Do not use any kind of tape to tape runners to the floor, to other runners or to anything else.

HISTORIC CHARLESTON FOUNDATION

ROBERT WILLIAM ROPER HOUSE
9 East Battery
c. 1838
Residence of Mr. Richard H. Jenrette

2004

Number Nine East Battery is one of Charleston's earliest and finest examples of Greek Revival architecture. Robert William Roper, a wealthy planter and state legislator, brought from the City Council two adjoining lots on East Battery, for $4,100 each, on April 2, 1838. The sale was "subject to the condition that no house less than three stories high shall be erected thereon." In the 1840 edition of the Charleston City Directory, Roper is listed as living at the corner of South and East Bay because all of the lots to the south of the house were still vacant at the time and owned by Roper.

This section of East Battery was low-lying and sandy ground until after 1820 when the city finished building the first sea wall. The solid construction of the house has withstood many hurricanes, storms, the earthquake of 1886 (after which the earthquake bolts with lion's head terminals were added) and the Civil War. In fact, the Civil War has left a permanent mark in the house. A 500-pound fragment of Confederate cannon still rests on the roof beams. The hunk of cannon barrel landed there when Confederate troops were preparing to evacuate the city in 1865 as northern troops approached the city. A Blakely cannon, weighing 30 tons and one of the largest cannons used in the Confederacy, was located in an earthwork at the corner of South and East Batteries. It could not be moved, so it was blown up to prevent its use by Federal troops. The detonation sent a huge fragment high into the air and onto the roof of the house.

Roper House is unusual for Charleston in that the tall Ionic columns of the pizza rise for two stories. In other areas of the country, the columned façade would be a grand facade. Roper modified the Greek Revival model to suit local customs, so that, instead of forming a portico, the five massive Ionic columns form a Charleston Piazza, set above a terrace of masonry arches.

Some have credited Charles Friedrich Reichardt, a German architect working in Charleston who designed the old Charleston Hotel, as the designer of Nine East Battery. No records exist to prove that he was the architect. Reichardt was a pupil of Karl Friedrich Schinkel, Germany's greatest classical architect whose Altes Museum (1822-1830) in Berlin could have inspired the design of the Roper House.

In 1845, Robert William Roper died without children and a large part of his inherited wealth went by his father's bequest, to found Roper Hospital. His widow, Martha Rutledge Roper, sold the house in 1851. Since then it has been owned by several notable families, including that of General Randolph Siegling (Siegling occupancy 1874-1929) and Solomon R. Guggenheim, a New York millionaire and an outstanding patron of modern art to whom the Seigling heirs sold the house in 1929. Guggenheim's estate sold it to J. Drayton Hastie in 1952, and in 1968 it was purchased by Richard H. Jenrette whose affection for Charleston has led him to undertake several restoration and rehabilitation projects in the city, notably the Mills House Hotel and the Blacklock House on Bull Street, which he donated to the College of Charleston.

In Mr. Jenrette's residences one can see his exceptional collection of neoclassical furniture and other decorative arts. According to Mr. Jenrette, the neoclassical period in American furniture design (roughly 1800-1840) signifies the first flowering of a uniquely American design idiom and the final flowering of hand-made furniture before the advent of machine-made furniture. The style itself developed during a period of great nationwide pride particularly after the War of 1812, when we had broken from England. In the eighteenth century, most American furniture was primarily English in nature. The neoclassical styles represent a blending of European and American tastes.

In addition to housing Mr. Jenrette's collection of Federal and Empire furniture, the house is a showcase of nineteenth century decorative techniques such as marbleizing and graining. The baseboards and floors were painted by Robert Jackson, a well-known *trompe l'oeil* artist who specialized in these illusionistic decorative techniques.

GROUND FLOOR PARLOR

The walls here and in other major reception rooms were painted by Robert Jackson to resemble marble blocks. Mr. Jackson works on a white wall, first scoring the block outlines and then building up the blocks with subtle color gradations and veining. Upon completion the walls are varnished.

