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# 'L' Shape Makes Blake House Stand Out

By JACK LELAND  
Post-Courier Reporter

When built, prior to 1800, the Federal-Georgian residence at 58 South Battery had a sweeping view of the Ashley River and access to a landing for boats.

An advertisement for its sale in 1816 described it as "That commodious and pleasantly situated house and lot, No. 6, South Bay," and went on to state that "the convenience of a landing renders it an eligible situation for a planter."

Planters made much use of Lowcountry waterways for travel, the state's public road system being of a limited nature until much later.

In 1800, South Bay (Battery) ended at what is now Lenwood Boulevard where Conseillere's Creek ran in from the river. The street originally was called Fort Street because of a palmetto log gun emplacement that stood where 39 South Battery is today.

The creek forked just north of South Bay and the smaller branch ran easterly toward Legare and King streets. Lamboll Street is located over part of the filled-in creek and marsh. Between the creek and the Ashley River was a peninsula of land that was owned by Edward Blake, William Gibbes, Robert Mackenzie and George Kincaid, all connected with either or both commerce and plantations in the Lowcountry.

Edward Blake, in 1779, deeded the fairly large lot at No. 58 South Bay to his son, Capt. John Blake, a member of the Continental Army. He was cap-

## Do You Know Your Charleston?

tured when Charleston fell to the British in 1780 and was placed aboard a prison hulk in Charleston Harbor.

While a prisoner, he could have been one of the Americans nursed by the mother of President Andrew Jackson, Elizabeth Jackson, who volunteered to help with the prisoners aboard the infamous and notoriously ill-staffed prison hulks. Mrs. Jackson died while nursing on the ships and was buried in an unmarked grave outside the city limits.

After the war, John Blake became president of the Bank of the State of South Carolina and operated a factor's office. He also served in the South Carolina General Assembly as a legislator and a senator. The South Bay lot remained vacant for two decades and Blake maintained a residence on King Street until he built the house at 58 South Bay, in which he was living in 1800, being listed there in the 1801 city directory.

The John Blake House is unusual in Charleston because of its "L" shape. It is constructed of cypress and heart pine on a brick basement that, in itself, is unusual in much of the old city. However, the land along South Battery is rather low and subject to the force of hurricane winds and tides, the latter

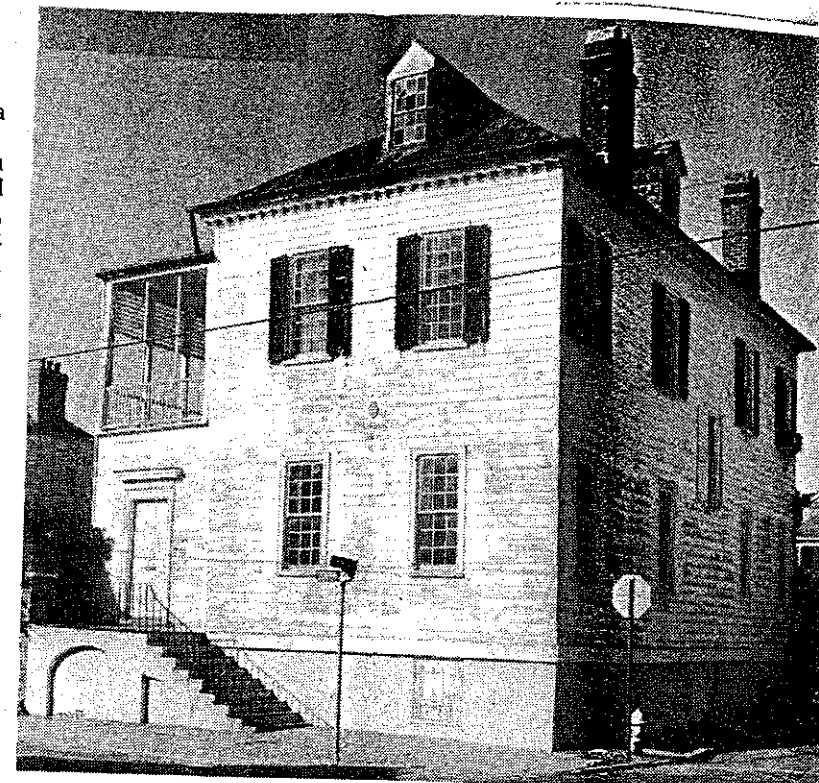
being the reason why so many houses in that area are raised above ground level.

The house has a symmetrical exterior that is a form of compromise between the Federal and Georgian ideals with a preponderance of Georgian, which is exemplified in the wooden cornices that have strong "cyma recta" moldings and modillions, all definitely Georgian.

Masonry steps with wrought-iron railings lead to a stoop outside the balanced classical entrance doorway that opens onto the lower porch. This porch and the upstairs one have slender pillars and balusters. Once inside the piazza, one realizes that No. 58 South Battery is really a Charleston "Single House," modified by having a wing extending at right angles to the rear portion. The normal single house would have been on a fairly deep lot with out-buildings or extensions behind the main rooms.

John Blake left a good inventory of the house when he died in 1810 and it indicates that the south room on the second floor was the formal drawing room, a situation not unusual in old Charleston. The drawing room was expensively furnished with draperies, carpets, a piano, card table and chairs.

The first-floor south room had books and could have been a library while the central room on the first floor apparently was a family sitting room and opened onto the dining room at the rear where the family silver was on display.



Staff Photo by Tom Spain

John Blake House, 58 South Battery St.

See Blake House, Page 2-B

## ...Blake House Stands Out

Continued From Page 1-B

Sometime after Blake's death, the first-floor front room became the main drawing room with the addition of a regency-styled wooden mantle. It is rather elaborate with geometric moldings, sunbursts and foliation. The other rooms have the original Federal mantels with dentil molding and pilasters. The main rooms have Federal overmantels and paneled wainscot. The doors and windows have simple surrounds.

