

Preservation Society Photo

May photo of hurricane damage to Sans Souci house. 12/21/90

Former Sans Souci Owner Shocked By Demolition

By KERRI MORGAN
Of the Post-Courier staff

The former owner of Sans Souci on the Ashley said Thursday that she was shocked to learn that most of the historic house was demolished by its new owners last week.

"I was just crushed when I saw what they'd done to my ex-house," said Dr. Patricia A. Carter, who lived there from 1948 until it was damaged extensively by Hurricane Hugo in 1989.

Dr. Carter said she recently sold it to Dr. Robert Robinson, who had moved here from Jamaica. She learned of the demolition when the Post-Courier reported that the city of Charleston preservation office had issued a stop-work order because the action had not been approved by the city's Board of Architectural Review. The board has jurisdiction over the demolition of houses more than 75 years old that are located south of Mount Pleasant Street on the peninsula.

"My whole heart was in that house," Dr. Carter said. "I tried to preserve it and keep its antiquities. I did not sell it with restrictive covenants (requiring the new owners to preserve the house) because at the closing Dr. Robinson assured me that he wanted to restore the house as it was to its original splendor. ... Maybe I trusted too much. He told me how

much he loved the house, and I swallowed it hook, line and sinker."

Robinson did not respond to a message left by the Post-Courier at his office, and later attempts to reach him were unsuccessful.

Dr. Carter said the house was inspected by several building and preservation experts who said it could be salvaged and restored. But she decided to sell it because the restoration was expected to be a costly and lengthy process.

The Preservation Society of Charleston and the Historic Charleston Foundation also have protested the demolition. John Meffert, the preservation society's executive director, said he inspected the house shortly after the hurricane and again in May.

"It had been damaged by the hurricane and it needed work, but it was definitely salvageable and worthy of restoration," he said.

"People come here for the authenticity of Charleston and the caring of people who have these historic properties."

Meanwhile, Charleston's preservation office is determining what can be done to salvage what's left of the house. Preservation Officer Charles E. Chase said the stop-work order was lifted temporarily to allow the contractor to stabilize the remaining walls.

But Chase doesn't want any further work to be done until after he determines the condition of the house before the demolition began and approves the owners' plans for rebuilding it. He has heard that the house was damaged extensively by the storm and termites, but that the contractor may have saved portions of it with the intent of rebuilding the house to its former appearance.

So far, however, he has been unable to arrange a meeting with the contractor.

"We see this as a dismantlement and potential demolition," he said. "If they aren't going to cooperate with us, we'll have to put another stop-work order on it."

Chase said he probably will require the owners to appear before the BAR on Jan. 9. If that occurs, Dr. Carter plans to attend.

"I understand the BAR can't take his land and can't fine him. They can't do anything except make him put it back exactly like it was. But I want to make sure that's done," she said.

The house, built about 1804 by John Gibbs, is located in the northwest section of the peninsula overlooking the Ashley River. It contained original woodwork and early American plank floorboards and had gardens designed by famed landscape architect Louretl Briggs.

Owner plans to restore house

By KERRI MORGAN
Of the Post-Courier staff

The owner of the historic Sans Souci on the Ashley plantation house in Charleston said Friday that it is not being demolished, although much of the building has already been taken down.

Dr. Robert J. Robinson said the house is being taken apart to remove and replace portions damaged by Hurricane Hugo, exposure and termites. But it will be restored to its original appearance using some of the authentic building materials, he said.

City preservation officials imposed a stop-work order on construction at the site Dec. 21 because they discovered that the roof and most of the second floor had been removed, and they thought the house was being torn down.

Preservation Officer Charles E. Chase said he issued the order because Robinson did not obtain Board of Architectural Review approval before beginning what appeared to be a demolition. The board has jurisdiction over demolitions of buildings more than 75 years old that are located on the city peninsula south of Mount Pleasant Street.

Chase said Friday that Robinson needs to present documentation of what the house looked like before it was taken apart and certified drawings of what he plans to do to restore the house.

