



AMERICAN STUDIES DEPARTMENT

Oct. 23, 1997

Dr. Carter Hudgins  
Director  
Historic Charleston Foundation  
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Dear Carter:

Enclosed is a draft of an article on the Aiken-Rhett house site that I discussed with you over the summer. The South Carolina Historical Magazine (or whatever its called) has finally decided that they are not interested in publishing it. You had mentioned that you might consider including it an volume you are preparing on Charleston buildings or possibly use it as a pamphlet that could be distributed at the Aiken-Rhett house. Either would be fine with me.

You will find that this piece is essentially a case study of the architecture of urban slavery. The paper makes the same points as the piece you and Betsy Cromley published in the last VAF perspectives but it does so by looking in depth at the Aiken-Rhett house.

For the time being I've provided only xeroxes of potential illustrations. The HCF may have other and better images and I would not be opposed to different graphics if they help clarify how this complicated site works or rather used to work.

I look forward to your response.

Expectantly,

John Michael Vlach  
Professor, American Studies and Anthropology

The Plantation Tradition in an Urban Setting:

The Case of the Aiken-Rhett House in Charleston, South Carolina

by John Michael Vlach

The southern plantation of the antebellum era is usually recalled as a vast agricultural estate comprising several thousand acres where large numbers of enslaved African-Americans labored to produce a single commodity -- cotton, rice, tobacco, sugar, hemp -- for export. By 1860 when close to four million African-Americans were held as slaves all across the southeastern United States, about two-thirds of them were living on plantations. If we use ownership of at least twenty slaves as the benchmark of plantation status, we find that in 1860 there were over 46,000 plantations spread across the southern countryside from Maryland to Texas.<sup>1</sup>

While the majority of slaves in the South lived on plantations, the institution of slavery was, however, equally well entrenched in the region's cities. In the three largest southern cities -- New Orleans, Richmond, and Charleston -- slaves made up one-third of the population. Urban slaves usually worked as servants for the more well-off whites but many were craftspersons who often pursued the same skilled trades as their owners. In either case they were usually housed in their masters' homes.<sup>2</sup> Such arrangements, which put blacks and whites under the same roofs, were quite different from the common plantation experience

where slaves were provided with quarters set out away from their owners' residences. If, however, an urban master owned several slaves -- say six or more -- as was frequently the case for the very wealthy, they too were assigned to separate buildings set away from from their owner's houses at the back or to the side of the house lots. Historian Richard C. Wade offers an apt description of urban slave quarters:

Not only were the bondsmen's quarters placed close to the main building, but the plot itself was enclosed with high brick walls. The rooms had no windows to the outside and were accessible only by a narrow balcony that overlooked the yard and the master's residence. The sole route to the street lay through the house or a door on the side. Thus the physical design of the whole complex compelled slaves to center their activity upon the owner and the owner's place. . . . The whole design was concentric, drawing the life of the bondsman inward toward his master. . . . This compound was the urban equivalent of a plantation.<sup>3</sup>

The remnants of such arrangements can still be seen today in several southern cities including, in addition to Charleston, Mobile, New Orleans, Huntsville, Montgomery, Savannah, Richmond, and Washington, D.C..<sup>4</sup> Wade calls these urban settings composed of houses, slave quarters, yards, and tall enclosing walls "compounds." I would suggest that some of these compounds, particularly the larger ones, could more properly be labeled "urban plantations."

The largest urban slaveholding estates were laid out along the same formal premises as rural plantations. First, the slaveholders' own residence was not only the largest and most centrally located building, but was also the most elaborately decorated structure. Its impressive scale and decorative features immediately made clear who was socially significant and who, more importantly, was in charge. The way in which slave dwellings and the other work spaces such as kitchens, laundries, dairies, carriage houses, and stables were subordinated by being set to the side or rear of the owner's residence can be seen in the layout of the grounds at several of Charleston's more prominent residences. At the Miles Brewton house, for example, social hierarchy is signaled by both the marginal position of the work buildings at the edge of the property as well as by their modest size and relatively plain finish.<sup>5</sup> Like their rural counterparts, urban slaveholders, when it was possible, also used symmetrical building arrangements that placed the slave owner in the center of a balanced, hypothetically self-contained world. The ensemble built for Henry Faber and later acquired by Waccamaw rice planter Joshua Ward, also in Charleston, follows a plan similar to many rural estates. It consists of a prominent and rather ornate mansion house flanked by identical slave dependencies that lack even the slightest hint of decoration.<sup>6</sup> Without any outbuildings a large home like the Faber-Ward residence was merely a large house, but when it stood in the company of a set of service structures the same building took on the appearance of a plantation mansion or "big house." Given the fact that the largest urban

