

WHO BUILT THE TOWN CLOCK?

*COMPOSED BY PELHAM LYLES
FAIRFIELD COUNTY MUSEUM*

In 1785, the General Assembly of South Carolina authorized the establishment of a public market in the town of Winnsborough on the northeast corner of



Congress and Washington Streets. This first market house was a square, wooden building, painted yellow, and was topped with a wooden tower and belfry. Today there is a small parking

lot on that corner adjacent the law office and the partially burned building on the east.



Some years later, probably between 1820 and 1830, this market house was sold to Robert Cathcart for a goodly sum. Mr. Cathcart in turn donated to the town a site for a new market house: his old duck-pond, a boggy piece of land just in front of the old market house in the middle of Washington Street. The town council accepted the land and petitioned the legislature for authority to erect a new public market-house. The S.C. legislature gave this authority, "Provided the building be no more than 30 feet in width." The erection of our town market and tower was begun soon after this, probably in 1822. Col. William McCreight was the contractor for the project, as well as the construction of the courthouse. He was also the first town intendant, or mayor.



Top image taken about 2012. The middle image appears to be from about 1920-30. The bottom image shows the ruins of the old Winnsboro Hotel which burned in the 1930s.

The tower bell was French made and is said to have had silver in its composition. Its tone, it is said, was beautiful and silvery. This bell did good service until 1895. During a fire that year two young men were ringing it so vigorously that it cracked and was sent to Philadelphia to J. McShane for repairs. When, after some delay it was returned and sounded for the first time, the tone was so different from the old tone that doubt was expressed immediately as to its being the original bell.

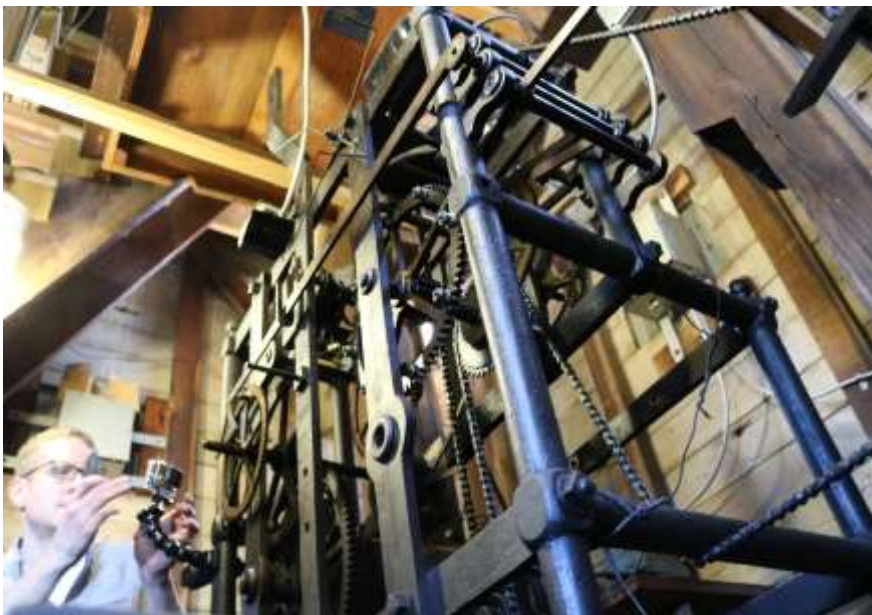
The public market occupied the ground floor and had a bell of its own. Its tone was not so silvery as that of the clock, but was a very welcome one when its ringing proclaimed to the villagers that fresh meat was to be had at the market. It was said that the town dogs were the first to arrive barking when the meat cutter rang the bell. It is interesting to learn that this was an old custom not particular to Winnsboro. One who was a visitor to the 1926 Sesquicentennial Exposition in Philadelphia, in a description of the old market house there, wrote of the ringing of the bell when a boat arrived up the river bringing good things to eat from England and the tropics.



When the curfew law prevailed in town the old market bell tolled the curfew at 9 o'clock every evening.

