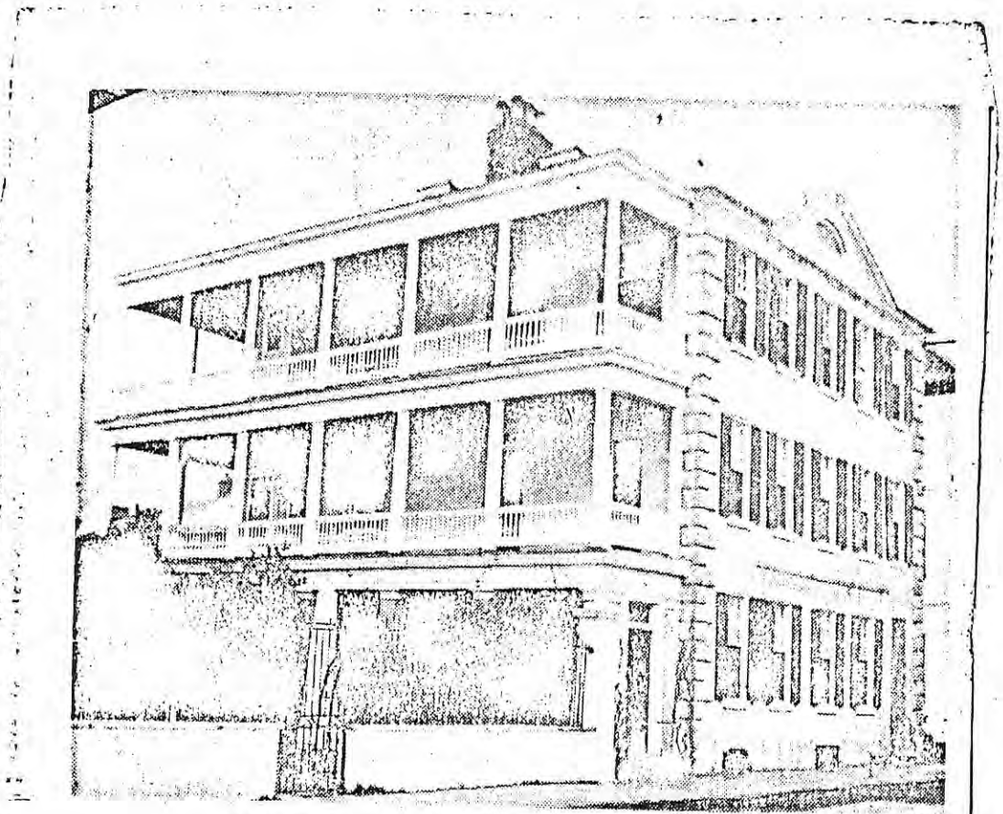
News + Courier 1960



(Staff Photo By Gibbs)

JACOB MOTTE HOUSE AT 69 CHURCH ST.
House Was Built In 1745 By Richard Capers

Do You Know Your Charleston?

Motte House Is Interesting Story Of Changing Periods

By ISABELLA G. LELAND

No. 69 Church Street tells some interesting architectural stories. It is a Charleston double house, but the usual arrangement has been altered. The most elaborate mantel is not found in the drawing room as one would expect, but on the third floor front. In the pantry is another ornamented with urns, garlands and acanthus leaves.

The history of the Jacob Motte house and the story of its architecture will be explained during a town house tour of the South Carolina Historical Society Feb. 27. The tour will be in conjunction with the annual meeting of the society and will include several other houses.

Part of the explanation may be found in the devastation suffered as a result of shelling during the War Between The States. Part in the desire to bring the house "up-to-date" with, first the fashionable Adam style of the late 18th century, then the Greek Revival which was in vogue during the early 19th.

It is likely that the present entrance was at one time a window, and that what would then be the central window was the entrance, running, as was usual in a double house, through to the rear with the stairway rising at its back. With the present arrangement the dining room has been enlarged by throwing the original hall into it, and the entrance now opens on the north room where a closet to the left of the chimney has been made into a passageway.

The mantels seem to have been changed from room to room as fashion dictated. The elaborate mantel in the third floor and that in the dining room, which seem to be a pair, were probably in the drawing room, once, and were replaced by the more fashionable double. At that time perhaps the dining room mantel was put in the pantry, and, as can be deduced by the design, shortened to make it fit.

During the bombardment of Charlestonin the War Between the States the house was severely damaged. The dining room mantel was so badly injured that the present central panel, the procession of Ariadne and Bacchus drawn by a pair of panthers, is a reproduction made by a member of the family taking a pressing from the undamaged one. Many of the graceful details of the latter mantel are missing here, the charming sea shells and birds and blossom cassually dropping out of the frame.

The house has been in the same family for 91 years. Mrs. William Mason Smith bought it in 1869, and her grandson, William Mason Smith, of Charleston and New York, is the present owner. The drawing room is still painted the light blue-green which Mrs. Smith remembered from her girl-hood as being "so becoming to young ladies," with a slightly darker chair rail. Here the paneling is original. What at first appears to be a pair of matching marble mantels on closer inspection turns out to be one wood and one marble. One fluted marble mantel being damaged during the same shelling, Mrs. Smith had it copied in wood. In addition to the mantels an elaborate cornice with grapes and leaves has been added to the room.