Robinson said he was disturbed by reports this week that the house was being demolished, adding he was unable to respond because he was out of town for the

4-B Saturday The News and Courier/The Evening Post, Charleston, S.C., December 29, 1990

HOUSE

from Page 1-B

holidays.

He said there was a misunderstanding. Since he planned to restore the house to its original condition, he did not consider the temporary dismantling of the house to be a demolition. He said he submitted his plans to the city's building inspections department, but was not told he also would need BAR approval.

"The house is not being demolished," he said. "It is being taken apart and put back exactly as it was. It was in such bad shape you could not build on it."

Termites had eaten through thick beams on the second floor, causing the house to tilt to the right, he said. Much of the interior also had deteriorated from exposure to the elements during the 15 months since the hurricane ripped off the roof and rear walls. He said the previous

owner paid to have the gaping holes covered, but the work was never done.

"All I'm trying to do is preserve this house," he said. "I'm taking out the bad wood, replacing it, and putting it back like it was. I'm just trying to reinforce the house before I put it back. It will look just like it did before."

Robinson, an obstetrician who moved to Charleston from New York in 1979, said he restored a historic building at 233 Calhoun St. for his office and also wanted a historic house. He looked at several before deciding to buy Sans Souci on the Ashley from Dr. Patricia A. Carter.

"I wanted this house because it was an old house and because it belonged to Dr. Carter, who was also an obstetrician," he said. "We looked at other old houses and this was the one I wanted. If those people who thought I was demolishing it had contacted me, I could have explained."

Dr. Carter, who lived in the house

from 1946 until Hugo struck September 1989, said Thursday that she was stunned at the present condition of the house because Robinson had assured her that he wanted to preserve it. She was relieved Friday to learn that he is restoring it.

"He told me 'I want the house you had, Dr. Pat ... I will take loving care of it and restore it,'" she said. "Having been an obstetrician here for so long, there's a certain history about me as well as the house. I'm glad he reaffirmed what he told me. I believe him. I think he's a man of honor. But you can understand why I thought it was being demolished, to go up there and see the whole second floor taken off."

The house, built about 1804 by John Gibbs, is located in the northwest section of the peninsula overlooking the Ashley River. Sans Souci on the Ashley, also known as Devereaux House, and Lowndes Grove are the only two historic plantation houses on the peninsula.

1-B 12-29-90 Please see HOUSE, Page 4-B

The dismantling of a historic house

The apparent demolition of Sans Souci on the Ashley, one of the most important historic houses on the upper peninsula, was described by one leading preservationist as one of the most regrettable losses in recent memory. Assurances that the house will be reconstructed only partially mitigate the loss.

There is no question that the city Board of Architectural Review should have had a chance to look at this project before it proceeded. The BAR could have required assurances that the condition of the house was such that wholesale removal of the original building was required. It could have insisted that original materials would have been retained when possible and reviewed plans for

its dismantlement, if needed.

As it is, the BAR will have an opportunity to review the plans for reconstruction, since what amounts to a virtual demolition above its foundation was done without approval. Insofar as it has the authority, it should insist that the work be done with original materials in accordance with the house's original design.

While rebuilding with original materials may mitigate the dismantlement, it doesn't alter the fact that the situation should never have occurred, at least in the manner that it did. The loss of original historic structures is a loss to the community that can't be altogether repaired, even by a faithful rendition.

12-31-90 SA

City Again Halts Rebuilding Of Historic Plantation House

By KERRI MORGAN
Of the Post-Courier staff

01-91

For the second time in less than a month, the city of Charleston halted the reconstruction Wednesday of the historic plantation house known as Sans Souci on the Ashley.

Much of the house was dismantled in recent months to remove portions damaged by Hurricane Hugo and termites, and is being rebuilt. The city had specified that it must be rebuilt exactly as it was.

But officials discovered Friday that the third story was being built higher than that of the original house and that the chimneys had been enclosed, said Yvonne Fortenberry, director of planning and urban development.

