

Brick House Believed Built By Watchmaker

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Special Writer

The three-and-one-half story brick house at 89 Broad St. is believed to have been built sometime after 1786 by Stephen Lee, a watchmaker, factor and planter.

The property is currently owned by John Beckroge and Norman E. Brown, who purchased it in 1978 and renovated the house as an antique shop and residence.

Stephen Lee acquired the property by his marriage to Dorothea Smyser, daughter of Paul Smyser, shopkeeper and planter, who had purchased it in 1748 from Jacques Vouleaux.

The 1748 deed cites a dwelling house and kitchen on the lot, having one chimney per structure, indicating the structures were rather small.

Smyser died in 1786, bequeathing the "House and Land" in Broad Street to his daughter, Dorothea, who had married Stephen Lee in 1784.

Stephen and Dorothea Lee conveyed the property by deeds of lease and release, dated July 10 and 11, 1786, to Joseph Cox. Cox, by deeds of lease and release dated July 12 and 13, 1786, conveyed the property to Stephen Lee.

By this frequently used legal maneuver, Stephen Lee gained full title to the property in his own name.

A Stephen Lee was a Patriot officer during the Revolution, and a Stephen Lee was among prisoners whom the British placed on prison ships in Charles Town Harbor in May, 1781 and exiled from Carolina in December, 1781.

Lee is listed as residing in Broad Street in city directories from 1790 to 1807. After his death in 1807, his widow, Dorothea Lee, continued to live there.

Afterwards, the property was the residence of their daughter, Caroline Dorothea, and her husband, Joshua Lockwood Jr. The Lockwood family retained the property until 1871, when it was acquired by Mrs. Clementine H. Bernard, wife of Simon B. Bernard.

Subsequent owners included Dr. Joseph Maybank, a prominent physician who had his office there. Dr. Maybank was the father of the late U.S. Sen. Burnet R. Maybank.

Eighty-nine Broad follows the plan of the Charleston single house, one room wide, two primary rooms to a

floor, with a stairhall centered between the primary rooms.

The original plan survives on the upper floors, while the ground floor has been altered by the removal of partitions and the lower part of the staircase, to accommodate an enlarged commercial space.

The facade, now stuccoed, is three bays wide. Architectural details are simple, the major embellishment being a dentilled cornice, executed in brick, which extends across the facade and continues around the east side of the building.

The hipped roof has a single dormer on the front slope and dormers on the east and south slopes. The dormers have gable roofs, with simple gable ends.

The east wall, which is unstuccoed, reveals Charleston grey brick laid in Flemish bond.

A shallow indentation in the brickwork of the lower north corner of the east wall appears to have been for the accommodation of a gate. The indentation is wider than the passageway between the east wall of 89 Broad and the west wall of the neighboring structure at 85-87 Broad.

In the rear of the property is a two-story outbuilding of Charleston grey brick, which appears as a detached structure in the Ward Plat of the neighborhood in 1881. The outbuilding is now connected to the main building by an extension.

In the interior, surviving original architectural details include the upper part of the staircase, window and door surrounds and, in the formal drawing room on the second level overlooking the street, a paneled chimney breast, wooden cornice, wainscoting and chair rail, all in the Adamesque (Federal) style.

