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157 Wentworth St. Is Altered 'Single House'

(EDITOR'S NOTE: Nine-
teenth in a series of articles
on the early dwellings along
Beaufain and Wentworth
streets. The twentieth article
will appear on Saturday.)

By W.H.J. THOMAS

When Mrs. Eleanor
Wilkinson began building her
two-and-a-half story brick
residence in the early 1850s
the plan of the traditional
Charleston "single house" had
been altered in several ways
to allow for more privacy and
for improved intercommu-
nication between
rooms.

The addition of a main en-
trance on the street — to the
side opposite the piazza —
permitted direct access to the
pantry and kitchen areas
without passing through prin-
cipal rooms. It also allowed
for double parlors opening into
each other or a double parlor-
dining room that was not split
down the center by a hallway
frequently filled with children
dashing up the stairs.

Such a change was in keep-
ing with the studied decorum
of the period; and the added
width necessary to run an en-
trance hall and stair hall to
one side of a string of rooms
did not harm the appearance
of the exteriors of the new
dwellings, for the squat,
blocky outline that often re-
sulted from this expanded
plan fitted well with the solid,
robust qualities of the archi-
tectural styles popular during
the mid-century period.

The house that Eleanor
Wilkinson built (157
Wentworth St.) for herself
after the death of her husband
was constructed of Charleston
"gray" brick laid in American

bond, with three courses of
stretchers for each course of
headers, with the exception
of front and rear gable where
it runs five courses to one.
Flat arches in brick top the
windows, and the molar joints
are capped in a hard, bedded
mortar, though the actual clay
dip is in a sandy clay
(perhaps explaining the ap-

Do You Know Your Charleston?

parent lack of earthquake
damage to the dwelling,
because of the "give" permit-
ted by this type of sand
mortar).

In keeping with a popular
practice of the period, there
was a goodly use of
brownstone as both trim and
as supports. The sills of the
windows are brownstone and
the front steps and certain
embellishments about the
residence are of the same
material.

In the rear yard is a
particularly attractive two-
story dependency, with eight
bays to its west side, with
what would appear to be its
original slate roof, and with
segmental arches over win-
dows and doors.

The interior of 157
Wentworth is laid out with
three rooms of good size open-
ing into each other and with
a long hallway to the east
side. The first two rooms, ap-
parently intended as a double
sitting room, measure ap-
proximately 20 by 17 feet
each, with the third room
measuring roughly 17 by 15
feet.

Decorative treatment in

each room is held to a
modified plaster cornice and
rather strongly carved wooden
muntins and door and window
frames. All through the lower
floor of the house the framings
are broad, with heavy reeded
patterns, and large square
un-carved corner blocks. All
windows on the west side are
full-length, with double hung
sashes that may be raised
to allow direct access to
the piazzas.

The property on which 157
Wentworth now stands was
owned early in the 18th cen-
tury by John Hume (1752-
1841), a Santee rice planter
who owned considerable real
estate in this west part of
the city. The lot passed to
his son, Robert Hume (1790-
1871), who then sold it to Ben-
jamin D. Lazarus, a well-to-do
Jewish hardware merchant in
the firm of Lazarus, Levy and
Lopez.

On Feb. 4, 1853, Lazarus
sold this lot, with its
dimensions of 59 feet on north
and south and 200 feet on
east and west lines, to Mrs.
Wilkinson (listed in the deed
as a widow) for \$3,500. There
is no building or "im-
provements" listed in this
transaction, as the low price
would confirm. Mrs. Wilkinson
probably set about building
her home in 1853, although
the city directories of the
period do not list her as a
resident here until 1856.

