

# April 1, 1975 dgers Mansion 'Second Empire' Example



Burbage)  
Francis S. Rodgers Mansion

By ROBERT P. STOCKTON

Charleston's foremost example of the "Second Empire" style of architecture is the Rodgers Mansion at Wentworth and Smith streets.

The style, the principal characteristic of which is the Mansard roof, takes its name from the Second French Empire, the reign of Napoleon III (1852-70).

It was during the Second Empire period that the Mansard roof was revived in France and was from there exported to America, where it enjoyed periodic popularity through the 1890s.

This roof form features steep sides on the lower part and a gently sloping or flat surface on the upper part of the roof. When pierced by dormers, it provides the attic with more living space than a gable or hip roof.

First used in the mid 16th Century on the Louvre by Pierre Lescot, it however took the name of the 17th Century French architect, Francois Mansart.

The four-story mansion at 149 Wentworth St. was designed by architect Daniel G. Waynes for Francis Silas Rodgers, a prominent Charleston businessman, industrialist and public servant.

Containing some 13,883 square feet, the house is finished on the exterior with Philadelphia pressed brick, with mortar joints of one-eighth to one-sixteenth of an inch, with window cornices and quoins of stone.

The Mansard roof, above a bracketed cornice, is crowned with a delicate cast iron railing, and a domed cupola rises above it.

A prominent feature of the facade is a square bay window, with cotton plants depicted in a window cornice, indicating a major source of the builder's wealth.

A double flight of granite stairs, with

cast iron railings and copper handrails, rises to the pedimented portico which has four Corinthian columns.

One enters through two sets of double doors, the inner set glassed. Both the entrance foyer and the wide, high-ceiling hallway are panelled in mahogany and paved with colored tiles.

To the west of the hallway are double parlors, now used as board rooms. These rooms are decorated identically, with mantels and mirrored overmantels in amber-beige colored marble, parquet floors, elaborate plaster ceilings and carved woodwork, including panelled wainscoting, door and window surrounds and double sliding doors.

**The News and Courier**

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Mantels were made by Emile T. Viett, whose "Gas Power Marble and Granite Works" were on Broad Street. The two large chrystral chandeliers (originally gas-lighted) in the drawing rooms are said to have been made in Europe by a craftsman who was brought to Charleston to properly install them.

On the east side of the hallway rises a wide square-for staircase of oak, with square balusters and square newell posts with carved shell, swags, and egg and dart designs.

To the east of the staircase was the dining room, now divided into offices. Also on the east side of the main hall was the library, with oak woodwork and an

amber-beige marble mantel and mirrored overmantel.

From the main hallway, between the library and the staircase, another hallway runs eastward to auxiliary rooms.

On the second and third floors were bedrooms for Rodger and his family (which included 12 children) and a schoolroom.

The upper floor included a billiard room with grey mantels stencilled in black and pressed tin ceiling and cornices.

On the rear of the structure are two tiers of piazzas. With the exception of the enclosure of these and the installation of a few removable partitions, the house is essentially as it was when built.

Rodgers bought the large lot on which the building stands on July 27, 1885.

According to his obituary in The News and Courier, March 14, 1911, "The House in which Mr. Rodgers spent the last years of his life is considered one of the handsomest in the city... This house was practically completed in 1886, but was partially destroyed by the earthquake (Aug. 31, 1886), and was not finally occupied until 1887."

Rodgers is first listed as living in the house in the city directory of 1888. A native of Charleston, Rodgers made his fortune in cotton factoring, phosphate manufacturing, coastwise trade and assorted other financial interests.

He also served on City Council, helped organize the city's first paid fire department and was chairman of the Board of Firemasters for some 30 years.

His house remained in his family until 1920, when it was bought by the Scottish Rite Cathedral Association, which sold it in 1940 to the Atlantic Coast Life Insurance Co.

149 Wentworth

4/21/1975

# Rodgers Family Spared No Luxury In Building Wentworth St. Mansion

By LISA DENNIS  
Post-Courier Reporter

In the early 1880s, a wealthy Charleston businessman, Francis Silas Rodgers, set aside \$100,000 to build the four-story mansion that stands at 149 Wentworth St. When costs exceeded \$150,000, he stopped counting.

A massive expression of Victorian exuberance, the completed Rodgers Mansion, including every luxury available at the time, had an estimated value of \$250,000 — an exorbitant amount even by today's standards.

