

178 Ashley Avenue

Robert Hume Lucas House

c. 1851

Daniel Cannon owned a very large piece of property above Calhoun which later became Cannonborough. On November 3, 1784, he gave a parcel of his holdings to the minor sons of William Doughty—namely, **William Cannon Doughty and Thomas Doughty**. (The transfer was not actually recorded until August 6, 1790, though.) Each received half of a parcel that was 200 feet wide and ran all the way from Ashley Avenue (then known as Thomas Street) to Rutledge Avenue (then known as Pinckney Street). William took the southern half edged by Doughty Street, and Thomas took the northern half (which is the current property for 178 Ashley Avenue).¹



The ownership of the Doughty brothers' land became involved in a lawsuit involving the related Johnston, Gaillard, and Doughty families. On June 25, 1822, as the result of a judicial order in the families' lawsuit, a public auction was held for the future home of 178 Ashley Avenue and the adjacent lot to the south. According to the newspaper notice of the sale, both properties already contained "excellent Brick Out Buildings."² **William Johnston**, who owned the adjacent land the north, was the high bidder at \$3300 for the future home of 178 Ashley Avenue, and the sale was recorded two days later.³

Mr. Johnston sold the lot to **John Martin VanRhym** on July 1, 1830.⁴ Mr. VanRhym sold the 100 foot wide piece of property (that still extended all the way through the block) to **William Lucas** on October 26, 1832, for \$1500.⁵ The property added to Mr. Lucas' holdings in the area; he had already acquired the land to the north.

In the 1849 city directory, William Lucas and his family were living on Rutledge Avenue. When the federal census was taken on November 29, 1850, William and Charlotte (Hume) Lucas were living with their very large family—17 people—including their son Robert Hume Lucas in the area; the census did not record house numbers or streets, but the Lucas family was near the United States Arsenal (that is today MUSC), so they probably still lived on Rutledge Avenue.

¹ Deed book C, page 550.

² Southern Patriot, June 23, 1822, at 3

³ Deed book H9, page 436

⁴ The deed from Mr. Johnston to Mr. VanRhym has not been located, but the recital in a later transfer listed the date for the sale.

⁵ Deed book B10, page 15; Robert P. Stockton, "MUSC Will Restore Old Mansion," News and Courier, Aug. 8, 1977, at B1

William Lucas split up his holdings and conveyed two tracts to his son **Robert Hume Lucas** by deeds dated July 10, 1850, and June 2, 1851.⁶ The deeds from father to son were never recorded, but a later deed confirming the transfer identified the price for the two tracts as \$1500, a figure that indicates no house had been built.

Robert H. Lucas⁷ was born on August 16, 1825, in Charleston. He married Emma Julia Lucas⁸ on January 8, 1846, but she died later that same year. When his cousin, Jonathan Lucas, died in 1848, Robert became the superintendent of his cousin's extensive industrial operation, Lucas Mills. Perhaps his new position led him to undertake building an elegant house near the mills. Regardless, construction of the house must have happened quickly; a map was drawn in 1852 (right) that shows the house already on the property with two outbuildings.



Certainly, the house was built before February 1852. On February 13, 1852, Robert Lucas (shown below) mortgaged the property to William Blanding, the trustee under the marriage settlement of Robert and his second wife, Jane Mary (Gordon) Lucas, for \$11,000. (The mortgage was later satisfied.) The mortgage described the property as having a dwelling house with outbuildings and required that Mr. Lucas keep \$10,000 of insurance on the house and outbuildings. The tremendous increase in value from \$1500 to \$11,000 indicates the house was added by Robert Lucas in late 1851 or early 1852.⁹

In 1852, Robert Lucas was living in the house and would remain with his family for a few years, but the ownership for most of the next decade was a family trust. On June 16, 1854, **William Blanding**, as a trustee for the Lucases, paid \$14,000 for the double lot with buildings.¹⁰ How the house was used during the trust's ownership is unknown, but in the 1855 city directory, Robert Lucas was listed as

⁶ Deed book C16, page 266 (Note: This deed was actually recorded on May 17, 1872, when it was discovered that the deeds from William to Robert were never recorded. The 1872 deed to the price of \$1500 for the earlier transfers.)

⁷ The photograph of Mr. Lucas was included in Edwin Allen Sherman, Brief History, Constitution and Statutes of the Masonic Veteran Association of the Pacific Coast with the List of Officers and the Entire Roll of Members from the Beginning, December 27, 1878, to January 1, 1901.

