

House Reflects Individual Taste

By ROBERT P. STOCKTON

The house at 109 Smith St. is one of those vernacular structures which baffle the attempts of students of architectural history to place them into precise frames of period and style.

Such structures follow no apparent architectural "rules," but reflect the use of very individual and unschooled taste and the influence of expediency.

The house at 109 Smith St. appears to have been built for, or rather, put together for, Mrs. Julia Ann Rutledge Keitt, a black school teacher, sometime between 1880 and 1888.

The site of the house was historically part of the mill pond of Gov. Thomas Bennett, which was surveyed and laid off into lots in 1855.

It was not until 1879, however, that the lots were sold at auction, by which time they were part of the estate of George A. Trenholm.

Wilmot G. DeSaussure, as trustee of Mrs. Mary Riker, purchased two lots at the auction, paying \$31 for lot No. 61 and \$28 for lot No. 62.

On Aug. 9, 1880, DeSaussure sold lot No. 62, described as a "lot ... of land covered with water," for \$120 to Julia Ann Rutledge.

Miss Rutledge, subsequently Mrs. Keitt, had the present house erected on the lot by 1888, as it is depicted on the Sanborn Insurance Map of that year as a two-story frame house with piazzas and a one-story rear wing.

Mrs. Keitt was, according to city death records, a native of Charleston. Her husband was Wade H. Keitt, listed in city directories as a porter, a "canvasser" and a school teacher, at various times.

The Keitts are listed as residing at 109 Smith St. beginning in 1891. Before that, a black woman named Jennie Starrs resided at the address.

Mrs. Keitt died at the residence on July 10, 1895, at the age of 40, and was buried in Ephrat Cemetery.

Her will, dated the day before her death, directed her executor to "sell my real Estate, Consisting of Two houses and lot ... on the West side of

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Smith street ... known by the number 109." Proceeds of the sale were to go to her sister, Mrs. F.R. Corbett.

The "two houses" mentioned in the will included the main house and a one-story wooden house which stood in the rear yard until 1976, when it was demolished.

The smaller house was designated a dwelling on the 1902 Sanborn insurance map but, according to tradition, it was used as a schoolhouse.

Edward A. Lawrence, executor of Mrs. Keitt's will, sold the property to William M. Jacobs in September 1895, for \$800. Jacobs sold it in 1903 to Kate Simons, who sold it in 1911 to Charles F. Pequette.

Pequette sold it in 1912 to Shaffer D. Bradley, who died in 1933, bequeathing it to his daughters, Corinne Pearson Watson and Mabel Scott.

Mrs. Watson died in 1978, leaving as heirs her sister and her husband, Theodore A. Watson. They sold the property in 1979 to L.R. Cannon and John F. Limehouse.

Cannon and Limehouse sold the property in the same year to the present owner, W. Benjamin Hutto, who restored the house as his residence.

The house at 109 Smith appears at first glance as a typical 19th-century Charleston single house, one room wide, with piazzas on the south side and a gable roof.

Unusual features, however, are soon apparent. The main part of the building appears to have been two structures, each one room deep, put together on a common foundation.

There is evidence, both on the interior and exterior, that two structures were joined together, or that perhaps the back structure was an addition to the front. The sills, however, on which the two portions are

erected are continuous from front to back.

The marriage of structures resulted in a house two rooms deep, with no central hallway and with a single interior chimney serving fireplaces in the front and back rooms on both floors.

In the absence of a hallway, the staircase was placed in the rear room. The L-shaped stair rises to a landing with doors opening to the two upstairs rooms.

The stair has simple square newels and square balusters. The upper part of the stairwell is faced with flush, beaded boards about four inches wide, laid horizontally.

The same type of flush, beaded board is found on the south exterior wall of the house which is sheltered by the piazzas.

Unusual features include two doors with three-over-three panels; mantels which follow no particular style and have odd pieces of molding added; very narrow door and window surrounds and baseboards; and a small built-in bookcase with a hand-carved sunburst design on top.

The house also has two batten doors, one of which, located on the second-level piazza, is false, having no opening on the inside. The batten door and a false window on the same level were covered over with sheetrock on the inside, but remain visible on the exterior.

The house had a one-story rear wing by 1888, when it appeared on the Sanborn map. Subsequently a second story was added and a bath

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(Staff Photo by Tom Spain)

109 Smith St., c. 1880-1888

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and kitchen were added to the rear portion of the piazza.

Also at some point, the fireplace in the original upstairs rear room was blocked off and the extended over part of the piazza.

The original portion of the house is two bays wide, with rather small windows on both levels. The piazza side of the house was apparently originally five bays deep, with alternating doors and windows.

The piazzas have plain square posts and balusters. The cornice, with returns, is repeated in the front gable. The interior chimney has a corbelled cap and rain hoods. Floors on both levels are pine, of random width.