

# Lot At 4 Gadsden St. <sup>BR</sup> April 13/1970

## 'Made' By Lumberman

(EDITOR'S NOTE: Fifteenth in a series of articles on the early dwellings along Beaufain and Wentworth streets. The sixteenth will appear on Saturday.)

By W. H. J. THOMAS

At the northeast corner of Beaufain and Gadsden streets stands a tall stucco-covered brick residence that was built by a local lumberman on a piece of "made land" that he may have filled in himself with the chips and sawdust of his sawmill that was located just to the north of this present building.

This home builder was John H. Steinmeyer, and evidence indicates that he had completed his three-story dwelling by 1852, although he apparently never owned the land that it stands on today.

The property which the Steinmeyer house occupies was Lot No. 64 on the plan of Charleston Green and was held in the name of Elizabeth Harleston. After her death, her executrix, Elizabeth Corbett, and her executor, John Harleston, sold the property to a wealthy dry goods merchant named Nathan Nathans for \$1,280. The lot measured at that time 212 feet, six inches, along Beaufain and 120 feet, four inches, up Gadsden.

This conveyance was made on January 11, 1831, at a time when much of the lot must have been marsh and part of a backwater of the Ashley river. In the deed of transfer property is not described as a "water lot," but it appears that portions of the lot were under water.

The city directory and street

guide to Charleston for the year 1840 still show no listings for Gadsden Street, and a check of city maps of the period shows the river reaching in at this spot. The map of 1844 by W. Keenan records only the north portion of Gadsden and shows the corner lot as marsh. The same is true of the W. Williams map of 1849. It is not until one examines the J.H. Colton map of Charleston, made in 1855, that we actually see Beaufain being connected up to Gadsden at this point, rather clearly ruling out any building on the lot much before this date.

Nathan Nathans himself does not seem to have done any building in this area, although he did quite a bit of business as a landlord and the lot remained in his name for 55 years. As early as 1837, Nathan was keeping a dry goods store on upper King Street, far enough above Calhoun Street to have the location referred to as "The Neck", an uptown area that consistently got more and more uptown as the years passed.

It appears that he kept his place of residence uptown as well. A strange thing is Nathans' name disappears from the city directories after the late 1830s, and he is not listed on tax books of the 1850s. Yet in the "List of Tax Payers of the City of Charleston 1860" Nathan Nathans reappears in force as owner of \$77,200 worth of taxable real estate and nine slaves.

We find Nathans giving Steinmeyer a mortgage and lease on this property at mid-century. At first there was a saw mill nearby, and it seems quite likely the nature

of the leasing of part of this property was to permit its filling-in with waste from Steinmeyer's mill.

By 1852, not only did Steinmeyer still have his steam sawmill on Gadsden, but he also was listed as a resident of 100 Beaufain, which would place him about on this corner. The house appears to be from this period and, since addresses were ter-

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### Do You Know Your Charleston?

ribly casual matters in those days and the compiling of street listings even more so, we may feel quite safe in dating this tall dwelling (presently known as 4 Gadsden) as circa 1852.

The Steinmeyer family continued to live here for many years and J. H. Steinmeyer and Son expanded until it was being identified as a lumber and commission merchant firm, a slight altering in its commercial designation that suggests greater size and prosperity.

An interesting period photograph exists that shows this dwelling after the storm of Aug. 25, 1885. The roof has been torn away, portions of the south brick wall have collapsed and fallen down the piazza roof and portions of a tall picket fence have been broken by falling debris.

The caption to the picture is of interest because it says that J.H. Steinmeyer's handsome house has been so badly damaged that it probably will be demolished, a

pessimistic suggestion that happily was never acted upon.

Its salvation most probably was due to the professional skills of the next owner, a man noted for a long career as a builder.

By the date of the storm Nathan Nathans had died. His executors — Levy Nathans, David Nathans, Alexander Nathans and Jacob Nathans — apparently saw little future for the ruined house and on March 9, 1886, sold it to George W. Egan for \$4,000.

Egan is advertised in the late decades of the 19th century as a builder and contractor, and he may be best known as one of the builders of the jetties at the entrance to Charleston harbor. He is also remembered as an owner of Bonny Hall, the Combahee River plantation. He was the builder of the central portion of the present Bonny Hall house, which was later expanded by the New York publisher Nelson Doubleday. It is believed that Egan's son, James Henry Egan, designed Bonny Hall while a student at Georgia Tech.

The piazzas on 4 Gadsden were damaged again in a storm of 1911 and it was after this date that they were rebuilt with their present steep slant to better resist the lift of the wind.

The house at Beaufain and Gadsden passed to James Egan in 1911. He left it in his will, probated Nov. 12, 1953, to Daisy F. Egan. It was conveyed to J. Jarvis Egan in the summer of 1957.

It was on December 22, 1965, that the dwelling was sold to its present owner, Mrs. Amalie Stone Walker.

The large dwelling is quite



STEINMEYER HOUSE CONSTRUCTED ABOUT 1852

The entrance porch retains its Tower of the Winds capitals, a specimen of the Corinthian order that utilized both the lotus and acanthus leaf, while the order of the piazza columns along the south side of the dwelling is Tuscan. (Staff Photo by Swain.)

typical of the full-size residences built in Charleston during mid-19th century, with a high roof parapet, heavy stone lintels and sills to the

full-length windows, and decorative treatment held to a minimum. The west entrance still boasts its handsome little porch with the

design for the capitals of its columns and pilasters taken from the Corinthian order used on the Tower of the Winds at Athens.