

# The Edwin L. Kerrison House

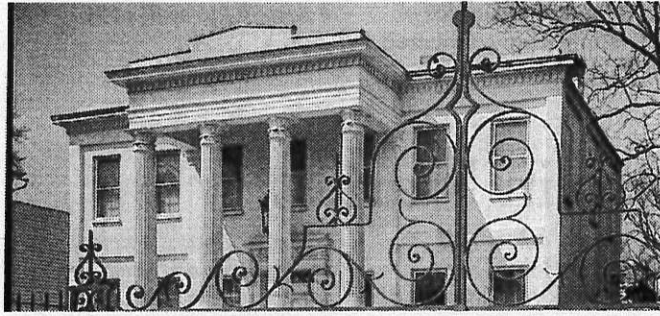


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*The Edwin L. Kerrison house.*

**By George Woolston**

Located at 138 Wentworth St., the two-story stucco-brick home with its brooding Tower of Wind columns backing the elegant garden and driveway secured by a gate, crafted by none other than Philip Simons, the Edwin L. Kerrison House looks as if it should be perched on the banks of East Egg rather than nestled in the heart of Harleston Village. Indeed, it is quite unique in comparison to the flavor of other local structures.

Edwin L. Kerrison was a local dry goods merchant who started off small. Then, around 1830, he turned his dry goods business into a department store at the corner of King and Market Streets, where the Riviera Theatre currently stands. The original structure was built in 1830 and in 1838 was destroyed in the great fire. Kerrison rebuilt his department store where it stood. In 1852, the building was sold and remodeled into a theatre. Kerrison's store moved further up King and its bottom floor is now the home of Anthropologie.

Back to the house: After the fire, Kerrison decided to build his home on Wentworth Street.

Completed in 1840, the home was designed by famous Rhode Island Architect Robert Warren, who was related to Nathaniel Russell and spent his winters and South Carolina.

The house was built in Greek Revival style with Tower of Wind portico columns and a row of heavy dentils under the roof, a common characteristic of Warren's work in Rhode Island. It also features a front door copied from Minard LeFevre's book on Greek Revival architecture. The house was one of the first to have running water in Charleston, with the water pumped from the cistern to the rooms in the house. Located at the rear of the property is the unique octagonal bathhouse, which was used as a guest house. In 1842, the house was listed for rent advertising it as recently built with running water and a "handsomely laid out garden."

The house was used as the headquarters for the Protestant Episcopal Diocese of South Carolina from 1947 to 1970. In 1970, the house became privately owned. Until recently, the Villa de la Fontaine Bed and Breakfast was also located on the property. The sign still hangs at the front of the property.

Charleston Mercury, 11/29/2012

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## Mansion Boasts Neo-Classic Design

By LISA DENNIS  
Post-Courier Reporter

The white mansion at 138 Wentworth St. dates to 1839 and remains one of the most stately homes in the historic district.

The neo-classic design of the house has been attributed to Russell Warren of Rhode Island. In her book, "Architects of Charleston," Beatrice St. Julien Ravenel writes: "One Charleston building may possibly be a product of his Classical Revival period. This is the brick ... house (at 138 Wentworth).