⁸ Emma J. Lucas was born in 1825 to Jonathan Lucas III and died October 10, 1846.

⁹ Deed book P12, page 541

¹⁰ Deed book I13, page 167. Then, on February 14, 1855, William Jervey was swapped in to replace Mr. Blanding as the trustee of the marital trust. Deed book Z12, page 365

residing on Rutledge Avenue instead of Ashley Avenue. In 1861, however, Robert Lucas was listed in the Charleston census as residing at the Ashley Avenue house.¹¹

Regardless, on May 19, 1863, the property was sold to **Otis Mills** for \$23,000.¹² Mr. Mills lived on lower Meeting Street near his eponymous business, the Mills House Hotel, and only a few weeks later, on July 1, 1863, flipped the house for \$40,000 to Maj. **Thomas Hutson Lee**.¹³ The sudden jump in the price is unexplained.

Maj. Lee¹⁴ lived in the house from at least 1867 to his death on March 7, 1898. He married Eliza Lucilla Haskell.¹⁵ Before the Civil War, Maj. Lee had operated a business selling real estate and slaves. After the War, he seems to have focused entirely on insurance. In 1880, they were at “16” Ashley with six daughters and one son and three servants; in the rear houses were two more black families.



During the Lees’ time at the house, the lot expanded slightly. On May 17, 1883, Mrs. Lee bought the 5 foot segment on the northern edge for \$125 from Robert S. Rutledge, the neighboring property owner to the north.¹⁶ The addition was a rectangle of 5 by 91 feet on the north attached to the main property that is otherwise 100 by 185. An extra room attached to the northeast corner of the house seems to have accounted for the add-on to the lot. Given the size of the property, it is unknown why new property was acquired for the addition, but perhaps the new room of the house was meant to be accessed along the north side of the house.

After Mr. Lee’s death, Mrs. Lee was there until her death on April 5, 1905. In 1910, her daughters, Miss Lula Lee and three sisters (Kate, Lela, and Helen) shared the house. Three black families lived in the rear building.

On December 7, 1910, the estate of Mrs. Lee sold the property to **Estelle McN. Harris**¹⁷ who conveyed it to her husband, **Wilmot L. Harris**, on the same day.¹⁸ Mr. Harris served as the postmaster while residing at the house, but his job had not come easily; Mr. Harris was a native of New York and was initially objected to by Sen. Ben Tillman as a carpetbagger when he was nominated in 1902 by

¹¹ Not only did he leave the house, he soon moved much further away; in 1867 he moved to California and, oddly, received patents for ice machines. He returned to South Carolina, moving to Spartanburg in 1898 and remained until his death on January 29, 1915. “Robert H. Lucas Died Last Night,” *Spartanburg Herald*, Jan. 30, 1915, at 5

¹¹ Deed book K19, page 317

¹² Deed book S14, page 390

¹³ Deed book J14, page 177

¹⁴ (b. Mar. 4, 1834)

¹⁵ (b. 1836; d. Apr. 5, 1905)

¹⁶ Deed book K19, page 317

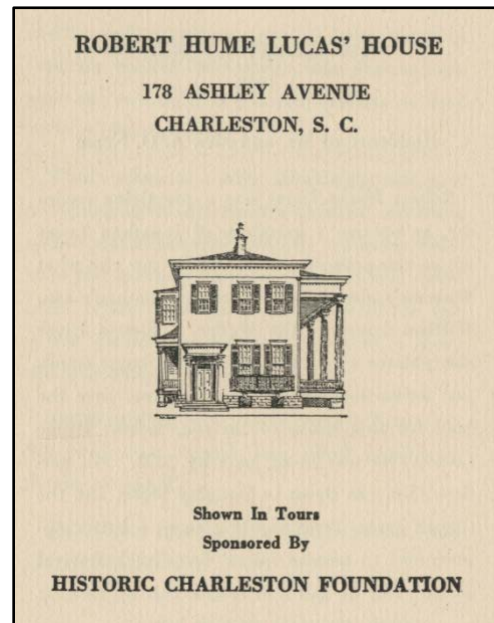
¹⁷ Deed book O25, page 272

¹⁸ Deed book W25, page 69

President Roosevelt.¹⁹ Eventually, Mr. Harris was appointed when locals offered their support to placate Sen. Tillman, and he was reappointed in January 1912.²⁰ When Mr. Harris died on May 7, 1913, he left all of his estate to Mrs. Estelle McN. Harris,²¹ and she sold the house on September 8, 1913, to **Hortense A. Tobias**.²²

