

270 King St. Was Triumph Of Tudor Gothic Revival Style

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John Henry Devereux's Masonic Hall at 270 King St., now sadly defaced by remodelings, was a triumph of the Tudor Gothic Revival style when built in 1871-72.

The Grand Lodge of Ancient Free Masons of South Carolina determined in 1870 to build a new hall to the rear of its then-existing building at King and Wentworth streets.

After considering several plans, the hall committee chose Devereux's design for a Tudor Gothic building fronting on Wentworth Street, containing three stores on the ground floor, a hall the full size of the building on the second and two large meeting rooms on the third. The building was to be designed to permit future expansion on the site.

That plan subsequently was abandoned in favor of completing the whole project at once.

Sealed estimates were opened on May 1, 1871, and the cornerstone was laid Dec. 20, 1871. The completed building was dedicated Dec. 10, 1872.

The completed building, described by the Charleston Daily Courier, measured 65 feet on King Street and 115 feet on Wentworth Street and was 74 feet high.

The lower floor was divided into three stores fronting on King Street, with a hall entrance on Wentworth Street.

Each store was 20 feet wide by 95 feet deep, and the front of each store was spanned by an arch. Recessed within each arch was the shop entrance and display windows. The

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shop doors were 6 feet wide, in two folds, with each fold having a single light of plate glass.

The hall entrance on Wentworth Street was a 20-foot-wide foyer, from which stairs ascended to the second floor.

The Grand Lodge Room, on the second floor, was 70 feet long by 60 feet wide and seated 1,000 persons. The ceiling was 40 feet high, coved, corniced and enriched.

Five chandeliers lighted the room, which had windows ranged in two tiers, richly molded with columns, hoods and finials.

At the east end was a projecting balcony, curved on massive oak and walnut brackets, with a Gothic balustrade "of elegant finish and design."

At the west end was a raised platform.

On the third floor were examining rooms and the Blue Lodge Room, which seated 600 persons. The room was 44 by 42 feet, with a domed ceiling 40 feet high. Walls were blocked off in imitation of stone, and the ceiling was corniced and enriched.

Other rooms in the building included a "refreshment room," regalia room, the Grand Secretary's office and a ladies' toilet room.

The Courier noted: "The style of the architecture is that which was

most generally used during the reign of the Tudors and is known to modern architecture as 'Tudor Gothic.' The arch usually pointed in the Gothic, in this style is flattened. The Facade is enriched by clustered columns, coped and richly molded."

The building's original appearance is depicted in Arthur Mazyck's "Guide to Charleston, Illustrated," published in 1875.

The Gothic-arched storefronts have been replaced by a single modern storefront, and the oversized windows of the upper levels have been reduced in size and given 20th-century treatment.

Otherwise, the exterior appearance remains unchanged, despite several enlargements and remodelings of the building. The interior is now very different from that described in 1872.

The building is said to have cost \$35,000 to build. That has not been substantiated, but it is known that by June 10, 1871, \$22,000 had been raised by subscriptions to script, bearing 7 per cent interest per year, pledged by the Grand Lodge.

The first remodeling occurred in 1877, when the Grand Lodge Room was divided. One-third of the room was cut off by a wall of lath and plaster, extending to the ceiling and matching the wall opposite it, with false windows in the face and a coved ceiling at the top. The change necessitated the recentering of the balcony and stage in the diminished Grand Lodge Room.

See Style, Page 2-B



Staff Photo by Brad Nettles

270 King St. Was Masonic Hall

...Style

Continued From Page 1-B

The Washington Light Infantry agreed to pay for the changes on condition that two new rooms created from the cut off one-third of the Grand Lodge Room, be leased to the W.L.I. for 30 years, at the yearly rent of one peppercorn. The alterations, which were to be completed by Dec. 1, 1877, were not to cost more than \$2,000.

The building was remodeled again in 1885, was repaired after slight damage by the 1886 earthquake, was given a new hall entrance on King Street in 1895 (removed in 1914), was extensively repaired in 1908, was enlarged and remodeled in 1920, had the original three stores combined into one in 1936, and was "modernized" in the 1950s.

The Grand Lodge sold the building to the Shahid family, the current owners, in 1946