

## **LOCAL LANDMARK DESIGNATION REPORT**

### **Austin Lawrence House, ca. 1848**

(Exterior Designation)

2383 Cedar Falls Rd, Franklinville, N.C.

### **LOCAL LANDMARK SIGNIFICANCE SUMMARY**

This 160-year-old house in Cedar Falls, Randolph County, was built on a rock outcropping on a steep hillside overlooking the Deep River. Its first owner was Austin Lawrence, a mill manager from New England who came to Randolph County with his family to work in the burgeoning textile industry. The solidly built house has woodwork and moldings made from the Greek Revival classical designs by architect Asher Benjamin (1773-1845) in his pattern books that were widely circulated in the first half of the nineteenth century. After the Lawrence family moved away around 1855, the Cedar Falls Mill Company owned the house and it was rented to various tenants for over 100 years. The 160 year history represented by the Austin Lawrence House starts with the expanding growth of North Carolina in the early 1800's, the textile mill development of Randolph County, N.C., the founding of Cedar Falls, and the spreading of industrialization from New England to and through the American South.

### **HISTORICAL CONTEXT AND SIGNIFICANCE**

Summarized from Austin Lawrence House  
Historic Structure Report, Spring 2001  
Randolph Community College Students  
RCC Historic Preservation Technology Program  
Benjamin Briggs 11, RCC Program Head

The Austin Lawrence House occupies a prominent location on a bluff above the northeast bank of the Deep River providing a spectacular, unobstructed view of the water from its long front porch. This house has had very few owners, which has contributed to the relative lack of modifications. It was built ca. 1848 on a rock outcropping on a steep hillside overlooking the Deep River by Austin Lawrence. He is believed to have come to Cedar Falls, Randolph County, from New Hampshire to work for the Cedar Falls Manufacturing Company. The house was later sold to the Sapona Cotton Mill which is the successor to Cedar Falls Manufacturing Company. The house was owned by the Mill and served as one of the mill-owned properties available for rent to mill employees until it was deeded to the Randolph County Heritage Society. Thus, the Austin Lawrence House has been intimately tied to the local Randolph County textile industry throughout its life. According to "The Heritage of Randolph County, N.C. Volume 1" Randolph County was one of three centers of the antebellum textile industry in North Carolina. The Cedar Falls mill was the first of these cotton mills in Randolph County and was a major supplier of the shirts and pants of the Confederate Army.

Historical records reveal that Austin Lawrence purchased a parcel of Randolph County land in 1841 (Deed Book 24, Page 1). He bought the property on which the house is located in two tracts. A deed recorded in Deed Book 28, Page 47, indicates that Austin Lawrence bought approximately 8.5 acres along the Deep River from J.M. Steed on September 6, 1848. Austin Lawrence came to Cedar Falls to work in some capacity for the Cedar Falls Manufacturing Company. The 1850 census lists his occupation as “manufacturer”, and the cotton mill is the most likely, if not only, manufacturing establishment in Cedar Falls at the time. This is supported by the fact that in the 1852 advertisement for the sale of the house, Austin Lawrence offers to sell his share in the Cedar Falls Manufacturing Company. The fact that he owned shares with a cost of \$500 indicates that he was a man of some wealth and most likely had a supervisory position with the company.

Austin Lawrence advertised the house for sale in October, 1852. The advertisement appeared for three months in the Greensborough Patriot. In the ad, Mr. Lawrence describes the house as “a large dwelling, two stories in front and one in the rear, with a Piazza in front and a covered passage from the house to the Kitchen”. The house currently consists of a main section that is a center-hall-single-pile form on the first floor and a center-hall-double-pile form on the second floor, with the two floors in the front of the house facing Deep River. There are also three rooms to the left of this structure (facing the house from the river) with the kitchen located in the far left room. It is interesting to note that Austin Lawrence described his house as being “finished in the latest style”. At the least, this indicates that he was aware of and appreciative of the Asher Benjamin moldings that are unique and distinguish this house from others in the region.

