



GEORGE ROBERTSON HOUSE

2003

1 Meeting Street

c. 1846

Residence of Mrs. John C. Hawk, Jr.

The George Robertson House is one of the largest and most spacious "single" houses constructed in antebellum Charleston. The single house plan calls for the positioning of the house with the gable end facing the street and is usually flanked with tiers of piazzas rising on the southern side of the main structure. The huge rooms and lofty ceilings provided a maximum flow of sea breezes through the interior and the piazzas shelter the interior from the direct rays of the sun. In this case, the piazzas are recessed behind a brick screening wall which provides privacy from the original carriage way and provides a symmetrical placement of window openings on the primary facade. The house follows the Greek Revival style of architecture which was popular in America from 1820 to 1860 and was remodelled in the 1870's and again in the early part of the twentieth century. Later changes are evident in the doors with glass panel inserts. The handsome pair of massive iron lamps that flank the entrance are believed to have been copied from the Strozzi Palace in Florence.

ENTRANCE HALL

This antebellum mansion has two very unusual features. The entrance passage was placed on the northern wall rather than in the center of the house, and its proportions are unusually massive. The focal point of the entrance are the stairs which rise dramatically for 22 steps to the second floor. The balustrade curves gracefully at the base to form a bold S-scrolled newel. This imposing staircase and the flooring is constructed of heart pine which is found in abundance in the Lowcountry.

Prints, Alice Ravenel Huger, part of a series on rice cultivation in South Carolina.

Tables, banquet ends to a family table brought from Virginia

Chairs, carved set of 12 from Orient

Dining table, from Orient (where owner grew up)

GEORGE ROBERTSON HOUSE

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DRAWING ROOM

The mansion has been privately owned by only 5 families since originally built 140 years ago. The builder, Robertson, a Scotsman sold the property to Williams Middleton soon after construction. Middleton was the last of his surname to own the famous Middleton Place Gardens on the Ashley River. The Middleton Family lived here throughout the Civil War and sold the house in 1870 to the Ross family, wealthy Philadelphia merchants and shipowners who held extensive property in Charleston and in Philadelphia. The Ross family held the property until 1922 (52 years) until the death of Miss Mary Jane Ross at age 90. Before her death, she established the Ross Memorial Trust with the intent of endowing the house for use as a Museum in memory of her two brothers who fought in the Civil War, one being killed while serving with the Washington Light Infantry of Charleston.

Mrs. Ross had traveled extensively during her lifetime and the house was filled with art works, collectibles and curiosities from throughout the world. The Trust was to be funded by income from real estate holdings. This bequest was never realized. After legal battles that lasted twenty-two years, the Museum Trust was abolished by the courts and the assets were distributed to charitable organizations in Charleston and Philadelphia.

The mansion was then purchased for \$35,000 in 1945 by Mrs. Minnie S. Carr, who also owned the property at 2 Meeting Street. Mrs. Carr converted the house into apartments but very carefully preserved and protected the ornamentation and architectural elements of the earlier period. The Carr and Carrington families also donated the wonderful band stand in the White Point Gardens to the city during this period.

Mrs. Carr sold the property to the current owners, Dr. and Mrs. John C. Hawk, who returned it to a private family dwelling and have lived here with their family for 43 years. It is not uncommon for the Hawks to have 24 for Sunday family dinner or for special family holidays. After the Hawks purchased the property, the basement served for a short time as the temporary home of "Miss Mason's School" an elementary day school which is now located in modern buildings on the Ashley River. Mrs. Hawk, a prominent Charleston lawyer, has been active in preservation efforts in the city and often donates her legal expertise to preservation and conservation programs.

Tables, here and in dining room, from owner's families, from Virginia

Window box, made by friend, holds family photograph

Mirrors, gold leaf, in both rooms, were painted and when the seven layers of paints were removed they were found to be gold leaf

GEORGE ROBERTSON HOUSE

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PIAZZA

The house commands one of the most desirable locations in Charleston overlooking White Point Gardens and the harbor beyond. The modern park (White Park Gardens) can be traced to 1837 when the city rearranged certain streets to establish this "pleasure ground". During the Civil War, the garden was torn up to erect the Battery Ramsay and the King Street Battery, two military fortifications with earth works that supported huge Blakely cannons - the largest weapons in the South. The families that have lived here have witnessed some of the more turbulent events in American history and have watched the evolution of the harbor from the days of sailing ships to nuclear propulsion warships ply the Charleston harbor.

On its wide piazzas, friends and relatives of William Middleton, last of his surname to own the famous Middleton Place Gardens, gathered in the pre-dawn chill of April 11, 1861, to cheer the firing of a shot from Fort Johnson into Fort Sumter, heralding the beginning of the Civil War.

The house survived that war without a scratch, an amazing feat considering its proximity to the Confederate batteries in White Point Gardens just across South Battery. The legal war ended with it being converted into apartments and the subsequent sale of its out-buildings.

Today it is the residence of Dr. and Mrs. John C. Hawk who maintain it as a single family residence.

The late Empire Period residence rises high above its English style basement. The huge rooms and lofty ceilings probably give it more cubic footage of space and fewer individual rooms of any of Charleston's antebellum residences.

A Scotsman, John Robertson, had the house built in 1846. It is of solid construction, utilizing the out-sized "Charleston" brick made at brickyards along tidewater rivers, heart pine timbers and flooring and cypress from Lowcountry swamps. Its builder erected solid brick servants quarters to the north. An annex that extended to the west end of the corner lot was torn down in 1961 when the main house was purchased by its present owners.

The massive iron lamps flanking the Meeting Street entrance to the house are unusual and quite ornate. These probably were placed by interim owners. Robertson sold the house shortly after it was built to William Middleton.

Middleton occupied it as a town house until 1870 when he sold it to Mrs. Alexander Ross. The house then entered a period of fairly lonely occupancy, for the Ross family consisted only of grown-ups. During the late 19th and early

Miss Ross's will, set up the house as a museum in memory of her brothers. Both of them fought with the Confederate Army, one being killed while serving with the Washington Light Infantry.

The reading of the will initiated one of the longest court cases ever to take place in this country. It began shortly after Miss Ross died and was not finally resolved until 1944. The litigation resulted in the museum trust's being abolished. The Charleston Library Society, the First Presbyterian Church, the Medical Society of South Carolina (Roper Hospital) and Philadelphia Presbyterian Hospital received what was left of the estate. Legal fee claims of \$92,438.03 were presented by the Charleston law firm of Hagood, Rivers and Young, and the widow of a Philadelphia lawyer who died during the litigation.

