

The Wrightsborough Quaker Historical Site – Page 1

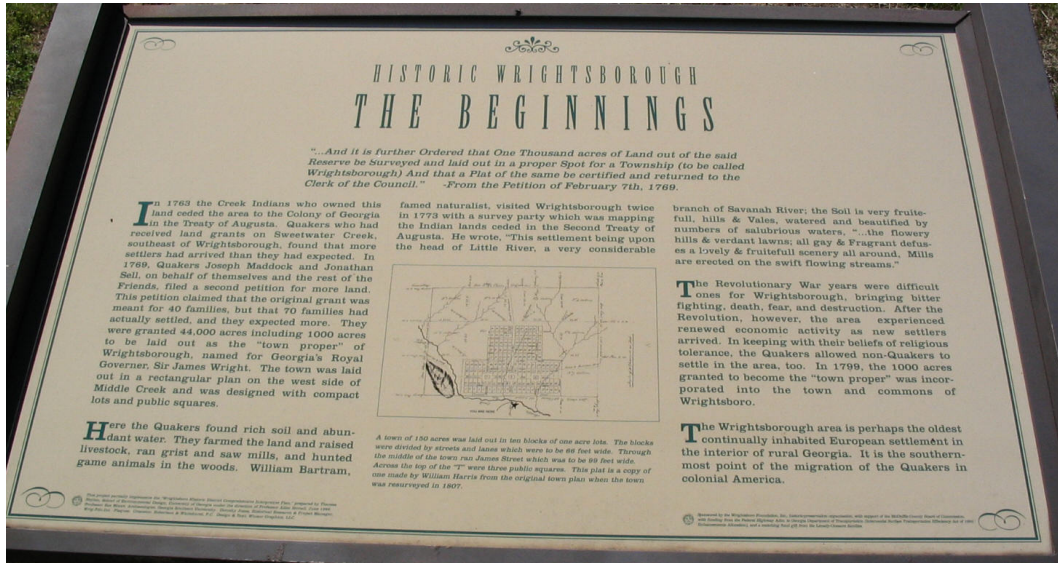
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Beverly Whitaker and Sara Potts.

Our visit to historic Wrightsborough was made on May 3, 2004. Located about 40 miles from Augusta, this historical site is in McDuffie County, Georgia, of which Thomson is the county seat. The Wrightsborough Township covered all of present-day McDuffie County, and parts of Warren and Columbia counties.

Note: The historical markers pictured and transcribed in this document indicate that the restoration of the settlement is a project which is partially implemented by the "Wrightsboro Foundation, Inc."



Most research shows that the original spelling was *Wrightsborough*, and that it was shortened to *Wrightsboro* when in 1799 the town was incorporated. Wrightsborough Township was settled beginning in 1767 by about 40 families of Orange County, N.C. The township and town probably reached the peak of its growth by early 1775. According to author Robert Scott Davis, Jr., "almost every settler who lived in the township has been identified as a Quaker when, in fact, the Friends were a minority there from a very early date." Even so, the settlement was regarded as a Quaker community, and certainly it was established by Quakers who were the early leaders.



Transcription:

HISTORIC WRIGHTSBOROUGH THE BEGINNINGS

“... And it is further Ordered that One Thousand acres of Land out of the said Reserve be Surveyed and laid out in a proper Spot for a Township (to be called Wrightsborough) And that a Plat of the same be certified and returned to the Clerk of the Council.”

-From the Petition of February 7th, 1789.

In 1763 the Creek Indians who owned this land ceded the area to the Colony of Georgia in the Treaty of Augusta. Quakers who had received land grants on Sweetwater Creek, southeast of Wrightsborough, found that more settlers had arrived than they had expected. In 1769, Quakers Joseph Maddock and Jonathan Sell, on behalf of themselves and the rest of the Friends, filed a second petition for more land. This petition claimed that the original grant was meant for 40 families, but that 70 families had actually settled, and they expected more. They were granted 44,000 acres including 1000 acres to be laid out as the “town proper” of Wrightsborough, named for Georgia’s Royal Governor, Sir James Wright. The town was laid out in a rectangular plan on the west side of Middle Creek and was designed with compact lots and public squares.

