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16 Clifford

"Dating" an historic structure is always a challenge, but occasionally a house does not fit the usual standards and criteria for categorizing it in an architectural "period."

The small brick house at 16 Clifford St. is such a house.

The two-and-one-half-story house, in ruins for several years, is being restored by Mr. and Mrs. Henry Buist Jr.

Though built sometime between late 1859 and 1861 — the documentary evidence of this is incontestable — the house has some architectural and construction details usually associated with houses of an earlier period.

The general style and mood of the house, its basic bulk and shape, its gabled facade with just a hint of the Victorian, its romantic French windows, the high transoms over the entrance doorways — mark it as being of the period just before the War Between the States — 1850-60.

The brickwork — laid in the American or common bond typical of the mid-1800's — also supports these standard means of "dating."

A closer inspection, however, reveals certain anacronisms.

The sash windows, for example, have nine lights in the top sash, nine in the bottom — the classic "nine-over-nine" found in houses of the early 1700's through the 1820's, with an occasional overlap into the 1830s and 1840s.

It would have been more common for a house built in the 1850s or 1860s to have a "six-over-six" light pattern in its sash windows.

On the interior, one is startled to find a mantel which obviously dates from the Federal period of the early 19th century.

Also Jack C. Muller and David Dunlap of the architectural firm of David Leroy Parrott, architects for the restoration project, point out apparently early construction details.

The fireplaces, Muller pointed out, were constructed with wooden support members exposed to the fire. This is more characteristic of early houses, he said.

Dunlap also noted that hand-hewn wooden pegs were used in lieu of nails in parts of the house.

Albert Elfe, a master builder, apparently built the house and a companion brick structure (now demolished) on the adjoining lot to the east, sometime after acquiring the property on Nov. 10, 1859.

Elfe bought the property from the estate of Abraham Ottolengui, in an auction ordered by the Charleston County Court in Equity.

Public notices of the estate sale, published in the Charleston Courier and the Charleston Mercury, describe fully all lots and buildings in the estate.

As Ottolengui owned all property on the north side of Clifford Street except for the King Street corner, the public notices give a clear picture of the entire block.

It is clear that the only brick building in the block at the time was William Enston's store at King and Clifford, now occupied by Birlant's.

It is also clear that Clifford Street property lines have changed greatly over the years.

A comparison of measurements given in the Otto-

lengui estate notices with current measurements given in the Charleston County tax maps, show that the present lot of 16 Clifford was part of a lot known as 12 Clifford in 1859.

It is described as that "lot of land, with one and a half story wooden dwelling and kitchen, 12 Clifford St. — measuring in front 66 feet by 16 feet 10 inches deep, more or less. Rent, \$96 per annum."

Elfe bought this lot from Ottolengui's estate, as well as a lot, with a two-story wooden dwelling and kitchen, known as 14 Clifford, measuring 49 feet along the street and 16 feet and 10 inches deep. That house and lot rented for \$216 a year.

Elfe had gained control of the rear portion of what is now 16 Clifford's lot in the marriage settlement with his wife, the former Elizabeth A. Sutcliffe, in 1830.

That portion of the lot was then part of the rear of a lot fronting on Archdale Street (on which 25 Archdale now stands).

This rear portion of the Archdale Street lot adjoined Elfe's Clifford Street lots purchased from Ottolengui and he built 16 Clifford and its companion straddling the original property lines.

The two brick houses are listed on the site in the city census of 1861. The census was completed by Sept. 20 of that year.

The ward book (tax list) of 1859-61 indicates a change took place on the property during that period. There is a sharp increase in the property val-

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uation, with the notation "Brick H." and the new valuation written over the old in blue pencil.

It is evident, from a comparison of the various documentary sources, that Elfe built the two brick houses between the latter part of 1859 and the latter part of 1861.

The 1859-61 ward book has two ditto marks under the phrase "Brick H." which would ordinarily mean three brick houses on the site.

However, the third brick house never existed, so it is possible Elfe began building it but abandoned the project when the Civil War began.

The changes in the ward book are written in the same type of blue pencil with which notations were made in the ward book after the great fire of Dec. 11 and 12, 1861.

However, it is apparent that Elfe's two brick houses escaped the 1861 fire, as the property is not marked "burned" in the ward book, as was other property lost in the fire.

Neither is Elfe's name included in the street-by-street list of property owners who suffered losses, which was published in The Courier and Mercury in several editions after the fire.

The possibility that Elfe used materials from the original wooden house in building 16 Clifford may explain its several "old fashioned" details.

When the original wooden house was built is uncertain. The Phoenix Fire Insurance Map of 1788 shows a number of frame houses along Dutch Church Alley, as the street was then called.

Dutch Church Alley was 25 feet wide in 1788. City Council bought considerable property along Clifford Street in 1819-20, apparently to widen the street.

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