compounds might be home to between thirty to forty individuals (both black and white), the only feature that really marks an urban plantation as different from its rural counterpart is the absence of cultivated acreage. Put another way, what we find in various southern cities -- Charleston, Mobile, New Orleans, Huntsville, and Lexington, to name a few -- is that the residential portion of a plantation (the master's homeplace) was symbolically "moved" to town along with a set of useful support structures.

One of the largest and certainly one of the most elaborate examples of these plantation-like estates in an urban setting is the residence in Charleston that once belonged to William Aiken, Jr. (1806-1887) [Fig. 1]. Since the house was later occupied by his daughter, Henrietta Aiken Rhett, the property is now most frequently referred to as the Aiken-Rhett house. However, in recognition of the fact that the property was first built for cotton factor John Robinson, the building is sometimes labeled referred to as the Robinson-Aiken house.<sup>7</sup>

The house and its back buildings occupy a lot that extends through an entire city block between Judith and Mary Streets [Fig. 2]. The main house stands at the southern edge of the lot near the intersection of Elizabeth and Judith Streets; it is three-story brick building that was constructed sometime around 1820. The original layout of the house, which can still be determined by inspecting the layout of its cellar level, consisted of two large front rooms and two smaller back rooms that were divided by a central hallway [Fig. 3]. In plan this dwelling was a rather common

type of house known to scholars of vernacular architecture as an I-house but called a "single house" in the local Charleston dialect.<sup>8</sup> Because the rear section was covered only by a shed roof, it looks more like an architectural after-thought than an original element. Furthermore, since the corners of the larger front portion of the house are marked by decorative coining, that section is seen as the primary unit of the house. It is apparent that what Robinson had in mind was a one-room-deep house, and one can reasonably assume that Robinson was attempting to follow the local Charleston tradition for a single-family dwelling. He, in fact, ended up making his twelve-room house which had many of the elements of a larger double-house look very much like the smaller single house; proof that the single-house plan had considerable social weight both as an expression of local custom and as a symbol of local identity.<sup>9</sup>

Most Charlestonians during the antebellum period usually faced the gable ends of their I-houses rather than their longer sides toward the street. Consequently, public entry was generally gained indirectly via the gable end of the porch (known locally as a piazza). Visitors had to pass first through a substantial screen wall that gave the impression that they were entering the house when, in fact, they found themselves still outside on the piazza. However, Robinson's house, because it was located at the corner of the block, had two potential public faces. Robinson chose to place his front door in the long southern facade along Judith Street. Thus the building offered the frontal access typical of a rural

house [Fig. 1]. Visitors approached the house via a set of wide centrally-positioned steps that led to the broad piazza and then they moved into the house via the front door and hallway.

William Aiken, Jr. acquired the house and its lot in 1833 from his father who had purchased it from Robinson six years earlier. It was the younger Aiken who was responsible for up-grading the building and its grounds and giving them their current configuration. His program of transformations provides us a highly revealing "text" indicating his desire both to establish his place in Charleston society and to display his authority over his human chattels.

Aiken thoroughly rearranged the house and property [Fig. 4]. The Judith Street entrance was closed off and the wide sandstone steps leading up to the piazza were moved around to the back of the house where they connected a newly created grand stair hall with the rear courtyard. Thus, the house was essentially reversed in direction as the previously private back door could now serve as a significant point of access. At the same time a second entry was created by transforming the northwest rooms on the basement and first floor levels into a sumptuous lobby entrance outfitted with a high vaulted ceiling, fluted Grecian columns, and two curving staircases. The flamboyance of this space was matched by a large dining room wing that was added to the southeastern corner of the house. Since there was no longer any street access to the piazza, the old front door and hallway were removed and replaced by a

single wall fitted with sliding pocket doors. These doors could be opened to create a drawing room that occupied the entire first floor of the house. These changes, the result of considerable tinkering, suggest a deeply felt need to modify the functions of the building. Aiken's architectural manipulations continued until 1858 when he added yet another wing opposite his dining room; this was an octagonal room lit by a skylight that served as his art gallery.

