

HISTORIC AMERICAN BUILDINGS SURVEY

WILLIAM ENSTON HOME -- MEMORIAL HALL

HABS NO. SC-686-C

Location: 900 King St., Charleston, Charleston County, South Carolina. Located at the center of the property, in a circle formed by the crossing of Canterbury and Colsterworth avenues, this building faces southwest toward King Street.

Present Owner: The Board of Trustees of the William Enston Home.

Present Occupants: The staff and residents of the William Enston Home.

Present Use: Common area and library downstairs; workshop upstairs.

Significance: The William Enston Home is an early example of benevolent, philanthropic housing for the elderly. Funded by a bequest of 1859, the complex was built between 1884 and 1888, with additional structures put up in 1893, 1927, and 1933. With its neat rows of detached, double cottages, set amid spacious, landscaped grounds, the Home provides an unusual and well-preserved example of nineteenth-century picturesque, suburban planning concepts adapted to this type of institutional function. On the regional level, few buildings in the Romanesque Revival style were built in this part of South Carolina; the Enston Home provides one of the pre-eminent local examples.

By 1882 it had been decided to reserve ground at the center of the site for a memorial to Home founder William Enston. The earliest plans called simply for a statue, but in 1888 the city of Charleston funded construction of the two-story Memorial Hall. Featured here is a bronze bust of Enston by noted sculptor Edward Valentine.

PART I. HISTORICAL INFORMATION

A. Physical History:

1. Date of Erection: 1888; dedicated February 22, 1889, as described in the *Proceedings on the Occasion of the Dedication of Memorial Hall*.
2. Architect: Not known. Though the materials and stylistic elements of Memorial Hall relate closely to those used for the cottages, it is not entirely certain that Howe was its designer. While the *Yearbooks* name Howe as designer of the cottages and list his fee under the Home's expenditures, no such connection is made there between him and Memorial Hall. Moreover, while the cottages exhibit

WILLIAM ENSTON HOME --
MEMORIAL HALL
HABS No. SC-686-C (Page 2)

relative technical sophistication -- e.g., their plumbing and ventilation systems -- Memorial Hall employs no such refinements.

A recently compiled "Summary of Materials Available in the City of Charleston Archives" makes note of a seven-page document, dated July 1888, supposedly written by Howe, containing "specifications for work on Memorial Hall, includ(ing) details for cement, mortar, lime mortar, brick, carpenter's work, plasterer, painter, trimmer and plumber." Unfortunately, City of Charleston archivists had no information regarding the whereabouts of this document or the identity of the summary's compiler.

It may be that the building was designed by its builder, local contractor Colin McK. Grant. In the 1888 *Charleston City Directory* Grant advertised that he would "furnish plans and specifications for the construction of new buildings," and "cheerfully" provide estimates.

3. Original and Subsequent Uses: Originally, a community room, superintendent's office, and library downstairs, with non-denominational chapel upstairs; currently, community room downstairs, with workshop and storage upstairs.
4. Builder: Colin McKenzie Grant. The *Proceedings* cite Grant as having "erected" the Memorial Hall. Grant worked as a contractor in Charleston as early as the 1880s.

Among Grant's many jobs around Charleston were the remodeling of the County Courthouse (1883), the addition to the Second Presbyterian Fellowship House (1887), and the rebuilding of the East Battery (which the 1894 *Yearbook* called "a brilliant achievement of the year"). Grant submitted a bid for the Enston Home cottages but was rejected.

Grant owned property along Meeting Street, south and east of the Enston Home. He died in 1921, and in his will, he left money for the founding of the Colin McK. Grant Home for Aged Presbyterians (now operated as transitional housing by the Charleston Housing Authority). The six four-bedroom cottages date from between 1923 and 1927, and are located at the southwest corner of Meeting and Huger streets, one block from the Enston Home. Though limited to white Presbyterians over forty (and expressly barring Roman Catholics from residence or employment), Grant's Home, with its individual, four-unit brick cottages, seems drawn from Enston's example.

5. Original Plans and Construction: An early steel-engraved image of Memorial Hall appears in the 1889 *Proceedings* (7). The appendix to this publication describes a handsome Memorial Hall of great utility, which will be most acceptable to the residents of the village, as a suitable place when so desired, for religious services, lectures, and as a daily reading

WILLIAM ENSTON HOME --
MEMORIAL HALL
HABS No. SC-686-C (Page 3)

room and library.

