

HISTORY OF WHITE HALL, v1.5

SPRING HILL HISTORIC COMMISSION

Statement of Significance

White Hall, on Duplex Road, in the northern part of Maury County town of Spring Hill, is recognized for its historical significance in architecture, its associations with its first owner, Dr. Aaron White, and local role in U.S. Civil War history. The large, frame house was built for Dr. White in 1844 by his younger brother, Henry. White was a large landowner and early surgeon and doctor of medicine in the Spring Hill community. His residence on the eastern edge of the village is one of the best vernacular adaptations of the prevailing Greek Revival in this part of the county.

The two-story, L-shaped, central-passage house has an imposing portico with Tower-of-the-Winds capitals, detailed doors and entries, and other intricate examples of excellent local carpentry. The house retains its original interior elements and has not been significantly altered. White Hall is the largest surviving frame structure within the corporate limits of the town and the best frame example of classical architecture.

In about 1844, Dr. Aaron C. White, son of General William White III, who had moved to Nashville from Virginia, moved from his plantation at Elkton, Giles County, Tennessee, to Spring Hill with his wife, Eliza Fain, daughter of Samuel Fain and Susan Wharton, early settlers in the western Maury County village of Williamsport. White had previously purchased a 300-acre tract east of the village of Spring Hill, and had a large frame structure constructed there by his younger brother, Henry. The house faced Mt. Carmel Road (now Duplex Road) and the rear of the farm extended to beyond Kedron Pike. The whitewashed frame house was christened "White Hall."

Although a medical graduate of the University of New York and a doctor of medicine, Dr. White farmed in Spring Hill for a number of years before selling off 266 acres at the eastern edge of his farm to Seth Sparkman. He sold two one-acre lots on the Kedron Pike, and donated another two acres to the town of Spring Hill for the erection of a boy's school. This was the site for many years of the Spring Hill Male Academy and, in compliance with Dr. White's expressed desire that it should always remain for educational purposes, it is now the site of the Spring Hill Elementary School. This left Dr. White exactly 30 acres surrounding White Hall. He resumed his medical practice, attending to the sick for many miles surrounding Spring Hill. His wife assisted him and ministered to as many of his patients as she could reach. In doing so, she contracted yellow fever in an epidemic which struck Spring Hill and died in 1853. A year later, Dr. White met Margaret Fain, a cousin of his late wife Eliza, daughter of John Fain, merchant and owner of Forest Hill, a large plantation on the French Broad River. After a brief but ardent courtship, he married her and brought her to White Hall. They had six children, all christened in the old Presbyterian Church; Rose, Ellen Amelia, Oohn Fain, Lucy Gillespie, Mary, and Caroline Wharton White. Dr. White died in 1874, and left his wife to cope with the six young children. He is buried in the Spring Hill cemetery. In 1877, Rose, the oldest child married John Wesley Cheairs, grandson of pioneer Nathaniel Francis Cheairs, III, and the couple took up residence at White Hall with her mother. She died in December of the same year, and Rose and her husband

decided to stay at White Hall. When the estate was offered for sale by court order, to give the other heirs their proportionate part, the couple bid it in; John Cheairs generously deeded his interest to his wife in fee simple, and thus the house remained in the family. Following the death of Mrs. Cheairs in 1927, the house was for many years the residence of her children, Irene, Rose, and Wharton Cheairs. Upon their deaths, the house was willed to Scarritt College in Nashville, which, in turn, sold the property in 1969 to Mrs. Hazel G. Morton.

Several Civil War incidents are associated with White Hall. In March 1863, the dashing Confederate Cavalry General Earl Van Dorn established his headquarters at Dr. White's home in Spring Hill. The general, his staff, and aides-de-camp took over the entire house leaving only the kitchen wing to Dr. White, his wife Margaret, and several small children. Van Dorn literally held court in Spring Hill. He held several military reviews which he attended dressed in a resplendently tailored uniform. Brass band concerts entertained the villagers, and "the mansions were lighted until midnight." Jessie McKissack Peters, wife of neighboring doctor and former State Senator, Dr. George B. Peters, supposedly visited Van Dorn at White Hall. Such aspects of Van Dorn's social life did not suit his hostess, Mrs. White, and she asked her husband to get the general out of the house. Before Dr. White could face up to the uncomfortable task of asking the general to leave, Van Dorn summoned him and told White that he was transferring his headquarters to the Martin Cheairs house (now Ferguson Hall at the Tennessee Children's Home). Van Dorn was in his new headquarters less than a week before he was assassinated by Dr. George Peters in the county's most famous murder, a major sensation of the day and still a matter of dispute.

