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Chapter 4

ANSONBOROUGH

Revolving Funds and Area Rehabilitation

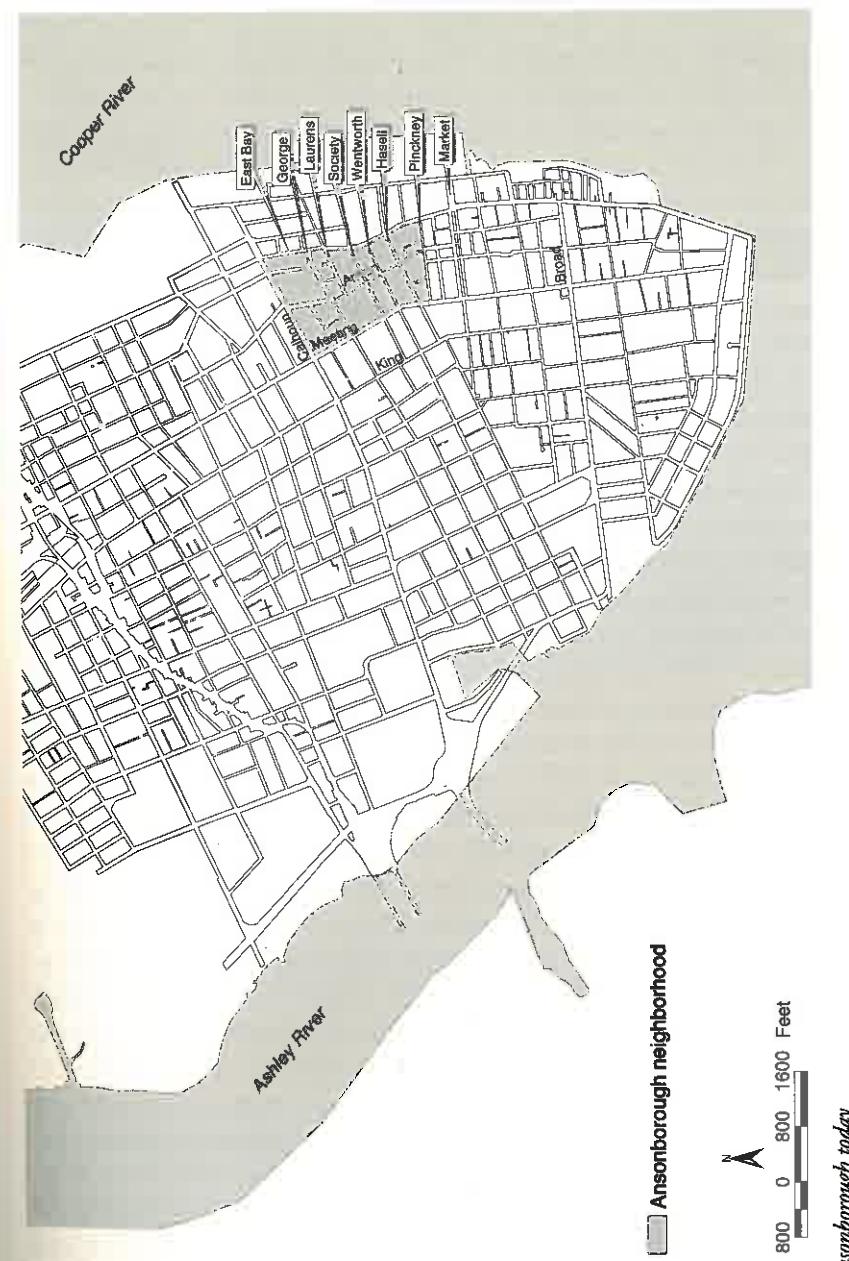
WITH THE ANSONBOROUGH project, Historic Charleston Foundation dramatically transformed one Charleston neighborhood and brought national recognition to itself and the city of Charleston. Through the innovative use of a revolving fund, the foundation demonstrated the possibilities of a broad areawide approach to historic preservation using a small amount of capital as a catalyst to private investment and restoration. From this standpoint the project was enormously successful: it turned the Ansonborough district into a preservation showplace and represented the first time a revolving fund had been used for area rehabilitation in the United States. But the Ansonborough project eventually raised complicated social questions about residential displacement and neighborhood gentrification, issues that Historic Charleston Foundation would address in subsequent years.

Although an interest in area rehabilitation had helped inspire the creation of Historic Charleston Foundation in the 1940s, it was not until the late 1950s that a formal plan of action was implemented. The initiative launched by the trustees in February 1957 was significant in several respects. First was the breadth of the strategy: the foundation planned to target an entire neighborhood, not just an individual building. Second was the dynamic definition of preservation: historic buildings were to be rehabilitated for contemporary use as parts of a modern city, not converted into museums.