The works for the new clock were ordered in 1837, from Alsace, France by Colonel William McCreight. The components were imported to Charleston and hauled to Winnsboro in wagons by an African American freedman named Adam Blake. His biography and a narrative written by his great granddaughter is included here. The construction of the building was finished in 1837 and the clock works from France were installed in that year. The mechanism is of iron and the pendulum is solid copper. All of the supports to the iron gears are of heavy timber construction.

1837 clockworks still keeping time.



In 1875 it was found necessary to repair the clock tower, and the tower was reinforced with internal wooden buttressing. The carpentry work was done by another well-known African American craftsman of Winnsboro, John Smart. He was responsible for crafting a number of public buildings, churches, and private structures around town. A biography for him also appears below.

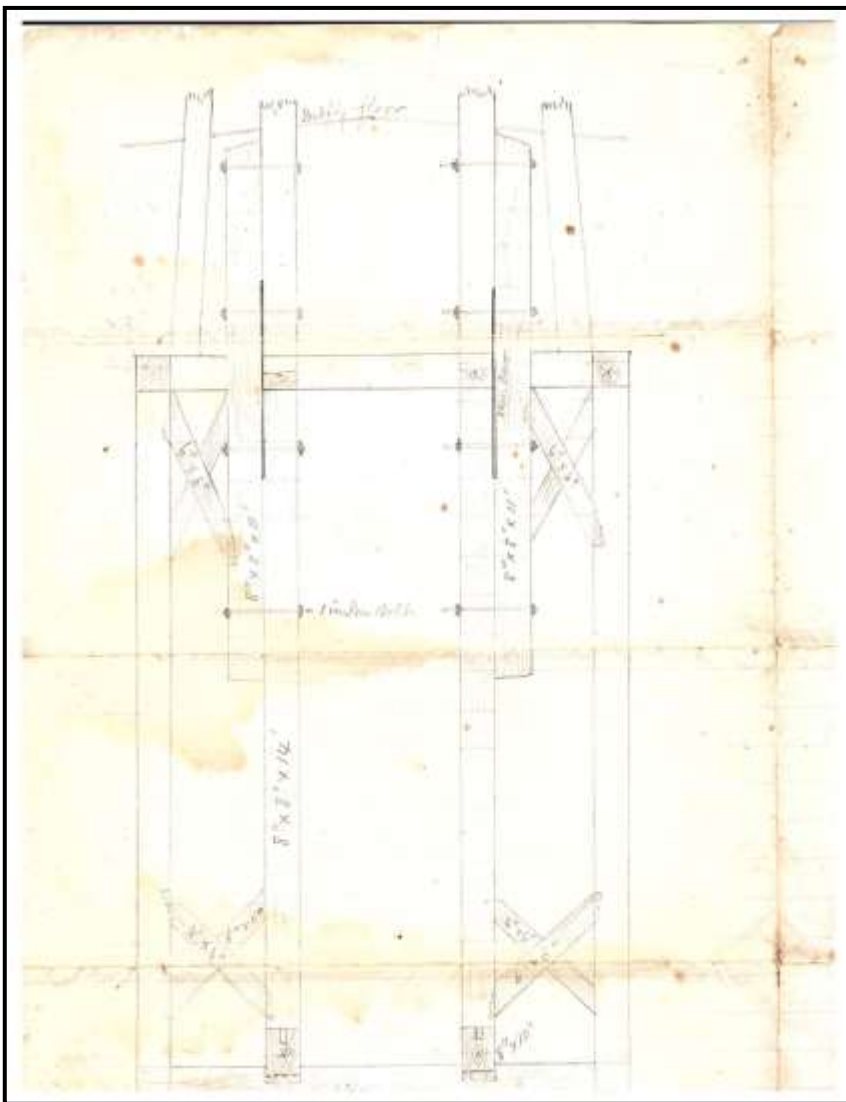
Some years ago, the county museum staff discovered a measured drawing of the wooden framework that John Smart built to stabilize the weakened walls of the brick tower. The existence of this design was unknown as it was tucked into the pages of an old bible in the

museum collection. An early News and Herald article about the history of the town clock stated that architect A. Y. Lee was responsible for designing this timber structure to be built by John Smart.

