



As the Deep River wanders through North Carolina's Piedmont plateau, forming a horseshoe bend in northern Moore County, there stands on a hilltop above it one of the first

large houses of the state's upland frontier country, the House in the Horseshoe. Built around 1772 by Phillip Alston and sometimes known as the Alston House, its walls bear numerous scars and bullet holes sustained during a Revolutionary War skirmish.

REVOLUTION

During the American Revolution, groups of citizen-soldiers waged irregular warfare in the Carolina backcountry. Whigs supported American Independence, while Loyalists or Tories remained loyal to Great Britain.

During the war, Philip Alston was a prominent leader of the Revolutionary cause. On the morning of July 29, 1781, while Alston and his Whig militiamen camped outside the House in the Horseshoe, a Loyalist raiding party, commanded by the notorious Col. David Fanning, surprised and attacked them. During the ensuing skirmish, the Loyalists ignited a cart filled with straw and rolled it into the house, attempting to set it on fire. After several casualties on both sides, Alston surrendered. The house stood riddled with bullet holes, many of which remain.

Although Alston was distinguished as a colonel in the Whig militia, a justice of the peace, and a state senator, his career was marked by scandal. He was twice indicted for murder, removed as a justice of the peace, and suspended from the state legislature for a variety of reasons. After escaping from a Wilmington jail in 1790, where he was being held in contempt of court, Alston fled to Georgia, where an unknown assassin killed him in 1791.

RETREAT

Before fleeing the state, Alston sold his Moore County plantation to Thomas Perkins. In 1798, Gov. Benjamin Williams acquired the twenty-five-hundred-acre plantation and renamed it "Retreat." In addition to serving four one-year terms as the governor of North Carolina, Williams had been a captain under George Washington, fought at the Battle of Guilford Courthouse, was a member of the first board of trustees of the University of North Carolina, and served in the national Congress at Philadelphia.

Williams enlarged the house by adding two wings containing a kitchen and a master bedroom. One of Williams's ambitions was to become a planter. The growing of short staple cotton was becoming a profitable pursuit as a result of Eli Whitney's invention of the cotton gin, and the Horseshoe land was excellent for that purpose. In 1801 Williams planted forty-two acres of cotton; he grew nearly two hundred acres the following year. By 1803 his plantation was being worked by about fifty slaves and was valued at thirty thousand dollars.

Williams died on the plantation in 1814. Though he was first buried some distance away, his grave was subsequently relocated on the grounds of his former home. His family occupied the house until 1853. The dwelling changed ownership several times until 1954, when it was purchased and restored by the Moore County Historical Association. In 1955 the state acquired the property.

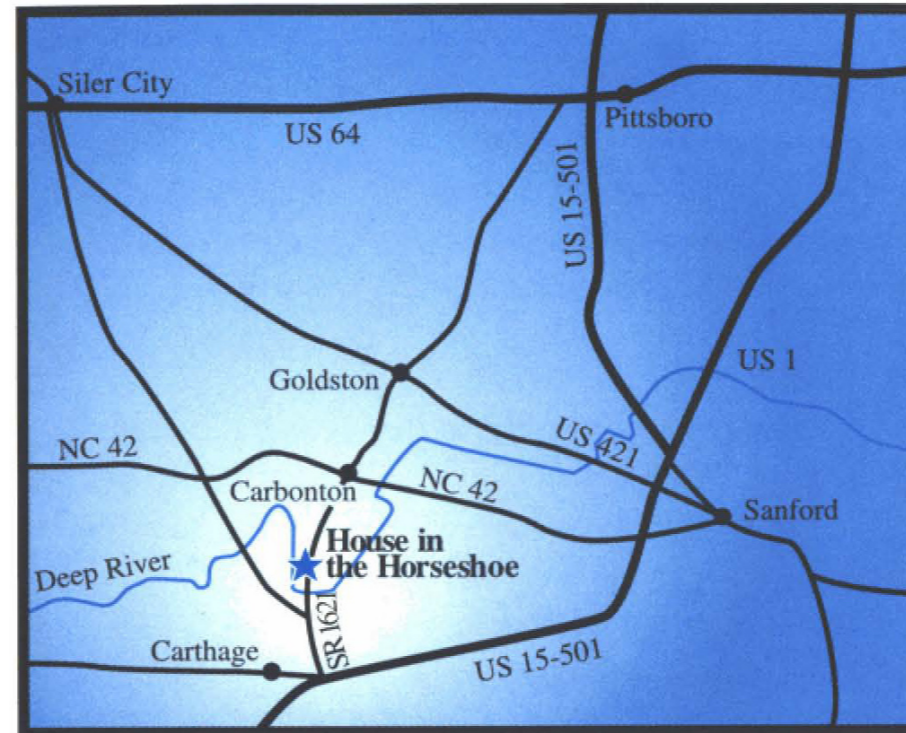


Gov. Benjamin Williams



ARCHITECTURAL GEM

The architectural style of the house follows that of the coastal lowlands. The two-story frame dwelling is a typical eighteenth-century plantation house, which features a gable roof with large double-shouldered Flemish bond chimneys and a shed porch. The center-hall plan reflects Governor Williams's early nineteenth-century remodeling of the house. It is distinguished by the strikingly elaborate and well-executed detail of the doorways and some of the interior woodwork, including the especially fine mantel in the north parlor. The interior is furnished with interesting late colonial and early Federal-period pieces.



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House In The Horseshoe



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the Scars of
the American
Revolution

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