

Blodge - 17-173 King

Writer, Millionaire Part Of Past

Charleston

Building, Notables Linked

News & Courier

10-2-72

1B:1-8

(EDITORS NOTE: Fifth in a series of articles on notable King Street buildings. The sixth will appear two weeks from today.)

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Staff Reporter

In addition to its integrity as a fine postbellum building, 171-173 King St. has a special place in history, having been linked with the lives of two notable Charlestonians.

The first was William Enston, the 19th Century millionaire philanthropist who endowed the Enston Home for the elderly.

More recently, it was the childhood home of Earl Mazo, political journalist of national stature and the first biographer of President Richard M. Nixon.

Enston was born in 1808 in Canterbury, England. Twelve years later his family moved to Philadelphia, where Enston served an apprenticeship in his father's cabinet-making business.

He came to Charleston in 1832 as a cabinet-maker and soon set up his own business on Meeting Street.

In 1835, Enston bought the site of 171-173 King for \$4,550 from the Society for Relief of Disabled Ministers and of the Widows and Orphans of the Independent or Congregational Church.

In a building there, the

predecessor of the current structure, he laid the foundation of what became Charleston's largest furniture and cabinet-ware establishment.

He apparently also lived in the same building initially, moving later to 118 Queen St.

Enston was noted for his "sagacious investments," and at his death from a heart attack in March, 1860, a Charleston Daily Courier obituary estimated his estate at \$2 million to \$5 million.

In addition to extensive Charleston property, he held a half-interest in the Charleston Hotel and an interest in three steamship companies and owned property in Cincinnati, Chicago and other "Western" cities.

His will directed that his entire fortune, after the needs of his widow and several other relatives were met during their lifetimes, was to be used by the City of Charleston to establish a home and hospital for the indigent elderly.

The Enston fortune was reduced to some \$500,000 as a consequence of the Civil War.

In 1882, his widow, Mrs. Hannah Enston and other surviving annuitants made a settlement whereby the city received \$136,950, about half in real property, to build and maintain the home.

The Enston Home was developed in 1887 on upper

Do You Know Your Charleston?

King Street and is still in operation. The chapel there contains a bust of Enston.

A portrait of him, commissioned by a grateful City Council, hangs in the City Hall Council Chambers.

The predecessor of 171-173 King was lost in the great fire of 1861 which cut a blackened swath from the east end of Hasell Street to the west end of Tradd Street.

Some time before, Enston's furniture business had been moved to 187-189-191 King (now Birlant's) which was not in the path of the fire.

The present structure at 171-173 King was apparently built for Mrs. Enston shortly after the Civil War.

It is recognizable on the "Bird's Eye View of the City of Charleston," published in 1872, which shows it sandwiched between the three-story building at 169 King and the two-story double building at 175-177 King.

Mrs. Enston's building is an evolution of the antebellum Gothic Revival style.

Its second floor window cornices, with pyramidal indentations, are identical to those of the Gothic Revival building at 187-189-191 King,

which Enston built sometime after 1848.

The facade rises to a high entablature, the frieze of which features a line of raised rectangular panels with oval recesses, which complements the fenestration below it.

The cornice, sweeping upward in a concave line, is also Gothic in derivation.

Originally, a first-floor passageway ran through the center of the building from the street to a rear piazza.

The rear yard was divided into two sections with two-story kitchen buildings.

On the main building's second floor, the four main rooms retain late Greek Revival mantels and simple woodwork.