This room houses some of the later, bolder furniture forms of the period 1830-1840 which utilized deeply carved animal paw feet and twisted reeding in their decoration. Particularly noteworthy is the secretary bookcase by the New York City cabinetmaking firm Joseph Meeks and Sons. The center table is an example of Philadelphia Empire furniture incorporating bold carving and gilded and stenciled decoration.

This front room was used as a gun room by Solomon Guggenheim, who also installed a huge steel safe (since removed), between the parlor floors during the early1930's when banks were failing. The iron beams that supported the safe still survive under the floorboards of the section between the sitting and dinning rooms.

DINNING ROOM

The chandeliers here and in the reception rooms were originally piped for gas and were added during the Siegling occupancy. The plaster medallions on the ceilings were modeled by David Flaherty after prototypes which survive from the same period. The furniture is New York and dates 1825-1835.

Because Empire furniture relied so heavily on gliding and stenciling for its exuberance, Mr. Jenrette has had most of his collection carefully restored to its original brightness. Sometimes the original gliding has been painstakingly cleaned of dulling layers of dirt. When a piece cannot be cleaned, it is re-gilded to recreate the original effect.

The portrait over the New York Empire sideboard is of Mrs. Thomas Lowndes (nee Livingston) and is attributed to Thomas Sully (1783-1872). The portrait to the left of the fireplace is of Maria M. Calhoun, John C. Calhoun's grand-daughter. It was painted by Charles Bird King (1785-1862), who is best known for his likenesses of American Indians. Many of his paintings are now in the White House collection. The pink-banded porcelain dinner service is French.

SECOND FLOOR HALL

One of Mr. Jenrette's prized possessions is the French Empire mahogany tall case clock from the Napoleonic period, circa 1810. It is decorated with ormolu (gilded bronze) mounts of Napoleon's profile and an eagle with astrological symbols on the face.

FRONT CARD ROOM

On the wall hang documents relating to General William Moultrie (1720-1805), Charleston's great Revolutionary hero. Moultrie was a member of both the first and the second Provincial Congress and was appointed a Colonel of the Second South Carolina Regiment. In March 1776 he took command of the Palmetto Fort he had built on Sullivan's Island and held it against the attack of Admiral Sir Peter Parker. The General Assembly soon named the fort in his honor and he was named a Brigadier General in the Continental Army. Moultrie served as Governor of South Carolina from 1785-1787 and from 1792-1794.

DOUBLE DRAWING ROOM

It was quite common to locate the primary reception rooms on the second floor to catch sea breezes. Here, the floor length sash windows offer access to the piazza and to two cast iron balconies on the front of the house overlooking the harbor.

The carpet in these rooms is a copy of that in the old Senate House in Raleigh, North Carolina. We admire the highly polished old floorboards today, but forget that they rarely saw light of the day in the mid-19th century as they were covered with carpets woven in 27-inch strips and laid wall-to-wall.

Above the fireplace in the front parlor hangs Harriet Cany Peale's (c.1800-1869) *Porthole Portrait of George Washington,* circa 1850. On the opposite wall hangs Mather Brown's *Portrait of General William Moultrie.* The furniture is primarily early nineteenth century New York in origin. The mahogany sofa with gilded brass paws and superbly carved cornucopias and foliage on the back and arms is from the shop of Duncan Phyfe. The side chairs are also attributed to Phyfe and have curule legs. Curule or "Grecian Cross" legs appeared in both French and English cabinetmaker's design books that are known to have been owned by Phyfe.

In the rear parlor, over the mantel, is portrait of President Andrew Jackson, by Ralph Earle, Jr., painted in 1823. The superb mahogany and satinwood fall-front desk circa 1810 is attributed to Duncan Phyfe. Mr. Jenrette has one of the largest private collections of Duncan Phyfe furniture. These earlier Federal style pieces rely on carefully matched veneers and delicate carving for their elegance and represent an earlier phase of the neo-classical impulse in American design, compared with the slightly later and more robust late Federal or Empire pieces.

The chandeliers, once gas lit, are en suite with those on the first floor and were installed during the Siegling occupancy. These second floor drawing rooms were designed for entertaining. The carved woodwork and plaster ceiling medallions are Greek Revival in style and incorporate popular design motifs of the period: the anthemion, acanthus leaves and other vegetable designs. As on the exterior, the decoration is restrained, almost austere, in contrast to the later Greek Revival decoration on the 1850's.

