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54 Meeting St.
Library Society

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Ford House Dates To

Early 1800s

By ROBERT P. STOCKTON

Timothy Ford's house at 54 Meeting St. ranks among the best of Charleston's houses in the Adamesque style.

The house was built between 1800 and 1806 by Ford, a native of Morristown, N.J., who served as a youth in the American Revolution, with distinction.

After graduating from Princeton and qualifying as an attorney, Ford moved to Charleston, perhaps attracted by the friendship of fellow Princetonians from Charleston.

He became the law partner of Chancellor Henry W. DeSaussure, and he and DeSaussure shared a double residence at the southeast corner of Tradd

and Meeting streets before Ford built his new and larger house on Meeting Street.

Ford bought the site of 54 Meeting St. on Nov. 9, 1800, for 580 pounds Sterling, from Francis Mulligan. Mulligan is listed in Clark's city directory of 1796 as "collector of the revenue and contractor for the troops."

Ford continued to be listed in city directories as living on Tradd Street until the directory of 1807, the survey for which was taken in 1806 and which indicates he had moved around the corner to Meeting Street by then.

During the Marquis de Lafayette's visit to Charleston in 1824, the French hero was entertained in Ford's house.

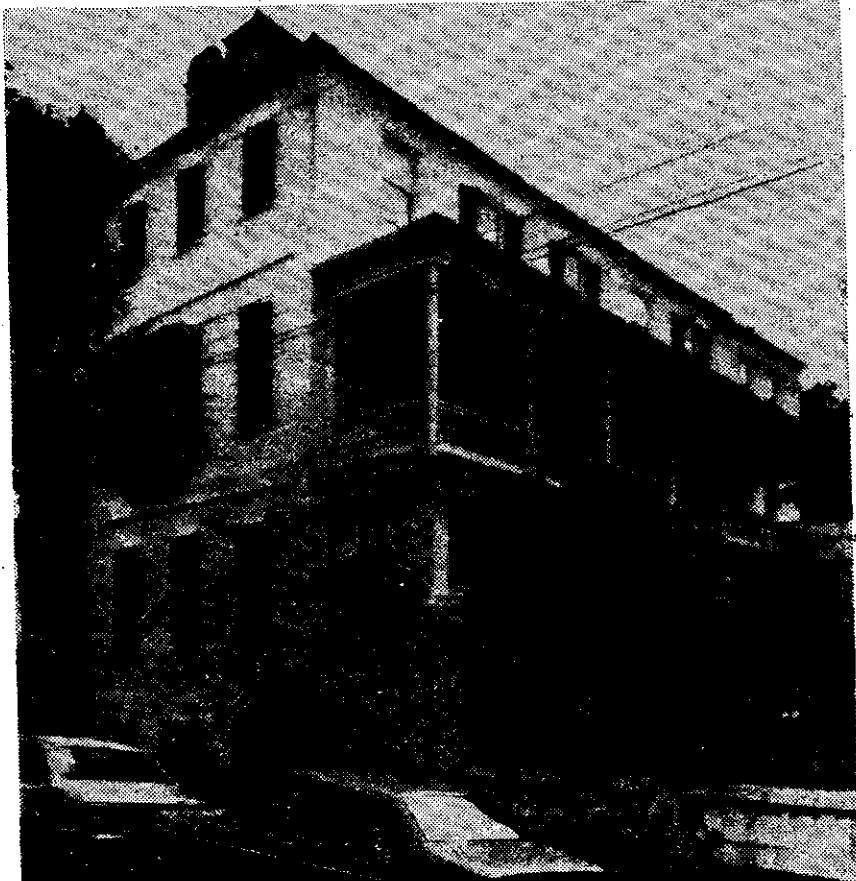
The News and Courier

Do You Know Your Charleston?

The house remained in Ford's family for more than a century. One of his two daughters, Louisa Catherine Ford, married Edmund Ravenel, M.D., a noted conchologist.

Dr. Ravenel's friend, the naturalist Louis Agassiz, stayed in the family's summer residence on Sullivan's Island while studying local sea life.

Ravenel is said to have sacrificed a



(Staff Photo by D. J. Johnson)

54 Meeting St.

rice crop at his Cooper River plantation by drawing off the reserve of irrigation water in order to complete Agassiz's collection of local fish.

Dr. Frank Durham, University of South Carolina English professor, has also speculated that Ravenel was the narrator of Edgar Allan Poe's "The Gold Bug," since Ravenel summered on Sullivan's Island while Poe was at Fort Moultrie, and both shared an interest in shells.

Ravenel's son, the second Edmund Ravenel, M.D., died in 1912, leaving the property to his Ravenel and Pringle cousins, who sold it in 1913 to Alfred Huger and H.L. Erchmann. Mrs. Nannie Miles Durant bought the property from them in 1915 and restored the house.

For many years it was the winter residence of Dr. and Mrs. Ramson S. Hooker of New York.

The house was recently restored a second time by the present owners, Dr. and Mrs. A. Bert Pruitt Jr.

During the recent restoration of the carriage house, foundations of a much older house were uncovered. Since the site was within the old walled city of Charlestown, it is possible the site has been occupied by structures since the 1680s.

Ford built a substantial house of brick, in the Charleston "single house" manner, of three and one-half stories on a high basement, with a hip roof and two stories of piazzas.

The house is rather plainly embellished on the exterior, the only original being a cornice of large dentils at the roofline.

Two string courses of molded brick were added to the street facade by Mrs. Durant who also changed the piazza entrance, from the former simple surround with classic pilasters and entablature, and rectangular transom, to the present surround, with fluted Corinthian pilasters, broken pediment, paneled reveals and scalloped fanlight.

In contrast to its original exterior, Ford's house is splendidly decorated on the interior in the Adamesque style, though in a more restrained taste than found in the house of his neighbor, Nathaniel Russell, across the street.

The house retains its original staircase, with slender mahogany newels and balusters, rising to the garret level, as well as mantels, cornices and friezes, wainscoting, door and window surrounds, paneled window reveals, six paneled doors and other features typical of its construction period.

On the rear of the house is a three-story addition between the main house and the service building, which was built around 1820, judging from its mantels and woodwork.

During the recent restoration, the pointed brickwork of the main house, which had been stuccoed and scored at an early date, was uncovered in the wall between the main house and the c. 1820 addition.

The current owners are also restoring the garden which was designed by the late Loutrel Briggs, author of the book, "Charleston Gardens."

(wood lining)