

Do You Know Your Charleston?

55 King Street

SCHE+ ND



Fraser, Whose Family Opposed His Art, Lived Many Years in King St. House

The house at 55 King street, now owned and occupied by Mr. and Mrs. James G. Snowden, formerly was the home of Charles Fraser, Charleston artist, whose miniatures will be exhibited at the Gibbes Art gallery by the Carolina Art association beginning next Monday.

Little authentic information is available today concerning the house. Although Fraser lived there for many years during his career as an artist, there is no record showing just how many. It is believed by some that the house was originally the property of the Grimke family. Fraser's mother was, before her marriage, Miss Mary Grimke, so it is within the range of possibility that the house was, if not the artist's birthplace, the scene of some of his boyhood life.

The house is a double house containing eleven rooms. Apparently, however, at least during its known history, the house always has been occupied as a single house by one family. It is certain that Fraser occupied both sections and the present owners, as well as Mrs. Snowden's mother, Mrs. Henry Drake, who secured the house from the late Charles O. Witte, also used the structure as one house.

Fraser used the south side of the house as his residence, old records indicate. The north side he used as his office, in the practice of law, and as his studio. The studio proper was in the front room.

In 1819, the year after he began painting professionally, Fraser maintained a law office in Tradd street. For ten years before his start as a professional artist, Fraser had practiced law with marked success. His family was opposed to his becoming a painter.

In 1831, old records reveal, Fraser still maintained in his home a law office as well as his studio. Further records, according to Miss Smith, show Fraser listed again as having a law office at what then was 93 Tradd street.

Charles Fraser, the youngest of his family, was a son of Alexander Fraser and Mrs. Fraser. The last of fourteen children, he was born on August 20, 1782, only a few days before Marion fought at Wadboo with the British cavalry, his last fight of the Revolution.

The artist died on October 5, 1860. Thus his life covered the period between the Revolution and the Confederate war. He showed early in life an artistic aptitude, and despite the family opposition which led to his becoming a lawyer, the aptitude persisted and today Fraser is recognized as among the foremost miniaturists. While occasionally one of his works falls below his standard, there are many that reach the highest grade.

House was owned by
Col. William Lee
from 1802 to at
least 1813. Fraser
may have lived there
afterwards. He would
have been over
30 years old

55

Tri Delta Tour Includes Snowden Home

The unusual old house at 55 King St. was constructed in 1762 and has been in the Snowden family for about 100 years. The residence of Mr. and Mrs. James G. Snowden, the house will be on tour for Tri Delta sorority, Friday afternoon, Feb. 23.

The house is believed to have been built by Frederic Grimke and the land on which the house stands was purchased by Grimke in 1747 from Francis Baker. Charleston artist Charles Fraser once resided in the house and some of the views in the Fraser Sketchbook are views from the upper windows of 55 King St. Fraser's mother was Grimke's daughter.

The house was originally constructed as a double dwelling — probably for rental purposes — and there is architectural evidence that testifies to this fact. The most noticeable is the thick piece of brick wall that projects through the slate roof of the property, dividing the house in two vertically. Where access doors were later cut to

make the house one dwelling they had to be made through this internally very thick wall.

Although the house is Georgian in period, its

woodwork is comparatively plain and like all old houses it has had a number of alterations. The delicate sunburst mantel of the drawing room, for example, is unquestionably later than the Georgian house. The finely carved cornice of this room is probably later, too, and was perhaps companion to the mantel. The house, however, retains the sturdiness of Georgian construction and the house wall on the north side of the staircase landing is fully two feet thick.

Mr. and Mrs. Snowden have fine old pieces of furniture on both sides of the family and they possess three portraits by Charleston artist Jeremiah Theus. The Theus portraits of Richard Baker and Elizabeth Elliott are on the north and south walls, respectively, of the drawing room. The Theus portraits of Mary Bohun, who married Richard Baker, is over the dining room mantel.

The Windsor chair in the drawing room is believed to be pre-Revolutionary as is the smaller Windsor chair in the sitting room behind the drawing room. The full length gold leaf mirror in the drawing room is circa 1820 and covers the window that was formerly a door. The handsome desk in this room, which is a Snowden piece, is about 1820 to 1830.

The attractive Hepplewhite

type sideboard in the dining room is a piece of furniture from Mrs. Snowden's side of the family. It is admirably — almost baronially — proportioned and has restrained and very delicate inlay. Its oval medallions, with a tracery of leaves, are uncommon and lovely.

The dueling pistols' case on the sideboard is used for flat silver. The framed flag over the sideboard was presented to Mrs. Snowden's grandfather by Marion's Men of Winyah, Georgetown, a military unit he had commanded for many years.

The beautiful Hepplewhite type end tables on the street side of the dining room came also from Mrs. Snowden's side of the family and belong with a drop leaf dining table which is being repaired. In the mahogany cupboard by the mantel there are silver salt cellars with the Baker crest that belonged to Richard Baker. The silver sugar and creamer in this cupboard are by Hayden and Gregg and are Snowden pieces. There is

a handsome Snowden soup ladle by J. Eyland & Co.

In the china cupboard at the north end of the room there are several very good looking pieces of lustre. The most exceptional is a sugar bowl and cover of silver lustre. The green Haviland plates in the cupboard and on the mantel, all of which have attractive sporting scenes, were a present to Mrs. Snowden's great-grandmother on her golden anniversary.

The house, by the way, is full of work by Mrs. Snowden, who is comfortably at home with old furniture and can make furniture as well as repair it. The small table under the gilt mirror in the dining room was made by Mr. Snowden and is appropriate with the mirror because the mirror is a Snowden piece. The very large, handsome blue pitcher on this table is Copeland.

The kitchen in this house is Mr. Snowden's chief work and a very pleasant and attractive kitchen it is. Because the room possessed a large, old fashioned fireplace he decided to peel the plaster and lathing from the end of the room and reveal the bricks. This he has done with great success. At the other end of the room he has built in a totally modern kitchen whose appliances look delightful with his friendly old fireplace and give the best of two worlds to the Snowdens and their four children.

Like all old houses 55 King St. has its life written in its face and it has survived two centuries with a good deal of poise. This is a house where people and children and pets are welcome and where the children and pets of the family are truly allowed to live in the house. The young Snowdens do their homework on the dining room table.

Tour hours will be from 2:30 until 5:30 and tickets may be purchased from any of the houses on tour during the hours of the tour. Houses to be shown include 170 Queen St., 168½ Queen St., O Gibbes St. and 15 Tradd St.

Tour guests are requested to wear low heeled shoes and to refrain from smoking within the residences.

Sketches
By
Laura
Peck

