



This quilt in downstairs bedroom was made by "Aunt Lucindy". (McDowell News photo) CAR



Carson House parlor with portraits of Catharine Wilson Carson and



Sketch of Carson House drawn by E. O. Nielsen.

Carson House

BY MILDRED BEEDLE FOSSETT

Carson House, a registered Historic Site at Pleasant Gardens in McDowell County, North Carolina, has witnessed political drama, the birth of a new county, the plunder of warfare, and many vicissitudes during the nearly 200 years since it was built by Colonel John Carson about 1780.

The three-story white structure with massive twin chimneys and double-storied verandas is about five miles east of Marion on highway 70 west. It was constructed of 12-inch walnut logs covered with white clapboards. Most of the walls and ceilings were finished with hand-planed material.

Situated on the west bank of Buck Creek, it is fronted by ancient boxwoods, tall trees that enhance the beauty and dignity of the mansion. A spacious lawn, where dogwoods bloom in spring, mocking birds sing in the tall trees, stretches to the main highway. A pair of millstones mark the entrance to the long driveway which leads to a visitor parking area.

Colonel John Carson, born March 24, 1752 in Ireland, immigrated to America, settled in Burke County about 1773. His first wife was Rachel McDowell, the daughter of "Hunting John" McDowell. They were parents of seven children; James, Jason, Joseph McDowell, Rebecca, John, Charles and Sally.

The first Mrs. Carson died and Colonel Carson later married Mary Moffitt McDowell, the widow of Colonel Joseph McDowell who was a hero of the Battle of Kings Mountain and for whom McDowell County is named. To this union was born five children; Samuel Price, William, Matilda, George and Jonathan Logan.

Colonel Carson was a representative to the Fayetteville Convention in 1789 when North Carolina ratified the United States Constitution; was a member of the State Legislature from Burke County in 1805 and 1806. He took an active part in County government until his death, March 5, 1841.

One of his sons, Joseph McDowell Carson, was a distinguished lawyer. He also served Rutherford County in the North Carolina Legislature, was a delegate to the Continental Convention in 1835. He acquired substantial acreage in Brindletown (Burke County) when gold was discovered in that area. In the years following he employed slave labor to mine small streams and banks. Operations were extremely successful and it is reported that he took more than a million dollars worth of gold from Brindletown.

With part of this wealth he built one of Western North Carolina's most picturesque homes, Green River Mansion, a short distance south of Rutherfordton.

Another son, John, became a doctor.

Samuel Price Carson, a son by the second marriage, made a name for himself in the annals of history. In November 1827 he and Dr. Robert Brank Vance of Buncombe County, an uncle of Governor Zebulon B. Vance, fought a duel at Saluda Gap as "an affair of honor." When the pistols had blazed Dr. Vance was fatally wounded.

The story of the duel and other incidents in the life of Samuel Price Carson are related in Moffitt Sinclair Henderson's biographical novel, "A Long Day for November."

Sam Carson served two terms as Congressman, during that time introduced a motion in Congress to inquire into the expediency of establishing a mint in the gold mining region of North Carolina. No action was taken while he was in office but in 1835 Congress authorized establishment of a U.S. Mint in Charlotte, North Carolina. Carson's hopes were not fulfilled while a congressman but his efforts were the groundwork for the goal finally achieved.

Samuel Carson later went to Texas where he was one of the signers of the Texas Declaration of Independence which freed it from Mexico. He was

also named as the first secretary of state of the new republic.

Colonel John Carson and his family were friends of many of the well-known builders of our nation during the 1800's. John C. Calhoun, Andrew Jackson, David Crockett, and others who made an indelible imprint on history, visited Carson House and enjoyed the gracious hospitality of its hosts.

At one period the house served as a stagecoach stop and inn for stages which traveled between Asheville and Salisbury. Colonel Carson's wagons made regular trips to Charleston and other southern markets to exchange produce and merchandise.

McDowell County, formerly a part of Burke County, was organized in Carson House in March 1843. The home served as County Government seat until a court house was built in Marion two years later on land given by Jonathan Logan Carson, the Colonel's youngest son.

A private school for young ladies was conducted in the home during the early 1860's. It was during this time that Stoneman's Raiders made their march of destruction and plunder through North Carolina.

At that time Jonathan Logan Carson and his family were occupying the home. The Carson servants buried the silver and other valuables and drove the livestock into the woods. Hams and other food were stolen by the soldiers and they ransacked the house, used fence rails on the property for firewood. The occupants of the home were not harmed and no serious damage was done to the house.

"Aunt Lucindy", one of the Carson slaves who lived to be over a hundred, was one of those present

during the visits of the Raiders which took place over a period of several days.