REAR CARD ROOM

This room was enlarged by Mr. Guggenheim by partitioning off a portion of the second floor hall. The door behind once led to an ample ballroom added by the Sieglings in the 1890's. Under the Sieglings, one could stand in the front card room and look down the hall and into the vast ballroom beyond.

PIAZZA

It seems very tranquil and bucolic today, but from piazzas and rooftops along the Battery Charlestonians watched as the first shots of the Civil War were fired beginning at 4:30 a.m. on April 12, 1861. Between this event and the beginning of the siege of Charleston in April 1863, the city enjoyed a relative calm. On August 29th, of that year, the Union Commander General Quincy Adams Gillmore began the bombardment of the city. The lower part of Charleston was bombed and shelled on and off until the surrender a year and half later. Those who could left Charleston for Columbia or the upcountry. Others removed themselves north of Calhoun Street where the shells generally did not reach. Downtown Charleston became a ghost town. Charleston was abandoned by the Confederate Army in February 1865 and the city was occupied by Federal Troops.

A northern reporter who came to Charleston in September 1865, found " A city of ruins, of desolation, of rotting wharves, of deserted warehouses, of weed-wild gardens, of widowed women, of miles of grass grown streets, of acres of pitiful and voiceful bareness that is Charleston, wherein rebellion loftily reared its head five years ago, on whose beautiful promenade the fairest of cultivated women gathered with passionate hearts to applaud the assault of ten thousand upon the little garrison of Fort Sumter."

Charleston's economy recovered gradually from the trauma of war. Cotton production resumed almost immediately, the city expanded its railroad lines, lumber exports grew, and phosphate mining along the rivers became a major industry.

Charleston survived the post-war period by preserving her heritage. While other cities were losing their architectural treasures and cultural and social institutions during the industrial boom, Charleston's genteel poverty preserved its surviving vestiges of the pre-war period, paving the way for her role as a leader of the preservation movement in the United States.

GARDEN

This is an elegant garden reflecting the beauty of this nineteenth century home. The iron fence separating the first garden space from the street is bordered with Viburnum tinus compactum (Spring Bouquet). This is a small version of the Viburnum tinus found in many Charleston gardens. A large oak tree (Quercus virginiana) on the street's edge shades this area from the morning sun.

GARDEN (Continued)

The south bed is filled with Camellias and large Pittosporum, underplanted with Aspidistra (cast-iron plant). This traditional shade plant is sometimes overlooked in creating new gardens. One of the many Magnolias in the garden is found in this bed. A large Pittosporum bends forward at the end of this bed, grandly reflecting the arch of the oak!

The second large area of grass is divided giving the effect of a great room, but a room that is inviting. This room is edged in holly fern (Cyrtomium falcatum), which is found in almost every Charleston garden. It grows and multiplies in almost any shaded area. Other traditional plants include azaleas and camellias. But in the sunny area there is Raphiolepis 'Majestic Beauty.' This large raphiolepis (Indian hawthorne) is the big brother or sister of the more common Raphiolepis indica, a smaller variety of this popular plant. There is also yellow jasmine (Carolina jessamine). There is probably Confederate jasmine somewhere in this area (it had not bloomed in the early spring when this was written). There are also several variegated hydrangea.

There are several more palmettos and four grand magnolias acting as a backdrop for this simple and very beautiful garden. There seems to be nothing in this garden that could not have been planted there in the nineteenth century when this house was built.

GARDEN OF THE ROBERT WILLIAM ROPER HOUSE **2004**
9 East Battery
c. 1838
Residence of Mr. Richard Jenrette

This is one of Charleston's earliest and finest examples of Greek Revival architecture. Robert William Roper, a wealthy planter and state legislator, brought two adjoining lots on East Battery, for $4,100 each. This section of East Battery was low-lying and sandy ground until after 1820 when the city finished building the first sea wall. The solid construction of the house has withstood many hurricanes, storms, the earthquake of 1886 and the Civil War.