Along the edges of the rear yard Aiken proceeded to transform two extant buildings and add several others. When his rebuilding program was completed the yard contained six outbuildings: a kitchen, a stable, two cow houses or milking sheds (although one of these sheds may have served as a chicken house), and two privies [Fig. 2]. The original kitchen that had been built for John Robinson was doubled in size to include two service areas on the first floor, a kitchen and a laundry, and five rooms for slaves on the second floor [Fig. 5]. The stable and carriage house was located directly across the service yard from the kitchen. The older section of this building was apparently only one story in height and only about thirty-six feet long. Aiken added a second story to this structure and increased its length to provide room for six horse stalls as well as space for their harnesses and a carriage on the ground level. A sizeable hay loft and two rooms for slave stable hands were located on the second level [Fig. 6]. In keeping with the refinements that Aiken carried out while remodeling his house, all of his outbuildings were also the finest

examples of their type being constructed with brick and graced with a number of fashionable details.

Aiken was a powerful and prominent man. He served both as a member of the South Carolina state legislature (1838-1844) and as the state's Governor (1844-46). After a brief return to private life, he was elected to three terms in the United States House of Representatives (1851-1857) where he was once nominated for the office of Speaker of the House only to fall three votes short. He was also a very wealthy rice planter, owning a 3,300 acre estate on Jehossee Island located along the Edisto River about thirty miles to the west of Charleston. In addition to the up-to-date steam powered machinery that he installed for threshing and preparing his harvest for market, he also kept some 700 slaves in a village consisting of eighty-four houses, three hospitals, and a church. In 1850 his plantation was appraised at close to \$400,000, more than half of which was invested in slaves. But while he seems to have commanded all the perquisites of power, surprisingly his own house on Jehossee Island, while served by a detached billiard room, was nevertheless quite plain. Solon Robinson, a northern journalist who visited the island estate in 1850 described Aiken's plantation house as: "a very humble cottage, embowered in dense shrubbery, and making no show, and is, in fact, as a dwelling for a gentleman of wealth, far inferior in point of elegance and convenience, to any negro house upon the place."<sup>10</sup>

Why Aiken's plantation lacked the expected mansion house at that time is not known. Perhaps he was called away too often by his

official duties in Columbia or Washington, D.C. to justify the expense.<sup>11</sup> But part of the answer may be that he conceived of his elegant home in Charleston as a portion of his plantation "brought" into the city. The buildings on his lot were, in fact, arranged in a manner that strongly resembled the forecourt seen at some of the more prominent rural estates such as Chachan in nearby Berkeley County.

Any visitor who may have entered into the rear service yard through the gate on the Mary Street side of the property found themselves no longer in Charleston but in Aiken's realm. While they would reach the steps to the house in only a mere two hundred feet, they would nonetheless have to move along a controlled pathway meant to insure that they would recognize Aiken's importance, their insignificance, and the great favor he was providing them by allowing them access to his house and grounds. All the great plantation homes were approached in this way along pathways contrived both to emphasize a planter's centrality in his domain and to call attention to the power that he wielded. Architectural historian Dell Upton refers to such designs as "processional landscapes" explaining that they were set up with a host of barriers or thresholds that visitors could use to calculate their social standing in the owner's world by measuring how far into that world they are allowed to enter.<sup>12</sup> In 1860 a visitor approaching Aiken's Charleston home through the Mary Street gate [ see Fig. 2] first passed between two privies -- one on the right, another on the left -- and even granting the beauty of their Gothic

decorations, they were sure to move on as quickly as possible. Next visitors found themselves moving between two rows of magnolia trees beyond which they might glimpse buildings reserved for animals (cows and chickens); structures that jutted noticeably out away from the tall encircling walls. Less than fifty feet further on they entered the primary slave domain. Here numerous black faces might look up from tasks in the kitchen and the stable to see who had arrived. The long two-story buildings now cut off the sounds of the outer world and a brick pavement set in a herringbone pattern covered the ground. If one was traveling by horse or carriage there would be sudden staccato bursts of sound as the clatter of hooves echoed off the enclosing walls. Perhaps a young boy would come to take care of the horses while others offered greetings and carried word into the house that travelers, expected or unexpected, had come. Walking on across the pavement toward the house, visitors would now sense fully its height; perhaps they would, if the time of day was right, be enveloped in its shadow. Upon reaching the steps, visitors might know that they were standing between the dining room and the art gallery, wings of the house that project backwards along the sides of the yard. These portions of Aiken's house stood taller than the work buildings and small gaps between these wings and the stable and kitchen subtly emphasized the fact that one had left the world of slaves and was about to enter the domain of white people. But the right to partake in such "civilized" affairs as dining or art gazing was not immediately granted. Access to Aiken's fine cuisine and a peek at his statues