Here the Quakers found rich soil and abundant water. They farmed the land and raised live stock, ran grist and saw mills, and hunted game animals in the woods. William Bartram, famed naturalist, visited Wrightsborough twice in 1773 with a survey party which was mapping the Indian lands ceded in the Second Treaty of Augusta. He wrote, “This settlement being upon the head of Little River, a very considerable branch of Savannah River; the Soil is very fruitfull, hills & Vales, watered and beautified by numbers of salubrious waters, “...the flowery hills & verdant lawns; all gay & Fragrant defuses a lovely & fruitfull scenery all around. Mills are erected on the swift flowing streams.”

The Revolutionary War years were difficult ones for Wrightsborough, bringing bitter fighting, death, fear, and destruction. After the Revolution, however, the area experienced renewed economic activity as new settlers arrived. In keeping with their beliefs of religious tolerance, the Quakers allowed non-Quakers to settle in the area, too. In 1799, the 1000 acres granted to become the “town proper” was incorporated into the town and commons of Wrightsboro.

The Wrightsborough area is perhaps the oldest continually inhabited European settlement in the interior of rural Georgia. It is the southernmost point of the migration of the Quakers in colonial America.

The Quakers – Page 3



Transcription:

HISTORIC WRIGHTSBOROUGH QUAKERS

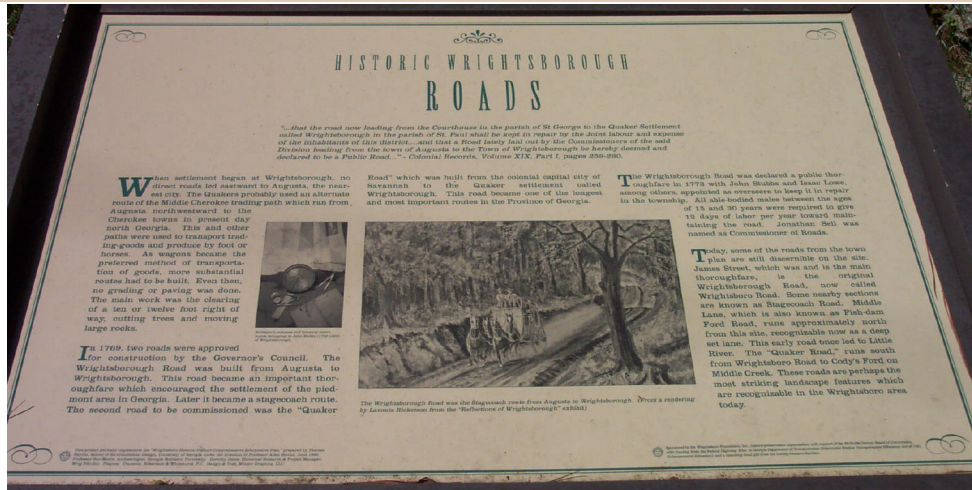
"The inhabitants of this part of the Country having formerly been inured to industry & Farming in the North Colonies, & finding this a fruitful Soil, turn these lands in the same sort of Agriculture. They Plant Wheat, Barley, Flax, Hemp, Oates, corn, Cotton, Indigo, Breed Cattle, Sheep & Make Very good Butter & Cheese." – William Bartram, 1773

The Society of Friends, whose members are often called "Quakers," had its roots in seventeenth century England. From there some of the Friends migrated to America to such colonies as New Jersey and Pennsylvania, thence to North Carolina. Some of these Quakers living near Hillsboro, North Carolina, became exasperated by the unfair treatment they were receiving at the hands of North Carolina British Governor William Tyron. Forty families applied to the Royal Governor of Georgia for a land grant of part of the newly ceded Indian lands. A reserve of 12,000 acres in the Wrightsborough Township, St. Paul's Parish was granted to Quaker petitioners, who settled in the area of Sweetwater and Brier Creeks, beginning in 1768. More families came, and Joseph Maddock and Jonathan Sell, on behalf

of the Friends, petitioned the Council for additional land, subsequently granted in the vicinity of what is now Wrightsboro.

The Quakers were peace loving, honest people who believed in simple living and hard work. Some of the men became craftsmen such as saddlers and coopers. The women spun, wove, and sewed for their families. They did most of their cooking over an open fireplace. The Friends were very concerned with learning, and most could read, write and figure.