Reportedly, Rodgers planned the house in 1881. He attempted to buy a small lot adjoining his land, so that the property would be a perfect rectangle, but the owner refused to sell. Consequently Rodgers bought an additional lot to the east, built a large stable and a dividing wall 14 feet high, thereby enclosing on three sides the property he was unable to obtain.

Rodgers engaged the services of architect Daniel G. Waynes, and construction began about 1885. The mansion was nearly completed in 1886 but it was damaged by the earthquake on Aug. 31 of that year, and was not occupied until 1887.

A native of Charleston, Rodgers was 24 years old when the Civil War ended in 1865. He married Elizabeth Evans Cochran that same year and went into business.

According to his grandson, Eric W. Rodgers of North Carolina, he and Francis J. Pelzer formed a company to buy and sell Sea Island cotton, a top-quality strain that was grown on the islands around Charleston. "It was obviously a great success," he adds, "for he earned enough money during the next 15 years to begin planning the Rodgers Mansion."

He also worked in phosphate manufacturing, coastwise trade and had other, assorted financial interests. City records show that Rodgers served on City Council, helped organize Charleston's first paid

## Do You Know Your Charleston?

fire department and was chairman of the Board of Firemasters for 30 years.

Because of his interest in fires, Rodgers had a large domed cupola built on the roof, from which he could see every house in the peninsular city and monitor any fires that broke out.

Containing 13,883 square feet, the dwelling is finished on the exterior with Philadelphia pressed brick and features a Mansard roof, typical of the French Second Empire style, crowned with a delicate cast-iron railing.

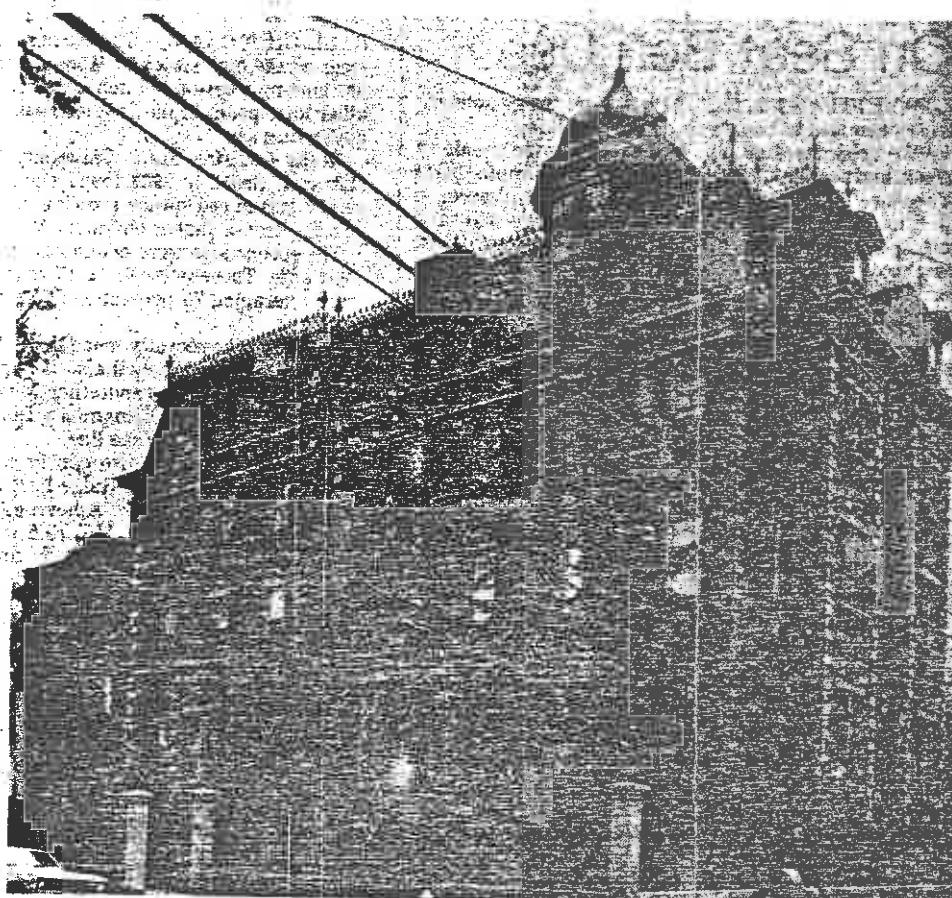
A prominent feature of the facade is a square bay window, with cotton plants depicted in a window cornice, indicating a major source of the builder's wealth. Just right of center, a double flight of granite stairs with cast-iron railing and copper handrails rises to the columned portico.