It is a beautiful apartment with handsome stained glass windows and neatly furnished. It is situated in the centre of the ground, facing west. It is two stories high, with tower and belfry, having a front of thirty feet, and a depth of forty feet. The entrance is in a spacious vestibule, on the left is a commodious office for the superintendent, and on the right, the staircase leading upstairs, about which nothing favorable can possibly be said.

The second story is in a single apartment, which presents a very attractive appearance; the ceiling, walls and gable roof are in native hard woods, neatly dressed and polished. It is lighted with ten stained glass windows of great beauty, and altogether, is a beautiful room.

At the east end of the hall stands an imposing bronze bust (of William Enston) mounted on a polished Carolina granite pedestal.

Another early description of the building appears in the *Pine Forest Echo*, July 15, 1892. Mentioning many of the same features as the *Proceedings* (including the "very ugly staircase"), this article highlights the open rafter ceiling of the second-floor apartment, the fine view from the tower, the painted portraits of Mr. and Mrs. Enston, and "engraved views of Canterbury Cathedral, etc., presented by Wm. Enston Butler, Esq."

6. Alterations and Additions: The interior has been subject to several alterations. Reports by Superintendent A.C. Grooms record that in 1965 the area beneath the stairs (between the front porch and the second floor) was walled off to create a storage closet. Another closet, measuring 3'-6" x 6' x 7', with a locking door and sheetrock walls, was built into the northeast corner of the ground floor's main room. At that floor's northwest corner, in the area originally occupied by the superintendent's office, stands a sheetrock wall, running east to west and dividing the space in two. The northern half of this space contains a sink and toilet. At some point, probably during the 1960s, the entire ground floor main room was walled with sheetrock.

A bronze bust of Enston, by Paris-trained Richmond sculptor Edward Valentine, and inscribed granite pedestal were originally located on the east wall of the second-floor apartment. In 1968 these were moved to their present location outside on the porch; E. J. McCarthy and Sons carried out this job at a cost of \$300. The second floor, formerly used as a chapel by the residents, now houses a workshop and storage area.

In 1987 two stained-glass windows were stolen from the north and south sides of the building (see the *News and Courier*, January 22, 1987, 2-B). They have not

WILLIAM ENSTON HOME --
MEMORIAL HALL
HABS No. SC-686-C (Page 4)

been replaced.

While red mortar is used in the rest of the building, the tower is held together with white mortar. This suggests that repairs may have been done to the tower. No documentation to this effect has been found.

PART II. ARCHITECTURAL INFORMATION

A. General Statement:

1. Architectural Character: Standing at the center of the Home site, Memorial Hall was built to resemble an English parish church. Its presence contributes significantly to the village or campus-like appearance of the site, and provides it with a focal point.

The building is made of red brick, with concrete trim and stained-glass windows on the second floor. Overall, it is a high, rectangular mass with gable roof and a tall, thin, peaked-roof bell tower -- the tallest structure at the Home. The round-arched windows and entry link the structure stylistically to the cottages and the then-fashionable Romanesque Revival. Its brickwork, though less elaborate than that found on the cottages, still provides for a fairly rich surface texture.

2. Condition of Fabric: With the exception of the bell tower, the building appears to be in fairly good condition. The interior of the second floor, however, is undergoing rather hard use as a work and storage area. In 1989 Hurricane Hugo did extensive damage to the site, and the bell tower remains in poor condition; filled with pigeons and rotting wood and metal work, it presents a serious health and safety risk.

B. Description of Exterior:

1. Overall Dimensions: 32' x 41'. The rectangular, two-story building, with tower in the southwest corner, is about 40' high at the gable peak and 70' at the peak of the tower. The tower, measuring 13' x 13', projects 2' from wall of the main building.
2. Foundations: Red brick slab.
3. Walls: Common-bond (5:1) red brick with red mortar, 15" thick. (White mortar was used in the tower above the second row of belt coursing.) There are rows of belt coursing at the level of the first floor, and at the bottoms of the first- and second-floor windows. A band of pressed concrete floral ornament is located near the west-end gable peak. Atop this peak is a concrete Celtic cross finial.

WILLIAM ENSTON HOME --
MEMORIAL HALL
HABS No. SC-686-C (Page 5)

A granite plaque near the north corner of the west facade reads: "Memorial Hall, erected by the City Council of Charleston, S. C. in honor of William Enston, 1888."

