

Miss Frost Tells Story Of Her Restoration Work

To The News and Courier:

So much has been written lately in kindly spirit about my restoration work of old Charleston houses, and my efforts to save the beautiful architecture of Charleston (all of which I greatly appreciate) that I think it not amiss to correct some of the misapprehensions set forth in the recent articles about the properties on East Bay between Tradd and Elliott streets. To go for a few moments into my Tradd street restoration, the houses that I restored on East Tradd street from a distressing state of delapidation, were Nos. 6, 8, 10, (No. 12 I bought but sold it unrestored; the buyer restored it); No. 19 Tradd street; Nos. 21 and 23 (two houses which I converted into one house, now known as No. 23 Tradd street; No. 49 Tradd street, known formerly as "Rackets Hotel" from the number of tenants in it; this house has such an attractive stairway that I was asked to sell it during the restoration period, which, of course, I refused, having consistently declined to sell the wood work, or to remodel the old house; I only restore them, a very different treatment from remodeling. No. 54 Tradd street, said to have been, and I think undoubtedly true, the original postoffice in early 1800. The marble step to the front door on the street has been worn thin on the edges, caused (I was told by former generation), by the constant passage of people going in and out for their mail; the postmaster lived in the dwelling rooms above. The balcony to this house is another of those mute and sad evidences of the vandalism that has been committed against these old homes; it was sold to me from another house, where I do not know, for it had already been taken down. No. 61 was the largest and handsomest of the Tradd street houses that I restored; this had very beautiful wood work, and I labored hard to buy the house to save that wood work, coddling the not too tidy children in the house so as to gain the good will of the owners; I regret and grieve to say that after my great efforts to save this house, some of the wood work was sold out of the house after I parted with it.

I also restored a tiny house on Ford's court, the smallest I ever tackled. It was so cunning that after selling it and undertaking the restoration for the purchaser, I had a house warming for it, as I also had for the largest, No. 61.

I next broke into St. Michael's alley, also a street of sad neglect and delapidation, once famed as the location of the law offices of some of our most noted attorneys of ante-bellum days. The street is one block long, named for the historic church of the Archangel St. Michael. It is the continuation of Elliott street (named for a distinguished citizen). Here I restored Nos. 4, 6 and 8 St. Michael's alley; the latter being the law offices of the Hon. James L. Pettigrew, one of our most able and distinguished attorneys. I am now in the room

gone that the contractor refused to repair it, so I had it sent to the mill and duplicated. This house is now happily owned by three delightful Charleston ladies who value it most highly; it gives me much pleasure to think that it is in safe and loving hands. Nos. 4 and 6 met an equally satisfactory fate. The owner of one of them told me that I must have had her in mind in restoring it, for it suited her so well when she came to Charleston as a bride.

I operated a little on the west end of Tradd street, converting an unsightly store into an attractive dwelling, but the west end of Tradd street is more modern and did not appeal to me.

At the time that I started all this work very few people besides myself were, apparently, interested in the saving of the beautiful homes of our city, but I had friends among the contractors and plumbers who kept me posted as to things that were about to be destroyed. Through the kind offices of my good friend, Mr. Julius E. Smith, of 91 Broad street, I learned that Colonel James Armstrong, of blessed memory, had taken a lovely fireplace out of his old home on Laurens street, why he did not say, but he said he thought the colonel would sell it to me. I telephoned the colonel and told him of my information and its source, and asked if I could buy the fireplace. His reply over the telephone, in his accustomed and well known good humor, was "My dear child, I will be only too glad to give it to you." It now adorns the fireplace in one of the drawing rooms in our old home at 27 King street.

Also through the kindness of the same friends I learned of two handsome iron balconies that had been taken down from somewhere on State street. Why they were taken

down or which houses they came from, I have never learned, but they were offered to me for \$50 apiece; very few, as I said, being interested in such things at that time. I bought them and placed them in our yard at 27 King street.