At that time (1944) this was the highest court fee ever awarded by a Charleston court. The claim was nullified on four occasions by the S.C. Supreme Court and subsequently settled for about \$69,000. The estate amounted to more than \$360,000.

Auction of Miss Ross's collection of antiques and her silver attracted one of the largest sales crowds ever to attend an auction here. One of the more fascinating items was an iron statue of an Irish setter that had won a prize at the 1876 Philadelphia Centennial Fair. It sold for only \$15 however.

Miss Ross left another antebellum residence, 144 Wentworth St., to the American Red Cross which still maintains headquarters there.

The house at 1 Meeting St. was bought from the Ross estate for \$35,000 in 1945 by Mrs. Minnie S. Carr, owner of 2 Meeting Street just across the way. Mrs. Carr converted both the main house and its servants quarters into apartments.

One of the tenants during the mansion's apartment era was a small elderly man, Joseph Daniel Aiken, a member of a prominent Charleston family who had spent most of his life in Connecticut. He retired and returned to Charleston in 1927. In 1944 he rented an apartment at 1 Meeting Street.

Other tenants paid little attention to Mr. Aiken and he lived very simply. Practically everyone, including his nearest relatives here, were astonished when he died in 1953 leaving an estate of about \$900,000. Aiken left each of four nephews \$1,000 each, but the bulk of his estate was devised to The Citadel, with a request that it be used to

Youth, 17, Charged With Grand Larceny

A Drake Street youth has been bound over to General Sessions Court on charges that he broke into a King Street pawn shop twice during the last two months.

Leon Jones, 17, appeared before Magistrate Peter W. Lempesis, who set bond at \$3,000 on two counts of housebreaking and grand larceny.

Acting City Police Chief Samuel H. Frierson said Jones is accused of having broken into Taylor's Pawn Shop, 609 King St. the night of June 7 and again on July 18.

First part of
article
missing

Date not
indicated

White House Architect May Have Designed Building

NOTE: Much of the material on the Ralph Izard House was compiled for the book by Anna Wells (1969).

V.H.J. THOMAS

war pattern of storms, fires and large fires destroyed the lower portions of Charleston during the 18th and 19th centuries. Destroying dwellings and institutional buildings in the city, many of which were considered the outstanding features of the period they existed.

such a mansion, in a fire that was restricted to the building, was the Ralph Izard House at the northwest corner of Meeting Street and South Battery, one of Charleston's landmarks as long as

on the house, its true materials of construction at the actual date of construction, the general room and even the precise details of its destruction are included in history. But a few brief references suggest that the Izard House is indeed a treasure of importance and the solution of the mystery of the house detected to learn the facts of the mansion fully.

It was it built by the state's most prominent elegant men of

the late 18th century, but there are suggestions that it was Charleston's only 18th century Gothic dwelling house and may owe its design to James Hoban, the Irish-born architect who built the White House in Washington, D. C.

Izard (1742-1804) was a fourth-generation descendant of one of the great Goose Creek planter families. He inherited considerable wealth at an early age and went on to school in England, attending first Hackney and finishing his education at

Do You Know Your Charleston?

Cambridge University. The efforts of Charleston matchmakers to acquire him for their daughters after his European education failed. On a trip north in 1767 he did, however, marry the beautiful Alice DeLancey of Westchester, New York.

Two years later the couple visited Europe and took up quarters in London. They remained abroad for a number of years, during which time, in the winter of 1774-75 in Rome, a well-known portrait of them was painted by John Singleton Copley. It now hangs in the Museum of Fine Arts in Boston.

By June 1775, with political tensions rising, the Izards considered moving from London. In 1777 they were in France

where Mrs. Izard remained until 1783. Congress had appointed Izard commissioner to the Court of Tuscany but the European complications prevented his being received there.

Apparently there was difficulty with Benjamin Franklin and other Americans in Paris. Izard decided to return to America, reporting first to Congress in the summer of 1780 in Philadelphia, then starting toward his southern home in 1781.

After years of war and sequestration, Izard's South Carolina estates were found to be in bad condition. His major seat was "The Elms", some 17 miles from Charleston. Shortly after his return, he wrote to Thomas

Jefferson, describing the quite neglected state of this large country place. Despite many years of separation from his properties and the long European sojourn, it appears that Ralph Izard had decided to concentrate on developing the holdings that had helped to bring him such wealth.

Within a few years his excellence as a planter became evident. The census of 1790 listed him as the second largest planter in South Carolina. He kept, at one time, 594 slaves on eight plantations, the size of The Elms being 4,350 acres toward the end of the century.

The need for a suitable town house must have been pressing on him following the Revolution. We may probably date the construction from 1794 to 1800, as in that first year there are numerous references in his letters to cutting lumber at The Elms to be shipped to Charleston for "the house", and in 1794 he wrote from Philadelphia concerning the difficulty of buying "25 bushels of plaster of Paris."

The city directory of 1794 gives his name but no address for Charleston. But in the 1801, 1802, and 1804 directories we find Izard listed as "1, Meeting Street."

The possibility of pointing to James Hoban as being responsible for the house designs is based on a few "coincidences." The architect and Izard were acquainted

and there is a reference to the rich planter visiting the Irish architect in the early 1790s. Hoban was actually living in Charleston in 1792 when Izard may have been putting together his first plans.

Then the unusual quality of the building, with its turrets on the east sides and unusually high parapet, suggests a high European fashion that might have been beyond Charleston builder-designers of that day. Family papers make reference to a designer of "genius," which would fit Hoban more closely than many another local builder.

Even though Ralph Izard was known to be "remarkable for his taste", and may have been capable of working out much of his own design, it would seem likely that a project of this size would require the certain hand of a European-trained professional.

To judge from contemporary descriptions, the Izard House at 1 Meeting St. was certainly an imposing one. A few years following Ralph Izard's death, the dwelling was visited by the Rev. Abiel Abbot who wrote it up in his journal as "one of the most splendid mansions of this city. It has three stories and piazzas above the basement and circular projections. There is more than a usual quantity of carved and ornamental work, tasteful, however, and modest."

Family tradition reports a curved drive came up to the front door which faced east.