The drawing room was very likely enlarged by combining two front rooms, leaving a wide, arched opening between. This was probably done by James Parsons, well-to-do lawyer and planter who owned the house in 1778 and very likely is responsible for the addition of the Adam mantels.

Both dining room and drawing room are completely panelled and have recessed windows with inner shutters. All bedrooms have a panelled dado and the ceilings of the four on the third floor are equally as high as the rooms on the first two. From the first floor a graceful stairway circles to the fourth floor attic and its four rooms under the eaves.

Family portraits and fine furniture add to the beauty and distinction of the house. In the dining room is a portrait by Earle of Bishop Robert Smith, first Bishop of The Established Church of South Carolina, and great-great-grandfather of the owner. Over the drawing room mantels are two paintings in matching gold frames, by Charles Fraser, Mr. Smith's great-great uncle. Throughout the house, and especially in the drawing room are the beautiful paintings by his sister, the late Alice R. Huger Smith, well - known Lowcountry artist. Also in this room are three unusual tables; a pair of Empire card tables of mahogany and rosewood with satinwood inlays, with griffon-headed harp supports and claw feet, and a third, slightly larger, but similar in design.

The exterior is strong and substantial with heavy quoined corners. A false front door on the south leads through a covered piazza, where Mrs. Smith's jogging-board is still in use, to a spacious yard. Here the former servants' quarters have been transformed into an attractive modern apartment. Both its windows and those of the other outbuildings have pointed arches, adding to the charm of their appearance.

It was built about 1745 by Richard Capers, planter of Christ Church Parish. It was the home of Col. Jacob Motte, for many years Public Treasurer of the Province, who had a family of 19 children and whose sons and sons-in-law were prominent men of the Revolutionary period.

69 Church St.
ND SC115

House Is Undergoing Third Renovation

The News & Courier - March 8, 1971

By W. H. J. THOMAS
Staff Reporter

The large Georgian dwelling house at 69 Church St., probably the city's earliest surviving residence of mansion proportions to have a symmetrical "double house" floor plan, is at present being renovated extensively for the third time since its construction more than 225 years ago.

This current renovation by its present owners, Mr. and Mrs. Anthony Cecil, is an attempt at genuine restoration, a term much used in Charleston while less frequently achieved. The Cecils have set about the remodeling of a much-changed dwelling of national importance with the goal of restoring many of the Georgian details which have been lost through changes in fashion and destruction by war and natural disasters.

The house stands on property owned by Capt. William Capers as early as 1715. Capt. Capers, progenitor here of an English family of uncertain French origin, died in 1718, and the land in time passed to his youngest son, Richard Capers (1712-1774), who as an adult became a prosperous Christ Church Parish planter.

The Church Street lot was securely his by 1745 and it was about this time that he apparently built this large home, perhaps as a wedding gift for his recently acquired third wife, the former Mary Ann Maybank.

To judge from construction details uncovered during the current remodeling, Capers built a residence with four rooms to each of its three stories plus full-height attic. In typical double house manner, the entrance floor was in four evenly proportioned rooms with a center hallway as divider from east wall to west. Both second and third floors had three rooms of equal size with large sitting rooms to the southeast corner taking in the area of the hallway to the east side so that these had a three-bay front.

Because of the size and weight of this house, an inner framing construction was created to carry all of this rather than simply using a straight bearing-wall method. In the basement, the builder placed two massive rows of brick piers which ran from front to rear on the lines of the hallway, with 14-by-14 beams resting on these.

Cross joists were placed on these beams, studs rising then to additional parallel 14-by-14 timbers, with another row of upright studs rising on the second story to a single 12-inch-

Do You Know Your Charleston?

by-36-inch beam which supported the weight of third and fourth floors. This plan may best be described as a reverse small "h" rising up two and one half stories if seen directly from the Church Street side looking west.

Because of a slight dip in the roof line where the front gable joins the main truss work, it appears that this house originally had a hip roof and the pediment and stucco consoles were a later addition.

The dwelling later became the residence Col. Jacob Motte, public treasurer of the Royal Colony, and then was purchased in 1778 by James Parsons, wealthy lawyer and planter. From 1800 to 1811, the house was owned by a planter and merchant named O'Brien Smith and it is Smith who probably made the first remodeling by replacing most of the cornices with examples from the Adam style, adding mantles of a fashionable design. He repaneled several of the rooms with low-relief Adam details, including all the little applied putty swags in the dado band of the first floor rear library.

