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G E O R G E T O W N

RICE
PLANTATIONS

TEXT AND PHOTOGRAPHS

BY

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Arcadia

TWO PLANTATIONS WHERE PRESIDENTS OF THE UNITED States were entertained, Clifton and Prospect Hill, now rest in impressive dignity within Arcadia's extensive boundaries. Both of these rice plantations entered history at an early date—at the very time that they were being groomed into low-country show places by the construction of fine mansions and the landscaping of gardens. George Washington stayed overnight at Clifton during his southern tour of 1791; and following him to Waccamaw in 1819, James Monroe was a guest at Prospect Hill, where his arrival and departure were staged with full pomp and circumstance.

The main seat of Arcadia, owned at the present time by George Vanderbilt, is the original Prospect Hill mansion and gardens. From here the property fans out to include the former plantations of Clifton, Rose Hill, Forlorn Hope, George Hill, Fairfield, Oak Hill, and Bannockburn. It also reaches to the sea, taking in all of Debordieu Beach. During the ownership of Dr. Isaac E. Emerson of Baltimore from 1906 until 1931 the whole estate was given its present name of Arcadia.

So prominently connected with Arcadia is the Allston (or Alston) family that the story of the plantation would be incomplete without at least a brief excursion into Allston history, for it was under this family that the place had its beginning.

John and William, the first of the Allston male line to settle on Waccamaw Neck, acquired lands here through grants and purchases between 1730 and 1750. They were the sons of John Allston of St. John's Parish, Berkeley, who had come to America from England in the late 1600's. The brothers probably first settled on Waccamaw at The Oaks and Turkey Hill, as is indicated by the old family burial plots at these two plantations.²⁸

William was married in 1721 to Esther LaBrosse de Marboeuf. (The LaBrosse name later became LaBruce.) The fifth of their many children, Joseph, born 1735, was the first to own Prospect Hill as a single tract. Known in the family as Joseph Allston of The Oaks, this

Arcadia

son purchased tracts totaling about 1,400 acres from John Huger, Thomas Butler, and George Smith. To his eldest son, William, Joseph willed the northern half of this property, the portion afterwards called Fairfield. To his fifth child, Thomas (born in 1764), the only one besides William to live to maturity, Joseph willed the southern half, and this part became Prospect Hill. On the death of his father in 1784, Thomas came into possession of both Prospect Hill and Turkey Hill farther up the Waccamaw.²⁹

Thomas married his cousin Mary Allston, daughter of his Uncle John, nicknamed during the Revolution, "Captain Jack of the Raccoon Guards." They established residence at Prospect Hill and built here the beautiful two-story mansion which stands today. It is a duplicate of the house which Thomas' brother William constructed at Clifton just to the south.

Thomas had no children, and at his death in 1794 the not quite finished house and the plantation, then about 550 acres, went to his widow. She later married Benjamin Huger II, son of Major Benjamin Huger, who had achieved fame as the American to greet the Marquis de Lafayette on the latter's arrival at North Island during the Revolution. On her second husband's death, a few years following the marriage, Mrs. Huger sold the plantation to Colonel Joshua John Ward of Brookgreen.³⁰

The famous gardens at Arcadia were apparently started in Mrs. Huger's time, since the published reminiscences of W. Hasell Wilson, a Waccamaw visitor of that period, mention Prospect Hill, as the home of Mrs. Huger and say, "There was a handsome garden attached to the house, and it was considered quite a showplace."³¹

President Monroe's welcome to Prospect Hill on April 21, 1819, was an elaborate one. One story of the great event says that a carpet for Monroe to walk upon was laid from the front entrance of the house to the canal, the direction from which the President's party came. Possibly the carpet has been extended a few feet with each telling of the tale, for laying such a cloth even halfway to the canal two hundred yards away would have been task enough and suitably impressive. But the plantation gentry were fond of doing things in the grand manner, and the President may indeed have walked on carpet all the way from canal to mansion. The welcome of Monroe's party was equaled by the lavish departure to Georgetown next morning in "one of the plantation barges, profusely decorated and adorned for the