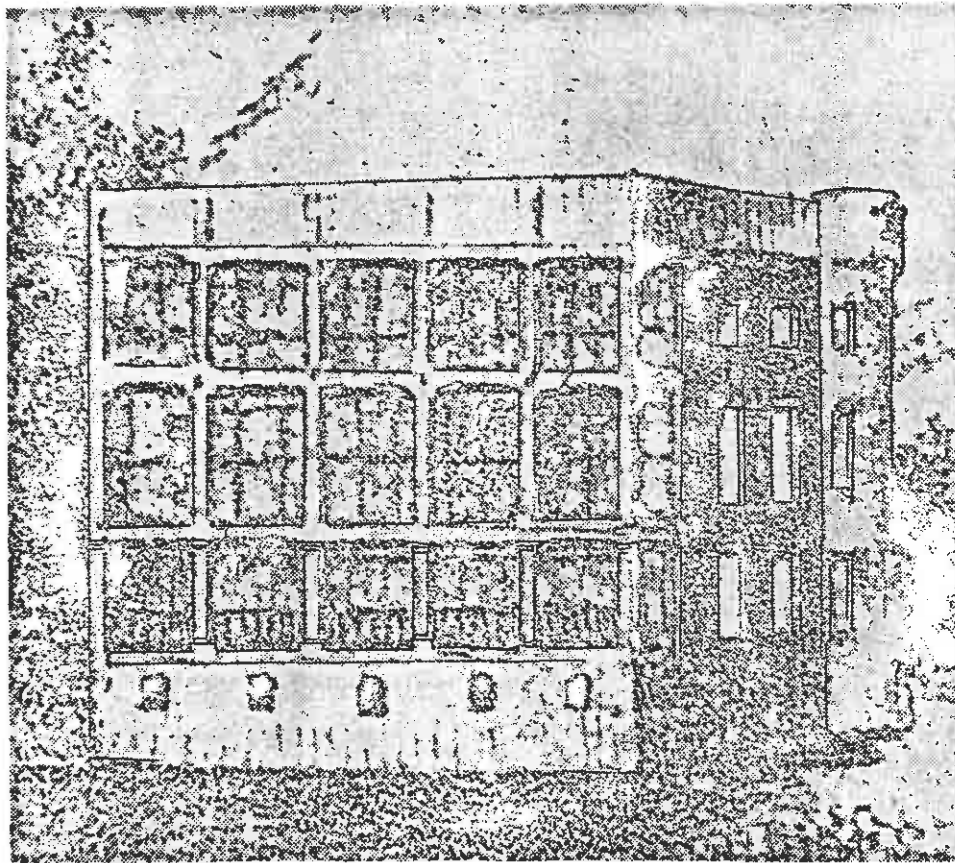
We may judge from a small lithograph—apparently the only existing illustration of the house—that the piazzas stood to the west, as there is no evidence of a main entrance. This would place the narrow side with windows to the south and the circular projection in the lithograph at the southeast corner.

In 1828, ten years after the Rev. Abbot visited the house, it was burned. Family tradition is that it burned on a Sunday morning while the family was at church and the servants were not able to organize the necessary effort to save the very grand mansion which had been constructed by one of a special breed of Lowcountry patri- cians.

Baptists To Open Conference Today

COLUMBIA (UPI) — More than 2,500 Baptists from throughout the state are expected to attend the annual three-day conference on evangelism opening in Columbia today.

Speakers for the conference include Dr. William E. Hull, associate professor of New Testament interpretation at the Southern Baptist Theological Seminary in Louisville, Ky.; the Rev. Sandy Ray, vice president of the National Baptist Convention, USA; and the Rev. W.D. Lawes, associate director of the Baptist Home Mission Board's Division of Evangelism.



RALPH IZARD HOUSE BURNED IN 1828
Enlarged fragment of engraving shows outline of dwelling.



1 Meeting — Empire period home has English style basement.

Meeting Street Mansion Was Center Of Two Wars

The imposing mansion at 1 Meeting St. was in the center of two wars, one military, one legal. Both made history in Charleston.

The legal battle lasted 22 years, five times longer than the Civil War which also swirled around the house.

On its wide piazzas, friends and relatives of William Middleton, last of his surname to own the famous Middleton Place Gardens, gathered in the pre-dawn chill of April 12 to cheer the firing of a shot from Fort Johnson into Fort Sumter, heralding the beginning of the Civil War.

The house survived that war without a scratch, an amazing feat considering its location in the lower part of the city which was heavily shelled by U.S. batteries on Morris Island.

The legal war ended with it being converted into apartments and the subsequent sale of its outbuildings.

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rooms and lofty ceilings probably give it more cubic footage of space and fewer individual rooms of any of Charleston's antebellum residences.

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Miss Mary Jane Ross, the last of her family, who died in 1922 at the age of 90.

She had traveled extensively during her lifetime and the house was packed with mementoes from many lands. These included a hand-carved cabinet created from a mantel that once graced an Indian rajah's palace, a set of hand-crafted silver from Kashmir, Chinese and Japanese antiques.

Miss Ross's will set up the house as a museum in memory of her brothers. Both of them fought with the Confederate Army, one being killed while serving with the Washington Light Infantry.

The reading of the will initiated one of the longest court cases ever to take place in this country. It began shortly after Miss Ross died and was not finally resolved until 1944. The litigation resulted in the museum trust being abolished. The Charleston Library Society, the First Presbyterian Church, the Medical Society of South Carolina (Roper Hospital) and Philadelphia Presbyterian Hospital received what was left of the estate. Legal fee claims of \$92,438.03 were presented by a Charleston law firm and the widow of a Philadelphia lawyer who died during the litigation.

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She later sold the house to Dr. and Mrs. John C. Hawk. The former servants' building was sold separately and this smaller building, now No. 3 Meeting St., has been remodelled into a charming residence.

The Hawks occupy the main house as a residence. A smaller unit at the rear of the South Battery vehicle entrance is now rented.

During existence of the mansion as an apartment building, the basement was converted into a restaurant. After the Hawks purchased the property, the basement became a temporary home for "Miss Mason's School", a private elementary day school now located on Halsey Boulevard. A seasonal tea shop was operated during the major tourist visitation period for several years.

The house has a hallway that is larger than many modern apartments. Its broad stairs sweep grandly upward and its main floor rooms are connected by massive sliding doors, enabling creation of a huge space for entertainment.