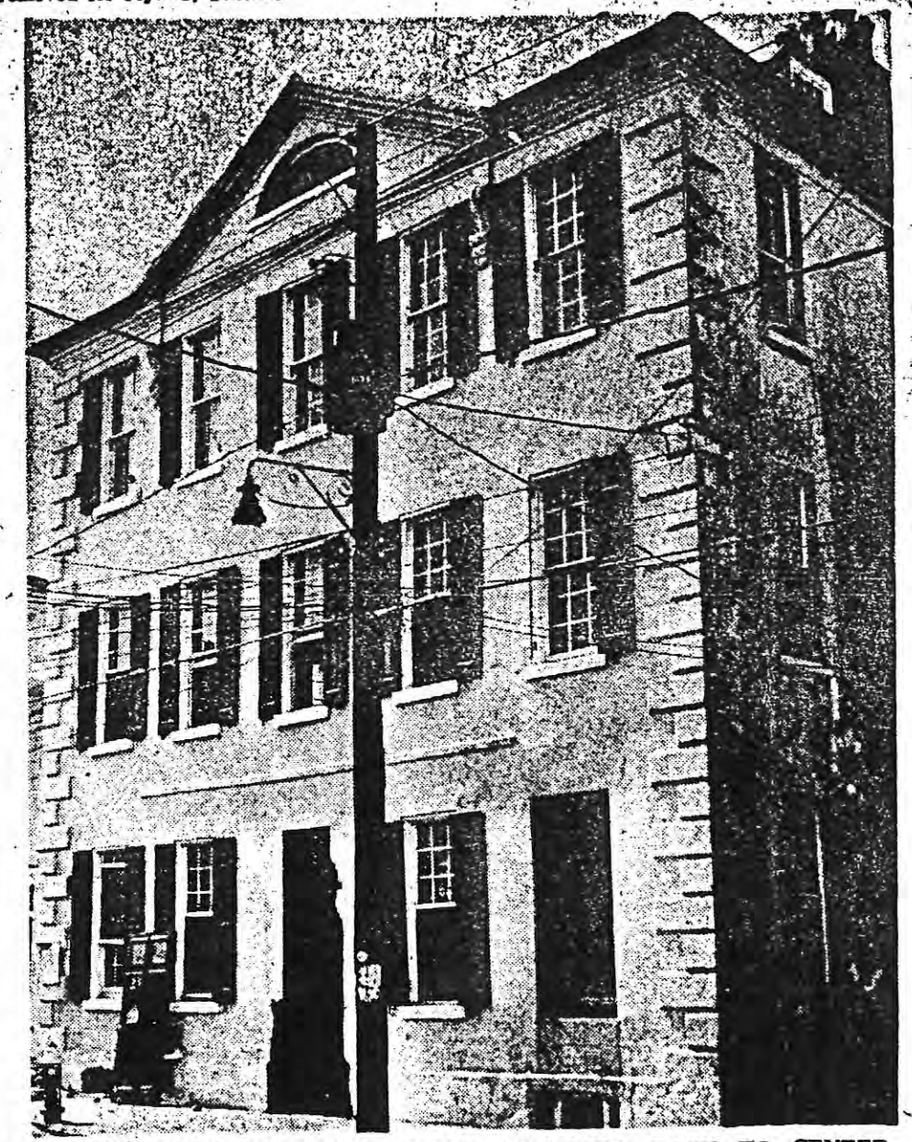
Smith sold this house, six plantations (Duhanon, Litchfield, Youghall, Prospect, Chickees and Dungannon), numerous slaves and livestock to John Pyne for $200,000. Pyne lived on here until his death in 1821 when the property went to his widow and half-dozen other heirs. It was held by the heirs until 1866, and probably during the 1840s, under their ownership, the house was once again remodeled.

There is some question about this matter, but it seems in the ante-bellum period the center door was changed to the far north front bay, a dining room was thrown open across the rest of the first story front (requiring the removal of the 14-by-14 beam on the south between first and second floors). The second story drawing room was expanded full across the front (requiring the removal of most of the wall beneath the 12-by-36 inch top beam).

In 1869, the house was sold to Mrs. William Mason Smith. Her descendants were to retain the property for 100 years, among these being her son, Daniel Elliott Huger Smith, who with his own distinguished daughter, Alice Ravenel Huger Smith, the noted watercolorist, wrote the "Dwelling Houses of Charleston."

The Cecils found the ante-bellum project had so weakened the reverse "h" support framing that the great 12-by-36 beam had cracked badly and the general structure was sagging. Closing in the floor plan to its original arrangement has not only given it back its Georgian aspect but created the necessary stability as well.

While much of the Adam detail is being retained, the Greek revival features have been removed and proper paneling and classical entablatures added to the principal rooms. The Cecils made an additonal discovery when several Adam mantles were removed for repairs; beneath these were found the old blue Dutch chimney tiles from the early 18th century. Forty of them were saved and another 360 ordered from a firm in Holland, which still makes them, to be placed in four fireplace openings.



DWELLING'S ENTRANCE BEING CHANGED BACK TO CENTER
First story floor plan restored to former arrangement. (Staff Photo by Murton)

69 Church Street

The Charleston Evening Post
December 11, 1968

Residence One Of City's Large

44th In A Series

By JACK LELAND
Evening Post Staff Writer

Ever since its construction in about 1745, the handsome house at 69 Church Street has been associated with families prominent in the city, the state and the nation. From it have come men and women who contributed greatly to the literary, art and government life of the area.

It is one of the city's largest private houses and its second story drawing room, spanning the width of the dwelling, is among the handsomest and most spacious in Charleston.

Rebecca Brewton Motte, the heroine of Fort Motte, grew up next door, at 71 Church St., and married Jacob Motte, the younger, who lived here. Col. Motte, senior, was the public treasurer of the Royal Colony for 27 years and occupied No. 69 as a residence although he was not the owner.

Today it is owned by the estate of William Mason Smith and continues in a family which purchased it in 1869. At that time it was in very bad shape, having been hit by several shells during the Civil War.

