



PRIMROSE HOUSE WAS BUILT BY WEALTHY MERCHANT
Outstanding Regency Residence Will Be Restored

140-Year-Old East Bay House Given To Historic Foundation

A 140-year old house at 332 East Bay St. — considered by architects an excellent example of the Regency style in America — has been given the Historic Charleston Foundation by anonymous friends of the Foundation.

According to Ben Scott Whaley, foundation president, the donors will also contribute funds for the restoration of the exterior of the building.

With its own funds, the foundation intends immediately to convert the interior into one or more large rental units with modern conveniences, retaining all original woodwork and detail.

It was also announced that — in order to conform with the Foundation's neighborhood rehabilitation plan for the 11 houses it has purchased over the past year in nearby Ansonborough — the foundation has been permitted by its donors to offer the house for sale to purchasers whose plans coincide with the Foundation's goals.

The Ansonborough project is being financed with Foundation money under a "revolving fund", which is based on reinvestment

of proceeds from sales or rentals of rehabilitated houses in other worthy old structures still in need of restoration.

According to Samuel G. Stoney, vice-president of the Foundation and historian, the property at 332

East Bay was purchased by Robert Primrose in 1817. Mr. Primrose, a well-to-do Charleston merchant, built the house shortly thereafter. Mr. Primrose was listed as a "vendue master" (auctioneer).

The three-story brick residence has an unusual and elaborately detailed semicircular portico facing East Bay, and excellent ironwork — including a pair of large lanterns — decorating the street entrance to its side piazzas. The interior includes a fine curving staircase, excellently proportioned rooms, mantels and other trim of the period.

It is diagonally across East Bay from the Gadsden House, a large and strikingly handsome mansion of the Adam period which was given the Foundation 18 months ago by Mrs. Charles Woodward of Philadelphia and The Wedge Plantation, McClellanville. Mrs. Woodward is the former Miss Elizabeth Gadsden of Charleston.

The Gadsden House has since been completely restored, and is being rented by the Foundation.

\$5.6 Million Capehart Bids Are Opened

A construction contract for 350 Capehart housing units at Charleston Air Force Base will be awarded within 30 days.

Bids on the project, to cost an estimated \$5.6 million, have been opened and are being studied by the Air Force.

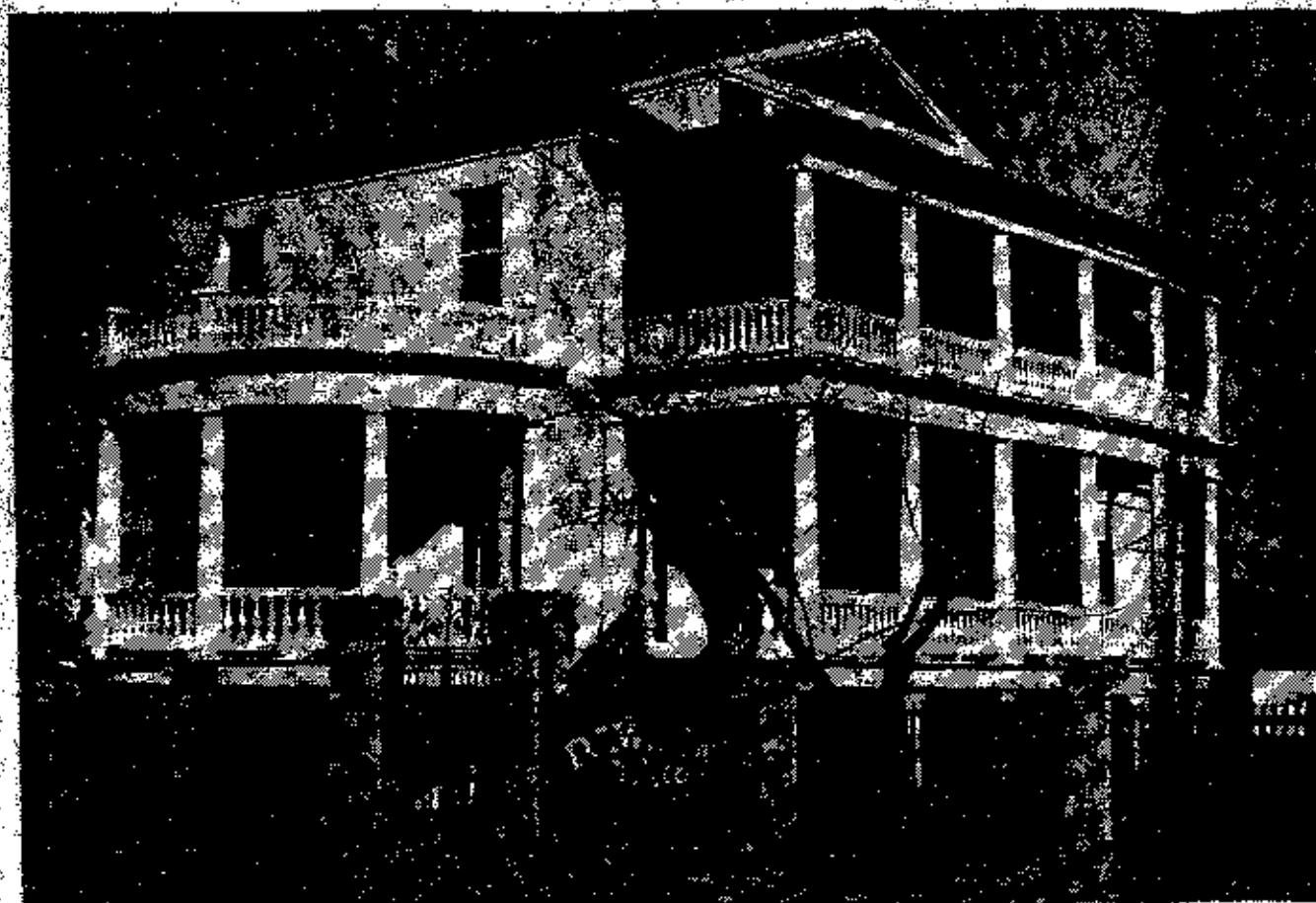
Bids being considered are from Thompson and Street Construction Co. of Charlotte, N.C.; M. B. Kahn Construction Co. of Columbia; and J. W. Bateson Construction Co. of Dallas, Tex.