From its upper piazza, a magnificent view of the harbor is afforded and the orientation of the house, east-west athwart the path of Charleston's sea breeze, plus its airy rooms and large windows, make it an exceptionally comfortable residence in one of the city's most desirable locations.

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materials:

Brick facade ornamented with a marble cornice.

any stone (Bromston).

shrapit.

tinted mortar.

masked piazzas.

Similar to Igoe's
at the gate.

A stalwart of South of Broad: One Meeting Street



PHOTOS BY GEORGE WOOLSTON

Elegance in the drawing room.

By George Woolston

Perched on the corner of Meeting and South Battery at One Meeting Street, the George Robertson House towers over the oaks in White Point Garden. It is one of the largest and most spacious single homes constructed in antebellum Charleston, and cuts quite a figure in the Charleston skyline.

Constructed in 1846 by George Robertson, the usual plan for a single home calls for the positioning of the house with the gable end facing the street, and is usually flanked with tiers of piazzas on the southern side of the main structure. In this case, however, the piazzas are recessed behind a brick screening wall,

which provided privacy from the original carriage way, along with a symmetrical placement of window openings on the façade. The home was built in the Greek Revival style of architecture, and was remodeled in the 1870s and then again in the early 20th century.

Since its construction, the home has been privately owned by only five families. George Robertson sold the house shortly after construction to Williams Middleton, who was the last of the Middletons to own Middleton Place Gardens. The Middleton family lived in the mansion throughout the War Between the States and sold the home in 1870 to the Ross family.

Carrying the mantle of wealthy merchants and ship owners from Philadelphia, the Ross family likely added the bay windows at the front of the home due to the seaman theme of the trim. Miss Mary Jane Ross, the last of the Ross family to own the house, intended on turning the home into a museum to honor her two brothers who fought in the Civil War, one being killed and the other serving in the Washington Light Infantry of Charleston.

To do this, she established the Ross Memorial Trust. However, after her death in 1922, her bequest was not realized and legal battles ensued. Finally, in 1945, the home was purchased by Mrs. Minnie S. Carr for \$35,000. Mrs. Carr lived next door at 2 Meeting Street and turned her newest purchase into apartments. In 1961, the home was sold to Dr. and Mrs. John C. Hawk, who turned the home back into a private home dwelling. They lived there for 47 years.

The home contains a variety of fantastic rooms, and one such room is the library located on the second floor. It features an amazing Chinese rosewood table and chairs in the bay window, which is flanked

by an antique Continental bookcase carved out of walnut with an etched glazed door. The room also used to be able to open up into another room to form a ballroom; however, when the Hawks moved in, they enclosed the space under the arch to form the library.

In the master bedroom is the carved mahogany "rice" bedframe by the locally famous furniture maker Boyd Smith, known as Smitty, who had shop on Queen Street. This was the room that combined with the library to form a ballroom.

Another remarkable feature of the home is the entrance hall and its grand staircase, complete with the original hardwood and heavy oak doors.

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September 2013

CHARLESTON MERCURY

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The George Robertson House at One Meeting Street



Original molding above the bay windows adds to the already elegant living room.

Continued from page 13

Each room has towering ceilings and is very spacious. The drawing room includes the original

fireplace in exquisite condition along with original moldings and hardwood floors.

A pair of massive, beautiful iron lamps flank



This arch in the library used to open up and form a ballroom.

the entrance to the home and are believed to be copied from the Strozzi Palace in Florence, Italy.

The home is a total of five stories, with a one bed, one bath ground floor apartment, and contains a

total of eight bedrooms, six of which are full, and two bathrooms, totaling approximately 11,820 sq. ft. The grounds also contain a one bed, one and one half bath, 988-sq. ft. carriage house.



High, vaulted ceilings in the master bedroom.

This is a home that completely defines South of Broad living — a combination of rich history, exquisite architectural taste and a refined luxury. With gorgeous and expansive views from all

three piazzas, it is perfect for entertaining on a cool autumn evening.

The home is exclusively listed by Debbie Fisher of Handsome Properties and may be purchased for \$5,495,000.



BRAD NETTLES/STAFF

The Board of Zoning Appeals voted 5-1 Tuesday to deny a request to make the home at 1 Meeting St. into three condominiums.

Meeting Street condos rejected

Preservationists win zoning battle

BY ROBERT BEHRE
rbehre@postandcourier.com

The brick mansion at 1 Meeting St. won't be carved into three condominiums, as preservationists and neighbors got their way Tuesday in a zoning battle that they say sets a precedent for the city's grandest historic homes.

The 1854 home at Meeting and South Battery certainly has the space for more than one family. Its 3½-stories have eight bedrooms, eight bathrooms and almost 12,000 square feet.

And it held five apartments and even a museum at previous times before a Charleston couple bought it in the early 1960s to raise their family.

The property has been listed for sale for \$5.4 million, and its current

Please see **CONDOS**, Page A4

P&C, 11/19/2014

Condos at 1 Meeting St. defeated by preservationists



Robert Behre, Nov 18 2014



The owners of 1 Meeting Street asked the City of Charleston for permission to make the large home into three condominiums. They say it is too large and expensive for a single family. Brad Nettles/Staff

The brick mansion at 1 Meeting St. won't be carved into three condominiums, as preservationists and neighbors got their way Tuesday in a zoning battle that they say sets a precedent for the city's grandest historic homes.

The 1854 home at Meeting and South Battery certainly has the space for more than one family: Its 3 1/2-stories have eight bedrooms, eight bathrooms and almost 12,000 square feet.

What do you think?

Should 1 Meeting St. be converted from a single-family home to condos?

- ☐ Yes.
- ☐ No.
- ☐ No strong opinion.

And it held five apartments and even a museum at previous times before a Charleston couple bought it in the early 1960s to raise their family.

The property has been listed for sale for \$5.4 million, and its current owners and potential buyer asked a city zoning board to give them a special exemption to convert the single-family home into three residential units.

Their architect, Jonathan Thompson, argued that the home previously had many residences, and it also has enough space to accommodate the parking needed. City Zoning Administrator Lee Batchelder also recommended approval, saying he toured the house and the applicants "have a compelling case for three residential units on this property."

The Board of Zoning Appeals voted 5-1 to deny their request.

Jay Williams of the Charles Towne Neighborhood Association said neighbors have multiple concerns about the plan.