As the plunderers opened bureau drawers, boxes, chests, they found Aunt Lucindy's shroud which she had "laid up in her chest" for years in preparation for that final event in her earthly life. A blue-coated soldier dragged it out of the chest, put it on, and danced around in it to the horror of the blacks. In spite of their entreaties, the shroud was carried away.

After the Civil War and the death of Jonathan Logan Carson the property was sold and Mrs. Carson and her children moved to Marion. During the following years the proud mansion was occupied by more than ten different owners until it was again placed on the market in 1963.

Thomas Morris owned Carson House during the 1916 flood which ravaged Western North Carolina with its torrents of rampant waters. Raging waters of Buck Creek surrounded the house, lacking only a few inches of rising to the porch floor. Mr. Thomas and his sons stayed on almost continuous watch duty and kept logs and other debris from battering the house.

When news of the proposed sale was circulated in 1963 the late Miss Mary Greenlee spearheaded a drive for the purpose of procuring the landmark as a permanent historical site.

Miss Greenlee contacted State officials in Raleigh and with the assistance of members of the local Historical Society and other interested citizens the efforts became a reality. The property was purchased, restoration completed, and open house cere-

have never been repainted and remain in excellent condition today.

Some of the handmade windowpanes in the dining room bear prominent imprints of heel marks which indicate that someone carelessly stepped on the newly made glass before it hardened. One is reminded of imprints in freshly poured concrete.

The portrait which hangs above the buffet in the dining room is Jessica Benton Fremont, an ancillary relative of the family of Colonel John Carson. Their common ancestor was John McDowell of Rockbridge, Virginia, a famed Indian fighter and survivor who was killed by the Indians. Jessica, the daughter of Elizabeth McDowell and Senator Thomas Hart Benton, Captain John Fremont's wife—is the heroine of "The Immortal Wife" by Irving Stone. The book is a biography of Captain Fremont, a renowned frontiersman who was one of the explorers of the West.

The piano in the parlor at Carson House formerly belonged to the family of Samuel Jasper Neal and his wife, Elizabeth C. Neal. Its exact age is not known but it was in use when Mrs. Neal (Miss Lizzie) gave music lessons as early as 1862.

At the time of the great fire in Marion in 1894 the piano was in the Neal home on South Main Street. The fire destroyed the home but the piano was saved by being literally rolled "end over end" out of the burning house. The top was partially burned and later repaired, the rest of the piano was undamaged.

Fine examples of antique pewter and glassware are displayed in the home. A glass-enclosed cabinet displays North Carolina pottery including early pieces fired in the western counties and some of the Hilton Pottery made in McDowell County by Ernest Hilton.

The Loom Room on the second floor has a loom, spinning wheel, flax wheel and cotton cards on display. Hand woven coverlets and blankets, hand-loomed bedspreads, beautifully made quilts, a

variety of needlework, are representative of the talents of the pioneer women. Hanging on the wall is a shuck hat bearing a card, "Made during the Civil War and the poor years that followed."

Dolls of yesteryear are exhibited in a small room at the head of the stairs. Feminine dolls of several eras; male dolls, a cobbler doll, cornshuck dolls and others are complemented by a doll's bed, tiny chairs, and a child's tricycle with red velvet upholstered seat.

A giant wreath, fashioned entirely from cornshucks, and a cornshuck "kissing ball" attract the attention of craft-admiring visitors. A trundle bed is a curiosity to the majority of the guests for many of them have never seen one.

The museum exhibits a treasury of carpentry tools, farm implements, arrow heads; countless items used inside and outside the homes of the Catawba Valley in pioneer days. An "Historical Map of McDowell County" and a "Literary Map of North Carolina" furnish interesting and valuable information.

Among items of historic value are: the pistol used by Samuel Price Carson in the Carson-Vance duel in 1827, a silver headed hickory walking stick which bears the inscription, "Growth of the Hermitage. Presented by Gen. Andrew Jackson to Col. John Carson 1830."

Visitors to Carson House are directed by a North Carolina Historical Marker which stands near the entrance to the driveway on U. S. 70 West.

Special tours by school students, clubs, or other groups may be arranged by contracting Miss Ruth Greenlee, Chairman of the Board of Directors of Carson House Restoration; or Mrs. Arthur Brown, Carson House Hostess.

It is entirely fitting that the proud home has been restored; now serves to perpetuate an interest in national, state, and local history and to transmit to posterity the finest traditions of the past. With our nation's Bicentennial observance approaching in 1976 Carson House, on the bank of Buck Creek, will be a participant in the 200th birthday celebration.



Samuel Price Carson above the piano. (McDowell News photo).

A portion of the dining room showing "Cat-tail" design painting on walls. (McDowell News photo).

monies were held in the autumn of 1964. Since that time hundreds of visitors from throughout the United States, Canada, and foreign countries visit Carson House each year.

