COMMENTS ON

OLD CHARLESTON BRICKWORK

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Charleston from it's beginning originated cargoes that were far larger in bulk than any it could assimulate. As a result ships came in in ballast. Brick, tile and such other building material as Bermuda Stone were at times used for this purpose and afterwards sold.

The coastal plain about the city, with the exception of a few rare deposits of marl hard enough to be used as ashlar, is practically stoneless. Timber gave the cheap, convenient, and usual building material. Clay and sand for brick making are common. They were found convenient to the city on all three of the rather short rivers that lead to the harbor.

Brick was made early, but not generally used until towards the end of the eighteenth century. In Charleston disastrous fires have swept away all the oldest buildings, but we find brick structures in the surrounding country

from 1686 forward.

At Medway Plantation (1686) a house exists built at this time by a Dutch emigrant, in the style of his country. The brick is reputedly local. Typical of the time, here, and in England, this brick is large, and comparatively soft. It is interesting to note that brick was made on this plantation and in the neighborhood until 1865. The size remaining fairly constant, and the quality improving markedly with time.

The Parish Churches of St. Andrews' and Saint James', Goose Creek, were begun respectively in 1706 and 1708 with brick of the same character.

The Mulberry Plantation house built on Cooper River in 1714 shows a considerable improvement in brick making.

In 1723 St. Andrews was enlarged by the addition of transepts and a choir. These are built of the first brick we can indicate as imported. About this same time the handsome little residence at Brick House Plantation

on Edisto was built of brick brought from Boston in New England. These are of the same general size, shape, and character as those used at St. Andrews. They also resemble quite closely brick found at the residence that is now 73 Church Street, apparently standing in 1733. Small in comparison with the native sorts, they are of a purer clay content, and much harder burned. Popularly they were known locally as "Dutch" brick.

About 1728 at William Harvey's house at 110 Broad Street, we find another sort of imported brick that is habitually used from this time forward. This maybe English brick. The walls of this house are made of what are apparently native brick. The corners and the flat arches over the openings are laid up in a dark red brick, with an even granular consistency. This was favored for rubbed work, and so shaped for the voussoirs in this building. Brick of the same appearance was used for the same purpose at the Glebe House on Glebe Street

(1770 c.). It is also found later as we shall see in other fine work. (c. 1770)

It is to be noted the stucco on the house at 110 Broad Street was evidently a subsequent improvement, and the little brick, used in filling out the quoins, another importation.

The building act passed after the great fire of 1740, (South Carolina Gazette, December 25, 1740) fixes the prices of three sorts of brick. English at six pounds per thousand, Carolina at five, and New England at three pounds ten shillings. These values are in South Carolina currency and hence about one-seventh the value of sterling.

Following this fire the three houses at 97, 99, and 101 East Bay Street were built of the same hard small brick identified at Brick House as coming from New England. It should be noted that the Baroque gable at 97 and the cornice that give the three

buildings architectural cohesion, are made of a larger type of brick, and so may date from a slightly later period.

There is a considerable discussion of the brick used in the construction of Miles Brewton's House at 27 King Street (1765-1769), (McCrady's History of South Carolina under the Royal Government note 2 p. 514), with the conclusion that this celebrated establishment must have been constructed of native brick, popular opinion to the contrary not withstanding.

In 1770, there is a mention made of Dutch brick. In a letter from Henry Laurens, a great Charleston merchant, who was afterwards a President of the Continental Congress. (Sellers: Charleston Business on the Eve of the American Revolution p. 66). Laurens instructs a schooner's captain to carry Dutch brick from Charleston down to Georgia, there barter them for shingles, and carry the shingles on to Jamaica

for further bartering.

As a note on building material as ballast. (Shoepf: Travels in the American Confederation. Vol. 2, p. 192). Johann David Shoepf noted in 1784 that Charleston received "shell-sand stone" from Bermuda, and brick from Europe, Holland especially.