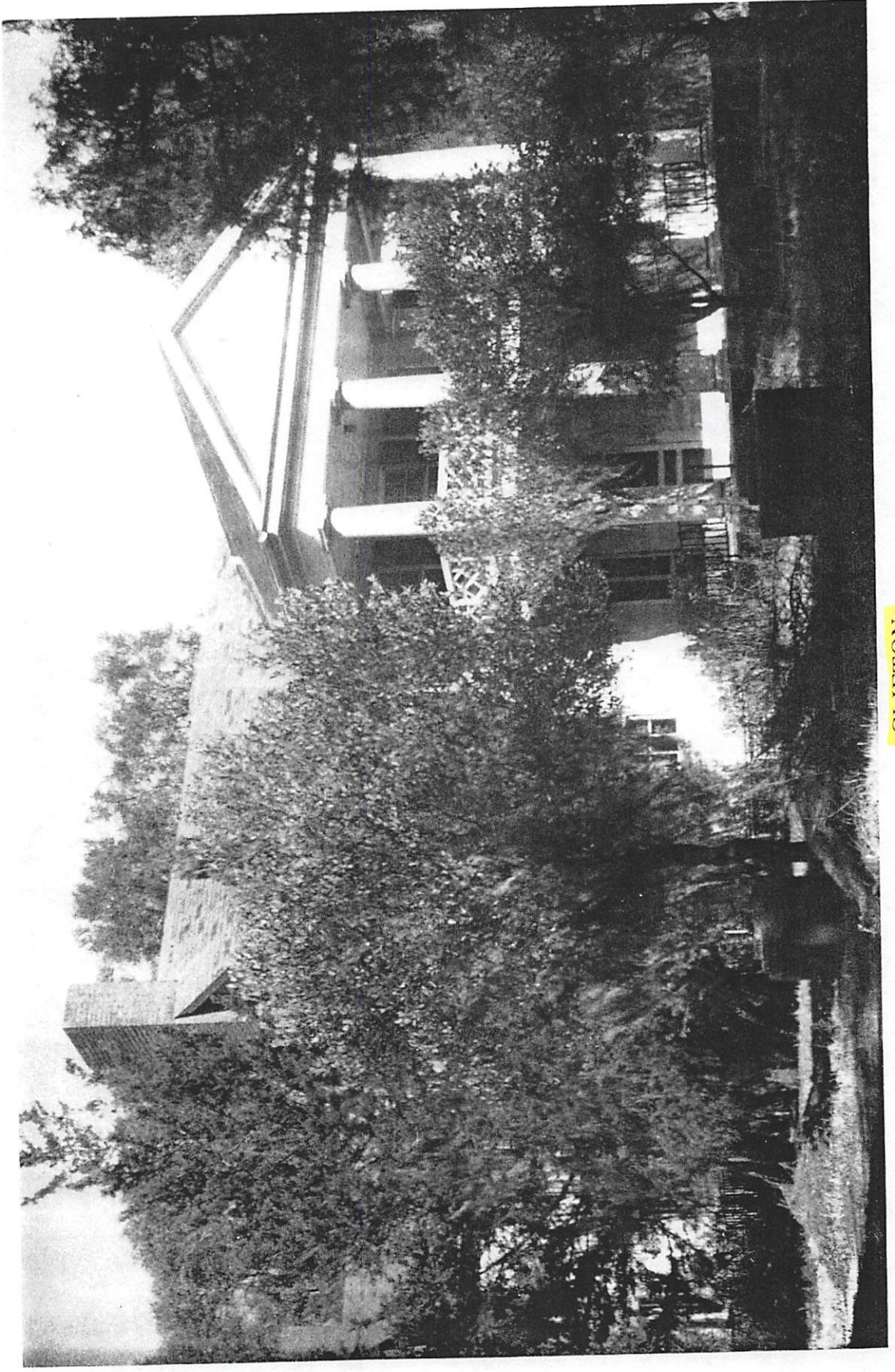
Georgetown Rice Plantations

In 1909 he purchased four more plantations, Forlorn Hope, George Hill, Rose Hill, and Clifton. Forlorn Hope, containing 793 acres, was originally part of Hobcaw Barony. It was conveyed to William Algernon Alston in 1835 and sometime after his death in 1860 passed to three heirs, Margaret D. Lucas, Josephine A. Simons, and Mary A. Deas, who sold it to Emerson.³⁷ George Hill was obtained from Martha A. Pyatt, Penelope B. Parker, B. Allston Pyatt, Catherine W. Pyatt, and Maham W. Pyatt.³⁸ Rose Hill, a plantation of 1,243 acres, which also came out of Hobcaw Barony, became the home of William Algernon Alston upon transfer from his father, Colonel William Alston of Clifton. William Algernon built the residence there—a roomy, attractive home, which burned in 1906 during the visit of a hunting party.³⁹ Emerson purchased the property from the heirs of the William Algernon Alston estate—Helen Alston, Fanny Alston, Rowland Alston, Thomas L. Alston, and William A. Alston.⁴⁰