The stairhall has a Federal staircase with handrail and slender, rectangular balusters. The wooden cornice in the stairhall is styled with candlelight moldings alternately marked right-side-up and upside-down.

The exposed beams in both attic and basement are hand-tooled and plaster laths also were hand-made, a painstaking job but typical of the work of the times. Flooring is of wide heart pine, planks from long-leaf pines that were cut along the rivers, rafted and floated to Charleston. The long trip through salt water served to toughen the wood and today's plumbers and electricians have a tough time boring holes, even with electric drills.

The house passed through many hands during the ensuing years, but all of its owners were people of substance who could keep it in good repair. William Gibbes built the impressive Georgian mansion at 64 South Battery and had a warehouse and factor's wharf out to deep water. South Battery became one of the primary residential streets of old Charleston.

When Murray Boulevard was built in this century, dredge spoil was used to build up the marshes of Conseilere's and other creeks all the way to Chisolm's Mill, where the U.S. Coast Guard Depot is today. After the fill settled, the city laid out streets, extending South Battery to Chisolm's Mill, and began selling lots. Today, the entire area is a high-cost section of the city.

In 1886, 58 South Battery was owned by John T. Ryan, a partner in the cotton brokerage firm of William K. Ryan and Son. His father lived nearby at 26 South Battery. In 1899,

the residence was occupied by Emma and Julia Ryan.

After Julia Ryan's death in 1914, it was occupied by Emma Ryan until the early 1920s when Henry W. Frost, a cotton broker, purchased it. In 1930, Rees F. Fraser, manager of a fertilizer and chemical company, was living there.

A year later, Mildred F. Brawley, widow of U.S. District Judge William Hiram Brawley, purchased the dwelling and occupied it as a residence until her death.

Judge Brawley was a noted jurist, serving as judge here from 1894 until 1911. Prior to that he practiced law in Charleston and was a member of the U.S. Congress and the S.C. General Assembly. He was a native of Chester and a graduate in 1860 of the S.C. College (now USC) and lost an arm at the battle of Seven Pines.

Louis D. Simonds bought the house and resided there until the late 1970s when he sold it to William E. Murray, New York entrepreneur and real estate developer, who is a native of Charleston.

The house has withstood the major hurricanes of 1818, 1885, 1893, 1912 and 1940, the Great Earthquake of 1886 and was narrowly missed by tornadoes that lashed the lower city in 1938.

Now neglect threatens the house, according to 451 downtown residents who recently petitioned Charleston Mayor Joseph P. Riley Jr. to take action to stop the deterioration of the house. At that time Riley said Murray had been informed of the need to make repairs. Last week Murray obtained the necessary permits, and work on the building is expected to begin soon.

# Landscape architects repeat performance

By LYNNE LANGLEY  
Of the Post-Courier staff

The first restoration of the 18th century South Battery garden brought raves, photographs in glossy gardening books and features in magazines.

Then Hurricane Hugo literally washed through the garden. A 4½-foot storm surge uprooted 80 percent of the plants and stacked them against the back wall of the garden.

Owner Bessie Hanahan called landscape architects Hugh and Mary Palmer Dargan to repeat the request she made in 1984 when she purchased 58 South Battery: Please restore the garden.

As the Dargans were working on the restoration of the restoration, they received a prestigious award from the American Society of Landscape Architects. Never before in this country had a private garden received this professional award for re-creation of a period landscape, say the Dargans.

The landscape architects faced deadlines on both restorations. Five years ago, the couple had set March 30 as their wedding date and were overseeing the installation of plants until the day before.

This year, Mrs. Hanahan's garden had to be perfect last month for the Festival of Houses and Gardens. The Historic Charleston Foundation regularly includes 58 South Battery on its spring tours.

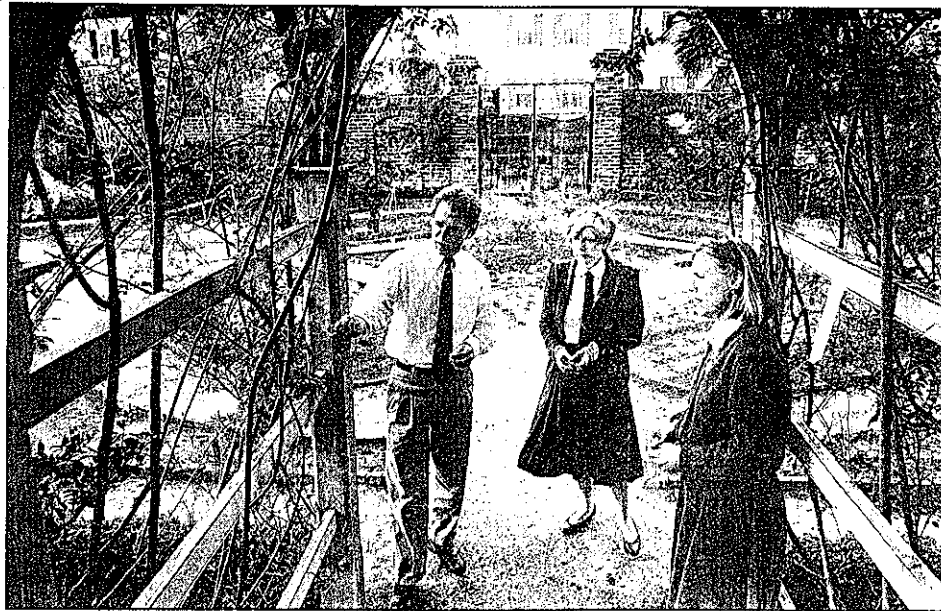
This month and next Mrs. Hanahan, hospitality chairman for the Spoleto Festival, will as always be holding parties for the performers and board members in her garden and home.

