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MUSEUM COMMISSIONERS ARE INVITED.

# 207-Year-Old House Has Interesting Past

Imagine if you can, the sense of history one must have living in a house that is over two hundred years old, and which has reverberated with the sound of many footsteps down through the years, including those of three year-old Alston Wilkes of Alston Wilkes Society fame.

Museum curator Bill Taylor and this reporter visited Mrs. Mildred Brown on Thursday at the historic Hawthorne-Brown house, located in the Union Community of Fairfield. The family of Mildred's late husband, Bob Brown, has owned the house since 1877, and Mildred has lived there for forty years, since she came to the house as a young bride.

The house is doubly interesting, because it combines the original log land bounty cabin with barracks from the old Furman Institute. Records reveal that the land on which it stands, in the amount of 100 acres, was deeded by land grant to James H. Adams in January of 1770, by the Governor-in-chief of this province, Greville Montague. Later, Adams deeded the land and cabin, which was built around 1771, to James Hawthorne for the princely sum of fifty dollars.

The original structure boasted of one large room with a huge fireplace and a smaller room, plus a sleeping loft overhead. In 1851, when nearby Furman Institute was moved to new quarters in Greenville, the Hawthorne family moved one of the student barracks to their property and attached it to the cabin. In intervening years, the Brown family added on two more rooms. Sometimes during the years, siding boards were put up on the outside of the house, covering the huge old logs.

Not much is known of the history of the house prior to 1851, however, thanks to a book written by Eli Alston Wilkes in 1910, some of the trials of the Wilkes family during the Civil War are revealed. The

Mildred does not own a copy of the book, which is entitled "Echos and Etchings".

Mrs. Elizabeth Hawthorne Wilkes, daughter of the Hawthornes who inhabited the house in the mid 1800's, lost her husband in 1863, just after the battle of Gettysburg. He had fallen ill with fever in Virginia, and had been taken in, according to Alston Wilkes' account, by a "Christian family", and Mrs. Wilkes went to tend him. In spite of her tender nursing and the kindness of his hosts, the senior Wilkes died. Mrs. Wilkes then returned to Fairfield County, where she and her young son remained throughout the war years.

Alston Wilkes gives a vivid description of the days in the spring of 1865 when Sherman's troops came through Fairfield. The Hawthornes, fearing for their daughter's and grandson's safety, urged them to flee to relatives in the northwestern part of the county before the Federal troops arrived. Mrs. Wilkes' beloved horse "Old Rob" was hitched to the buggy and the mother and son set out on their journey. Before they had gone very far, the king bolt broke and they had to return to their home. They arrived in coincidence with the Union soldiers, and found the household humming with activity as family valuables and food stuffs were hidden. Mrs. Wilkes buried her jewelry, along with her husband's papers, in the ground, and upon returning to the house discovered that in her haste she had forgotten to hide his watch. This was hastily buried in another spot.

At that time were huge boulders in that part of the county, and Mrs. Wilkes and Alston took the horse, "Old Rob", and hid him behind some of these boulders, in hopes that the Yankees would not find him. Food was hidden in the ceiling of the house. However, all this was to no avail, as Wilkes recorded



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cept his father's watch. Even "Old Rob" was 'aken by the enemy.

At one point, the house was in danger of being burned; indeed, soldiers had built a fire in the middle of what is now the living room floor. Mrs. Wilkes, a faithful Masonic daughter, ran outside, where she gave the Masonic sign of distress. An officer seated on horseback nearby recognized the sign and had the fire put out, thereby saving the house.

After their food had been eaten, or carried off by the soldiers, the Wilkes and Hawthornes were hard put to find food until crops could be harvest that summer. Alston Wilkes recalls that "coffee" was made from parched corn.

The story does have a happy ending, though. In 1866, standing before the mantel in her parents' home, Elizabeth Hawthorne Wilkes was married to Colonel Richard Wood of Chester, and although he was thirty years her senior, their marriage seems to have been a happy one.

**TODAY**

Today, of course, the only place one may see the logs of the original cabin is in the staircase leading to the sleeping loft, and in the loft itself. However, the ceiling still holds four large nails, put there long ago to support a quilting frame. In one corner of the living room sits a spinning wheel which Mildred found in the loft. She says her husband remembered seeing his grandmother using the spinning wheel. The huge old fireplace, where James Adams no doubt prepared his meals in the 1700's, and which Mildred remembers as being in use when she first came to the house, has been boarded up, but the chimney still stands as it has for two centuries.

Mildred says she has thought of building a more modern dwelling place, but just hasn't been able to leave this comfortable old house where so many have lived their lives through two centuries. She and her son, Bobby, live there alone - except for Bobby's stuff.

Mildred, also, has her collection of old bottles and other articles, and it would seem that the Brown family of the 1900's have also put their stamp upon the house.

*1978*

**Fairfield Ga**  
**Near Forts, Y**