

HCF, ca 1949

Charles Elliott's House
43 Legare Street
Mrs. Henry Rutledge Buist

FRONT HALL

As one enters the hall of Charles Elliott's house, one is immediately struck by the individual way in which the owner has so originally combined the furniture of many lands and periods into a home well suited to formal living.

On the right as you enter is a pier table of the Empire period, with marble pedestals and brass inlay. This elaborate piece is as typical of its period of 1810 as the mahogany and gold mirror hanging over it is of an earlier one. This mirror is American, was probably made about 1780. The gold eagle, its chief ornament, is typical of American craftsmanship of that period and, to exemplify the tastes and theories of the owner as concerns the furnishings of a home, this mirror is hanging against a *modern family portrait* ~~Persian prayer rug~~. On the opposite wall is a rather ornate love seat of the Empire period, and hanging over it a modern family portrait. Thus in the entrance hall have been collected four very different pieces with as much as 100 years separating one from the other and many countries.

The interior woodwork and panelling is a good example of the original early Georgian contemporary with the building of the house, but shows many modifications from time to time. For instance, the mantelpieces all are of a later period than the simple panelling of the wall, but these mantels were probably changed as early as 1825 or 1830, which was common in Charleston, when the ^{late Adam style} ~~late Georgian style~~ became more popular.

(This is for your knowledge - not part of your spiel)

However, the urn on the pedestal in the broken pediment of the overmantel in the drawing room is a comparatively recent addition and may date from alterations by the present owner, or possibly as early as 1870 or 1880. This also applies to the little decorative rosettes placed here and there on the panelling and the strap work bands around the edge of the ceiling in the drawing room, although the center CARTOUCHE and the Greek Fret strapwork in some of the other rooms is probably contemporary with the change in the mantels.

(This may interest tourists)

All the windows undoubtedly had window seats below them originally and they were cut down to the floor and patched at the time the steam heat was installed in the house.

DRAWING ROOM

Next, one enters through large double doors the formal downstairs drawing room. In this home the living room or library is on the second floor, unlike some Charleston houses where the more formal room is usually on the second floor. The drawing room of Mrs. Buist's house is by far the most elaborate and handsomely furnished room. The walls, I think, demand our attention first, for here can be seen a remarkable collection of paintings and mirrors. On the south wall is a large 15th century Italian canvas of ~~Salome~~^{Judith} holding the head of ~~John the Baptist~~^{John the Baptist}. This picture is by Allori and is thought to have been painted by him as the second copy, the original being in the Pitti Palace in Florence.

Two other large Italian paintings are on the other wall on either side of the fireplace. These are attributed to the well-known Italian painter, Mazzaliniⁱⁿⁱ, and are copies of Raphael's "Transfiguration and Ascension" in the Vatican in Rome. Mazzaliniⁿⁱ was a pupil of Raphael, and art critics say that the hand of the master can be seen in these splendid copies.

Along the west wall are several other Italian paintings, all originals by unknown artists, which were purchased by the owner from an old castle in Italy. The four round cherubs on the east wall are also old copies of the Italian school. The originals, by Titian, are in the Sistine Chapel in Rome. These are also considered very excellent copies and are well over 100 years old.

To those particularly interested in American art, the very fine Sully on the east wall is called to their attention. This is of Mrs. Middleton Smith by her famous brother, Thomas Sully, the portrait painter who worked much in Boston and Charleston.

Next, let us consider the mirrors. Most of these are Chipendale. Those on the south wall and the west wall have been in the owner's family for several generations and came from Baltimore. The center pair of mirrors on the east wall are very early Victorian.

On the mantel shelf is an interesting group of Sevres. The blue urns on either end are old Sevres and came from the same place in Italy where several of the smaller paintings were purchased. In the center is a bust of Marie Antoinette. This is "soft Sevres" and is said to be a lost art. The pair of smaller urns are also Sevres.

The piano is a modern Steinway, but the harp beside it is about 175 years old. It is an old Charleston piece.

The table in the southeast corner is Boulle, or Buhl. (Tortoise shell laid over wood and overlaid with brass.) It belonged to Mr. Gabriel Manigault, who had an astoundingly large amount of this furniture and, in visiting various Charleston homes, it is interesting to spot it here and there. The lamp on this table is another fine piece of Sevres; its mate is in the Louvre in Paris. There is a lovely Capo da Monte box on this table.

Probably the oldest and most interesting chair in the room is the oval-shaped center chair. It is Sheraton of about 1800, showing the Adam influence. The other three chairs of the same type are also of the Sheraton style. The elaborately carved love seat, with its matching chair, are late 19th century Chippendale. They came from Lexington, England.

In this room also are four Hepplewhite-style shield-back chairs. The small, low chair in front of the marble statuette with its Gothic decorations is an old cathedral chair. The papier mache chair is English or French, probably between 1772 and 1845, when process was first patented in England for making furniture, etc.

The sofa in the southwest corner has an interesting history. In its design it is typical of the late Empire style. It was used in the State House in Columbia by the Governor of South Carolina. It must have been made locally because of the remarkable decoration on the arms which are alligators.