Because of their religious beliefs, the Quakers attempted to remain neutral in war times. Nevertheless, they were victims of repeated Indian raids. Their refusal to bear arms against the British Crown made them subject to attacks by bands of American Revolutionaries, too. Twelve Quakers were reported killed by a band of roving Whigs in 1781. The raiders stole or destroyed their homes, crops, livestock, and other property. The new government confiscated the holdings of some of those who refused to bear arms and redistributed the property in the land courts. Many of the Friends became disillusioned with their new home. Some left soon after they arrived. Others remained longer, but their opposition to slavery made them out of place in this Southern farming community. By 1805, most of the Friends had left the area for lands northwest of the Ohio River.



Transcription:

HISTORIC WRIGHTSBOROUGH ROADS

“...that the road now leading from the Court-house in the parish of St. George to the Quaker Settlement called Wrightsborough in the parish of St. Paul shall be kept in repair by the Joint labour and expense of the inhabitants of this district....and that a Road lately laid out by the Commissioners of the said Dividison leading from the town of Augusta to the Town of Wrightsborough be hereby deemed and declared to be a Public Road...” - Colonial Records, Volume XIX, Part I, pages 259-260.

When settlement began at Wrightsborough, no direct roads led eastward to Augusta, the nearest city. The Quakers probably used an alternate route of the Middle Cherokee trading path which ran from Augusta northwestward to the Cherokee towns in present day north Georgia. This and other paths were used to transport trading-goods and produce by foot or horses. As wagons became the preferred method of transportation of goods, more substantial routes had to be built. Even then, no grading or paving was done. The main work was the clearing of a ten or twelve foot right of way, cutting trees and moving large rocks.

In 1769, two roads were approved for construction by the Governor's Council. The Wrightsborough Road was built from Augusta

to Wrightsborough. This road became an important thoroughfare which encouraged the settlement of the piedmont area in Georgia. Later it became a stagecoach route. The second road to be commissioned was the “Quaker Road” which was built from the colonial capital city of Savannah to the Quaker settlement called Wrightsborough. This road became one of the longest and most important routes in the Province of Georgia.

The Wrightsborough Road was declared a public thoroughfare in 1773 with John Stubbs and Isaac Lowe, among others, appointed as overseers to keep it in repair in the township. All able-bodied males between the ages of 15 and 30 years were required to give 12 days of labor per year toward maintaining the road. Jonathan Bell was named as Commissioner of Roads.

Today, some of the roads from the town plan are still discernible on the site. James Street, which was and is the main thoroughfare, is the original Wrightsborough Road, now called Wrightsboro Road. Some nearby sections are known as Stagecoach Road. Middle Lane, which is also known as Fish-dam Ford Road, runs approximately north from this site, recognizable now as a deep set lane. This early road once led to Little River. “The Quaker Road,” runs south from Wrightsboro Road to Cody's Ford on Middle Creek. These roads are perhaps the most striking landscape features which are recognizable in the Wrightsboro area today.