And third was the novelty of its financing: a small fund was to be used to leverage a major private sector investment.¹ All three of these ideas are now widely accepted as indispensable approaches to community revitalization, largely because of the pioneering work of Historic Charleston Foundation in Ansonborough during the 1950s and 1960s.

The trustees finalized an area rehabilitation plan early in 1957 and immediately set about publicizing the venture. The foundation explained to the press and potential contributors that it intended to identify an appropriate area in Charleston for rehabilitation, acquire properties there through purchase or gift, and undertake limited restorations. The nonprofit organization did not intend to become a long-term property holder in the neighborhood; rather it planned to sell its buildings to preservation-minded purchasers interested in taking up residence. If the foundation acquired structures unsuitable for single family use, these might be developed into rental units such as apartments, offices, and stores, with the income put toward other acquisitions. Not everything would be saved: unsightly structures would be torn down to enhance the neighborhood with gardens and open space. As originally envisioned, the foundation's capital was supposed to "revolve" in two ways. Within the neighborhood, monies used to purchase properties were to be returned to the fund upon resale. Following the success of the initial demonstration project, the concept of the revolving fund was to be employed elsewhere, in other neighborhoods. It was not expected that the fund would operate at a profit.² One newspaper editorial summed up the foundation plans as an attempt to "lay nest eggs that would encourage private investors to restore entire neighborhoods." The paper applauded the effort, pointing out that "unless Charleston pushes back the slums, the heart of the city will wither while the suburbs bloom."³

The foundation anticipated undertaking a certain amount of exterior restoration work on the properties it acquired, but it did not envision major interior restoration or redecoration; those would be the responsibility of purchasers, to be carried out with the oversight of the foundation. All properties sold by the foundation to private purchasers would have protective covenants attached to the deeds; these would be designed to restrict alterations or uses that would compromise architectural integrity. Significantly, though, the foundation did not expect individual property owners to embark on museum-quality restorations. Rehabilitation would preserve significant architectural features, but it was assumed that changes would be necessary to adapt



Ansonborough today

buildings to contemporary use.³ "We want it quite clear that we are not after more Russell Houses," one foundation spokesman observed in an early announcement about the project. "The properties we hope to reclaim will be used, because it is through their use that they will survive," he explained.⁴

Intensive fund-raising for the area rehabilitation project's capital fund began in earnest in 1957. A goal of one million dollars was established, but initial efforts focused on raising one hundred thousand dollars to inaugurate the plan. As with efforts at the Nathaniel Russell House earlier in the decade, significant financial support came from Henry Smith Richardson, president of the Vick Chemical Company and a winter resident of Charleston. He offered a grant of twenty-five thousand dollars through the Richardson Foundation on the condition that Historic Charleston Foundation raise an additional seventy-five thousand dollars, twenty-five thousand dollars of it locally. Private solicitation and newspaper articles publicized the campaign to Charlestonians, and out-of-town contributions were sought through an elaborate, lavishly illustrated brochure entitled *Charleston, South Carolina: An Historic City Worth Saving*. The booklet argued that Charleston was one of the few cities in the country that had "historic and architectural significance for all Americans" and that this heritage was threatened by the forces of progress in "the new industrial South." The case was made visually with images of architectural treasures and lost gems, as well as with a careful exposition of the revolving fund plan. The campaign had raised the money by October 1958.⁵

The revolving fund was established well before Ansonborough was identified as the first target neighborhood. Throughout 1958 the foundation investigated various parts of the city as possible sites for its project. It eventually settled on a residential district near the heart of Charleston comprised of parts of four of the city's historic suburbs: Ansonborough, Rhettsbury, Laurens' Lands, and Gadsden's Lands. After the late 1950s the boundaries of what came to be known as Ansonborough fluctuated, reflecting the purchases and initiatives of the demonstration project. Today, as a result of the foundation's rehabilitation effort and a subsequent revision of the city's zoning ordinance, the area bounded generally by Meeting, Calhoun, East Bay, and Pinckney Streets is known as Ansonborough.⁶

