

DOCK STREET THEATRE

135 Church Street

As early as 1739 a Dock Street Theatre stood at the southwest corner of Church and Queen Streets. The present theatre, opened in the late 1930's after an extensive reconstruction, occupies the same corner site. It is within the shell of the old Planters Hotel which in 1809 was constructed around four existing buildings to make a hotel. It was extensively remodeled in 1835 when the central facade was added.

The restoration project, under the direction of the local architectural firm of Simons and Lapham, was the result of a large community effort and included assistance from the W.P.A. and Federal Theatre and Art groups; research consultant on the project was Douglas D. Ellington, representing the W.P.A. The completed project required an investment of \$350,000.

The post-Revolutionary War hotel structure was in an advanced state of decay. It consisted of four buildings forming a single L-shaped group. The exterior of the present theatre reflects the aged appearance of the building before restoration, as Simons and Lapham repaired the faulty brick-work and ornate cast-iron balcony, put in new window frames and sashes, and gave the walls a thin color wash, but left the effects of time.

The recessed porch on the Church Street front, the balcony, the brownstone columns, date from the 1835 remodelling.

The interior of the old Planters Hotel was wholly rebuilt at the time of restoration, with all exterior walls and foundations being reinforced, the roof, floors and wall partitions remade largely in concrete and steel. The theatre was placed in the short leg of the L-shaped structure, eight apartments were added to the third story and a number of assembly rooms were created.

Within the old lobby area were remains of a stairway and details from the 1835 renovation. A ferroconcrete reproduction railing for the stairway was made, and the antebellum lobby details were restored rather than replaced with an interior treatment suited precisely to the hotel's early construction date.

The demolition of the Radcliffe-King Mansion (built in 1805) at the northwest corner of George and Meeting Streets had left stranded much paneling, a number of mantels, doorways and useable fragments of plasterwork. These were utilized on the interior balcony and on the second story level, creating a transition of period from first floor to the second.

W.H.J.T.