

ca. 1960s?

WILLIAM BELL'S HOUSE
c. 1800

23 Tradd Street
Home of Mr. & Mrs.
D. Trowbridge Elliman

Tradd Street between Church and the Bay was first burned out in the disastrous fire of Nov. 18, 1740, and was again burned out in the fire of 1778 which struck a newly rebuilt city. William Bell, a merchant of Charleston, dated this house for us by purchasing three feet to the west of his original burned-out lot to avoid a question of trespass by the foundations of the multiple dwelling he was building, which in later years became 21-23 Tradd. For the yard width of land he paid eighty pounds. This neighborhood was then prominent in the business life of the city, and it was here on Tradd Street near East Bay that Charleston's first white child was born.

In the year 1939, title was transferred to Mrs. Drapers's son and daughter-in-law, the present owners. Prior to 1931, 21-23 Tradd Street was owned by the late Susan P. Frost who made a business of restoring old houses. However, it was not until after its purchase in 1931 by the late Mr. and Mrs. Ernest G. Draper of Washington, D. C. that restoration was completed which also included the purchase of additional land to the south out to Longitude Lane on which a one story garage was constructed from old English brick as well as the garden walls. The fine iron balcony that now overlooks the garden was taken from a garage on Hayne Street which was purchased by the Drapers as well as the two story building of old English brick.

This house, one of a group of post revolutionary dwellings, fronting on Tradd Street, is entered by way of its charming Charleston garden from Longitude Lane during the tour.

The garden is notable and has attracted considerable attention

being photographed by Town and Country, National Geographic, House Beautiful, Holiday, and other magazines as one of the most distinctive small city gardens. The walls which enclose the garden are an addition and are copied after the walls of the cemetery adjoining St. Michael's Church to the south, but the focal point is the lovely old balcony rescued by the owners from a local tumbledown garage.

The interior of the house itself is mainly a restoration designed by the owners from plans by a New York architect, John Churchill, for comfortable living. The rooms have been turned around so that the kitchen is on Tradd Street alongside the dining room, while the living room occupies the whole rear of the house with french doors which open on to the patio and out into the garden. The roof is of old Charleston tile put together with tabby, as are the old English brick walls. The entire house is held together with earthquake rods from north to south. The interior beams and rafters are heart of pine and pecky cypress.



HISTORIC CHARLESTON FOUNDATION

51 MEETING STREET ∴ CHARLESTON, SOUTH CAROLINA 29401

THE WILLIAM BELL HOUSE, c. 1800
23 Tradd Street
Home Of Mr. and Mrs. Antony Mead Merck

This charming dwelling is one of a group of post Revolutionary War dwellings that were built to replace a sequence of buildings that were destroyed in the Great Fire of 1778. This disastrous fire swept along the harbor from Church Street to the Bay destroying 250 buildings in its path. The Fire was believed to have been an act of war and is thought to have been started by sailors who slipped into the city at night from a British man of war. Rebuilding began after the Revolutionary War and continued until the early 1800's.

William Bell, a prosperous merchant, built this dwelling and the attached dwelling at #21 Tradd. These buildings continued to serve as private dwellings throughout the 1800's, but lapsed into disrepair during the economic depression of the Reconstruction era.

In the 1920's the twin buildings, then in slum condition, were purchased by Mrs. Susan P. Frost, a Charlestonian who is recognized as one of the premier preservationist in the nation. Using her own funds, Mrs. Frost was responsible for saving numerous buildings in the old and historic district and organized Charleston's first preservation organization.

In 1931, the house was sold to conservation-minded owners who began restoration. It was one of the first houses restored in this part of the old and historic district.

Entrance (Traffic control only)



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DRAWING ROOM

When the house was renovated in the 1930's, the owners worked with a prominent New York architect, John Churchill, who transformed the interior from a hodge-podge of small rooms with collapsing walls - into this clever and functional floor plan. The architect rearranged the room by placing the drawing room along the private garden facade. The kitchen and dining rooms were relocated to the street facade. This provides both privacy for the family as well as the enjoyment of overlooking a splendidly restored walled garden.