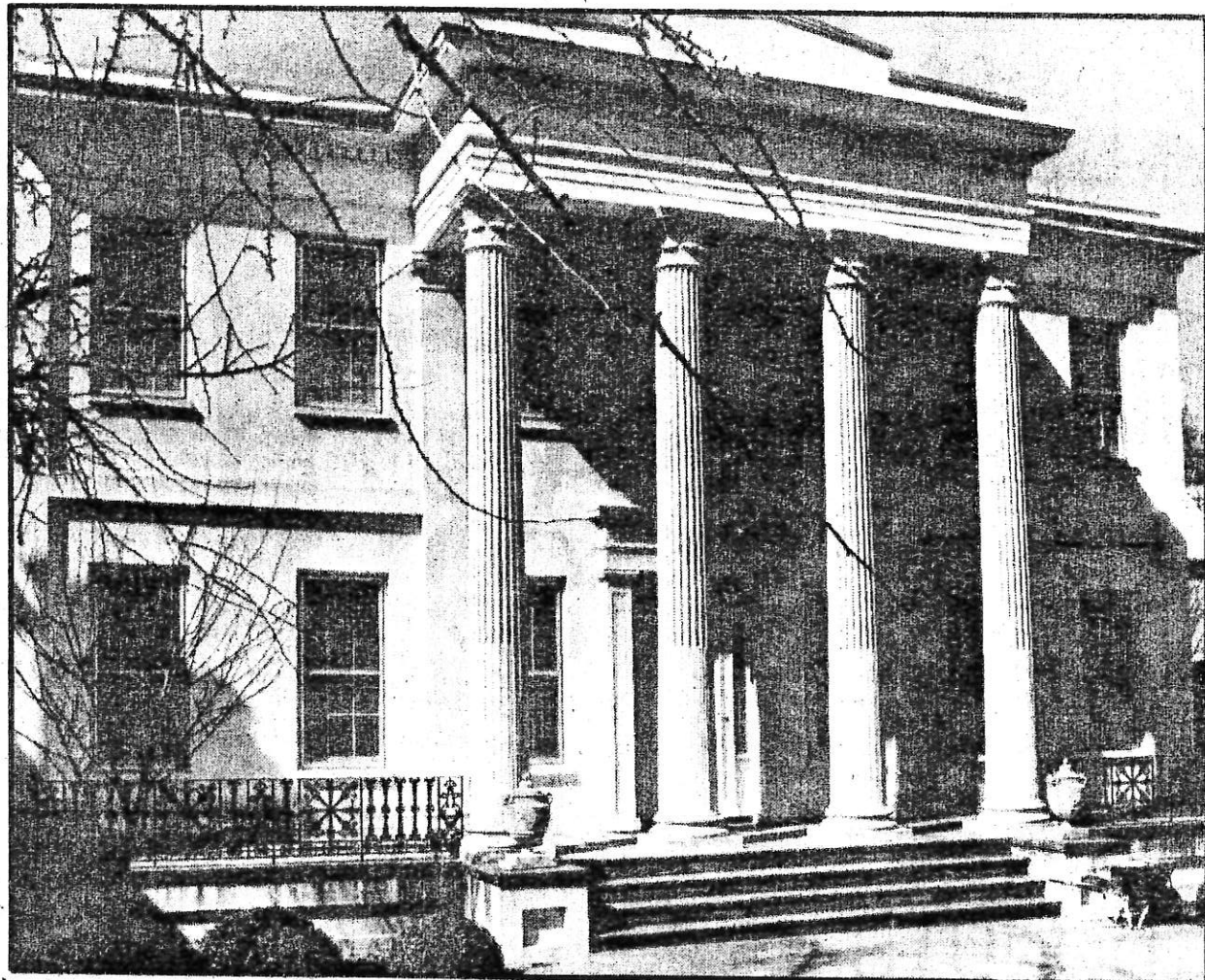
## Do You Know Your Charleston?

"In its Temple of the Winds type of columns (which here somehow have a faint Egyptian feeling with the foliage seeming as much lotus as acanthus), in the heavy row of dentils under the roof, and in the shape, size and disposition of the panes in the second story windows, it resembles the wooden Shephard House, 19 Charles Field St., in Providence, R.I., designed by Warren about 1840."

The large, two-story dwelling was constructed by Edwin L. Kerrison, founder of a dry goods business that has evolved into the present Kerrison's Department Store, and is owned by Aubrey W. Hancock.

Many people notice a similarity between the Kerrison Mansion and the Joseph Daniel Aiken House at 20 Char-

See Mansion, Page 2-B



Staff Photo by Bill Jordan

## A Stately Dwelling

This home at 138 Wentworth St. was one of the first to have bathing facilities and its octagonal

bathhouse and gazebo rank among the oldest and best preserved buildings of its kind in the city.

# Kerrison House Was Built By Founder Of Store

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(EDITOR'S NOTE: Ninth in a series of articles on the early dwellings of Beaufain and Wentworth streets. The tenth article will appear Monday.)

By W. H. J. THOMAS

The large two-story dwelling house at 138 Wentworth, recently purchased from the Trustees of the Protestant Episcopal Church in South Carolina by Aubrey W. Hancock and William A. Fontaine, was constructed between 1839 and 1849 by Edwin L. Kerrison, a founder of a dry goods business that has evolved into the present Kerrison's Department Store.