would only come after climbing a dozen steps and being shown through four more door ways. While it might take less than two minutes to move from the street to the dining room, this ritual passage -- or to use Upton's word the "procession" -- was sure to confirm Aiken's status as owner and further it was made clear to his visitors that they should be grateful. To have been stopped at the cow house or at the courtyard pavement would have been tantamount to saying that the visitor was no better than a beast or a slave. What we see here is a hierarchical landscape designed to be used as tool for the reckoning of social status. This kind of setting, laden with symbolic associations, was more common to rural plantations but nevertheless was created, as can be seen in the instance of Aiken's house, on urban sites as well.

All systems of etiquette require some mode of distance reckoning. Antebellum Charlestonians most commonly expressed what they saw as necessary formality by building their houses with "false walls" that screened their piazzas from the prying eyes of potential visitors.<sup>13</sup> The more prominent members of the planter class, however, lived by an even more formal standard that required more distance and thus more threshold features in order to transact their affairs in what they considered a suitable manner. Aiken literally turned John Robinson's house around in order to transform what had been a representative town house into an urban plantation. The steps that had once led from Judith Street directly onto an open and seemingly inviting piazza were, under his direction, placed behind the house where they marked the end of a presumably

high status visitor's passage along path framed by decorative trees and impressive brick buildings. The piazza became then the last stop on the procession across the property (or through the house if one had entered though the Elizabeth Street lobby) [Fig. 3]. No longer an initial meeting zone merging the outside with inside or visitor with resident, the piazza at Aiken's house had become a lofty viewing platform from which to look down on the uninvited commoners as they passed by on the street below. Aiken had replaced the Charleston tradition with the plantation tradition; he swept aside local vernacular custom in which the piazza served as a social buffer in order implement the ego-enhancing rituals practiced among the planter class.

It should be noted, however, that when the new entry from Elizabeth Street was created, the building was also provided with a gable-end entry that was at least visually reminiscent of so many of Charleston's single-houses. Consequently the reworked Aiken house combined design features that ambiguously signaled the tastes of both an urban dweller and a rural planter. Aiken made a considerable effort to have the Elizabeth Street facade display both the mass and the fenestration of a single house. Upon viewing the house from western gable, one sees a three-story brick house with three windows per floor and an entry way set to the side and slightly back. These same features could be seen in many of the city's prominent single houses such as the Thomas Heyward house on Meeting Street, the Mazyck-Ravenel house on Broad Street, and the Capers-Shutt house on East Bay Street. The primary objective of

Aiken's rebuilding program seems to have been aimed, however, at transcending the typical city mode so that he might be more readily recognized as one of the plantation elites.

Since it was the custom in the Carolina lowcountry for planters to leave their plantations during the summer-long "fever season" and take up residence in their second houses in Charleston, rural and urban locales were certainly linked by behavior.<sup>14</sup> But in Aiken's case, his urban plantation may have had extra significance for it provided him with the "big house" that his island estate lacked. For Aiken, his urban and rural domains seem to have been merged mentally into one estate. A man who owned 700 humans plus thousands of acres and who had governed a state could easily imagine that wherever he went he was in charge. The manner in which he structured access to his house clearly suggests as much. To move from Mary Street to his door in the manner that he prescribed by arrangement of various landscape features was to rise symbolically from the base of a social pyramid upward to its apex and to reach a point which Aiken understood to be just below his feet. Given the fact that Aiken's house had two public entrances, it is quite possible that only Aiken and the members of his immediate family followed the route indicated by the order of his service yard. If this was so, then the social messages signaled are all the more revealing. One senses, finally, in Aiken an urgent need to confirm that he was really in charge.

There is a manipulative quality in the architectural gestures of Aiken's urban estate revealing a anxious, even paranoid, turn of

mind that has been reported for many slaveholders. The fear of slave rebellion in Charleston had been fanned by the close call of Denmark Vesey's nearly successful plot in 1822 so that, according to historian Stephen A. Channing, the city "never again relaxed the outward forms of vigilance."<sup>15</sup> A profound need to keep his slaves under control clearly shaped Aiken's thinking as he developed and arranged the slave spaces behind his house.