Dr. Robert J. Robinson, who owns the house, said the roof is being raised so that the attic space can be used.

"There was an attic up there already. I'm just straightening up the roof a little bit so we can walk

through the attic. It does look a little different on top, but that's all. The rest will be the same," he said.

Mrs. Fortenberry, however, said no construction that would alter the original appearance of the house was supposed to occur until after Robinson submitted his building plans to the city.

Robinson said he thought the city agreed not to enforce the stop-work order after he talked to Ms. Fortenberry Wednesday.

She said Robinson was scheduled to meet with her staff today to discuss the matter.

"We want to make sure that we can ensure replacement of as much of the structure as we can because it was demolished without BAR approval," she said. "It's possible his plans could be approved, because we really only have review of demolition up in that area."

"The Robinsons have indicated a willingness to work with us and try to work things out. There's been

some work done on the site that they are not totally aware of."

On Dec. 21, the city preservation staff placed a stop-work order on the property, located at 203 Sans Souci St., because the house had been dismantled without city approval.

The city's Board of Architectural Review must approve the demolition of buildings more than 75 years old that are located on the peninsula south of Mount Pleasant Street.

City Preservation Officer Charles E. Chase lifted the initial stop-work order in December to allow basic reconstruction, pending his approval of the final plans.

Ms. Fortenberry said the city also is concerned that those plans haven't been submitted yet. But it may allow some leeway, she said, because the engineer Robinson hired to prepare the documents is a military reservist and has been working on military matters.

She said the stop-work order could be lifted after the meeting today.

City halts rebuilding of Sans Souci house

By KERRI MORGAN
Of the Post-Courier staff

1-17-91

The city of Charleston halted the reconstruction Wednesday of the historic plantation house known as Sans Souci on the Ashley for the second time in less than a month.

Much of the house was dismantled in recent months to remove portions damaged by Hurricane Hugo and termites, and is being rebuilt. The city had specified that it must be rebuilt exactly as it was.

But officials discovered Friday that the third story was being built higher than that of the original house and that the chimneys had been enclosed, said Yvonne Fortenberry, director of planning and urban development.

Dr. Robert J. Robinson, who owns the house, said the roof is being raised so that the attic space can be used.

"There was an attic up there already. I'm just straightening up the roof a little bit so we can walk through the attic. It does look a little different on top, but that's all. The rest will be the same," he said.

Mrs. Fortenberry, however, said no construction that would alter the original appearance of the house was supposed to occur until after Robinson submitted his building plans to the city.

Robinson said he thought the city agreed not to enforce the stop-work order after he talked to Ms. Fortenberry Wednesday. But she said it was enforced Wednesday afternoon.

She said Robinson is scheduled to meet with her staff today to discuss the matter.

"We want to make sure that we

can ensure replacement of as much of the structure as we can because it was demolished without BAR approval," she said. "It's possible his plans could be approved, because we really only have review of demolition up in that area.

"The Robinsons have indicated a willingness to work with us and try to work things out. There's been some work done on the site that they are not totally aware of. So we hoping we can get it all resolved."