Of the proposed 350 units, 192 will be for officers and 248 for enlisted men.

N TC

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332 E. Bay St.



REGENCY STYLE HOUSE RECLAIMED FROM DREARY RUIN
House At 332 East Bay St. Restored By Historic Charleston Foundation

(Staff Photo)

Do You Know Your Charleston?

Robert Primrose House Is Rescued From Ruin By Historic Foundation

By LOUIS F. ROEMPKE
News and Courier Staff Writer

Four months ago the Robert Primrose house on the southeast corner of East Bay and Vernon Streets was rotting down in its lot.

Today, with a newly refurbished exterior and a partially restored interior, the valuable old Charleston structure shares with the Philip Gadsden house across the street the honor of being a pearl among slums.

An anonymous donor gave the dwelling to the Historic Charleston Foundation in mid-summer and supplied funds to restore its exterior as well.

The building is three stories

high, brick and generously endowed with attractive galleries. It was built around 1820 by a well-to-do merchant, Robert Primrose, and is considered an excellent example of the Regency style in America.

Weather, lack of paint and a leaky roof all contributed to the near ruin of the semi-circular portico facing East Bay Street. The portico, however, was rebuilt board for board, column for column by a local construction company — the fluted columns being purchased from a firm in Philadelphia. Even the dentil under the eaves was reproduced from decaying remnants. Spool molding around the galleries was also replaced.

Current plans of the foundation call for the complete restoration of the third floor,

complete with central heating and modern plumbing. The first and second floors will be renovated as soon as possible after that.

A remarkable feat is being performed by the contractor in charge of the work. The plastered walls and ceilings were so ruined by leaks that they had to be ripped out. The cornicing, for the most part, however, is intact and is in place. When new plaster is put in it will blend with the present cornicing—a very tricky job.

The house has two marble mantels, pine paneling in all the rooms and a beautiful front entrance on the second floor.