The formal garden is known across this country and internationally through British writer Penelope Hobhouse, who chose the site as one of only three or four American gardens in her new book "Garden Style." William Welch's "Perennial Color for the South" showcases the garden as does the latest issue of "Historic Preservation" magazine.

Last Sept. 22, however, the site was disaster. The Dargans raced over to check and remember the sea of pluff mud. "It was so depressing. The plants were wrenched out of the ground," says Mrs. Dargan.

Dargan points through the formal gardens with their brick beds, past the arbor and screening plantings to the private garden backed by a brick wall. Hugo uprooted about 80 percent of the plants in the yard and deposited many of them against the wall, he says.

When the pluff mud dried, the Dargans brought in a team to shovel a foot or more of the salt-laden



Staff Photo by Wade Spees

Hugh Dargan, Mrs. Roger Hanahan (center) and Mary Palmer Dargan stand in the rose-covered arbor that links the formal gardens at Mrs.

Hanahan's house with private gardens where she entertains Spoleto celebrities and other guests.

slime that turns brick-hard. With the sprinkling system destroyed by salt, Dargan installed temporary irrigation standards above the ground. But neither watering nor rain could save all the plants.

Azaleas, dogwood, red bud, photinia and quince died outright, says Mrs. Hanahan. As she walked the garden each day, she adds, she noticed more plants declining. Then came the Christmas freeze.

"Mother Nature was not very kind to the garden," says Mrs. Dargan, enumerating plants such as pittosporum that survived Hugo only to suffer cold damage.

The second restoration had to dig down beneath the soil to new drainage pipes and to level the site. The lighting, installed by a Texas company also had to be replaced.

With most of the plants uprooted, the Dargans replanted what could be saved then turned once again to the challenge of finding the right flora.

For historical accuracy, only certain shrubs and trees are appropriate, Mrs. Dargan points out. Even more difficult, many nurseries do not carry stock large enough to give the immediate effect Mrs. Hanahan wanted.

The 30-year-old camellias of the first restoration are almost impossible to find, says Mrs. Dargan. The

two giant crape myrtles and an 18-foot-tall holly became "instant trees," she adds.

Like the 8-ton, 30-foot tree with 10-foot rootball the Dargans found for the College of Charleston's post-Hugo campus, Mrs. Hanahan's holly was delivered by a crane as the Dargans orchestrated a landscape contractor and his crew. Limbs, for instance, have to be chained precisely or the tree could crack in half as it's eased through a narrow garden entrance and into a massive hole.

The original restoration began with research, say the Dargans. They found photos of 58 South Battery in Loutrell Briggs' "Charleston Gardens" and a photo of the front gate dating to about 1936 at the Charleston Museum. The landscape architects read about other 18th and 19th century Charleston gardens, the popularity of pattern gardens and the plants most often used at the time.

Then the Dargans carefully began excavating the site for clues. The Dargans found bricks hidden under soil and weeds. The garden had been neglected for seven years before Mrs. Hanahan purchased it, notes Dargan. "It was waist high in weeds. I had to crawl through it."

The bricks revealed the pattern of the original garden and dictated the

restoration of the formal portion, a walled garden tucked behind gates on South Battery. Within a landscaped square, four oval beds surround a diamond-shaped central bed. All brim with flowers, some of them changed seasonally; gravel walkways border the plantings.

An arching arbor covered with roses leads to the private walled garden while shrubs and small trees offer a buffer for privacy. "The garden meets 20th century needs and has 18th century character," says Mrs. Dargan.

She points to the three separate axes which few Charleston gardens have, she says. "Even with the storm, this garden still looked good because it had good bones."

The axis runs from the front gate through the arbor to focus on a sundial by the back brick wall, which the Dargans designed and had built with old brick to replace a former cinder block wall. The arches reflect those of the front wall and the arbor.

The second axis, from the piazza steps to an urn, provides a view from the house across the formal garden. The Dargans' research showed that steps to the house in 1984 were not original and not in the right place. The correct location lines up perfectly, says Mrs. Dargan.



Residents in the downtown neighborhood of 58 South Battery decry...

## Petition seeks a halt to house deterioration

By MARSHA WHITE  
Post-Courier Reporter

A group of 451 downtown residents petitioned Charleston's mayor Friday to take action to stop the deterioration of a house at 58 South Battery.

The petition was started by area residents because the house had been allowed to deteriorate through neglect, said Jane Lucas Thornhill, a resident of Legare Street who said she had lived across from 58 South Battery for 22 years.

"The roof is leaking, window panes are out and the rain is pouring in," said Mrs. Thornhill. When an unoccupied building is allowed to deteriorate, vagrants often begin to loiter and the risk of fire is very great, she said.

Charleston Mayor Joseph P. Riley Jr. said Friday that he wrote to the building's owner, William E. Murray, in November 1982 about the condition of the property. A reply came that the building would be repaired soon.

But in the interim, the project archived and the repairs were not made, said Roy DeHaven, a staff member at the East Bay Co. real estate development firm which manages the property for Murray, who lives in New York.

Water damage from Hurricane David destroyed an old oil heater and the

pieces of cast iron are apparently still visible, DeHaven said. The firm did arrange to have the building scraped and painted, but the job had not progressed beyond the scraping stage, he added.

Bids have been received for repair of the house and Murray is expected to choose between the final two firms by Monday, DeHaven said. City building permits should be obtained next week, he said.

The mayor said the city building inspector had visited the property and issued an order that it be secured immediately. The building has been secured, he said.

"The house obviously from the outside is in deplorable condition," said Helen Scarborough, a next-door neighbor to the house at 58 South Battery. "The owner has had it long enough to have done something about it."

Mrs. Scarborough said she knows two people who have offered to buy the house from Murray, but he does not appear to be interested in selling it.

