

Line Street Dwelling May Be Oldest In Charleston

By ROBERT P. STOCKTON
and
W. H. J. THOMAS
Staff Reporters

Some houses, like discreet ladies, never reveal all secrets of their past, so the origin of 27-29 Line St. may remain obscured forever.

Completely ignored in the architectural survey of 1944, "This is Charleston", the house has been "discovered" in the new inventory of historic structures which is in progress.

Certain characteristics of the house lead some authorities to speculate that it is a 17th Century plantation house which has somehow survived.

If this is true, the house is the oldest in the city.

Standing with its back to Line Street, the house has the look of the early Lowcountry plantation house. It was built on a high basement, as it stood near a marshy creek which has been long since filled in.

Its floor plan, with three rooms in a row, with no stair hall (the stairs simply rise from the middle room) is similar to that of Middleburg, a 17th Century plantation house near the city.

Solid shutters, usually indicative of an early origin, remain on several windows.

On the other hand, the entrance doorways have fan-light transoms in the style of the late 18th or early 19th Century.

Of the three mantels, one is in the Classic Revival style of the early 19th Century, the others Greek Revival. One of the latter has an elaborate Greek scroll design executed in wood.

There had been speculation that three apparently old smaller houses in the back lot were surviving plantation buildings.

However, a detailed plat drawn in 1879 shows no structures on these sites.

One single-story building, shown on the plat at the convergence of three newly drawn property lines, may have been moved. If so, that accounts for one of these structures.

The plat shows the main house's piazzas then extended beyond the length of the house on each side, with staircases leading to the street on each side.

Written records concerning the property are as mystifying as the physical details.

According to Charleston historian H. A. M. Smith, all the land between present-day

with frustrating gaps in their sequence.

One record which casts doubt on an early origin of the main house is a conveyance deed dated 1823.

The purchase price, \$365, by accepted research standards would indicate there was no house on the property, which at that date measured 212 feet on Line Street and 90 feet on Nassau Street.

The lot was purchased at that time by James N. Elford, maker of mathematical and nautical instruments.

From this it may be surmised that Bernard Schencking's grant of 107 and

Calhoun and Line streets was granted in 1672 to Richard Cole but that he "died without making any sufficient settlement thereon."

Various smaller grants within Cole's boundaries were given subsequently, but it is difficult to pinpoint their exact boundaries.

However, the record of a 200-acre grant to James M. Goulard de Vervent, dated 1789 for Henry Laurens, former president of the Continental Congress who was imprisoned in the Tower of London during the Revolution.

Lot 119, with the same measurements as later acquired by Elford, fronted on Nassau Street, as Line Street had not then been cut.

It is listed on the 1780 plat among several which at the time had not been sold and were owned by Laurens.

There is no record of the lot ever having been sold by Laurens or his daughter and son-in-law, Martha Laurens Ramsay and Dr. David Ramsay, to whom he left all his Hampstead property on his death in 1792.

Dr. Ramsay, a physician who came to Charles Towne from his native Pennsylvania in 1773, was the author of several volumes on South Carolina history.

The property next appears in the records in 1815, in a plat of lands appropriated the previous year by the S. C. General Assembly for fortifications.

These were the Charleston Lines, built to protect the city from possible land attack in the War of 1812.

Although the 1814 legislative act appointed a commission to assess and purchase the property on which fortifications were being built, no record of these transactions has been found.

In 1822, the General Assem-

bly appointed Brig. Gen. John Geddes as commissioner to sell the Charleston Lines.

The sale took place in 1823, and Elford bought the lot at Line and Nassau.

A plat drawn at the time shows the major breastworks ended at Meeting Street above Line. However, Louis J. Barbot's historical map drawn for the 1883 Charleston Year Book shows the "First Parallel" of minor fortifications crossing the area just below Line Street, across Elford's lot.

The lot and dwelling were acquired from Elford's widow's estate in 1835 by Mrs. Louis Willis, wife of attorney and broker Henry Willis, for \$1,025.

At the same time Mrs. Willis bought Hampstead Lot No. 120, adjacent to the

Elford lot on Nassau Street and two slaves, Chloe and John, for \$500.

This combined real estate was subdivided in 1879 by Mrs. Willis's heirs, Henry Willis (the younger) and Elvina G. Tyler, and the present lot of 27-29 Line was drawn from back portions of the original lots.

The house was sold in 1879 to Anna C. P. Yates for \$1,610, whose heirs, Jennie Annie Shingluff and John William Yates sold it in 1907 to John H. Doscher.

Emelia R. Doscher sold it for \$2,875 in 1919 to Morris B. and Ida Sokol, who conveyed it in 1953 to Mrs. Jean Sokol Rosner, Joseph H. Sokol and Mrs. Sonia Ray Sokol Feinberg.

It is now owned by Mrs. Rosner and A. H. Rosenberg.

Water Threatened By Exterminators Health Board Says

COLUMBIA (UPI)—The State Board of Health has warned pest control companies to take precautions to prevent contamination of families' drinking water supplies.

John H. Millar of the board's Bureau of Environmental Engineering, said Sunday companies often mix insecticides with water at a customer's home.

"Some companies hook their hose to the person's spigot and drop the hose into the tank of insecticides," Millar said.

"When the tank is filled, they are ready to begin spraying but sometimes a negative pressure exists in the water line. When this happens the insecticides can be drawn into the house's water pipes," he said.

Dr. Lamar E. Priester Jr., deputy state health officer, said insecticides contaminated the water supply of a rural family earlier this year when the water pump malfunctioned during a termite-proofing operation.



(Staff Photo by Evans)

The Mystery - Is This Charleston's Oldest House?