4. Structural Systems, Framing: Load-bearing brick walls. The second floor is supported by two iron I-beams (possibly not original) running east to west along the ceiling of the first floor. These beams are in turn supported by two cast-iron Corinthian columns in the main room of the first floor.

The building is reinforced along the north and south interior walls by three pairs of brick piers. These support the roof framing on the second floor. The roof is framed in a "medieval" manner with exposed, carved wood hammer beams, collars, pendants, braces, and rafters.

5. Porch, Enston Bust and Pedestal: Four slate steps with rounded ends lead up to the porch, passing beneath a keyhole-shaped concrete arch. A retractable iron gate is fitted to either side of the arched entry. To the north side of the porch a door leads into the ground floor (the room formerly occupied by the superintendent's office); to the south is the staircase leading to the second floor.

At the center of the porch's east wall is the granite pedestal and Enston bust noted above. The inscription on the pedestal reads as follows:

The City of Charleston in lasting gratitude for his munificent benefaction and his noble example to his fellow citizens erects this memorial to William Enston founder of the William Enston Home, "To Make Old Age Comfortable." Dedicated Feb'y 22, 1889. Born at Canterbury England, May 5, 1808. Died at Charleston, S. C., March 23, 1860.

6. Chimney: One exterior brick chimney with corbelled cap near the center of the north side.

7. Openings:

- a. Doorways and Doors: The wood, four-panel front door with white porcelain knob is located along the north wall of the front porch. Two additional doors, both beneath round concrete arches, are located on the building's east side. That in the northeast corner is a wood four-panel door with brass handle and a screen door with a metal grill. To the south of this is a larger six-panel wood double door, with double screen door.
- b. Windows: While a variety of windows is used here, the predominant type is paired, tall, narrow, round-arched windows with circular lights above, set beneath concrete arches. Round windows with brick surrounds are found on the "basement" level of the north and south sides. In the tower are

WILLIAM ENSTON HOME --
MEMORIAL HALL
HABS No. SC-686-C (Page 6)

groups of narrow rectangular windows, with flat concrete lintels -- arranged to indicate the ascent of the stairway -- and round windows with concrete surrounds.

Windows in the ground-floor main room are made of old (probably original) clear glass. Those on the second floor are stained, leaded glass, tinted pink, green, blue, yellow, and red, and arranged in geometric patterns. As noted above, two of these were stolen in 1987 and have not been replaced.

8. Roof:

- a. Shape, Covering: Gable roof with concrete raking ending in small, pedimented forms along the east and west gable ends. There are metal gutters and drain pipes along the north and south sides. The roof of the main building is covered with composition shingles. The tower is still covered with the original painted metal shingles.
- b. Cornice, Eaves: Eaves are shallow. There are corbelled brick cornices along the north, south, and east sides. The line of the north- and south-side cornices continues around the east side, where it forms a blind, round arch over the second-story windows.
- c. Tower: The tower is located in the southwest corner of the building. It is currently in very bad repair. Many of the shingles are missing, as is most of the bracketed metal cornice between the lower portion of the tower and the belvedere. The wood framing beneath this cornice is exposed. The open, arcaded belvedere -- with four arches per side -- is faced with metal, and features a corbelled metal cornice with a band of pressed wave molding. It is capped by a peaked roof with metal shingles and a directional weathervane.

C. Description of Interior:

1. Floor Plans: From the ground-floor porch one enters a vestibule that branches off into a water closet and the rectangular main room -- sunk two steps below the level of the vestibule. The porch also provides direct access to the tower/stairwell. The second floor consists of a single, L-shaped room, with the tower filling the southwest corner.
2. Stairways: A wood stairway and balustrade of heavy, turned posts and thin, turned, vertical balusters are located in the southwest corner of the building, in the tower. There are twenty steps and two landings between the first and second floors. The stairway continues up to the belvedere, but was not surveyed beyond the second floor due to health and safety concerns. As noted above in section A.5., contemporary observers found the staircase ugly.

