



Staff Photo by Stephanie Harvin

Club has been at 53 E. Bay St. for 26 years.

Bonds Of Camaraderie Mark Charleston Club's Survival

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A certain nostalgia is associated with the established clubs of Charleston. The Charleston Club, one of the oldest, lends itself particularly to this appeal.

Simply remember the famous "Doctor Johnson," who said of Boswell, in recommendation for club-life, Boswell was indeed "clubbable." However, another friend, not so well thought of by Johnson, was "unclubbable."

Thomas della Torre, the Charleston Club's last surviving honorary member wrote of this when he compiled "A Sketch of the Charleston Club" in 1938. With great care, della Torre recorded the events and the changing nature of the Charleston Club, suggesting modern clubs are "an evolution of the London Coffee house."

The Charleston Club was chartered in 1852 under authority of the South Carolina General Assembly. The clubhouse was located at 45 Meeting St. on land now part of the post office parking lot. But in the wake of the Civil War — 1866 — the club was dissolved and the clubhouse sold.

As recorded in "The South Carolina Institute," a pamphlet printed in 1870, the structure was "a handsome three-story brownstone building, erected before the war by one of the wealthiest clubs in America for their own entertainment. It is probably the handsomest and best arranged clubhouse in this country, but has since the war been sold to the United States government and is now used as the United States Courthouse." The former clubhouse was destroyed in the earthquake of 1886, and the grounds were added to the government property.

Do You Know Your Charleston?

In April 1881, the club reopened its doors to membership. Gentlemen of the city, whose names are not recorded, raised \$13,600 to purchase 3 Meeting St. — now known as No. 7.

The club prospered in its new location and its membership increased. And with revived interest, gaiety and good times were had. For example, in the minutes of the annual meeting in December 1883 the secretary records J. Cla-rence Cochran's recipe for The Charleston Club Punch: "One Volume Green Tea; one Volume California Brandy; one-fourth Volume Santa Cruz Rum; Lemon juice and sugar to taste; Ice; Lemon peel. When about to serve, add one Volume mineral water. Note: California Brandy blends better than French Brandy; Santa Cruz White Rum has the better taste. If Santa Cruz cannot be had, use Jamaica Rum. Bacardi Rum will not do."

During the early 1890s, "The club rooms were crowded of an evening and the bottle was passed freely," della Torre reports. "There was a life, a camaraderie, which make those days unforgettable in retrospect. There was much gaiety and occasionally with a little disorder ... The

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Managing Committee was kept busy guarding against infractions of the rules.

But, he adds, "On the other hand, never was social life more delightful than then, never so many figures of note or of general popularity."

By 1896, however, the club's popularity was on the decline and by the early 1920s membership had dwindled to a point which caused talk of disbanding the club and dividing its assets.

On April 14, 1927, the clubhouse on Meeting Street was sold and members moved to 22 South Battery, under terms of rent. But the new location was not the answer to the club's problems. The club had by this time lost all but some 23 regular and three honorary members. As della Torre reports, "The fortunes of the club were now to their lowest point."

In the early '30s, just when things looked the worst for the club, the location was changed again, under the leadership of the new president — Henry Buist — this time to 45 East Bay St., under terms of rent. Membership began to increase and the club's monthly reunions were occasions to

be marked with a white stone," della Torre reports.

But more moves were in store. On New Year's Day of 1938 the club relocated to the middle apartment of Vanderhorst Row, 78 East Bay St., where members were treated to "a commanding view of Charleston harbor," again under terms of rent.

It would be 1958 before the Charleston Club would own its building again. The club moved diagonally across the street to its present location — 53 East Bay St.