The historic Clifton plantation was once the home of Colonel William Alston and played a large part in the story of this outstanding planter, the eldest son of Joseph Allston of The Oaks. William (born in 1756) inherited Fairfield upon his father's death in 1784. Instead of settling there, however, in 1785 he bought 1,206 acres of the northernmost part of Hobcaw Barony from Edward Mitchell and built on that tract an imposing two-story mansion, so impressive for that day that his younger brother, Thomas, was persuaded to make his own house at Prospect Hill an exact copy. The newly created plantation was given the name of Clifton.⁴¹

William Alston became so fabulously wealthy and influential that all Waccamaw called him "King Billy," and his cousin, Captain William Allston of Brookgreen, had to be content with the title "Gentleman Billy."⁴² William of Clifton served as a captain during the Revolution in General Francis Marion's command and later attained the rank of colonel. Sometime before 1792 he dropped an *l* from his last name to distinguish his branch of the family from the others, the Allstons having a tendency toward extreme duplication of first names—much to the confusion of South Carolina in general and its historians in particular. His descendants followed suit—thus the Alstons and Allstons.⁴³

William Alston of Clifton in 1777 married Mary Ashe, daughter of Brigadier General John Ashe of North Carolina. Of this marriage, five children were born: Maria; Joseph, who became Governor of



CLIFTON

Georgetown Rice Plantations

South Carolina; John Ashe; William Algernon; and Charlotte. Following the death of Mary Ashe, William married Mary Brewton Motte in 1791.⁴⁴

The year 1791 was momentous in other respects: not only did Clifton get a new mistress; it also entertained the first President of the United States. While making his southern tour in 1791, President George Washington came down Waccamaw Neck and spent a night here. The entry in his diary for April 29 reads:⁴⁵

We left Doctr Flagg's about six o'clock and arrived at Captn Wm. Alstons on the Waggamau to Breakfast.

Captn Alston is a Gentleman of large fortune, and esteemed one of the neatest Rice planters in the State of So Carolina and a proprietor of the most valuable ground for the culture of this article—His house which is large, new and elegantly furnished stands on a sand hill, high for the Country, with his Rice fields below; the contrast of which, with the lands back of it, and the Sand and piney barrens through which we had passed, is scarcely to be conceived.

At Captn Alston's we were met by General Moultrie, Colo Washington & Mr. Rutledge (son of the present Chief Justice of So Carolina) who had come out that far to escort me to town.—We dined and lodged at this Gentleman's and Boats being provided, we then next morning.

Saturday. 30th

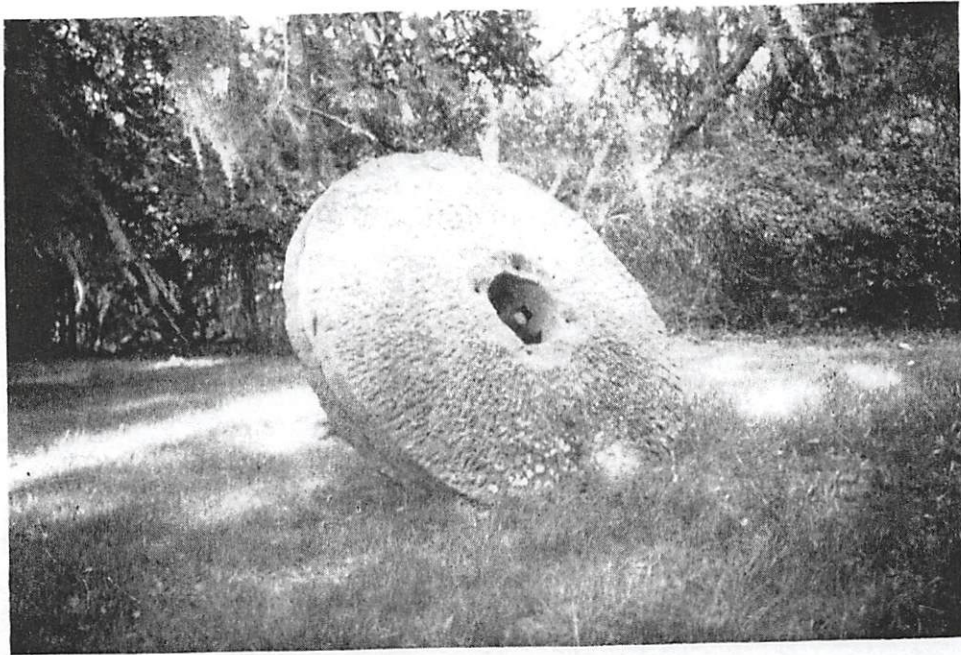
Crossed the Waggamau to Georgetown by descending the River three miles

