

PROPOSAL OF  
THE 1904 COUNTY HOME, DALLAS, N.C.  
TO THE GASTON COUNTY HISTORIC PROPERTIES  
REGISTER  
SEPTEMBER, 1985  
FINAL APPROVAL APRIL 24, 1986



GASTON COUNTY HISTORIC PROPERTIES COMMISSION

Mrs. Richard Penegar, Chrmn.  
Mr. Robert C. Carpenter  
Mrs. Fred S. Cloninger  
Mrs. William N. Craig  
Mrs. Thomas W. Springs  
Mrs. Wm. B. Shannon  
Mrs. H.O. Williams

## CONTENTS

1. Name and location of the property - Former Gaston County Home, Hwy. 279, County Park, Dallas, Gaston County, N.C.
2. Name and address of current owner of the property - Gaston County, County Courthouse, Gastonia, N.C.
3. Representative photographs of the property -
4. Map depicting location of the property -
5. Current deed references of the property -
6. Historical sketch of the property - This report contains a brief historical description of the site and structure prepared by Historic Properties Commission members Lucy Penegar and Herbert Lineberger.
7. Architectural description of the property - This report contains a brief architectural description prepared by Mr. Alan Waufle, Director of the Gaston County Museum of Art & History.
8. Documentation of why and in what ways the property is of historical significance to the county - Because of the rich heritage of caring that is directly tied to this structure, and for the fact that such a nice structure was erected for the upkeep of the poor and the sick, the Gaston County Historic Properties Commission members feel that the preservation of this structure is important to the history of Gaston County and proposes it for designation as an historic site.
9. Reaction of the N.C. Department of Archives and History -
10. Ordinance designating structure as historic property and public hearing notices, correspondence with owner.

— County Home —  
This structure was built in 1904  
with center tower + small 2-bay wings.  
(date of photo 1904 → 1930)



