

1838 Fire Caused Rebuild

By ROBERT P. STOCKTON

Rachel Lazarus' row of buildings at 229-233 King St. are in the Greek Revival style which proved the most popular "mode" in the rebuilding after the great fire of 1838.

Mrs. Lazarus was one of many whose buildings were destroyed in the 1838 fire, which devastated a wide area of King and Meeting streets and much of Ansonborough.

Only five years before the fire, Mrs. Lazarus had purchased from the estate of Ann Jane Bruce Swinton a large lot on the west side of King Street, a little south of Market Street, containing several buildings.

So devastating was the fire that the S.C. General Assembly passed an "Act for Rebuilding the City of Charleston," authorizing loans.

Under provisions of the act, Mrs. Lazarus mortgaged her burned-out lot in King Street to the Bank of the State of South Carolina for \$18,600.

According to the mortgage terms, as specified in the act, the money "should, within one year of its receipt, be expended in the erection of brick, or stone buildings, upon a certain lot of land..." The mortgage was dated Jan. 14, 1839.

It may be inferred that Mrs. Lazarus completed her three buildings by January 1840.

The three identical buildings were constructed for rental purposes. Two surviving leases are both dated in 1846.

Henry B. Clark secured a one-year lease, for the annual sum of \$800, to "the house and Lot with all appurtenances thereto in King Street, west side, known as No. 205." That property is now numbered 229 King.

Arthur Fogartie secured a two-year lease, annual rent \$800, to the "House and Lot, with all appurtenances thereto, in King Street, west side, Known as No. 209," presently numbered 233 King.

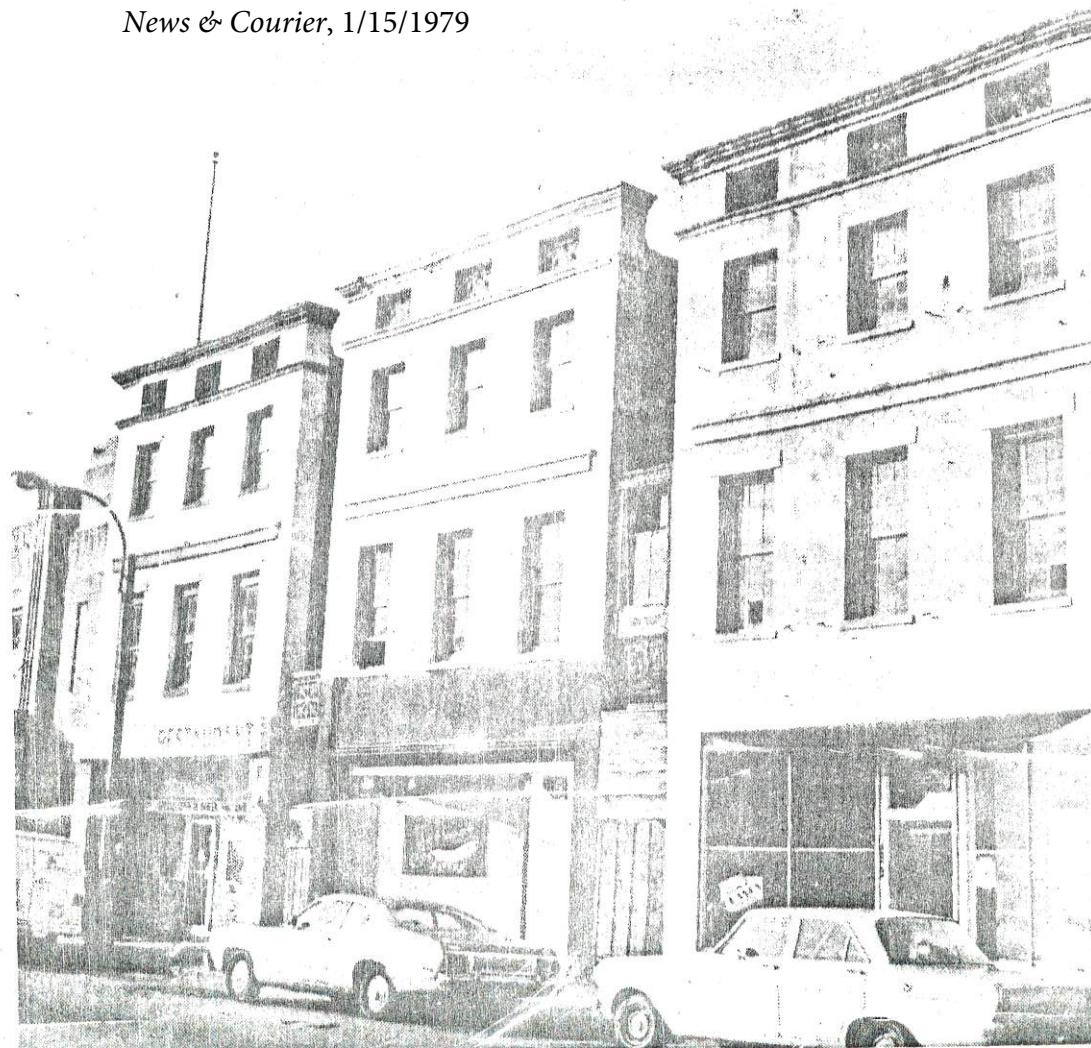
Mrs. Lazarus died in 1847, directing the executors of her will to "have all the Buildings and improvements on the Lot in King Street, purchased from the Estate of Mrs. Swinton, and now divided into three Lots, appraised....