Slaves were quartered in rooms set above the work areas in the back buildings, the practice followed by most urban slave owners. Aiken provided seven rooms for his slaves, five over the kitchen and two above the stable. Just how many slaves were quartered in these rooms remains unclear but tax records for 1860 indicate that Aiken kept fourteen slaves on his lot at the time of that assessment.<sup>16</sup> The ratio of two slaves per room is quite generous when compared to conditions encountered elsewhere in Charleston. In 1856 the city's grand jury reported many instances where "from twenty to fifty male slaves lived together in one house."<sup>17</sup>

But Aiken was not a particularly beneficent master. Indeed, the way in which he turned something as mundane as windows into a sign of his authority suggests the workings of a mind actively concerned with domination. Even though the slaves' rooms were set above the high brick walls that encircled the back yard, slaves were afforded no view beyond the confines of the property. Windows were placed only along the interior walls so that the slaves' gaze was directed back into the central paved courtyard [Figs. 5-6]; that is, down into slave space rather than out into the public

space of free people. Only those slaves living in the end rooms had the possibility of looking out past the walls by glancing at an angle from the windows in the end walls. In addition to the potential for a view of the outside world, these end rooms also had a bit of cross-ventilation, and thus they were apparently reserved for favored slaves like the household cook.<sup>18</sup> Just how much of a favor being assigned to one of these rooms might have been can be determined by comparing them to the other rooms over the kitchen. In the three middle rooms the windows opened not directly to the outside but onto the corridor running along the inside wall [Fig. 7]. Not only were these interior windows half the height of the windows in the other rooms but they were not aligned with the window openings in the exterior wall. Consequently these quarters were dark even on the brightest days. The occupants of these spaces were compelled to bend deeply at the waist in order to see out of their window and then they could only see into the hallway. Since these middle rooms had no ventilation to speak of, one senses that any person living there endured a higher level of misery than the slaves who were quartered at either end of the building.

Aiken's power over his slaves was also demonstrated by the his treatment of the external wall of the stable along Elizabeth Street. Here at regular intervals along the second story there are seven window-like niches about four inches deep [Fig. 8]. Rendered in Gothic form with pointed tops, these decorations offer the suggestion of windows but provide none of the functional benefits. These implied windows provide ornamentation that improved the view

for the passersby while preserving the sense of enclosure required of a building intended for human captives. The act of providing a set of false windows that otherwise might have provided slaves with light, access to refreshing breezes, and the ability to look down from above entails considerable irony for the gesture signals in one action the ability both to provide such benefits and to deny them absolutely, as was done here.

All of Aiken's back buildings were not only substantially constructed with brick masonry but they were all, even the privies, decorated with Gothic features. Evidence within the buildings suggests that these ornamental moves were initiated during the 1840s and thus represent a second program of modifications to the back buildings. While the new decorative touches might seem unique, if not eccentric, it should be noted that at several other prominent Charleston estates the Gothic style was also used to decorate the dependencies. The laundry at the Isaac Motte house, for example, shares its lines with the Aiken cow house and carriage house at the Miles Brewton house not only has pointed lancet windows but makes an even more pronounced Gothic statement with the crenelated parapet along its roof line. The grounds of the William Blacklock house feature both a carriage house and a gazebo rendered with Gothic doors and windows. The rationale behind these decisions connects to the profoundly felt dilemma sensed by many slaveholders in the late antebellum period; that is, they wanted to be able to display both humane concern for their slaves and still remain

separate and aloof from them.<sup>19</sup> Creating quarters that were fashionably decorated provided a means to achieve both goals.

Buildings dressed with Gothic elements conveyed several messages, but most of all they were seen as picturesque structures lending beauty and charm to their settings. According to the prevailing thinking of the day, buildings rendered in this most up-to-date mode would be perceived as attractive regardless of their function. Moreover, the Gothic style made reference to the middle ages, an era considered to be a time marked by emotion, faith, spontaneity, and a closeness to Nature, values that were aggressively promoted by American tastemakers during the second quarter of the nineteenth century.<sup>20</sup> Further, because the Gothic style was promoted explicitly as a Christian style, when applied to slave buildings those structures would not only be seen as physically improved but potentially as a statement of moral reform. It is not too difficult then to understand why slaveholders like Aiken became advocates for this mid-nineteenth-century fashion. Aligning themselves with the tenets of Gothic propaganda, they could easily persuade themselves that their actions had improved the lives of their slaves.<sup>21</sup> Of course, fitting a slave building with lancet windows did little to alleviate the systematic exploitation and brutality of chattel slavery. As we have already seen Aiken was particularly mean spirited in the way that he prevented his slaves from having visual access to the world around them. While Aiken might have felt uplifted by the fact his back

buildings were decorated with churchly motifs, it is not likely that his slaves joined in his exaltation.