to Dallas →

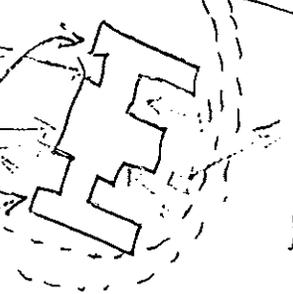
to Cherryville ←

to Boss, City ←

Ag Center

horse arena

Original bldg did not have these long wings

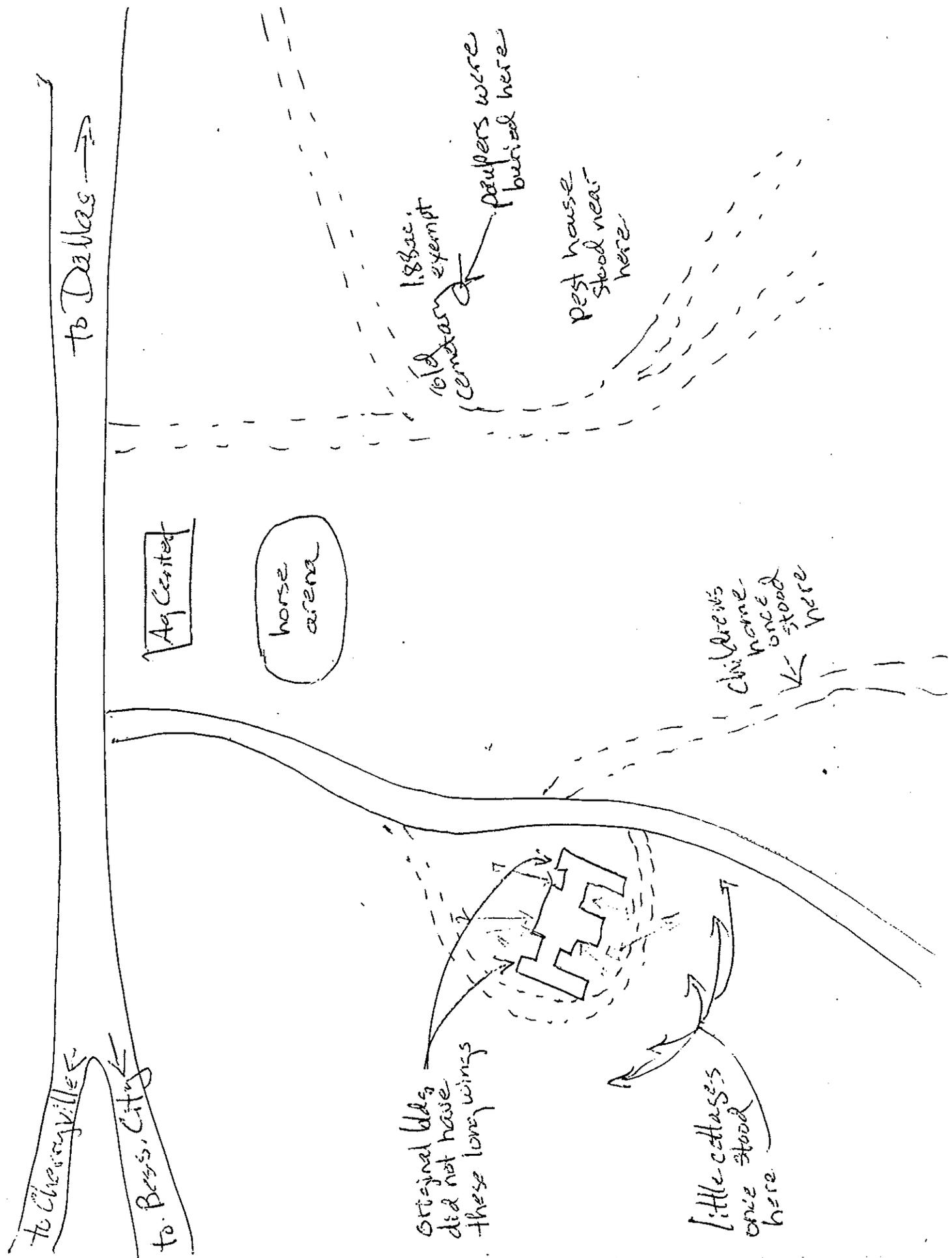


little cottages once stood here

old cemetery 1830s exempt paupers were buried here

pest house stood near here

children's home once stood here



## CHAIN OF TITLE FOR FORMER COUNTY HOME

1. Sarah Hovis willed to A.A. Rhyne, Jr., her "Friend and nephew", the plantation she lived on containing 120 acres, and to Hannah Clemmer, "a woman of color", the adjoining 30 acres that would go to A.A. Rhyne, Jr. after Hannah Clemmer's death. Will Jan. 12, 1876, State Archives, Raleigh.
2. A.A. Rhyne, Jr. sold to the Board of Commissioners 114 acres on Feb. 2, 1880. In this deed claim to the homestead therein was released. This structure possibly had been used to house the poor. Gaston Deed Book 9, p.443, Gaston Deeds Room, Gaston County Court House, Gastonia, N.C.

## GASTON COUNTY HOME

According to research, the building known as the County Home in Dallas was built in 1904, however, Gaston County has been looking after its underprivileged for a much longer period. After searching the minutes of the Board of Commissioners 1881-1892, and Wardens of the Poor Records 1861-1889, we find that the county was concerned over the upkeep of the poor and infirmed as a regular part of its business meetings.

On Jan. 6, 1879, with J.G. Gullick Chairman of the Board, \$139.50 was appropriated for keeping 9 named paupers, moving 3 more into the house, and building a shed to the house. Three month's upkeep figured to be \$13.50 and moving someone into the poor house cost the county \$1. to \$2. (The shed cost the county \$20.) The Keeper of the Poor at this time was Harvey Dilling.

Miscellaneous Records of Wardens of the Poor contains a note that the Board was ordered "that no further appropriations be made for paupers outside the poor house and that all outside paupers asking for aid from the county appear before the Board on Tues. after the first Monday in March, 1879."<sup>2</sup>

From these records we can see that there was already some structure for keeping the poor. It is interesting to trace the building of the next county home and see how the land came to be set aside for the poor.

