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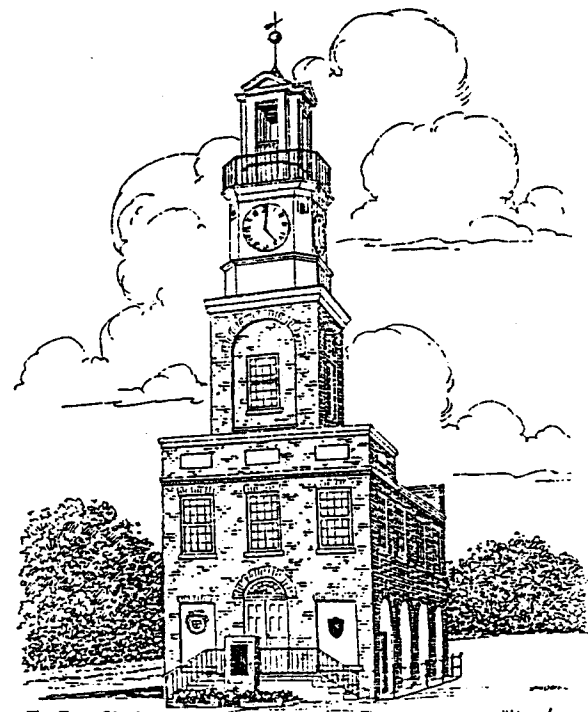
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THE TOWN CLOCK



*The Town Clock
Erected in 1833*

*Winnsboro,
South Carolina*

THE TOWN CLOCK BUILDING

The most familiar landmark in old Winnsboro is the Town Clock. The building is located in the downtown and is truly the very heart of the community. It was primarily built to house the public market, but because of the fact that its tower housed the clock and belfry, it soon became known to the citizens as the "Clock" instead of the "Market".

Town clocks were common and played an important role in the life of early American towns. The tolling bell pealed messages understood by the townspeople. The bell was used as an alarm for fires, danger, curfew, special announcements, and last but not least, "butchering days" - to make the townspeople aware that fresh meat was available. Tradition has it that there were beaten paths from every direction made by dogs that knew the sound of the bell and that it meant morsels of fresh meat for them.

Winnsboro's market house with its clock tower was built in 1833-34 on a small piece of land in the middle of Washington Street. The land had formerly been used as a duck pond before the land was donated to the town as a site for a new market house. The Town Council accepted the land and petitioned the Legislature for authority to erect a new market house and town clock. The authority was given "provided the building be no more than 30 feet in width".

The brick came from Charleston, and legend has it that 50 wagons were needed to make the three week trip to Charleston and back. Works for the clock were ordered from Alsace, France by Colonel William McCreight, Town Intendent. The clock, with its heavy iron weights, was wound by a windlass with large wire cables. The clock was later wired to run electrically and continues to keep Winnsboro on time to the present.

The bell for the clock tower was also made in France, and it sounded a "silvery tone". It was used until 1895 when during a fire it was rung so vigorously that it was cracked and had to be sent to Philadelphia for repairs. When it was finally returned, the "old-timers" reported it had lost its silvery tone or perhaps was not the original bell that had been sent for repair.

The market house was built to specifications in width with one large room on the ground floor used for the public market and two small rooms. One of the rooms was used as Town Hall and the other as a "Guard House" where breakers of the peace were retained temporarily.

In 1875 further construction and repairs were made resulting in the present tower. In spite of the cracked bell and repairs to the tower, the old clock has run continuously for over 160 years. Legend has it to be the oldest continuously running town clock in the United States.

THE ARCHITECTURE OF THE CLOCK

The hand-made brick walls of the building are 8, 12, and 18 inches thick and 18 and 24 inches in width in the tower. The molding around the top of the interior walls is part of the original plastered walls. There are 12 windows on the main floor with 12 panes over 12 panes. The original mantle still adorns the fireplace in the upstairs meeting room. Double doors are used for all entrances with double half-doors used on the ground floor. All entrances have a fan shaped panel of glass overhead. The "S" shaped irons on each side of the exterior are braces that hold heavy earthquake rods in place.

The steps and landing of the building are granite quarried in Fairfield County.

The rooms of the Town Clock are often used for small group meetings and the upstairs of the building is home to the Fairfield County Chamber of Commerce.

This stately, pristine building remains the heart of Historic Downtown Winnsboro.