

19 Wentworth Street
Charleston, South Carolina

William Lebby's House
1847

The history of the house at 19 Wentworth Street begins after the great fire which burned from the evening of the 27th to the morning of the 28th April, 1838, and destroyed an area of the city roughly bounded by Society, Archdale, Market, and East Bay Streets. After the fire, the rebuilding of the "Burned District" seems to have proceeded comparatively slowly, for in the Directory of 1840 - 1841, only five houses in the burned district had been rebuilt on Wentworth Street: one near the Bay, a business establishment west of it, one at the corner of Anson Street, two small private residences at present numbers 31 and 35 Wentworth Street, and the Methodist Episcopal Church, (now St. Andrews Lutheran Church) which had been rebuilt the same year as the fire.¹ After the Fire Loan² was authorized by the City of Charleston, the rebuilding of the street proceeded much faster.

William Lebby, (born Charleston, 26 April 1814: died Charleston, 2 October 1882) married Anne Elizabeth Smith November 23, 1843.³ A skilled machinist, he had served an apprenticeship under Thomas Dotterer, one of the pioneer steam engine builders of the city, whose shop, before the fire, stood a few rods west of present number 19 Wentworth.⁴

William Lebby purchased from James W. Gray, Master in Equity, who was acting for the heirs of Sarah Elizabeth Ancrum Winslow, for the sum of twelve hundred dollars, on 8 July 1847, the lot on which number 19 Wentworth Street now stands, "being lot number 51 in the division of Ancrum's Lands made by a plat or survey of Joseph Purcell dated 1 May 1799."⁵

Lebby had built at once the house that now stands there, for on 26 July mortgaged the property to the Provident Institute for Savings for twenty-five hundred dollars. This was to be paid in three equal payments,

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and it was satisfied in 1852.

At the time he built it he had apparently had but one child, his
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son Thomas Dotterer Lebby, so that the rather small house served him
very well for a few years.

However, in a few years he had achieved great success with his
machine works, and in 1855 he apparently built a somewhat larger residence
at the northwest corner of Ashley and Bee Streets, which still stands;
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the lot he had purchased on 20 May 1852.

Nevertheless, he continued to own the property at Wentworth Street,
and it appears to have been occupied for several years by Edward Lafitte,
a relative.

On 1 January 1855, he mortgaged the Wentworth Street property for
four thousand dollars to one Anne Legare, which mortgage was satisfied on
10 February 1858. This mortgage must have been given to help him accom-
plish the building of his new house on Ashley and Bee Streets.

On 9 January 1860, he mortgaged the Wentworth Street property again,
to the Charleston Savings Institution, for three thousand dollars (which he
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paid 22 August 1862). This mortgage must have been for the sake of
raising funds for the great step of purchasing, along with several other
industrialists, the great West Point Mill, for ninety-seven thousand dollars
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which he took early that year. Thereafter he was managing director of the
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large enterprise. The building of the West Point Mill still stands and is
the Administration Building for the Charleston Municipal Marina; it houses
the Chamber of Commerce as well.

William Lebby was a most successful and farsighted industrialist of the mid-nineteenth-century in Charleston, and he was involved in numerous industrial enterprises, including a cotton mill at Pelzer in ¹⁴ ¹⁵ Greenville country. His will very properly makes provision for all his family, even for the widow of his brother Thomas.

On 1 July 1868, William Lebby sold to Julius L. Bulken, as trustee for Mrs. Wilhelmina C. Wohltmann, wife of John N. M. Wohltmann, the house and lot at 19 Wentworth Street, for the sum of five thousand dollars. Lebby accepted as part of the transaction a mortgage for half the sale value, ¹⁶ which was ultimately satisfied. Mrs. Wohltmann apparently lived there for a few years, and about 1888 she appears to have transferred the house to a ¹⁷ Mrs. W. C. Rohde, who may have been her daughter; however, it may have been Mrs. Wohltmann herself, married a second time.


L. Louis Green III

26, July 1968

FOOTNOTES

1. Directory & Strangers Guide, Charleston, 1840-41
2. City Ordinances, of the City of Charleston 1814, Charleston; pp. 86-88, 354-
364
3. Nathaniel Lebby and His Descendants, Charleston 1968, by E. DeTreville
Ellis, pp 266-267. Pages with references to William Lebby are reproduced
as Appendix "A"
4. Ibid., p.268. Also Directory for 1837
5. Register of Mesne Conveyance for Charleston County, Volume Y-11 p.439
6. Ibid, Vol U-11 P.395
7. Ellis, op.cit., p.267
8. RMCO, Vol S-12, p 447
9. Directory, 1859; Census of Charleston, 1861
10. RMCO, volQ-13, p.95
11. Ibid, vol O-14, p 166
12. South Carolina Historical Society Magazine (quoting from the Diary of
Jacob Sass Schirmer), vol 61, p 163
13. Directories, 1859,1867, etc.
14. Ellis, op cit, p. 269
15. Ibid, pp473-475
16. RMCO, Vol #-15 p121
17. "Ward" Books (Tax Assessor's Books), 1859-70; 1871-75, etc; Directories
etc.