

*A house is just wood and bricks. It is the people who inhabit it and the events that happen there that shape it into a home and a place to be remembered. Such is the house built in 1840 by John Hamilton. The Hamilton House is the oldest brick home in Dalton, Georgia. It is a home rich in history . . .*

John Hamilton was born in 1803, in White Plains, Westchester County, New York, and worked as a civil engineer. While working on a Tennessee River project in Kingston he met and married, Rachel Wester. He and Rachel moved to Cross Plains (now Dalton), Georgia, in 1839, while he oversaw the construction of stone culverts and bridge approachments for the Western and Atlantic Railroad. At this time Cross Plains only had nine other families living there.

The land on which John chose to settle and build a home originally belonged to Cherokee Chief Youngbird. The Chief's favorite hobby, horse racing, led to his death as he raced down what is now Thornton Avenue. Buried west of the house near the railroad track, the Chief's ghost is supposed to haunt the tracks. All of the property of the Cherokee Indians in Georgia was confiscated

in 1834 by the Georgia Land Lottery. John bought the Chief's property consisting of five land lots, in 1838 from Mr. Absolem Holcomb, a land speculator, who had bought the property through the Georgia Land Lottery. John and Rachel lived in Youngbird's double log cabin while their brick home was being built. The property includes a fresh water spring that has an estimated flow of 430 gallons a minute, or 620,000 gallons in a 24 hour period. It was the spring that attracted Chief Youngbird, the Hamiltons, and later industry to the location.

John took great pride in his work and used his knowledge of stone and brick to build his home. It is said that John liked to sit on the large back porch so he could see the trains pass on a track that he had helped to construct. The home was built to last and has seen only two major renovations in its history. The walls throughout are of solid brick and wide wooden beams and rafters that are still sound and strong. The bricks were made on the property.

The construction of the home is timeless. The original portion of the home is quite large with four rooms and a large hall and staircase on the ground floor, upstairs rooms with dormers, and

a full basement. The kitchen, with a large fireplace, (6 feet wide and nearly five feet high) attracts a lot of attention because it is located in the basement. Because fire was a great hazard, most homes built during this time had kitchens that were located away from the main house. The main floor of the house was heated by four fireplaces and later by a coal fired furnace with vents that can still be seen in the foyer floor.

A few years after the house was completed, an addition was made with a kitchen and dining room on the ground level and a room above. There is a carriage house beside the main house.

In 1906 a room was built on the north end of the residence, a bedroom called "Mr. Moody's Room", for the foreman who was there for construction of No. 2 Mill for Crown Cotton Mills.

John recognized the importance of the spring on his property and had it walled in with brick. He built a spring house with a vaulted stone arch over it. The spring house was also used as an office where it was cool and quiet. The structure was seriously damaged in the blizzard of 1993 but its remains are still quite visible.

John was a wealthy landowner with a 1,000 acre working

plantation. He was active in county politics and served as a judge in the inferior court. It was said to be a happy home and a religious one also. Neighbors looked forward to visits and parties at the Hamilton House. John and Rachel were known for their gracious dinners and parties, and the children had a childhood of comfort and joy.

John and Rachel had eleven children. Four died very young and are buried near the Hamilton House in a fenced graveyard with four headstones and footstones still standing, but the lettering has disappeared with the ravages of time and weather. Five boys and two girls survived to adulthood.

A nearby mountain was named for John's wife and daughter, Mount Rachel, on which a large lighted star is displayed every Christmas season. Dalton's main downtown street, Hamilton Street, is named for John.

John and Rachel are buried in the Old Presbyterian Cemetery. He was first buried on the Hamilton House property but his remains were moved when Rachel died. John died in 1853 before the Civil War and Rachel, left with seven children and a huge plantation, proved to be an astute businesswoman and successful plantation owner.

The House would now see history at its door and in the halls and rooms and even on the lawn as the Civil War came to Georgia.

All five sons of John and Rachel enlisted in the Confederate Army, and all survived. During the war Rachel and the children went to live in Butts County in central Georgia. Rachel returned home before the end of the war and help nurse the soldiers hospitalized in her home. After the war she remained there until her death in 1876.

The house was used by both Confederate and Union forces as headquarters and as a hospital, first by Confederate Brigadier General Joseph H. Lewis, 1863-64. His brigade was called the "Orphan Brigade" because Kentucky was in the hands of the Union forces. General Joseph E. Johnston's Army of Tennessee spent the winter of 1863-64 in Dalton. Outnumbered and outflanked by Sherman's forces, the Brigade and Johnston evacuated Dalton May 12 and 13 in 1864.

The famous locomotive chase of "The General" went by the house and actually stopped near the location of Crown Cotton Mill to cut the telegraph lines and observed Colonel Jesse Glenn and his company of men drilling in the

fields in the Hamilton bottoms. Two hospital buildings were built on the property with lumber supplied by Rachel.

The house was used as a hospital near the war's end and tents were used for the army's headquarters. Dalton was spared Sherman's burning of Georgia and the historic home was saved.

In 1884 the home and plantation were sold to Crown Cotton Mills. Destined to always be known as the Hamilton House, mill superintendent Frank Hamilton and his wife Maud moved in in 1904. Janice Kreisler, their daughter, was the last Hamilton to live in the old house. She moved to Atlanta in 1983. Oddly enough, the Frank Hamilton Family is of no relation to the John Hamilton Family which originally owned the house.

Cousins, David, Lane and Clay Hamilton (descendents of John Hamilton) and officers of Crown America restored the house in 1984 to make it the office headquarters of Crown Cotton Mills/Crown America. According to David Hamilton, company president, in 1984, "We would like to retain the original plan and also retain progression work through the years."

The home/office was sold to the Whitfield Murray Historical Society

in 1997 by Crown Cotton Mill Properties.

In April of 2006 Kevin McAuliff, an historic preservation specialist with the North Georgia Regional Development Center, noticed a bulge in the west wall of the house while conducting a visual inspection. The home was closed while options for and means of funding necessary repairs were assessed. With support from the City of Dalton and a federal grant, repairs were made and the building was declared structurally sound in 2010. Repairs included construction of a rear porch and a new red cedar shingle roof. An ongoing project of the Whitfield-Murray Historical Society, plans are to continue restoring the house and grounds to its past beauty. The house is on the National Register of Historic Places and is Historic Site Number 1 on the Georgia Historical Commission Marker in Whitfield County.

The Hamilton House is located at 701 Chattanooga Avenue in Dalton, Georgia. For more information, visit [www.whitfield-murrayhistoricalsociety.org](http://www.whitfield-murrayhistoricalsociety.org), Whitfield-Murray Historical Society, 715 Chattanooga Avenue, P.O. Box 6180, Dalton, GA 30722. Phone: 706-278-0217 Email: [wmhs@optilink.us](mailto:wmhs@optilink.us)

*Information compiled by Jane Harrell*

# THE HISTORIC



*Hamilton*

*House*

DALTON'S OLDEST BRICK HOME,  
BUILT 1840

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701 Chattanooga Ave.  
Dalton, Georgia 30721