

Lanneau Family: Pitt Street Developers

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Staff Reporter

It was not long after the opening of Harleston Village on the west side of Charleston that the enterprising Basile Lanneau purchased the block-long section of building lots which would later become the site for one of the most consistent and interesting rows of Greek Revival dwellings in the city.

By 1770, the streets of the Harleston district were laid out and first purchases of lots made. In 1778, Isaac Harleston sold the six deep building lots on the west side of Pitt Street between Beaufain and Wentworth to Lanneau, a prosperous currier and tanner who came down to Charleston

Do You Know Your Charleston?

as a youth from the French settlement of Acadia.

Lanneau and his descendants developed this block, apparently in two phases. They were responsible for the construction of the houses standing today as 1, 3, 5, 7 and 9 Pitt (11 Pitt was demolished a number of years back) and kept ownership of portions of this property up into the 20th century.

The Lanneaus settled in Acadia (the area known today as the Canadian provinces of Nova Scotia, Prince Edward Island, New Brunswick and a part of Quebec) as early as the 1660s but were pushed into exile with their fellow settlers by the British in 1755 after

being accused of encouraging Indian attacks on the British in the French and Indian Wars.

The Lanneaus arrived in South Carolina in late 1755 and stayed though most of the Acadians moved on to Louisiana and Mississippi. The young Basile was befriended by Henry Laurens, local planter, merchant and Revolutionary War leader. He grew up under Laurens' protection, abandoned the Catholic church for Protestantism and, with time, became a prominent citizen of Charleston.

He had many descendants by his second wife, one of these being Basil Lanneau Gildersleeve, a grandson who became a leading classical scholar, professor at Johns Hopkins University and an editor of the American Journal of Philology.

Nothing apparently survives on Pitt from the first constructions of Basile Lanneau (he was listed as a resident of this section of Pitt as early as 1796), though the brick carriage house behind 3 Pitt looks suspiciously early. However, the five antebellum dwellings which now compose "Lanneau Row" stand as a monument to his family's endeavors and to the fashion consciousness of the 1830s and 1840s when these five surviving homes were built.

While the vicissitudes of life have been harshly felt here during the 20th century, the future looks encouraging for at least part of Lanneau Row. The house at 7 Pitt is now being purchased by Mr. and Mrs. W.T. Tamsberg who will restore it as a single family residence. With 1 Pitt restored

several years ago and with 5 Pitt maintained by the Pollitzer family all through this century, that will leave only 3 and 9 Pitt to be "saved."

The lot now occupied by 7 Pitt (dimensions of 65 feet on east and west lines, 212 feet on north and south lines) was left by the family's founder to Bazile R. Lanneau who conveyed it at the end of the 19th century to Charles Henry Lanneau for \$3. Soon after it was transferred to the ownership

of Mary J. Lanneau and Alfred W. Lanneau. In June of 1915, it was sold out of the Lanneau family to Mrs. Annie-Arden Jervey Ball.

A check of the city directories through the 19th century shows the Lanneau family consistently on Pitt Street with the exception of several years in the late 1830s when they may be found scattered about on other streets nearby. Can it be that this was the

time of construction for much or all of the row?

The street guide and city directory for 1840 shows the family back on Pitt and designates dwellings at 1, 3, 5, 7, 9 and 11.

Since the manner of construction and the Greek Revival ornamentation all suggest the late 1830s, it would appear that 7 Pitt and its neighbors were probably built between 1837 and 1840, at the time the family took other

residences to allow for the development of the property.

