



12 WENTWORTH HAS BEEN EXTENSIVELY RESTORED
Dwelling was constructed during early 1850s. (Staff Photo by Evans)

Wentworth Street House Stands As Example In Ansonborough

(EDITOR'S NOTE: First in a series of articles on recent Ansonborough restorations. The second will appear in this column next Monday.)

By W. H. J. THOMAS

The Ansonborough district on the east side of Charleston has witnessed many successful restorations during the last 12 years since Historic Charleston Foundation set out to save this neighborhood as a whole. Restoration efforts have been constant through the years, with scores of 18th and 19th century residences transformed from a slum condition back to handsome single-family dwellings.

One of the most striking restorations of the past year is that of 12 Wentworth St., now the home of Mr. and Mrs. Raymond Putnam Hill. By the time the Hills purchased this three-and-a-half story brick residence, its interior had been altered by numerous renovations and additions over the 115 years of its existence, and its exterior had developed a markedly derelict appearance, with three levels of battered piazzas strung across its front.

Today the appearance of 12 Wentworth is an asset to its district and an example of what may be achieved in the restoration of an early home while still preserving its period character.

The property on which it now stands was burned over by the extensive fire of 1838 and was still listed as a vacant lot in 1850 when it was

owned by one Paul Remby. In 1852, Remby sold the property to Miriam M. Cohen, a widow, for \$1,600. Mrs. Cohen conveyed it to William G. Armstrong for \$1,750 on June 5, 1853.

Armstrong, who was a manager of Bennett's Rice Mill just to the east of this residence, became the builder of what is now 12 Wentworth. That Armstrong was the builder is supported by the evidence that he was listed as a resident of this section of Wentworth in the city directory of 1855, while earlier owners of the property were not listed in earlier directories; that there were buildings standing on the lot in February of 1857 when the property was sold after Armstrong's death; and that the sale price of \$5,500 on that date indicates a dwelling as substantial as the one still standing there.

The house he built for himself (it appears from the conveyance after his death that he was the father of four children, including a son, James Campbell Armstrong, who is remembered as a Confederate hero) had its principal rooms raised above a full basement level, with double rooms of good height (approximately 11 feet) opening into each other on the south front.

The house was constructed of English-size brick laid in American bond, with flat iron roofs above the windows, and a gable end roof with sufficient pitch to make for a full

attic story. The openings on the south reached nearly from floor to ceiling as was usual with the period and led to piazzas that screened the house from the street.

The house was purchased from the Armstrongs by John A. Burekmeyer, a prosperous wholesale merchant with much real estate in mid-town Charleston. On Oct. 15, 1863, he sold the house to William Fogo for \$16,000 in obviously inflated Confederate money. It later passed to Stuart Wilkins Fogo.

In the 1870s, the house and lot were sold to James

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Thomas Welsman, a merchant who was also treasurer of the South Carolina Railroad. Following his death, his executors, Robert N. Gourdin, Emma Sarah Welsman and Wilmot Gibbs DeSaussure, sold it to Charles W. Seignious on May 22, 1884.

Seignious left it to his daughter, Mrs. Rebecca C. Honour. She in turn sold it in 1898 to George Carroll. It remained in Carroll family ownership until being sold in the 1940s to Gordon Realty Co.

It was purchased in 1963 by Historic Charleston Foundation and then sold twice before being bought by the Hills.

Mr. Hill, an engineer who

has supervised large constructions on several continents, first took the interior down to its basic structure by stripping it to the brick walls and the heart pine beams. He removed the piazzas and took down two additions to the rear of the house that were heavily infested by termites.

Termites had done no real harm to the dwelling itself, although there was evidence on the surface that they had attacked the iron-like, four-by-12 salt-cured pine beams but gave up the project as hopeless. The brick walls themselves, showing only slight earthquake damage, only required repointing.

A passage went through the ground level of the dwelling from street to rear garden. This became a closed entrance, with small apartments placed on either side.

Another problem was an inner staircase. One existed from third to fourth floor but none below this, apparently the piazza stairs having been the only means of going from one lower floor to another. The Hills built in a new staircase, copying the details from the balusters and railing of the single stretch of staircase.

A living room, dining room, living room annex and kitchen were created on the second floor, library and bedroom and a small study in the stories above.

Because the plaster work which had been very plain had to be removed, Mr. Hill and the contractor, Herbert A. DeCosta, designed a typical

mid-19th century cornice in wood for the rooms.

The window panels, high baseboards and the one-and-a-quarter inch pine floors are original. Special sound systems and an air control system were installed.

Among the handsomest features of the house are the deep-veined Italian marble mantles that were taken from fragments of the mantles at The Wedge, the Santee River plantation. During a recent restoration of The Wedge, a house dating from the 1820s, an excess of the material was found to exist and the Hills used these for four fireplaces.

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