

Historic homes play prominent roles on campus

BY JASON EVANS
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CLEMSON — New signage will help the historic buildings on the Clemson University campus continue to tell their stories.

Executive director and chief curator of the Department of Historic Properties at Clemson University Will Hiott, who has worked at the university for 28 years, gave a talk titled “Preserving Clemson” at a recent meeting of the Easley Friends of the Library group.

“I always love to be in a library,” Hiott said. “We’ve done a number of things over the past 28 years. Restoration on Fort Hill, work on Hanover House, work on Hopewell, General Andrew Pickens’ home, and, certainly, campus restoration and preservation of the university national registered buildings.”

Clemson University recently installed new signs at 11 historic buildings on campus. According to a university news release, the grounds of each facility on the National Register of Historic Buildings now feature a 9-foot, bronze-colored sign

that tells the story of its origin, name and significance to university development.

The Clemson main campus buildings on the register are the Trustee House, Tillman Hall, Hardin Hall, Godfrey Hall, Holtzendorf Hall, Mell Hall, Sikes Hall, Long Hall, Riggs Hall, Serrine Hall and Fort Hill.

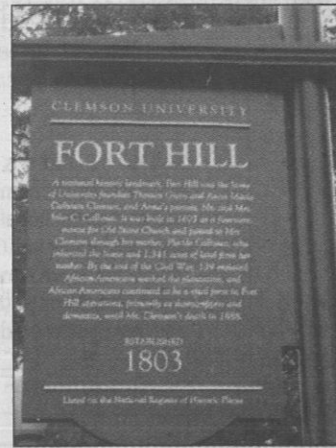
A National Historic Landmark, Fort Hill “is really the centerpiece of the university campus,” Hiott said.

“It’s sort of odd, you usually don’t think of universities having antebellum plantation homes in the middle of them,” he said. “I can’t think of another university campus that has a founder’s antebellum home — which had been a cotton plantation — in the middle of campus.”

Fort Hill was the home of John C. Calhoun and his wife, Floride, and then later the home of his daughter, Anna Calhoun, and her husband, Thomas Green Clemson, Hiott said.

His presentation walked listeners through a layout of the plantation in its heyday.

“It’s funny, sometimes I say ‘plantation’ to kids and what they picture in their mind is a gated golf community,”



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New signage was recently placed on National Register buildings on the Clemson campus.

Hiott said. “They don’t really have an idea of what a plantation in the 19th century was.”

The seventh vice president of the United States, John C. Calhoun “was a prominent individual during his era,” Hiott said. During his lifetime, he served as a U.S. representative, secretary of war and secretary of state. When he died, Hiott said, he was a sitting U.S. senator.

“One of the reasons John C. Calhoun is still talked about today is because he was a

major historical figure really for 40 years,” Hiott said. “He was a heartbeat from the presidency as vice president for John Quincy Adams and Andrew Jackson.”

Thomas and Anna ended up moving in with Anna’s parents at Fort Hill because the couple “hated Philadelphia,” Hiott said.

“The Clemsons, as a couple, lived at Fort Hill twice,” he said. “They lived both as newlyweds and then they later lived as retirees. It’s sort of interesting to look at how the site changed their lives and how their lives changed the site in many ways.”

It’s also important to tell the story of the cotton plantation’s slaves, he said.

“One of the projects we’ve been working on over the years is to tell that story as fully as we can and making connections to those families even to the present day.” Hiott said.

A brochure produced by Hiott’s department outlines the African-American experience at Fort Hill. Many descendants of former slaves and wage hands still live in the area, the brochure said.

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A colonial house built in 1716, Hanover House celebrated its 300th anniversary in 2016.

Hopewell was the site of the Hopewell Treaties between the Confederation Congress of the United States of America and the Choctaw, Cherokee and Chickasaw people.

Fort Hill is open to visitors seven days a week, and those who stop by have also had the chance to look at other historic sites on campus.

“This past year, we’ve had the Hanover House open seven days a week,” Hiott said.

Hopewell is currently closed to visitors, Hiott said.

“Hopewell is sort of a preservation project,” he said. “I hate to say it’s a ‘diamond in the rough,’ but if you look inside, it’s very, very rough ... We’ll have to see what the next six months bring.”

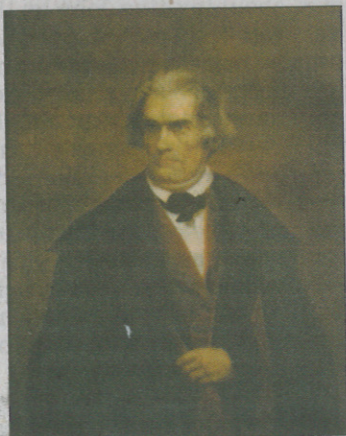
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Preserving Clemson



PHOTOS SPECIAL TO THE JOURNAL

Fort Hill, John C. Calhoun's home, still plays a vital role at Clemson University today.



John C. Calhoun



Floride Colhoun Calhoun



Anna Calhoun Clemson



Thomas Green Clemson