GARDEN

The focal point of this distinctive small city garden is the handsome iron balcony that was installed during the 1930 restoration. This impressive architectural element had been stripped from an unknown Charleston building and left abandoned in a garage.

Please note the original tile roofing material. These are individually shaped units of baked clay. This particular shape is known as pantile. This roofing can still be seen in Charleston dwellings, but was relatively rare in the American colonies. The great abundance of wood encouraged early settlers to use wood shingles rather than the harder to produce tile.

The walls that define the courtyard were constructed from early brick materials that were salvaged from various sites. The brick is laid in the same bond that occurs in the walls adjoining St. Michael's cemetery.

DRAWING ROOM: (If Asked)

Interiors were planned by the owners with the assistance of Kathleen Rivers, a noted Charleston designer.

The portrait of Mr. Merck is by William Draper, of New York. Mr. Draper is considered to be one of America's most prominent portrait and landscape artist and his work is included in major collections throughout the world. His works included portraits of John F. Kennedy, Richard Nixon, The Shah of Iran, John D. Rockefeller as well as numerous world leaders and prominent public figures. This is the second generation of the Merck family to sit for Mr. Draper.

Furnishings include pieces inherited by the owners as well as pieces purchased in this country and abroad. The Oriental chest is one of a matched pair (the mate is in the dining room). Porcelains include Chinese export ware and Meissen ware (a ceramic ware made at Meissen near Dresden which was developed under the patronage of the King of Saxony about 1715)

Dining Room:

The owners preference for the traditional designs of the Georgian period are evident here in the handsome banquet table and the set of Georgian Revival dining room chairs which are ornamented with boldly carved motifs. The chairs and table are crafted in walnut. The serving table is English, Sheraton design and dates from the 1790's. The water color over the mantel is a rendering of the dining room at Kaminske House in Georgetown (S.C.), the ancestral home of Mrs. Merck, which has been donated for use as a House Museum. The oriental chest descended in Mr. Merck's family as did the very fine portrait of Johann Henreich Merck, a German aristocrat of the 18th century.

THE WILLIAM BELL HOUSE

1992

23 Tradd Street

c. 1800

Home of Mr. and Mrs. Marshall Sanford

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THE WILLIAM BELL HOUSE
Page 2

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THE WILLIAM BELL HOUSE
Page 2

DRAWING ROOM
(continued)

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DRAWING ROOM

This lively room houses a nice collection of antiques and family pieces.

The mahogany secretary on the wall opposite the garden wall dominates the room, late 18th century, c. 1790, English, with original glass.

The mahogany dumbwaiter, dates to the late 18th century, c. 1790, also English.

The Oak Hall chair, c. 1900, by the entrance hallway, is of particular interest. Tradition calls this form of chair a Bishop's seat, though it certainly is not literally. It probably served as a halltree, holding umbrellas and hats by a front door.

A set of 3 English Regency chairs, c. 1810, behind the sofa.

A set of Bedsteps, mahogany and leather, c. 1820, now holding books, by the fireplace.

The large impressionist painting is by a Vietnamese, Le Pho, who worked in Paris. Titled "Quietude."

The impressionist painting by the dining room door is by the owner's grandmother, Clare Reynolds.

Over the mantel is another impressionist piece by Constantin Kluge. The subject is a chateau in the Loire Valley.

The chest is English, c. 1780.

Three framed, colored lithographs of scenes of Edinburgh.
Portuguese needlepoint carpet.

Visitors are invited to glance into the entrance hall.

Notice the mahogany chest, c. 1840, and the American antique clock of Amish origin. The clock is reverse painted on glass.

