

4/12/00 from the file of
Mary Rice McMaster

THE KING HOUSE

(Known as the Rion House) Previous owners were Hall, Rion, Rabb, Stephenson, and 2 other families for a very short time each. Mr. and Mrs. King bought the house in August 1983.

Mansell Hall was a builder of the area. Several homes he designed and built are still standing and bear testimony to his ability to erect buildings that will withstand the ravages of time. This house originally consisted of two rooms up and two down with a center hall. With it were also the brick kitchen and privy and probably other out buildings. The lot at that time extended west to Vanderhorst Street. This house was built in 1855 for his bride. She died shortly thereafter and in 1857 he sold the property to Colonel James Henry Rion.

The Rions had 6 children, and before moving into the house they enlarged it and did extensive renovations and decorating. A large wing was added to the south side and 2 rooms and a porch to the rear of the house. Plumbing and gas lighting, almost unheard of in Winnsboro were installed. The equipment needed for the manufacture of acetylene gas for the chandeliers was installed and put into operation by Colonel Rion.

A French decorator was employed to supervise the painting and the carving and installation of the unique woodwork which is different in every room. Five very fine medallions with a French influence were added on the ground floor. The plain pine staircase was removed and a handsome walnut one replaced it.

The original brass and britannia (an alloy of tin, antimony, and copper) chandeliers still hang from the ceilings. The sheer beveled cutglass in the walnut double front doors and side lights was imported from France by Charles Comfort Tiffany of New York for Colonel Rion.

A veranda and balcony front the house and are supported by six handsomely turned columns. The columns, wrought iron bases and Corinthian capitals were imported, the bases and capitals probably from Lyons, France.

Colonel Rion had installed for his convenience speaking tubes which were removed some time in the 20th century as were the "R" monograms in the front and side gates.

Colonel Rion was one of the most brilliant, interesting, and mysterious men ever to live in Winnsboro. He graduated from South Carolina College (USC) in 1850 at the top of his class. In 1851 he

came to Winnsboro as a professor at Mt. Zion Institute. Foremost among lawyers of the South, highly educated, a patron of the Arts, and philanthropist, he grew up in the home of John C. Calhoun, Fort Hill which is now on the Clemson University Campus. He was reputed to be the son of the lost Dauphin of France. At the outbreak of the Civil War he was made one of the first South Carolina colonels. He was wounded three times, the last time at Petersburg.

Colonel Rion's wife was the gifted and talented Mary Catherine (Kitty) Weir of Columbia. She inherited her father's musical and literary abilities and wrote several pamphlets and books. One of her books was on horticulture and titled "A Southern Lady Floralist." When Clemson College was founded, her friend, Thomas J. Clemson, left it to her judgment to select the site for the institution and to approve the designs and placements of the first buildings.

In the garden around this home, rare shrubs, boxwoods, roses, bulbs and cut-flowers for every season were planted. The original boxwood is still flourishing and the magnolia trees have reached their full majestic height.

The house was spared during the Civil War because Mrs. Rion's relatives in the North obtained and sent papers of immunity for her home. Many of the Rions friends brought their valuables here for safe keeping and some families whose homes were burned found refuge here.