Restoration: The Town – Page 6



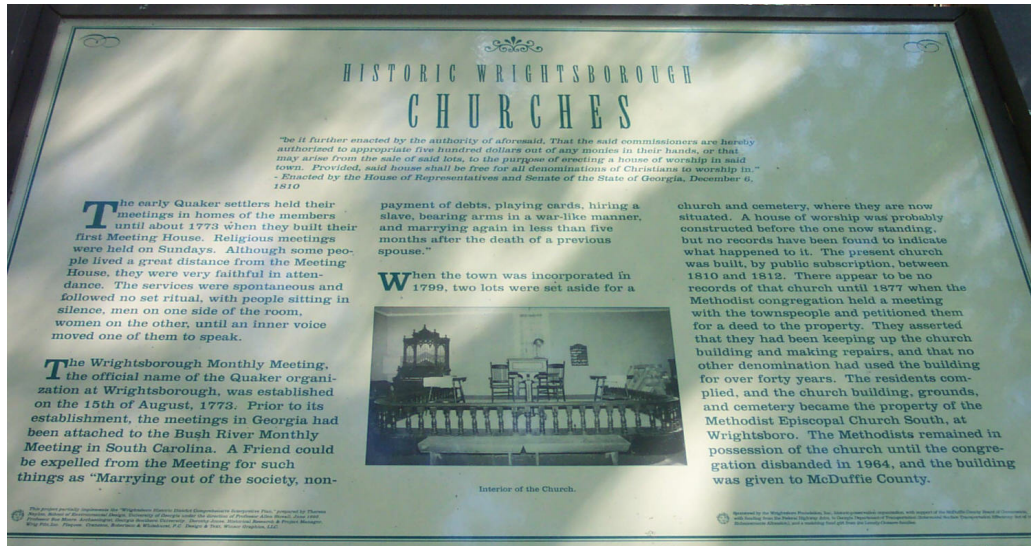
Well



Cabin



General Store



Transcription:

HISTORIC WRIGHTSBOROUGH CHURCHES

“be it further enacted by the authority of aforesaid, That the said commissioners are hereby authorized to appropriate five hundred dollars out of any monies in their hands, or that may arise from the sale of said lots, to the purpose of erecting a house of worship in said town. Provided, said house shall be free for all denominations of Christians to worship in.”

- Enacted by the House of Representatives and Senate of the State of Georgia, December 6, 1810.

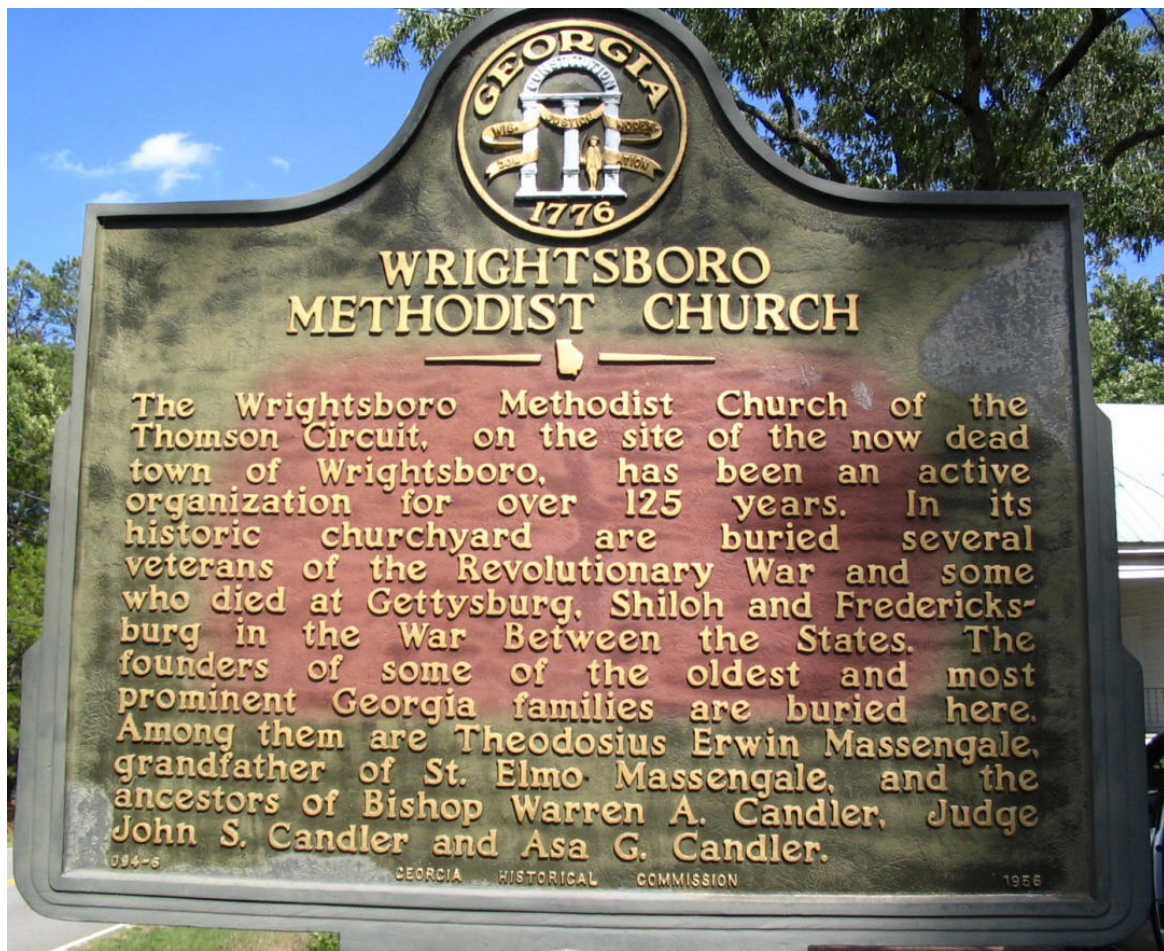
The early Quaker settlers held their meetings in homes of the members until about 1773 when they built their first Meeting House. Religious meetings were held on Sundays. Although some people lived a great distance from the Meeting House, they were very faithful in attendance. The services were spontaneous and followed no set ritual, with people sitting in silence, men on one side of the room, women on the other, until an inner voice moved one of them to speak.