In 1868, Austin Lawrence sold the property to the Cedar Falls Manufacturing Company. It is presumed that the Mill purchased the house as rental property for mill employees. Cedar Falls Manufacturing Company transferred the house to Sapona Mills who owned a row of houses that they rented to mill employees. The houses were numbered and were generally referred to by number. The number “11”, which can still be seen over the front door of the Austin Lawrence House, is believed to be from the days when the house was the “Number 11” mill house. Members of the Cedar Falls Historical Society have recalled that different areas of the Austin Lawrence House were rented to different families. The upstairs was apparently a favorite with newlyweds; sometimes one couple would live in the two rooms on the left and another in the room on the right. Another family might have lived downstairs. Water had to be hauled from a spigot outside. The entrance to the bathroom was from the porch. Until that time, an outhouse, located close to the barn, was used. This was the only bathroom until the interior bathroom was added for tenant Dr. Wrenn. In recent times, the house has been known locally as the Wrenn house because a Dr. Wrenn lived in the house as a tenant.

The Austin Lawrence House was owned by the mill and used as rental property until it was deeded to the Randolph County Heritage Society in the 1990's. In 2000, the Heritage Society sold the house subject to a preservation easement. The current owners

of the house have maintained historical preservation and have interest in obtaining National Historic Register designation.

## **STATEMENT OF SIGNIFICANCE**

The Austin Lawrence House, Ca. 1848, meets Local Landmark criteria as it is significant in Randolph County for its distinctive Greek Revival architectural construction. The Austin Lawrence House maintains an outstanding degree of original integrity with regard to location, design, setting, materials, workmanship, feeling, and association. Its unique location and distinctive architecture represents an established and familiar visual feature of Franklinville and Randolph County, N.C. The 160 years of history represented by the Austin Lawrence House starts with the expanding growth of North Carolina in the early 1800's, the development of Randolph County, the founding of Cedar Falls, and the spreading of industrialization from New England to and through the South. It includes the process of people leaving their subsistence farms and becoming laborers in southern cotton mills. Significance also lies within Austin Lawrence, a young man from Marlboro, New Hampshire, with New England ways and styles of construction and interest in investing in southern cotton mills.

## **ARCHITECTURAL CONTEXT**

Architectural History of Randolph County, 1985

By: Lowell McKay Whatley, Jr

The Austin Lawrence House, ca. 1848, is one of the landmarks of the Greek Revival style in Randolph County. The builder of the two-story center-hall plan house drew inspiration for the decorative trim work from a well-known, widely used builder's guide, "The Practical House Carpenter", by Asher Benjamin (1773-1845) who was a New England builder-architect whose published manuals helped popularize the Greek Revival style all across the United States. A mantel in the house is directly adapted from Benjamin's book, specifically from Plate 51, "Design for a Chimney Piece". The mantel is a traditional "post and lintel" form with a Greek key design decorating the frieze; this is carried on turned colonnettes. The firebox is framed by a molded architrave with bull's-eye corner blocks. The local artisan's rendition of the mantel is somewhat crude and two-dimensional when compared to the Asher Benjamin design, but it is important to find that Randolph County craftsmen tried to imitate published examples of their work.

The house has a great deal of additional high-quality work. The molded cornice is carried across the gable to form a classical pediment; the gable is covered with sheathed siding as is the area sheltered by the Doric gallery across the façade. The double-leaf entrance is framed by sidelights in a symmetrically molded architrave with beveled corner blocks. The house is built into the hillside so that the rear façade displays only a single story; the central door on the rear façade is set in a cross-topped architrave with transom. Nine-over-nine double-hung sash are used on the ground floor, with 9/6 sash on the upper story. The house also features interior chimneys, molded two-panel doors and an open staircase with turned newel post and square balusters.