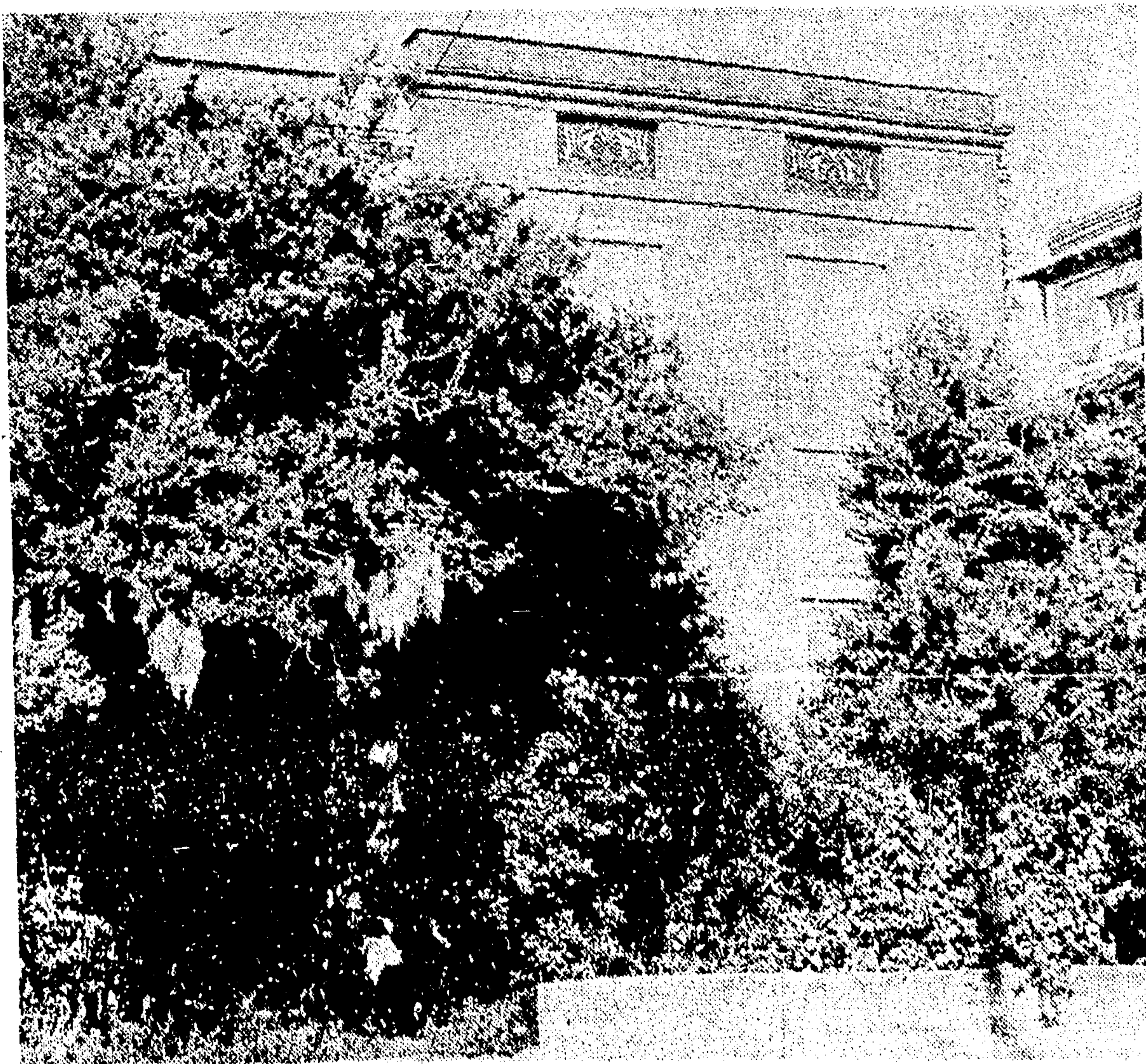
A check of city directories also shows that 7 Pitt was the residence kept by the Lanneaus as their own home long after the other dwellings in the row had been sold.

The plan for the house is an interesting variation on the usual "single" house arrangement. In order to gain a great deal of interior living space unspoiled by the intrusion of hallways, the dwelling's first story was laid out with three principal rooms opening into each other, all having direct access to the south piazza through two sets of French doors. There is no actual front door and the feeling is one of being close to the garden area, with a freeness of circulation from parlor to library to dining room.

The stairs were placed in a cabinet hallway on the rear north side, thus supplying convenient passage to the pantry area and to the two-story dependency at the rear of the house. The second story also consists of three principal rooms which may be reached by a north side hallway.

The Tamsbergs plan to retain the period features of the dwelling, these consisting of handsome foliate woodwork in the door and window architraves, black marble mantles veined in gold and ribbed plaster cornices so typical of the Greek Revival.

As a distant plan, after completion of the main house, the Tamsberg wish to restore an unusual one-story brick building in the rear of their lot. Tradition tells us that it was used as a school house, and its large rooms and double sliding doors suggest that this was indeed its use.



7 PITT WAS HOME OF LANNEAU FAMILY

Dwelling apparently built between 1837 and 1840. (Staff Photo by Murton.)

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