Mrs. William Mason Smith, senior, carefully restored the mansion. Left a widow at 25 with five children, she conducted a school in the big house.

Richard Capers, its builder, was head of a family that was to give South Carolina three Episcopal bishops, one of whom was a heroic brigadier in the Confederate Armies before donning the robes of a cleric.

A progenitor of the Smith family was South Carolina's first Episcopal bishop, the Right Rev. Robert Smith. The house today contains his breakfront and a part of his library as well as an oil painting of the bishop that is somewhat of a controversy within the family. It is one of two or three that are exactly alike and it depends on which branch of the family is present to decide which of the paintings is the original.

In more recent years the house was owned by Daniel Elliot Huger Smith. With his daughter, Alice Rutledge Huger Smith, he wrote the "Dwelling Houses of Charleston", a definitive history of the city's old houses that also contains a pot pourri of historical items concerning their inhabitants.

Miss Smith became one of the city's best known artists and her paintings were exhibited widely. They are in great demand today because of the soft sentimentality and remarkable integrity with which she captured the feel of the Lowcountry.

Rebecca Brewton Motte was refugeeing at the Motte plantation on the Congaree River when it was seized by the British army as headquarters. When Col. Harry Lee and Gen. Francis Marion arrived to attack the Redcoats, Mrs. Motte herself gave the order to set her home afire, even providing the fire arrows with which the job was accomplished.

The Motte family sold the Church Street house to Col. James Parsons in 1778. He had a great record as a soldier in the Revolution and also was a member of the Continental Congress. He was offered the vice presidency of South Carolina in 1776 but turned it down.

A wealthy planter and merchant, O'Brien Smith, bought the house in 1800 and kept it for 11 years. It was possibly this Smith who installed the beautiful Adam mantels that now grace the big fireplaces. He also seems to have been responsible for creating the handsome drawing room by making a wide arched opening between the two street-front rooms on the second floor.

Smith also closed the central door on the street that formerly opened into the room that is now a dining room. It was obviously an office prior to the alterations he made, the house being typical of the sort built by the merchants of the pre-Revolutionary period.

The house is unusual also in that it has a full cellar, an adjunct not normal to houses built on the lowlying Charleston peninsula. Its upper rooms have the same tall ceilings as the ground floor. With its attic and cellar, it has a total of five floors.

Like the main house, a charming outbuilding at the rear is built of Lowcountry brick. This former kitchen and servant facility has windows with pointed arches, and architectural departure from the normal style of houses of the period.

The house has a large lot and a rear entrance on Ford's Court which gives it access to Meeting Street on the west.

Its position, atop a rise of ground running back from the Cooper River waterfront, and the fact that its first floor is about three feet above ground undoubtedly has stood it well during hurricanes.

One huge storm drove a schooner of nine-foot draft up Water Street and into Church Street, a scant half-block south. But the old house at No. 69 withstood the winds and the waters.

Its wide piazza
onto a walled gar
rear where one of
most prolific "
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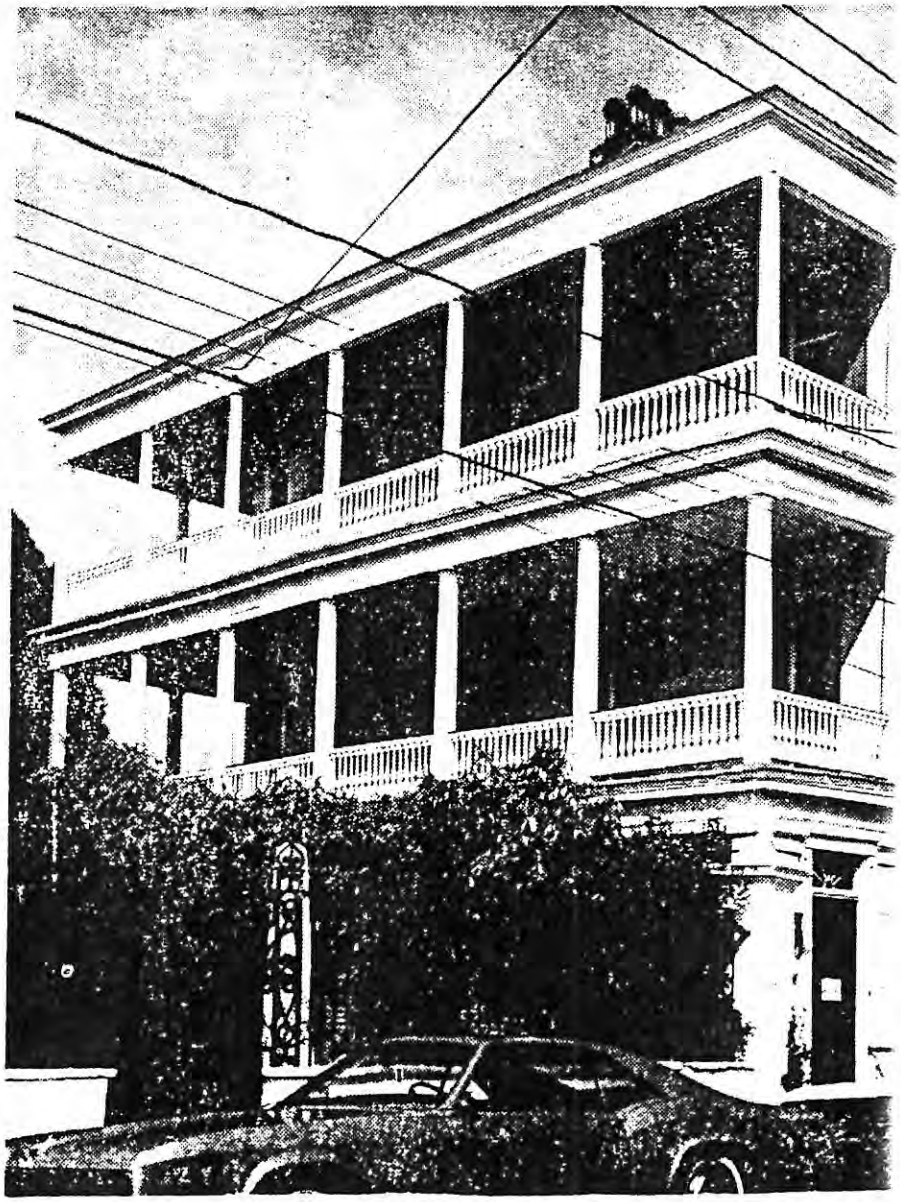