One enters through two sets of double doors. The first set, which were left open in Rodgers' time, are made of solid mahogany. They open inward, each fitting securely into niches along the inner wall. The second set of doors displays leaded stained glass, which is still intact.

The entrance foyer and the wide, high-ceiling hallway that stretches to the rear of the dwelling are paneled in mahogany and paved with colored tiles.

To the west of the doorway are double parlors, which are decorated identically with amber-beige marble mantels, matching beveled mirrors, elaborate plaster ceilings (originally covered in gold leaf), parquet floors and carved woodwork including paneled wain-

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Staff Photo by Bill Jordan

Four stories and cupola affords wide view of peninsula.

## ...Victorian Mansion

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wainscoting, door and window surrounds and double sliding doors.

The two large crystal chandeliers (originally gas-lit) in the drawing rooms are said to have been made in Europe by a craftsman who was brought to Charleston to install them properly. And the mantels, made by Charleston stone worker Emile T. Viett, are said to have been constructed on the site.

Eric Rodgers says the rear parlor was actually a music room, where the children were instructed in piano, violin and guitar.

East of the hallway, the paneling and wainscoting changes to oak. An open square staircase of oak, with posts featuring carved shell, swag and egg and dart designs, commands attention! The staircase was highlighted by another stained-glass window, which is lost.

Rooms on the east side of the main hall include a library, with oak woodwork and another marble mantel and mirrored overmantel. Large French doors opening on to the first-floor piazza also were ornamented with stained glass. The dining room, with an elaborate fireplace, had a slightly domed, molded tin ceiling — one of the earliest tin ceilings used in Charleston.

On the second and third floors were bedrooms for Rodgers and his family, which included 12 children (four of whom died in infancy or early childhood), and a schoolroom where they were tutored. The upper floor included auxiliary rooms, a billiard room (with pressed tin ceilings and gray mantels stenciled in black) and a circular access stairway to the cupola.

The three-story east wing of the house consisted of the butler's pantry, a fully equipped kitchen, laundry room and servants' quarters for approximately 10 full-time employees.

Although none of the fixtures remain, the mansion was equipped with several bathrooms (toilet, tub and basin), according to Eric Rodgers. The dwelling had an independent water supply, consisting of an artesian well in the garden, a cistern in the basement, and a high water tank and windmill near the carriage house, which is no longer standing.

The cistern caught rain water that was drained from the roof through square copper guttering inside the walls of the house. A recently discovered tunnel running from the cistern to the site of the water tower indicates that the two may have been connected, possibly serving as a back-up system to the artesian water supply.

Also in the basement was a gas plant that supplied the dwelling with a lighting and heating system. Eric Rodgers

says he can remember the butler, every nightfall, lighting the lamps along the main hall.

Rodgers' two carriages were kept in a carriage house out back that featured a feed room, tack room and upstairs rooms for the stable boys. This was adjacent to the stables, which were entered from Wentworth Street.

Contrary to rumors, Rodgers did not have a tennis court on the roof. He did, however, have one in the back yard, along with a formal garden for Mrs. Rodgers. The basic layout of the garden is still visible.

On the rear of the structure are two tiers of piazzas, which are enclosed. Eric Rodgers says he remembers his grandmother sitting on the porch in the afternoon enjoying her garden. His memories of Mrs. Rodgers provide a glimpse of what life was like:

"She maintained a regular schedule. Breakfast was between 8 and 9, a light lunch was served at noon and at three o'clock dinner was served. After dinner she would rest awhile and then dress, informally but beautifully, always with a fresh corsage pinned to her dress at the shoulder.

"She would invite the Rodgers grandchildren to come to the mansion on many Saturdays during the school year and more often during the summer months. She was never too busy to greet her grandchildren cheerfully and talk with them, but she never was to be interrupted when she took her afternoon nap. A light supper was served about dark and the family generally went to the living room for talk and games or to their bedrooms or to attend to other matters. I think the family entertained a great deal over the years."

Following Rodgers' death in 1911, the dwelling remained in his family until 1920. Apparently it was his intention to have his children and grandchildren remain there, but gradually, each went off to establish his home.

The Scottish Rite Cathedral Association took over the mansion, building a large auditorium near the carriage house and converting the third floor into a meeting hall. Unable to keep up the property, the association sold in 1940 to the Atlantic Coast Life Insurance Co., which uses the building as offices.

Robert W. Scarborough, secretary of the company, has taken great interest in the house, cultivating a correspondence with Eric Rodgers and compiling information on the Rodgers family.