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Vernacular Architecture of Charleston & the Lowcountry

ROBERT WILLIAM ROPER HOUSE
Constructed 1838-39
9 East Battery

The Robert William Roper House is one of Charleston's most monumental Greek Revivial houses. With its prominent position on the southern edge of the battery, its massive five-columned Ionic portico could be seen from miles away by approaching ships. Such a prime location on which to build emerged from a civic fiscal crisis. The city originally intended for this section of the Battery to be part of White Point Gardens, an L-shaped public park running from Atlantic to Church streets, on East and South Battery. The financial panic of 1837 encouraged the city to sell the lands on the eastern side predicting that they "will produce a beautiful row of ornamental buildings along the whole line of East Bay Battery." The income generated from the sale of these lots was used to finance the development of the southern section of the park extending it westward to Meeting and later to King street. When presented late in 1837 this plan was

> accompanied by a diagram, executed by Mr. Reichardt, in which the whole scheme is minutely and accurately delineated...It will produce a public promenade or garden, covering an area of three acres of ground, perfectly accessible to the sea breeze....unsurpassed in beauty, and in all the sources of heathful recreation, by any similar spot in the United States.

With the development of the park and the high retaining wall, the battery became a social gathering place in Charleston. S. Bernard's "View along the East Battery" (1831) (see illustration accompanying 21 East Battery) shows men and women strolling, children playing, and dogs cavorting. An 1842 letter from Izard Middleton to his brother Nathaniel who was summering in the north not only demonstrates the centrality of the battery to daily life, but also hints at the excitement that Roper's house evoked amongst his contemporaries. Izard wrote, "Here are we so quiet (except Tuesday and Friday evenings) so peaceful, so hot, figs at Breakfast, water melons & musk melons at dinner – in the afternoon the battery to walk upon. Mr. R. W. Roper's house for to delight the eye." John Izard Middleton was himself an amateur artist, and his enthusiasm for classical architecture combined with his travels in 1808-09 resulted in the publication of, A Description of Cyclopean Walls and of Roman Antiquities with Topographical and Picturesque Views of Ancient Latinum, and marked Middleton as one of America's first classical archaeologists. His comment to his brother seems to indicate that the massive columns supported on an arcaded base rising to the balustrade parapet struck a chord of approval with Izard. It seems he approved of Roper's classical temple-sided, modified single house.

In April of 1838, Robert William Roper purchased two lots along the Battery from the City for $8200. He also acquired a triangular section of the lot which bounded his to the north for $1439 and which Isaac Holmes had recently bought from the city. The acquisition of this additional piece of land was significant in the siting of the house on the property. An undated plat (see illustration accompanying 21 East Battery) reveals that the City had divided the lots along East Bay Street (now East Battery) parallel to the lots behind them rather than in direct relation to East Bay. Because of the angle at which the Battery was laid out this meant that the lots on East Bay were not perpendicular to the street. With the additional triangular section, Roper was able to align his house as the traditional single house in Charleston is usually placed, perpendicular to the street.

Prior to the construction of his East Bay house, Roper resided on Legare street near its Southern end. In 1832 he purchased from Sarah Purcell a wooden dwelling house for $3000. The 1835 City Directory lists this property as his residence. In July of 1839 he sells this property perhaps indicating the completion of his East Bay residence. This supposition is bolstered by the 1840 City Directory which lists Roper's residence at the corner of East and South Bay. The Legare street property was surveyed at the time of the 1839 sale and indicates a narrow, perhaps two bay, single house of wood on a brick foundation with an "Addition Lately put up, Wood" on the northern side and piazzas on the southern and western sides. The only outbuilding indicated is a wooden two story kitchen building.

Roper's house on East Battery was vastly grander in scale and execution. Exhibiting a modified single house plan with the narrow end facing the street, the colossal Ionic columns of the piazza stretch down the length of the lot. At the time of its construction however, nothing stood between Roper's house and Charleston harbor beyond. Open to the public grounds of White Point Gardens Roper's house was situated very differently from the private enclaves surrounding many of Charleston's single houses. Entrance to the house was not from the side piazza as with many single houses, but from the street as in Charles Edmundston's House (21 East Battery). The removal of the staircase and hall from the center of the structure allows for uninterrupted movement on the second floor between the two parlours. Triple sash windows extending to floor level allow for air circulation as well of free communication between the parlours and the piazza. Originally, as in his house on Legare street, Roper also had a piazza stretching across the back of the house which would have provided greater seclusion and privacy than that on the side. Even today, one can sense the efficacy of public rooms of the second floor with large open windows and outdoor living space. In the summer months, this remains one of the coolest locations in town.

