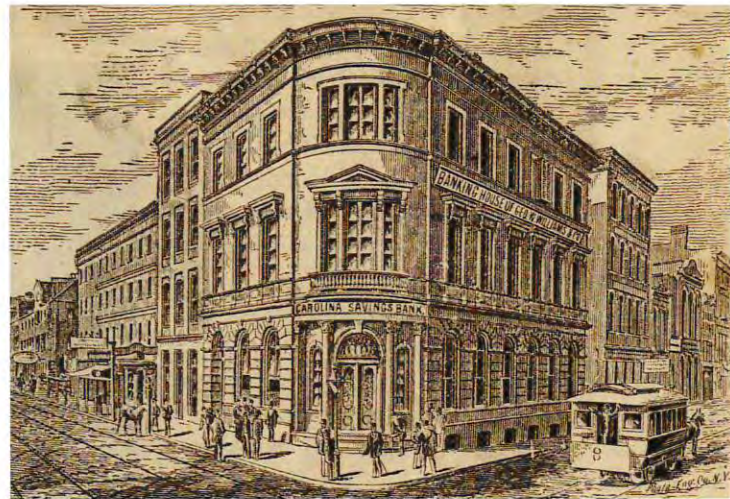


ONE BROAD STREET:

AN ARCHITECTURAL GEM

by Peg Eastman



If you have been on Charleston's Broad Street recently, you have likely noticed the restoration underway at the impressive Renaissance Revival-style building that graces the thoroughfare's eastern end. With an assortment of images from the SCHS collections and beyond, Peg Eastman traces the varied history of this remarkable structure and some of the notable personalities associated with it.

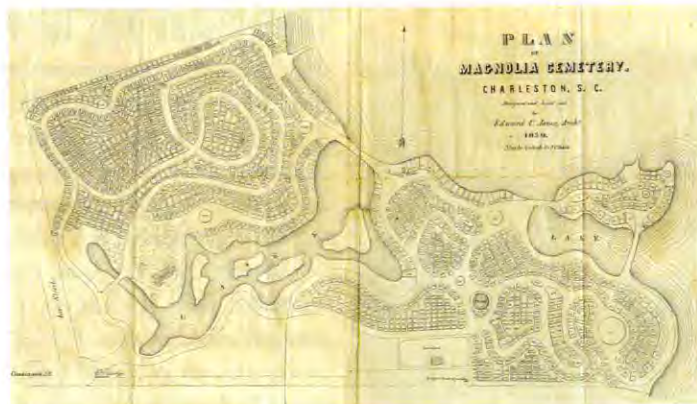


THE SOUTHWEST CORNER of Broad and East Bay Streets has been a prime location since Charleston was founded. Designated as lot number thirteen on the Grand Modell plan of 1680, the site was first granted to Jacob Waite, one of the earliest Quakers to settle in the city. Waite died ten years later, and by 1696, Benjamin Schencklingh had acquired part of the lot. Schencklingh was a wealthy Goose Creek planter who is remembered for taking part in the peaceful overthrow of the proprietary government in 1719.

The fire of 1740 damaged or destroyed most of the buildings south of Broad Street, including the bastions and their gun carriages. Property loss amounted to £250,000, and for the only time in the colony's history, Parliament came to its aid and sent £20,000 for disaster relief.

Afterwards, the tract changed hands numerous times before it was purchased in 1852 by the State Bank of South Carolina and its president, New York City native Edward Sebring. In anticipation of building a banking facility and commercial building next door at 3 Broad Street, the corner lot and adjacent properties on Broad and East Bay Streets were all included in the transaction. Sebring commissioned Jones and Lee, one of Charleston's leading architectural firms, to design the new buildings on the site.

Directly above, a purple box demarcates lot number thirteen in this detail of a 1725 plat based on the Grand Modell. Top, a circa 1980 photograph by Charles Bayless (left) and a late-nineteenth-century card showcasing Charleston properties owned by George Walton Williams (right) present One Broad Street at different points in its 163-year history. From the collections of the South Carolina Historical Society.