Handsome house at 69 Church St. was built

Church Street Residence One Of City's Largest

The Charleston Evening Post
December 11, 1968

th In A Series

JACK LELAND
g Post Staff Writer

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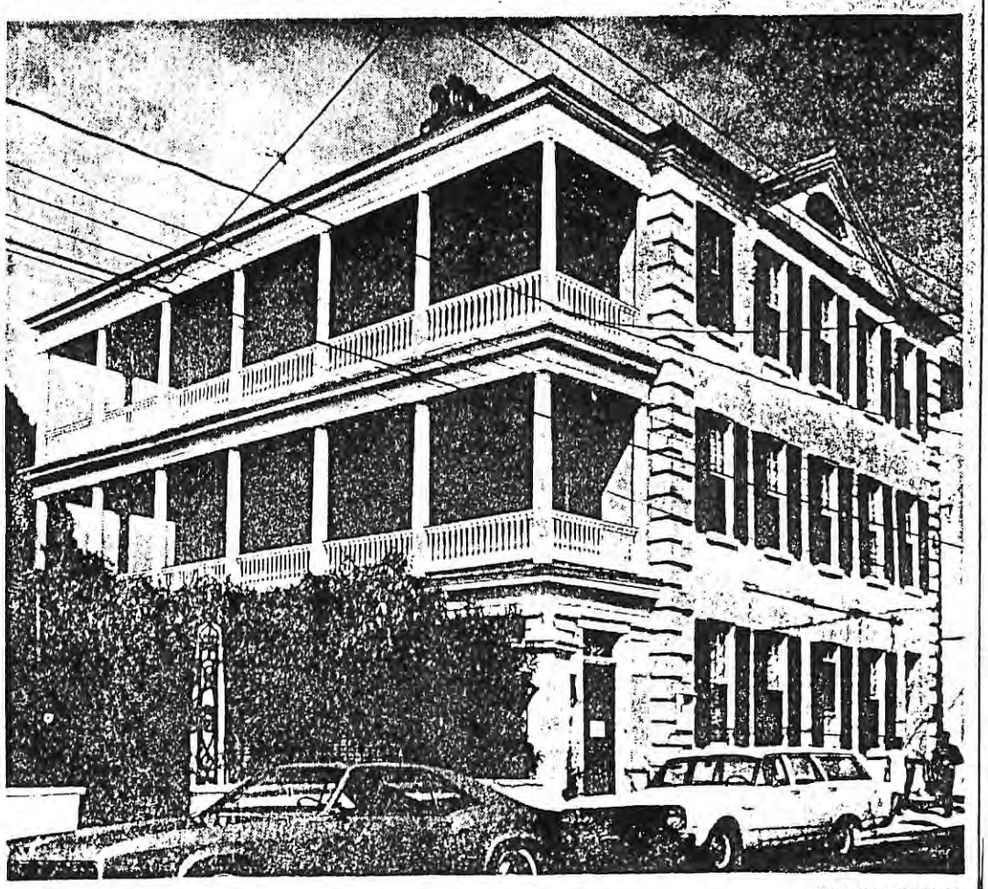
Its wide plazzas look out onto a walled garden at the rear where one of the area's most prolific "Confederate Jessamine" vines covers the porch of the outbuilding. On the lower piazza rests an ancient joggling board, relic of an era when these were fixtures on almost every porch. They served as a bouncing place for the very young, a courtship site for the young and a restful seat for the elderly.



(Staff Photo By Jordan.)

Handsome house at 69 Church St. was built about 1745.

69 Church Street Change Authorized By Board

The News & Courier
January 29, 1971

By W.H.J. THOMAS
Staff Reporter

Charleston's Board of Architectural Review yesterday granted permission to change the location of the front entrance and to remove the plazzas on the Richard Capers house at 69 Church St., one of the city's earliest dwellings. The application for the changes was submitted by Anthony Cecil.

The present entrance to the dwelling (constructed circa 1745) is located to the extreme north side of the five-bay front. Plans will place the doorway in the center bay, replacing the present north end entrance with a window. It was reported at the Board of Review meeting that there is evidence that the original entrance was at center.

