

History is alive at 20 South Battery

By George Woolston

Watching over White Point Garden for more than almost two centuries, the Stevens-Lathers mansion at 20 South Battery has been both a bystander and a participant in our nation's history. The handsome structure was also a part of history as seen in film; specifically, it was one of the places where the steamy mini-series "North and South" was filmed in 1985. The house's mercurial history began with humble beginnings, saw an elegant rise to luxury, suffered disrepair and was eventually brought back as extravagant as ever.

The Stevens family bought the original plot of land on which the house stands in 1843 for \$4,500. They built a modest three-story structure here, shown in an aerial view from 1850 as having a t-shaped design, which was common for that era. The Stevens eventually sold it to the Blacklock family, who had moved from their mansion on Bull Street to have a view of the harbor. As the War began to heat up, the Blacklock family fled. In 1870, the Blacklocks sold the home to Col. Richard Lathers.

Col. Lathers was a native of Georgetown, S.C., and had moved to New York City to start up his own business, which was very successful. Later, he found himself serving as a colonel for the Union during the War Between the States. Upon the ending of the War, he returned to his native South to help rebuild.

Lathers got right to work. He purchased the property at 20 South Battery and immediately began renovation. The

result — a five-story Greek Revival and Second Empire style mansion, complete with a ballroom, expanded northeast wing and mansard roof. Lathers held extravagant parties in his new ballroom, often between Southerners and Northerners in an attempt to reconcile the differences from the great conflict. He became frustrated with his peace efforts, and in 1874 he sold the mansion to Dr. Andrew Simonds and retreated back North.

One fascinating story from the time the Simonds resided there was how one family member fell through the roof of the ballroom and hung from a chandelier until she could get rescued by one of the maids. The Simonds family held onto the property for 40-odd years until it was sold to W. B. Chisholm, who then shortly after sold it to Mr. and Mrs. Ernest H. Pringle.

During the Pringles' stay, the house was used as a headquarters for Liberty Loan Activities, of which Mr. Pringle was in charge. It was also used to

accommodate 15 aviators. The Pringles then sold it in 1959 to the Tobias family, who turned the dwelling into 12 efficiency apartments.

In 1971, the Gay family purchased the home for \$93,000 and spent over \$200,000 in renovations. Following their purchase, they opened the Battery Carriage House Inn, a bed and breakfast located in the rear building of the property. It is rumored that strippers from the 1920s and 1930s were entertained in the very

building. Frank G. Gay was a local hotelier who was also responsible for the openings of the Elliot House on Queen Street along with the Meeting Street Inn.

When Hurricane Hugo hit, the house fell into disrepair and stood unoccupied until Drayton and Kat Hastie acquired the house a few years later. They worked hard to return the home to its former respected state. The Hasties also took over the operation of the Battery Carriage House Inn



The second floor hallway.



The grand ballroom.



The dining room located in the main living space on the first floor.



A view looking down the staircase from top of the fourth floor.

and still run the inn today.

Shortly after their acquisition of the Battery Carriage House Inn, the Hasties began to receive odd reports from their guests. It appeared that the guests were graced by the presence of paranormal entities in the middle of the night. Multiple guests who stayed in rooms 8 and 10 reported about either seeing a ghost with a headless torso and/or a ghost that most dubbed as the "Gentleman Ghost."

The headless torso ghost is believed to be a man from the War Between the States era. The story behind the gentleman ghost is that he was a young college student, the son of a former owner of

the home, who had jumped off the roof and committed suicide. Because of these ghost sightings, the Battery Carriage House Inn is often a stop on the multiple ghost tours that run in Charleston.

The Stevens-Lathers Mansion is truly one of the iconic homes in Charleston with a rich historical past of extravagance and elegance. Well situated and spacious, it is now on the market and a place where a family can entertain in fine Lowcountry style.

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