

SAMUEL S. MILLS' HOUSE
1839
15 THOMAS STREET

This distinguished old home illustrates its own history in a number of ways. In spite of the indubitably Charlestonian piazzas on its south side, it has a marked look about it of New England taste. So much so that it would fit well among the towering elms about the green of a Massachusetts village. This appearance may be said to have been congenital, as it was built by a man, born in that state, who shortly before had married a girl whose father was also from Massachusetts.

Samuel Sage Mills and his wife, the former Mary Eggleston, had been married for only a few years when he bought in January of 1839 for \$3,500 from Mrs. Benjamin Markley the frontage of this property on Thomas Street with a frontage of 177 feet on Warren Street. On the same day for half that sum, he sold a little more than half this land to his wife's brother-in-law, Lawrence A. Edmondston. The Mills and Edmondstons seem to have built promptly two houses that still closely resemble each other.

Charleston was then in a great time of building. The Eclectic period was bearing its height. Such monumental buildings in the Roman and Greek styles as the Market and Hibernian Halls and the now vanished Charleston Hotel were setting examples of good taste in the classic orders. Mills and Edmondston followed this fashion with proper discretion in the design of their homes. It is now best seen in the former. Its two stories are faced with ship-lap siding that better imitates smooth stone than the usual clap-board. A fine stout cornice adorned with modillions hides the roof. On the entrance face at either end were tall Ionic pilasters, with entasis and flutings. The one to the north has disappeared, but scars indicate the loss. Scars also show that the capitals of the lesser order framing the recessed entrance have also gone. The piazza columns, at both stories, were also evidently fluted and with Ionic capitals. All of the details show excellent taste both in design and execution.

Charlestonians were then departing from the two usual styles of planning, the regular single and double houses. Mills used a modified form of the latter. Instead, however, of the usual wide hall containing the stair and running down the center, with two rooms on each side, Mills put narrow compartments east and west through his house and a stairway between the rooms to the north. Each of the larger rooms has a fireplace. The four necessary chimneys were run besides the narrow compartments. In the attic, they are brought together on arches so that there are only two chimney stacks coming out through the roof. The recessed entrance, also unusual here, lets into one of these narrow compartments. Acting as a hall, this leads to the parlors and the inner rooms. The stair is notably handsome, spiraling gracefully in a semi-circular enclosure. The detail of the hand-rail is most pleasantly designed. After the taste of the period, the ample parlor and dining room have good marble mantels. They are connected with a big folding door, and like the bedrooms above them have long French doors letting on to the piazza. Also in the style of the period, the architrave mould framing the openings have square corner decorations. The doors have the then usual long pair of panels. Except for the outer delapidations, the house stands very much as it must have been when Samuel and Mary Mills moved in to it.

Their neighborhood at that time was appropriate to a house that savored of New England. Across Warren Street, to the south, lived Mrs. Mills' relative George W. Eggleston, from Massachusetts. Back of his home was that of Benjamin Panenil Dunkin, whose middle name proclaims his background, and the Brewsters, Dunkin's former New England in-laws, were living in the neighborhood then, or soon after.

Mills sold the house in 1842 to a widow of a wealthy Wadmalaw Island planter, Mrs. Susan S. Wilson. The lady, dying in 1847, did not long enjoy it. In a later division of her property the house went to her daughter Joanna, who had married her own first cousin, Isaac Rison Wilson. This Mrs. Wilson sold the house in 1852 to Simon A. Robinson.

Robinson, who was a senior employee of the Bank of Charleston, appears to have died towards the end of the Confederate War. Under his will recorded in 1865 the house went for her lifetime to his mother, thence to his daughter Eliza Ladson Godfrey Robinson. Miss Lalan, as she liked to be called, died in 1939 when her home was entering its centennial year. She left it to her friend Mrs. Elizabeth F. DeBoise. It was sold again in 1958, and once more in 1963.

Mills and Edmondston had some interesting architectural connections. The former was at one time in business on the Bay with his relative Otis Mills. Otis Mills made one of Charleston's most considerable Ante-Bellum fortunes. A monument to this is the St. John Hotel, with its fine decorations in terra cotta and cast iron. Built by Mills as an investment, it had when it opened in 1853 such very up-to-date equipment as running water and steam heating. It was long called the Mills House. In 1861, while commanding in this District, General Lee slept there. Edmondston's father, Charles Edmondston, was the builder of the fine residence at 21 East Battery, now the town house of Mr. J. J. Pringle Smith, of Middleton Place.

The neighborhood names about Samuel Mills' house are of historic interest. Thomas Street and nearby Radcliffe Street got their names from the wealthy Charlestonian who laid them out in the seventeen-nineties as parts of his suburban village of Radcliffeborough. That name was carried until a short time ago by the church of St. Paul's. Radcliffeborough. Warren Street apparantly was given the surname of Radcliffe's mother, who was then an old lady. Vanderhorst Street commemorated Arnoldus Vanderhorst, Governor of South Carolina in 1794-1796. Radcliffe was the builder of a most notable house in the following decade. It stood at the corner of George and Meeting Street and long housed the High School. Its fine Adam decorations were used, after its destruction, to adorn the rooms of the Planters Hotel that were incorporated into the new Dock Street Theater.

S/SAMUEL G. STONEY

Mrs. J. Addison Beale, Sr. is a great grand daughter of Mills.