The Dr. Flagg mentioned in Washington's account was Henry Collins Flagg, second husband of Rachel Moore, whose home was Brookgreen.⁴⁶ Flagg had invited the President's party in for dinner.

Only a few years after Washington's visit the mansion at Clifton burned. The family saved most of the furnishings from the flames and established their home at Fairfield, leaving Clifton apparently without a main dwelling until Dr. Emerson built one there for his daughter, Margaret Emerson Vanderbilt. The new Clifton house, a place of mansion proportions supported in front by four white columns, was constructed, as nearly as can be determined, during the early or mid-1920's. Mrs. Vanderbilt, who lived there for only a few winters, was staying there in 1927, but since then the big house has been unoccupied.

In Colonel Alston's will, dated November 29, 1838, Clifton was left to his son, William Algernon Alston of Rose Hill. The property remained in William Algernon's estate until it was sold to Isaac Emerson in 1909.⁴⁷

Arcadia



MILL STONE AT ARCADIA

In 1925 Dr. Emerson acquired Bannockburn, a tract of some 3,058 acres, from Ralph Nesbit of Caledonia plantation, to whom it had been given by his father, Colonel Ralph Nesbit. Bannockburn had formerly been the John Izard Middleton place.⁴⁸

Fairfield was the eighth and final plantation to be annexed to Arcadia. After the Clifton fire Colonel William Alston had made his home there, adding two large wings to the small four-room house already standing. His son Charles, to whom he left the property, built a dining room on the side facing the river, bringing the total number of rooms to eighteen. The fine old wallpaper and the quaint interior architecture of this residence, the main dwelling at Fairfield, made it outstanding among low-country homes.⁴⁹

Charles Alston married Emma Pringle, member of another well-known coastal family, and they had four children who lived to maturity and to whom the plantation was willed. They were Joseph Pringle, Charles Pringle, Susan Pringle, and John Julius Pringle Alston. Susan outlived all her brothers and left Fairfield on her death in 1921 to her cousin, Mrs. John E. Allston, the former Elizabeth Deas.⁵⁰

During Mrs. Allston's ownership of Fairfield, Henry Ford, the automobile manufacturer, called on her and offered to purchase the



WAVERLY

Brookgreen

ONCE AN ENORMOUSLY PROSPEROUS RICE PLANTATION, Brookgreen with its lovely old gardens and live-oak avenue has lived on to become the setting of a magnificent array of sculpture and native flora—a gift to the people of South Carolina from Mr. and Mrs. Archer M. Huntington.

Like many of the plantations on Waccamaw, Brookgreen was born under Allston ownership. William Allston, son of the first John Allston of Waccamaw, developed the land into a plantation¹⁰⁶ and constructed here the main house, used not only by his family but by succeeding owners. William (born in 1738) was known as “Gentleman Billy” to distinguish him from his cousin, William of Clifton, who was called “King Billy.” A lover of fine horses, “Gentleman Billy” owned one named Trial, that came in first at the Newmarket track in Charleston in 1769, winning a handsome silver bowl still in the Allston family’s possession. Later, during the less festive times of the Revolution, William served as a captain in General Francis Marion’s command and thus attained his official title. He died in 1781 shortly after becoming sick in camp. Racked with fever, he rode the whole way home, only to collapse upon his arrival.¹⁰⁷

Perhaps William’s greatest distinction is that he was the father of the artist, Washington Allston, whose birth he recorded thus in the family Bible: “‘My son Washington was born on Fryday Night—half after Eleven O’clock the 5th of November, 1779.’” The place was Brookgreen, and the infant’s mother was Rachel Moore (afterwards, Mrs. Henry C. Flagg).¹⁰⁸