"It's a shame," Mrs. Scarborough said. "I didn't get the petition up, but I was happy to sign it." The building and gardens used to be beautiful, she said. "but they aren't any more."



Staff photos by Tom Spain

...Peeling paint, broken windows



# 58 South Battery

Restoration saved unusual house 'from rack and ruin'

By LISA DENNIS  
Post-Courier Reporter

The long-awaited and well-planned restoration of the historic house at 58 South Battery is just shy of completion and the new owners, Roger and Bessie Hanahan, couldn't be more pleased.

The unusual, L-shaped, 2½-story frame house was built about 1800 by John Blake, a Revolutionary patriot and state senator. Due to its historical significance, the house became the center of controversy when, in December 1983, downtown residents complained it was deteriorating from neglect and petitioned the mayor to take action to save the structure.

The owner at that time, New York entrepreneur William E. Murray, apparently had planned to restore the dwelling, but the project went awry. He also reportedly refused to sell the property until an agreement finally was reached with Mrs. Hanahan in April 1984.

Her purpose in buying the house was "to save it from rack and ruin," and return the house and gardens to a condition similar to that of its 18th century origin, she says.

"It took three years for us to purchase the house because of the controversy regarding its neglected condition and the refusal of the owner to either clean it up or sell," Mrs. Hanahan says. But by the time she did acquire the property, initial research and planning for the restoration was already well under way.

Although the exterior and interior looked terrible, the house remained structurally sound, and, surprisingly, a great deal of original detail was found inside, according to David Hoffman, who Mrs. Hanahan says "is responsible for rebuilding the house."

Hoffman is a local builder and planner who specializes in restorative work. Other houses in the area he's worked with include Drayton Hall, the Aiken Rhett House and the residence at 15 Legare. The Blake House has been his primary project for the past year and a half.

"We wanted to keep the integrity of the house, with the exception of 20th century conveniences," Hoffman says. "It was truly a restoration, not a renovation." Some of the problems his crew dealt with were repainting and plastering, reworking of the windows and window openings, flooring and

## Homes In Detail

masonry repairs, installation of modern utilities and restoration of interior detail work and the double piazzas outside.

The greatest changes were made in the kitchen, bathrooms and the back portion of the house, which was a 20th century addition anyway, Mrs. Hanahan says. She adds that John Laurens served as preservation consultant in the early stages of the restoration.

In fact, a whole team of experts worked with the Hanahans on the project, including New York interior designer Arnold deV. Copper, landscape architect Hugh Dargon and Englishman John Taylor, who specializes in the authentic restoration of furniture. Copper claims this has been one of the most extensive renovations in the city.

The interior plan is that of a modified single house, the main portion having two rooms on each floor, divided by a central stairhall. That plan is modified by the west wing which features one room on each floor, each accessible from the piazza or the northeast rooms.

The exterior is rather conservative for its period, with proportions more Georgian than Federal. But the interior was done in the high style of the Federal and late Georgian periods, featuring elaborate paneling and woodwork, much of which remained intact all these years. There is also an abundance of natural light provided by numerous windows, many of which still have the original, unrefined glass of the period.

While excavating the garden, Mrs. Hanahan found pieces of fine English china, dating to the late 18th century, which would indicate someone of considerable wealth must have lived there.

In keeping with this high style, Copper and Mrs. Hanahan selected brilliant color schemes, in red, yellow and blue tones, for the primary rooms. "People seem afraid of colors," Copper says, "but this is a Georgian home. There's beautiful woodwork, the rooms are well proportioned reflecting an Italian Palladian influence, and they would have used vibrant, brilliant colors."

Coincidentally, when paint and plasterwork

were removed during renovation, many of the original colors used in the house were discovered and some were identical to those they had selected.

The wall treatments are even more interesting because of a special painting technique used to simulate texture. Copper signed on a New York painting team for the project. The results are evident in the front stairhall where baseboards are a marbleized slate-gray and, above these to the chair rail, walls are a wax-finished deep terracotta with the look of leather. Above the chair rail, walls are a pale blue-gray.

The striking color schemes are complemented in each room by curtains and upholstery with elaborate fringes, borders and ribbons. Rooms are further enhanced by the owners' fine 18th century English, American and French furniture, appropriate to the period, much of which was selected specifically for this house.

Mrs. Hanahan admits to a long-time interest in antiques and travels frequently to examine and purchase new pieces. She commissioned John Taylor, who works out of New York, for much of the restorative work.

Color makes an immediate impression in both the formal drawing room and dining room on the first floor. Brilliant Chinese celadon green with white trim is the primary color in the drawing room, echoed in elaborate multicolored draperies in an English documented glazed chintz pattern. The central fireplace features original "King of Prussia" marble and an elaborate mantel. Also of note, original brasses for bell pulls were found and are still used today for decoration.

The dining room is sparsely, but elegantly, decorated with fine antiques, including a spectacular mirror over the mantel. But what grabs your attention is the wall color, which Copper describes as "maple's gold." The milk-based paint, meticulously applied in layers, allows underlying tones of vermilion to show through the bright gold color, providing texture for added interest. The baseboards were given another special paint technique to simulate the look of grained mahogany.

"Antiqued" gold cornices, found within the

See House, Page 3-E



Staff Photo by Wade Speers

Bessie Hanahan bought historic house to save it

# ...House

Continued From Page 1-E

house and dating back to 1850, top the otherwise plain windows which line two walls. The elaborate mantel is completely original and an example of fine craftsmanship throughout the house.

Across a narrow hallway, in the west wing, is the kitchen, a pleasant mix of old and new. The hearth and fine dentil molding were all preserved, but modern appliances and cabinets make it practical and liveable.

The hallway also connects a utility room in back (with a private stairway leading to the master bedroom), a powder room and rear entrance from the garage. The bathroom, which once adjoined the dining room, was reworked to provide a wet bar in the dining room and make the bath behind it accessible from the hall. A large cistern discovered under the utility room will probably be converted into a wine cellar, according to Mrs. Hanahan.