The area was chosen for several reasons, chief among them the rich concentration of historic architecture. Within the six-block core of the district were some 135 colonial and antebellum residences, four churches, and the

city's first public high school. Most of the structures dated from the 1840s, as a result of a catastrophic fire in 1838 and the subsequent rebuilding. Because the foundation was looking to "practical contemporary use" of these historic buildings, other factors were also important. Many of the residences were small and medium-sized homes, rather than grand mansions, which made them "adaptable to modern living" and the requirements of young families. The location of the area, close to major shopping thoroughfares, also seemed vital "for the creation of the kind of in-city residential area so necessary to solution of the urban revitalization problems Charleston faces."⁷ Urban renewal provided a final rationale for selecting Ansonborough in this experiment in rehabilitation. To the foundation, it appeared to be an area in decline, a place "where tenements and slums were beginning to predominate."⁸ One impetus for this transition to high-density, renter-occupied dwellings had been the demand for housing during World War II, stimulated in Ansonborough by the influx of workers employed by the port facilities nearby at the foot of Calhoun Street. Following the war, concern focused on the increasing number of poor blacks in the area. The foundation worried about the "dangers" for Ansonborough "because of the encroachment of negro tenements."⁹

The first property acquired by the foundation became the nucleus of the rental endowment. The so-called Gadsden House (ca. 1800) at 329 East Bay Street was donated to the foundation in December 1958 by Elizabeth Prioleau Gadsden Woodward, who had purchased it the previous June for twenty thousand dollars.¹⁰ In the coming years Mrs. Woodward, a Charleston native, and her husband, Charles Henry Woodward, would become important supporters of Historic Charleston Foundation through this and similar gifts. As residents of Philadelphia, they maintained a winter residence at a plantation in the Charleston vicinity and played active roles in preservation efforts in Philadelphia's Chestnut Hill and on Mount Desert Island, Maine, as well as in Charleston.¹¹ The Woodwards' gift of the Gadsden House in 1958 included funds for both exterior restoration and conversion of the interior into modern rental apartments. Within five months the two-story kitchen building, which had previously housed two families, had been converted into a spacious, two-bedroom "garden house." Eventually the foundation opened it for public tour in an effort to publicize its fledgling Ansonborough project. The foundation emphasized to the press that the building would not become a traditional historic house museum. In the fol-

lowing year three apartments were completed in the three-story main house, each with "its own warm-air furnace, modern kitchen, and modern tile bath." The foundation anticipated a yearly income of forty-five hundred dollars for its revolving fund from rentals in this property.¹²

The foundation made its first purchases in 1959, when it acquired eight properties clustered at the intersection of Anson and Society Streets in the heart of the six-block core of the rehabilitation project. None of the properties had been on the market when the foundation approached owners in the spring, and negotiations were kept secret until a public announcement was made in July about the foundation's new initiative. For a cost of eighty-seven thousand dollars the foundation purchased houses located at 63, 64, 68, 71, and 72 Anson Street and at 40, 42, and 44 Society Street.¹³ A local newspaper hailed the announcement of the purchases as a "wise step in the right direction" and expressed the hope that "this move will encourage private investors to buy property in this and other parts of Charleston, with a view to pushing back urban blight in the midtown area."¹⁴ Within a year three more purchases had been announced—48 Laurens, 56 Society, 66 Anson—at a cost of thirty-four thousand dollars.¹⁵

The Robert Primerose House (ca. 1817) was the second property donated to the foundation, in July 1960, and its operation as rental apartments became another source of income for the revolving fund. Like the Gadsden House, which was located across the street, the property at 332 East Bay was a grand mansion house well suited for conversion into rental units. The foundation acquired it by gift from the Woodwards, who also contributed funds for exterior restoration. The interior conversion was financed by private donations and foundation funds.¹⁶