Washington Allston’s stature as an artist has fluctuated from time to time, but contemporary critics give this son of Brookgreen a position of high importance. Edgar P. Richardson, Director of the Detroit Institute of Arts, writes that Allston “was our first full-scale romantic artist. This in a sentence is his importance for, in so being, he changed the character and enlarged the horizon of American art.” Allston was the first American artist to explore the whole range of painting. He did



BROOKGREEN

Brookgreen

The Brookgreen Club took the place of the Waccamaw Club in 1924, and in 1926 W. S. Griffin of Greenville, South Carolina, became owner of the plantation. Griffin's interests later were taken up by the F. M. Credit Corporation, which sold Brookgreen in January, 1930, to Archer Milton Huntington, nationally prominent patron of art, who acquired also the three adjoining plantations, The Oaks, Springfield, and Laurel Hill. The deed covers about 6,635 acres, but Brookgreen Gardens proper takes up only some 45 to 50 acres, centering on the old boxwood garden.¹¹³

About two miles south of Brookgreen is The Oaks burying ground, which has been partially restored by Mr. Huntington. Following their marriage in 1801, Joseph and Theodosia Burr Alston made their home at The Oaks, willed to Joseph by his grandfather, Joseph Allston of The Oaks. The plantation as such is no more, and the house in which Joseph and Theodosia Alston lived has long since disappeared, leaving the land once again a wilderness. But the still-intriguing tale of the ill-fated Theodosia lives on in romantic minds.

A gifted and ambitious man, Joseph won the governorship of South Carolina in 1812, but the year which began so brilliantly for him ended in tragedy. On June 30 of that year, his ten-year-old son and only child, Aaron Burr Alston, died of malarial fever while the family were staying at The Castle on Debordieu Beach, and Theodosia was never able to shake off the grief caused by loss of her only child.

At the persistent urging of her unhappy father that she visit him, Theodosia left The Oaks on December 30, 1812, for Georgetown, where she boarded a schooner, "The Patriot," bound for New York. The ship never reached its destination nor was any word ever heard again of the crew or passengers. Serious consideration has not been given either by the family or by historians to the tale originating from Nag's Head, North Carolina, that the schooner was captured by pirates and all aboard forced to walk the plank. "The Patriot," really a pilot boat fitted out as a privateer after war began, was carrying her guns below deck as ballast. The breaking loose of these guns would have been enough to cause the ship to founder during the heavy gales known to have whipped the Carolina coast through the first days of January, 1813.¹¹⁴

The tombstone over the graves of Governor Joseph Alston and his small son in The Oaks burying ground concludes the story of three tragic lives:

Georgetown Rice Plantations

ERECTED TO THE MEMORY
OF

JOSEPH & THEODOSIA BURR ALSTON
AND THEIR SON
AARON BURR ALSTON

THIS LAST DIED IN JUNE 1812 AT THE AGE OF 10 YEARS
AND HIS REMAINS ARE ENTERED HERE.

THE DISCONSOLATE MOTHER PERISHED A FEW
MONTHS LATER AT SEA.