Meantime, after I had completed all that I was able to do in the way of restoration of East Tradd street, I was offered six houses on East Bay between Tradd and Elliott streets, together with considerable frontage on Bedon's alley to the rear, including two charming little old English brick two-story houses. These houses have had a very different fate from the Tradd street ones, and from the plans I had for them in buying them. Having sold all my Tradd street houses, mostly at considerably less than it had cost me to buy and restore them, I bought the East Bay properties for future income, with no intention of ever selling them. I intended to restore them and to keep them for investment. Dealing as I did in all this work almost wholly with borrowed capital, the interest charges became too heavy. They were all under purchase money mortgages, so that borrowing on second mortgages to restore them was at the time impossible. Then came the five years of deep depression when it was unwise and impossible to borrow. I finally had to start selling off sufficient of the buildings to relieve the pressure from the mortgages. The only ones I was able personally to restore were the two little houses on Bedon's alley. After restoring them I sold them to Dr. Edwin L. Kerrison. Still finding myself unable to finance the complete restoration as I had planned, I sold No. 97 East Bay to Mr. Dunham, of Long Island, and a little later I sold No. 95 to Mr. John McGowan. That left me still holding on precariously to four houses on the front, Nos. 91, 93, 83 and 87. No. 83 needed some immediate repairs and in doing this necessary work, the house having such distinct atmosphere and charm, my contractor and I became so fascinated by the possibilities that I could not stop work, and in order to continue the restoration, I had to sacrifice Nos. 91 and 93. So that now I am holding on tight to only two, Nos. 83 and 87, with the selfish consolation for my disappointment, that I still hold the two best in the block.

Meantime the two balconies had been reposing in our yard all this time, one for over twenty years, waiting to be used in the restoration of these houses. Both of the original balconies at Nos. 83 and 87 had been taken off before I came into possession of the houses. One, that from No. 87, I saw being hauled down East Bay on a truck and I asked my contractor who had bought it and he told me, but I will not mention the parties. The other of my two balconies, in an all-guarded moment I agreed to sell to Mrs. Pannett at No. 1 Tradd street; the lovely one she now has on her front porch. I regretted to see it go, but I had to sell it and she has held it

Florida and this I was unwilling for. I was holding both of them for Nos. 83 and 87 East Bay. The one that I retained for all these years is now adorning No. 83 East Bay, the house that is now in process of restoration.

This account of my years of effort at restoration may seem a bit too personal for the public eye, but it may be of interest to some, and will serve to correct what was a somewhat, though unintentional, misrepresentation, in that it was said that the sale of the last two and the restoration of No. 83 represented the consummation of my hopes. On the contrary, it represented the miscarrying of my plans and a bitter disappointment to me that I was not able to restore all my holdings, and to keep them. I have never commercialized my restoration work, or my love of the old and beautiful things of Charleston. A friend once told me that I had too much sentiment to make money, and I think it is partly true. At any rate it has been a great pleasure to be able to take some small part in their restoration and preservation of our old homes, and to point the way to others who were more blessed in their financial ability to carry on the work. It has been a privilege to make my contribution toward such an important and worthwhile work.

This, briefly, is the story of my effort to preserve the old Charleston as I know it; this letter may be too personal for publication. It may be considered too egotistical for me to even think of putting it in writing; but if it will point the way to others to join us in the fight to preserve the old-time and old-world beauty of Charleston I shall not have labored or written in vain.

SUSAN P. FROST.
Charleston.

97 East Bay

97 East Bay St. Nrc May 2/79 Built Around 1741

By ROBERT P. STOCKTON

The three-story brick house at 97 East Bay St. is part of a suite of buildings constructed around 1741 by Othniel Beale, the engineer of the city's colonial fortifications.

Beale purchased the site of the house in March of 1741, along with a low-water lot in front of it, on the opposite side of East Bay Street and another lot to the rear, extending west to Bedon's Alley.

The purchase price, 2,400 pounds in South Carolina currency, would indicate that the Hill family, which had owned the lot since 1734, had not rebuilt upon it after the great fire of 1740.

According to the deeds of lease and release, the lot then measured 25 feet, 4 inches in front on the Bay, 217 feet in depth and 16 feet, 6 inches on the rear line.

In September 1748, Beale purchased from Joseph Shute and Anna, his wife, a triangular piece of land, 8 feet wide at the widest point and 123 feet long. The piece of land was added to the rear width of Beale's lot, giving it a width of 24 feet, 2 inches.

According to the deeds, part of the new line ran "from the South east corner of said Othniel Beales new Brick Store, to the South West corner of said Othniel Beales new brick Kitchen, both now occupied by Messrs. Stiel and Hume."

The language of the deeds indicates that Beale had completed the brick store (in the 18th century, that meant a storehouse) and brick kitchen, and implies that he had completed the combination shop and residence, which those auxiliary buildings served, sometime between 1741 and 1748.

Beale completed the double building at 99-101 East Bay St. at the same time, as the two structures have a common roof and their facades are related by a belt course and a cornice extending the width of the two facades, and a giant order pilaster at either end of the two facades.

The two facades are also related to that of 95 East Bay, which has a matching pilaster on its south flank. The builder of 95 East Bay is unknown, and it has been speculated that perhaps Beale was the builder.