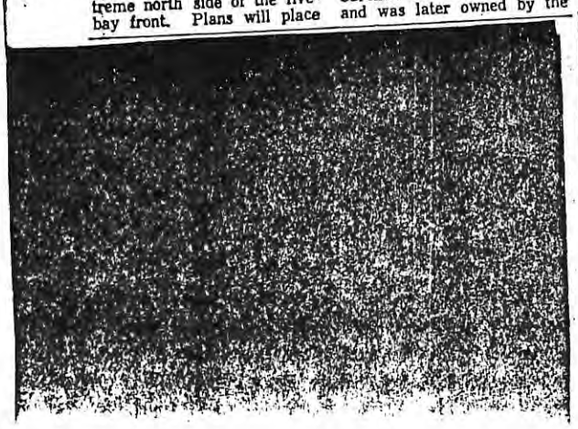
It is believed the piazzas to the south of the building were added at mid-19th century. The dwelling was in the 18th century the home of Jacob Motte, Public Treasurer of colonial South Carolina for some 27 years, and was later owned by the Huger Smith family; the noted water-colorist and author Alice R. Huger Smith lived there through her life.

Presented to the Board of Review were preliminary plans for the construction of a one-story building with glass-paneled sides to serve as the museum home of the "Best Friend of Charleston", a reproduction of South Carolina's first steam locomotive.

The shed will be located off Ann Street to the rear of the William Aiken house at 456 King St. It will be constructed by Southern Railway, which maintains its offices in the Aiken house.

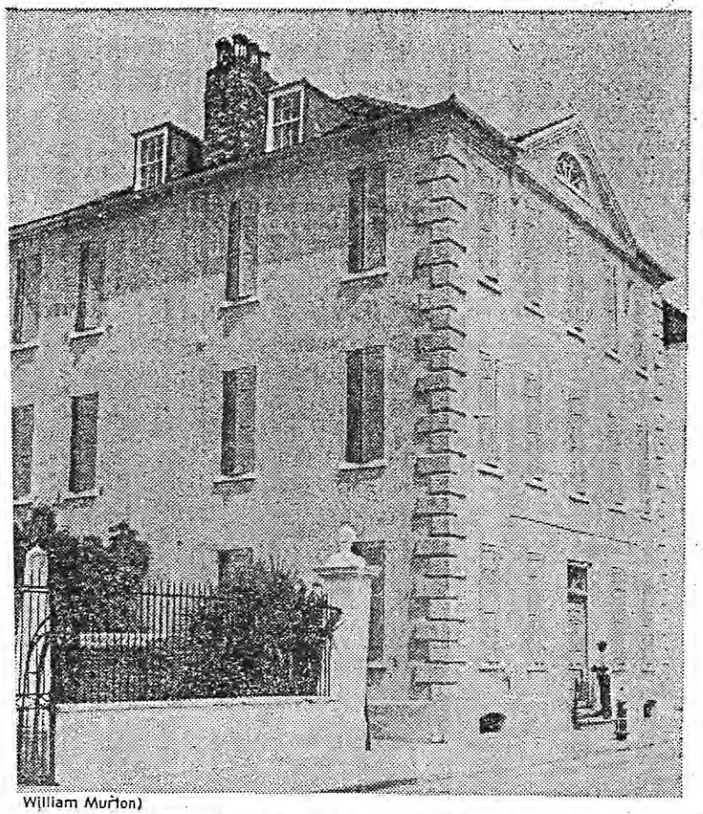
Also approved by the Board of Review was an application to remove the west side piazzas to a two-and-a-half - story brick dwelling (circa 1840) at 162 Queen St. The application was submitted by Mrs. Patsy Collier, agent for the McKenna estate.

Also approved was an application to demolish a frame dwelling at 373 Meeting St. The dwelling is listed in the [illegible] of the city; ap-



69 Church St.——An Unusual Form Of Double House

P+C 1975



William Murton)

69 Church St. Has Unusual Features

By ROBERT P. STOCKTON

The stately dwelling house at 69 Church St. is an unusual form of the Charleston "double house."

Its construction has been attributed to Richard Capers but documentary evidence gives equal candidacy for such credit to either Jordan Roche or Jacob Motte.

The house was one of the largest built in Charlestown before the American Revolution, not only in ground coverage, but also in height and floor space.

It has three full floors, an excavated cellar and a spacious garret.

The entrance floor, in typically double house fashion, has four squarish rooms, central entrance hall and central stairhall.

The second and third floors each have a suite of two rooms extending the full width of the front. The southeast room of each suite is larger, taking in the space of the hallway. To the rear are two rooms and the stairhall on each floor.

The design is unusual in that the third floor windows are the same size as those of the lower floors, a departure from prevailing architectural taste which dictated that top floor windows be made smaller for esthetic reasons.

A classic pediment, supported on consoles, perhaps the first use of this architectural form in Charleston, and bold quoins add distinction to the facade. The pediment's fanlight also aids several dormers in lighting the attic.

The size and weight of the house made necessary an inner framing system rather than a straight bearing wall method.

This system begins in the basement where two rows of massive brick piers run along the lines of the hallway with 14-by-14 inch beams resting on the piers. Cross joists were placed on the beams with studs rising from them to additional 14-by-14 inch beams.