THE WILLIAM BELL HOUSE

Page 3

DINING ROOM

The impressionist painting over the mantel is by the owner's grandfather, Thomas Reynolds, husband of the artist in the drawing room.

The sideboard is mahogany, probably English, 19th century.

The dining table is a fine reproduction, surrounded by eight splat-back chairs, 19th century English.

The eight prints in the room are Scenes of London, c. 1820.

The Winter Landscape is by De Zwart, a late 19th/early 20th century Dutch impressionist painter.

Visitors are invited to exit through the kitchen.

GARDEN OF THE WILLIAM BELL HOUSE
23 Tradd Street
c. 1800
Residence of Mr. and Mrs. Richard M. Lilly

2009

This charming post-Revolutionary dwelling was preserved in the 1920s by Mrs. Susan P. Frost, a Charlestonian who was recognized as one of the premier preservationists in the nation.

As you approach this garden, a wall screens everything...except a beautifully shaped *Magnolia soulangiana* which offers an intriguing glimpse of the garden as yet unknown. The rose on the top of the wall is 'Mermaid'. There are the canes of the Cherokee Rose climbing into the *Magnolia soulangiana*. Enter from the Longitude Lane Door, watch out for two steps down. Your first impression is of a spacious entertaining venue, great privacy and lots of fun plants.

Creeping Fig has been used extensively to great effect. Not only covering walls, but the niche spaces as well. Looks like a great thick hedge. It covers the garage wall and has been planted on the riser step of this back patio. The owner uses the word "frisky" to describe the fig when it starts to get out of hand. The homeowner in this case is the gardener, only occasionally needing extra help from someone to cut the creeping fig.

She and her husband have lunch almost every day at this first sitting area. The planting borders on three sides here were reclaimed from paving which went wall to wall. The border flowers chosen each year are whatever appeals to her at the moment. She once started with a color scheme in mind, but quickly decided it was more fun to be spontaneous. You will see *Stokesia*, the leaves of an autumn flowering *Anemone* (also in pots), Snaps, Primroses, Pansies and various bulbs. The unusual curving stem plants are *Osteospermum*. Holly Fern, *Ternstroemia* and *Pittosporum* are young plants in the bed. Several *Hydrangea* plants, *Agapanthus* in the ground and in pots are along the garage.

She does like pink tulips and buys them, potted and growing, from the garden center when color is showing in the bud. She then tucks them in beds wherever she feels the need for a cheerful spot of color. Last year she took several stems of *Hydrangea* and just stuck them in the ground. They took! A nice surprise and lots of satisfaction.

GARDEN OF THE WILLIAM BELL HOUSE

PAGE 2

Step down onto the main paved area and look at the center garden spot. It actually is a drain for the water that would otherwise flood the space during a rain. Plants of Boxwood (*Buxus harlandii*) and Boston Fern and Ivy, along with iron benches, effectively disguise the mechanics of the drain.

Old borders on both sides of white Azalea, Camellia japonica, C. sasanqua and tall Nandina lead your eye to the back terrace with towering Tea Olives and a Photinia. The 50 year old Tea Olives provide the garden with seven months of fragrance. The Photinia has many clusters of white flowers in the spring followed by deep red/brown berries in the fall. While looking up, notice the lovely cast iron balcony across the center of the house, added in the 1930s.

The back terrace makes a wonderful place to have evening cocktails and enjoy their view. Affording privacy to the west are Holly, Confederate Jasmine and Lady Banksia Rose. The potted citrus plants of 'Meyer' Lemon provide fragrant blooms. While sitting here they can enjoy some borrowed scenery: a very old, large Magnolia grandiflora, Palm, and Lady Banksia Rose, all across the lane.

Cushions on the low wall of the terrace provide nice extra seating without needing more chairs. Keeps the terrace spacious. The Lions were bought in England. Her young children used to play on them, pretending all sorts of scenarios.

Don't encourage window peaking! Exit the same door you came in, giving you another look at the garden on the way out.