That the Gothic style was used by Aiken as a means of social control can be inferred from the fact that no Gothic motifs appear on antebellum homes anywhere in Charleston. Charleston residents either clung to the older classical revival modes or took up the Italian renaissance style which came into vogue during the 1830s and 1840s. The exterior of Aiken's house was trimmed out with elements of the classical mode, a statement meant to convey, among other things, his allegiance to the patriotic values of the early republic. Classicism was a prudent image for a politician and member of the elite class. Aspects of this conservative style were also carried into the interior of the building when the new entry lobby was created sometime after 1833. Here Aiken may have simply been trying to retain the consistency of the design already present in his house but given the fact that this renovation campaign was undertaken when the classic revival mode was generally in decline, it seems that his efforts were yet another expression of his conservative politics. By moving his house stylistically in one direction and his slave-occupied outbuildings in another, Aiken was able to draw a clearer line between the black and white occupants of his property. This gesture of segregation occurs during a period when the civic authorities Charleston sought to ban African-Americans, free or enslaved, from certain parks, promenades, and municipal gardens; efforts that were generally considered inadequate if not a complete failure.<sup>22</sup> The architectural

finishes employed in Aiken's buildings show that he too was seeking the means to declare his authority over his slaves. He found that by housing them in smaller, detached back buildings, he was able to impose the strictest regimen of racial separation. Initially the kitchen and the stable were visually connected to the main house by shared features of Grecian decor. Even though the stable and kitchen were plain buildings, they still had the unmistakable low pitched roof lines of ancient temples, an allusion that was further emphasized by their raking cornices, full pediments, and circular windows in their gable ends [Figs. 5-6].<sup>23</sup> Aiken's decision then to add Gothic ornament at a later date reveals his ardent desire to distinguish black spaces from white spaces; the race of household occupants was to be marked by the differences in the decoration of the two sets of buildings. While Charleston clergyman James Henley Thornwall lamented that slaves were "divided out among us and mingled up with us, and we with them, in a thousand ways" suggesting a general condition of confusion in matters of race and territorial prerogatives, in Aiken's backyard questions about race and space were already asked and answered.<sup>24</sup> Aiken took exacting measures to make it clear and certain that his slaves understood exactly where they belonged.

William Aiken's urban plantation is finally a unique instance of the architecture of slavery and care must be taken not to generalize too broadly from the evidence it provides. However, Aiken, like many of his class, seems to have used all the means available to him to keep the threats to his ideal world, both real

and imagined, at bay. Certainly the possibility of another slave uprising must have seemed imminent to white Charlestonians. In 1850 not only were slaves numerous constituting slightly more than half of the city's population but there were then more than 3,400 free blacks living in Charleston who provided slaves with daily examples of the potential benefits of liberation. In the face of such circumstances, members of the socially elite were not inclined to remain passive and Aiken's program of architectural transformations was far from passive. While few men could have assembled an estate that could rival Aiken's, many would have admired and envied it and probably endorsed the social sentiments that it embodied.

## NOTES

1. On the history of plantation architecture see John Michael Vlach, Back of the Big House: The Architecture of Plantation Slavery (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press), esp. pp. 1-17 and John Michael Vlach, "Plantation Landscapes of the Antebellum South," in Edward D.C. Campbell, Jr. and Kym S. Rice, eds. Before Freedom Came: African-American Life in the Antebellum South (Richmond: Museum of the Confederacy, 1991), pp. 21-49. Also surprisingly useful are the earlier works by Ulrich Bonnell Phillips: American Negro Slavery: A Survey of the Supply, Employment and Control of Negro Labor as Determined by the Plantation Regime, 1918 (rptd. Baton rouge: Louisiana State University, 1966) and Life and Labor in the Old South (Boston: Little, Brown, 1929).