From the beams another row of upright studs rise on the second floor to a single 12-by-36 inch beam which supports the weight of the third floor and attic.

It appears that during the antebellum period the entrance door was moved to the far north front bay, the entrance hallway was incorporated into an enlarged dining room (requiring removal of one of the large beams between the first and second floors) and the second floor drawing rooms were opened by removing most of the wall between them.

After the present owners, Mr. and Mrs. Anthony Cecil, bought the house in 1970, they found that the antebellum remodeling had weakened the framing system so that the great 12-by-36 inch beam was badly cracked and the general structure was sagging.

The Cecils restored the inner framing system, regaining the necessary stability and returning the house to its original Georgian double house balance.

Do You Know Your Charleston

Who built the house, and when, is not certain. Several records of conveyance of the property are missing.

A deed of conveyance for the adjacent property of Col. Robert Brewton to the north (now 71 Church St.), lists Richard Capers as owning the property on Brewton's south line in 1745.

Capers inherited the property from his father, Capt. William Capers, who had acquired it by 1715.

It has been speculated that Richard Capers built the house about 1745, perhaps as a wedding gift to his third wife, Mary Ann Maybank.

The first recorded evidence of the house is found in a deed of Aug. 25, 1761, in which Mrs. Rebecca Roche, widow of Jordan Roche (who died in 1754), relinquished her dower in the property to her husband's nephew, Francis Roche.

According to the deed, the property consisted of the lot "with the Brick House Mefsuage or Tenement and out Houses thereon Erected."

The deed further states that "the said Lott of Land Brick House buildings and premifses... are now in the ufe Pofsefsion and Occupation of Jacob Motte Esqr. Publick Treasurer."

Motte never owned the property, though he probably lived there until his death in 1770, after 27 years as the province's treasurer.

It would not have been unusual at the time for a tenant to build on a rented lot.

The house was subsequently owned by James Parsons, eminent lawyer, planter and political leader during the Revolution.

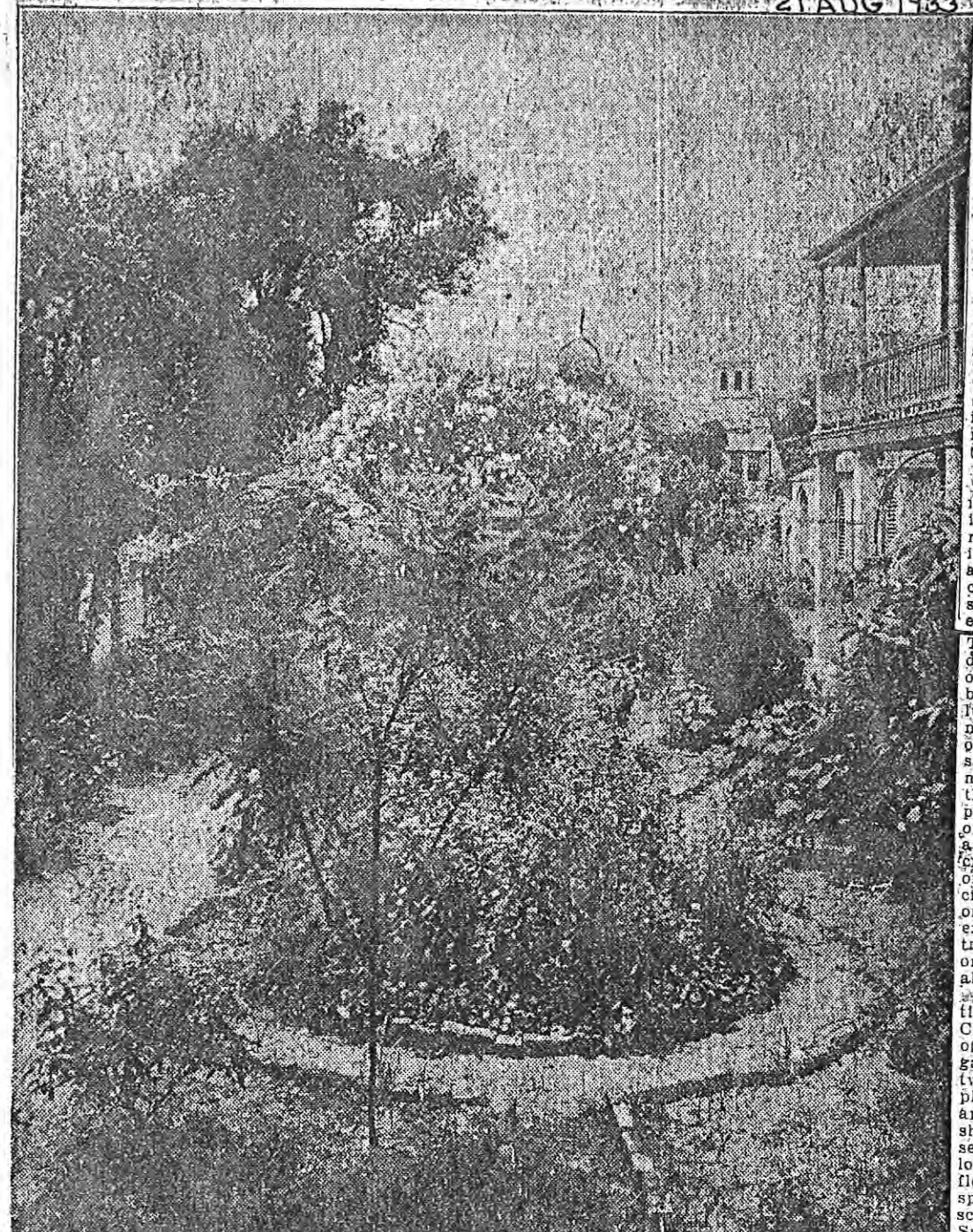
In 1800 it was acquired by O'Brien Smith, planter, who remodeled it extensively in the Adams style.