Upstairs, the library and master bedroom are decorated in similar high style. A second bedroom, which required a great deal of restorative work, is as yet unfinished. Again some work was done to rearrange entrances to a bath. It used to open at the head of the stairs, but is now accessible from the guest bedroom.

The library, which is where the formal parlor would have been located originally, is another elegant room. Here, a soft terra rosa color was selected to offset the glazed "faux pine" paneling, almost a khaki green color, which was achieved through yet another special painting technique. Draperies are another document print, of unglazed chintz this time for a less-formal room.

The master bedroom turns to muted wall colors for a more restful feel, again enhanced by fine furnishings and elaborate drapes. Adjoining

the room are a dressing room and closet area and an elegant bathroom with marble tub.

The Hanahans were able to take some liberties here, because it wasn't in the oldest part of the house. And since the house was being restored as a home, not a museum, certain conveniences seemed necessary. As Copper says, "I'm very practical. But that doesn't have to be incompatible with authenticity."

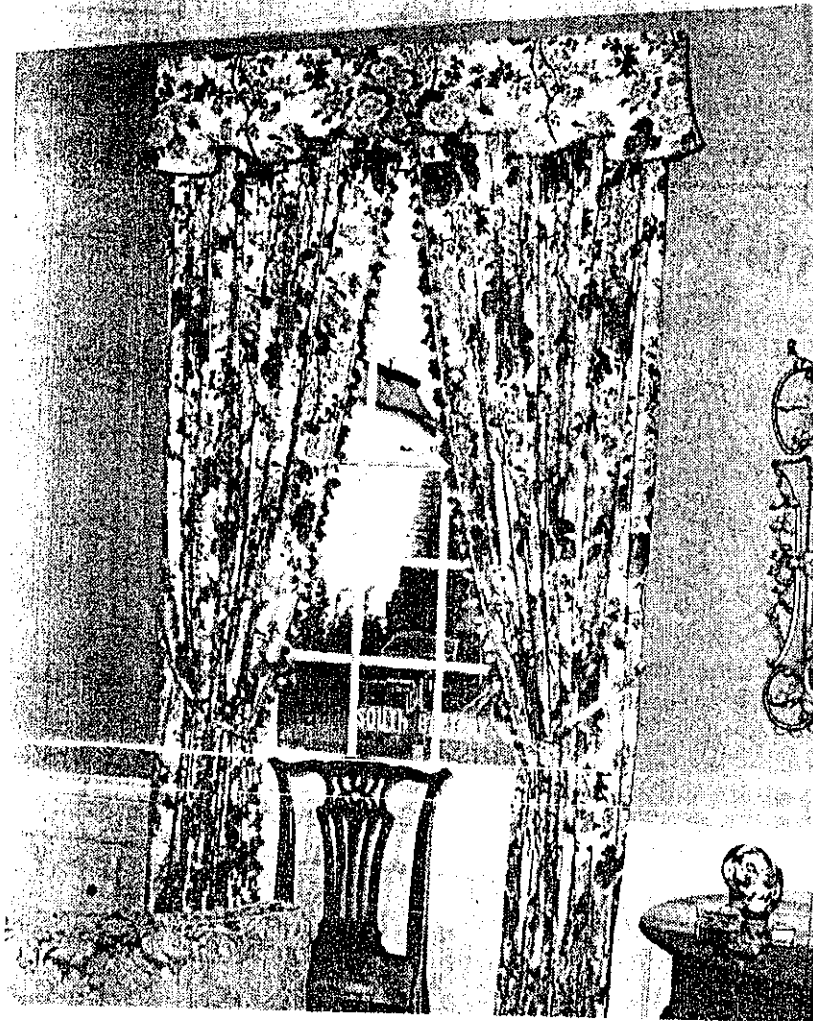
The third floor features two small turret rooms which are mirror images of each other. Both are covered to the ceiling in wallpaper, one blue, the other rose, with matching carpets for a unified look. A small bath over the west wing is a happy combination of both colors as far as color. Copper credits Hoffman with devising the plan for this bathroom.

At the rear of the house, several dilapidated sheds were razed, and a covered garage built in their place. The garage features tall-topped French doors which open westward to a harbor-covered terrace overlooking the family garden.