2. Richard Wade, Slavery in the Cities: The South, 1820-1860 (New York: Oxford University Press, 1964), pp. 58-59. See also David R. Goldfield, "Black Life in Old South Cities," in Campbell and Rice, Before Freedom Came, pp. 123-153.

3. Wade, Slavery in the Cities, p. 59, 61.

4. See John Michael Vlach, "Without Recourse to Their Owners:" The Architecture of Urban Slavery in the Antebellum South," in Elizabeth Collins Cromley and Carter L. Hudgins, eds. Perspectives

in Vernacular Architecture, VI (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 1997), pp.150-160.

5. For an illustration of the plan of this urban estate see Alice R. Huger Smith and D. E. Huger Smith, The Dwelling Houses of Charleston (Philadelphia: J.B. Lippincott, 1917), p. 98.

6. See Jack Leland, 62 Famous Houses of Charleston, South Carolina (Charleston: The News and Courier and Evening Post, 1991), p. 53 and Carter L. Hudgins, et. al., eds., The Vernacular Architecture of Charleston and the Lowcountry, 1670-1990: A Field Guide, prepared for the Vernacular Architecture Forum (Charleston: Historic Charleston Foundation, 1994), pp. 250-251.

7. The development of the Aiken-Rhett house is nicely summarized in William Nathaniel Banks, "The Aiken-Rhett House, Charleston, South Carolina," Antiques, Vol. 98 (Jan., 1991), pp. 236-239. The back buildings of the Aiken-Rhett house are detailed in Liz Seymour, "Letter from the Past," Southern Accents, Vol. 20 (Sept.-Oct., 1997), pp.330-337. But I have based my interpretation here primarily on field investigation of the site and on the data in the Historic American Buildings Survey housed in the Prints and Photographs Division of the Library of Congress. Included in the archival material are numerous photographs, sheets of measured drawings (some reproduced in this essay), and other information on the house and its occupants.

8. On the history of I-house in the United States consult Fred B. Kniffen, "Folk Housing: Key to Diffusion," in Dell Upton and John Michael Vlach, eds. Common Places; Readings in American Vernacular Architecture (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 1986), pp. 7 - 10. The standard works on Charleston architecture containing many illustrations of "single houses" are: Albert Simons and Samuel Lapham, The Early Architecture of Charleston (New York: American Institute of Architects, 1927) and Samuel Gaillard Stoney, This Is Charleston (Charleston: Carolina Art Association, 1944. New scholarship offering, at last, an authoritative explanation for the origins of the "single house" is currently in progress by Bernard L. Herman of the University of Delaware. Some sense of his findings is contained in his "Charleston Single House," in Carter, et. al., The Vernacular Architecture of Charleston and Low Country, pp. 352-355; and Martha A. Zierden and Bernard L. Herman, "Charleston Townhouses: Archaeology, Architecture, and the Urban Landscape, 1750-1850," in Rebecca Yamin and Karen Bescherer Metheny, Landscape Archaeology: Reading and Interpreting the American Historical Landscape (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 1996), pp. 204-207.

9. See Peter A. Coclanis, The Shadow of a Dream: Economic Life and Death in the South Carolina Low Country (New York: Oxford University Press, 1989), pp. 8-11 for a discussion of the symbolism of the Charleston single house; consult as well Kenneth Severens,

Charleston: Antebellum Architecture and Civic Destiny (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 1988), pp. 7-8.

10. Herbert Anthony Keller, ed. Solon Robinson: Pioneer and Agriculturist (Indianapolis: Indiana Historical Bureau, 1936), p. 368; Ulrich B. Phillips, American Negro Slavery: A Survey of the Supply, Employment and Control of Negro Labor as Determined by the Plantation Regime, 1918 (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University, 1966). p., 253.

11. A diary account by a Martha Scofield, who visited Jehossee Island in 1865, describes Aiken's island residence as a large building standing amid formally landscaped grounds complete with stately magnolias, urns, and statuary. Clearly there had been many improvements since Robinson's visit of 1850. All traces of this later development were lost to a fire in the late nineteenth century. This description is cited in Chalmers Gaston Davidson, The Last Foray: The South Carolina Planters of 1860: A Sociological Study (Columbia: University of South Carolina Press, 1971), p. 152.

12. Dell Upton, "White and Black Landscapes in Eighteenth-Century Virginia," Places 2, no. 2 (1985): 66.

13. For a discussion of the social psychology of single house residents see Peter A. Coclanis, "The Sociology of Architecture in

Colonial Charleston: Pattern and Process in an Eighteenth Century Southern City," Journal of Southern History 18 (1985), pp. 607-623.