## **CONSTRUCTION TECHNOLOGY & SEQUENCE**

(Analysis Provided by “Historic Structure Report, The Austin Lawrence House, Spring 2001,” Randolph Community College Historic Preservation Technology Program, Benjamin Briggs, Program Head)

### **Construction Dates**

This historically valued house consists basically of two separately dated sections. One section is a two-story structure constructed in 1848, and a second section, a one-story wing added to its west side, circa mid-to-late 1850's. Dating of the wing was done through methods of examining saw markings, nails, materials, and their applications. Another dating note is from an advertisement in a newspaper for the home's sale in the mid 1850's. Although the ad describes a covered passageway to the kitchen, it has not been determined whether it refers to the current kitchen located in the wing portion or to some other outbuilding that would be typical of the era. Within the interior spaces of both sections other remodeling work has taken place. These remodels during other time periods were probably done to accommodate the introduction of electricity, indoor plumbing, for use as boarding house, and as rental property.

### **One-Story Wing Section Overview**

Although not exactly in dimensionally comparison, architectural features were done in Greek Revival style to match the two-story portion. The west-end gable has the completely enclosed molded cornice similar to the two-story portion's gables. The front porch covers approximately two-thirds of the wing portion but extended across the entire wing originally. A portion of it was enclosed at the west end to accommodate an indoor bathroom and small dining area off the kitchen circa 1920's. The bathroom's access after this remodel was from the front porch, thus allowing the home to be used as a boarding house.

Front and rear entrance doors in the wing portion are from a more recent remodeling probably circa 1970's. The windows date historically (circa 1850) on the front façade as 9 X 9 pane, double-hung sash type and the rear façade being as 6 X 9-pane, double-hung sash type. One exception are two modern replacement-style windows as also the doors dating circa 1970's and reduced in size from their original types.

The wing roof also was probably wood shingled originally, as pieces were again found in its attic crawl space area and then replaced by a galvanized steel standing-seam roof type. Exterior siding portions of the house wing are covered in clapboards having also an approximate 5 ¾ exposure except under the porch roof and within the enclosed gable end where those areas are covered by horizontal boarding of approximately 9" exposure. Portions of the clapboards on the wind were replaced with a pressed-fiber type siding door during another remodeling. These siding areas close off the porch bathroom door and reduced the window size openings for the aforementioned replacement windows. After closing off the outside entrance, the bathroom was then enlarged to its current size

by removal of the dinette partition wall with access from the kitchen allowing the home to be used for rental property.

### **Two-Story Section Overview**

Exterior features are done in Greek Revival style with various elements unique to the area's vernacular architecture of the time period. Most notable is the completely enclosed horizontal portion of the molded cornice on the gable ends. A covered portico or porch extends across the entire front with entrance into the house through a double set of side-lighted, paneled doors in the front, and a single paneled door having a three pane window transom over it at the rear. There is also a paneled door leading into the enclosed basement area below the rear second-story portion from the interior hall. All doors date from the original 1848 construction.

Windows date historically on the front façade as 9 X 9-pane, double-hung sash type on the first floor while the rear façade and second story have a 6 X 9 pane, double-hung sash type. The original roof material was probably wood shingles, as pieces were found in the attic craw space area. Currently the roof covering is asphalt/fiberglass shingles over the tongue-and-groove boards used as sheathing.

Exterior siding portions of the house are covered in clapboards having an approximate 5 ¾ exposure, except under the porch roof and within the enclosed gable ends. Those areas are covered by horizontal boarding of approximately 9" exposure.

### **Floor Plan/Main Structure Framing**

The interior is a center-hall floor plan with one room on either side of the hall, one pile (or room) deep on the first floor. The second floor is of a two-pile depth due to the home being constructed on a hillside. The perimeter wood sill foundation rests on large stones buried in the ground, with the exception of piers supporting the sill along the rear portion. These rest on a large rock outcropping having been in-filled between to enclose a basement area. Likely smaller piers are also used to support interior sectional floor joist beams as required where the ground slopes from the rear to the front of the house. The basement area below the two-story rear area provides the only access beneath this portion of the house. The main structural system is of timber-framed post-and-beam method design having joinery mortised and tenoned with pegs. A unique horizontal lap joint design was found on a sill beam having angular cuts and notches with a type of key inserted. This joinery design was located on the north rear sill beam, supported by the piers on the rock outcropping.

