

Historical Research on the Joseph John Laughinghouse Residence (Flynn Christian Home), Greenville, N.C., for the Heritage Tour, 4 April 1981

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The Flynn Christian Home, a house constructed by Joseph John Laughinghouse around the turn of the century, is an historically significant structure associated with several prominent citizens of Greenville. Three generations of the O'Hagan and Laughinghouse families owned the property. Particularly during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, Charles James O'Hagan, Joseph John Laughinghouse, and Charles O'Hagan Laughinghouse devoted much of their time and energy towards improvement of the city and its residents.

The Joseph John Laughinghouse residence occupies part of lot twenty-two shown on early maps of Greenville--that is, the lot located on the northwest corner of Fifth and Pitt streets. The property was purchased on 20 November 1850 from John May, trustee, by Charles James O'Hagan. O'Hagan paid \$815 for lots nine, ten, twenty-one, and twenty-two. He likely built a home on lot twenty-two shortly after 1869, for that year he requested the right to lay off a homestead. The imposing structure is shown on an 1898 map of Greenville, along with a wood shed, an ice house, a small house, and a well.

O'Hagan's ability to construct his home and outbuildings resulted from his successful medical practice in Greenville. He did not begin his practice until the mid-1850s, but the ambition had been with him since his childhood in Ireland.

Charles James O'Hagan, son of John P. and Martha (O'Kane) O'Hagan, was born on 16 September 1821 in Londonderry County, Ireland, where his father edited a newspaper. O'Hagan was educated at Londonderry and Belfast and at Trinity College in Dublin. His parents moved to New York in 1840; John P. O'Hagan edited a Brooklyn, N.Y., journal after their arrival.

Their son followed them to New York in 1842. O'Hagan clerked in a New York grocery store after his arrival, but he moved to North Carolina shortly thereafter. He taught school in Kinston, Hookerton, and Greenville. While in Greenville, O'Hagan began the study of medicine.

Leaving Greenville in 1847, O'Hagan entered the Medical College of New York University, where in 1854 or 1855 he was graduated with high honors. During this time, he spent a year in Greenville practicing medicine to help support himself and his family. Following graduation, O'Hagan returned to Greenville to serve the people of Pitt County and North Carolina.

His practice was interrupted during the Civil War. Initially, O'Hagan served as assistant surgeon in the First North Carolina Cavalry. In 1862, he was appointed chief surgeon of the Thirty-Fifth N. C. Regiment of Infantry, serving until the end of the war.

After the war, O'Hagan carried on an extensive practice and participated in several professional organizations. He was an active member of the State Board of Health and was elected president of the Medical Society of North Carolina. He also was elected second vice president of the American Medical Association.

O'Hagan wed twice. He married Eliza Forrest (Forest?) of Greene County, probably before 1848. The union produced Eliza (10 July 1848-29 January 1919), who later married Joseph John Laughinghouse, and Martha (1850-1935), who apparently never married. Charles James O'Hagan Jr. was born to O'Hagan and his second wife, Elmira Clarke of Pitt County.

The will of O'Hagan, dated 30 March 1894 and proved on 5 January 1901, indicates that Martha O'Hagan was to receive all of her father's household and kitchen furniture. The residue of the estate was to be

divided among his three children; J. J. Laughinghouse served as executor.

It is not clear how or why, but the children apparently agreed to allow Joseph John and Eliza O'Hagan Laughinghouse to build a new residence on the site of O'Hagan's house. What is now the Flynn Christian Home appears on a February, 1905, map of Greenville. Since O'Hagan's home appears on the 1898 map and another map published in 1900, and since O'Hagan's will was not proved until January 1900, it is clear that the Laughinghouse residence was built between 1900 and 1905. According to the Eastern Reflector (Greenville) of 3 February 1904, however, <sup>John</sup> Laughinghouse's daughter, Elizabeth, and Secretary of State James Bryan Grimes were married in Laughinghouse's residence that day. It is likely, therefore, that the house was built between 1900 and 1903, inclusive.

That Laughinghouse built his impressive home (noted for its tower, wainscotting, delicate interior woodwork, and parqueted floors) at the turn of the century probably is a reflection of his personal wealth and prestige as a public servant. His ability to invest in such an impressive house was grounded in years of hard work and judicious planning on his farm near Grimesland.

Laughinghouse was born near Grimesland on 4 October 1847, the son of Joseph Henry and Mary A. (Cherry) Laughinghouse. He was educated at Trinity School, Chocowinity (1857-1861) and at Horner's Military Academy, Oxford (1862-1863). The Civil War interrupted his education. Laughinghouse at the age of sixteen entered Company H of the 71st Regiment of Junior Reserves as a first lieutenant. On 1 October 1864 he was promoted to the rank of captain in Company H of the same regiment.

Following the war, Laughinghouse clerked briefly in a local mercantile firm and, at the age of twenty-one, commenced farming on his ancestral farm. He purchased the farm using credit. Originally, he grew cotton, but abandoned that crop in favor of tobacco. Using the tenant system, Laughinghouse succeeded in making money each year he grew tobacco. In 1901, he cultivated over 160 acres and sold over \$20,000 worth of his crop. His farm in 1901 supported fifteen horses.

Laughinghouse also achieved success as a Democrat. He served as a member of the North Carolina House in the assemblies of 1905, 1907, 1908, and 1915. He also served as Superintendent of the N.C. State Prison in Raleigh from 1909 to 1913.

He and his wife, who were married on 11 May 1870, raised seven children. Among them was Charles O'Hagan Laughinghouse, a prominent physician who served as president of the Medical Society of North Carolina and as State Health Officer from 1926 to 1930. Joseph John Laughinghouse died on 13 September 1927 and was buried in Cherry Hill Cemetery near the grave of Charles James O'Hagan.

The Laughinghouse residence declined somewhat even before Captain Laughinghouse died. By July 1926, he was renting the house, which Dr. Charles Laughinghouse referred to as "Mother's house," and was living off of the proceeds. Dr. Laughinghouse told his sister that the house was in bad repair and that his father would not repair it. In addition, the Presbyterian <sup>Church</sup> was preparing to build an imposing church at the corner of Pitt and Fifth streets, thus blocking the view of the house.

Following Captain Laughinghouse's death, the family attempted to sell the house. They negotiated during September 1927 with a Mr. Hassell and with Barnes S. Sumrell, but to no avail. Subsequently, Ned Laughinghouse, as executor of his father's estate, rented the house for \$75 a month. The Sumrell's decided to buy the house in April 1928, agreeing to pay \$6,000. They gave up the house in September, however, and continued to rent it for \$65 a month until January 1930.

The Laughinghouse family encountered many problems with the house after the Sumrell's vacated the premises. During April 1930, the house

was burglarized. Plumbing fixtures were stolen and windows were broken. At the same time, plaster in the upstairs rooms needed patching and the heating system needed repairs. In view of all of all of these factors, Ned Laughinghouse rented the house to the family of J. H. Manning for \$50 a month for a period of two years.

The home passed out of the hands of the Laughinghouse heirs on 1 August 1934 when the Mannings purchased it. It was purchased for use by the Flynn Christian Home from Nancy K. and Lee H. Hannah on 23 September 1964.