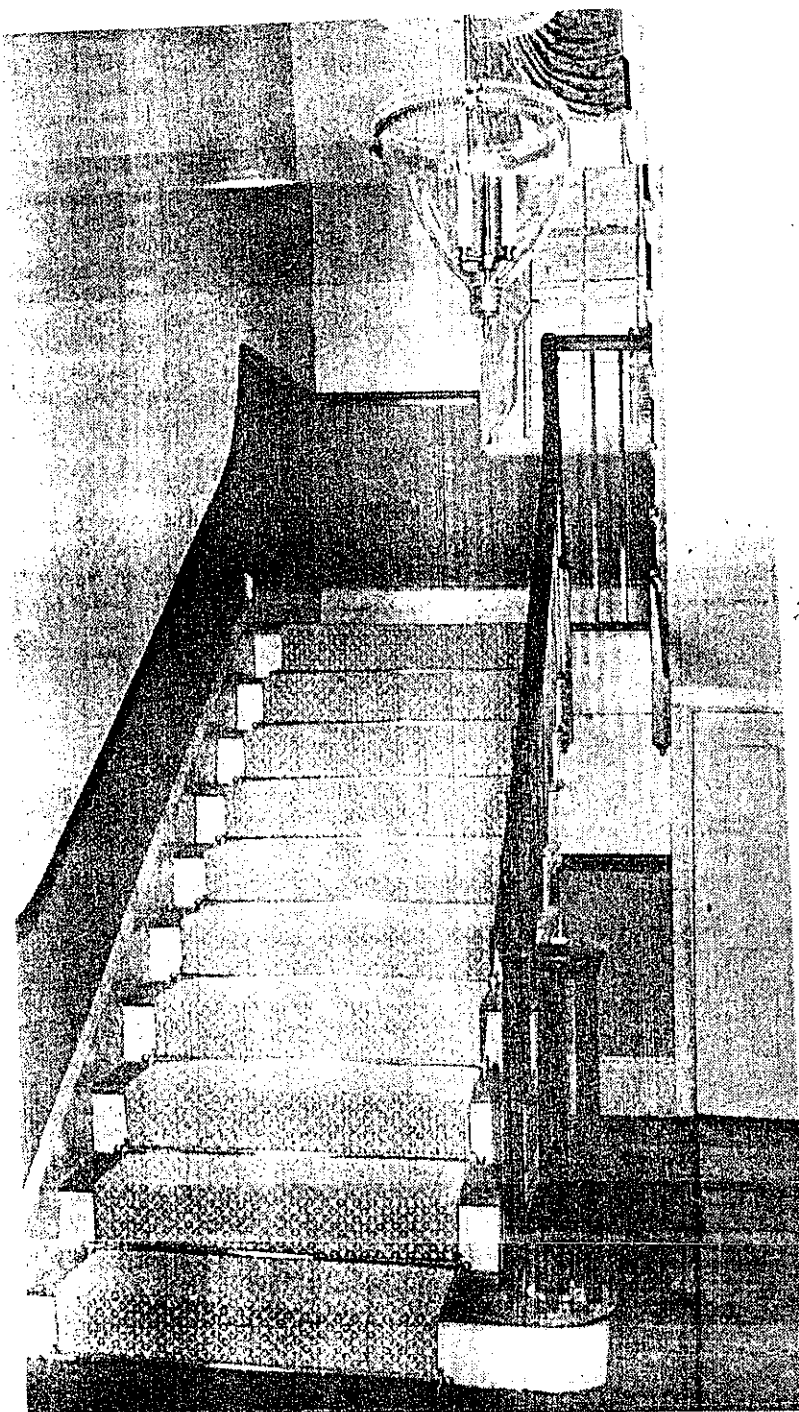
This more private sector of the yard is separated by heavy foliage from the front portion of the garden which was also part of the restoration project. For added privacy, Hoffman also redid the original front wall as a divider at the rear of the property. Scattered stone fragments gives the wall an antiquated look which belies its recent construction.

The formal garden in front was completely reconstructed from diagrams using original bricks excavated in the yard. Even flowers planted there are typical of what would have been planted in the 18th and 19th centuries, Mrs. Hanahan says. The original wrought-iron gates at the entrance were shipped off for scrap and have since been replaced.

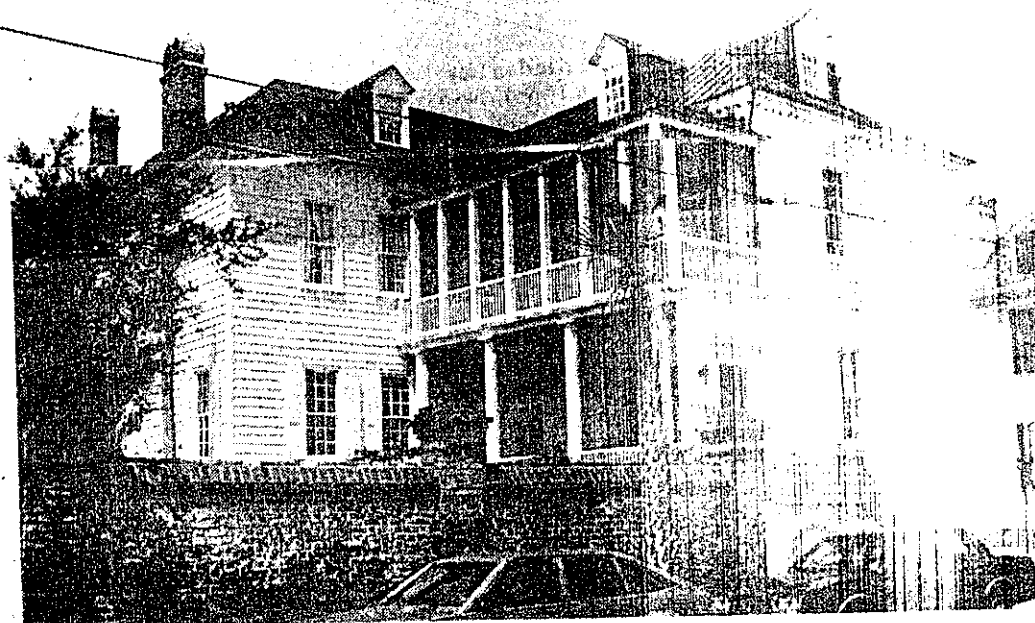
With a fresh coat of paint for the exterior and a blooming garden, the Hanahans are ready to get on with the business of daily living in their new "old" home.



This window is in the formal parlor.

