

Value Of Railroad Buildings Cited

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Charleston's surviving complexes of 19th Century railroad buildings are facets of the city's heritage which have recently attracted national-level attention among preservationists.

The complexes of depots, freight warehouses and related structures are being considered for inclusion in the

Library of Congress's Historic American Engineering Record.

The National Historic Engineering Record is for historic industrial sites what the National Register of Historic Places is for buildings and sites of architectural and other historical value.

Attention was focused earlier this month on the railroad warehouse at 2 Chapel St., for which the owner, Seaboard

Coast Line Railroad, had sought a demolition permit.

The City Board of Architectural Review on Feb. 1 granted a 180-day stay on demolition, to allow the Historic Charleston Foundation to study the possibility of "adaptive" use for the structure.

Adaptive uses are being found for railroad buildings in other cities, as in Salt Lake City, where a car barn complex is being turned into



Railroad Shop At Spring And Meeting, Built In 1858

Do You Know Your Charleston?

a shopping center, and Montgomery, Ala., where a circa 1895 station is blossoming into a fine arts center.

Two Chapel was recently evaluated by James C. Massey, director of historic properties for the National Trust for Historic Preservation.

Massey said the freight house is "an important significant example of high Victorian in industrial building, showing the elaborate way in which utility railroad buildings were decorated at that period."

The structure and its neighbor, 4 Chapel, were built in the bracketed, romantic "Chinese" style found in the published drawings of Alexander Jackson Davis and other 19th Century American architects.

The two buildings do not appear on the "Bird's Eye View of the City of Charles-

ton," drawn in 1872, but they do appear on the Sanborn Insurance Map of 1888.

The Sanborn Map identifies them as freight houses for the Northeastern Railroad and the Charleston and Savannah Railroad.

The "Bird's Eye View" shows a substantial complex of railroad buildings at Chapel and Washington streets, including a roundhouse, all belonging to the Northeastern Railroad.

The South Carolina Railroad's roundhouse was part of another complex of buildings on the present site of the Meeting Street Piggly-Wiggly.

The South Carolina Railroad acquired that half-block in 1847 and over the following decade or so built the complex which included the roundhouse, a foundry, a forge, machine shop and woodworking shop.

The complex remained in use until 1947, when Southern Railways, the successor of the South Carolina Railroad, built a roundhouse in North Charleston.

All but one of the buildings seem to have disappeared except the two-story machine shop building at Meeting and Columbus streets.

Piggly-Wiggly was completing plans to convert that century-old building into a supermarket when it burned in 1958.

The South Carolina Railroad also had in the 1850s, a passenger depot and a car shop on the north side of Line Street between King and Meeting streets.

The brick car shop, located at 44 Line St. survives and is used as a warehouse by Southern Railways.

An important antebellum railroad complex which has managed to survive more or less intact is that in the Ann and John streets area between King and Meeting.

This complex was built after draymen and wharf and warehouse owners blocked

the South Carolina Railroad's desire to bring its tracks to the Cooper River dock.

The railroad's officials and City Council met and decided on the mid-peninsula location in 1848.

The complex includes Camden Depot, whose battlemented tower gates have suffered considerable mistreatment but are now being studied for possible restoration.

Camden Depot may have been named after the Camden Branch of the South Carolina Railroad, which opened between Columbia and Camden in 1848.

The depot is believed to have been designed by Edward Brickell White, the first Charleston architect to employ the Gothic Revival style.

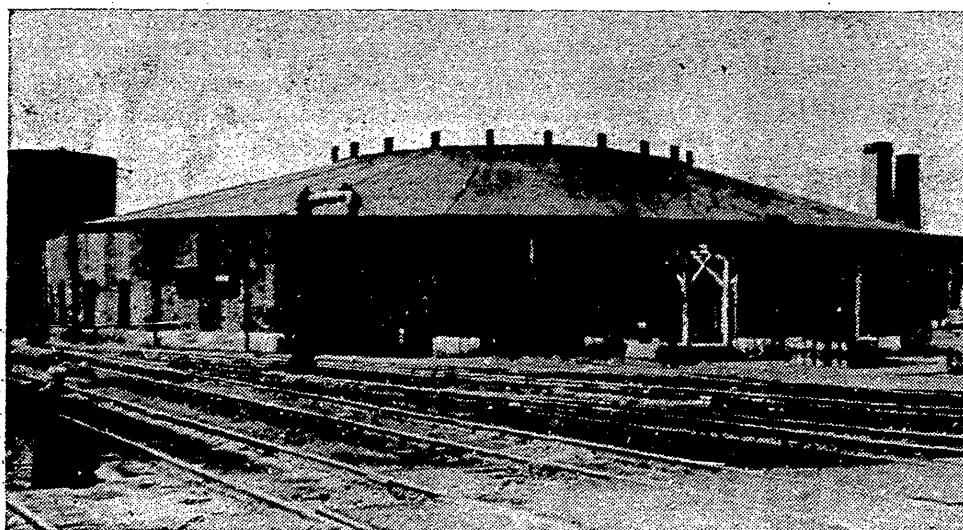
Also attributed to White is the former railway office at 39 John St., which features a buttressed facade, crenelated parapet, Gothic-arched doorways and windows with dripstones and a simulated turret on the southwest corner. It was built in 1850.

Included in the complex are the two brick South Carolina Railroad warehouses at 40 Ann St. and 36 John St., both in mid-Victorian styles. Charleston architect Edward C. Jones may have designed 40 Ann.

Forty Ann and Camden Depot have been designated parts of a National Historic Landmark which also include the William Aiken House (built before 1811) at 456 King St. and its Gothic Revival carriage house.

The mansion was the home of William Aiken, first president of the South Carolina Canal and Railroad Co., the nation's first railway with steam locomotives and in the 1830s the nation's longest rail line.

The mansion was inherited by Gov. William Aiken Jr. who sold it in 1863 to the South Carolina Railroad. It is now Southern Railways' division headquarters.



Antebellum Roundhouse Stood On Piggly-Wiggly Site—1935 Photo