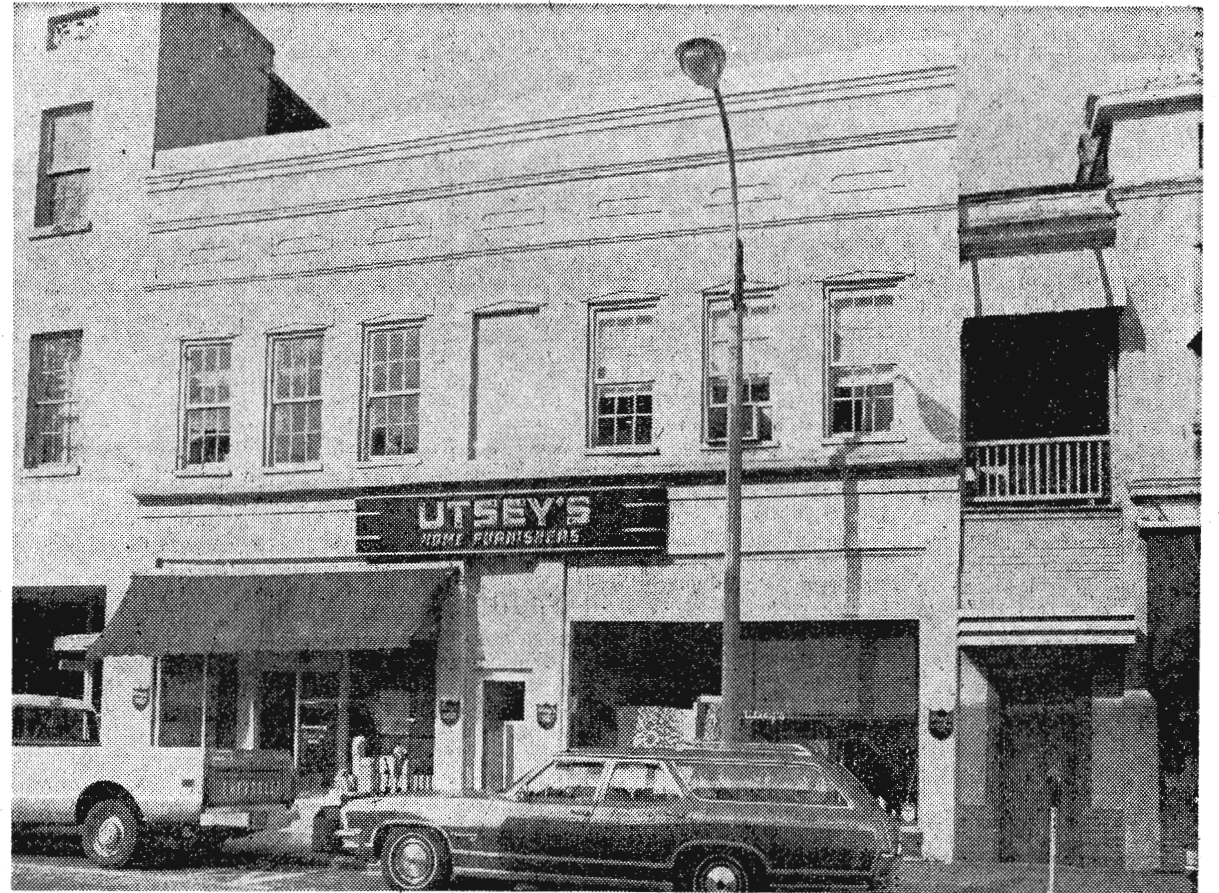
The Enston Home trustees received the building along with other Enston property in 1882.

In 1888, the trustees sold 171 King to attorney William Enston Butler, Enston's nephew, for \$2,510.

They sold 173 King the same year for \$2,735 to Fannie Goldstein, whose family operated a jewelry business there for many years.

The two halves were reunited in 1909 by Mrs. Fay Witte Ball and Mrs. Laura Witte Waring, and then it went through a series of owners.

Mrs. Clara Drowata bought



(Staff Photo by Swain)

171-173 King Built In Postbellum Gothic Revival Style

the building in 1937 for \$6,700. It is now owned by her son, W. C. Cecil Drowata.

The Drowatas operated the Southern Meat and Fish Market at 173 King from the 1920s to the 1950s.

At 171 King, the late George Mazo operated a grocery store in the first part

of this century and his family lived upstairs.

His son, Earl Mazo, born in Warsaw, Poland, grew up to be come Washington correspondent for the New York Herald Tribune and later the New York Times. He is now a Reader's Digest staff writer.

Mazo's first Nixon biography, published in 1959, sold a half-million copies. He co-authored a second Nixon biography 1968.

He was recently named a fellow of the Woodrow Wilson International Center for Scholars in Washington, D.C. The building has been

occupied for more than 15 years by Utsey's Home Furnishers.

It was not listed in the 1944 architectural survey, "This is Charleston", but has been included in a survey being made this year by the city and the Historic Charleston Foundation.