

## Do You Know Your Charleston?

# George Street Restoration Project Completed

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Staff Reporter

Extensive restoration work has been completed by the College of Charleston on the two-and-a-half-story frame dwelling house occupying the northeast corner of the intersection of George and St. Philip streets.

The remodeling of this late Georgian residence, built about 1803 by Barnard Elliott, is the first in a series of planned restorations of period

buildings on the expanding College of Charleston campus. According to the College's long-range plans, more than 20 other post-Revolutionary, antebellum and Victorian homes in this mid-town district will be saved and renovated for use as offices and classrooms.

This restoration work on 58 George St. has, in the last several months, transformed it in appearance from the rather curious semi-Victorian house with which local people

have been familiar back to a simple, unencumbered dwelling similar to the one Elliott constructed some 168 years ago. The restoration of 58 George entailed certain problems, as it had been thoroughly remade on exterior and interior by two previous owners: once after 1873 and again about 1911.

The lot the house now occupies was owned through the end of the 18th century by Francis G. Delieessline, a merchant. It was Delieessline who

conveyed the property to Barnard Elliott in July of 1803 though a release in the form of a mortgage, but it will have to remain uncertain as to whether Delieessline had an earlier home on the lot.

Elliott, a planter, was listed in the city directories of 1801 as living on St. Philip Street, of 1802 as being at 29 George, and of 1803 as being at 29 George, all three of these listings possibly placing him at this same corner lot. However, when Elliott signed the release of 1803, the property (then measuring 120 feet of George and being as much as 318 feet in depth) was described as being occupied only by "a kitchen."

Is it possible that in 1803 an earlier home (which Elliott may have rented) burned, leaving only a kitchen building, and he then took over the lot from Delieessline (for a mortgage of 1,266 pounds, 13 shillings and 4 pence) and built the present house? It seems likely, though no lease between Elliott and Delieessline was recorded.

The Elliotts lived on at this location after the builder's death, which was probably around 1812. But in 1826, following the death of John Middleton, Mrs. Elliott purchased his large mansion at the east end of George (14 George and now headquarters for the waterworks) where the family would live until 1879, though they kept ownership of 58 George for another 28 years.

On Jan. 10, 1854, Dr. Gibbs L. Elliott sold 58 George to Joshua Lazarus, then presi-

dent of the local gas works, for \$8,500. Lazarus lived at Laurens and Wall and never seems to have occupied the George Street house as his residence. His heirs sold the property (by then cut down to dimensions of 114 on north and south lines and 137 feet on east and west) to George W. Williams, wealthy merchant and banker, in 1863.

Ten years later, Williams sold the house to William Rieppe, keeper of a grist mill, for \$4,000. Probably during Rieppe's ownership it was remade with the recently removed west piazzas, tin window heads, a second story center bay projection, a double Victorian doorway and an assortment of Victorian ornamentation inside.

In settling the Rieppe estate in 1900, the house was conveyed to Anna W. C. Mehrtens, wife of grocer and dairyman George H. Mehrtens. She conveyed it to her son, William Rieppe Mehrtens, on Feb. 23, 1931. In the early 1950s it was purchased by Dorothy A. Krawcheck.

The College of Charleston Foundation acquired the house and lot (now measuring only 63 feet on George and being 73 feet in depth) on Oct. 4, 1970.

It was during Mrs. Mehrtens ownership that another remodeling of the Elliott house took place. Not long after the demolition of the Wieter's home at 26 George St. was accomplished in 1911 to allow for the construction of the Young Men's Christian Assn. building, much of its ornate post-Revolutionary woodwork was salvaged and fitted into 58 George.

When the contracting firm of H.A. DeCosta Co. took over the house to begin its reconstitution, the crews were confronted with the 1803 house, the 1870 house, the 1911 house and the alteration of 1952 when its basement was converted to a store and its two upper floors and attic to six apartments.

