

Steele-Knobeloch house captures spirit of Radcliffeborough

By Robert Salvo

With the Medical University to its west, the College of Charleston to its south and a revived upper King Street to its east, it's little wonder that Radcliffeborough is one of the most youthful and energetic neighborhoods in the city. The area's blend of historic appeal with a fresh dynamism is perfectly captured by the Steele-Knobeloch house at Eight Vanderhorst St.

The neighborhood dates back to 1786, when planter Thomas Radcliffe began laying out its roads and lot lines. He perished at sea in the first decade of the following century, but development continued

under the guidance of his widow, Lucretia Radcliffe. It was Lucretia who, in 1811, donated four lots for the building of St. Paul's Episcopal Church, now the Cathedral of St. Luke and St. Paul. This new construction in an emerging neighborhood was a conscious statement about the increased prosperity of the then-suburbs and the status of those living there.

This prosperity continued to the time of the War Between the States. Radcliffeborough, much like nearby Wraggborough and Ansonborough, became the site of many suburban villas constructed by Lowcountry planters, as well as a spot

for successful urban merchants to live handsomely. George Trenholm, Robert Barnwell Rhett, Dr. Benjamin Huger, Elias Whilden and the often-forgotten William Johnson (the first non-Federalist on the Supreme Court) all lived in the neighborhood. Radcliffeborough is also notable as the residence of many prominent African-Americans, both before and after the War: Daniel Johnson, Richard Holloway, Dr. Thomas Miller and the DeCostas all called the neighborhood home.

Eight Vanderhorst Street was built by one of those wealthy King Street merchants, haberdasher Walter Steele. His "Hat Hall" at 231 King sold caps

for men and women of all ages, in a wide range of styles. Some examples of his products remain in the collections of The Charleston Museum to this day. Interestingly, Steele advertised in a number of publications around the South and even published his own periodical for a time that combined advertising for his hats with his own jokes and remarks.

The house paid for by Steele's headgear empire was not his for long, as he sold it to Charles Henry Simonton in 1858, just a few years after its completion. A member of the Washington Light Infantry, Simonton served

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PHOTO BY ROBERT SALVO

One of the house's vintage fireplaces.



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The view up towards the front piazza.

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Radcliffeborough exemplar blends new and old

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the Confederacy some distinction; after the conflict's end, the lawyer and one-time General Assemblyman was made a federal judge, capping his career on the bench of the Fourth Circuit Court of Appeals.

In the 1870s Simonton sold it to Elizabeth Knobeloch, for whom the house takes its name. Her family, a clan of German bakers, held the house for many years. Descendant and resident Gustave Knobeloch was on city council and served in the General Assembly; later owner Harry von Glahn was on city council as well.

Radcliffeborough is notable for its public-use architecture, especially of the ecclesiastical kind (in addition to the Cathedral, St. Mark's Episcopal, St. Matthew's Lutheran, Central Baptist, Morris Brown and Brit Shalom are here). Eight Vanderhorst is all the more distinguished for being fine residential

architecture. After a recent renovation of the entire property, it will be a residence for even more, as it has been divided into condos. The division has been done with a preservationist's eye and nothing outside belies that fact.

The respectfulness and thoughtfulness brought to the project by architect Buz Morris continues inside. Unit A, currently for sale, is upstairs and has the entire upper front and rear piazzas to itself. Floor-to-ceiling windows with hand-blown English panes flood the space with light, aided by recessed lighting hidden in the trimwork when needed. A swinging wall, a Murphy bed and a split bath, with a little help from the back exit, allow the 1500-square-foot residence to offer a luxurious extra guest room that's practically invisible until needed.

Adroit blending of old and new can be seen throughout. If you're interested in it personally, contact Jack Gumb at Litchfield Real

Estate. He'll show you the vintage mantelpieces over the three working fireplaces, the lovely copper roof, original heart pine flooring and hand-plastered crown molding. He'll also show you the modern kitchen; on-demand water heater; the wine cellar with imported marble flooring and the striking private piazza supported by Tower of the Winds columns. Within and without, the Steele-Knobeloch house fully embodies the spirit of its historic yet lively neighborhood.



PHOTO BY ROBERT SALVO

The wine cellar is as handsome as it is useful.

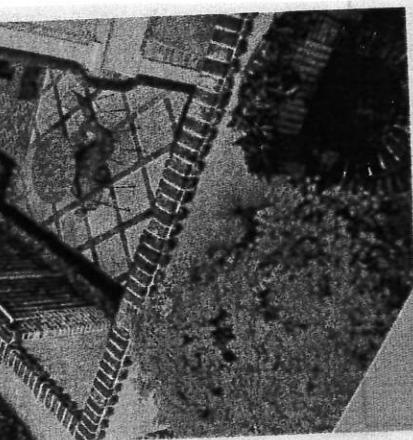


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View of the courtyard from the rear piazza.

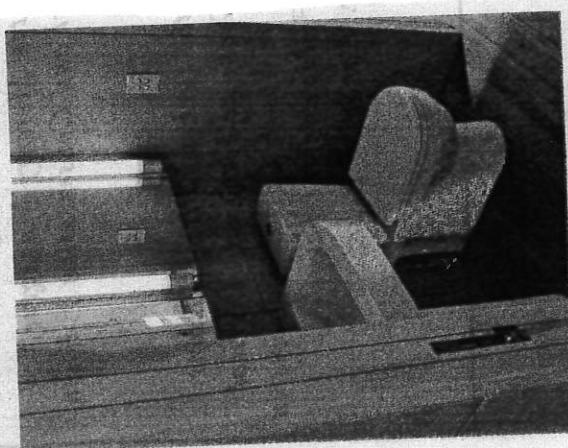


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The dutch bathroom has a host of high-tech features.



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Lighting built in to the trim blends new and old.