It is often said that Winnsboro's town clock is the oldest continually running town clock in the nation. A News and Herald article from 1960 announced that City Manager Ben White was having the old clock electrified and that Rodgers Clock Service of Harrisburg, PA would do the work. The clock had been mechanically operated and wound between 1837 and 1960. The article mentions that the daily winding of the clock was tiring and the electrification would make it easier!

The clock was wound daily with a windlass with cables, the winder having to climb the tower to do this. Colliers Weekly in 1921 published an

article describing the Winnsboro clock as "... the oldest public clock in running order." In 1967, a local article mentions that the electricity had gone off and was having to be reset, so it does appear that as long as the clock was mechanically operative, it at least ran continuously. A local news article in 1887 complained that all four clock faces on the tower had gotten out of sync,



with as much as a half hour's difference in time. A recent examination of the old clock by this editor reveals a simple electric motor mounted on the top of the frame which winds the mechanism regularly.

In February of 1865, General Sherman's troops, in his infamous "March to the Sea" came to Winnsboro after having burned the capitol city of Columbia. The Episcopal minister Dr. Lord, in reminiscences quoted by Julian Bolick in ***A Fairfield Sketchbook***, recounted that when General Slocum's Union troops were taking leave of the downtown area, some of the town's boys spotted "several 'bummers' with oil-soaked torches prepared, hiding in the...tower." Doctor Lord went immediately to a Federal officer who had not yet left with the troop withdrawal and pleaded for help in "dislodging the drunken buzzards from their roost."

The iconic Winnsboro Town Clock Building has been persistent as the image of our local history for nearly 200 years. The first floor is now used as meeting space for the Town's various organizations and as a polling station. The second floor of the Town Clock is home to the Fairfield County Chamber of Commerce.

Adam Blake's Story

The following narrative was published in a small book, ***Adam's Journey***, by Rosa Williams who was a descendant.

Descendants of Adam Blake were interviewed recently by a Spartanburg news reporter in the town clock. Seen from left to right are Angela Brown, Cynthia Banks-Smith, and Savilla Celestine Davis Gordon.



Introduction with Acknowledgements:

When I listened in on conversations that my mother, her sisters and brothers had regularly about my great- great grandfather Adam Blake bringing the town clock in a mule-driven wagon from Charleston, South Carolina to Winnsboro in Fairfield County, wonderful seeds of pride lodged in my mind. My great, great grandfather, the son of a slave who bought his and his family's freedom, played a major role in getting the clock that Winnsboro citizens, Black and White, determined the time of day for everything in their daily schedules since 1833. My sisters and brothers, my generation of relatives and friends did not know this. Our sparse knowledge of our family history and the history of Winnsboro in Fairfield County had a significant gap that needed to be bridged.

Now as I approach the end of the eighty-first year, I know it is time to share this knowledge, this source of pride, with others. My family, my posterity, needs to study and seek to learn

more about this Black entrepreneur who was astute enough to develop a business as a drayman and earn a living for himself and a family before the Civil War and the Emancipation Proclamation when Slavery was legal in this free country.

I decided that the time is now to document our family gurus' stories and capture the minds of living generations with seeds of pride. This effort to write historic fiction is meant to challenge other genealogist cousins and friends to probe and search for more factual details and saturate the creative minds of generations to come. This initial effort, Adam's Journey, is being presented at the 2006 Banks Family Reunion in Woodcliff Lake, New Jersey, July 6-9, 2006.

"Adam's Journey" is based on facts gleaned from a Winnsboro weekly newspaper, The News and Herald," conversations with my late mother Savilla Banks Davis Cousin Pearl Banks Boyd who lives in Winnsboro, and Anna Savilla Davis Boston, our Banks Family Reunion genealogist.

No one with whom I talked about this venture expressed any negativism. Family and friends have encouraged, assisted and given technical support for which I am eternally grateful. I challenge all of my capable, creative young relatives to pick up the tale and create history-based adventures in the life of our great great grandfather Adam Blake who worked to make a difference in his life as well as the lives of other people.

Writing, artistic and technical support were given by: Catherine D. Thomas, editing, Whitley Princetta Brown, typing; Lawanna Glymph, illustrator; Latanya Bowman Benjamin, publication-designer; James Leon Solomon, printing. Research at Fairfield County Museum, Fairfield County Chamber of Commerce and Fairfield County Library.

