

Society Street House Built For Bridegroom

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(EDITOR'S NOTE: Eleventh in a series of articles on recent restorations in Ansonborough. The twelfth will appear in this column next Monday.)

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Staff Reporter

The three-and-a-half story brick residence at 43 Society St. is part of a complex of at least four principal buildings which Robert M. Venning, a Christ Church Parish planter and factor, constructed between 1840 and 1851 after the great fire of 1835 leveled his previous holdings at the intersection of Anson and Society streets. Today, as reminders of his building activity, we have not only 43 Society but 58 Anson, 68 Society and 60 Anson as well.

It was in 1821 that Venning first began purchasing lots at his intersection, and both the Charleston city directories of 1822 and 1831 list him as being a resident of this section of Society Street. These several pieces of property remained in his name until after his death about 1858.

Family tradition has it that Venning constructed 43 Society St. as a wedding gift for one of his sons about 1840, and built 45 Society for himself about the same time. Soon after 1850 he was to

build 60 Anson as a store and probably partial residence, completing 58 Anson as a piece of rental property at about the same time.

A check of the "Cross and Index for Fay's Charleston Directory, 1840 and 1841" fails to show any Vennings living on Society Street, but by 1849, the directories do list a Henry M. Venning, lumber merchant, as in residence where 43 Society now stands. Henry was perhaps the son who received the dwelling as a wedding gift.

In 1859, the executors of Robert Venning (R.V. Venning, Elias Venning and William C. Venning) sold the property at 43 Society "with a three story Brick House thereon" to John Venning for \$6,000.

John Venning (like the builder listed as being "of Christ Church Parish") sold the house and lot on June 19, 1863, to a Robert B. Thayer for \$13,000. Thayer must have died soon after, for in 1865 a Samuel Ham, J. G. Thayer, Harriet Thayer and John D. Norsey took action through the courts of Richland County against William Thayer the elder, James Thayer and William Thayer the younger for the settlement of Robert B. Thayer's estate.

This action was followed by

the sale of 43 Society on April 21, 1869, for \$3,725 by Sheriff E. W. M. Mackey to one Patrick Flynn. This last-named individual was identified as being a constable, and he would own this dwelling until his death in the 1880s.

We find that on Feb. 8, 1883, Alice Flynn gained possession of the property by paying off \$111 in back taxes.

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The property next passed to a John James Flynn who conveyed it in November, 1923, to Nannie L. Flynn for \$10.

Nannie Flynn (listed in the deed of transfer as being of Jacksonville, Fla.) sold 43 Society to Julius W. Nicholas for \$10, and "other valuable considerations" on Feb. 28, 1930. It was next purchased by Ray Banov for \$3,500 on Dec. 23, 1942, then resold in 1948 to Eugene B. West and Roberta M. West for \$7,350. After Eugene West's death, the property was sold by O.T. Wallace and Roberta West on July 6, 1961, to Mary P. Brady.

The present owners, Dr. and

Mrs. Robert S. McCully, purchased the house in 1969.

It appears that the two-story brick dependency to 43 Society may be older than the main house itself and possibly a portion of Robert Venning's earlier house which survived the 1838 fire.

The dwelling he built for his bridegroom son was constructed on a fairly narrow lot (44 feet to street front and 104 feet in depth) but was admirably designed on a tall, narrow plan to gain as much interior living space as possible. To suit the vertical lines of the house, Venning used a somewhat more elongated version of the Doric column for his curtain-wall entrance and for the west piazzas than we shall usually find in Charleston during the 1840s. Then most building features seemed to thicken rather than become more slender.

He followed through on this treatment by placing quite tall narrow windows on the north and west sides as well, thus forcing the use of nine light double hung windows rather than the six light windows more usual for any period after the 1830s. Only on the third story was the builder able to go to six lights

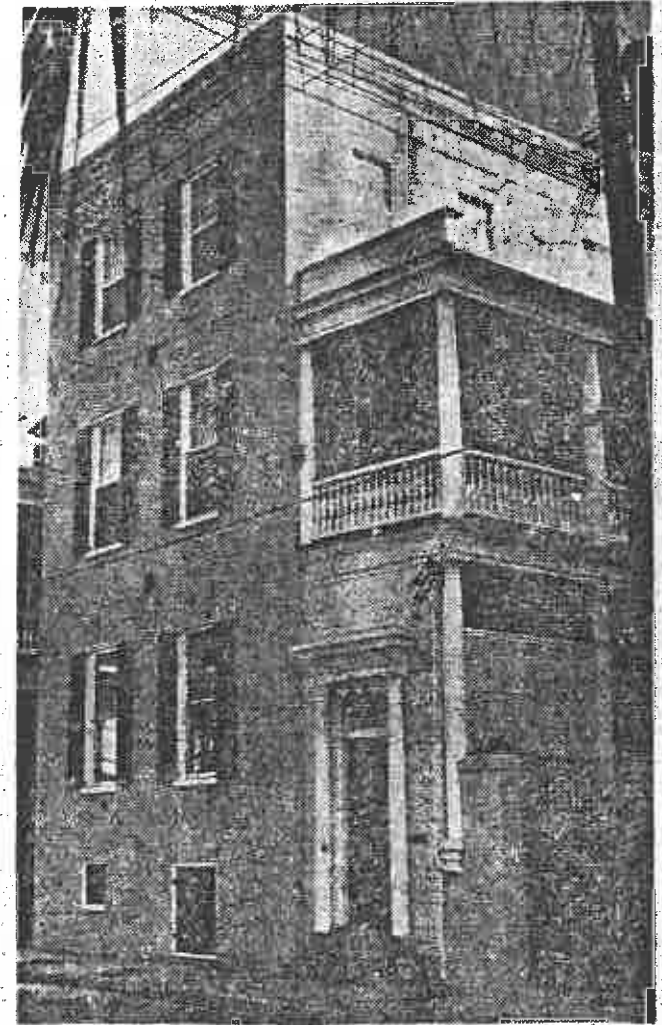
because of the shallowness of those top story openings.

The brick dwelling is now on its second round of restoration, as both Mrs. Brady and the McCullys have done extensive renovations to erase some of the attributes acquired when it was in a multi-unit apartment situation.

Not too many years ago, much of the present piazzas were boarded up for additional rental space. The large open fireplace had been bricked-in to accommodate space heaters and make-shift rooms were placed here and there about the main structure.

The McCullys have cleared the piazzas of added areas, closed off the house from the old kitchen in the dependency and opened the fireplaces again. The porous marble surrounds beneath the handsome Greek Revival wooden mantles had to be removed, as these had been painted over so many times that they could not be cleaned.

The garden has now been landscaped, with a brick entranceway added as well as iron work designed by the McCullys. The two-story dependency is planned as a future restoration project.



43 SOCIETY PART OF VENNING COMPLEX
Dwelling completed after 1840. (Staff Photo by Swain)