Left, the ornate fan-tracery vaulting of the Unitarian Church in Charleston (executed in plaster and lath) was added during Francis D. Lee's Gothic Revival remodeling of 1852–1854. Above, an 1850 plan of Magnolia Cemetery notes that it was "Designed and Laid out by Edward C. Jones, Archt." From the collections of the South Carolina Historical Society.

EDWARD CULLIATT JONES, the elder partner of the firm, was noted for his work in the Italian Villa style and had already designed numerous public buildings throughout the state as well as Trinity Methodist Church on Meeting Street and Roper Hospital on Queen Street. He also planned the grounds and buildings of an elegant new cemetery on Magnolia Umbria Plantation with Sebring, who served as Magnolia Cemetery's first president. Jones joined forces with his talented student Francis D. Lee in 1852.

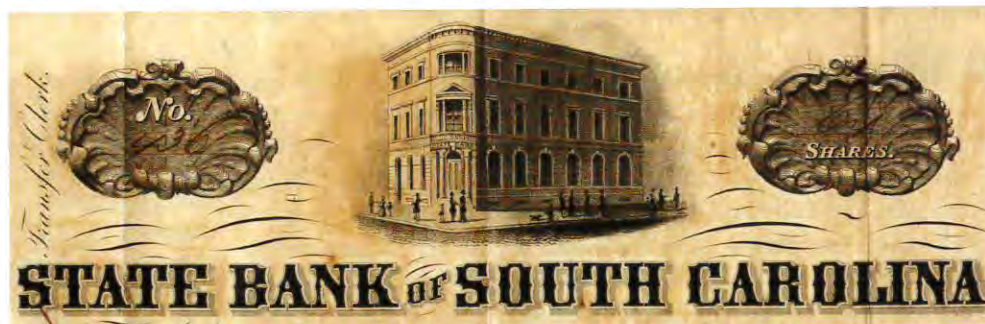
Lee was prolific and, according to architectural historian Samuel Lapham, "gifted in any style." His most notable achievements include the Unitarian Church in Charleston's fan-tracery vaulting, reminiscent of the Henry VII Chapel at Westminster Abbey and added during a remodeling of the church in 1852–1854, and the Moorish Revival-style Farmers' and Exchange Bank on East Bay Street. The four-year partnership with Jones produced more significant buildings, including the South Carolina Institute Hall, and after it dissolved, Lee relocated his office to the State Bank of South Carolina building at One Broad Street.

THE STATE BANK'S new home was completed in 1853 in the Renaissance Revival style. Its brownstone exterior was quarried in Connecticut, and the unique lion-head keystones that can be seen above the first-floor windows were reportedly patterned after the bank's managers. The entry doors, still in place, feature solid mahogany with ornate cast-iron grills.

The interior catered to the tastes of Charleston's luxury-loving elite. Above the bank was an open floor with oversized windows facing both Broad and East Bay Streets. Flooded with natural light, this space housed an exclusive subscription-only reading room that was part of the national mercantile-library movement dedicated to "shielding young men from the society of the vicious and profane and furthering their moral cultivation by providing an anchor against moral shipwreck on the lee shore of the brothel and grog shop."

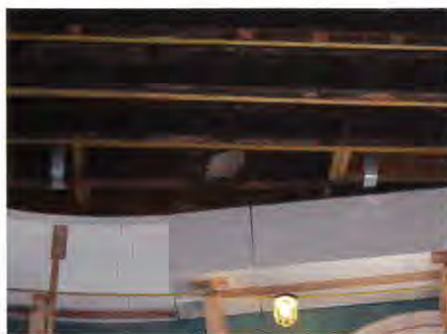
The third floor had private offices, while cooler accommodations could be found in the half basement. The rooms below ground level boasted eleven-foot-high ceilings and were ventilated by windows that opened into a trench over which grating was installed to protect pedestrians.

The novelist and historian William Gilmore Simms described both the bank, which was chartered in 1802, and its building. According to him, "The State Bank is a flourishing institution, though the outsider must not imagine that its name involves any connection with the body politic. There is a State Bank of South Carolina, called the Bank of the State, and its fiscal agent. But the State Bank is a private corporation." As for One Broad Street, he observed that "the finish of the interior is extremely fine—the oak carving being rich and abundant, and the paving of the Banking Hall being of the most showy fashion of encaustic tiling."