On November 29, 1864, the advancing Confederate Army of Tennessee under General John Bell Hood encircled a large federal force under General John Schofield at Spring Hill. As a Confederate detachment under General Nathan B. Forrest entered Spring Hill on Duplex Road from the Rally Hill turnpike, they were greeted by the White family in their front yard, who served the soldiers fried chicken from black tin trays. Neighbors across the road provided buttermilk and buttered biscuits. Most of General Schofield's troops escaped that night setting up the famous Battle in Franklin which led one of the biggest defeats of the Confederate army. After the terrible Battle of Franklin, the next afternoon, wounded soldiers were laid out in the front and back halls of White Hall for treatment by Dr. White. In later years, one of his children recalled being frightened and disturbed by the moans and cries of the wounded. Dr. Aaron White could not join the Confederate Army due to deafness, but still served the South throughout the war as a physician and surgeon. White Hall was added to the National Register of Historic Sites in 1984 and was formally recognized by the City of Spring Hill on July 21, 2008.

Currently the home is listed for sale for \$1.7 million at 2536 Duplex Road, Spring Hill, TN 37174.

Architecture and Construction

Architecturally, White Hall is interesting for its modified central passage plan; its monumental portico with Tower-of-the-Winds capitals; ornate door surrounds, balcony rails, and the heavy cornice on the exterior; and original mantel stairways, and other interior millwork and details. The original detached kitchen was long ago joined to the main part of the house by a dining room wing, but this rear addition adds to the overall character of this fine residence at the edge of the quiet little town of Spring Hill. Situated on the south side of Duplex Road on the eastern

edge of the city of Spring Hill, White Hall is a two-story, frame, central-passage plan house with a one-story rear service ell composed of former dependencies.

Built in 1844, the Greek Revival house rests on a limestone foundation and has a shallow hipped roof. The building retains its architectural integrity. The main facade faces north to the lane. A monumental pedimented portico is centered on the five-bay front; four, square-paneled pillars with tin Tower-of-the Winds capitals support it. The pediment has a raking cornice end and a plain weatherboard tympanum. A heavy molded entablature with a dentil course encircles the entire house. Center doorways on the ground and upper floor are identical; double-leaf paneled doors are separated from double-light sidelights by plain tapered pilasters, and each entry is topped by a four-light transom and a shouldered architrave hood. The upper doorway opens onto a cantilevered balcony with a decorative rail. The eight large windows on this front have 9*6 lights and louvered shutters. On the east elevation, an inset brick chimney is situated about 12 feet from the corner of the front of the house. Double-leaf doors at the center open onto a new brick stoop. A building seam about two-thirds of the way down the side indicates the enclosure of the rear porch. There are two shuttered 4*4 windows on the rear part and a fixed 8-light window over the center door. The west facade is plain, with an inset, corbeled brick chimney; the original rear porch and gallery were enclosed in the late 1800s. There are two 6*6 light sash windows on the rear; one on the upper story is very large and has shutters, and may have been moved from the main block of the house. A small center-pivot window opens into a bath. A narrow shed section is joined to the rear porch at this point. There is one large 6*6 shuttered window, again probably moved from the main block, and the roof extends another three feet, supported by square posts connected at the top by a latticework frieze. Two original dependencies were long ago joined to the west facade to form an ell addition. The original two-story frame kitchen is connected directly to the house. The kitchen portion serves as today's dining room and the upstairs room is used for storage. The exterior has a large 6*6 window moved from the main house, a glass-paneled door opening onto a rear porch, and smaller 6*6 windows in the upper left. An original quarter is joined to the rear of the old kitchen structure, and serves as the modern kitchen. Its exterior appearance is basically unchanged from the time it served as a residence. Its front side faces east and has a batten door and 6*6 window opening onto a shed porch. There is a small lookout and another 6*6 window on the south end, with two on the west, rear side. The porch floor is raised on stone piers, connected by latticework. The structure has a steep tin roof; the loft is now used for additional storage. The interior of the house is a modification of the common central-passage plan house. The staircase is not located in the entrance hall but rather on the enclosed rear porch. The house retains its original significant interior features, including doors and mantels with shouldered architraves and original ash floors. No original or later outbuildings are located on the property. The house is approached from Duplex Road on a wide herringbone brick sidewalk and is set in a park of mature trees.