"I think most the neighbors are saying this is an iconic property in an iconic intersection in the heart of the historic district," Williams said. "If this property can be condominiumized, what is next after that? ... We believe this is a self-created hardship."



The Board of Zoning Appeals voted 5-1 Tuesday to deny a request to make the home at 1 Meeting St. into three condominiums. Brad Nettles/Staff

The city saw a spate of large homes divided into condominiums in the 1960s, but Kristopher King of the Preservation Society said those precedents should not count much today.

"I would argue those happened in another day and age than where we are now," he said.

Batchelder said the city's zoning code did not restrict single-family residential areas much until it amended its zoning in 1966.

Other neighbors said the change would erode livability in that area, as extra cars, trash and recycling bins compete for space on a street already crowded with the bustle of other residences and visitors.

Louise Maybank, who lives at 8 Meeting St., said the board was making "a watershed decision," adding, "Condominiums are anonymous. It loses its personality in the neighborhood, and we don't need that downtown now."

Even if the change didn't affect the home's appearance from the street, others feared the loss of authentic interiors as new elevators, kitchens and bathrooms were shoehorned into historic homes built without them. April Wood of the Historic Charleston Foundation said some condominiums often aren't as well-maintained because of the challenge of getting multiple owners on the same page.

The home at 1 Meeting St. was owned for decades by Dr. John and Nancy Hawk. He died in 1999, and she passed away nine years later. She was remembered as a preservationist who felt so strongly about protecting her home that she never installed central heating or air conditioning.

Williams said 1 Meeting St. is one of many large historic homes on a relatively small plot of land, and he noted that the large Village Margherita home at 4 South Battery recently sold and was renovated for single-family use. That shows a buyer could do the same just a block west.

Resident Adelaida Bennett told the board the city shouldn't grant waivers or variances simply to create more profit for the owners.

"It may well be that the best and highest use for 1 Meeting St. is to tear down the building and build a 20-story hotel there," she said. "but that is not permitted under our zoning or architectural laws."

The owner withdrew a request for a variance to allow a three-story elevator and stair addition, and air-conditioning units that don't meet the city's setback rules.

The house's three piazzas and southern windows not only look out over White Point Garden but also the water. "If you can't sell this as a single-family house, then there's something seriously wrong," Williams said. "If this can be broken up, geez, what can happen next?"

A city, or a museum? 1 Meeting Street controversy poses serious question for Charleston
Brian Hicks, Nov 23 2014



The owners of 1 Meeting Street are asking the City of Charleston for permission to turn the large home into three condominiums. They say the home is too large and expensive for a single family. Brad Nettles/Staff

The South of Broad crowd says the Hawk family does not need to split their 12,000-square-foot, \$5.4 million mansion at 1 Meeting Street into three condos to sell it.

That could lead to Charleston's ruin, you see.

No, the neighbors say all the Hawks have to do is find a nice couple with six or seven kids, one car, a disdain for air conditioning and a propensity for throwing formal balls.

Oh, and they need enough income to pay a \$12,000 monthly mortgage (assuming \$1.1 million down) and nearly \$18,000 a year in property taxes.

How hard could that be?

Last week, downtown residents persuaded the Board of Zoning Appeals to deny a request from the Hawk family's potential buyer to convert the 8-bedroom mansion into three condos. That, the buyers said, was the only way they could afford it.

Mind you, 1 Meeting Street is already divided into two units - the main house and an apartment.

The city supported the plan, but neighbors and preservation groups said they were afraid that allowing condos in the historic home would contribute to traffic problems, leave - gasp - two extra trash cans on the sidewalk and lead to a more transient neighborhood.

Because you just can't trust those shifty bottom-feeders who buy \$2 million condos.

But mainly, they argued, this would set a terrible precedent. If a house this historic can be chopped up, what's next?

You mean other than the B&Bs on both sides of 1 Meeting, the smaller, four-condo home a half-block up the street, or all those multi-family houses on East Battery?

Please. All that talk of historical integrity went out the window when these folks said they were fine with two condos.

But make it three and, well, there goes ye olde neighborhood.

Times are a changin'

The most ironic thing about this whole fiasco is that it's about the former home of Nancy Hawk.

Hawk was a pioneer in the city's historic preservation movement, a woman who led a crusade to reduce the size of Charleston Place, stop the demolition of historic Market Street buildings and reduce the impact of automobile traffic on the lower peninsula.

Hawk was once president of the neighborhood association that now opposes this move.

You would think she's done enough for this city's historic character.

Of course, the neighbors think it ironic that Nancy Hawk's children would go along with a plan to alter the 1854 home she loved so much that she refused to add central air conditioning.

"Our choice would have been to sell it to someone who would keep it single-family," says Chris Hawk, one of Nancy's sons. "She would have liked that, but when we bought the house it was not single-family. It was five apartments - before we added 1½ Meeting in the back."

Yes, 1 Meeting Street had already outgrown modern families by the 1960s when John and Nancy Hawk bought the place as a home for their nine children.

Around that same time, a lot of the bigger homes South of Broad were being converted to condos - and some jobs were admittedly better than others.

Today condos are all over the place down there. It is a shame, but that is reality. Few people can afford the price tag and maintenance on these monstrous mansions from another era. Fact is, none of the Hawk family can realistically afford to buy out their siblings and live in the home - and the family includes doctors, a couple of lawyers and some pretty successful computer programmers.

When folks with those credentials can't afford a house's upkeep - or tax bill - you have to figure it might be a tad too big.

But several South of Broad folks told the Board of Zoning Appeals that the Hawks are crying hardship over nothing. You know, anyone who's anyone can afford a mansion that's not even quite a quarter the size of the White House.

Really? So it's not just the cruise ship crowd they consider riffraff.

Be reasonable

Historic Charleston Foundation was one of the groups that opposed the plan for 1 Meeting Street.

Make no mistake, the foundation is a great organization that has done a lot to make Charleston what it is today. Winslow Hastie, the chief preservation officer for Historic Charleston, says the foundation feels that altering a home of such a historic nature is not something they want to encourage.

Even if the outside of the home remains largely unchanged, Hastie says, alterations to the interior would be a horrible loss.

"While it's a large building, there are plenty of bigger single-family homes," he says.