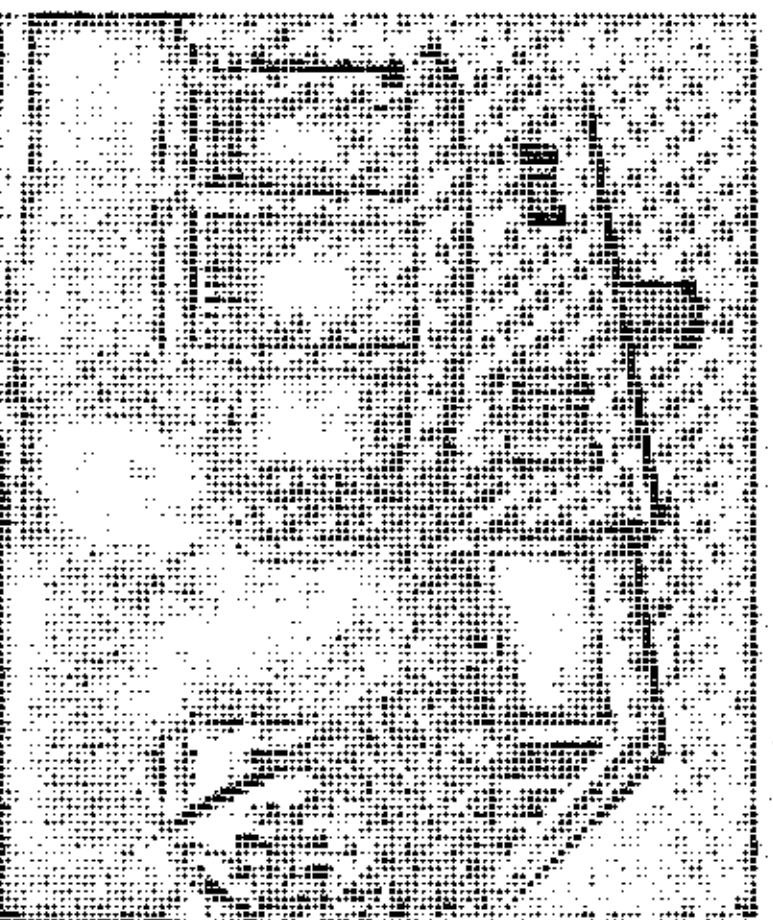
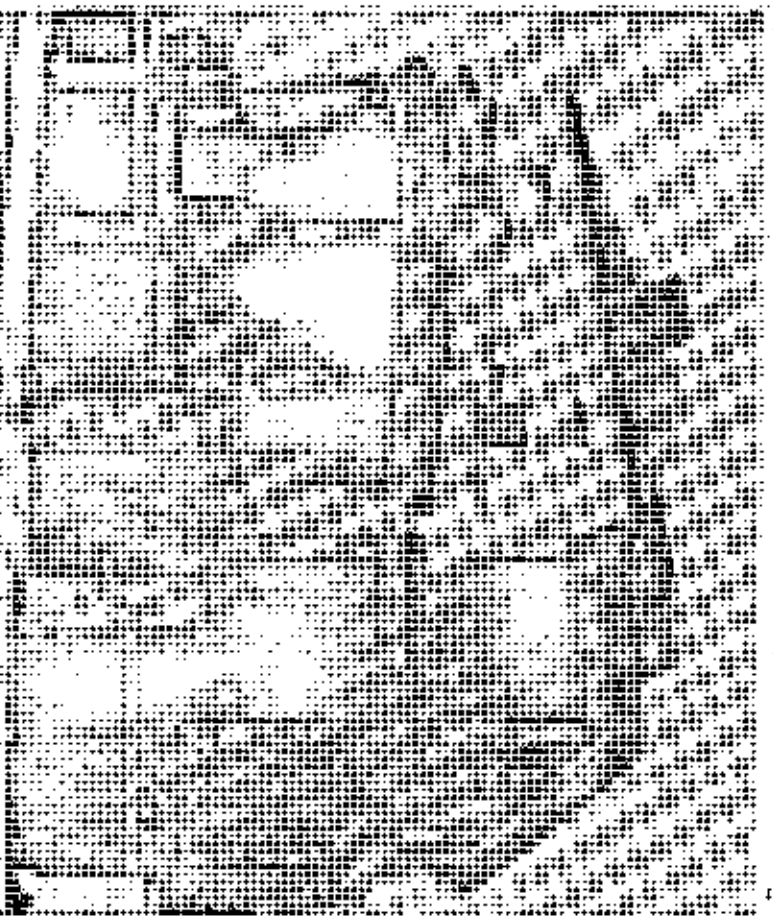
This entrance, according to the contractor, had between 12 and 15 coats of paint obscuring it and had to be removed with a blow torch.

Perhaps the most interesting feature of the house is its fake window of the front portico. When the blinds are shut, it looks as though there are three windows. The middle one is merely lit slow and one would have to cut a hole through the chimney to make it real.

The Charleston Historic Foundation is supplying the funds for the restoration as it has done for several houses in the Ansonborough project.

The foundation also intends to offer the house for sale to purchasers whose plans for the house would coincide with those of the foundation.

A coat of primrose yellow paint has been applied to this house under repair. "as a sentimental gesture toward its builder", a member of the foundation said.



BEFORE AND AFTER — The Robert Primrose House is an example of the type of urban redevelopment now going on in Charleston. These two pictures show the appearance before and after renovation of the stately Regency mansion, built about 1817. An anonymous donor gave the house to Historic Charleston Foundation, along with funds for its restoration. Now, converted into two spacious and elegant apartments, it is reborn to its former splendor. (UPI File Photo.)