The book Our Kin reports that, of the land that Sarah Hovis owned, she gave a portion "to a colored woman who had befriended

her for her lifetime with the remainder to Gaston County for the benefit of the poor." A will<sup>3</sup> dating Jan 12, 1876, indeed states that 30 acres more or less go to Hannah Clemmer ( a woman of color) during her natural life and after her death to the said A.A. Rhyne, Jr.<sup>4</sup>

On Feb 2, 1880, A.A. Rhyne, Jr. sold to the Board of Commissioners 114 acres of land with life estate on 34 acres to remain with Hannah Clemmer.<sup>5</sup>

In the minutes of the Board of Commissioners on Jan. 6, 1880, the Chairman appointed Jacob Kiser and B.G. Bradley Esqs. to meet A.A. Rhyne (Jr) on the 16th "for the purpose of surveying a tract of land (this day) purchased of said Rhyne by Gaston County." The chairman was also authorized to execute a note to A.A. Rhyne Jr. for the sum of \$800.<sup>6</sup>

According to the minutes of the Board on Feb. 2, 1880, A.A. Rhyne Jr. had just taken the job of keeper of the poor because on this date he tendered his bond which was received and ordered to be registered by a unanimous vote of the board. Also the county treasurer was ordered to pay A.A. Rhyne Jr. the sum of \$359.88, the balance for the tract of land purchased of him by the county.<sup>7</sup>

On Feb. 16, 1880, W.G. Rutledge Esq. was appointed to serve the committee to divide the Poor House lands instead of B.G. Bradley Esq. who could not serve "on account of illness in his family."<sup>8</sup>

On March 1, 1880, the Report of the Committee to divide the Poor House tract of land was received and the Committee had planned the aggregate 221 acres "into 4 lots, each having a spring of water, a good building site and plenty of fine wood upon them."<sup>9</sup>

Further evidence of a prior structure for the upkeep of the poor can be seen in the miscellaneous Wardens of the Poor Records where T.G. Padgett agrees to build " a house similar in all respects complete to a double house now at the Poor House for the sum of one hundred eighty five dollars, said house to be built on the premises at the "Poor House."<sup>10</sup>

In further records we see the reference to houses instead of the singular word house. The time for receiving the bids for the building of the Poor Houses and the digging of the well was extended to the 1st Monday in August 1880. At this meeting the contract was awarded to James M. Ford, at the sum of \$698. and that said work was to be finished by the first day of November A D 1880. The digging of the well was contracted to H.B. Huffstetler Esq. for the sum of \$45. and M.D. Friday and B.G. Bradley Esqs. were appointed to oversee the building of said Poor Houses and well.<sup>11</sup> Unfortunately, James M. Ford was unable to give bond as required and at the Aug 16, 1880 meeting of the County Commissioners, the contract was awarded to C.L. Gattie for \$785. on condition that he give bond of \$1000. and in case he fails, to give the contract to Joseph Crow at the sum of \$800.<sup>12</sup> But the Commissioners got a break because at the Dec. 28, 1880 meeting, the contract was awarded to Joseph Crow for \$785. after all.<sup>13</sup>

There is evidence that the commissioners were interested in maintenance of the Poor House as the miscellaneous records of Wardens of the Poor show Wm. Oliver being appointed to examine and assess the value of extra labor and improvements including clearing land on Poor House lands dated Jan. 1, 1883.<sup>14</sup> (According to local historians, these houses were situated on the site of the present structure or just behind it. Archeological materials are presumed lost because of bulldozing and landscaping since that time.)

Many requests were made to the County Commissioners by the Keeper of the Poor, such as medicines, supplies from J.R. Lewis & Son store (Dallas), and even sewing for the poor. There were many requests for doctors to be paid for examining and committing "lunitics", since many people came to live at the poor house for that reason. The Gastonia Gazette of Jan. 11, 1900, records "P.G. Wilson, M.D. be paid \$2.10 for examining lunitic, and W.L. Stowe 25 cents for committing lunitic".<sup>15</sup> Of course, the Keeper of the Poor must be paid by the month for each pauper.

