not soon surrender.<sup>4</sup>

Rhyne served until 1877 when fellow Democrat Robert A. White, who resided near the Cleveland County line, became the new sheriff. White served until 1882 when Democrat W. Clay Abernathy was elected.<sup>5</sup>

While Sheriff Abernathy was in office, an unprecedented act of violence occurred at the jail in Dallas. On March 22, 1884, Thomas H. Wilson, a resident of southern Gaston County, was killed by a Mr. McCulley, a black man. McCulley was incarcerated in the jail. The powerful York County, South Carolina Ku Klux Klan raided the Gaston County jail. They overpowered the guards, captured McCulley, and lynched him that same night. The persons involved swore themselves to secrecy, and none were ever implicated in the lynching.<sup>6</sup>

Another event of historical significance occurred at the jail in Dallas when Martin H. Shuford was sheriff. On December 18, 1891, Miss Caroline Shipp became the last woman in North Carolina to be hanged. Miss Shipp had been convicted of murdering her baby. Early on the morning of December 18, Miss Shipp rode from the jail to the hanging tree located west of Dallas. Her last meal consisted of sardines and crackers which she ate while riding on her pine coffin. Persons lined the road, and young boys followed the wagon on foot. Aubrey Costner, wagon driver, halted at the large oak tree. Van Sellers, the hangman, gave Miss Shipp a

handkerchief. When she dropped the handkerchief, a box under her feet would be kicked, and she would be hanged. Questions about her innocence or guilt, and bizaar<sup>e</sup> circumstances have further clouded this event.<sup>7</sup>

During the last twenty years for the jail in Dallas, the structure witnessed considerable change in the county and within itself. Sheriffs for the remainder of the "Gay Nineties" were A. K. Loftin and W. T. Love. In 1901 C. B. Armstrong was elected sheriff. In the same year the county by sixty-four votes turned down an effort to move the county seat to Gastonia, which had~~located~~ located to the south. During his administration (1901-1907) the jail partially burned, but the prisoners were safely removed. During the remodeling a concrete floor was placed in the jail.<sup>8</sup>

In 1907 Thomas E. Shuford was elected the new sheriff. He did not know that he would be the last sheriff of the jail in Dallas. During his administration a wooden annex was added to the rear of the jail (which has since been torn down - 1960-1965). On August 5, 1909, the Gaston County citizens voted by a 629 majority to move the county seat to larger Gastonia. On January 1, 1911, the move was consummated. A new sheriff, J. D. B. McLean, took up his duties in Gastonia.<sup>9</sup>

The building which had housed criminals and some of the county's foremost politicians now became home for the family of Clayton C. Costner. After some property changes, in 1941 the Yemmessee Tribe No. 134 Improved Order of Red Men purchased the jail. They maintained ownership until 1974. From 1974 until

1980 the jail has been both a western store, selling saddles and horsemen's accessories, and a restaurant. Both advertised their businesses as the "Old Dallas Jail."<sup>10</sup>

The jail remains as a monument to the violence of the Civil War and Reconstruction, to the McCulley lynching and the Caroline Shipp hanging, and to its current existence as a restaurant. This stately structure remains for everyone's enjoyment.

## Footnotes

1. Gaston County Deeds, Bk. 1, pg. 19 at Gaston County Courthouse, Gastonia, N. C.

2. Robert F. Cope and Manly Wade Wellman, The County of Gaston, (Pub. by Gaston County Historical Society, 1961), pp. 69-70. "The Old Gaston County Jail in Dallas", typescript copy by Dalton Stowe of Dallas, N. C. 1980.

3. Cope & Wellman, County of Gaston, pp. 97-99; 203.

4. Ibid., pp. 99-103.

5. Ibid., pp. 110, 120, 203.

6. Statement of William N. Craig, Rt. 3, Gastonia, N. C. made March 12, 1980 to Robert C. Carpenter.

7. Robert L. Williams & Paula Dover, "The Last woman To Be Hanged," The State, (February 1980), Vol. 47, No. 9, pp. 25-26. Statement of Miss Jonnie Detter, Dallas, N. C. made March 18, 1980 to Mrs. Theresa Williams.

8. Cope & Wellman, County of Gaston, pp. 146-150. Statement of Miss Jonnie Detter.

9. Cope & Wellman, County of Gaston, pp. 149-150; 203. Statement of Miss Jonnie Detter. Typescript of Dalton Stowe.

10. Gaston County Deeds, Bk. 105, pg. 546; Bk. 44, pg. 289; Bk. 1132, pg. 884; Bk. 1220, pg. 343. Typescript of Dalton Stowe.

This historical sketch has been prepared for the Gaston County Historical Properties Commission by Robert C. Carpenter, Rt. 1, Box 218-A, Bessemer City, N. C. 28016.

## ARCHITECTURAL DESCRIPTION OF DALLAS JAIL

The old Gaston County Jail is a two story brick structure with a basement that raises the main floor level approximately four feet from the finish grade. The basement level of the original structure consists of cut granite blocks in rectangular shapes laid to form a 30 inch thick load bearing base for the two upper floors. The basement level on the addition is constructed of load bearing brick that matches the rest of the structure.

The walls are 24 inch solid load bearing brick walls laid in running bond with a row of headers every fifth course to serve as masonry ties between the inner and outer wythes of masonry.

The original exterior is penetrated by three windows on the upper level that are symmetrically placed across both the front and rear of the building. All of the upper level windows have cut granite lintels and sills and the end windows have cut granite jambs in which the original bars are embedded. The window in the addition was constructed to match the end windows thereby causing the building to have an assymmetrical window arrangement.

The windows on the main level have a flat brick arch lintel and cut granite sills and regular brick jambs. On the original building the main floor level had a symmetrical arrangement of a window, a door, and a window.

A notable detail that is not present on many structures is the sloping parapet at the end of the building. The brick on the parapets is laid in running bond and matches the slope of the roof. The parapets also have brick caps.

Another detail that is quite unique is the triangular brick cornice on the front and rear of the building. This was accomplished by extending the brick from the wall at an angle of 45 degrees to the face of the wall and then a special shaped coping brick was placed over this that supported the gutters.

The structure of the original building was wood framed with wood floors and a wood framed roof. The building partially burned in approximately 1907 and when it was rebuilt, the structure was replaced with a steel frame and corrugated barrel vaults over which concrete was poured to produce a virtually fireproof and secure building. The floor of the main level was left in wood, the floor of the second level is now concrete, as well as the ceiling of the second level. The roof is framed of wood sheathed with 1" x 12" pine boards and covered with tin roofing.

At the time the jail was rebuilt, the West end addition was added. This is evidenced by the same structural floor system used in both the original building and the addition. It was only <sup>10</sup>~~four~~ years after the addition and renovation that the county seat was moved to Gastonia and the jail was no longer used as a jail.