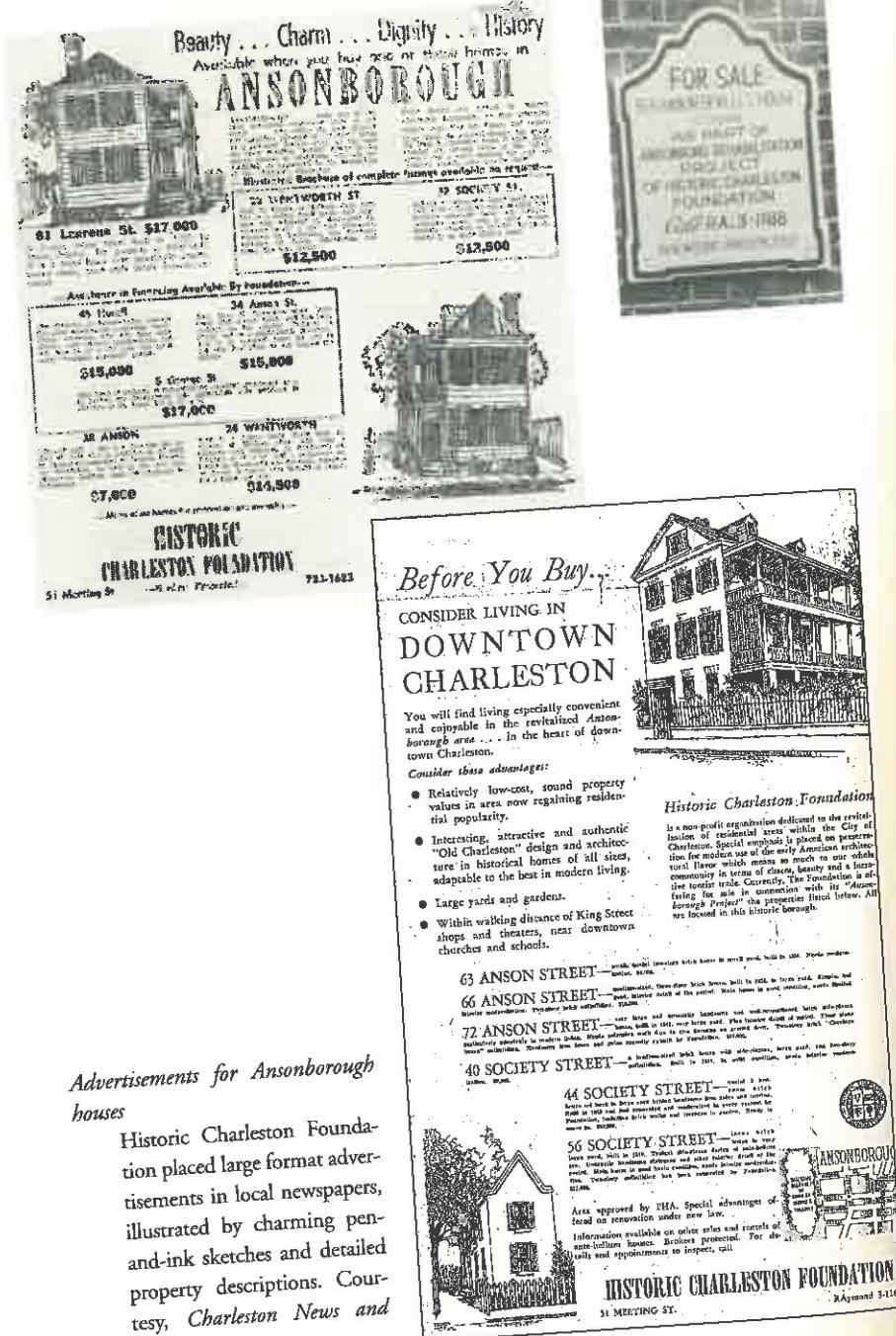
It took about three years for the Ansonborough project to gain enough momentum to get off the ground. By then the foundation had acquired thirteen houses, and the disposition of these properties suggests how the area rehabilitation plan and the revolving fund were operating. Seven of the thirteen houses had been sold by March 1962. The Gadsden and Primerose Houses continued in commercial use, as apartments that generated rental income for the revolving fund. Two properties had been razed, and only two remained unsold. The seven sales included 63, 71, and 72 Anson; 42, 44, and 56 Society; and 48 Laurens. Unsold by March 1962 were 40 Society and 66 Anson. Buildings were razed at 64 and 68 Anson. Almost immediately after the foundation completed its first set of purchases, it had demolished the

frame building at 68 Anson Street. This was a small modern structure regarded as without architectural significance and discordant on the street of antebellum homes. Originally the plan was to engineer the resulting vacant lot into an alley, to be christened Foundation Lane, to provide access for outbuildings at the rear of some of the other properties. Instead the lot was added to the property at neighboring 72 Anson Street, giving this residence a spacious triple lot. Restoration work had been undertaken at 64 Anson Street, but it was later razed following extensive storm damage.¹⁷ In short, the foundation was not simply preserving homes *in situ*; it was actively using historic architecture to construct an aesthetically pleasing neighborhood.