Interior detailing includes classical imagery likely inspired by the widely available pattern books. Considering the massive proportions of the columns, however, the interior ornament is surprisingly subdued. Adherence to symmetry on the inside results in an unusual arrangement on the exterior. Each parlour has two evenly spaced windows which are framed by the columns of the piazza, resulting in five columns instead of the expected even number. Much speculation has centered on the identity of the architect who combined elements of vernacular Charleston urban structures with Greek Revival aesthetics. Kenneth Severens argues that both circumstantial and stylistic evidence suggest that Charles F. Reichardt may have been involved. Reichardt, who trained with the German neoclassical architect Karl Friedrich Schinkel, arrived in Charleston in 1836. Sadly, all of his known buildings are now destroyed (the Meeting Street Theater, the Guard House, and the Charleston Hotel). The monumental colonnade of the Roper House shares much in common with these buildings. Reichardt's involvement with the development of White Point Gardens also lends credence to this conjecture.

Robert William Roper was the son of a prosperous rice planter, and from his father Thomas Roper he inherited the slaves and the rice plantation which the provided the wealth for constructing his East Bay residence. Roper was active on both a state and local level especially in encouraging agricultural diversification and cotton manufacturing as a way of decreasing dependence on the north. Ironically, Roper died of the malaria so prevalent on rice plantations and carried by the mosquitoes which breed in the rice beds. He was eulogized by the Courier as "a large and successful planter, and enlightened agriculturist." His wife, Martha Rutledge Laurens sold the house in 1851 and having no children much of his estate went to the founding of the Roper Hospital. Some Victorian alterations were added by Rudolph Siegling whose family owned the house from 1874 to 1929 when Solomon R. Guggenheim purchased it as a winter home. The house is currently owned by Richard H. Jenrette who acquired it in 1967.

Sources:

Severens, Kenneth and Martha Severens, "The Robert William Roper House, Charleston, South Carolina," The Magazine Antiques.
Severens, Kenneth. Charleston: Antebellum Architecture and Civic Destiny.

MDMcI

ROBERT WILLIAM ROPER'S HOUSE
c. 1838
9 East Battery

It is a bit puzzling, to walk in a couple of blocks, out of the eighteenth century atmosphere of East Bay into the mid-nineteenth century architecture of East Battery. Your explanation is the sea wall, called in Charleston "The High Battery." Not until the eighteen thirties was this made high enough and strong enough to give protection from the hurricane tides that swept up the harbor from the sea.

Who Robert William Roper had for architect is not now known, but the versatile and able Edward Brickell White, had just begun to practice in Charleston. There is a high likelihood of his being the architect. In 1838, when the house was begun, the site was even more splendid than now, since nothing stood to the South between its monumental portico and the Ashley. Its heroic proportions are due to this. The rest of the house is in scale with and equal in finish to this distinguished piece of classic revival designing. As a whole, it is in many ways the most splendid private residence in Charleston.

In 1845 its owner, dying without children, a large part of his inherited wealth went by his father's bequest to found the Roper Hospital. Mrs. Roper sold the house in 1851. Since then it has been owned by a number of families, notably that of the late General Rudolph Siegling and the late Solomon R. Guggenheim.

Its present owners have faced and solved what is becoming an increasing problem in Charleston. Our large old houses, built by a more relaxed and serviced generation, are hard to adapt to modern requirements. By making the main rooms of this house into two beautiful apartments, its integrity and charm have been kept and its further happy existence insured.

It was the boast of the neighborhood that the only thing that stood between them and the Canary Islands was Fort Sumter. Look though the windows of the rooms pictured

here and let your eye wander from that line and you can read three hundred years of history in the names of the landmarks about one of America's finest and most romantic harbors.

Samuel Gaillard Stoney
Monograph for Historic Charleston Foundation