14. John P. Radford, " Race, residence, and Ideology: Charleston, South Carolina in the Mid-Nineteenth Century," in David Ward, ed., Geographic Perspective on America's Past: Readings on the Historical Geography of the United States (New York: Oxford University Press, 1979), p. 349.

15. Crisis of Fear: Secession in South Carolina (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1970), p. 45. See also Wade, Slavery in the Cities, p. 103.

16. List of the Tax Payers of the City of Charleston in 1860 (Charleston: Evan and Cogswell, 1861), p. 5 indicates that William Aiken was assessed taxes for fourteen slaves, one carriage, and two horses. These totals seem low because not only did he have room for many more slaves but he had enough stalls in his stable for six horses.

17. Quoted in Wade, Slavery in the Cities, p. 58.

18. Information on room occupants was provided by Ernest Sheely, former curator at the Aiken-Rhett house.

19. See Eugene D. Genovese, Roll, Jordan, Roll: The World the

Slaves Made (New York: Pantheon, 1972), pp. 75-86, and James Oakes, The Ruling Race: A History of American Slaveholders (New York: Knopf, 1982), pp. 120-122.

20. Alan Gowans, Styles and Types of North American Architecture (New York: Harper Collins, 1992), pp. 136-43. See also John Michael Vlach, "Gothic Revival Architecture," in Mark Leone and Neil Asher Silberman, eds., Invisible America: Unearthing Our Hidden History (New York: Henry Holt, 1995), pp. 142-43.

21. Charleston slaveholders were not alone in their use of Gothic decoration on slave quarters. At several rice plantations located in Georgetown County, South Carolina the quarters for field hands and other service buildings had windows cut out with pointed tops in imitation of Gothic lancet windows. Consult the Historic American Buildings Survey data for Arundel and Hopsewee plantations. See also William P. Baldwin, Plantations of the Low Country: South Carolina, 1697-1865 (Greensboro, N.C.: Legacy Publications, 1987), p. 108.

22. For discussion of the tactics used in Charleston to control the slave population see Norrece T. Jones, Jr., Born a Child of Freedom, Yet a Slave: Mechanisms of Control and Strategies of Resistance in Antebellum South Carolina (Hanover, Conn.: Wesleyan University Press, 1990), pp. 76-77.

23. John J-G. Blumenson, Identifying American Architecture: A Pictorial Guide to Styles and Terms, 1600-1945 (Nashville: Association for State and Local History, 1977), pp. 26-27, 89.

24. Review of Rev. J.G. Adger's Sermon on the Instruction of the Colored People (Charleston, 1847) cited in Wade, Slavery in the Cities, p. 61.

## Captions for Figures

1. View of the Aiken-Rhett house from the southwest corner of Elizabeth and Judith Streets. To the left of the arched entrance stands the art gallery and the carriage house and slave quarter. (Courtesy of the Library of Congress: Louis I. Schwartz, 1963 [Note that all of the illustrations in this essay are drawn from the Historic American Buildings Survey or HABS and are available from the Prints and Photographs Division of the Library of Congress])
2. Plan of the Aiken-Rhett house and grounds. (Courtesy of the Library of Congress: Mark W. Steel and Robert A. Busser, 1963)
3. Approximation of the original plan of the Aiken-Rhett house when built for John Robinson circa 1820. (Modified from a plan drawn by Reginald Lee Gibson, 1985)
4. Plan of the Aiken-Rhett house. Sections of the house that were added or modified by Aiken are darkened in showing the extent of the renovations to the rear of the house. (Courtesy of the Library of Congress: Reginald Lee Gibson, 1985)
5. The kitchen and slave quarter at the Aiken-Rhett house. (Courtesy of the Library of Congress: Louis I. Schwartz, 1963)

6. The carriage house and slave quarter at the Aiken-Rhett house.  
(Courtesy of the Library of Congress: Louis I. Schwartz, 1963)

7. Plan of the second level of the kitchen and slave quarter at the Aiken-Rhett house. (Courtesy of the Library of Congress: Robert A. Busser, 1963)

8. Elevation of the exterior of the carriage house and slave quarter at the Aiken-Rhett house. (Courtesy of the Library of Congress: Martin Weil, 1963)