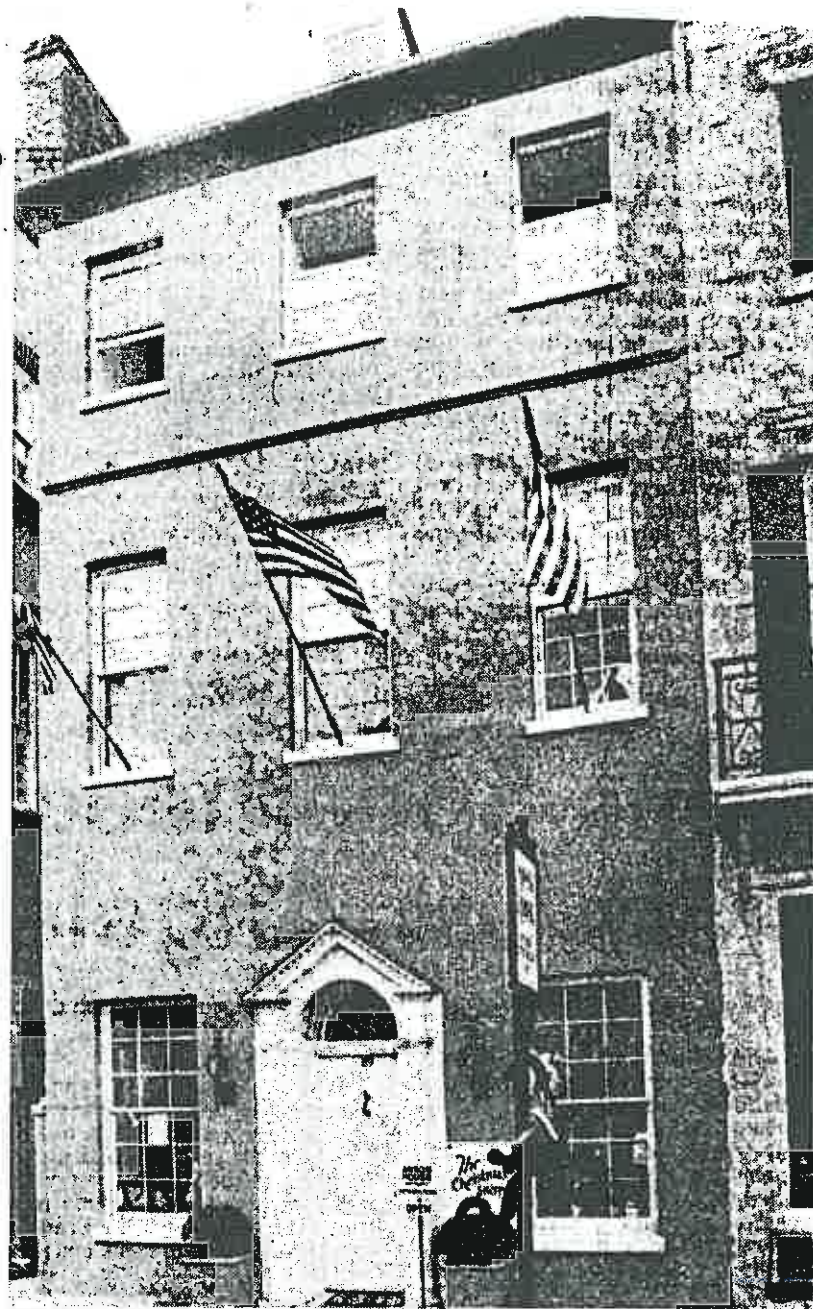
The Adamesque decorations include enriched ovolo molding and a band of round and oval bands in the chair rail. The band of round and oval beads is repeated on a slightly enlarged scale in the carved wooden cornice, which also has cya rect, ovolo, beak and cavetto moldings and a course of pieced dentils.

The staircase has a 19th century newel on the present lower end, obviously added when the lower flights of the stair were removed.

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Staff Photo by Tom Spain

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The staircase has slender balusters, rectangular in section, and slender handrail with a "grip" long the top edge. The railing curves, sans newels, in its lower two flights, while in the upper flights it turns at right angles, with slender newels as connecting supports in the angles.

The lower flights of the staircase have brackets featuring small fluted pilasters and meander scrolls, on the string. Strings on the upper flights are unadorned.

In the garret, walls and ceilings are faced with wide, beaded boards, and batten doors open to the two garret rooms.

There is no clear documentation of the date of the present structure, and speculation inevitably arises that Paul Smyser may have built it before the Revolution.

The exterior appearance of the building could add fuel to the speculation. The brick dentil cornice is similar to cornices found on pre-Revolutionary buildings, the earliest extant being the Harvey House, built c. 1728, at 110 Broad.

In the interior, however, the earliest architectural details are all in the Adamesque (Federal) style, found in Charleston only in structures dating well after the Revolution.

The interior architectural evidence would indicate that the attribution of the house to Stephen Lee, sometime between his acquisition of the property in 1786 and his death in 1807, is probably correct.

The facade of the building was altered in the latter part of the 19th century by the addition of a false gable with a tripartite window screening the front dormer, round-headed Romanesque Revival style windows on the third level, a wide belt course below the third level windows, cornices with ogee-arched pediments over the second level windows, and a shop front on the east side.

In the 1978 renovation, the Victorian features of the facade were removed and smaller shop windows and a new doorway in the Colonial Revival style were added on the first level.