

Railroad Street Gibson

claimed the name first is a matter of debate.

On the Lumber River, we find the unique settlement of Riverton. This quaint "suburb" of Wagram is summer home for some, retirement home for others, and permanent home for a few of Wagram's leading citizens. Because of the writers, teachers, preachers, and others who have lived there, Riverton is considered one of the intellectual centers of the county.

Although Wagram was not incorporated until 1912, the area around it was settled during the period of the American Revolution. The early settlers were almost entirely Scottish, moving here from the Cape Fear Valley area. The town was named by two lumbermen who built a tram road from Red Springs in connection with their business. The lumbermen were brothers, James and William Williams. It was they who called the community "Vagrom." Why this very German name was chosen for this very Scottish settlement has never been fully explained, except that one of the Williams brothers was a student of European history and an admirer of Napoleon, who fought a battle at Wagram, Austria.

It is interesting to note that many of the Scots in the Wagram area are not Presbyterian but Baptist. The Reverend Daniel Whyte and his wife came to the area and converted many of the local people to the Baptist faith. Spring Hill Baptist Church is one of the oldest in the area, having organized at Spring Hill in 1813. It was moved to Wagram much later. At Spring Hill, the Reverend Mr. Whyte preached in the morning in English and in the afternoon in Gaelic, for there were many Scottish people in the settlement who knew no English.

Another historic church in Wagram is Montpelier Presbyterian Church, which was originally at Montpelier, the stagecoach stop on the Lumber River. Many years prior to the settlement of Wagram, the community center was called Spring Hill and was located approximately a mile west of the present town. Here on the banks of Shoe Heel Creek were the Spring Hill Baptist Church, the Spring Hill School, organized in 1820, a grist mill, and a number of houses. The Spring Hill School or Academy was one of the first schools in what is now Scotland County. The nearby Spring Branch Baptist Church is one of the oldest black churches in the area, dating back to the days of the Civil War.

The Wagram community has long been noted for its scholarly atmosphere. Numbers of ministers, lawyers, teachers, and writers have called it home. John Charles McNeill and Gerald Johnson are two of the best known.

The McNeill Memorial Gardens and the restored home of John Charles McNeill are two significant landmarks in the community. Some

years ago, the house was moved from its original location near Wagram to the gardens and its restoration began. McNeill was awarded the highest literary award in the state, the Patterson Cup, in 1905. President Theodore Roosevelt made the presentation. In his remarks, President Roosevelt said, "Mr. McNeill's poetry is an achievement of which the Commonwealth of North Carolina and the South have a right to be proud."

In the McNeill Memorial Gardens also stands the restored home of one of the first temperance societies in America, the Richmond Temperance and Literary Society. The society was organized in 1853; and this "home," built shortly thereafter of red bricks which were molded by hand and burned in homemade kilns. In the center of the ceiling was painted a group of gold stars, one for each member. If a member died, his star was painted over with silver. If a member broke his pledge and drank, the star was painted black. Some stars were said to have several coats of black and gold paint, for only when one reformed was his star painted gold again. Here, the members met regularly to read poetry and other literature and to debate the issues of the day. At the apex of the roof a tall upside down goblet, pointing its base to the sky, stood on a large open wooden book. The goblet represented the temperance idea, and the book represented the literary idea. Sherman's army, moving north during the closing days of the Civil War, shot off the goblet and the book; but they have since been restored. The Temperance Hall is registered as a national historic place by the Department of the Interior.

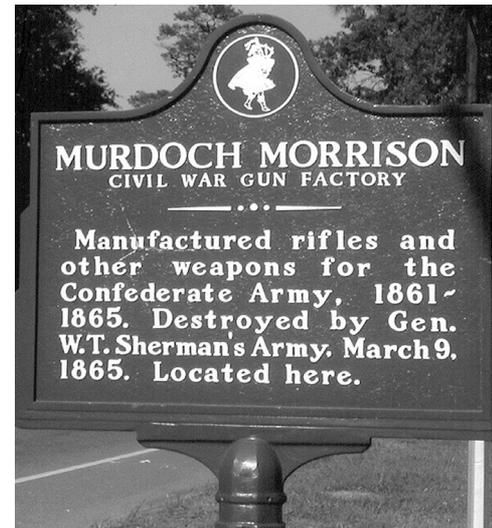
John Charles McNeill was buried in Spring Hill Cemetery, which is adjacent to the McNeill Memorial Gardens, the Temperance Hall, and his restored home. On the monument is engraved



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one of his most quoted poems, "Sundown":  
 "Hills, wrapped in gray, standing along  
 the west;  
 Clouds, dimly lighted, gathering slowly;  
 The star of peace at watch above the crest –  
 Oh, holy, holy, holy.  
 We know so little what is best;  
 Wingless, we move so lowly;  
 But in thy calm all-knowledge let us rest –  
 Oh, holy, holy, holy."

One of the most historic spots in the county is Laurel Hill Presbyterian Church, known locally as Old Laurel Hill. One of the earliest communities in the county developed here. The church, which was to be the mother church for most of the other Presbyterian churches in the area, was established in 1797. This was a thriving business community in the post-Revolutionary War period. Mr. Duncan McFarland operated a tavern and stagecoach stop for the convenience of passengers on the New York-New Orleans stage. He owned much land and is said to have laid out a sizable town, which he hoped would grow to rival New York, New Orleans, and Paris in time. It was here that the Scottish Fair was held for years after its beginning in 1783. The fair was the highlight of the year for many of the local settlers and for those



Civil War Gun Factory – Laurel Hill

who came from some distance to spend the week or so camping nearby. As time went on, the fair became so boisterous that some citizens began to complain; and in 1873 a bill was passed in the state legislature to abolish the fair. Old Laurel Hill declined as the business center of the county after the railroad came through, laying its tracks to the south. Old Laurel Hill was on the route of Sherman's army when it passed through in 1865, and the church yard was used as a camping place. Legend has it that the soldiers used some of the benches from the church to build a bridge over the nearby creek and that some of the soldiers carved names and initials in the bell tower.

Cool Springs Methodist Church and Silver Hill Presbyterian Church, two of the oldest black churches in the county, both grew out of Old Laurel Hill Presbyterian Church. Both of these are landmarks in this part of the county.

The route of the stagecoach line which ran through what is now Scotland County has been marked as a Boy Scout project. The route ran from Gilchrist Bridge, near present-day Wagram, by way of Old Laurel Hill, to a point on the South Carolina line near Gibson. An 1839 post office map shows the route and has marked in the area, which is now Scotland County, only Montpelier (across the Lumber River), Laurel Hill (now Old Laurel Hill), Stewartville, Gibson, Wagram, or present-day Laurel Hill was marked because they did not exist at that time.

During the years of the Civil War, the Richmond Mill Dam was the site of a thriving gun factory, operated by Mr. Murdock Morrison. Of course, it