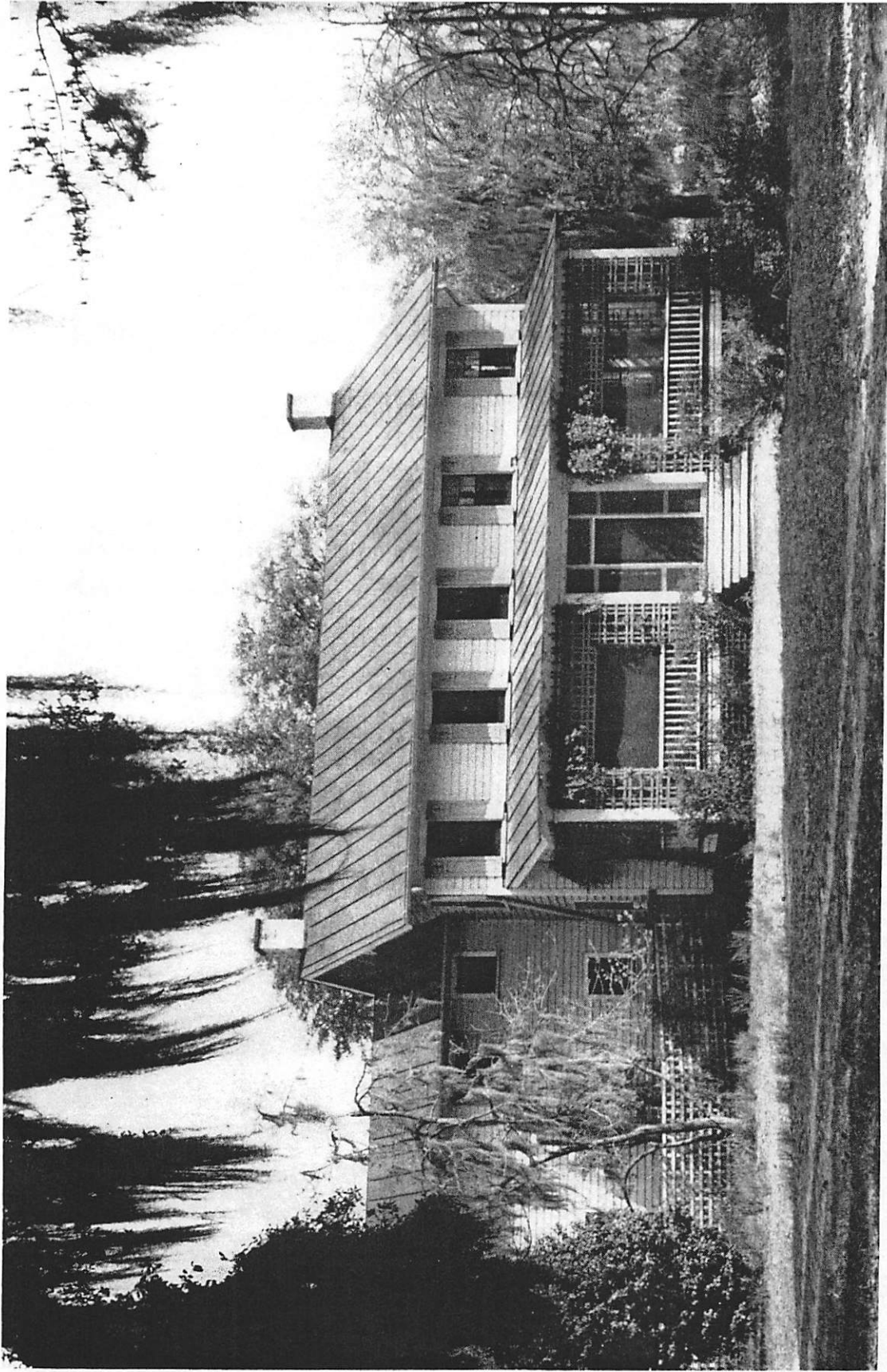
AND ON THE 10TH SEPT. 1816 DIED THE FATHER
WHEN LITTLE OVER 37 YEARS OF AGE, WHOSE REMAINS
REST HERE WITH THE SON'S

THE LOSS OF THIS CITIZEN WAS NO COMMON ONE TO
THE STATE. TO ITS SERVICE HE DEVOTED HIMSELF FROM
HIS EARLY YEARS.