City's Preservation Progress Cited In UPI Feature Article

EDITOR'S NOTE: Mrs. Bellows, whose affairs writer for UPI, visited Charleston recently to report on the pioneering efforts here to link historic preservation with urban redevelopment. Her article and the accompanying picture were distributed nationally by UPI.)

By MAGGIE BELLOW

CHARLESTON, S.C. (UPI) — The labyrinthine alley "Carlish Row" of Porgy and Bess is gone.

The same old houses are there, older still. But the shacks that inspired DeBose Heyward to write "Porgy" are long gone. Houses now, with new paint, fresh piazzas, iron grille railings and gracious magnolia gardens.

Whole, huge sections of Charleston, the 300-year-old one-time showpiece city of the South, are being returned to their former splendor through a unique citizen's experiment in urban renewal.

The reverse blockbusting technique was invented by a small but passionate group of citizens who call themselves the Historic Charleston Foundation.

rickets and dimes from the people of Charleston.

Long Been Iced

Charleston had long been "iced" in an economic deep freeze by the dulling poverty of the Reconstruction years and the depression.

Too poor to tear down their once-splendid mansions and build new homes, Charlestonians had chopped them into fire elements. The antebellum "single" homes sagged into shabby hovels; the cobblestoned alleys, former gardens and courtyards were junk holes.

The city, whose guns at Fort Sumter touched off the Civil War, had survived five disastrous fires, a waylone sacking, and the neglect of poverty, with more than a thousand pre-Civil War buildings still there, if scarcely intact.

Hat Passed

But when antique collectors started to sack whole houses — from iron fences to brickwork to timbers — a few citizens were outraged. They passed the hat to save one house, the Heyward House (built in the 1770s and George Washington slept there), and then passed the law that put "don't touch" signs on "Old Historic Charleston."

The Historic Foundation, struggling along on what money they could raise by guided tours, did manage to buy another mansion and restore it — to prove it could be done.

But in 1957 they got a windfall and an idea. The idea: Could an entire neighborhood make a comeback from the slums by the restoration of certain selected houses? The windfall: A Richardson Foundation grant of \$25,000 if the city could raise another \$75,000.

Wave Whipped Up

On the wave of enthusiasm whipped up by The News and Courier and the Charleston Evening Post, the group got their revolving fund and went to work.

They decided to tackle Ansonborough, six blocks of desolation near the city's heart that still had standing 135 before-the-Civil-war homes, including the city's oldest, built in 1712. Into this shambles of peeling paint, falling porches, stacks and converted "kitchen" houses stepped the foundation. They bought seven houses in a cluster, drafted an architect, a contractor, and an historian who carefully traced and dated every house.

Two homes they completely restored, adding bathrooms, modern plumbing and fancy kitchens, to provide dollars and cents guidelines to lure other buyers. The other homes they gutted, restored the facades, and put for sale signs on them along with the historic plaques.

Peeks Up

That block began to perk up as business and professional

people, attracted by its nearness to Broad Street and the commercial center along the main drag, King Street, invested and remodeled.

"When the block was secure, we flipped our wings and hopped to another," explains Mrs. S. Henry Edmunds, secretary to the foundation. To date 80 houses have gone through the foundation's hands — and their seed money is still intact. But another estimated \$2 million went into Ansonborough from private owners.

Restoration has become a citywide passion. Banks and insurance companies have restored old homes for branches; groups of doctors and lawyers have bought pre-revolutionary warehouses for offices; one-time cotton warehouses are now swank restaurants or apartments with fashionable view of the harbor. A group of 18th century merchant's houses are now Rainbow Row townhouses; old kitchen shacks have been turned into boutiques or garden homes.

Being Cut Up

Even the old high school, one of the first public high schools in the nation, is being cut up for modern apartments, and the old county library with its formal gardens has become an elegant address.

The kitchen shacks and pump houses of Price's Alley are now

a fashionable court; and one entrepreneur is tackling a whole city block house by house, in his spare time.

Charleston's next challenge is the long, one-block-wide spirally main street which leaders hope can make a comeback through restoration.

"We want to make Charleston a living historical area," says Mrs. Edmunds, whose next project is to spread their experiment of turning too-large mansions into money-making apartment complexes.

The dividends from the \$700,000 snow on the face of the town.

Executives, young marrieds and professional people are moving back into the city as the sums swirl up around the center.

Similar Projects

And last year 1.2 million visitors came to Charleston, dropping about \$35 million into the city's economy.

Similar restoration projects are under way in Annapolis, Md., where a revitalizing fund is working to reclaim its scenic waterfront and old city by putting landmarks to use as shops, galleries, houses and restaurants. In Newport, R.I., where "Operation Clapham" has bought 43 houses to restore, and in Mobile, Ala., where their Historic Development Commission has begun its own do-it-yourself renewal project.