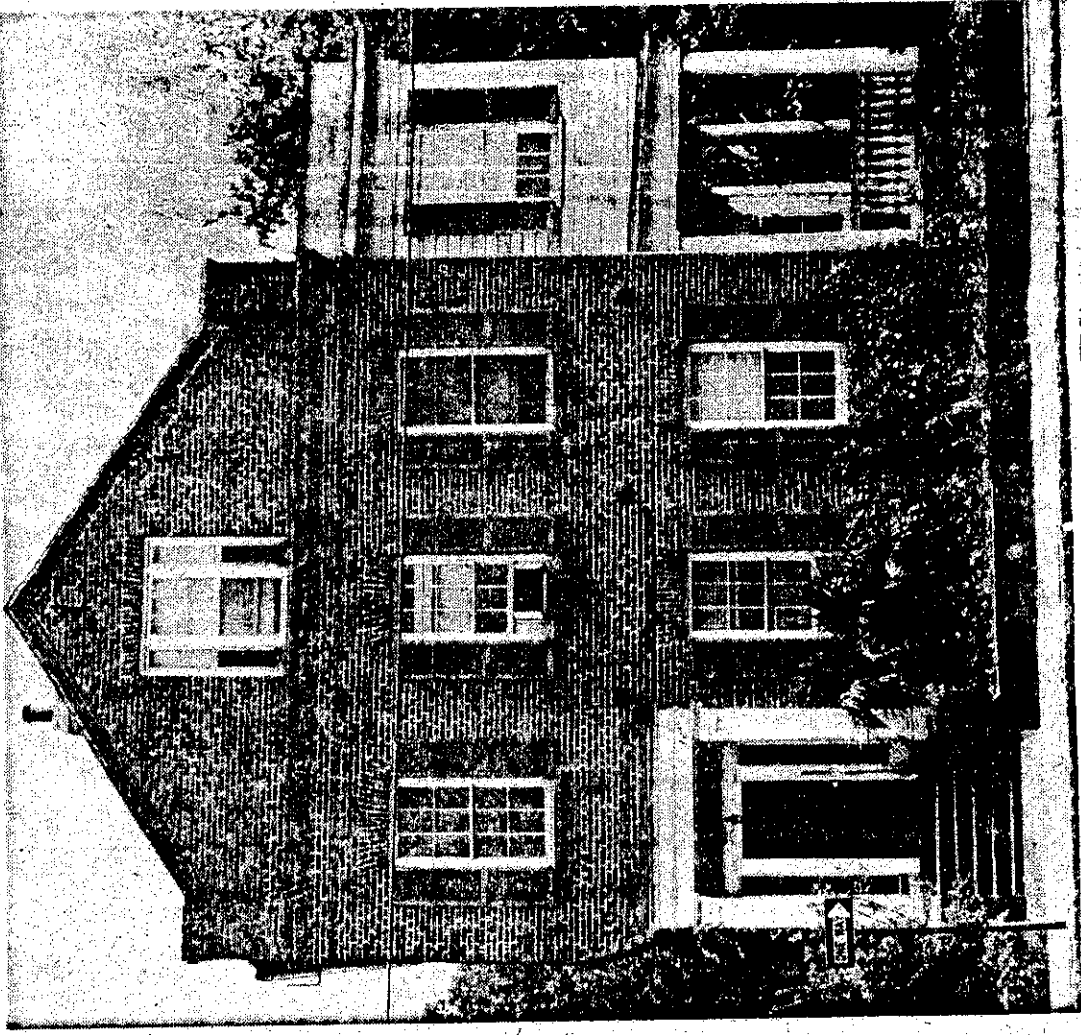
Mrs. Wilkinson made her
will in the same year she
bought this lot, leaving her
properties to her four
daughters — Anna B. Keith,
Mary Meminger, Virginia
W. Belin and Sarah A.
Wilkinson — but putting in
property at 157 Wentworth in
the name of her son-in-law

as executor, this individual
being Christopher Gustavus
Meminger (1822-1888), the
German-born attorney who
became secretary of the
treasury for the Confederacy,
and who is also remembered
as the founder of Charleston's
public school system. Through
this period he lived in the
now-demolished dwelling that
occupied the northwest corner
of Smith and Wentworth, just
across from Mrs. Wilkinson's
home.

On May 20, 1874, after his
mother-in-law's death,
Meminger sold the property
to Mrs. Miriam Valentine for
\$8,000. She kept the brick
dwelling as her residence
some 17 years before selling
it to James M. Seignious
(listed as a cotton factor in
the later decades of the 19th
century) on March 9, 1891,
for \$8,500.

Seignious died in January
of 1922, directing his executor
(Francis M. Robertson and
the Charleston Security Co.)
to sell and dispose of "all
real estate at public auction",
"that inasmuch as certain
economic depression in the Ci-
ty of Charleston rendered it
inadvisable to sell at public
auction." Seignious' pro-
perties they requested private
sale and were granted this
right in court.

Robertson and
the Charleston Security Co. sold
the Wilkinson house to P. Lee
Bissell on Aug. 22, 1924, for
\$8,100. Bissell then conveyed it
to Mrs. Lillie Bissell Anderson
on Jan. 20, 1925, and it was
her family home for many
years. It was purchased from
her estate in the late 1940s
by her son, W.S. Anderson.



WILKINSON HOUSE CONSTRUCTED CIRCA 1853
Builder was mother-in-law of Confederate leader. (Staff Photo by Murton)