But Nancy Hadley, one of Nancy Hawk's daughters, says they have had the home on the market for four years and this potential buyer - who wants to live in one-third of the home and sell the rest as two condos - is the first bite they've had.

Realtors have told the family for years to face reality and convert the home into condos. Apparently, the buyer pool for \$5.4 million 19th century homes that have not been modernized and include formal ballrooms is kind of limited.

"We would love to sell it to someone who could keep it single-family," Hadley says. "Is it reasonable to expect us to keep up the house for 20 years to find them?"

No, it's not. The real irony here is that in South Carolina - allegedly a big property rights state - folks are trying to use bureaucracy to put unreasonable burdens on good citizens.

Yes, it is a historic district and it's very important to preserve it. But be sensible. If there were no other houses South of Broad cut up into condos or converted to boutique hotels - next door - these folks might have a point.

But the fact is Charleston is changing, and people have to accept that.

Charleston is not Colonial Williamsburg, it is a working, living city. They can't all be museums. And this is a plan that would maintain the façade of the house while bowing to what is an economic reality for 99 percent of people. Three families are better than an empty mansion in the heart of the city's most beautiful neighborhood.

There just aren't that many alternatives, and the Board of Zoning Appeals needs to recognize that and reconsider. Either allow this, or you let people from off scarf up all the nice houses as trophy homes (and let them sit empty much of the year) or have the neighbors and preservation groups buy it. If we are going to be this strict on these homes, 29401 is going to have to be the richest ZIP code in the country, or we're headed back to all that too-poor-to-paint, too-proud-to-whitewash stuff.

The punch line here is that Nancy Hawk considered turning the home into condos - and even talked to preservation groups about it. Her daughter, Margaret Hawk O'Brien, says in 2006 the plan was to turn the house into two condos and an apartment.

At the time, O'Brien was thinking of retiring and moving back from Washington to Charleston. Her mother offered to take the third floor and attic of 1 Meeting Street as her condo, and give her daughter and son-in-law the first two floors. They would have continued to rent out the basement apartment to help pay the taxes.

But O'Brien stayed in D.C. a while longer, and it never happened. Nancy Hawk died two years later.

So basically, the queen of Charleston's historic preservation movement was just fine with seeing her grand home turned into three separate living quarters.

"She would mostly be upset at the idea of adding air conditioning," Hadley says.

That's a family serious about historic preservation - but one that can no longer live in the past.

Just one real viable option for Hawk house

BY EDWARD M. GILBRETH

It's a bit of a delicate issue because I have friends, neighbors and even colleagues within the hallowed walls of 134 Columbus Street who disagree with me — and some strongly so — but I believe the extended Hawk family got mistreated by the Board of Zoning Appeals, which voted last month 5-1 to deny the family's request to subdivide the massive 1854 brick masonry house at One Meeting Street into three separate condominiums. Even though I think of myself as very much a preservationist, the circumstances surrounding this house are fairly unique.

How many single families in the entire U.S. in this day and age have the financial wherewithal or inclination to assume responsibility for a huge, 3½-story, 12,000-square-foot mansion that's 160 years old with eight bedrooms and eight bathrooms? Who'd want it? Well, some people would if money weren't an object, but it is an object that looms about as large as the house itself.

One Meeting Street, formerly the site of the Ross Museum, had further outgrown its utility as a single family dwelling even by the 1960's when purchased by renowned surgical oncologist Dr. John Hawk and his wife Nancy, herself a well-known preservationist. As reported by my colleague Brian Hicks based on his conversation with Dr. Chris Hawk (one of nine children raised in the house), the structure was comprised of five apartments — before the Hawks put an addition in the back known as 1½ Meeting Street.

Things were a lot different back in the 1960's, as we all know. Money went further, property was less expensive, labor was cheap, private education wasn't yet completely through the roof, property taxes and innumerable other fees, surcharges, excises and so forth were either dramatically less or nonexistent.



FILE/BRAD NETTLES/STAFF

One Meeting Street, formerly the site of the Ross Museum.

Line by line

The financial realities of the day south of Broad Street were such that relatively "ordinary," local, hard-working, successful businesspeople, entrepreneurs and professionals — perhaps with a little family money tucked away (and it wouldn't have been a heck of a lot back then) — could afford to maintain these types of houses and educate passels of children, as was the case with the Hawk family. This doesn't mean that certain houses weren't being condominiumized. But it's also true that plenty of such houses were realistically within grasp of being maintained as single-family dwellings.

For better or worse, the Charleston of today is nothing like that. Now that the city is an international destination, the laws of supply and demand have led to skyrocketing real estate prices with fixed maintenance costs, property taxes and insurance expenditures that in some cases break the budget even before the first light switch is thrown. Consequently, many of the old vanguard families have simply packed it in and moved off the peninsula.

In the case of One Meeting, the house is listed at \$5.4

million — arguably a bargain considering the cachet of the address and the grandeur of the house. But there's just one problem: There's a nearly complete dearth of potential buyers. Few can afford it. Those who can would have to modernize it, which would be another huge chunk. And even if money were absolutely no object, the big American family is becoming mostly a thing of the past, thus obviating the need for such a tremendous amount of space — at least on a full-time basis.

So what are the Hawks supposed to do? Sit on it as the house starts to fall to pieces? Keep sinking money into it — money that they may or may not have? Keep lowering the price until it's considered an irresistible investment — one that can be gussied up a little and promptly flipped for a nice profit?

There are two — and only two — viably realistic choices for this house: Either sell it to someone from yonder who won't spend any time in it except during Spoleto, who will maintain its façade as yet another beautiful but empty and lifeless ghost house, or allow the Hawks the legal right to subdivide and realize something for their large and extended family — which is

what the senior Hawks would have wanted. Since option one isn't happening (on market for four years and only one contingency offer to buy and subdivide), that really only leaves option two.

Irony of ironies, as Brian Hicks pointed out in a column, Nancy Hawk understood the possible need to turn the house into condominiums before she died in 2008 and even talked to preservation groups about it.

As it is now, what the Board of Zoning Appeals has told the Hawks is reminiscent of a famous 1975 headline from the New York Post concerning President Gerald Ford's alleged attitude toward an ailing New York City: "DROP DEAD."

I don't support generalized relaxation of condominium rules by any stretch, but this house truly needs a waiver.

