



(Staff Photo by Jordan)

1792 house shows classic revival, Victorian influences.

31 Meeting Street

Home Is Reflection Of Many Periods

(26TH IN A SERIES)

By JACK LELAND
Evening Post Staff Writer

Number 31 Meeting Street was one of the first houses in Charleston to install gaslights in the ante-bellum era and one of the last old mansions here to be wired for electricity.

It also is a reflection of many changes wrought in the 1792 building by its various owners. The delightfully Victorian Gothic "tea house" in its garden is only one symbol of the architectural styles imposed on the original structure.

For its various owners changed its exterior and interior to suit the housing fashion that happened to be most popular at the time. However, the present owners, Mr. and Mrs. Craig M. Bennett, are restoring the interior of the house to the mid-Georgian style its builder favored.

He was Lt. Gov. James Ladson, a member of a wealthy family of plantation owners. In 1792 the house opened on Ladson's Court (now Ladson Street) to the north. It was a typical Charleston "single house" with its north door leading into a hall that traverses the building. The present front entrance opens onto a piazza on the garden side; the change having been made in the 1830s.

Despite the many changes, some of the original woodwork still remains on the first two floors. After Ladson's widow died the property was acquired by Jeremiah A. Yates whose brother, Joseph, owned 27 Meeting St. One of the second floor mantels is similar to those in 27 Meeting St.

In 1832 Charles M. Furman, a banker, bought the house. He sold it in 1844 to Erastus M. Beach who drastically changed it. Beach added the piazzas on the garden side and squared off the third floor, adding the Empire era parapet roof line that exists today. Beach also erected the wrought iron fence and installed classic revival doors on both the Ladson Street and porch entrances.

The entrance hall was rearranged by Beach, the stairway being changed to coincide with the new front door location. Beach installed three black marble mantels typical of the ones popular in the 1840-50 period.

The house was one of the first in Charleston to be piped for gaslights and two lovely crystal chandeliers installed by Beach still remain.

The Victorian aspects of the present house date from after 1877 when Christopher P. Poppenheim bought the place following the death of Beach's widow. Poppenheim was a disabled Confederate veteran who owned a Cooper River rice plantation and conducted a hardware business on King Street in Charleston.

He built the large two-story bay fronting on Meeting Street and added a dining room. The charming tea house was part of a garden that included an olive tree, 20 orange trees, kumquats and other tropical shrubs, all planted by him.

Japanese laborers, brought to Cooper River after the Civil War to work the Poppenheim rice crops, laid the herringbone design brick garden walks. The wrought iron pedestrian gate on Meeting Street was installed by Poppenheim. It bore his initials "CP" in the center until the Bennetts bought the house. Bennett altered the lettering to its present "CB", the change in the final letter being fairly simple to accomplish.

The 1886 earthquake undid most of Poppenheim's remodeling and the characteristic "X" shaped cracks that earth tremors leave in masonry showed up in the plaster walls of many of the rooms. After the quake Poppenheim installed metal ceilings in most of the rooms. The Charleston tornado of 1938 seriously damaged the building, leaving the north weatherboarding detached from the house.

Poppenheim had four daughters, all of whom graduated from Vassar College, the first women from Charleston to attend that northern institution. One, the late Miss Mary B. Poppenheim, was a charter member and (in 1917-19) president general of the United Daughters of the Confederacy. She was responsible for the founding of the Paris, France, branch of the UDC.

With her sister, Louisa, she was an activist for equal rights for women. She participated in suffragist campaigns to obtain voting rights for women. She took part in a 30-year struggle that finally saw coeds admitted to the College of Charleston in 1918.

The Poppenheim sisters, according to a contemporary, were "wedded to the past", eschewing electricity for many years. Their home was almost a museum with its Victorian furniture and other antiques.

Miss Louisa Poppenheim resisted change in practically everything except women's rights. When Tradd Street was changed from one-way west to one-way east, she continued to drive westward on that thoroughfare, much to the consternation of other motorists and the dismay of police who were cowed by her gentle, but terribly firm, admonishments.

The Poppenheims installed the water fountain in the garden with the delightful figure of Narcissus holding an umbrella over his head. The figure is a duplicate of one in the Kaiserhof Gardens at Bad Neuheim, Germany.

The Bennetts hung a pair of beautiful wrought iron gates

at the vehicle entrance on Ladson Street. The gates date from the early 19th century and formerly were on Charlotte Street. They were redesigned for the new location and a large brass sunburst center was added.

The tropical trees of the Poppenheim garden were killed by cold weather less than 25 years ago but the garden still contains many old camellias and other Charleston garden favorites. It has a number of crepe myrtle trees, one of which is believed to be the oldest in the state. Relics of the past include pomegranate, tea, olive and Chinese camphor trees.

Keepi Poste

By Ba

Most of the correspondence to this column arising from the gun-control controversy has originated in the National Rifle Association or, apparently, at its behest. The theme invariably is the same: gun regulations gnaw at a basic American freedom.

Thus, it was refreshing to be given the views of leading manufacturers of firearms on the subject. This next is a joint statement:

"We favor and advocate federal legislation to control mail-order sales of rifles and shotguns in interstate commerce. We suggest that provision be made for those states which do not desire this assistance to exempt themselves by legislative action.

"For those states which feel the need for more stringent local control, we recommend that they employ the principle of statewide licensing of all gun owners under proper safeguards to protect the right of law-abiding and responsible citizens to own firearms. . . . It is our opinion that licensing gun owners is more practical, less costly and more effective than registering every individual gun. We are opposed to gun registration.

"We further advocate legislation at the federal and state level to impose stricter penalties for the misuse of firearms. We also believe more attention must be given to the enforcement of the 20,000 federal, state and local firearms laws already on the books.

"The gun in the hands of the juvenile, the mentally incompetent, the addict and the criminal is clearly a danger.

"The current discussion of firearms controls stems from the conflict between two fears: The anxiety of society over the illegal use of arms and the concern of law-abiding citizens that their right to use firearms legally will not be arbitrarily crippled. Most gun enthusiasts recognize that society's fears are real and legitimate.

"The individual who is blindly opposed to any law, however well-conceived, is n

Street Work ded Tomorrow

around the closed area without disruption, with city police and State Highway Patrolmen on duty directing the flow of vehicles.

Northbound traffic leaves Morrison Drive at Huguenin Avenue and goes north to Algonquin Road and over to Meeting Street.

Southbound traffic leaves Meeting Street at Cunningham Street over to Huguenin Avenue and down to Morrison Drive.