

4 Chalmers Street

Notes from interview with former owner Nancie Quick
July, 1998

- Ms. Quick owned the property from 1983 to 1996. She wished to convey the following information to the purchasers of the property however, they have not been receptive and have undertaken major, insensitive changes to the property. She is giving the information to Historic Charleston Foundation on the express condition that it not be shared with the current owners.
- The property is single house plan, predominately wood framed. One brick wall remains from an earlier structure which was destroyed in the 1886 earthquake. There is also a brick kitchen building that may or may not partially remain from the earlier structure.
- The property belonged to the Baker family for several generations in the 19th and 20th centuries. The family maintained a corner grocery at Chalmers and Church for many years. The present structure on the corner was actually moved there (from the next lot over) relatively recently in order to provide an exit for a bank parking lot.
- The property line for 4 Chalmers actually extends 2-3 feet beyond the rear brick wall and is marked only by a painted mark along the brick wall. Ms. Quick successfully argued for this extension to the Master in Equity although it will very likely become part of the (First Federal) bank's property by adverse possession.
- The property passed to John Dean who married a daughter in the Baker family and the Quicks, in turn, purchased the property from his estate. Ms. Quick learned much of this information from Rosemary Suggs, a granddaughter of Agnes Dean, and from Eleanor Shriver who lived in the house and apparently was Mr. Dean's sister.
- In the 1920s/1930s, some members of the Baker family from Savannah moved in with the family at 4 Chalmers. Ms. Quick believes it was then that the originally separate kitchen was connected to the house. A two-story frame extension was added in the northwest part of the property to create a living room and bedroom for this group. Still, the only bathroom was located at the southeasternmost part of the house, a converted part of the second story piazza, located off the front bedroom. No separate stair was installed to access the added bedroom from the added living room below. Also a shed kitchen addition was made behind the earlier kitchen. It has since been ripped down.
- Nancie Quick completely removed the 1930s addition because it was termite infested. In so doing, she discovered a window frame between the hall and the living room

addition. This was removed to create a passage from the hall to her living room addition.

- The walls of the entry hall and the second story hall (now plastered over by the new owners) were covered with beaded lapped cypress boarding of some sort. The ceiling also was covered with similar woodwork.
- The new owners ripped down a shed that was on the property and built a garage. (BAR?) The shed had a smaller footprint than the garage. It was three bays deep and opened toward the house. One bay was a privy, one was for coal storage (the front two fireplaces burned coal) and one bay was for wood storage (the kitchen fireplace burned wood)
- The brick wall has become a source of controversy as the Slave Mart was built against it. Ms. Quick successfully stopped an effort by the Department of Parks to heavily refit the structural supports of the Slave Mart.

Also in the file are blueprints of the Quick additions (corrections in pen to preliminary plans made by Nancie Quick) and copy of newspaper article about member of Baker family

99 And Going Strong

By CHARLENE HAVNAER
Staff Reporter

Seated in a wheelchair, her thick white hair pulled back in a net, the tiny 99-year-old woman reels off a string of dates that make a much younger listener's head spin.

"Let's see, the great earthquake, that was Aug. 31, 1886, and I was 5-years-old," says Mary Hogan Baker, a smile crossing her lips as she recalls the day. "My daddy and mother took us all into the buggy shed where we stayed for a week until the danger was over.

"The great exposition... Well, it was held where Hampton Park is now and each state had an exhibit. It lasted for six months and it started Dec. 1, 1901."

On the wall behind the little lady hangs a picture she says was taken Oct. 11, 1911, when she married Thomas F. Baker. Seated beside a dark handsome man and dressed in a white suit with a plume hat propped on her head, a beautiful young woman smiles from the frame.

Although some 70 years have elapsed and five children, 20 grandchildren and 34 great grandchildren have been born since that happy day, the woman is quite obviously Mrs. Baker. The years have turned the dark hair to white, but have taken little toll on the smooth clear complexion.

When asked about the comparison, Mrs. Baker chuckles:

"When I was in the hospital last year this lady kept looking at me and finally said, 'You're 98, well you don't look like it. What kind of cream do you use?' I laughed and said soap and water."

Time has been good to Mrs. Baker who says with assurance that she will be one century old Oct. 28. Not only has it allowed her to retain her beauty, it has left her at age 99 with a sharp mind and a stunning sense of humor.

"I don't know anyone who isn't inspired by Mary Baker," says Margaret M. McAllen whose mother was Mrs. Baker's godmother. "She's very intellectual. She doesn't falter for a minute. She is always right on top of everything."

Mrs. Baker makes it her business to stay on top of things. Although Padgett's Disease, a deterioration of the bones that makes them brittle, has confined her to a wheelchair for the past year and prevents her from going many places, Mrs. Baker reads constantly, never going a day without a newspaper.

She even re-registered to vote this year after missing a few elections because "I felt they needed another vote with the way things have been going." I voted for the wrong man, though, because I always vote straight Democratic ticket," she adds with a chuckle.

Her friends call her "Miss Fine and Dandy" because when she's asked how she's doing, Mrs. Baker responds "fine and dandy."

"She makes other people feel good



Staff Photo by Brad Nellies

Current Events

Mary Baker keeps up with the world by reading books and magazines. Her friends say she puts everyone in good moods because she is always happy-go-lucky.

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because she's always happy-go-lucky and always in a good mood," says Blanche M. LePrince, who has known Mrs. Baker for about 35 years.

"She's very, very friendly," adds Catherine T. McAllen, Margaret McAllen's sister. She just sparkles. She is full of personality and it bubbles over."

Mrs. Baker attributes her long life and her health — never having been sick a day in her life until the 1950s — to having taken care of herself. "I never abused my health by smoking and drinking."

To many Charlestonians, Mrs. Baker is a walking history of the city, having seen more of its growth than most residents.

She grew up on Coming Street, one of eight children of the late Michael and Ellen Hogan, at a time when the city stretched from Shepherd Street to the Battery and was surrounded by farmland.

"I saw street cars pulled by

horses, then trolley cars and then buses came along," she says.

After dating Baker for 10 years, they were married and raised five children in the house in which she grew up.

Her husband died in 1937 at age 67 and Mrs. Baker eventually moved into the home of her daughter, Agnes Coffee on St. Andrew's Boulevard where she still lives.

Mrs. Coffee, who says all of Mrs. Baker's children are very close to their mother, agrees with all the praise her mother receives.

"I think she is outstanding in everything she does," she says. "Anything she attempts to do, she does well."

Mrs. Baker says she has lived a good life, but when asked how much longer she plans to live, she smiles and says, "I'm ready to go now. I'm just waiting for the Lord to call me."

In the meantime, she adds with a chuckle, "I plan to live as long as I can and die when I can't help it."