### **ARCHAEOLOGY and ACCESSORY STRUCTURES**

The property upon which is located the Austin Lawrence House contains many points of archaeological interest. The following points have been researched by Randolph Community College's Historic Structure Report and are highlighted by a locator map attached to this Landmark report:

Point A contains a slab of natural rock that is about twelve feet in length across the front. Handmade brick and smaller rock are laid with mortar in a twelve feet square and several more rocks are in a pile in the left rear corner, possibly once being a chimney. Point A looks as if it was a smokehouse or even a kitchen in the past. Letter B on the property map signifies rocks in a circle, which no longer exist. According to a local resident, this is where a washhouse once was located. These rocks were probably once part of a fire pit used to heat water.

There is an old roadbed that leads to Area C on the property map. The old roadbed is located off the right rear corner of the house. The road continues up a hill leading to an area about sixteen feet across, which contains glass, pottery, intact bottles, leather shoe soles, and small pieces of galvanized metal roofing material. This debris could be from the Austin Lawrence House or the local train depot located near the property. Most of the debris is from the early to mid-20<sup>th</sup> century era.

Area D on the property map is located down hill closer to the house. This area contains remains of a barbed-wire fence, perhaps used for fencing in farm animals. Also, ceramic fence insulators were found in fence post and in surrounding trees. According to data the fence is probably from around the 1940's or later because of the use of electrical insulators. There is a mound of dirt about sixteen feet in length located just down the hill from the debris. This could be a field termination row, which is the result of clearing a field or garden. Remaining terraces are visible directly behind the house, which are covered by brush and trees. These terraces were man-made and at one time contained an apple and peach orchard according to an 1852 newspaper article written by Austin Lawrence when attempting to sell his home.

Area E is a probable roadbed located beside the barn. This road is flat, and starting behind the barn is built up with fieldstone and brick, which is very similar to the type used on the 1848 home. The roadbed ends behind the house close to the rock slab foundation. This could have been used to get to the house from the backside of the barn where horses or wagons could have been kept. Area F is another roadbed which is terraced with brick and rock and when followed off the property leads to the location of the old train depot.

Area H designates the location of an old railroad bed. In 1894, the Cape Fear and Yadkin Valley Railroad came through Cedar Falls with a factory rail line coming from Greensboro to Franklinville. The tracks no longer exist, but the railroad bed is still obvious, running in front of the Austin Lawrence House. This help to explain why the home was once used as a boarding house for passengers of the railroad.

Behind the house coming from the left corner stands an old barn. Mr. Joe Corner built the barn in the late 1930's. Wire nails are found throughout the structure. The foundation is a dry-lay of handmade brick and fieldstone. There are two boards on the

back sliding door of the barn that contain small raised letters , part of which read “Cedar Falls, NC”, probably indicating origination from the local textile mill.

## **MAP AND PLANS**

A Geographical Information System (GIS) air photograph map, (produced by the Randolph County Planning Department) of this property reflecting the structure and its relation to nearby streets and other buildings is included as part of this report. The map identifies and labels all accessory buildings and structures on the property, including the exterior of the Austin Lawrence House. Detailed floor plans are maintained by the Randolph County Tax Department, records of which are available to the Randolph County Historic Landmark Preservation Commission. In addition, significant drawings including landscape features, moldings and hardware, and construction sequence are detailed by sketches and drawings in work entitled “The Austin Lawrence House”, Spring 2001, Prepared by Randolph Community College Students, Under the direction of Benjamin Briggs 11, RCC Historic Preservation Technology Program Head, a copy of which is maintained in the records of the Randolph County Historic Landmark Preservation Commission and the Randolph County Planning Department.

## **PHOTOS**

Submitted as part of this report are digital photographs, (including a compact disk) prepared by the Randolph County Planning Department. The photographs include significant landscape features to reflect physical setting. Also included are pictures of subsidiary buildings located on the property. Interior photographs are provided that reflect notable trim and significant interior features.

## **HISTORICAL RESEARCH CERTIFICATION**

Historical data used for this report will be reviewed in public hearing by the Randolph County Historic Landmark Commission. A final record of Certification after public hearing will be reflected in the official minutes of the Commission.

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Chairman, Randolph County Historic Landmark  
Preservation Commission

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Date