The Wrightsborough Monthly Meeting, the official name of the Quaker organization at Wrightsborough, was established on the 15th

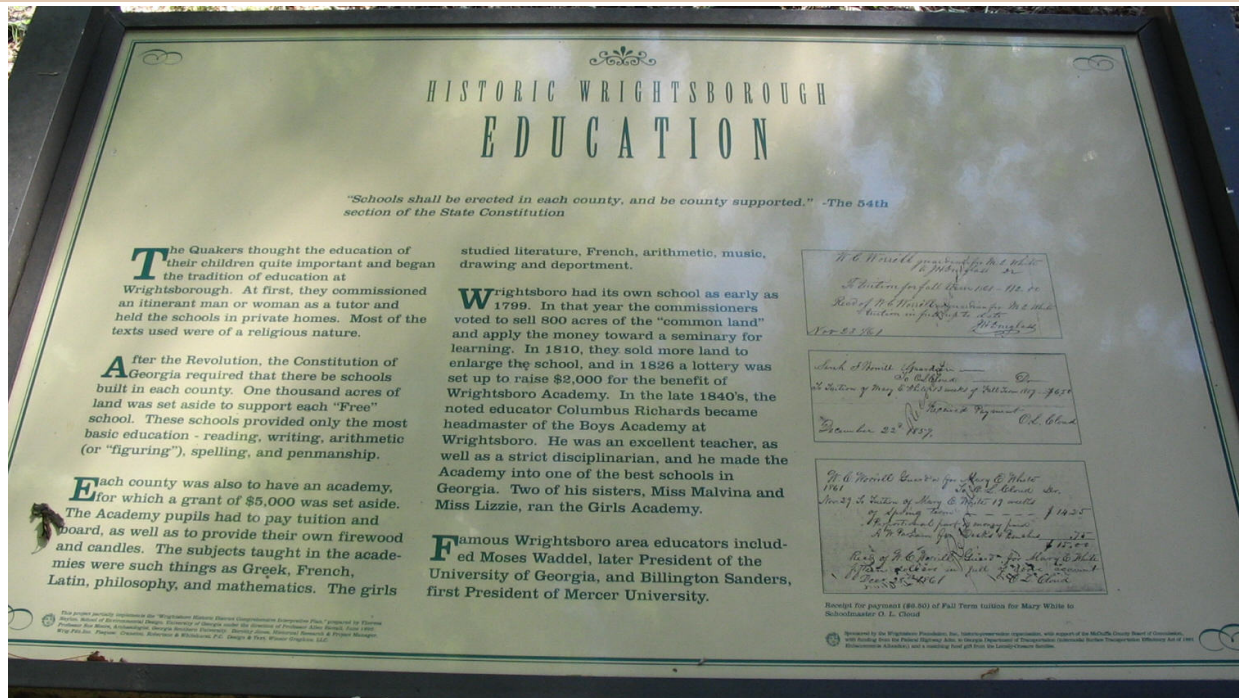
of August, 1773. Prior to its establishment, the meetings in Georgia had been attached to the Bush River Monthly Meeting in South Carolina. A Friend could be expelled from the Meeting for such things as “Marrying out of the society, non-payment of debts, playing cards, hiring a slave, bearing arms in a war-like manner, and marrying again in less than five months after the death of a previous spouse.”