May God continue to bless each of us as we try to help each other live for him.

Rosa M. Davis Williams
June 10, 2006



This is the homeplace of Henry Laurens Elliott where Rosa Williams grew up. The Elliott house was constructed previous to the Civil War. After Reconstruction, when the town was recovering economically, H. L. Elliott greatly enlarged the original house to the size and magnificence seen here.

Eight year old Loki asked, "Momma where did you live when you were eight years old?" "Oh, I lived on the Elliot's Place", said Momma. And Where is the Elliot's Place?"

asked Loki. "It's in the north end of town near the Mt. Zion school", said Momma. All of our family lived there; there was my momma, daddy, brothers, sisters, grandmother, granddaddy,

some aunts, uncles, and some cousins too. "Why did everyone live in the same area", asked Loki. "We were all born and raised there", said Momma "It was great granddaddy Adam Blake who first came to Winnsboro in 1813.

He had walked from Richland County to Winnsboro in Fairfield County looking for work."

ADAM'S JOURNEY:

Adam was a bright and brave boy who wanted to help his family. He was the older of his four brothers and three sisters all under twelve years of age. His parents had been brought from French West Africa as slaves and had bought their freedom from their slave masters. The family was very happy to be free but it needed to find a way to make a living for itself. Adam was only a lad but he felt that he should be the first to become an independent worker since he was oldest and stronger than the other children were in his family.

The Blake family was one of three families that met each week for a praise service on Sundays and sometimes during the week. They were especially happy, thankful and joyful for having gained their freedom and they invited the other families to join them in this service. They all stood in the middle of the floor and did "shout" dances and songs that lasted until the middle of the night. They prayed and prayed prayers of thanks to God.

The next morning things were quiet and still, the Blake family sat around their table made of split logs and ate a breakfast of corn cakes, molasses and fried fatback. They wondered where the next meal would come from and how they were going to survive. Adam's father had heard about farms in Fairfield County and wondered if he might find work there. His wife did not want him to leave her at this time; she was expecting another baby soon. So Adam said, "I can go there and find work. I can help you keep food on the table," Adam's mother said, "You are too young to leave home now." His father thought for a few minutes and said that the path to Fairfield is safe and is not very far. Perhaps he could walk to Fairfield. If he left early in the morning, he would get there long before dark. Right away Adam knew that he could do this. He asked his mother to let him go to find some work and she too said, "You may go...you may go to Fairfield to find work."

The next morning Adam and his mother were out of bed before dawn. He dressed carefully while she made breakfast for him. She also made a lunch of hoecake with blackberry jelly, two apples from their apple tree, and a piece of rabbit left from the Sunday dinner. She carefully wrapped the lunch in a piece of cloth and tied it up. She then attached a length of thin rope so that he could swing the rope over his shoulder and his hands would be free to climb a tree if he needed to. She then put an old rabbit's foot for good luck in his pocket. By this time everyone was up and dressed' they hugged Adam and kissed and waved good-bye to him and he skipped happily along the path, northward toward Fairfield County.

Adam walked and walked for about two hours along the woodsy path. He saw many animals playing: squirrels, deer, rabbits, and even snakes slithered through the grass. He stopped under a spreading oak tree to rest and eat an apple. After this short break, he continued uphill then

downhill, he ran towards Ridgeway. Along the way, he found a spring with some clear cool water and drank from his cupped hands.

Suddenly there were voices and smoke coming from a thick grove of trees. Two men dressed in military uniforms were crouched beside a small fire; they were cooking something. Adam walked quietly so as not to be noticed but the soldiers saw Adam immediately. They asked Adam why he was walking alone and where was he going. Adam said, "I'm going to Winnsboro to find work. I need to help my family to provide food." The soldiers were only curious about Adam's walking alone. "Well, good luck", said the soldiers. And Adam walked on. He began to run when he walked out of sight of the soldiers.

(These soldiers had gotten lost from their company. They had been in battle off the coast of the Atlantic Ocean, south of the state line. They were from Canada and were in the War of 1812, which was still in progress.)

