

## 20 SOUTH BATTERY

Col. Richard Lathers did not build 20 South Battery, but he placed his mark, indelibly, upon the mansion.

The colonel gave the house its present appearance when he remodeled the antebellum structure in 1870, in the taste of that period.

Samuel N. Stevens, a factor, actually built the house after he bought the apparently vacant lot for \$4,500 on June 7, 1843.

Stevens died in 1845 but city directories show his widow, Mary Smith Stevens, continued to live in the house on South Bay (now South Battery.)

Mrs. Stevens and her son, Samuel N. Stevens the Younger, sold the property on Dec. 18, 1859, to John Freer Blacklock, a factor, for \$20,000.

A plat also shows a kitchen building which remains on the property, a stable which has disappeared and two privies which yielded a large number of champagne bottles when excavated recently.

The "Bird's Eye View Map" published by John William Hill about 1850 shows the house with a broad gable roof with a wide fanlight in the front pediment.

The house retains its basic floor plan, as built for Stevens. The plan is unusual in that the entrance door is in the northwest wing of the "T" and the front of the central portion is taken up by double drawing rooms on the main floor.

The drawing rooms retain plaster cornices and Greek Revival pilasters decorated with anthemion, in the style of the 1840s.

The entrance hall, in the northwest wing of the "T" opens into the stairhall, in back of the drawing rooms.

There is retained the staircase, with its Empire style newel post and mahogany rail, typical of the 1840s, which sweeps to the upper floors in beautiful semi-oval curves. All but the top flight dates from Steven's time.

Col. Lathers, who retained these features when he remodeled, was a native of Georgetown who moved to New York in 1847 and became a millionaire as a cotton broker, banker, and insurance executive and railroad director.

In the trying period just before the Confederate War, Lathers toured the South, in a vain speechmaking attempt to hold the Union together. During the war, he served with the Union forces.

After the war, Col. Lathers retired from business and returned to Charleston to help rebuild the state.

On Feb. 21, 1870, he bought the South Battery house and began embellishing it. He added a large ballroom above a porte cochere on the northwest corner of the house, expanded the northeast wing to the rear and added a mansard roof to provide space for a large library.

The mansard appears on the house in the "Bird's Eye View of Charleston" of 1872, proving he had completed it by then.

Col. Lathers' additions permitted him to hold large and elegant receptions to which he invited political and military leaders of the North and South in an attempt to heal the wounds of the recent conflict.

Alfred L. Dennis, a visitor from New York, describes his visit, on March 5, 1874, to "the beautiful house of Col. Lathers on the Battery."

There, he said, "we were welcomed with great cordiality and introduced to a large company of gentlemen and ladies who had been invited to meet us.

"A fine picture gallery occupied a large space on the first floor, and in the top of the house is a large library well stocked with books and engravings, and commanding from two sides noble views of the city and harbor.

"From the balcony we could see Fort Sumter, and with a glass could trace the points made memorable during the long seige..."

Gen. James Conner described a reception for Gov. Horatio Seymour of New York, and William Cullen Bryant, on April 4, 1873.

"They received in the Music Room-really a handsome room...the furniture quite handsome. Coffee, wine, and punch in a little room off the Music Room. Supper, in one of the front drawing rooms thrown open and the table set in one..."

Lathers, however, finally gave up trying to get the estranged North and South reunited, sold the South Battery house on Aug. 11, 1874, and returned north.

His house is now owned by Mr. and Mrs. Frank Gay, Jr.