When the town was incorporated in 1799, two lots were set aside for a church and cemetery, where they are now situated. A house of worship was probably constructed before the one now standing, but no records have been found to indicate what happened to it. The present church was built, by public subscription, between 1810 and 1812. There appear to be no records of that church until 1877 when the Methodist congregation held a meeting with the townspeople and petitioned them for a deed to the property. They asserted that they had been keeping up the church building and making repairs, and that no other denomination had used the building for over forty years. The residents complied, and the church building, grounds, and cemetery became the property of the Methodist Episcopal Church South, at Wrightsboro. The Methodists remained in possession of the church until the congregation disbanded in 1964, and the building was given to McDuffie County.









Transcription:

HISTORIC WRIGHTSBOROUGH EDUCATION

"Schools shall be erected in each county, and be county supported." - The 54th section of the State Constitution

The Quakers thought the education of their children quite important and began the tradition of education at Wrightsborough. At first, they commissioned an itinerant man or woman as a tutor and held the schools in private homes. Most of the texts used were of a religious nature.

After the Revolution, the Constitution of Georgia required that there be schools built in each county. One thousand acres of land was set aside to support each "Free" school. These schools provided only the most basic education – reading, writing, arithmetic (or "figuring"), spelling, and penmanship.

Each county was also to have an academy, for which a grant of \$5,000 was set aside. The Academy pupils had to pay tuition and board,

as well as to provide their own firewood and candles. The subjects taught in the academies were such things as Greek, French, Latin, philosophy, and mathematics. The girls studied literature, French, arithmetic, music, drawing and deportment.

Wrightsboro had its own school as early as 1799. In that year the commissioners voted to sell 800 acres of the "common land" and apply the money toward a seminary for learning. In 1810, they sold more land to enlarge the school, and in 1826 a lottery was set up to raise \$2,000 for the benefit of Wrightsboro Academy. In the late 1840's, the noted educator Columbus Richards became headmaster of the Boys Academy at Wrightsboro. He was an excellent teacher, as well as a strict disciplinarian, and he made the Academy into one of the best schools in Georgia. Two of his sisters, Miss Malvina and Miss Lizzie, ran the Girls Academy.

Famous Wrightsboro area educators included Moses Waddel, later President of the University of Georgia, and Billington Sanders, first President of Mercer University.



Transcription:

HISTORIC WRIGHTSBOROUGH NINETEENTH and TWENTIETH CENTURIES

"The sites in the Wrightsboro Historic District have a great archaeological potential for yielding information about Georgia history, community evolution, commercial and domestic activities, at various time periods, and ethnic relations." -Dr. Sue Moore, Georgia Southern University.

After the beginning of the nineteenth century, Wrightsboro grew into a busy farming community. Rather than settling the town according to the plan, however, most of the settlers remained dispersed through the area, living on farms or close to streams near their mills. Various commercial and industrial establishments settled themselves along James Street, the Quaker Road, or Fish-dam Ford Road. Eventually, there were churches, several general stores, a leather tanyard, a post office, facilities for stage travellers, and a silk mill. Some of the early inhabitants ran saw mills on the creeks in the vicinity, and later, other settlers mined gold in the nearby Little River area. Wrightsboro

became a prosperous agricultural community producing cotton and timber.