Clockwise from top, an 1856 stock certificate features the newly completed State Bank of South Carolina building; each of the building's distinctive lion-head keystones wears a unique expression; the cover of a Mercantile Library Association publication was found in a wall by the current owner. Stock certificate and keystone photograph from the collections of the South Carolina Historical Society; Mercantile Library Association cover courtesy of Mark Beck.





Evidence of the damage pictured in an April 1865 issue of Frank Leslie's Illustrated Newspaper (above) can still be seen in the building at present (left). Leslie's illustration courtesy of Accessible Archives; cannonball hole photograph by Lauren Nivens.

Francis D. Lee was given a commission in the Confederate Corps of Engineers and planned coastal fortifications at Fort Walker—where he saw active service during the Battle of Port Royal in 1861—as well as Battery Wagner. He also invented the spar torpedo, which was successfully used by the CSS *David* to attack the USS *New Ironsides* and later piqued the interest of Emperor Napoleon III in France. In 1866, Lee moved to St. Louis, where he formed a partnership with Thomas Annan and designed many buildings, including the city's famous Merchants Exchange.

IN 1866, One Broad Street was acquired by associates of John Fraser and Company, a mercantile and factorage firm led by managing partner George Alfred Trenholm. A director of the Bank of Charleston and former member of the South Carolina General Assembly, Trenholm had replaced C. G. Memminger as Confederate treasury secretary in July 1864 and was briefly imprisoned at Fort Pulaski after the war for his role in Jefferson Davis's cabinet. Trenholm returned to Charleston upon his release in October 1865 and, with the aid of the Reverend Anthony Toomer Porter, received a pardon from President Andrew Johnson on October 15, 1866. Restored to citizenship, he reorganized his cotton brokerage under the name George A. Trenholm and Son and managed his business pursuits from One Broad Street.

But litigation stemming from Trenholm's Civil War activities would dog him for the rest of his life. John Fraser and Company had an interlocking directorate with its Liverpool branch, Fraser, Trenholm, and Company, and was heavily involved in blockade-running during the conflict. The company also kept excellent books, which were confiscated after the evacuation of Charleston. As a result, Trenholm and his wartime partners were forced to liquidate their real estate holdings when the federal government sued for import duties on illegal blockade goods. One Broad Street was purchased by the Carolina Savings Bank of Charleston in 1875, and the new bank operated from that site for the next eighty-two years.

THE BUILDING WAS THE PRIDE of lower Broad Street until the federal bombardment started in 1863. By the end of the war, the destruction it suffered was so severe that it made the April 1, 1865, issue of *Frank Leslie's Illustrated Newspaper*. Interestingly, the cannonball hole and scars of burned beams uncovered during the current restoration almost perfectly match the damage seen in the *Leslie's* illustration.

The fate of the State Bank of South Carolina was equally dramatic. The bank's negotiable assets and valuable papers were removed to Camden during the shelling, but a detachment of Sherman's army found and appropriated them as they passed through the area on February 27, 1865. To make matters worse, the bank's one hundred prewar Blue Ridge Railroad Company bonds (for one thousand dollars each) were in the possession of cashier Benjamin M. Lee when he was taken prisoner by Sherman's forces near modern-day Lake City. With its assets gone, the bank collapsed.

The architects of One Broad Street fared better. According to Beatrice St. Julien Ravenel, Edward C. Jones "was attached to the commissary of the Regiment of Reserves" in 1861. After the war, he moved to Memphis, where he had a second career designing numerous landmarks in Tennessee, Mississippi, and elsewhere in the South. While Jones's early buildings were produced with sixteenth-century techniques and tools, by 1890, he had mastered steel and rivets, thus enabling him to produce the first skyscraper south of St. Louis. (The D. T. Porter Building still stands in Memphis today.)

Right, George A. Trenholm became a senior partner and owner of John Fraser and Company in 1853.

Below, One Broad Street was valued at \$50,000 when it was liquidated as a result of federal litigation against the firm twenty years later. Trenholm portrait courtesy of Ethel Nepveux; United States v. John Fraser and Company property listing from the collections of the South Carolina Historical Society.