Beale, a native of Massachusetts, was a sea captain who settled in Charleston in 1721. By the 1730s, he was a leading merchant in the Indian trade, sending agents as far inland as the Mississippi, exchanging Bri-

tish manufactured goods for deer skins.

Beale accumulated much of the low-water land opposite his buildings and his wharf (or bridge, as the term then was applied) was one of the most important on the Bay.

He was also a public servant, serving as president of the Royal Council, as a member of the Commons House of Assembly and in other positions.

In 1742, 1744 and 1752, he was placed in charge of strengthening Charleston's fortifications and in 1755 was named commissioner of fortifications.

Beale lived next door at present-

Do You Know

Your Charleston?

day 99-101 East Bay. He died in 1773 at the age of 64.

His will devised to his widow, Hannah Gale Beale, "one half of all the Issues Rents & Profits Yearly & every Year arising from the House & Stores adjoining on the South" of his dwelling house.

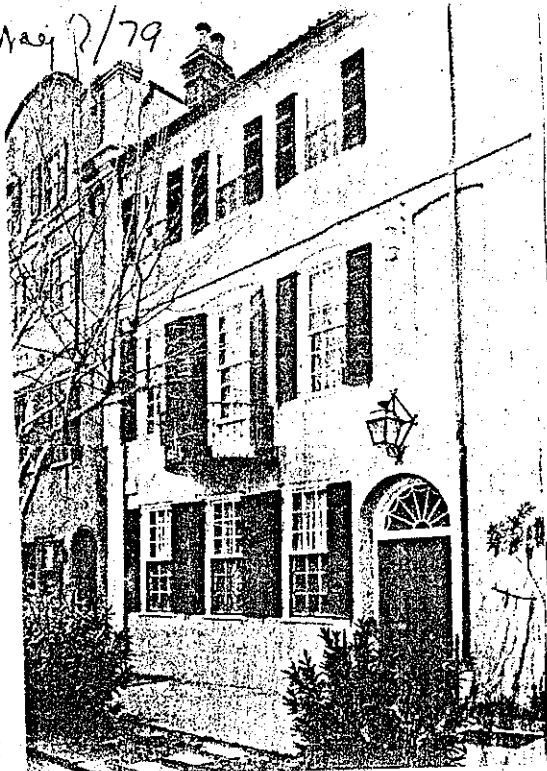
According to the will, the house and stores were occupied in 1769 by "Messrs. Robinson & Jamison who have for many years past paid Seven Hundred pounds Currency pr Annum." In 1772, the buildings were leased to Messrs. Simpson & Johnson, under the name of Simpson & Co., for 600 pounds per year.

After Mrs. Beale's death, the property descended to her son, John Beale, who had formerly been his father's business partner. John Beale had also served in the Assembly and was a Patriot officer in the Revolution.

John Beale died in 1807 and subsequently his heirs filed suit in the Court of Equity, contending that Beale's buildings and wharf were "in a state of dilapidation and decay and daily decreasing in value, for want of repairs, & for which they were unable from insufficient funds to bestow, to render them productive."

Consequently, the court accepted their plea for division of Beale's estate and the property was sold at auction on April 5, 1810, when James Mitchell, for a high bid of \$14,000, acquired present-day 97 and 99-101 East Bay.

Mitchell died about 1831. In 1839,



(Staff Photo by Tom Spain)

97 East Bay St.

Cesimir Dutrieux, a baker, purchased the property at 97 East Bay. Dutrieux's family retained the property until 1893, although they moved to Meeting Street after the Civil War.

The property subsequently went through numerous owners, becoming at various times a boarding house, a dairy, a grocery, a place of "refreshments etc." during the Dispensary years, and a carpentry shop.

Susan Pringle Frost bought the property in 1920 and sold it in 1936 to Thomas C. Dunham. At the request of Mr. and Mrs. Dunham, Mrs. Dorothy Forcher Legge directed the restoration of the house, with Gaillard Dotterer as contractor.

Old photos show the building with

an early storefront and an open arch on the north end of the facade, giving access to a covered passage.

During the restoration, the storefront entrance was replaced with a window, and a new fanlight entrance was placed in the archway. A semi-oval balcony was placed on the second level, where a balcony had formerly been.

In the interior, a dining room, kitchen and pantry was built into the former shop space, and Mrs. Legge designed a staircase to replace a "homemade narrow ladder" from the ground floor to the first floor.

The original staircase, from the first to the second floor, remained intact, however, as did the paneled drawing room on the first floor.