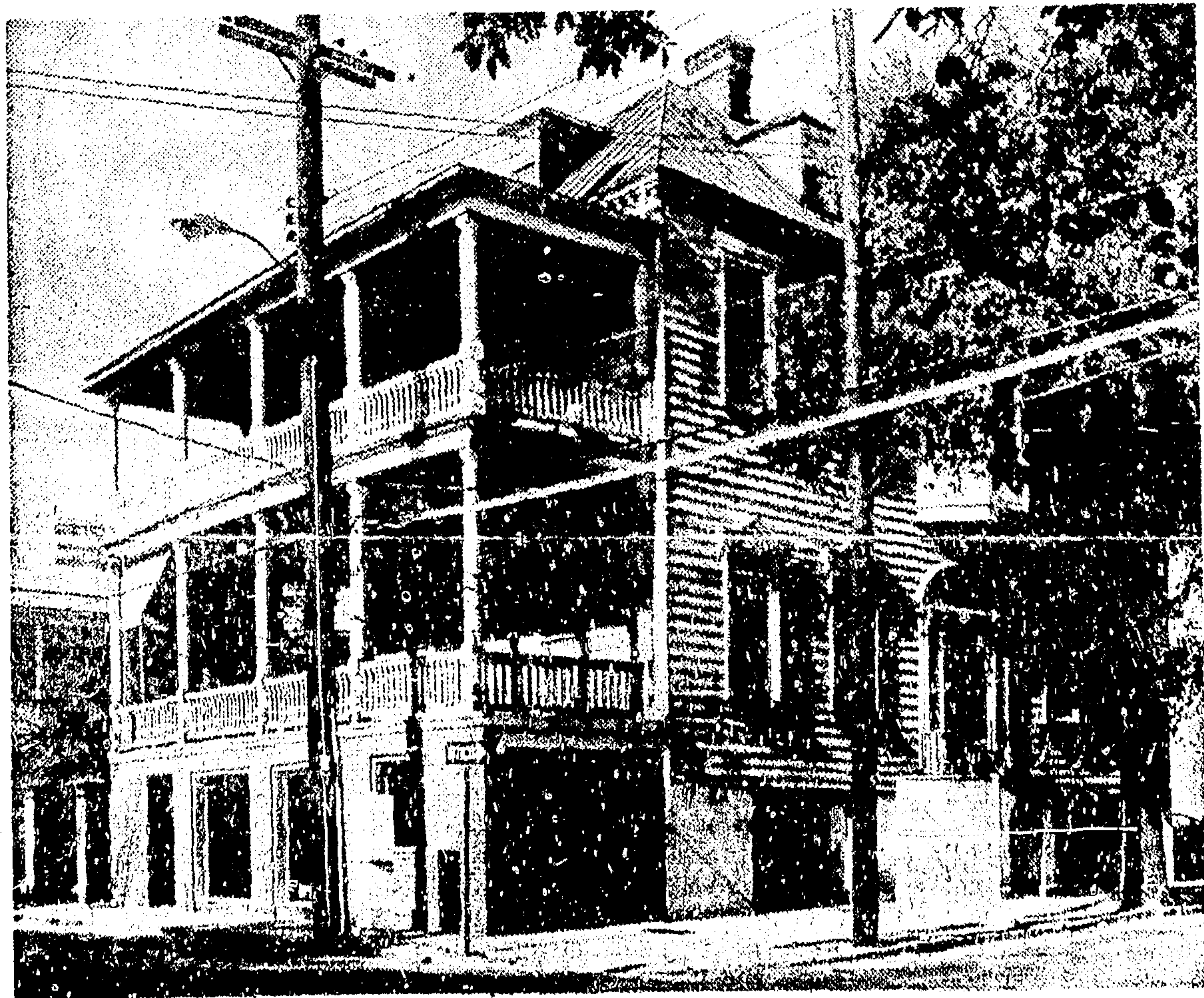
Almost all of the Victorian features were removed, with the exception of rear ell additions consisting of several rooms. It was decided that the paneling and woodwork from

the Wieter's home should be kept. These sections of dados, door and window architraves, and a full hallway arch of impressive elaboration were actually too large in scale for 58 George but were considered fully worth preserving.