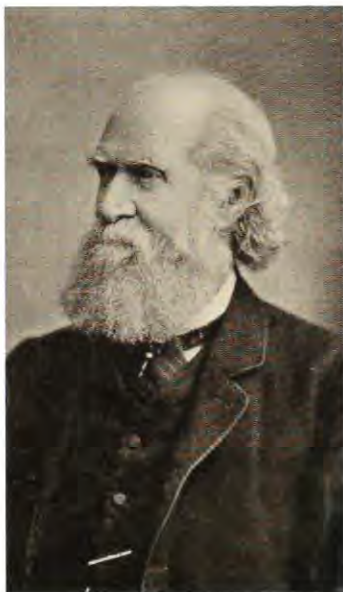
"State Bank," Southwest corner Broad and East Bay.

All that lot of land and buildings known as the State Bank, situate, lying and being on the Southwest corner of East Bay and Broad-street; measuring and containing on the Eastern line on East Bay Street, forty-five (45) feet; on the Western or back line, forty (40) feet four inches; on the North line on Broad Street, seventy-seven (77) feet eight inches, and on the South line seventy (70) feet one and a half (1½) inches, be the said dimensions a little more or less. Butting and bounding to the North on Broad Street; to the East on East Bay Street; to the South on lands of Benj. F. Evans and Harvey Cogswell, and to the West on lands of Benj. F. Evans and Harvey Cogswell, as appears by a plat thereof drawn on 16th April, 1866, by White and Gourdin, Civil Engineers, and hereunto annexed. Valued as per schedule, at \$50,000.



THE BANK'S FOUNDER, George Walton Williams, was a self-made entrepreneur with an enormously successful wholesale-grocery business. The profits he made from blockade-running during the Civil War—estimated to have been more than one million dollars—were wisely invested in British sterling rather than Confederate currency, and his was the first mercantile house to resume business in Charleston after the conflict. He also chartered the First National Bank of Charleston in 1865, and his grocery and banking interests prospered so much that additional office space was soon needed. In 1875, he headquartered the newly organized Carolina Savings Bank as well as the banking department of George W. Williams and Company at One Broad Street.

The following year, the building's second floor was used as the armory of the Carolina Rifle Battalion, a militia group associated with Wade Hampton's Red Shirts during the hotly contested gubernatorial campaign of 1876. The second floor then housed South Carolina's first



Clockwise from top, Carolina Savings Bank letterhead portrays the building at the busy intersection of Broad and East Bay Streets; George Walton Williams contributed much to Charleston's post-Civil War economy but is best remembered for his opulent residence at 16 Meeting Street (the Calhoun Mansion); the narrow double doors discovered during the current restoration once formed a hidden entrance to the Carolina Rifle Battalion's armory. 1886 letterhead and Williams portrait from the collections of the South Carolina Historical Society; armory doors photograph courtesy of Mark Beck.

telephone exchange starting in 1879, while the third floor served as the local office of the U.S. Signal Corps (and its offshoot, the U.S. Weather Bureau) from 1877 to 1897.

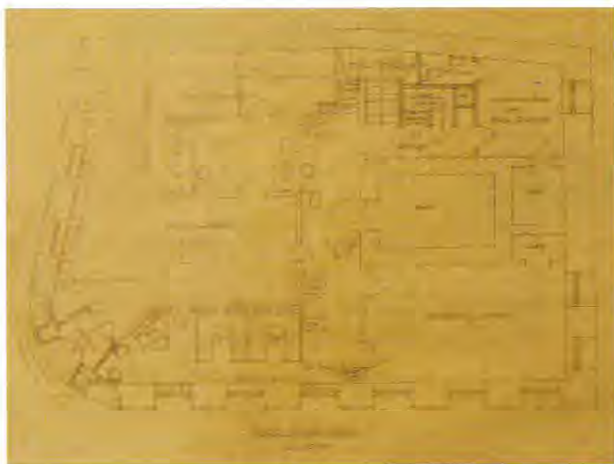
THE SIGNAL CORPS, which still occupied the third floor when the earthquake of 1886 struck Charleston, oversaw the repairs to the building. A spiderweb of iron earthquake rods was placed above the original roof, and a new roof was installed above them. Since the building's original cornice fell during the earthquake, a replacement cornice of cast iron served as an anchor for the new rods. The structure was further secured with an additional set of rods disguised as a row of small, decorative lion heads. After the 1938 tornado swept through Broad Street, another series of rods was added to the third floor to shore up the damage.