Edward M. Gilbreth is a Charleston physician. Reach him at edwardgilbreth@comcast.net

Historic Evolution of 1 Meeting Street



1739 Ichnography of Charleston at high water

Prepared by architects Jon Thompson & Simons Young
presented at BZA meeting on 11/10/2014

Historic Evolution of 1 Meeting Street



News and Courier – 1944 Article

1788 Phoenix Fire-Company Map



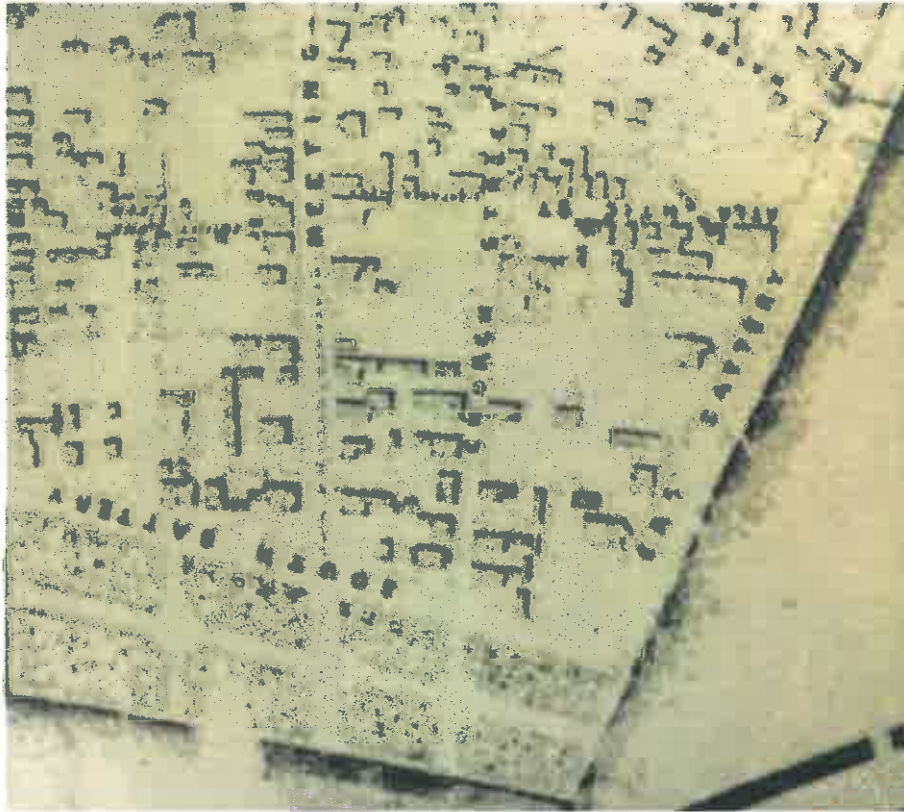
Historic Evolution of 1 Meeting Street

Meeting St. -- This notable, three story brick building on a high brick basement was built c. 1846 by George Robertson, a cotton broker. It was formerly the Ross Museum, housing the art collections of the Ross family. The collections and house were sold, with proceeds going to the Charleston Library Society and the South Carolina Medical Society, after a prolonged suit to settle the estate of Miss Mary Jane Ross. The house is in the Italianate style popular in the city in the 1840s and '50s. (Smith & Smith, Dwelling Houses, 192-195. Stockton, 1920, June 9, 1975.)