Adam could hear the ripple of water in the distance. "That must be Cedar Creek", he thought. "I'll stop here and eat my lunch." He held onto small trees and carefully trudged down the bank toward the creek. It was a slippery walk down toward the water but he found a spot to sit on a large boulder. He took his lunch from his shoulder, sat down by the creek and ate his rabbit, hoecake and his blackberry jelly. He left the apple to eat later because he saw blackberry bushes and could pick a handful to eat as he scrambled up the embankment back to the path.

Walking much faster now, Adam was trying to make up for the time he enjoyed eating his lunch! The sun had moved toward the western sky and in a few hours, night would fall; he must get to Winnsboro as soon as he possibly could.

There was a small totem pole standing at the foot of a red clay hill and just beyond this hill was a thick grove of live oak trees. Adam could see movement in the grove; there was drumming, dancing, cooking talking and laughing; this was a celebration taking place among a family of Indians. Adam would have liked to join them but he could not, there was no time for visiting.

There was only time to enjoy the walking along the woody path. He could see on a hill several horses; he must be approaching a farm. As he came closer, one horse was nervously looking down into the ravine. "What is she looking at", he thought. A colt, her baby, had fallen into the ravine and could not climb out. The colt was struggling hard to climb out but to no avail. Adam scrambled down into the gully and led the colt out. He gently rubbed the colt down and found that he was not seriously hurt except from some bruises on his back and thighs. A man came to the hill to get two of the horses. He needed them to pull a wagon full of cotton bales to the gin house. Adam told the man what had happened to the colt. The man thanked Adam for helping his colt out of the ravine and being sure he was all right. He asked Adam where he had come from. Adam told him that he had come from Richland County and that he was looking for work. This man was Mr. Elliot, who was in need of help on his farm and he gave Adam the job of water boy for the slaves who were picking cotton in the field. Adam

lived and worked on Mr. Elliot's farm with the other slaves until he was thirteen years old. Because he was free, he was paid two dollars each week.

He saved his money and finally had enough to buy a wagon. He borrowed a horse from the Elliots. It was the colt he rescued from the ravine that was now almost grown. The horse and boy became trusted friends as they both matured. Adam used his wagon and the horse to haul things around the farm; bales of cotton, bales of hay, supplies from the general store, and slaves who moved from farm to farm. He went all over Winnsboro hauling goods, equipment, and people. People came from far and near to use Adam's hauling service. He became the drayman for the area. He finally bought his horse. "I want you to be my very own horse", said Adam to his borrowed horse one day. He counted his money that night and felt he could make a deal with Mr. Elliot. Sure enough, Adam had enough money to pay for the horse and he actually owned "Babe".

Housing for slaves on the Elliot's farm was barracks style. Adam did not like the room he occupied; he began saving to buy or build a house of his own. He did like some of the young girls he met around the barracks and he teased them a lot. He especially liked Savilla Smith who was owned by Mr. Elliot's brother, James. Adam continued to save the money he made. He went home to visit with his parents and siblings from time to time. At these times, he could ride his horse or drive his wagon. His parents and siblings were so very proud of him. Adam was nineteen when he and Savilla Smith "jumped the broom".

Savilla Smith was a lovely girl who kept the Elliot's children during the day. Her mother was a housekeeper for the Elliots; she was one of the slaves who maintained their household. Her duties were helping to cook, watch the children, sweeping, dusting and almost anything there was to be done to maintain a well-run Big House.

As time passed, Savilla and Adam had a number of children: Ceasar, Simon, Mariah, David and little Savilla. Adam worked hard to support his family. He became a trusted and admired citizen of Winnsboro as he grew into manhood. One of Mr. Elliot's brothers, James Kinney, manufactured cotton gins and Adam helped him distribute his gins to other towns including:

Chester, Rock Hill, Blythewood, Ridgeway, and Camden. Adam was well known throughout the upper state and the Midlands of South Carolina. He knew the history of Winnsboro more than any other citizen did; he remembered details about the growth of town and most everything of the significant events around town.

A Fairfield County Courthouse was of great need and interest to everyone in Winnsboro. Robert Mills designed the courthouse and it was built around 1823. Adam was about twenty years old when he hauled materials to build the courthouse.