The property includes a group of outbuildings which are probably as old as the house.

Do You Know Your Charleston?

Garden of 69 Church Street

News and Courier
21 AUG 1933



Variety of Flowers and Trees Grown in Garden Hidden from Public View

Secluded from the street and hidden from the eyes of the passers-by the garden pictured above has been fashioned during the last six months by the Misses Alice R. Huger Smith and her sister, Miss Caroline Smith, in the deep lot at the rear of their home, at 69 Church street.

Following the death of their uncle, Robert Smith, who also resided at 69 Church street, the Misses Smith gave up their joint studio at 8 Atlantic street in January and decided to have their studios at their home. The corner of the building seen at the right of the picture, the old wash house and servants' quarters, of former days, which adjoin the kitchen of the residence, is the studio of Miss Alice Smith and houses her beautiful watercolor paintings. Miss Caroline Smith has her music studio on the second floor of the residence, in a large and beautiful room overlooking Church street.

Previous to its metamorphosis into a flower garden, vegetables were grown in the plot, guarded and tended by Mr. Robert Smith. That the garden has attained the degree of beauty, as pictured, in its short history, is due to the loving care which the Misses Smith expend upon it, although their old colored gardener bitterly complains that they "trabble" the plants so much they won't grow. He has exacted a promise that they won't "trabble" a watermelon vine, which spreads luxuriantly over the lower part of the garden, until its time of usefulness is over.

Now Being Rearranged

The garden is now in a process of change and will give a different effect in the fall. The large round flower beds (there is one behind that in the foreground of the picture) which recently were a riot of brilliantly colored zinnias, have been dug up and in their place a square bed has been arranged, with inverted corners, in which will be set different plants. The bed proper will be sown in bulbs. The large bird of paradise tree, a member of the mimosa family, which is seen in the immediate foreground, will continue to occupy its place, as will the white oleander tree, viewed in the distance. Among the mass of shrubbery at the right is an alligator pear tree, which the Misses Smith planted one night after having the pear for supper.

Running parallel with the brick wall of the First Baptist church, which bounds the garden on the left, is a cooter-backed walk of old brick, which runs the length of the lot. A large urn in which a small fig tree grows, is at the end of the walk. Over the walk is a series of three arbors, over which vines peculiar to this section are trained. Yellow jessamine and Cherokee roses clamber over the first, woodbine, the second, and Wistaria, over the third.

Bordering the brick walk on the south, nestling against the wall of the churchyard, are gardenias and strawberry shrubs. An opopanax tree and a lovely thing called "Golden Rain," a member of the mimosa family, also are to be seen in the vicinity of the walk. At the right a row of coxcombs flaunt their brilliant heads.

Extends Toward Meeting

The deep lot in which the garden is situated extends almost to Meeting street, being bounded on the north by the old brick stable, which is now used by Miss Caroline Smith as a garage. A narrow driveway connects the garage with Meeting street. Abutting on the lot are properties of families living on Water, Tradd and Meeting streets. The deep wells, formed by the custom of building on the street, with large back lots, were spoken of as "the lungs of the city" by their grandmother. The earliest recollections of her studio, then the wash house, said Miss Alice Smith, is the annual boiling of marmalade from the sour oranges which grew in profusion in the lot. The first floor of the building is distinguished by a huge fireplace with a large iron crane, and the pot in which the oranges were boiled hung from this crane over a roaring fire. The orange trees are now no longer in existence, but six varieties of fig trees, the black, brown, pound, lemon, sugar and Ischia now bear abundantly in the rear of the lot.

The brick wall of the First Baptist church, which extends from Church street, borders the portico of the residence as well as the garden and in the narrow space between the wall and the portico are planted wild violets, both purple and white, and wood fern, the shady, damp spot making an ideal setting for these wild plants which love swampy places. Geraniums flourish in various parts of the spacious garden and following their scheme of reorganization, the Misses Smith expect to concentrate them in a bed just beyond the studio.

Surrounded by Churches

Through the columns of the studio can be seen the peaked roof and arched windows of the brick and mortar tool house, in which the gardening implements are kept.

In taking up the zinnias, which bloomed so brilliantly in the early summer, the Misses Smith followed a custom successfully employed here by many, that of taking up the plants in August and sowing new seed, which will furnish one with a profusion of bloom in October.

The garden, say the Misses Smith, is surrounded by churches. In addition to the First Baptist on the south, the twin cupolas of the First (Scotch) Presbyterian church can be seen in the distance and further to the right, although out of the picture, St. Michael's Protestant Episcopal church rears its steeple of sparkling whiteness.