The county Poor House has also been called the Pest House, although separate houses were used for the sick. The citizens and County Commissioners not only helped the paupers and lunitics, but were concerned with the sick. This was especially true with the outbreak of smallpox. A Gazette article dated March 7, 1901, states that "The smallpox hospital is now in full operation. It is a regular camp with barracks and all appurtenances and supplies for living comfortably."<sup>16</sup>

The County Commissioners' minutes in 1901 tell of 5 houses

to be built on the lands known as "the County House lands". Each one was to be 16 ft. wide, 32 ft. long, 10 ft. story, each house to be planked up and down and slotted, ceiling over head, ceiling & floor to be dressed, each house to have one partition, tongue & groved & dressed on each side, each house to have 4 windows, 2 doors, & 2 stove flues... at the sum of one hundred and twenty five dollars each, complete.<sup>17</sup>

A Jan. 9, 1902 Gazette article states that seven pest houses with fourteen rooms on the county home property were completed by Mr. D.F. Friday at a cost of \$600.<sup>18</sup> According to an interview with Mr. Gus White on Oct. 4, 1985, (a 93 yr. old gentleman), these houses were situated behind the paupers' cemetery and were demolished in the 1930's.

The Gastonia Gazette also kept the public informed as to the severity of the smallpox epidemic. An article on Feb. 6, 1902, records Dr. Jenkins, the county physician, bringing more people to the camp, bringing the population up to 26, of which eight have the disease. Incidentally, Dr. Jenkins notes in the article that persons that have been vaccinated either don't contract the disease or have a mild case of it.<sup>19</sup> By the March 20, 1902 paper, Dr. Jenkins is more emphatic about the vaccination stating that "if everybody in Gastonia were to be vaccinated before night, this smallpox expense would cease in 30 days and next year's smallpox account, instead of amounting into the thousands of dollars, would run only into the hundreds." at this point there were 30 persons at the county camp with almost daily additions.<sup>20</sup>

The April 11, 1902 Gazette records the first smallpox death as follows:

The first death from smallpox at the county pest house occurred yesterday morning. It was the case of John Rice, a negro man who had been at the pest house for some time. He had a severe case and had been unconscious for a week. He was buried in the county graveyard.<sup>21</sup>

Commissioner's minutes record many smallpox expenses. One of the largest expenses was for paying the guard! Whole families that had a case of smallpox were transported to the pest house and had to be guarded so that no one left to expose others. On March 7, 1901, a Gazette article reports that "the town has bought a 3 seated hack for transporting the patients and employed Mr. Anderson Davis... to look after the moving. All the patients were carefully wrapped and were able to sit up. The carriage was closed and decorated with yellow flags."<sup>22</sup>

A later article reports the expenses as follows:

#### SMALL\*POX EXPENSES

W.E. Rhyne, guard	28.00
Elvira Hunter, cook	8.00
J.H. Jenkins, physician	28.70
A.R. Holland & Brothers, supplies, pest house	11.98
Dallas Drug Co., medicine	6.75
W.L. Stowe, supplies pest hs.	8.91
W.L. Stowe, guard	29.00
S.F. Long, supplies, pest hs.	17.84
Town of Cherryville	8.87
J.A. Rhyne, supplies pest hs.	10.22
S.M. Simms, guard	3.00
A.B. Kimball, guard	2.00
A.P.H. Rhyne, supplies	53.18
J.F. Handsell, guard	6.00
Anders and Floyd	6.00
	<hr/>
	228.45 <sup>23</sup>

It is during this time of concern for our less fortunate

fellow citizens that the county commissioners were being pressured to move the county seat to Gastonia. The population nucleus had shifted to this new town built around the new railroad. It is interesting to note that the commissioners voted to remodel the county jail in Dallas that had suffered from an extensive fire; and rebuilt it with steel vaulted fire-proof floors. Dallas was still the center of government and education with the original Gaston College being one block East of the Courthouse. During this time H.L. Rhyne was keeper of the county home and R.A. White was Chairman of the County Commissioners.

With all the activity at the county home, space must have been at a minimum. Headlines in the Gastonia Gazette dated April 8, 1904, read:

#### NEW COUNTY HOME

The time of the board of county commissioners was occupied largely at Tuesday's session (April 5, 1904) with the question of building a new county home. The Board decided that the present home was inadequate and will advertise at once for bids on a new building.