Shrewd marketing helped inaugurate the project and establish its early success. The foundation cultivated the local press, which in turn covered the Ansonborough project extensively. Most of the foundation purchases (and its subsequent sales) were reported in the newspapers, and the foundation used these stories to publicize its efforts. "All of our houses are for sale at any time before, during or after restoration," Ben Scott Whaley, president of the foundation, explained in 1960, offering the foundation's most recent purchases "to anyone who is interested in getting a charming house in a reawakening neighborhood at a very reasonable price."¹⁸ The trustees of Historic Charleston Foundation often set the example by buying homes for themselves in Ansonborough, and this too was reported in the press. The first purchase of a revolving fund property, 71 Anson Street, was made by Peter Manigault, the chairman of the foundation's rehabilitation project.¹⁹

The foundation organized tours of its Ansonborough properties to stimulate public interest in the demonstration project. The first was held in May 1961 to showcase the adaptive use of the Gadsden and Primerose Houses and the extensive restoration work at 42 and 44 Society Street. Elaborate restoration by the foundation was the exception rather than the rule for revolving fund properties, but it was undertaken in these cases to demonstrate the potential for the entire neighborhood. In general the foundation preferred to undertake exterior restoration of a limited kind, and then only to stabilize a structure or to suggest the appearance of prosperity in Ansonborough.²⁰

Conventional advertising was equally effective in marketing homes in Ansonborough. The foundation placed large-format advertisements in local newspapers, illustrated by charming pen and ink sketches and detailed property descriptions. One advertisement from 1961 urged home buyers to "consider living in downtown Charleston . . . in the revitalized Ansonborough



*Advertisements for Ansonborough
houses*

Historic Charleston Foundation placed large format advertisements in local newspapers, illustrated by charming pen-and-ink sketches and detailed property descriptions. Courtesy, *Charleston News and Courier*.

area," where they would find reasonable prices, attractive architecture, spacious gardens, and the convenience of easy walking distance to shops, theaters, schools, and churches. Asking prices ranged from four thousand dollars for a small two-story brick house that needed modernization to thirty-three thousand dollars for a recently rehabilitated three-bedroom home set in a spacious garden.²¹ A later advertisement described "authentic picture-book houses with all the charm and flavor of Historic Old Charleston" that were "adaptable to modern family living" with their "large yards, roomy interiors and architectural details that lend themselves to imaginative decorations."²²

The publicity and marketing were intended to identify preservation-minded purchasers who would find Ansonborough a sound investment, make it their home, and undertake the restoration, inaugurating a process designed to encourage other individuals to make similar decisions. Purchasers could buy either from the foundation or from other property owners in the area. For those who purchased from the foundation, protective covenants were attached to their deeds to minimize inappropriate changes. These covenants were to run with the land, binding purchasers and their heirs for seventy-five years. The covenants applied to building exteriors, not interiors, and prohibited alterations, additions, and changes in color or surfacing without the written approval of the foundation. Buyers who later wanted to sell their property were required to give the foundation the opportunity to purchase it prior to contracting with another party. In these ways the foundation sought to effect a demographic and architectural transformation in Ansonborough through transfers of property ownership and a system of preservation oversight.²³

This residential transformation altered both the economic and racial composition of Ansonborough. Low-income tenants who were often—although not exclusively—African American were replaced by middle- and upper-income residents and property owners who were most often white. Precipitating this kind of social change had been one of the purposes of the Ansonborough venture, and the foundation publicized the transition underway in the mid 1960s in brochures that characterized their project as “the most extensive, concentrated, permanent slum clearance or urban rehabilitation in Charleston by any organization, government or private, since World War II.”²⁴

While revolving fund purchases continued through the 1960s in the heart of Ansonborough, stabilization of the eastern border of the district received considerable attention. Through the donation of the Gadsden and

Primerose Houses, the foundation had already marked out the commercial thoroughfare of East Bay Street and its surviving mansions as an important line of demarcation. Subsequent acquisitions reiterated the preservation commitment to this corner of Ansonborough. The purchase of the Stephen Shrewsbury House (ca. 1809) at 311 East Bay in October 1962 was characterized by foundation president Ben Scott Whaley as "rounding out our project by tying together our holdings in Anson, Society, and Laurens streets with those on East Bay."²⁵ The Andrew Moffett House (ca. 1839) at 328 East Bay was acquired through a property trade that saved it from being demolished for a parking lot. By September 1963 it had been converted into three apartments, which the foundation advertised as "combining the elegance of the old with the comfort of the new."²⁶ The donation of the William Blake House (ca. 1789) at 321 East Bay Street in March 1965 gave the foundation a total of five properties on East Bay between Laurens and Calhoun as a firm anchor for the northeastern corner of Ansonborough.²⁷