1850 image: 1 Meeting Street
Charleston Architecture 1670-1860

Historic Evolution of 1 Meeting Street

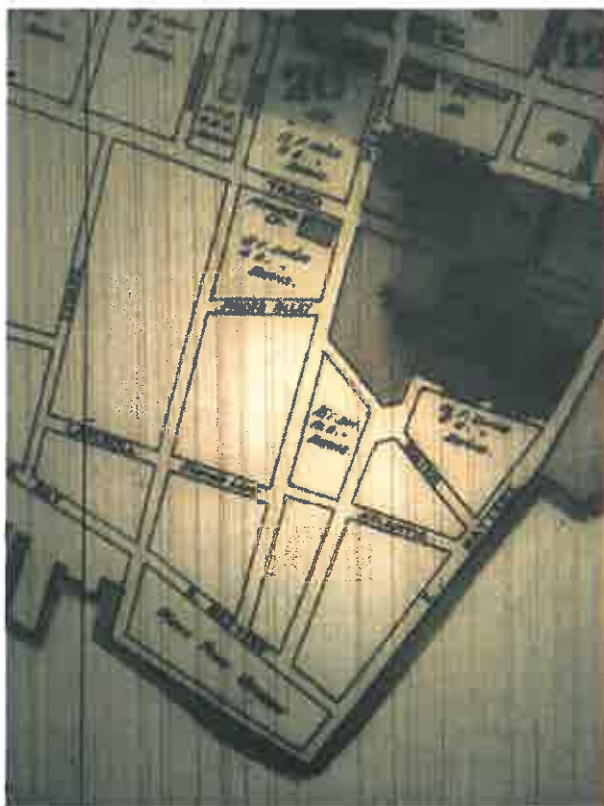


1852 Bridges and Allen Map

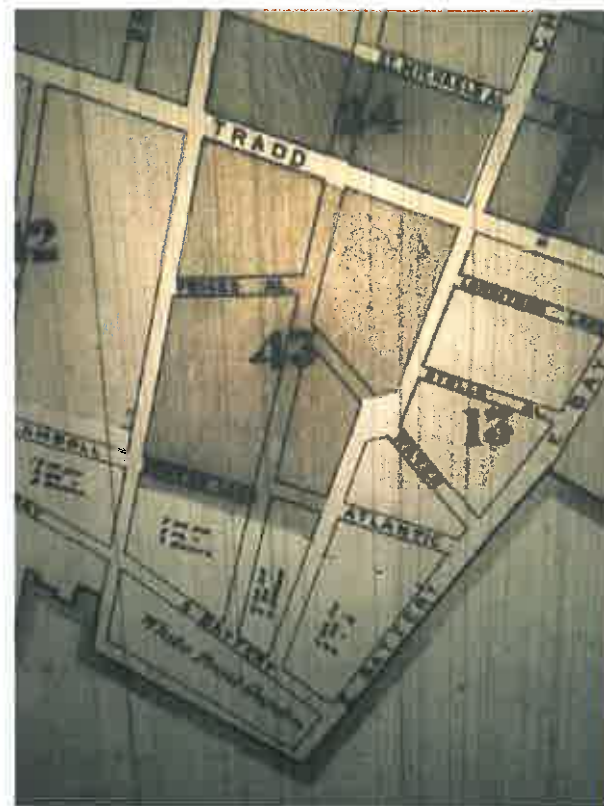


Enlargement

Historic Evolution of 1 Meeting Street

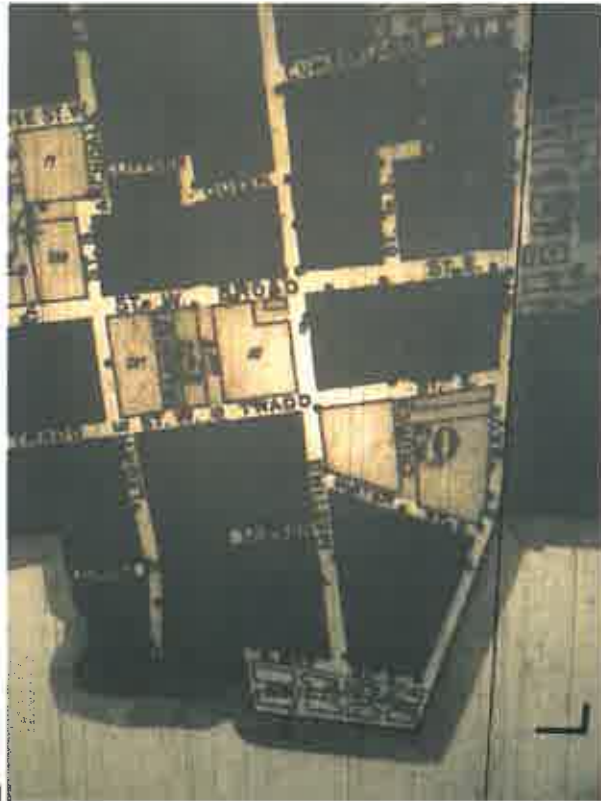


1884 Sanborn

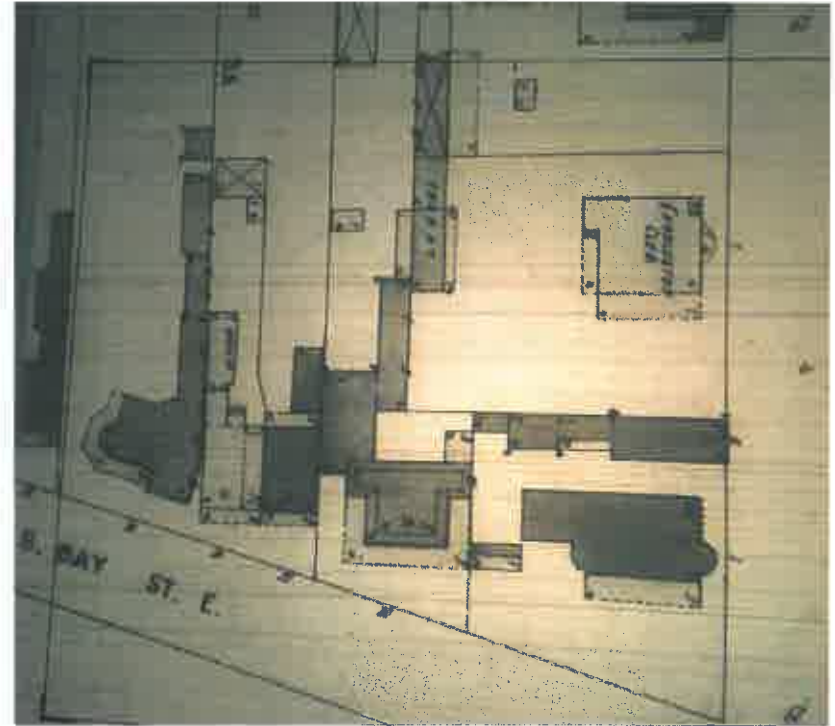


1888 Sanborn

Historic Evolution of 1 Meeting Street



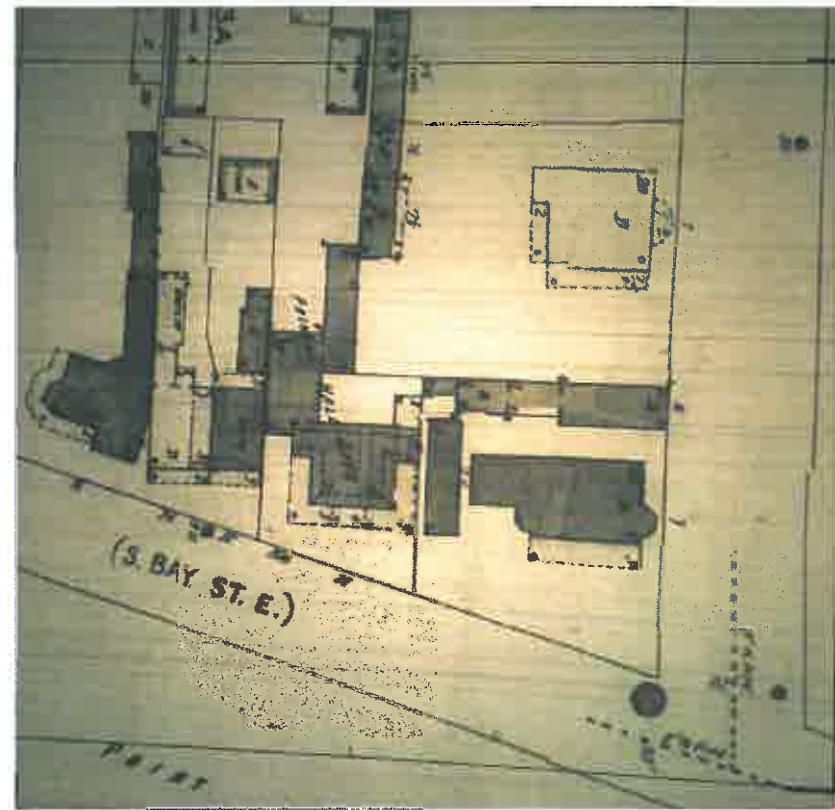
1902 Sanborn



Historic Evolution of 1 Meeting Street



1955 Sanborn





(above) Details of frosted glass door panel, door knocker and door knobs.



1 Meeting Street.
John Robertson House. 1846.