

THE OLD HIGH SCHOOL

Constructed 1840-42, Portico Constructed 1850, Rehabilitated 1984.

55 Society Street

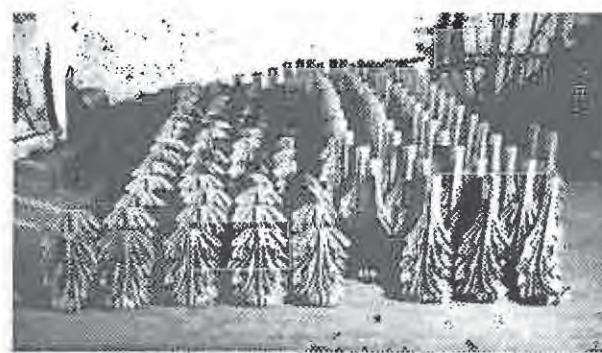
Edward Brickell White, architect

The High School of Charleston was founded in 1839, replacing an early preparatory academy associated with the College of Charleston, and responding to major inroads in public education in the city in the second quarter of the nineteenth century. The School Board approved the current plan by Edward Brickell White in 1840, after rejecting a more expensive scheme.

White designed the two story portico for the High School in 1850, as well as one for the College of Charleston's main building. He corresponded with Worcester, Massachusetts architect Elbridge Boyden concerning fabrication of terra cotta capitals and modillions for both projects. Boyden may have been the first architect to employ the use of terra cotta in his designs. On April 22, 1851, Edward B. White informed Charleston City Council of the arrival of the barque, *Isabella* from Boston containing the terra cotta elements, probably manufactured by Tolman, Luther & Company of Worcester. Although sizes were incorrect and certain elements broke in transit, the repairs were made by September and the column capitals were installed.

In 1881, the High School moved to the old Radcliffe-King Mansion at George and Meeting Streets and the building was leased through the 1930s to a series of African-American fraternal orders. In 1886, the column capitals were heavily damaged in the earthquake and were later taken down. Historic Charleston Foundation first acquired the structure in 1964 and sold it to a buyer who did not complete rehabilitation. In a succession of owners, much of the interior was lost excepting cast iron columns, some structural members and flooring, and a single Greek Revival mantel, and the building devolved back to the Foundation. It was not restored on the exterior until 1984, when Historic Charleston Foundation required the restoration of the capitals as a condition of sale and rehabilitation. The capitals are based on the Tolman catalogue of 1851, the surviving accounts in City Council minutes, and fragments of the capitals found in the yard of the building. The capital bases and all decoration, including fifty-two acanthus leaves, are cast in a fiberglass-reinforced, polymerized cement material from molds made by New York sculptor and conservator, Robert Pringle.

The wrought iron gates were probably installed in 1840 and correspond to similar work in the city at the time.



55 Society, photograph showing work on the capitals, HCF

55 Society, photograph, c. 1965, before restoration of the capitals, HCF