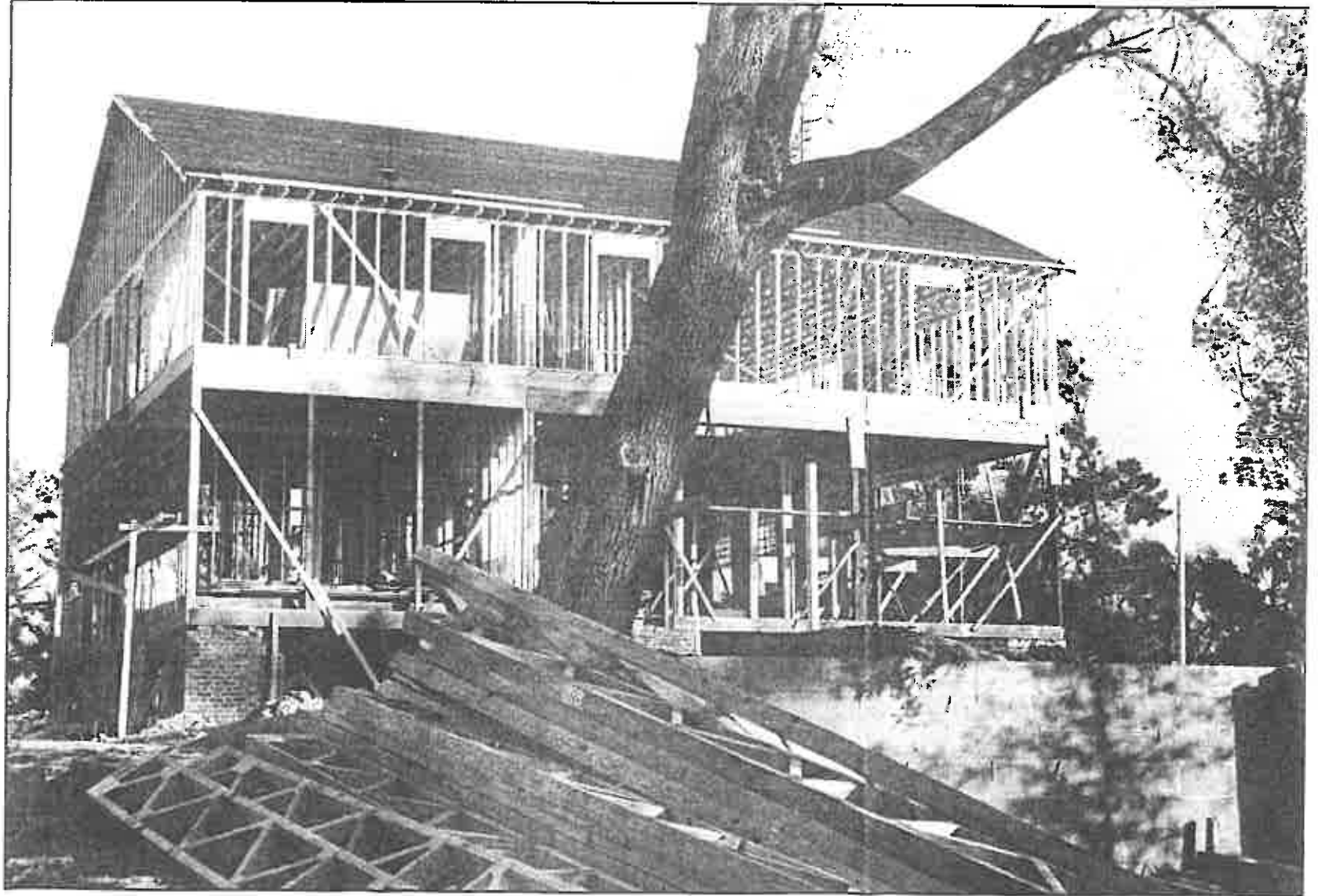
On Dec. 21, the city preservation staff placed a stop-work order on the property, located at 203 Sans Souci St., on Dec. 21 because the house had been dismantled without city approval.

The city's Board of Architectural Review must approve the demolition of buildings more than 75 years old that are located on the peninsula south of Mount Pleasant Street.

City Preservation Officer Charles E. Chase lifted the initial stop-work order in December to allow basic reconstruction, pending his approval of the final plans.

Ms. Fortenberry said the city also was concerned that those plans haven't been submitted yet. But it may allow some leeway, she said, because the engineer Robinson hired to prepare the documents is a military reservist and has been working on military matters.

She said the stop-work order could be lifted after the meeting today. "It's possible we might allow them to do some construction on site while we work out some of things in question," she said.



Work has stopped on the house known as Sans Souci on the Ashley, shown here from the back of the house.

Staff Photo by Roger Cureton