A precise northern boundary for Ansonborough was delineated by the city's decision in 1964 to build a municipal auditorium on Calhoun Street. As proposed by City Council in May—and approved by voters in the November general election—an auditorium and exhibit hall complex would be constructed on a site bounded by Calhoun, Anson, Alexander, and an extended George Street.²⁸ As a large municipal project in midtown that required issuance of \$3.5 million in bonds, the civic auditorium stimulated public discussion in a way that Historic Charleston Foundation's private purchases in nearby Ansonborough had not. Coverage in the local papers revealed that a close working relationship had developed between Historic Charleston Foundation and city government, particularly with regard to urban renewal and the Ansonborough area rehabilitation project.²⁹

In the campaign to persuade voters to approve the bond issue, slum eradication became the persistent theme of advocates of the civic auditorium. Other arguments were made, of course: the auditorium would enhance cultural life in the city; the exhibit hall would attract regional and national conventions; all the activity would benefit the local business climate. As appealing as any argument was that construction would "necessitate demolition of a three-block area of housing that is, for the most part, badly dilapidated."³⁰ While this area was racially integrated, most press reports characterized it as "a Negro slum."³¹ One reporter made a quick visit by car and informed readers that:

A brief tour of the section . . . reveals only a few houses that appear to be sound. But these are also in need of much repair. The narrow streets are filled with Negro children playing, and the predominately Negro residents sit on sagging steps and porches that look dangerously unsafe. Peeling paint, broken or missing window panes, and hard-packed dirt instead of grass contribute to the generally rundown appearance. Clotheslines frequently hang from one house to another. Automobiles steer through what often becomes an obstacle course of dogs, buckets, bicycles, rubber tires, and assorted debris, and stares from those who stand or sit along the streets seem to indicate that few pass through the section.³²

While the mayor and other advocates of the auditorium promised that landowners would receive fair compensation for their property and that tenants would receive assistance locating housing elsewhere, black and white residents of the affected area were less confident, expressing concern about uprooting families from homes and neighborhood ties, as well as apprehension about the difficulty and cost of moving.³³

The proximity of the proposed auditorium to the Ansonborough project was crucial for the leaders of both city government and Historic Charleston Foundation. The foundation's area rehabilitation project had been under way for five years by 1964, and construction of the auditorium promised a block-wide geographic and social barrier between Ansonborough and residential districts to the north. This advantage was obvious to the members of City Council who had proposed the auditorium in May, arguing that it would border Ansonborough and give it additional protection.³⁴ One alderman subsequently observed that the proposed location would inoculate Ansonborough from "invasion by slums."³⁵ For his part, the president of the foundation thought that "eradication of urban blight in the heart of our community . . . would greatly improve the setting of the six blocks of significant period architecture in which we are working, and help us toward our goal of giving Charleston in-city residential areas which are also tourist attractions of great value."³⁶ Paradoxically, demolition of one neighborhood would enhance the preservation of another.

While approximately seven hundred people were eventually displaced as condemnation and land acquisition went forward, not all of the buildings at the eleven-acre site were razed. Historic Charleston Foundation decided that

at least four houses on the auditorium site had sufficient architectural interest and structural integrity to warrant rescue, and it decided to incorporate the buildings into its Ansonborough project through relocation. The foundation purchased the frame houses at 114 Anson Street and 15 Wall Street for one dollar each from the city, and in March and April 1966 both of them were moved to a large lot at the southeastern corner of Anson and Laurens Streets. The empty lot had been created when the foundation chose to raze the existing building, the former 76 Anson Street, to accommodate the relocated structures. This residence had not been sold in the two years that the foundation had owned it, and it "didn't seem suitable for restoration," explained Frances R. Edmunds, the executive director of Historic Charleston Foundation.³⁷ The foundation moved a third frame house, 116 Anson Street, from the auditorium site in June 1966, although this building seems to have remained "homeless" for a number of years, propped up on steel beams in various locations. A fourth house, a challenging three-story brick structure, was relocated in July 1967 from 86 Anson to 82 Anson.³⁸ Relocating these four buildings in 1966–67 rescued the structures from certain demolition, even as it created streetscapes of a different appearance than had actually existed. Such "salvage preservation" was an unprecedented move for Historic Charleston Foundation but one that seemed justified in the context of area rehabilitation through urban renewal.