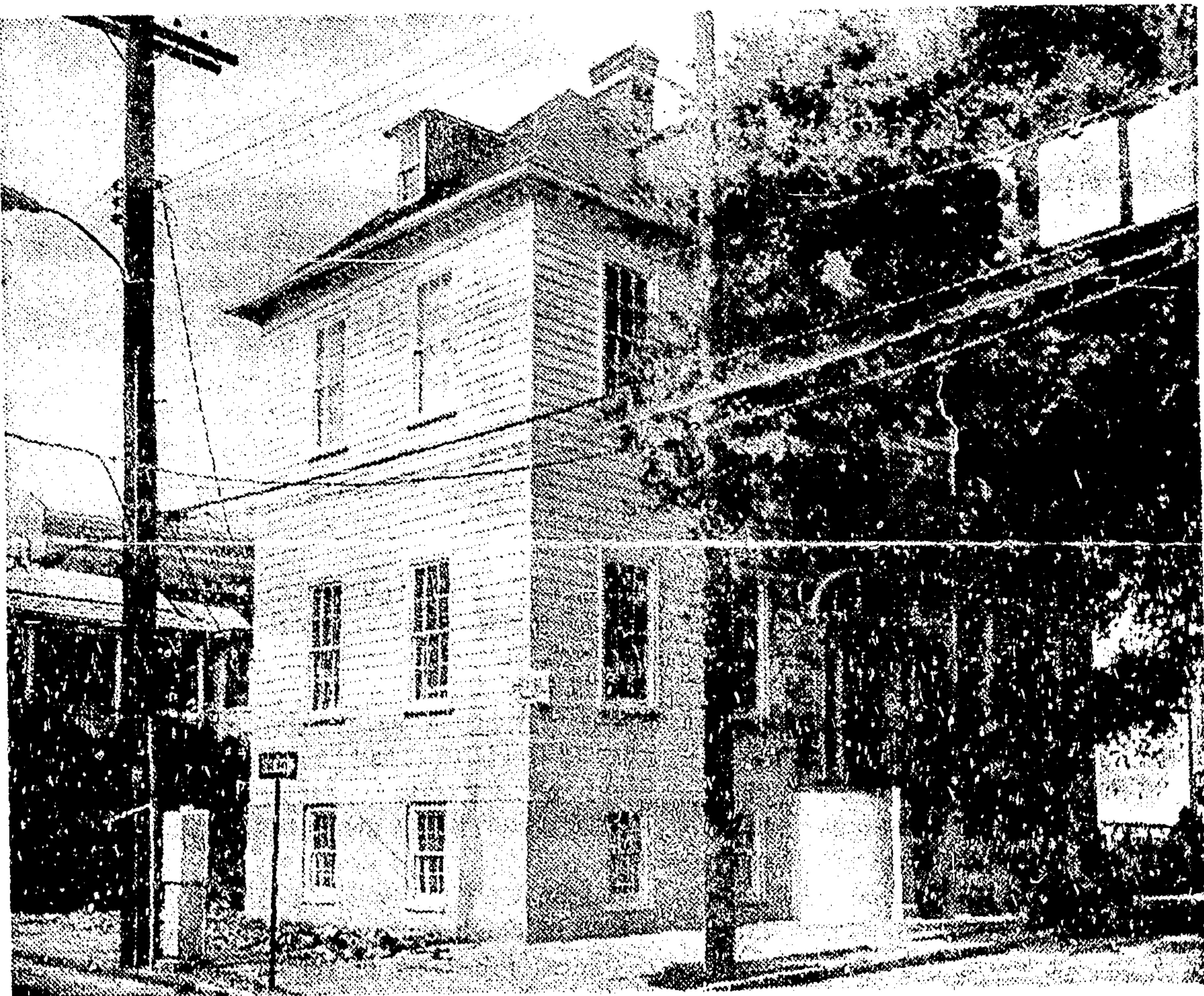
Local architect and historian Albert Simons contributed the plans for a new front entrance with period tracery sidelights to replace the former ones from the late 19th century. He also selected the colors for interior and exterior,

choosing a pale gray for the outside finish to cut down on glare, bright shades for the interior east rooms (where light is cut by the number of surrounding trees), and softer shades for the west side rooms where sunlight is plentiful.

The entrance floor is being used as classrooms, and the second story is occupied by the Office of Institutional Research and the Office of Alumni Affairs and Development.



**BEFORE—DWELLING ONE YEAR AGO**  
House was utilized as apartments.



**AFTER—58 GEORGE FOLLOWING RESTORATION**  
Home becomes offices and classrooms. (Staff Photo by Burbage)