

Greek Revival Style Evident In Charlotte Street Dwelling

(EDITOR'S NOTE: Seventh in a series of articles on the early dwelling houses of Charlotte Street. The eighth article will appear in this column next Monday.)

By W. H. J. THOMAS

It appears that during the first 10 to 20 years of the development of Mazyckboro and Charlotte Street as a quite genteel suburban area, the building lots were purchased by local people chiefly as investment property. Persons began buying lots from members of the Mazyck family in the 1790s but then the property would exchange hands a number of times before a builder — frequently 30 or even 40 years after the initial sale — actually began first construction.

Samuel Ham, carpenter, shipwright and wharfowner, was an early investor in Charlotte Street property but apparently was never a builder there. Still in the 18th century, while living on Amen Street, he purchased the large lot designated as No. 40 on J. Purcell's plat of the street, part of which is now occupied by the three-story frame house known as 40 Charlotte.

He paid 490 guineas to Al-

exander C. Mazyck, Paul D. Mazyck, Nathaniel B. Mazyck, Mary Mazyck and Catherine Mazyck for the lot, then measuring 80 feet on Charlotte, 85 feet on Chapel, 432 feet on its east line and 416 on its west line. He divided the lot in half and sold that portion facing on Charlotte.

John Eberley Halsall later acquired the lot and held it until 1827. He was a butcher living up at Hampstead. One William Halsall, also a butcher, lived on Charlotte Street until 1819 but it does not appear that he occupied any building on the spot where 40 Charlotte now stands.

Halsall sold this property as an empty lot to Jonah M. Vennin for \$2,200 on July 3, 1827. Vennin was listed

as a lumber merchant, later as a factor and commission merchant, and by the 1850s had a "lumber yard" on "Vennin's Wharf."

He was listed with a residence on St. Philip Street until 1831, having by this date apparently completed the present large Charlotte Street dwelling.

By the early 1870s Vennin had apparently died and the property was put under the care of Edmund G. Holmes, a planter living a few doors

to the east, as the guardian of the "Vennin minors".

It was in 1877 that Mary O. Quincy, Florence V. Bolger and Ida E. Bee brought suit against Holmes. To relieve this suit for the division of the estate, it was decreed that the Charlotte Street house and lot be sold at public auction. On Dec. 13, 1877, it was purchased by M. Virginia Walker, wife of David A.

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Walker, a local marble dealer, from Sheriff C.C. Bowen for \$3,250.

Benjamin H. Rutledge later acquired the property as a Walker trustee and had the house sold to Julia L. Mousseau for \$3,600 on Dec. 14, 1888. The property later was passed to Emily Walker, as only child and sole heir of Julia Mousseau. Her mother died in February of 1900.

The property was passed to Julia Walker Freeman, who sold it to Marie Walker Shingle and Lewis W. Rivers in 1950 for \$4,500. In 1955 it was purchased by William Seabrook.

The house that Jonah Vennin built for himself was a starkly modern house at the time of construction. If it was indeed completed by 1831 (and there seems no reason to think otherwise), it would be among the earliest homes in the city that may be termed Greek Revival. Although this style was in evidence in America as early as 1820 in its most typical form, it came quite late to Charleston.

Historian Talbot Hamlin places much of the responsibility for the delay on the success of Charleston's amateur architect Gabriel Manigault, who brought the Adam or Federal style to the city after returning from his studies in England. In his book "Greek Revival Architecture in America", Hamlin examines the excellence of Manigault's work "which was a bar to further development."

"In his work," Hamlin writes, "there are traces of the influence of Adam and Paine, and of Louis XVI detail; but he made of these a new synthesis quite personal in its restraint and unlike the work of his contemporaries elsewhere. It set a standard so high that Charleston builders who followed it found

little temptation to seek new form ..."

With the exception of a few buildings by Robert Mills, Hamlin added, "true Greek Revival work became common in Charleston only in the forties".

Perhaps being in the building supply trade, Vennin had a greater awareness of the changing fashions. Having a lumber yard certainly must have influenced him in building a frame dwelling. He chose a "single" house plan but faced the residence to the street rather than running it back along the length of the property, as with many of his earlier neighbors. The L-shape extension to the rear of the dwelling probably dates from that period of the 1830s as well, giving an extra room depth while still maintaining a plan that allowed for free circulation of the breeze.

He used a broad, unadorned clapboard facing, large full windows and doors and faced his home with a two-tiered piazza. In its every feature we see the bare simplicity that would be so fashionable in every part of the United States: the plainness in cornice, door and window framings, flat surfaces and the choice of unfluted Doric columns all



40 CHARLOTTE WAS PROBABLY BUILT BY LUMBERMAN

Evidence suggests house was constructed by 1831. (Staff Photo by Evans.)

became a ruling characteristic of the style.

One wonders if David

Walker, the keeper of a marble yard, may not have added up to the entrance level of the piazza when he had this as his home.