When restoration was complete, the house was furnished with antiques . . . many of the pieces, as well as historical items in the museum, are from the homes of early families in the County. Museum exhibits are representative of early settlements in the Upper Catawba Valley.

The Mary M. Greenlee Memorial Research and History Room contains volumes of history, biography, and valuable reference material. Here one may trace the genealogical records of more than fifty families. In addition to the Carsons and McDowells one finds carefully compiled records which bear the family name of; Cathey, Conley, Dvsart, Colay, Hunter-Burchfield-Leginwood, Blanton, Burgin, Byrd, Cuthbertson, Gilkey, Halliburton, Hemphill, Hensley, Corpening, Lytle, Lonon, Tate, Logan, Patton, Rowe (Rauch), Neal, Alexander, Simmons, Bowman and many other pioneers who came to what is now McDowell County in the 18th and early 19th centuries.

A valuable contribution to the reference material is two volumes, plus an index, of cemetery records in McDowell County which have been compiled by Miss Ruth Greenlee. Genealogy tracers have found Miss Greenlee's work extremely helpful.

Above the fireplace mantel in the living room is a portrait of Colonel John Carson. In the same room are portraits of Joseph McDowell Carson, Samuel Price Carson and his wife, Catharine Wilson Carson

of Brentwood, Tennessee.

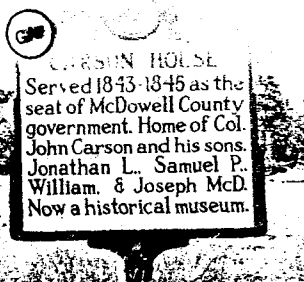
On the four-poster "cannon ball" bed in the downstairs bedroom is a handmade quilt which is an intricate example of needlework. The beautiful cover was made by "Aunt Lucindy", who claimed to be the daughter of a king in her native Africa. The quilt, which is more than a century old, is elaborately decorated with appliqued intertwined floral sprays, each stem and petal daintily buttonholed with matching thread. Some of the quilted rows of tiny stitches are less than an eighth of an inch apart. The floral designs in pastel colors are appliqued over a solid piece of white cloth. It is lightly padded, the quilting gives the flowers a raised appearance.

Hanging above the bed is a portrait of Margaret Anne Carson the last Carson child born in Carson House. She was the youngest child of Jonathan Logan Carson and Mary Sturtevant Presnell; was one of the occupants of the home when Stoneman's Raiders pillaged the property in 1863.

In the dining room one is attracted to the unusual decor of the painted walls. During the time the property was owned by Romulus Brown, nearly a century ago, an itinerant painter stopped at the home and asked to paint the dining room to pay his board. His name is long forgotten but his craftsmanship has remained a conversation piece through the years. The design is a marbelized pattern of bluish gray with delicate shadings of blue, red and brown on the baseboards. It is said the painter used cattail hairs to make the marbelized streaks and it is referred to as the "cat-tail" design.

His handiwork has been lasting for the walls

Miss Mary M. Greenlee of Old Fort, N. C. (McDowell News photo)



The North Carolina Historical Marker for Carson House.

are more than two years old and less than thirteen "jomes,"⁴⁰ English measure in height; or that is older than three years and less than fourteen jomes, and the owner of the Horse or of the horses gelded in this manner, even though they die, shall have no right to collect damages, as long as clear and convincing proofs that they have been mishandled are not presented.

16°. . . . In order to avoid the inconveniences that could injure the preservation of the herds, I command to all who manufacture indigo, that they shall burn the weed as soon as they take it from the steeper or from the vats, and it shall not be lawful for anyone to convey the water from his vats into any stream made use of by the inhabitants or their herds. And if there be any indigo factory erected without attention to this very important point, it shall be removed; or it shall be constructed in such a manner that the great injury in contaminating or ruining the water shall be remedied.⁴¹

The fines resulting from infractions of this regulation shall be divided, half being retained for some public use under my direction in the various treasuries established in . . . shall be expressed.

The extermination of wild beasts of prey that are causing great damage to the herds, shall be an object of the greatest importance, but as it should be necessary to reward those who kill them, I nullify the old regulation on this matter until sufficient funds be acquired for this purpose.

As experience has indicated that the herds of all kinds form an essential branch of wealth in this Government, therefore it necessarily attracts our attention. Overseers shall be named in each district who will see that this regulation is obeyed. In the interim I command all the magistrates and the other officials of the Government, and the people in general, to be careful that they obey the laws that precede it and to give me notice of any violation of them that may come to their attention.

⁴⁰ This is probably similar to the "palm" measure used to determine the height of horses.

⁴¹ This article is similar to the one in document one, and was intended to remedy the same situation described in the manufacture of indigo and mentioned in note 31, *supra*.