

SOUTH CAROLINA STATE HOSPITAL
THE MILLS BUILDING

Mrs. Inez N. Fripp
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To the immediate right of the main entrance to the campus of the South Carolina State Hospital, Columbia, S.C., is one of the most beautiful and historic buildings in the state, as well as in the nation.

This magnificent structure, The Mills Building, named for the designer, Robert Mills of Charleston, S.C., who attained national recognition, was the second authorized and the third completed mental hospital in the United States built with public funds, for the exclusive care of the mentally ill.

On December 20, 1821 the South Carolina General Assembly passed an Act²²⁶⁹ establishing and authorizing the construction of a building for the care of the mentally ill.

The South Carolina State Hospital in Columbia, S.C. was the SECOND state mental hospital to be established in the United States and the THIRD to be ready for patients, December 18, 1827. The FIRST patient, a white woman from Barnwell county, S.C., was admitted to the Mills Building, the original facility, on December 12, 1828.

The enthusiastic, dedicated pioneers in the General Assembly of S.C. who were responsible for the establishment of the mental hospital were Colonel Samuel Farrow 1760-1824, of Spartanburg, known as The Father of the ^{Asylum} Hospital, and Major William Crafts, Jr., 1787-1826, of Charleston.

While in the United States Congress, 1813-1816, Colonel Farrow endeavored to establish a place for the mentally ill. This was not successful, and when elected to the S. C. House of Representatives in 1816, he continued to strive for the establishment of a facility for that purpose.

In this effort he was ably supported by Senator William Crafts, Jr., a brilliant and eloquent orator.

Their combined inspiration, determination and perseverance enabled them to persuade the South Carolina General Assembly to enact legislation authorizing the institution they felt was so urgently needed.

The Mills Building

The FIRST state hospital for the mentally ill was opened in Williamsburg, Virginia, on October 12, 1773. The SECOND to be opened was the Eastern State Hospital, Lexington, Kentucky, on May 1, 1824.

Although the South Carolina State Hospital was the SECOND to be state authorized and established, delays in construction resulted in it being the THIRD to be ready for patients on December 18, 1827.

The appropriation of the South Carolina General Assembly in 1821 was \$30,000.00 for the grounds, a four acre square almost within the "Town of Columbia", and for the building to be constructed of brick and stone, covered with slate or tile.

When completed and furnished, the fireproof building, spacious enough to accomodate one hundred and twenty patients, was estimated to have cost approximately \$100,000.00.

According to the architect, Robert Mills, "The building combined elegancy with permanency, economy and security from fire - - - the facade represents a center and two wings, with a cupola for ventilating the upper stories. The entrance of the center building is under a grand portico of six massive Greek Doric columns four feet in diameter, elevated on an open facade, and rising the entire height of the wing buildings, the whole surmounted with a pediment - - -."

The roof garden of the Mills Building has been claimed as the first in America.

The rooms of this building are vaulted with brick resting on brick walls and supporting floors above, with a flat roof and parapet.

On the second floor are the original four very large parlors and the spacious entrance hall the width of the building with the graceful, curved stairway. This beauty with the unusual entrance door with typical Mills glass fan-shaped arrangement attract admirers of old structures.

In the beginning there were many very small rooms for patients.

On the ground level were the dirt-floored kitchen and the dining area, which existed for many years until there was devised a system of dumb waiters to convey meals from a much improved kitchen to several dining rooms in quarters occupied by patients.

The original center building is five stories with the wings four stories high.

In 1838 an additional wing was completed at each end of the Mills Building' a second wing at each end was added in 1842; and ~~another addition to each came later,~~ ^{considered, but did not materialize}

Newspaper accounts and historical documents of the South Carolina State Hospital describe the laying of the cornerstone of the Mills Building on July 22, 1822 with appropriate Masonic ceremonies.

This very important cornerstone has not been in evidence for many years and the belief is that it was long ago hidden beneath additional brickwork. All efforts to locate this marker have failed.

Members of the family of the contractor or builder of the Mills Building, William Gray, also have knowledge of this cornerstone and one relative recalled that as a teenager he visited the Mills Building and personally saw the marker. Unfortunately, he was unable to remember the exact location.

The Mills Building was ready for patients on December 18, 1827, but there was great difficulty in persuading families to send their mentally ill to the facility for them in Columbia.

Because of this reluctance, the first patient, a young white woman from Barnwell county, was not admitted until a year later, December 12, 1828.

Of interest is that this young woman's mother was employed as the first matron to care for her.

Admissions came very slowly, and there were advertisements for patients who were accepted from South Carolina, North Carolina, Georgia, Florida, Alabama and Tennessee.

Interesting is the story of the massive twelve foot brick wall which was constructed in 1827 by the builder, William Gray, to enclose the Mills Building.

This barrier was on three sides of the four acres property and extended in front of the Mills Building for about a third of a block from each corner. Directly in front, for about the length of the building, was a low brick wall surmounted by a wrought iron picket fence.

This same iron picket fence was moved to the new location of the hospital entrance at Bull Street and Elmwood Avenue in 1896; and again used in the modern entrance of 1958.

July 26, 1962 marked another progressive step at the South Carolina State Hospital in which the Mills Building area was involved.

In a special ceremony there began the lowering of the 1827 twelve-foot high brick wall for so many years associated with the mentally ill. Most of this formidable barrier was lowered to about four feet, including a surmounting wrought iron picket fence.

The lowering of the wall was far reaching in importance and influence, and in creating a different, more healthful attitude toward the mentally ill, as well as materially aiding in the improvement and rehabilitation of many patients. There is now an unobstructed view of the beautiful campus and the unusual rear of the Mills Building, definitely different to the magnificent entrance to the North. Patients are benefited by being able to see adjacent areas and the traffic which give the feeling of being a part of the city.

For numerous years the Mills Building was occupied by white men and women patients.

As the patient population gradually increased, accommodations in the Mills Building became so overcrowded that wooden buildings for men were constructed nearby and many were cared for there until completion of the south wing a block away to the East.

With the construction of additional buildings, the white women patients were transferred; and for a long while the Mills Building was occupied by Negro women patients.

When the last of these patients were transferred to the State Park Unit or Division (now the Crafts-Farrow State Hospital), the Mills Building was once more completely renovated and refurnished as a modern residence for women student and graduate nurses - ^{in 1937} the South Carolina State Hospital Training School for Nurses was then in operation.

With the discontinuance of the Training School for Nurses, there were more renovations and the Mills Building is now a modern residence for women personnel, nurses, nursing assistants, etc., as well as affiliate student nurses from general hospitals throughout the state present for special instruction referable to mental illness.

There is a modern cafeteria and serving area in the east wing, ground level, for office personnel, residents of the Mills Building, and many of the professional staff.

All through the years, the west wing, ground level, had remained in almost the original state; dirt floors, small, dark rooms, no conveniences.

This entire area was completely renovated, remodeled and transformed into spacious, well lighted, modern accommodations for the Personnel Division of the S. C. State Department of Mental Health, as of February 7, 1962.

There is every reason for South Carolinians to have a feeling of pride in the original building, the distinguished creation of Robert Mills, which was perhaps the first mental hospital designed with a new idea of humane mental treatment. It certainly represents an early and significant step in improved medical and mental techniques.

The Mills Building, along with the South Gate at Pickens and Calhoun Streets and the Wall are included on the list of the City's Historical and Cultural Buildings and Sites, adopted and revised by the Historical and Cultural Buildings Commission on January 3, 1967.