

## **History of the Brown-Hawthorne House and its Furman Institute Structural Components**

The facts about Furman Institute's 14 year operation in Fairfield County (February, 1837 to February 1851) are taken here from a document that was copied from the Furman University Library in Greenville and given to me for our document files here in the Fairfield County Museum. Unfortunately, the volunteer failed to copy the title page containing the author and date of publication. The typewritten paper is called "Furman's Fairfield Days." The bibliography for the paper lists these sources: Records in the Fairfield County Courthouse; Minutes of the Furman Board of Trustees, 1825-1851; Minutes of the Executive Committee, Furman Board of Trustees during the Fairfield period (incomplete); Minutes of the Furman Faculty Meetings during the Fairfield period (incomplete); The Baptist Encyclopaedia, William Cathcart, Everts, 1883; Baptist Beginnings in Education, W. J. McGlothlin, Sunday School Board, 1926; The Life Work of James Clement Furman, H. T. Cook, Alester G. Furman, 1926; Lest We Forget, J. S. Dill, Broadman Press, 1938; Centennial issue, The Baptist Courier, December 8, 1921; History of Fairfield County, Fitz Hugh McMaster, State Pub., 1947; Two Centuries of the First Baptist Church of South Carolina, H. A. Tupper, Woodward and Co., 1889; and "interviews."

The background for development of the Baptist congregations in early Fairfield County history began as early as the 1760s when Philip Mulkey established a nearby church called Congaree, the first Baptist church in the up-country of SC. It was Mulkey's follower Joseph Reese who baptized Richard Furman for whom Furman Institute, later University, was named. In 1833 Furman's son James Clement Furman married Harriet Davis, the daughter of Rev. Jonathan Davis, whose Fairfield County plantation establishment was located in Monticello. In 1820 Rev. Davis had organized Fairfield Church near the spot where Furman Institute would be located in 1831.

In 1825, The State Convention of the Baptist Denomination in SC incorporated the establishment of an academic and theological seminary which opened first in the village of Edgefield. After it failed to thrive, Furman Institute was moved to High Hills of the Santee (present day Stateburg). After five years, the school had failed again, and by 1835, under the influence of Nicholas Hodges, it was decided to move the school to Fairfield. Rev. Jonathan Davis was elected president of Furman's Board of Trustees and obtained 557 acres near Fairfield Baptist Church for the campus.

Fairfield County Deed Book MM, p. 502 shows a plat for the deed (signed March 8, 1836). Fairfield Church is shown in the north central area of the plat just east of the old road from Monticello to Winnsboro. The road and its straightened-out modern representative SC State Highway #213 divides the Furman campus about in half. It shows the easternmost placement of the Faculty Residence, a brick two-story building which still stands and is occupied presently by Herman Mattox. Across the road on the west is located the school structure on a high hill. The first Institute building was a frame structure 120 feet long by 30 to 40 feet wide, and it housed the students, class-rooms, and library. At its opening in February of 1837, there were 50 boarders and 13 local students. Each student was required to work 2 ½ hours per day in the fields under the direction of a farmer and the teachers were expected to go with them to the field.

The principal of the English and Classical School was Professor W. E. Bailey. Leader of the Manual Labor feature was William Davis, assisted by N. W. Hodges. The theological division was started the following year.

Tragically, on May 1, 1837, a fire destroyed the building along with its entire contents, taking the life of a student. Undaunted by this, plans were made to rebuild. By January of 1838 a dozen small one and two-room cabins were erected on the hill in a semi-circle to house the students. They were paid for by individuals and erected around the burned site. A new three storied brick classroom building, assumed to be fire proof, was constructed on the site of the previous building. A quarter of a mile east of this arrangement the brick "teacherage" was built, and it was in this home that the first Mrs. James C. Furman died in 1849. In January of 1838, the theological department was opened with Dr. Hooper in charge and Rev. J. S. McGinnis split his teaching duties between the Classical and Theological departments.

The author of this paper has inserted a crude drawing of a single dormitory cabin, "reconstructed from the description in minutes of the Board of Trustees and that of local citizens who remember seeing them." This single cabin was described as being 18 feet long, 16 feet wide with 9 ft. ceilings. The structures sat one foot above ground (on stone piers), had one door, two windows, and one chimney. The author's drawing suggests that clapboard siding covered the frame buildings.