The municipal auditorium, completed in 1968, continued to be a source of controversy, as its appearance attracted critics and defenders. Designed by Lucas and Stubbs Associates, it was a modernistic monolith, eventually named for J. Palmer Gaillard Jr., who had actively promoted its construction as mayor. Critics attacked its massive size and scale as unsuitable for the setting and for the surrounding cityscape. At the Charleston meeting of the National Trust for Historic Preservation in 1970, architect Philip Johnson blasted the auditorium, the site of the conference, for violating "every thinkable canon of taste because its scale does not fit its site." In a subsequent letter to the editor Charleston architect and founding trustee Albert Simons, who had not been involved in designing the auditorium, attempted a rejoinder by predicting that "a screen of foliage" would grow and create a transition "between the domestic scale of the old dwellings and the towering walls [of the auditorium] which will be flecked with moving sunlight and shadows from windblown branches." But Simons had an additional argument: "By replacing a depressed area with a cultural center the auditorium has favorably



Salvage preservation

Utility wires were cut down to allow a two-story frame house to be moved from Wall Street to an empty corner lot at Anson and Laurens Streets in March 1966. It was one of four houses moved by Historic Charleston Foundation from the site of the new municipal auditorium and incorporated into the Ansonborough project. Courtesy, HCF

affected the future success of neighboring Ansonborough, still striving to achieve its complete reclamation."³⁹ As a defense of aesthetic design, it was a curious social and political argument, and it reflected the perception of the auditorium complex as a Maginot Line between Ansonborough and residential districts to the north.

By the mid 1970s the foundation's first area rehabilitation project seemed to be a success by most measures. Ansonborough had attracted millions of dollars in private investment, property values had soared, and the tax base had swelled.⁴⁰ When executive director Frances R. Edmunds announced the "primary completion" of the Ansonborough project in 1976, she observed, "this is now a stable area with a good real estate market and superior home owners, and this was our goal."⁴¹ Through the 1960s and 1970s the foundation had used its revolving fund to acquire over 60 buildings in Ansonborough, almost one-half of the 135 historic structures estimated to be in the six-block core when the project was launched in the late 1950s. Over this period,

restoration work and property improvements were undertaken on some 100 Ansonborough buildings—by the foundation, by purchasers bound by the foundation's protective covenants, and by individual owners electing to follow the foundation's example. One assessment in 1966 suggested that the foundation's original \$100,000 investment had stimulated between \$1.6 and \$2 million of purchases and improvements.⁴²

Significantly, by the 1970s few sales involved a role for Historic Charleston Foundation, a development that reflected, as one newspaper observed, "the new popularity of Ansonborough as a good, in-town residential area."⁴³ The establishment of a neighborhood association for Ansonborough also testified to confidence in the prospects of the neighborhood. Organized in January 1970 to represent the interests of "a contemporary urban residential community," the Historic Ansonborough Neighborhood Association concerned itself with issues of zoning, open space, and beautification, including prodding Historic Charleston Foundation from time to time to clean up the vacant lots it still owned in the neighborhood.⁴⁴

From the perspective of the preservation community, middle-class home owners, real estate brokers, downtown merchants, and the tax collector, Ansonborough had more than fulfilled its promise. It had become a comfortable neighborhood and a sound investment. The experiment had confirmed the promise of a broad focus on area rehabilitation and the catalytic power of well-targeted private investment. But from the perspective of residents who had been forced from the rehabilitated area in the 1950s and 1960s, the Ansonborough project was more problematical. As the executive director of Historic Charleston Foundation observed in the 1980s, Ansonborough seemed in retrospect "a case study in displacement."⁴⁵ The success of the project revealed the necessity of confronting the twin issues of displacement and gentrification.⁴⁶ Subsequent foundation ventures sought to address these social and economic issues with the same innovation that had characterized the Ansonborough project. Beginning in the early 1970s the foundation moved on to tackle other Charleston neighborhoods. While the focus continued to be area rehabilitation, the new emphasis would be facilitating home ownership for low-income families within their neighborhoods, a subject addressed in a later chapter.⁴⁷

Most immediately, Ansonborough gave Historic Charleston Foundation and its executive director Frances R. Edmunds enormous visibility. The project brought increasing national interest to Charleston's architec-

tural heritage and professional attention to the work of Historic Charleston Foundation as a preservation organization involved in enterprising and effective work. Newspapers and magazines across the country started featuring stories about Ansonborough in the 1960s, under headlines such as "Boston Chamber of Commerce Lauds Preservation Efforts in Charleston," "Inner City Blight Lifted from Historic Houses: A Colonial City Meets the 20th Century," "How Private Money Saved a Slum Area," and "Charleston: Call It Making the City Work."⁴⁸ Charleston became an important case study in preservation monographs, and the foundation itself prepared information sheets for national distribution on the creation and management of revolving funds based on its experience. The publication in 1966 of *With Heritage So Rich*, possibly the only government report ever to be released as a coffee-table book, was a significant catalyst to the passage of the National Historic Preservation Act later that year; Historic Charleston Foundation and the Ansonborough project were showcased in one of its chapters.⁴⁹ Professional and scholarly societies organized conferences in Charleston to see firsthand the work of Historic Charleston Foundation with revolving funds and area rehabilitation.

