

# Hickory Hall Remains Part Of Calabash's Rich History

BY TERRY POPE

One of the oldest houses in Brunswick County is still home to Lola Mae Simmons, 81, who lives in the Colonial-style plantation home known as Hickory Hall.

Overlooking the Calabash River, the two-story wooden-framed home built in 1799, and completed in 1812, was once the center of a magnificent plantation stretching from Longwood, past Sunset Beach and across the South Carolina line. There is history stored in the antique home, along with many legends, both mysterious and tragic.

The stories vary; it depends on whom you ask. Ms. Simmons, who was born in the home in 1904, is not even sure of its history. She shares the six-bedroom structure and its many acres of farm land today with several hounds and house cats.

An occasional tourist will stop by, along with reporters, historians and authors all interested in its past, but the home is still just a private home for now. "Private Drive. No Trespassing," a sign posted in the driveway reads. One can view the home from a distance directly behind the Simmons Calabash Seafood Restaurant on N.C. 179.

"It's been in the family for a number of years," Ms. Simmons said. "It became my father's house (Sam Thomas), but he never would talk much about it."

Ms. Simmons gave birth to seven children at the home, including Robert Simmons, a member of the Calabash town council who recently recalled growing up in the home. For those who are superstitious, one can also hear strange sounds coming from the home as well, Simmons said.

"It was so big, there were always plenty of rooms to play in," Simmons said. "You can hear all kinds of strange sounds at night. Before mama carpeted the stairs, especially right at the top, you would think someone would be walking on them at night, but I've never seen any ghosts up there."

The unique feature of the home is that it was built over a huge hickory



STAFF PHOTO BY TERRY POPE

AS IT STANDS TODAY, Hickory Hall at Calabash is the private home of Lola Mae Simmons and also houses much history and many legends since its construction in 1799.

stump that later became used as a table for many decades, which is how the home got the name Hickory Hall. Other portions of the floor were lined with long leaf plankings from ten to 12 inches in width, timber imported from England by its original owner, Samuel Frink.

"They claim the men used to sit around the stump and play cards, and pirates would come up and join them," Simmons said. "I don't know how much of that is true."

Many of the rooms have been remodeled since they were originally built, Simmons said. Carpet has been added over the top of the original floors while the original wood paneling in some rooms still remains, pieced together with wooden pegs rather than nails. Four chimneys surround the home to provide each room access to a fireplace.

"A lot of the old lumber brought over from England is as solid as iron," Simmons said, "but most of the lumber put in since then has been replaced two or three times. There's enough brick under the house, just from the foundation, to build a good-sized home today."

The stories surrounding the home are mysterious and tragic. The first Samuel Frink to inhabit the home was a prosperous landowner, the grandson of Nicholas Frink who moved to the area from Connecticut in 1734 after receiving a grant of 500 acres. When Nicholas died, Samuel obtained 1,210 acres of land, including the portion where Hickory Hall was later built.

Legend has it that Samuel became depressed over the Civil War and the loss of his slaves and shot himself in March 1865. His son, Dr. Lorenzo Frink, picked up the pistol and cast it in the Calabash River. Later, Dr. Frink's wife is believed to have fallen to her death down the steps of Hickory Hall.

Legend also has it that Dr. Frink, who owned 39 slaves, performed experimental surgery on them in the attic of the home. He is said to have tied the slaves with iron shackles to the ceiling beams in the torturous heat.

"They claim he was deported from

England for experimenting with surgery over there," Simmons said. "He did practice medicine at the house. A lot of his medicine bottles are still there. The scales that he used is still there."

Simmons said there are holes in the ceiling beams where the shackles were once tied. The heat in the attic is "suffocating in the summer," he added.

When Dr. Frink died in Southport, his son, Samuel, sold the home to Sam Thomas, Simmons' grandfather, in 1875. Despite the many years, the home remains in good shape today, Simmons said, and only needs a fresh coat of paint on the outside.

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