Authenticable Dutch Brick was used at Woodville Plantation on Santee River at the end of the eighteenth century. Two bricks brought from an out building are now in the collection of the Charleston Museum. These are large, strong and salmon colored. On one is inscribed the date 1796. On the other, in handsome script: (See illustrations)

"HAT IS LIGTER EEN GE(HELL) DORP TE VERTEEREN DA(N) EEN HUIS TE WINNEN."

"It is easier to destroy a whole village than make a house."

Brick similar to them in size and appearance are found

at 129 Tradd Street. The residence here was built in 1797 by Joseph Winthrop. A number of additions and alterations have also employed brick of the type used to trim the arches at the Harvey House. A garden wall is made of small brick of the sort used at Brick House. Also very fine examples of Carolina Grey brick from about 1840 have been used in the existing out-buildings.

Possibly dating from about 1800 are some very small, very hard, dull yellow brick found at the Elms Plantation, on Goose Creek, and at San Souci, on the Ashley River, now just within the city limits. These have been surmised to be Dutch on the strength of the description of the "clinkers" that paved the village of Broek, near Amsterdam, in 1797. (Mugridge: Letter book of Mary Stead Pinckney. Grolier Club p. 83). They were used at the Elms to line the arches at the back of a privy and cover the treads of a stair winding

down to a sunken dairy.

The Elms Plantation is notable also for having had a barn built of sun-dried brick, in the manner of adobe. After the fashion of the Egyptians in the time of Genesis these were made with a considerable mixture of rice-straw.

From the Revolution to the War of 1812, Charleston was largely used as a winter entrepot for the United States. This business produced a number of advertisements of imported brick and other building materials.

For example:

May 3, 1797 the City Gazette and Daily Advertiser notes the receipt by the See Blume from Bremen, of 40,000 Tile, and 5,000 Bricks. On the 23rd of the same month, the same paper advertised a few thousand Brick brought by the sloop Brimo from New York.

The Times on September 29, 1802 advertises the Big Harriet from Hull with coals and brick. The same

paper on February 18, 1803, offers for sale from the ship Juno, 18,000 Hamburg Brick, and 250 Stone Flags. It was previously noted that she had fetched in 130 tons of stone ballast.

In the years following 1800 Charleston did some very notable building, using it's particular adaptation of the Adam style. Two of the finest examples of this are William Blacklock's House (1800) at 18 Bull Street, and Nathaniel Russell's House (see illustration) at 51 Meeting Street, now the headquarters of the Historic Charleston Foundation. In both of these buildings native brick is used for the main part. The flat arches over the openings, the relieving arches that have been used with such decorative effect, and the belt courses at the latter residence are all done in the type of fine grained red brick, first noted at William Harvey's House on Broad Street.

After the war of 1812 the steamboats and

discriminatory tariffs sent this City into a serious decline as an entrepot. At the same time cotton aided rice in giving it substantial exports.

Foreign brick makes way for the increasingly excellent native products that come to a high state of excellence at this time. Notable "Carolina Grey" brick is to be found at the Bennett's Rice Mill (1844) on Cooper River (see illustration), opposite the East end of Society Street. This mill was designed and constructed by a family who made their own brick, sawed their own lumber, built over their own subdivision of the spreading City, and incidentally planted a fair share of the rice that was processed here at their own mill.

Fort Sumter, begun in 1830, was in fair part built of brick made at Medway Plantation by Peter Gaillard Stoney. His fine type of brick may also be seen in George Robertson's House (1846-1850) at

1 Meeting Street. It is of interest to note that these bricks were made within sight of the house built on Medway, in 1686.

Flemish bond predominates throughout the period we have discussed. English bond is used to a certain extent in early fine work as at Mulberry. Later this less ornamental bond was relegated to the side walls. American running bond took it's place here after the Revolution.

Jointing is variable. Before the Revolution the joints were often struck with rodded lines. In the Adam Period the joints are very carefully finished with hard, white, shell-lime putty. These have a chisel edge profile. Later, as at 39 Legare Street (c. 1840), and 1 Meeting Street (c. 1850), mortar joints are flush, and have been colored to match the brick. At the Legare Street House the joints are then carefully accented with a neat half round beading of

shell-lime putty. At the Meeting Street House a white line was painted over the flush joints.

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