The new building is to be a brick structure covered with slate and will contain 26 or 27 rooms. The main part of the house will be two stories high.<sup>24</sup>

The commissioners' minutes read that "a new county home be built at the (old or) present site as per plans and specifications prepared by Spencer and Spencer."<sup>25</sup>

A Gazette article appearing on May 24, 1904, reads:

Yesterday morning Messrs. J.Q. Holland, Jno. D.B. McLean, and Miles Carpenter went to the county home and located the site of the new building just where the present home stands. The old home will be moved away and used as a stock house. By using the present site the shade trees can be saved. The old county home was built 25 years ago.<sup>26</sup>

In another article the same day we find:

Mr. W.S. Robinson is just completing a lot of 325,000 brick at the Moro-Webb mill, which will be shipped up the road to the new mill at Hudson. Next week he will move his brick plant to the county home, where he will make about 350,000 brick for that building.<sup>27</sup>

Construction had already begun on the new county home.

The commissioners' minutes on May 16, 1904, state that a well was drilled at the county home for 60 cents a foot in dirt, \$1.50 a foot in soft rock, and \$3.00 in hard rock.<sup>28</sup>

The July 4, 1904, commissioner's minutes also read about much work on the new county home. Paid to Carolina Heating & Plumbing to heat the county home was \$1200., and to Spencer & Spencer for making plans, etc. for the county home was \$1500., to R.F. Rankin and Co. was paid \$1200. (part payment on county home).<sup>29</sup> R.F. Rankin and Co. was paid another part payment of \$1300. at the Sept. 5, 1904, meeting and Carolina Heating & Plumbing was paid \$1100. on account.<sup>30</sup>

From the early 1900's to the closing of the county home, there were three strong directors; Thomas Edson, Dwight Beam, and finally Fred Biggerstaff. It continued to be a very active business to keep up the poor. The Gastonia Gazette wrote of the changing image of the county home in an article of 1969:

Many years ago, perhaps 100, the picture was different. The county home originated as a 'pest house' where people with contagious diseases were quarantined during wide-spread epidemics. Then it became the poor house— an ugly drab place where unwanted, indigent olsters spent their last days in wretched existence in chicken- house type dwellings.

Fortunately for its inmates and the county, the county no longer suffers the stigma of 'poor house'. More appropriately, it is a home for the homeless, where the aged and infirmed can expect to live out their lives with-  
out anxiety about food, clothing, and medical attention.<sup>31</sup>

The county home became, in later years, more of a working farm with milk cows, cattle and hogs, and vegetables grown. "Honor prisoners" from the nearby prison camp helped with the chores. The same Gazette article in 1969 quotes Mr. Biggerstaff, the Director, on the subject of farming:

In recent years the budget had ranged from \$40,000 to \$50,000 annually- but that was when thousands of gallons of corn, okra, tomatoes, and other vegetables bubbled merrily in pots in preparation for canning. Then the 150 acre farm provided food both for the home and the county jail.<sup>32</sup>

Life at the county home must have been pleasant for many who lived there. The 1969 Gazette article quoted several of the elderly living there concerning their feelings. Each one was complimentary, considering it truthfully a "Home". One spinster said, "I got plumb homesick at Christmas when I went to visit my nieces several days."<sup>33</sup> Countless civic groups and individuals made routine trips to the county home to help with the chores, to bring worship services and parties, and to take the elderly on shopping trips.

Rates for living at the county home were mentioned in the 1969 Gazette article as follows:

The monthly rate for care at the home is \$100. which doesn't of course, reflect the true cost, Joseph McCauley (Director of the Welfare Dept) says. Inmates receiving Social Security checks relinquish to the county all but \$5. which they use for small personal pleasure. Any person owning property, stocks, or bonds must sign these over to the county before he is eligible to enter the home.<sup>34</sup>

In the same article, the closing of the county home is mentioned..."making way for private enterprise to provide housing and care for the elderly and sick". Mr. Joseph McCauley, director of the Welfare Dept., said that private homes for the

elderly are encouraged if they could take the people at the rate that the county home offered, but that was virtually impossible.<sup>35</sup>

All of the original structures have been demolished except the 1904 brick building and a small brick outbuilding which was probably built to store dairy products. The structure that remains (in 1986) has been altered to some extent. The original block was five bays wide, having a three story tower on the center front. Two one story wings are part of this structure, with large windows matching those on the center structure.

