

Valk House Typifies City's Victorian Dwellings

125 Broad St.

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Victorian architecture—that most maligned of all styles of building—for many cities their only architectural heritage.

Charleston, of course, has had better fortune and has been left with a goodly number of houses from the several centuries of her history. But this abundance of 18th and 19th century dwellings and commercial buildings has pushed the city's good Victorian buildings somewhat to the background as the misbegotten children that followed an earlier and more noble line.

After a long period of being forced to hide their "unattractive" faces, Victorian buildings are now drawing interest to them for their many virtues and for the varied forces that brought this manner of design into vogue.

Perhaps the worse offense committed by Victorian architects and designers was in choosing to fulfill such a variety of tasks in constructing a building. It was not enough that a house simply be a house but it must also tell a story and, if possible, even point up a moral.

And so we frequently find ourselves confronting a mixture of Classical, Gothic,

Romanesque or Venetian motifs in the same building, as the architect did his best to fulfill an ideological concept.

This fault, however, freed the designer from stereotyped floor plans and offered him a chance to attempt imaginative arrangement of rooms, alcoves and elaborate service areas. With large families and large staffs and none of the desire for mingling with servants and children as in the 18th century, this planned cosy isolation was a nature reflection of the period.

Charleston's Victorian dwellings were built in a moderately indulgent manner typical of the influence of consistent conservatism in taste that has always prevailed here. The designs usually followed the "single" house plan and ornate carvings and contrasts of color were kept to a level of gentleness.

One of Charleston's more interesting Victorian dwellings is the Valk House at 125 Broad St., which has recently been restored to something close to its original appearance. It was constructed in 1886 by Charles Robert Valk, a prominent businessman.

Valk lived at 125 Broad from the time of its construction until his death in 1937. He had been born at West Compo, Conn., in 1848, but had come

to live in South Carolina, and at the age of 16, while a student at Porcher's School at Abbeville, had enlisted in the Confederate army with the rest of the school.

He took part in two fierce battles, at Honey Hill and Adams Run, both in South Carolina. During the war he served as a member of Company A of Goodwin's Regiment. At the time of his death he was a member of Camp Sumter, United Confederate Veterans.

After the Civil War, Valk went into business, becoming superintendent of a fertilizer

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concern. He later organized Valk and Murdock, which ran a large machine shop, iron foundry and shipbuilding plant. Much iron work about Charleston still bears the imprint of the firm.

Valk and Murdock was later reorganized as the Charleston Dry Dock and Machine Co. Valk was active in business until his late 70s, some ten years before his death. His firm was later reorganized again and named the Charleston Shipbuilding and Drydock Co.

Valk had begun the con-

struction of 125 Broad at the time the earthquake of 1886 struck. The workmen had put up only about ten feet of wall and these were knocked down. According to Valk's son, Courtney Valk of Charleston, who was born at 125 Broad, the house was then built to be earthquake proof with iron rods running from the chimneys down to the ground level.

Construction took approximately one year. Building costs were between \$5,000 and \$6,000 but the doors and interior woodwork, which was brought down from Boston, cost an additional \$1,500.

One of the more interesting features of the house is the pale yellow brick out of which it is made. The large blocks are known as Stoney Landing brick and have a high sand content.

Apparently only a small amount of these bricks were manufactured. One other Charleston dwelling, 25 East Battery, was built with these blocks but they eroded so quickly from the force of weather that it was necessary to stucco the house, according to Courtney Valk.

After the builder's death, 125 Broad was sold to the Richards family and more recently to Mr. and Mrs.

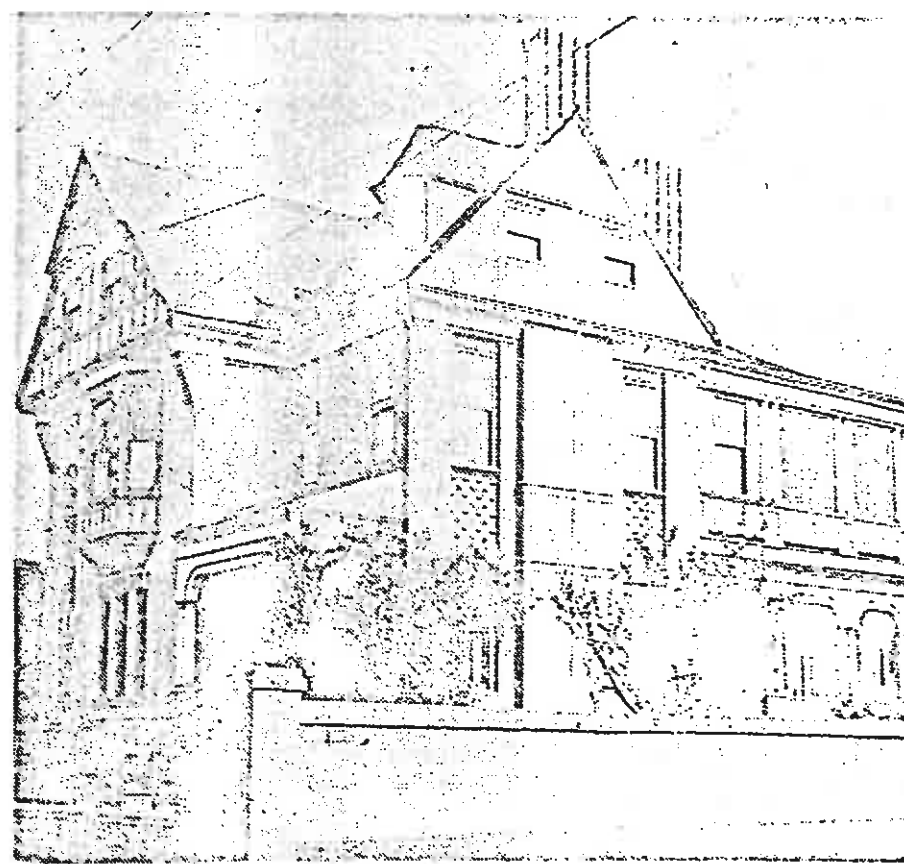
Martin C. Kennedy who have restored it close to its original self.

The trim on the exterior of the building has been painted in shades that blend well with the Stoney Landing brick. (The builder originally had the trim painted a deep red-brown known as Indian Red.)

The interior has been kept much the same as the builder intended, with doors, mantles and trim kept to the natural color of the wood. The mantles show the Victorian love of varied design and pieces of bric-a-brac. A mantle in the front parlor is composed of several different woods and has a dozen separate spaces for urns, figurines or other ornaments.

Mr. and Mrs. Kennedy found it necessary to cover the iron shingle roof with asbestos shingles. After some 80 years the iron shingles had become pitted.

Many other features of the Valk House — its spacious but snugly balanced rooms, a nicely placed servants staircase, a basement cistern from the days when the city's water supply was not the best, stained glass windows and ornate gas fixtures — all show the care and planning put into the construction of a good Victorian dwelling.



VALK DWELLING WAS BUILT IN 1886

House was constructed to withstand earthquakes. (Staff Photo by E