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SOUTH CAROLINA INVENTORY FORM FOR HISTORIC DISTRICTS AND INDIVIDUAL PROPERTIES IN A MULTIPLE PROPERTY SUBMISSION

NAME OF MULTIPLE PROPERTY SUBMISSION: City of Laurens Multiple Resource Area

PREFERRED NAME OF PROPERTY: Williams-Ball-Copeland House

HISTORIC NAME(s) OF PROPERTY: Williams-Ball-Copeland House

COMMON NAMES(s) OF PROPERTY: The Villa; Hampton Heights; Franks House; Baptist Retirement Center

LOCATION: 544 Ball Drive

CLASSIFICATION: Building

OWNER: South Carolina Baptist Ministries For the Aging, Inc.
c/o Thomas Garrett
Post Office Box 4000
Darlington, S. C. 29532

DESCRIPTION

The Williams-Ball-Copeland House, constructed ca. 1859-61, is a two-story, brick residence. The exterior is stuccoed and scored. Built in the style of an Italian villa, the house has an irregular floor plan and a full basement. The cross-gable roof has a boxed cornice with returns and a hip-roof belvedere. A three-story tower with belvedere is located at the northwest corner of the building. Both belvederes are characterized by small windows and modillioned cornices. Fenestration includes single, paired, and tripartite windows, some with shelf architraves or round arches. The main entrance is located in a gabled ell which projects from the east elevation of the house; the entrance is recessed and has double doors and a semicircular fanlight. A single-story, hip roof porch with pedimented portico and paneled, wood pillars surrounds the south wing. Windows beneath the porch are floor-length, with nine-over-nine lights. The tower has small, round, four-light windows on the second story and a tall, tripartite, arched window on each elevation of the third story. A single-story kitchen ell (added ca. 1880) and a shed-roof porch are located on the west elevation. All exterior doors and windows were covered with plywood in 1981 to protect the house from vandalism. According to written sources, the interior has heart pine floors and doors, sixteen-foot ceilings, elaborate

mouldings, three staircases, and a marble mantel.[1] After the house was vandalized during the 1950s, a subsequent owner added mantels from several old homes in Laurens; he also replaced the wood stair rail with one of ram's horn.[2] Nevertheless, the Williams-Ball-Copeland House retains its overall architectural integrity. The house is situated on the crest of a prominent hill in the western section of the city. To the north of the house are two, small, brick buildings, which date from the same period as the house. One was originally the summer kitchen, and the other was a combination smokehouse and food storage house. Both were renovated as apartments ca. 1960, but retain their architectural integrity. The south lawn has a fountain and boxwood garden, dating from the nineteenth century.

SIGNIFICANCE

AREA(s) OF SIGNIFICANCE: Architecture, Communications, Politics/Government

LEVEL OF SIGNIFICANCE: L (for office use only)

SUMMARY OF SIGNIFICANCE

The Williams-Ball-Copeland House is significant for the contributions made by four of its former residents--John Drayton Williams, Beaufort Watts Ball, William Watts Ball, and Sarah Ball Copeland--to the fields of publishing, politics and government, and civic work. The house is also an outstanding example of the Italian villa style of architecture. Built ca. 1859-61 as a winter residence for Col. John Drayton Williams (1798-1870), the house was one of at least four in the city of Laurens built in this style; it is the only one which remains intact. Contractor for the house was Dr. John Wells Simpson (1796- 1881), who employed skilled, slave artisans in its construction; Dr. Simpson also built the Laurens County Courthouse (National Register, 1972). Col. Williams was a member of the South Carolina House of Representatives (1848-50) and the Southern Rights Convention of 1852. He was a member of the Secession Convention and a signer of the South Carolina Ordinance of Secession.[3] In 1875, Col. Beaufort Watts Ball (1830-1902) purchased the house and 122 acres of land from Col. Williams' estate. Ball was an attorney, Confederate Army veteran, member of the South Carolina Constitutional Convention of 1865, State Representative, Intendant of Laurens, Solicitor of the Seventh Judicial Circuit, and Laurens County Democratic Party Chairman. He was a strong supporter of Wade Hampton and frequently hosted political meetings at the villa during the Red Shirt campaign. In the late 1880s Col. Ball purchased a weekly newspaper, the Laurens Advertiser, and became its editor. When his health became poor, the paper was edited by his son and daughter, William Watts Ball and Sarah Ball (later Copeland)[4]. William Watts Ball (1868-1952) purchased the paper in 1890 and served as its editor for three years, beginning a prominent publishing career. He later served as editor of The State newspaper in Columbia (1913-23) and the Charleston News and Courier (1927-51). He was author of The State That Forgot, a book about South Carolina

history and political philosophy.[5] Sarah Ball Copeland (1876-1965) was born in the villa and lived there until 1954. Mrs. Copeland, in addition to working with the Laurens Advertiser, was active in the local chapters of the United Daughters of the Confederacy and the Daughters of the American Revolution, the Episcopal Church, and the Wednesday Club. The latter organization operated a small library in the 1920s, which under Mrs. Copeland's direction became the Laurens County Library. Mrs. Copeland served as Chairman of the Library Board of Trustees for twenty-seven years, during which time the library moved first to City Hall and later to a separate, new, library building on South Harper Street.[6] In 1959 the villa was sold to Clyde T. Franks (1885-1970), a prominent South Carolina preservationist, who renovated the house after it had suffered several years of vandalism.[7] Carl B. and Mary L. Smith purchased the property in 1973 from the Franks' estate and sold it to the present owners in 1979.[8]

ACREAGE: Approximately 3 acres

VERBAL BOUNDARY DESCRIPTION: The boundary of the Williams-Ball-Copeland House nomination is shown as the red line on the accompanying City of Laurens zoning map, which is drawn at a scale of 800 feet to the inch. The nominated property includes the historic house and outbuildings and the lot on which they are situated.

QUAD NAME: Laurens North

QUAD SCALE: 1:24000

UTM REFERENCE POINT(s): 17/405905/3817895

OTHER INFORMATION: The Williams-Ball-Copeland House is part of a sixty-nine-acre tract of land which is being developed as the Martha Franks Baptist Retirement Center. The main building has been completed, and work on an apartment complex is underway. Funds are being raised for the renovation of the villa, which will serve as a reception and administration building. To honor the donor of a $100,000 contribution to the restoration, the building will be named the James H. Thomason Administration Building. Renovation plans and specifications were prepared by Neal Architects of Greenville.[9]

FOOTNOTES

[1]Julia Chiles Lovell, The Villa: Monument and Beacon, Saga of Five Families (Clinton, S. C.: Jacobs Press, 1983), pp. 21, 23.

[2]Ibid., pp. 39, 42.

[3]Ibid., pp. 11, 18-20, 24. Other Italian villas known to have been built in Laurens were the Garlington-Todd House (substantially altered), the Col. J. H. Traynham House (demolished), and a residence on North Harper Street (demolished).

[4]Ibid., pp. 26-28.

[5]Ibid., pp. 26, 29-31.

[6]Ibid., pp. 26, 33-36.

[7]Ibid., pp. 39, 41-43; Book 133, p. 232, Laurens County Deeds, Laurens County Courthouse, Laurens, S. C.

[8]Lovell, pp. 45; Book 203, p. 302 and Book 220, p. 292, Laurens County Deeds, Laurens County Courthouse, Laurens, S. C.

[9]Lovell, pp. 49-51.