He says with the exception of strategically placed partitions, the installation of an elevator and air conditioning, and the enclosure of the first and second floor piazzas by the Coast Guard, which occupied the building for several years during World War II, most of the original features of the house are preserved and in excellent condition.

# Graceful Lodgings



Staff Photo by Cynthia Kahn

Richard Widman, president of Charming Inns of Charleston, Inc., holds a Tiffany stained-glass window which will go inside the Wentworth Mansion.

## Rodgers Mansion refashioned as hotel

By CYNTHIA KAHN  
Of The Post and Courier staff

With all the hubbub surrounding the building of a hotel at 68 Wentworth St., Richard Widman, Scott Williams and his wife, Louise, are happy that their hotel located farther up at 149 Wentworth has been approved by the zoning commission.

"We've always had a majority of the support of this neighborhood," said Widman, who is also president of Charming Inns of Charleston Inc. "A couple of people were not in favor of it. But we won the zoning, and they both sold their houses."

Widman and the Williamses are reconstructing the inside of the old Rodgers Mansion. The house, built by Francis Silas Rodgers, was completed shortly before the earthquake of 1886 devastated the city.

The mansion, which recently served as the home to Atlantic Life Insurance, will open as the Wentworth Mansion hotel in a few months with Widman as owner and the Williamses as the managers.

Even among the dust and debris of construction, the grandeur of the Rodgers Mansion is evident. The huge four-story, 24,000-square-foot building features tremendous views of Charleston from the Ashley to the Cooper rivers. Matching marble fireplaces, crystal chandeliers and Tiffany windows are just a few of the features left in the house by the original owners which will also be used by the hotel.

To update the building, the

mansion will be divided into 21 rooms with a manicured garden connected to a 50-seat restaurant, separate meeting facilities and a day spa in the restored carriage house and stable.

"If you want the best and the most unique hotel in Charleston, you will seek us out," said Widman proudly. "We have our sites set on being a five-star and five-diamond hotel."

The Williamses moved from Virginia to Charleston to work with Widman. Both worked in fine hotels before moving to Charleston, and they felt this was the right hotel for them to manage.

Some of the amenities they promise are tea service every day at 4 p.m. along with wine and cheese tasting, a special wine cellar where guests can choose the wine they want to complement their Lowcountry cuisine, personalized tours of the city, as well as a whirlpool bath in every room.

Each room will be different from the others, featuring period antiques and spacious showers made of English tile.

Hotel rates are scheduled to be priced from \$275 for an east wing room to \$450-\$625 for one night in one of the mansion suites.

"What we're looking for is understated elegance, not Victorian gaudy," said Widman. "We'll have great features. You're not going to feel as though you can't sit down or be comfortable."

To make sure he was design-

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Post and Courier File Photo

The Rodgers Mansion on the corner of Wentworth and Smith streets will soon open as the luxury inn, The Wentworth Mansion.



Photo Provided

The interior of the Wentworth Mansion will feature fine art, antique furniture and other Victorian-style decorations. The mansion is scheduled to open for the spring tourist season.

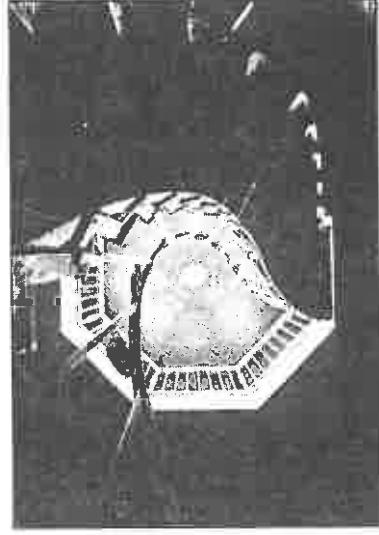


Photo Provided by Charming Inns of Charleston Inc.

A spiral staircase on the fourth floor leads to the cupola which offers views of the Ashley and Cooper rivers.

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Staff Photo by Cynthia Kahn

**Louise Williams (from left), Scott Williams and Richard Widman discuss business as construction goes on around them.**

## HOTEL

**from Page 1**

ing the right hotel, Widman traveled to various five-star and five-diamond hotels around the country. He wanted to stay in these places to see not only what they offered, but what it was that people were looking for in a fine hotel.

As the Williamses walk through the mansion on a weekly, sometimes daily, basis, they keep noticing the changes taking place as the hotel begins to take shape and the construction workers complete various tasks.

"It keeps getting bigger and bigger," said Louise. "It's just kind of neat to walk around sometimes."