Following the story, it appears that problems had begun to affect the school already. The manual labor department was plagued with rebellious students who shirked their work. The school operated at a loss, and in 1839 the trustees authorized the sale of all property such as horses, stock, provisions, and all movables except two mules and an ox cart and oxen. This marked the beginning of the abandonment of the classical school and the manual labor feature. Local liquor shops were contributing to the demoralization of older students and there were complaints about the boarding prices charged for students. In 1844 several neighbors petitioned for fences to be repaired and insinuated that the school steward had killed some of their cattle. There was a rapid turn-over of faculty members and administrators, and James Furman was offered \$400 a year to divide his teaching time with preaching at nearby Fairfield Baptist Church. Another nineteenth century writer claimed that there was general complaint among the teachers that the boys of Fairfield were only interested in running barefoot and tending to farm animals, and that they were generally "unteachable." By 1841 there was discussion about moving the school to another place in a more "salubrious climate where there was a larger proportion of white people, cheaper living conditions, and a denser Baptist population." The failure of the Columbia to Charlotte railroad to locate a segment or spur closer to Furman and a strained relationship with Mt. Zion Institute in Winnsboro are also given as possible reasons for the decision to close the Institute in Fairfield. By 1850, plans were being made to move to Greenville. Preparations were made for the immediate removal of the school as the expense of moving was only a "little more than \$500 since there was not much to move---the library, the furniture, the household goods of the professors, and little besides." By January of 1852, the move was complete.

In 1851 the State Convention of the Baptist Denomination sold to John R. Shurley of Fairfield District 317 acres of land on which the school building and cabins were located. Shurley had been operating another boarding school named Shurley Institute in the area and perhaps may have contemplated expanding with the acquisition of the Furman facility. However, more controversy erupted with the Fairfield Baptist congregation around arguments about some of the institute property. Rev. Jonathan Davis died in 1855 and the quarrels increased until his death until someone burned down the church, destroying all the church records. Members organized the First Baptist Church and moved to Winnsboro. Fairfield Church went virtually out of existence. It appears that the neighborhood had “gone to pot”, all in the advancing wake of the difficult war years to come.

### Brown-Hawthorne House Addition



Furman barracks addition to Hawthorne log house (in shade on the right).

The author of this paper writes that “people of the community bought up the cabins and some claim today that the sills of their present homes are laid on material taken from the cabins.” Sometime after Furman Institute’s departure in January, 1852, it is said that a descendant of Adam or James Hawthorne dismantled one or more of these dormitory barracks and attached a longitudinal addition to a log house that still stands less than ¾ of a mile west of the Furman campus. The log cabin had been built on a 100-acre tract granted to James H. Adams in 1770 by South Carolina’s Royal Governor Greville Montague.

The property was sold to James Hawthorne in 1771 and shortly afterwards, according to Hawthorne family tradition, a “bounty log house” was built in the typical frontier cabin configuration of two rooms and an above sleeping loft. The 18-foot by 25-foot building housed Hawthorne descendants until it was sold in 1877 to Robert Brown, the ancestor of the present owner. Sometime after Furman Institute abandoned the campus in 1852, the Furman barracks addition was attached to the west end of the Hawthorne house.

The above document quotes that the Furman wood frame dormitories or barracks on the campus measured 18 feet long, 16 feet wide with 9 ft. ceilings. The frame barracks addition to the Hawthorne log house measures 18 feet wide and 33 feet long and has two rooms and a sleeping loft or garret under the high pitch of its roof. This second floor room is accessed by a steep staircase and had its own fireplace for heating. The attic lofts of both sections of the house are accessible through a door connecting the two structural components. Each component has its own steep stairwell.



Stairwell in log section



West end on left (Furman barracks). East end below shows clapboarding over log and deteriorated rear shed room and kitchen ell in far right.



Detail of log notching on front of Hawthorne house visible under collapsed front porch



Brick Furman teacherage nearby, now used as a home.

## Additional Historical Facts of Importance to our Community and State

The Hawthorne structure continued to house several generations of family members from the eighteenth through nineteenth centuries. Reverend Eli Alston Wilkes, Jr., a Methodist minister, was raised in this house. The Alston Wilkes Society was founded in 1962 as a non-profit organization dedicated to providing rehabilitative services to adults released from correctional facilities and is the largest statewide agency of its kind providing direct services in the United States. In 1910 Eli Wilkes wrote an autobiography called Echos and Etchings. The first chapter in his book details his boyhood when General Sherman's Union Army marched through Fairfield County in February of 1865. His mother, Mrs. Elizabeth Hawthorne Wilkes, whose husband had died after Gettysburg in 1863, attempted to take her young son to a safer place with relatives in western Fairfield, but the king pin on the carriage broke when they tried to leave. They tried to hide the horse, but the "bummers" of Sherman's army soldiers confiscated it. Later, a soldier set a fire in the middle of the living room, but Mrs. Wilkes gave the Mason's sign of distress and an officer extinguished the fire.

In 1877, Robert Brown bought the property from the Hawthorne heirs and the present landowner, Bobby Brown is his descendant. He was raised by his widowed mother in the house until she moved out into a newer nearby structure a dozen years ago. The house has been vacant ever since and Mrs. Brown died last year.