Perhaps the best indication of the arrival of Charleston on the national scene was its hosting of the annual conference of the National Trust for Historic Preservation in November 1970, coordinated by Historic Charleston Foundation. Over sixteen hundred people gathered in Charleston for the meeting of the nonprofit National Trust, the country's largest private preservation organization, chartered in 1949 to promote historic preservation in the United States. Among the five days of presentations, receptions, and tours on the general theme of "Preservation in Our Changing Cities," the foundation's activities and especially its Ansonborough project were prominently featured. An entire panel discussion was devoted to the subject of "The Charleston Story," and one of three "tours of preservation techniques" took visiting preservationists into Ansonborough to see "the methods used to bring back from slum" this section of the city.⁵⁰ Tour brochures informed visitors that in Ansonborough they would see "adaptive use on an area-wide scale" and explained the role of Historic Charleston Foundation in assuming "the financial burden of 'showing the way' to practical modern use of fine old buildings."⁵¹ In a lengthy essay in the conference program, Frances Edmunds also highlighted the success of the Ansonborough project, stressing its lessons for preservationists all across the country: the feasibility of similar area reha-



"The Charleston Story," National Trust for Historic Preservation

The Ansonborough project brought wide attention to Charleston's architectural heritage and the work of Historic Charleston Foundation. The best indication of the arrival of Charleston on the national scene was its hosting of the annual conference of the National Trust for Historic Preservation in November 1970. An entire panel discussion was devoted to "The Charleston Story," with presentations from Peter Manigault, Frances R. Edmunds, Dr. George C. Rogers, and Joseph H. McGee. Courtesy, *Charleston Evening Post*, 6 November 1970.

bilitation projects elsewhere and the utility of revolving funds for stimulating preservation by the private sector.⁵²

As suggested by her role at the Charleston meeting of the National Trust, by 1970 Frances Ravenel Smythe Edmunds had established herself as both a formidable force for preservation in Charleston and an important figure in the American preservation movement. Her association with Historic Charleston Foundation had begun soon after the organization's founding, and the evolution of the foundation over the following four decades directly reflected the confidence of her personality, the authority of her operating style, and the tenacity of her vision for preservation. As one acquaintance explained: "Frances came from a family that was confident about dealing with anything, so she didn't hesitate when she was asked to be the executive director of a new preservation organization. . . . She would take on anybody. Charleston wouldn't begin to look the way it does today if it hadn't been for her willingness to make enemies anywhere. Practically speaking, she saved the city and put it back on the map."⁵³ At the time of her retirement in 1985

Frances Edmunds was regarded as the most influential woman in Charleston (the mayor was considered the most influential man).⁵⁴ A native Charlestonian, she was the daughter and granddaughter of a line of prominent attorneys and the great granddaughter of an early historian of Charleston who is often credited with introducing the city and its heritage to the world—and to Charlestonians.⁵⁵ The future foundation director had been educated at Saint Timothy's School in Catonsville, Maryland, and at the College of Charleston, and she subsequently gained valuable experience working as a newspaper reporter and later as a real estate agent. She married attorney S. Henry Edmunds, became the mother of three daughters, and in 1948 at the age of thirty-one she volunteered to serve as a "hostess" during the inaugural season of Historic Charleston Foundation's spring house tours. In fairly short order Frances Edmunds assumed responsibilities as the director of tours, the first paid staff position at the foundation.⁵⁶ Her organizational and promotional skills gave the tours a firm financial footing—eventually they proved one of its most successful fund-raising efforts—and Frances Edmunds soon found herself in charge of the entire organization, in a position variously labeled executive secretary, director, and ultimately executive director.

Frances Edmunds oversaw the establishment of the revolving fund in 1957 and the selection of Ansonborough as the foundation's first area rehabilitation project in 1959, and from this experience in Charleston she emerged as an important national commentator on the value of adaptive use of historic buildings.⁵⁷ When the National Trust met for its annual conference in San Diego in 1971, the year following its meeting in Charleston, the organization recognized Frances Edmunds with its highest honor, the Louise du Pont Crowninshield Award. The award acknowledged her work with Historic Charleston Foundation, not just in Ansonborough but also in other preservation planning initiatives in the 1960s that included a major revision of Charleston's zoning ordinance, a significant expansion of the historic district, and a successful program to beautify the city's financial and legal center along Broad Street. These and other preservation planning projects from the 1960s through the 1980s are the subject of the following chapter.⁵⁸