WILLIAM ENSTON HOME --
MEMORIAL HALL
HABS No. SC-686-C (Page 7)

3. **Flooring:** Flooring on the porch consists of black, white, and red clay tiles arranged in a geometric pattern. The ground-floor interior is covered with square, black and red slate tiles in a checkerboard pattern. Linoleum flooring is found in the vestibule and toilet. The second story is floored with 3" stained boards running east to west.
4. **Wall and Ceiling Finish:** In the main room of the ground floor the walls are of sheetrock painted off-white, with 3"-high baseboard moldings. The ceiling is textured plaster painted to match the walls. The walls and ceilings of the vestibule and toilet room, however, are covered with 2"- and 3"-wide vertical boards painted white. Ceiling moldings and 12"-high baseboards finish these last rooms, and were probably the type of wall surface originally found in the main room.

The second floor is paneled with 2"-wide vertical, tongue and groove, native oak and pine boards, stained dark, with 12"-high baseboards and stained vertical and horizontal board wainscoting rising about 5' above the floor. The open, "cathedral" ceiling exposes the medieval-type roof framing, with carved oak hammer beams, collars, pendants, braces, and rafters, all stained dark.

The interior walls of the porch and tower are cement plaster over brick, incised to look like stone blocks.

5. **Openings:** Interior doors, like those opening to the exterior, are wood, four-panel type. Windows (described above, section B.7.b.) have wood sills on their interiors.
6. **Decorative Features and Trim:** The most notable features of the interior are the exposed, medieval-type roof framing, stained-glass windows, and woodwork of the second floor (all described above in sections B.4, B.7.b., and C.4).
7. **Hardware:** Light switch and socket covers are plastic. Door handles are white porcelain on the ground floor, plain brass upstairs.
8. **Mechanical Equipment:**
 - a. **Heating, Ventilation:** Heat is provided on the ground floor by a gas unit of fairly recent vintage. Windows in the tower and on the ground floor are fixed; those on the second floor pivot open from the center to provide ventilation.
 - b. **Lighting:** The building is electrically lit. Originally, light was probably supplied by oil lamps.
 - c. **Plumbing:** A toilet and sink are located in the northwest corner of the ground floor.

WILLIAM ENSTON HOME --
MEMORIAL HALL
HABS No. SC-686-C (Page 8)

9. Furniture Portraits, Records: Several pieces of furniture here appear to be original. These include a bookcase with glass double doors, coat rack, podium, various chairs and tables, an upright piano, and a wood trunk with the words "TRUSTEES OF THE WILLIAM ENSTON HOME, 1882" carved into its top. This trunk, along with two other wood boxes and four cardboard boxes, were found upstairs. Inside they contain records and papers dating between the early 1880s and the 1980s relating to the establishment and operation of the Home. These records are disorganized and many are in an advanced state of decay.

On the upstairs walls are framed photographic prints of medieval English cathedral interiors and exteriors. These were mentioned by the *Pine Forest Echo*, July 15, 1892, as a gift of William Enston Butler. Downstairs are oval, gilt-framed oil portraits of Hannah and William Enston (the latter copied in October 1939 by John Robinson Fleming from an original by John Stolle), and a rectangular, gilt-framed oil portrait of Mayor William Ashmead Courtenay (painted by Stolle in 1905). One of the boxes just mentioned holds a bound volume containing several letters related to the Courtenay portrait and as well as a copy of the artist's contract.

In one of the boxes found in Memorial Hall, alongside records dating from the early 1880s, were advertisements for the following products and services which, whether purchased for the Home or not, were clearly under consideration:

- The Davey Safety Engine, Chicago, IL (a pump for domestic water supply).
- The Springfield Gas Machine, Springfield, MA (for domestic interior lighting).
- The Wiley Patent Safety Oil Cabinet, Charleston, SC (for holding kerosene, benzene, naphtha, spirits, or other kinds of burning or lubricating oils).
- The North American Mining Co., New York, NY (for digging deep water wells).
- Gordon and Maxwell, Hamilton, OH (for water work and sewage pumping machinery).

PART III. SOURCES OF INFORMATION

See overview (HABS No. SC-686):

PART IV. PROJECT INFORMATION

Documentation of the William Enston Home was undertaken during the summer of 1993 by the Washington Office of the Historic American Buildings Survey (HABS) of the National Park Service. The principals involved were Robert J. Kapsch, HABS/HAER Division Chief, and Paul D. Dolinsky, Chief of HABS. The project was sponsored by the Historic Charleston Foundation, Lawrence Walker, Executive Director, and Jonathan H. Poston, Director of Preservation Programs. Additional support was provided by the Charleston Housing Authority, Don Cameron, Director, and the Enston Home Board of Trustees, Park Smith, Chairman. The measured