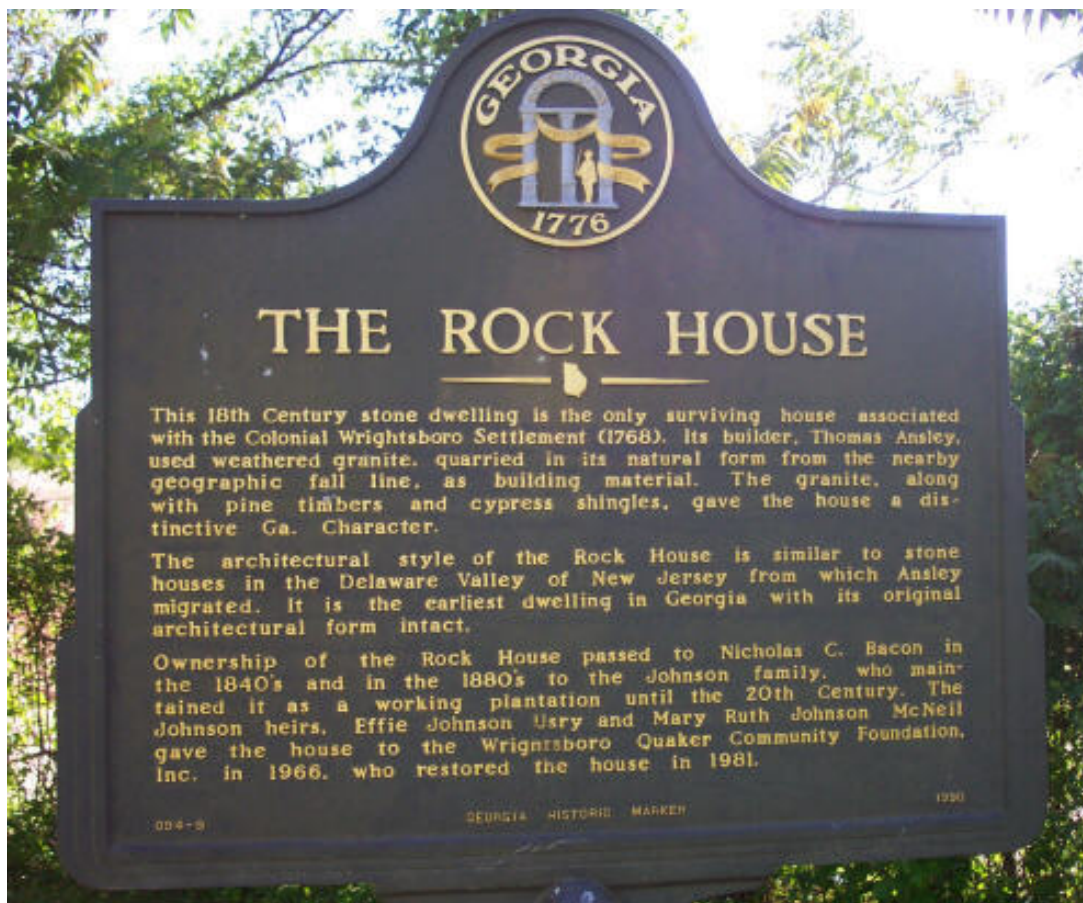
In the 1830's, the Georgia Railroad being built from Augusta to Atlanta by-passed Wrightsboro and passed through the area about six miles south. As the town of Thomson grew around the railroad depot, Wrightsboro began to decline. The Civil War had a crippling effect on the agricultural area whose cotton industry had depended on slave labor. Then the depression of the post war South hit, and many of the residents of Wrightsboro began to move to Thomson and Augusta, and other larger towns. By the late nineteenth century, Wrightsboro's town government was inactive.

After the turn of the twentieth century, Wrightsboro, like other communities dependent on cultivating their cotton for existence, was devastated by the arrival of the boll weevil. Residents continued to leave, and the community school closed in 1920. The Hawes General store, the last of its genre, closed during the 1930's. Even the Methodist Church disbanded in 1964 when the congregation dissolved.

The Rock House – Page 13



Part of the Wrightsborough Township, the Rock House is the oldest building in Georgia, with its original floor-plan intact. This view is from the back. The house was marvelously designed and constructed with three stories. Its owner, Thomas Ansley, was an ancestor of President Jimmy Carter whose recent novel of the Revolutionary War (*The Hornet's Nest*) takes place in the Wrightsborough area.



The Rock House, continued – Page 14



Beverly Whitaker



Sara Potts

The house had several fireplaces, and we were really impressed with the size of this one! Beverly and Sara hope you have enjoyed your “tour” with us.

Learn more about Wrightsborough
and about the Quakers.

Beverly provides links to several
Internet sites she has found to be
helpful. You can find the links at:
[http://freepages.genealogy.rootsweb.com/
~gentutor/Quakers.html](http://freepages.genealogy.rootsweb.com/~gentutor/Quakers.html)

Email Beverly Whitaker at:
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