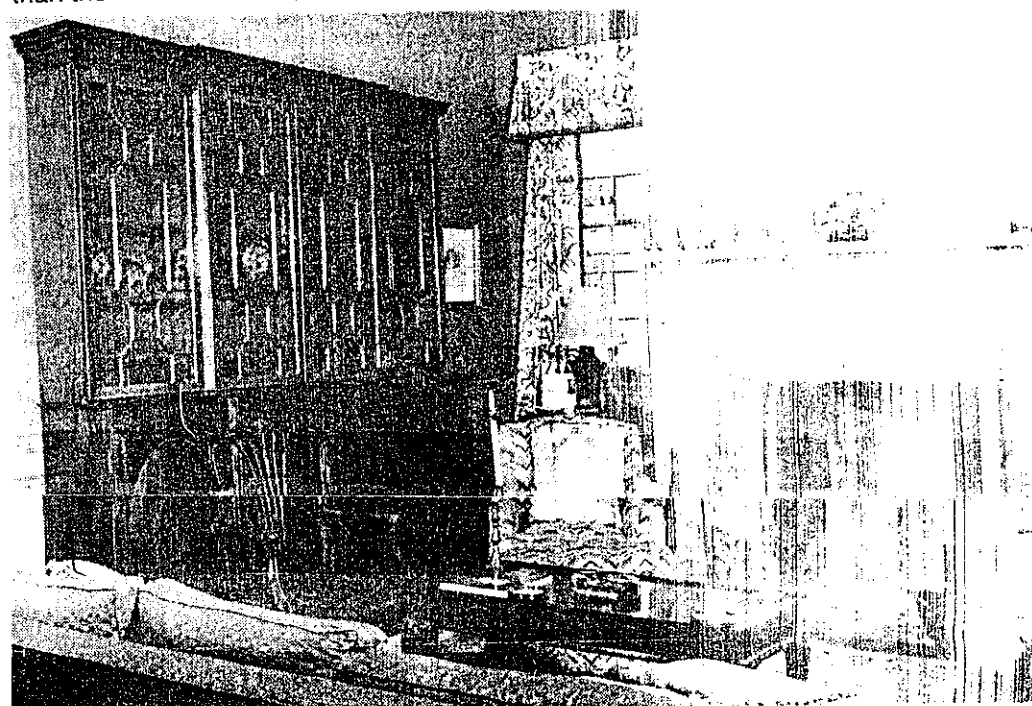


**Stair hall has marbled baseboards**

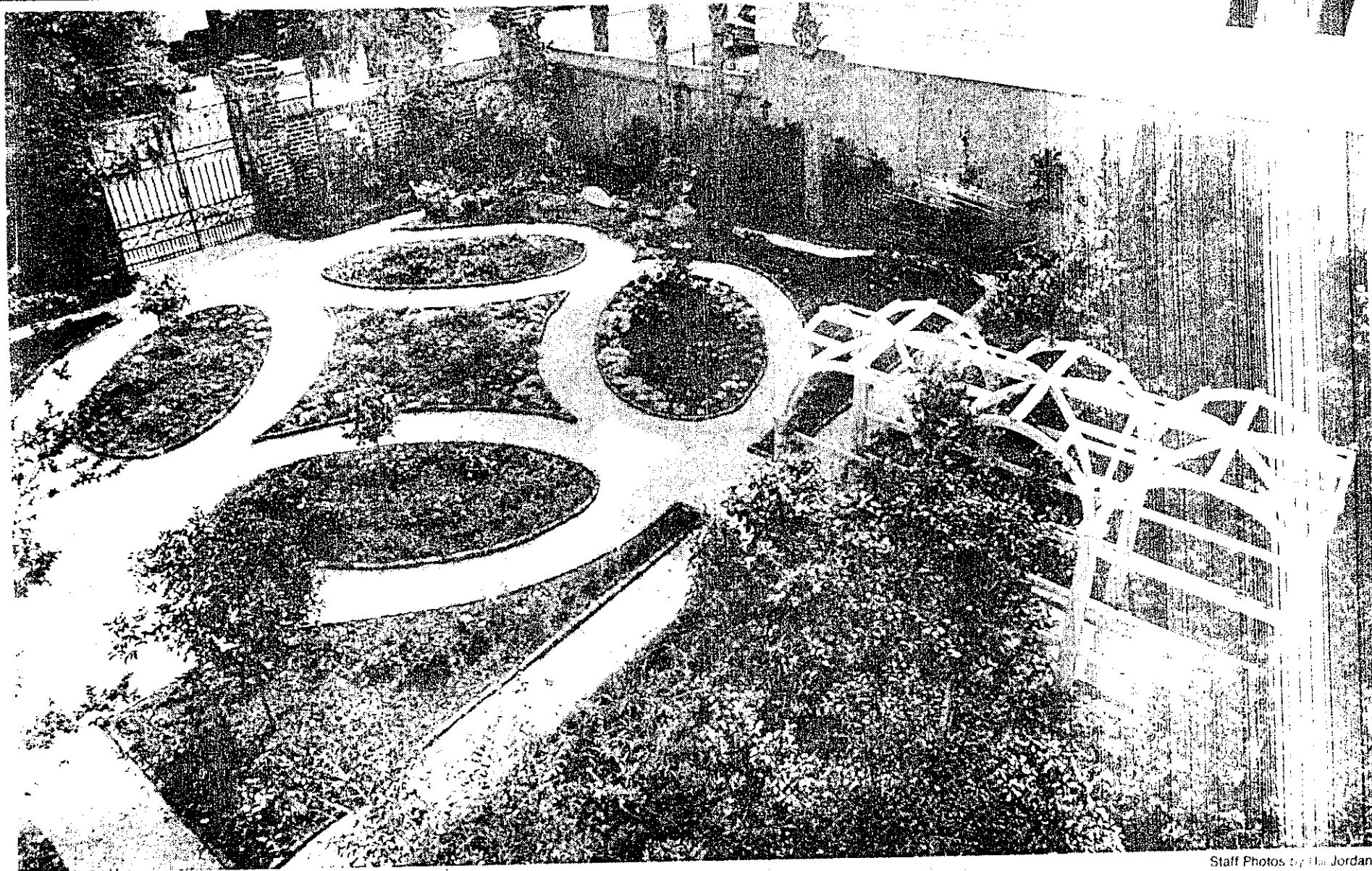


### **58 South Battery**

Fresh paint, restored piazzas and replaced windows look a far sight better than the house did two years ago when it had deteriorated so much neighbors complained. Below, nice art deco and drapes can be found in the living room.