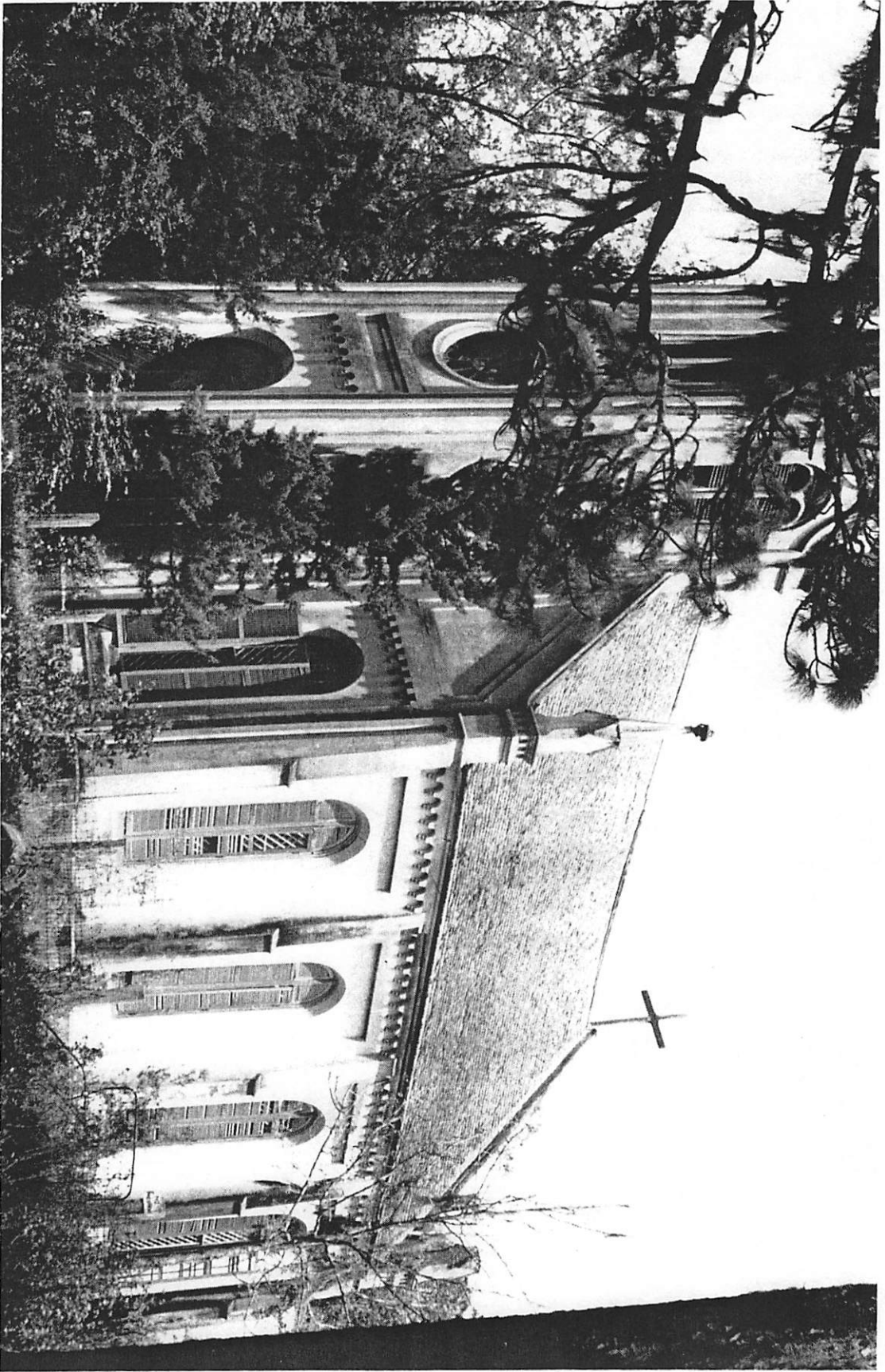
ON THE FLOORS OF ITS LEGISLATURE HE WAS
DISTINGUISHED FOR HIS EXTENSIVE INFORMATION &
HIS TRANSCENDENT ELOQUENCE IN THE CHAIR OF THE
HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES FOR HIS IMPARTIAL
CORRECT DECISIONS & EVERYWHERE, HE WAS
DISTINGUISHED FOR HIS ZEALOUS ATTACHMENTS TO
REPUBLICAN PRINCIPLES.

IN THE CAPACITY OF CHIEF MAGISTRATE OF THE
STATE WHEN BOTH HONOUR & THE RESPONSIBILITY
OF THE TRUST WERE HEIGHTENED BY THE
DIFFICULTIES AND DANGERS OF THE WAR OF 1812
HE BY HIS INDOMITABLE ACTIVITY & HIS SALUTARY
MEASURES EARNED NEW TITLES TO THE RESPECT & THE
GRATITUDE OF HIS FELLOW CITIZENS.

THIS GREAT MAN WAS ALSO A GOOD ONE.
HE MET DEATH WITH THAT FORTITUDE WITH WHICH
HIS ANCESTOR DID, FROM WHOM HE RECEIVED HIS
NAME & THIS ESTATE & WHICH TO BE FOUND
IN THE GOOD HOPING TO REJOIN THOSE WHOSE LOSS
HAD LEFT IN HIS HEART AN ACHING VOID THAT
NOTHING ON EARTH COULD FILL.



NIGHTINGALE HALL



PRINCE FREDERICK'S CHURCH, PEEDEE



CHICORA WOOD



OLD RICE MILL AT CHICORA WOOD