It was in the summer of 1838 that Kerrison bought the first portion of his building lot. He paid \$2,500 to John Cessford Ker, a local merchant, for a lot 47 feet across at Wentworth Street

and reaching back 201 feet. On April 15, 1839, Kerrison purchased a lot of roughly the same size from David C. Levy, an auctioneer with Tobias and Co., for \$2,400.

We know he completed his home by 1842 because of the advertisement that may be found in the Charleston Courier on March 7 of that year. It reads:

"TO RENT, that very elegant BRICK RESIDENCE, recessed from the street, with a handsomely laid out Garden in front, situated on the North side of Wentworth between Pitt and Smith streets, recently built, and at present occupied by E. L. Kerrison. The house is commodious and beautifully arranged, every attention having been paid to comfort and elegance. The lot measures one hundred feet front, by about one hundred and eighty feet deep. Or

the premises are a Kitchen with large accommodations for servants, a Study, Store House, Bathing House, Carriage House and Stable, all newly built brick buildings, a very large Cistern, and well of water, the waters of which are conducted by means of pipes into the various buildings, where use and comfort may require them. For particulars, Apply to ALONJO J. WHITE, Auctioneer and Broker, 20 Broad St."

Abraham Tobias bought the property for \$10,000 on Jan. 10, 1843. Six years later he sold it to Godard Bailey, who then sold it on April 30, 1850 to Edmund Brownell. On March 19, 1851, it was once again purchased by Abraham Tobias. The city directories for this period show Kerrison as a resident of this portion of Wentworth Street, and he

may have rented it from Tobias.

Acting as executor of the will of Abraham Tobias, Thomas Jefferson Tobias sold the property on March 13, 1859, to William A. Wardlaw for \$12,500.

Wardlaw made a sale of

## Do You Know Your Charleston?

the dwelling to T. Reid Boylston, who then sold it to May Selena Arnold. It was next purchased by John A. Quackenbush from Mary Elizabeth Schmidt, executrix of the estate of May Arnold.

In May of 1878, it was sold to Mrs. Elizabeth C. Remaker for \$7,000. In settling her estate at the start of the 20th century, the house was sold by W. Gibbs Whaley, master

in equity, to Georgia G. Miller for \$5,100.

Mrs. Miller died in 1923, leaving the property to her son, Gordon Miller, and her daughter, Marguerite C. Miller. It remained in the Miller family until 1947, when it was conveyed for \$1 to the Protestant Episcopal Diocese of South Carolina. It has served as the Diocese headquarters since that time.

On March 11, 1970, it was sold to its present owners who hope to restore it while making no real structural changes.

The design for the house has been attributed to Russell Warren of Rhode Island. In her book "Architects of Charleston," Rebecca St. James Ravenel writes: "One Charleston building may possibly be a product of his Classical Revival period. This is the brick Miller house, now 138 Wentworth St. . . . In

its Temple of the Winds type of columns, (which here somehow have a faint Egyptian feeling, with the foliage seeming as much lotus as anthurus, in the heavy row of dentils under the roof, and in the shape, size and disposition of panels in the second story windows, it resembles the wooden Shepard house, 19 Charles Field Street, in Providence, Rhode Island, designed by Warren about 1840."

Many others have noted the similarity between the Kerrison House and the Joseph Daniel Aiken House at 20 Charlotte St., built about 1848. In the portico and the capitals may be traced from 20 Charlotte St. the nearly identical entrance framing, general room proportions and the architrave of the wide interior hall doorway. There is that sameness that cannot be

denied. The Charlotte Street house has been attributed to James M. Curtis who was active locally when Kerrison had his home constructed.

Both dwellings — in keeping with the period in which they were built — have a general bareness that was the fashion in this phase of neo-classicism. Yet a certain fondness for the lavish detail, to become more popular by the 1850s, is apparent.

As if to relieve the stark expression of tall unadorned plaster walls and windows and doors of great size, we find the builder has made elaborate use of cornice treatment in the entrance of the dwelling, with a repetition of the anthemion motif which may also be found over the front door exterior.

The interior floor plan is of interest, with an attempt made to create a sense of great space for formal living.

**KERRISON HOUSE RECENTLY SOLD BY EPISCOPAL CHURCH**  
Dwelling was completed by 1842 when offered for rent. (Staff Photo by Evan