Later (probably 1930's) additional wings were added to the existing wings and a two story porch was added across the front with the demolition of the tower. Sometime during the renovation the entire structure was painted white, leaving an imposing Greek revival flavor to the building situated at the entrance of the county park.

During the farming period, the home had several barns. According to local historians, the first barn burned in about 1940. It was replaced but lightning struck and burned it in approximately 1963. The last barn was more of a stable for local horse enthusiasts who, under the leadership of Mr. Biggerstaff, started an active Horseman's Association for the county. A performance arena with viewing stands and refreshment facility were built. This last large barn burned in 1980. There still remains a smaller barn, southwest of the home.

It is interesting that Gaston County built such a large and imposing structure to house the poor and sick. Over the years

it has held this stately position. In the 1969 Gazette article the writer says:

Seeing the grazing beef cattle in an adjacent field, the stranger traveling the Dallas Cherryville highway might mistake it all for the handsome estate of a wealthy farmer.<sup>36</sup>

Although the grazing cattle are absent, the old county home still has an aura about it that demands your attention as you pass by. Because of the rich heritage of caring that is directly tied up with this structure and site, the Gaston County Historic Properties Commission feels that the preservation of this old county home is most important and therefore recommends that it be designated a county historic site.

Historic sketch prepared by  
Lucy R. Penegar  
Herbert M. Lineberger

## FOOTNOTES

- 1- County Commissioners' Minute Docket 1868-1881, Jan. 6, 1879, (hereinafter cited as C.C. Min.)
- 2- Miscellaneous Records for Wardens of the Poor 1861-1889, N.C. Dept. of Archives and History, (hereinafter cited as W. of Poor)
- 3- Laban Miles Hoffman, Our Kin, Daniel E. Rhyne, Laban L. Jenkins, & L.M. Hoffman, 1915), p. 367.
- 4- Will of Sarah Hovis , Clerk of Court, Gaston County Court house, dated Jan. 12, 1876.
- 5- Gaston County Deed Book 9, p. 443, Register of Deeds, Gaston County Court house, Gastonia, N.C.
- 6- C.C. Min., Jan.6, 1880, p. 533.
- 7- C.C. Min., Feb. 2, 1880, p. 535.
- 8- C.C. Min., Feb. 16, 1880, p. 538.
- 9- C.C. Min., Mar. 1, 1880, p. 542.
- 10- W. of Poor, Archives & History.
- 11- C.C. Min. July 5, 1880, p. 560.
- 12- C.C. Min., Aug. 16, 1880, p. 562.
- 13- C.C. Min., Dec. 28, 1880, p. 578.
- 14- W. of Poor, Archives & History.
- 15-Gastonia Gazette article "Following Orders", (hereinafter cited as G.G.), Jan. 11, 1900.,
- 16- G.G. "All In The Hospital", Mar. 7, 1901.
- 17- C.C. Min., Nov 19, 1901, p. 232.
- 18- G.G., Jan. 9, 1902.
- 19- G.G., "More Cases of Smallpox", Feb. 6, 1902.
- 20- G.G., "Fifteen New Cases", Mar. 20, 1902.
- 21- G.G., "Death From Smallpox", Apr. 11, 1902.
- 22- G.G., "All In The Hospital", Mar. 7, 1901.
- 23- G.G., "County Matters", Sept. 5, 1902.
- 24- G.G., "New County Home", Apr. 8, 1904.
- 25- C.C. Min., Apr. 5, 1904, p. 454.
- 26- G.G., May 24, 1904.

27- G.G., May 24, 1904.

28- C.C. Min., May 16, 1904, p. 469.

29- C.C. Min., July 4, 1904, p. 484.

30- C.C. Min., Sept. 5, 1904, p. 511.

31- G.G., Apr. 20, 1969, "Our Own White House".

32- Ibid.

33- Ibid.

34- Ibid.

35- Ibid.

36- Ibid.