The three layers of stabilizing rods were revealed during the current restoration. Mark Dillon, a structural engineer working on the building, remarked that "the tension rod system in One Broad is the most elegant and comprehensive of any system I have seen in my 32-year career and the roof rod design closely approximates what modern earthquake engineering design is supposed to do."



Above, an 1886 photograph shows earthquake damage on the south side of Broad Street between East Bay and Church Streets. Right, an extensive network of earthquake rods was found under the newer of One Broad Street's two roofs during the current restoration. 1886 photograph from the collections of the South Carolina Historical Society; earthquake rods photograph courtesy of Mark Beck.





Architectural drawings completed by Simons and Lapham prior to the 1948 renovation of One Broad Street include a first-floor plan (left) and an elevation showing wood trim around the vault door (right). From the collections of the South Carolina Historical Society.

Over the years, the building's upper floors were leased to a variety of tenants. One early-twentieth-century occupant was the Carolina Portland Cement Company, which was presided over by Charleston industrialist J. Ross Hanahan. Others included the office of Magnolia Cemetery, the French consular agency, attorneys, real estate agents, foresters, engineers, and a public stenographer.

WHEN CAROLINA SAVINGS BANK was sold to First National Bank of South Carolina in 1957, the vacated building was acquired by the Irving, Melvin, Klyde, and Rudolph Robison family partnership and then leased for a short while by South Carolina National Bank and the federal district court. Carolina Bank and Trust moved into the building in 1963 and purchased it from the Robison partnership in 1968. One year later, however, both Carolina Bank and Trust and One Broad Street were sold to Bankers Trust of South Carolina.

In 1978, Bankers Trust carried out a \$320,000 restoration managed by Frisch Construction Company. Because of moisture penetration, the building's brownstone had begun to flake onto the street, so the Ball Corporation was tasked with developing a polymer coating to stabilize the surface and make repairs. A lush interior, designed by John Ragsdale, featured ornate iron teller grills and stair and landing railings crafted by acclaimed blacksmith Philip Simmons. Northern Irish artist Jim McDonald (known for his paintings of the *Titanic*) was commissioned to re-create the hand-painted ceiling of the president's office.

In 1985, Bankers Trust was acquired by North Carolina National Bank, which vacated and sold One Broad Street to Helen Bradham in 1993. She, in turn, sold the property to One Broad Street LLC five years later. During this time, Carolina First Bank utilized the building as its downtown Charleston branch. In 2004, it was sold to Broad Street Ventures LLC, and two years later, Carolina First Bank ended its tenancy because the lack of drive-through capabilities rendered the building obsolete for its purposes. Broad Street Ventures subsequently stripped the interior in anticipation of converting the structure to luxury condominiums, but the work was halted by the Great Recession. One Broad Street remained empty until it was purchased in 2014 by Mark Beck, an entrepreneur and founder of a multinational technology firm based in Mooresville, North Carolina.

With the help of Charleston-based architectural firm Bill Huey + Associates and contractor NBM Construction, Beck is taking the interior back to its 1853 appearance. The original door heights and decorative alcove will be restored, and an English encaustic tile floor will be installed. The refurbished building will be adapted for mixed use, with retail space on the first floor, offices on the second, and an apartment on the third. ♦

IN 1948, Carolina Savings Bank updated One Broad Street. The architectural firm of Simons and Lapham designed a midcentury look featuring lowered door heights, simplified trim details, and a modern steel door leading to the vault. The building was air conditioned, and new stairs and a fireproof records repository were added to the second floor for the relocation of the bookkeeping department. Since it never flooded, the basement was turned into a storage area.



Taken in the midst of the current restoration, these photographs capture the president's office on the first floor (above) and the light-filled north-east section of the second floor (right). Photographs by Lauren Nivens.



Peg Eastman is actively involved in the preservation of Charleston's rich cultural history. She is a freelance writer for the Charleston Mercury, and through the History Press, coauthored with her brother Mendel & Me: Life with Congressman L. Mendel Rivers (2007) and authored Hidden History of Civil War Charleston (2012), among other works.