Adam witnessed the building of other houses and churches in Winnsboro, some of which are in use today. The Gladden House, the Timms and Long houses were built with Adam's help.

Home of James McKinney Elliott. His cotton gin shop was behind this building which was demolished in the 1960s. The Timms, Long, and Gladden houses are still occupied and stand on West College St. .

When I was a young girl in Winnsboro in the 1930's, the popular picnic place was at Fortune Springs Garden near the Flat Rock. Little did I know that this park was named for a slave, Pompey Fortune. Pompey and Adam Blake were friends and he often helped Adam with his hauling. Pompey Fortune was Captain John Buchanan's slave who had served Colonel Lafayette during the Revolutionary War.

When the town ordered a clock from Alsace Loraine, France and it came by boat to the nearest seaport, Charleston, South Carolina, it was Adam who drove his wagon from Winnsboro to Charleston to get that clock. Adam watched very carefully as the clock was dismantled and pieces wrapped carefully in quilts and placed in his wagon. He drove very cautiously as he returned to Winnsboro with his precious load so as not to damage pieces of the clock. He made many trips to and from Charleston to bring parts and materials for reassembling and restoring the clock to be installed in the building on its base where it now stands in Winnsboro.

Adam was the only person in town who knew how to reassemble the clock. His fine mind allowed him to remember the position for each piece of the clock. (Adam was pleased to be able to do this for the town he had grown to love).

The clock was then as it is now a wonderful service to the people of Winnsboro. I remember hearing the clock strike in the quiet of the morning and evening. I recall hearing that town clock strike. The clock on the mantle in our house was set according to that clock. Our house was at 500 West Moultrie Street approximately a mile and a half from down town. During the nine months of school at Fairfield County Training School, children got to school on time by it. During the summer months whether you were playing in the sand bar or picking cotton in Reverend Moore's cotton field, lunchtime was designated by that clock. When I was about thirteen, I kept a Mrs. Brown's three daughters while she worked at the Economy Drug Store soda fountain. I knew when to set the table in preparation for lunch by that clock.

"Yes, Loki." said Mama, "We heard the story of Adam's journey from my grandpa and from my daddy. Your great, great grandfather was a wonderful person who enjoyed living and working in his town, Winnsboro. Aside from hauling, Adam raised vegetables, cotton and corn. His wife and children helped to plant, hoe, and pick veggies and cotton, He like being a person who could and would help others."

John Smart, A Man of Many Talents

John Smart was born during slavery in 1842. After Emancipation, he became a leader for the African American community in Fairfield County. His skills as a self-employed carpenter, contractor, and architect were accompanied by his talents as a preacher and a leader in the new Democratic party.

The local media of August 11, 1868 covered a Democratic gathering in Ridgeway, S.C. with about a crowd of about 2000 from the area and also from Columbia and Kershaw. Among the speakers were Col. H.C. Davis, General Wade Hampton, Col. Thomas, General J. D. Kennedy, Col. F. W. McMaster, Col. James Rion, Major McClure, and Captain W. J. Depass. Leading African American businessman John Smart also addressed the crowd.

As a carpenter he is known to have designed and built Wayman A.M.E. Church in which he was a member, completing it in 1878. Also, he was employed in the rebuilding of St. John's Episcopal Church after it was burned in 1888.

John Smart served as the President of the Hook and Ladder Volunteer Colored Fire Brigade in the late 1800's. The Hook and Ladder Colored Fireman moved into their new building in 1891, erected for their use by the Town Council. The building was situated on the east side of Vanderhorst Street about midway between Washington and Liberty Streets. It was a two story frame building and John was the contractor and builder.

In 1901, Smart left Winnsboro and went to Columbia, S.C., after receiving a contract for constructing the Desportes Building. This was a two story brick building containing ten store rooms. The cost of the contract was more than \$20,000. This was a very large contract and Smart was no doubt the man for the job.

John Smart died, March 27, 1908 and was laid to rest in the Old Russell Cemetery in the town of Winnsboro. He was one of the first African-Americans in Fairfield County to have a street named after him.