## Gaston County Home

The structure known as the Gaston County Home is located west of Dallas on N.C. Highway 279. It is a brick building done in a Colonial Revivalist style and is reminiscent of a Georgian plantation house. The home has undergone many changes through the years in both tenants and architecture.

The original portion of the <sup>structure</sup> dates from the turn of the century and consists of a main block and flanking side wings. Construction is brick in common bond, 1:6. Roof material is slate on the two story section and metal elsewhere. The original wings have become hyphens due to the addition of wings laid perpendicular to the main block. These later wings are also built of brick. Other major changes that have taken place at the Old County Home are: the connection of the kitchen to the main building, the addition of sun porch and exit stairs on the roof of the original west wing, lowering the roof of the main block, removing a central, three-story block tower, and the addition of a two story portico to replace a single story portico.

Documentary photographs show the main block of the house to be similar to that which stands today. The central, double doorway projects slightly from the facade since it was once in the tower now removed. Windows on the two story facade and the original side wings are six-over-six sash set in segmental arch openings. Windows in the later side wings are six-over-six but without the segmental arches.

The prominent portico which rises two stories on large, square piers, replaces a one story porch which had six columns and shed roof. Today's portico has a flat roof, a design which ties in with the small, covered porches located on the facades of the later wings. The main doorway on the facade contains two replacement doors with transoms and are set in a large segmental arch. Doorway and windows on the original portion of the building are accented with large shutters. Positioned over the entrance way is a window treatment that alludes to a Palladian Window; having a pattern of 4-12-4 lights.

Passing through the main doors, one enters into the stair hall which crosses the main floor hall at the point where the stairs begin to rise. Architectural detailing in the county home on the first floor includes chair rail and wainscoting, transoms over five panel doors, a simple baseboard, and doorway architraves which are completely plain except for corner blocks with roundels.

The first floor of the oldest sections in the house is subdivided into several rooms on both the north and south sides. Ceiling height on the first floor is over ten feet. Closets have been added to corners of some rooms and modern bathrooms have been installed. At the back of the stair hall, a passageway to the old kitchen has been enclosed; tying the two structures together.

The stair in the county home are wide and accented with nicely turned balusters and square newel posts at both the bottom and in the second floor stair hall. Room

arrangement on the second floor is quite similar to that of the first floor with a series of rooms placed off a central hall running the length of the building. At the axis with the stair hall, there is a room larger than the others and may have been used as a communal sitting room. There is no indication that walls have been moved to create this large room. In some instances two small rooms off the main hall have been combined into one, usually to create rooms for new uses such as shower rooms or multiple restrooms.

The ceiling height on the second floor is lower than that of the first. An immediate indication of the lower ceiling is the lack of transoms over the doors. The wainscot seen on the first floor is not found on the second floor. The architraves, however, are the same plank boards accented with corner blocks and roundels. A door at the north end of the second floor leads to the added sunroom located on the roof of the original first floor extension wing.

The attic is reached through a ceiling crawl opening in a room in the southeast corner. Vestiges of the original central tower can be seen in the attic. The tower was probably removed at the time the flat portico was added. The documentary photographs shows this tower extended beyond the ridge line of the main roof. The tower was embellished with a circular window at the third story level, and capped with a hip roof and finial. There has been a slight lowering of the main roof sometime during the twentieth century.

The side wings which were added during the twentieth

century, were designed with symmetry in mind, yet they are not perfect reflections of each other. The wing on the southeast side is slightly wider and, therefore, contains rooms on both sides of a central hall which runs the length of the addition. The northwest wing has a side hall with rooms located only on the northwest side. Each wing was added for more dormitory space for the county "poor" home. The rooms therefore, are not tremendously large, except one room in the north end of the southeast wing. This room was probably used as a communal sitting area. Shower room and multiple toilet rooms still remain intact in the northwest wing. Doors in both wings have transoms and ceiling heights similar to those on the first floor of the main block. Although this structure has had a long succession of tenants, particularly in the wing areas, there has not been much alteration of the interior architectural fabric.

There remains one outbuilding from the county home, a simple dairy with hip roof. This building is constructed of brick like the original home. It is roofed with a combination of sheet metal and metal tiles.

Alan D. Waufle

June 24, 1985