

NUMBER FORTY-FOUR CHARLOTTE STREET
The William Henry Houston House
c. 1834
Historic Charleston Foundation's
Most Recent Renovation

Number Forty-Four Charlotte Street was built in 1834 by William Henry Houston on one of the handsomer streets in a neighborhood that had begun to develop about a quarter of a century earlier and now enjoyed great prestige.

Already the Second Presbyterian Church had been built on the corner of Charlotte and Meeting Streets and looking across the green was Joseph Manigault's handsome home. Two doors east, number 32 Charlotte was an outstandingly fine example of later Adam architecture, the personification of the best in the Charleston "single house." Robert Martin had recently completed his fine brick dwelling at 16 Charlotte Street and a few years later Joseph Aiken was to build 20 Charlotte Street, with its high columned portico. In 1859, F. D. Lee designed the Gothic Revival Church of St. Luke's, now the Fourth Baptist Church, immediately to the east. Just two blocks to the north was Governor William Aiken's great mansion on the corner of Elizabeth and Judith Streets, built 20 years earlier and considered one of the city's more impressive residences. In fact, Mazyck Borough and Wragg Borough, through which Charlotte Street runs, were important suburban developments in the expanding city and Charlotte Street, which ran the length of a high ridge, with creeks on either side, was the area's finest street.

Mr. Houston built his house for maximum effect over a high basement which was not necessary in one of the highest spots in the city. He faced his home to the street, which emphasized its importance and made the most of the four principal rooms, two to each floor, and four smaller rooms which constituted the main house. He then enhanced this effect of grandeur with double tiered piazzas, and added a significant wrought iron fence to complete his domain.

The house was gently cared for for many years, but recently was deteriorating rapidly and multiple tenements became the order of the day. Then, probably through carelessness on the part of its occupants, there were two destructive fires - until it appeared that the house was doomed.

Historic Charleston Foundation, though concentrating its efforts in the Ansonborough area, is ever mindful of other areas and Charlotte Street is still among the city's handsomer and more important thoroughfares. It is one of our few streets with a lovely vista at either end - to the east one sees the Cooper River

quite plainly and, to the west, the eastern wing of the Old Citadel with its handsome Vanbrough facade designed by E.B. White about 1850. There are 14 buildings on Charlotte Street listed in "This is Charleston": - Buildings Valuable to the City are: Nos. 16 and 20, The Second Presbyterian Church and the Fourth Baptist Church; Valuable are: No. 32; Notable are: the Gas Works at the east end of the street, Nos. 29, 33, 36, 40, 43 and 44; Worthy of Mention are: Nos. 2 and 4.

It was because of these fine older buildings - but also because of important new construction in the area - the Civic Auditorium and the Federal Building, also the County Bond Issue which insures the future of the Old Citadel - that the Foundation determined, if possible, to salvage this building and thus add to the stability of a valuable area. An anonymous friend of the Foundation, a Charleston business man interested in and concerned about the center city, contributed the necessary funds to make the purchase possible. Individual neighbors used their influence to assist with the details of the purchase - and in 1966 - the house was bought.

It has now been restored in four comfortable apartments, as you will see - another example of Adaptive Use - and should serve not only as encouragement and incentive to the neighborhood but as a model for similar work elsewhere. There is one apartment in the basement; one on the principal first floor of the main building; one on the entire second floor; and a small two-story house in the kitchen wing. The attic rooms were not restored - the extent of the fire damage is evident here. It was necessary to replace the entire roof and rafters. Each apartment has two bedrooms, is air conditioned, has a modern sizeable kitchen, a fine bath, open fires and its own piazza. They will rent for \$135 a month unfurnished, and the larger apartment on the second floor, for \$150 a month. The original house was somewhat smaller than the present building. Somewhere along in its history an addition was added in which the present kitchens and the back bedrooms on the two main floors are located.

The general contractor for this restoration is H.A. DeCosta Company. The consultant on color, Mrs. R.N.S. Whitelaw of the Foundation Staff.

The subcontractors are:

Heating and Airconditioning - Thunder Corporation

Plumbing - Thunder Corporation

Electrical Work - Heinsohn Electric Service

Painting - L.W. Stone

The landscaping, drastically curtailed by a nonexistent budget, is still in process. The work is being done by Mr. M.W. Hills of Three Oaks Landscape Nursery. The front garden is designed for an effect of style, but with minimum maintenance. The beds, unplanted, are covered with pinebark; the paths with pebbles. Of necessity, apartments demand a larger area for parking and turning so much of the very large lot is surfaced with fine granite screenings which will become quite hard and very white. In the future we look forward to adding additional shrubbery, particularly along the fence, and hedges to divide parking areas from the garden area to give a pleasing pattern to the property.

F. R. E. [Frances R. Edmunds]

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