The tea table in front of it, with its little gallery, is an interesting piece. Tea tables were made in this manner to protect the service. The bird cage attachment underneath is an arrangement whereby the top may be revolved and tilted. This is of the Chippendale school. The orange box decorated with two white pheasants is Bavarian china.

Other interesting ornaments include the dancing lady on the piano which is Dresden china; the most unusual white openwork

DINING ROOM

The dining room too exemplifies the spirit of the house. The owner is from Baltimore and the tables and chairs, the tall wine cabinet in the southeast corner of the room, and the corner cupboard in the southwest corner with the little eagle on top, are Baltimore pieces of about the 1830's, when the influence of the French Empire had made itself felt in American furniture design. In Baltimore at this time there were working many very able and distinguished cabinetmakers. Though we do not know from whose shop these pieces came, it is most interesting to find them here in Charleston.

Across from the door as one enters, on the west wall, is a Sheraton china cabinet of unusual design. It was purchased in England and in it is a splendid collection of china which includes Lowestoft, Rookingham, Crown Derby, and some French pieces. Some of this is family china, and other pieces have been collected by the owner.

The tea table in this corner of the room is Hepplewhite in design. On it is a very handsome silver opergue which is English. The table on the east wall, to the left of the door as you enter, is also of the Hepplewhite style. On it is the most fascinating liqueur set. The top is made of a solid piece of crystal which opens back disclosing the set of bottles and glasses. This is one of the charming imaginative conceptions of the French Empire period.

To the right of the door as you enter is an old English sideboard. This is a rather unusual design of the Regency period, probably dating from about 1820. Over it hangs one of the Gilbert Stuart engravings of George Washington. It is engraved on silk and it is said that only four of these were made. The portrait over the mantel is the grandfather of the owner.

HALL

As one goes up the steps, notice the old Sheffield platter on the newel post. This was probably part of an altar set. The clock on the landing is called a grandmother, because of its smaller size and the simplicity of its bonnet. It is English.

Notice the prayer rug hanging on this wall. It is silk. The one in the upstairs hall is thought to have been made in Tabriz where the very finest Persian carpets were woven.

In the upstairs hall notice the particularly fine Sheraton chest-on-chest. This is an old Charleston piece, the brass handles on the sides are original. It is interesting here to notice that, as styles in furniture design changed, people often modified their bureaus and tables by substituting for the original handles those that happened to be the last word of their day.

LIVING ROOM

The upstairs living room is the family room and is a happy combination of interesting old pieces and comfortable new ones. Perhaps the most interesting piece is the steward's desk in the southwest corner. This came from England and was used by the steward on a large estate. He kept his complicated accounts while standing up.

Between the steward's desk and the sofa is an old Swedish music box. The mirror over the sofa is a Bristol mirror, an old American piece made in Bristol, Connecticut, about 1830. The sofa is an example of the type of work done by Duncan Phyfe.

In the northeast corner, the breakfront is Sheraton in design and is English. The love seat near it was also bought in England. It is of Hepplewhite style. The library table in the center of the room is most unusual. You will notice that it has drawers on either side and is decorated with a rather unusual inlay. It has somewhat the feeling of Chippendale.

The bookcase on the west wall and the desk secretary on the south wall are English, of about 1840. The rug is an old Kerminshaw.

The bust of John C. Calhoun is by Valentine. The engraving on the west wall of a man on a horse is particularly interesting in this house. It is of President Franklin Pierce, who was a grand-uncle of the owner.

The original engraving over the mantel is by Dore. It came from England in 1860. It is one of six.

The two engravings in the southwest corner of the room are of John and Henry Laurens. John was a signer of the Declaration of Independence. The desk underneath is a Governor Winthrop type. In front of it is a nice old ladder-back Chippendale-style chair.

The round clock on the east wall is tole of about 1740 and still keeps perfect time. It has a huge key.

The dogs and statue of Robin Hood are old Staffordshire. The pair of cockers is particularly unusual.

BEDROOM

The bedroom is as elaborately furnished as the rest of the house. Here again are seen several Baltimore pieces of the 1830's. The bed, with its ornately carved cherry posts and mahogany back, is from Baltimore, as is the wardrobe to the right of the door as you enter. In front of the bed is a Grecian sofa of about 1795, in the ^{is} Directory style. It is a particularly fine piece with its inlaid brass decoration.

The chairs in this room are interesting later Sheraton pieces with their brass inlay. The desk on the south wall is a Governor Winthrop. The corner cupboards are reproductions.

On the mantel are some very fine Victorian vases. They were bought in England and were made of black onyx with cloisonné let-in. The clock and vases are a set.

Just to the left of the door as you come in is a fascinating little sampler. It was made by the great-grandmother of the owner some 125 years ago. The child was only eight. The sampler shows St. Patrick's cathedral in Baltimore, which has since burned.

Beyond the bedroom is a charming dressing room. The chest and wardrobe are Santa Domingo mahogany, a part of an old bedroom set ~~from Baltimore~~. Notice the pair of Lowestoft vases on the mantel.