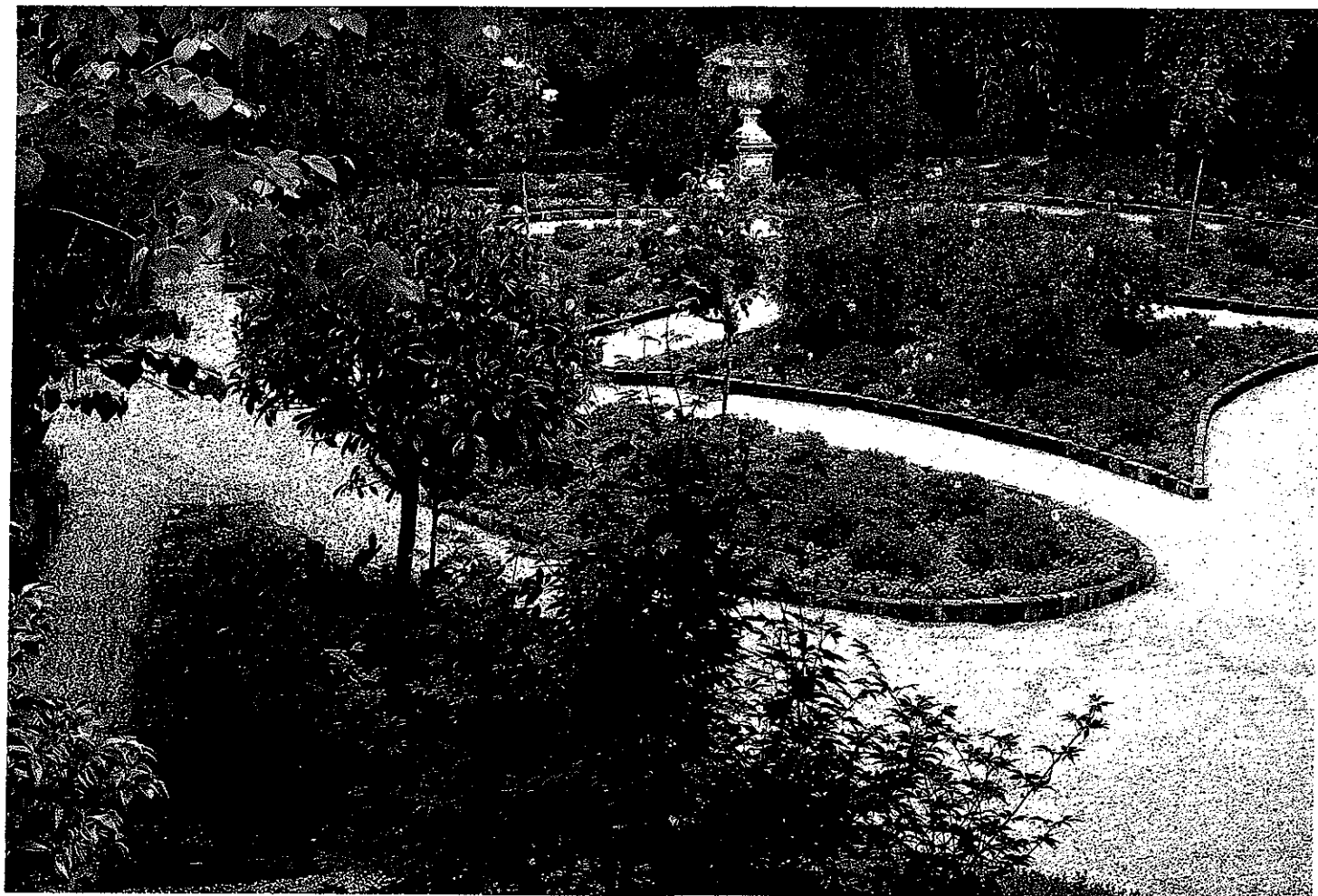




Staff Photos by The Jordan

**The garden was authentically restored — from the layout to the plants**





ALEXANDER WALLACE

# THE GARDEN AT 58 SOUTH BATTERY

*Purpose of the project:* The designers sought to research, interpret and implement a sensitive setting for an 18th-century frame home in a historic district. Archaeological and literary records revealed a pattern of bricks beneath an accumulation of soil on the grounds adjacent to the house. The design intent was to reinstate the excavated pattern garden through the use of traditional construction methods and to utilize native and exotic plant materials consistent with the period of the house.

*Role of the landscape architect:* The landscape architect was responsible for all drawings, bids and execution of plans and directed a team of skilled architects, an architectural historian, an archaeologist and craftsmen. The garden re-creation was handled exclusively by the landscape architect. Modest archaeological excavations were also directed by the landscape architect, who mapped the existing pattern as it



Top: The pattern in this 18th-century residential garden was buried beneath soil in the yard. Above: A fountain is located on axis with a trellis in the garden.

emerged from the soil. Shards of pottery and bottle glass were inspected for their location, age and relevance to the site by the state archaeologist. The landscape architect also supervised each of the many skilled craftsmen who were involved in the project.

*Local significance:* This project exemplifies a complete transformation from a "non-environment" to a late-18th-century garden. It helped to revive lost and diminishing craftsmanship techniques in the fields of historic preservation, traditional building and plant materials selection for historic re-creation projects. The restoration of the garden also began a conscious effort on the part of local realtors, bankers and the gardening public to think about a historic home and its sensitive grounds improvements.

*Special factors:* It was necessary to design creatively in a small space within the context of a tight period style.

*Category:* Historic Preservation and Restoration

*Location:* Charleston, South Carolina  
*Landscape architects:* Hugh Dargan Associates, Inc.—Hugh and Mary Palmer Dargan  
*Consultants:* John Laurens, architectural preservation; Libby Robenson Page, horticulture; Edgewood Builders, general contractor; Downtown Landscaping, landscape contractor; John Watson, lighting