"After such appraisement ... it is my will that my son Benjamin shall have the privilege of purchasing the said intire Lot, with the improvements," paying the appraised value of the improvements plus \$3,500 for the three lots. Or Benjamin could have the option of buying one of the three lots, with the building thereon, for \$3,500.

Benjamin D. Lazarus opted to purchase from his mother's estate the lot and building then numbered 209 King and now numbered 231 King St. It was conveyed to him in March 1848.

Mrs. Lazarus' will also allotted \$10,000 to be invested by the executors for the support of her daughters,

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(Staff Photo by Brad Nettles)

King Street Buildings In Greek Revival Style

Emma and Adeline, "while they should remain unmarried."

The executors invested the money in the two remaining King Street buildings, conveying them to the two daughters, with Joshua Lazarus as trustee. The buildings, then numbered 205 and 207, are now 229 and 231 King.

The building at 229 King was subsequently the location of the Jet White Steam Laundry, founded in 1901 by the Cliff brothers. The business was acquired in 1902 by another brother team, Washington R. Gnann and William G. Gnann.

The Jet White boasted steam-operated pressing machines, an innovation in laundering. A concentric business was the Jet White Towel Supply, which in 1905 advertised a "clean towel every day" for \$1 monthly, soap provided free of charge.

Washington R. Gnann acquired full title to the business in 1917, including the lot and building at 229 King and adjacent property fronting on Market Street, on which were

located stables for the laundry-wagon horses.

He died in 1920, and the business was devised to his widow, the former Nellie Claire McKevelin. She subsequently remarried twice, to Raymond Sherlock and to Clarence Brinker.

The real estate at 229 King and adjacent lots on Market were acquired in a Master in Equity sale in 1926 by G.L. Buist Rivers, for \$5,000.

Mrs. Gnann and her third husband, Clarence "Dutch" Brinker, continued to operate the business until World War II.

Family tradition relates that Mrs. Brinker was a "romantic," who during the Depression dry-cleaned gowns free of charge for impoverished members of old families attending the St. Cecilia balls. She was also an independent-minded woman who continued to hitch her horse in front of the Jet White long after hitching posts were denounced as traffic hazards.

The property at 229 King is currently owned by Spiros Fokas and Frederigos Shavros, 231 King is

owned by Spiro C. Vallis and 233 King is owned by Indigo Realty Co., according to current tax records.

The three buildings are identical in style, three stories of brick with stuccoed fronts. Side walls are laid in American bond.

On the street facades, upper levels remain essentially unchanged. Windows on the second floor of 231 and 233 King retain nine lights to a sash. Upper windows are slightly smaller, in the Palladian tradition, with six lights to a sash.

Decorative iron grills with Greek Revival motifs fill small rectangular blank recesses, in the front parapets, which simulate attic windows.

Courses of molded brick run above and below the blank windows of the parapet. A wider band of molded brick runs between the second and third windows.

Wood and cast iron vestiges, in the Greek Revival style, remain of the piazza screens of the second level.

The buildings were designed to have shops on the ground level and residences on the upper levels.