

# Dwelling Recently Restored

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(EDITOR'S NOTE: Sixth in a series of articles on the early dwellings along Beaufain and Wentworth streets. The seventh article will appear on Saturday.)

By W. H. J. THOMAS

Job Palmer, a builder-carpenter who spent 73 of his 97 years in Charleston after coming down from his native Falmouth, Mass., began the construction of his tall, handsome residence at 166 Wentworth St. during the final phase of that "golden age" of Charleston architecture which extended from about 1740 to 1810, when the city saw its period of greatest prosperity as one of the major seaports in the Atlantic community.

Following both in general lines and in small details the favored style of the Adam brothers that ruled in Charleston at this time, he built for himself a spacious and subtly elegant dwelling in the sophisticated Adam interpretation of neoclassicism.

Much of the property in this area at the end of the 18th century was owned by James Shoolbred, a well-connected planter who was the first British consul in Charleston

and who had made an important marriage when he took as his wife Mary Middleton, a daughter of Thomas Middleton of Crowfield.

Schoolbred sold this Wentworth Street lot (then measuring 240 feet, eight inches on its south line and 212 feet, six inches in depth) to Palmer on Oct. 23, 1803, for a sum of 1,000 pounds.

At this time Job Palmer had been living at 32 Trott St. (early name for the east end of Wentworth) and this keeps appearing as his address through 1807. The city directory of 1809 does not list Job Palmer but in 1813 he is listed in his new house at the west end of Wentworth.

One may judge from this that he took his time with the construction of this important house, perhaps being half moved into a partially completed residence by 1809 which would explain his absence from the 1809 directory.

Palmer must have been considered a valued man in the community, as he held for 39 years the position of clerk of the "independent Congregational Church" and was a deacon there for 30 years. An inscription made to him

following his death in January of 1845 referred to him as possessing "an unblamable and exemplary Christian character". Two of his sons became ministers (one serving as pastor of the Congregational Church for 21 years) and four of his grandsons entered the clergy.

A number of months after Palmer's death — on June 17, 1845 — his sons, Benjamin M. Palmer and Edward Palmer, sold the house and

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lot to Fredrick Richards, a "merchant tailor", for \$5,000. Richards kept the house for seven years, selling it for \$11,000 to a planter, John A. Fripp, in August of 1852.

Fripp died in 1870 and his widow, Mrs. Mary Fripp, sold the house to Charles O. Witte for \$5,000 in the early autumn of that same year. Witte was a merchant, a banker and served as consular representative for the Free State of Hamburg and later as German consul from 1870 to 1907. It does not appear that he ever lived at 166 Wentworth but held it as investment property. For many years he made his

home at 172 Rutledge Ave., now Ashley Hall School.

On Mar. 2, 1908, the house at 166 Wentworth was transferred to Beatrice Witte Ravenel, along with several other pieces of Charleston property. T. L. Sanders, a "cotton classer" for the firm of Middleton and Ravenel, bought the house for \$7,200 on Jan. 23, 1911.

The house was owned by the Sanders family for 55 years, during which time it was converted into several apartments.

It is now the home of Dr. and Mrs. Robert A. Pringle and has been restored as a single family residence.

The house Job Palmer built for himself follows the basic Charleston "single" house plan with an L extension. The exterior is of a pleasant soft-colored red brick laid in Flemish bond; the brick coloration is so appealing that the builder did not mark the floor levels with a raised belting for the visual relief as may be seen on dwellings constructed of a drab or overly-brown brick. Over the windows are played flat arches of brick, except for the gently arched stair windows to the east.

When the Sanders owned the property the main entrance

to the piazzas was changed from street front to garden and the present entrance represents a restoration; luckily this double piazza door, the transom and the front door to the house had all been stored in the basement after being removed and could be placed back in their intended spots.

The handsome interior stairway was also preserved during the years when 166 Wentworth was in apartments. When it was not found to be of use the railings were enclosed by a wall and the removal of this wall found this original feature still intact.

The first floor sitting room retains its paneled wainscoting and its plaster frieze and cornice in enrichments in waterleaf details. Only the broad black marble chimney insert is of a later period, probably being added in 1840. During the recent restoration of the house this mantle was uncovered from beneath thick layers of plaster of Paris which had been applied during the Victorian period.

The rear first story room and the two principal second story rooms show additional variations of the light and graceful Adam treatment. From the simplicity of the

second story front room it is apparent that this was intended as a bed chamber rather than as an upstairs drawing room as is more frequently found in the three-story Charleston "single" house.

A reminder of an earlier day may be found in one of the dining room window panes; a faint inscription reads: "Jan. 9, 1861, the first guns for Southern liberty fired at Morris Point."

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166 WENTWORTH WAS CONSTRUCTED CIRCA 1809  
Built during high period of Adam style popularity. (Staff Photo by Burbage.)