Thomas Jefferson Tobias was there from 1913 with his wife, Hortense, until his death in 1937.²³ Mr. Tobias had been born on May 3, 1868, to Joseph and Rosa (Mordecai) Tobias. He was a leading merchandise broker, running his family's business that had been founded in 1821, A. Tobias' Son & Co. Mr. Tobias was a trustee of the K.K.B.E. synagogue on Hasell Street and member of the Hebrew Orphan Society. His widow was still there in 1940 according to the federal census with a daughter and several black families living in two rear buildings.²⁴

Mrs. Tobias was still living in the house when she conveyed it to **Alpha Olin Neese**²⁵ for \$16,000 on June 30, 1942.²⁶ Mr. Neese planned to live in the main house and renovate the rear buildings as rental properties.²⁷ Mr. Neese was the proprietor of the White House grocery for many years at 356 King Street.²⁸ The house was to be included in the 1948 house tours of the Historic Charleston Foundation, the first such tours.²⁹ Mrs. Margaret Euzelia Neese, Mr. Neese's wife, died while residing at the house in 1960.³⁰



When the house was advertised for sale on April 3, 1963, it was described as having two residences in the rear: a single-family house and a duplex. Mr. Neese agreed to sell the house to **Julian R. Youmans** and included the mirror in the front living room, the chandeliers in both living rooms, and the blinds for \$42,000.³¹ The deal was struck in October 1963, but the sale was not recorded until January 2, 1964.³²

¹⁹ "Harris Really Postmaster Now," Evening Post, Nov. 25, 1903, at 5

²⁰ "Reappointed Postmaster," Evening Post, Jan. 22, 1912, at 11

²¹ Mrs. Harris was born on August 10, 1870, to Paul and Susan Jenkins. She died on August 16, 1971, in Florida.

²² Deed book Y26, page 81

²³ "Death Claims T.J. Tobias," Evening Post, March 16, 1937, at 2

²⁴ Mrs. Tobias died on December 9, 1960, but she no longer lived at the house.

²⁵ Mr. Neese died on July 10, 1975. "A.O. Neese, Veteran Merchant, Dies," News and Courier, July 11, 1975, at 7

²⁶ Deed book N43, page 529

²⁷ "A.O. Neese Buys Tobias Residence," News and Courier, May 30, 1942, at 12

²⁸ "King St. Property Sold," News and Courier, Oct. 18, 1942, at 10

²⁹ "Tours of Old Houses Create Interest Throughout Nation," News and Courier, Apr. 11, 1948, at 5-Azalea (special insert)

³⁰ Mrs. Neese was born September 17, 1892, to L. Milton and Martha Wilson. She died October 13, 1960.

³¹ Deed book S77, page 365

³² Deed book H79, page 8

Julian R. Youmans sold the house to Dr. Clarence B. Calcote as part of a deal that included other neighboring properties on Ashley Avenue on January 3, 1967.³³ Either Mr. Youmans or Dr. Calcote was responsible for splitting the house into several rentals; the house was used as two dwellings, and the rear buildings were five more.

Dr. Calcote sold the house to the **Health Sciences Foundation of the Medical University** for \$175,000 on April 5, 1977.³⁴ MUSC got the house to use it for an alumni-faculty house. The name, Wickliffe House, honored the donor, Margaret Wickliffe of West Union and New York City.³⁵ Miss Wickliffe died on December 25, 1979.³⁶

The Charleston Board of Architectural Review approved removing part of the house and renovating it in 1978.³⁷ The neoclassical house has columns that were copied from the Tower of the Winds in Athens. The foyer has a staircase that is set below the floor with a double staircase to the main floor. The mantels were made of Italian marble and the chandeliers used French prisms. The main house has both a raised basement and attic. The kitchen was modern to replace the old kitchen still in the rear. The two buildings behind the house were the kitchen and carriage house with servants' quarters.

Inside the house, the main stairway links the first and second floor. The stair—albeit in roughly finished form—continues into the basement which has been finished as a few areas including at least one defined room. The east side of the house has a central door and windows in line with those on the main floor. On the second floor, the two principal rooms have both had their openings onto the central hall widened into permanent openings instead of doors, so they can serve social functions but not as bedrooms any longer. The framing of the attic has ghost marks showing that the ceiling was plastered with knee walls along the sides, strongly suggesting that the area was use for living space. However, there are currently no dormer windows, and whatever service stairs surely existed originally have been removed and replaced with a pull-down attic ladder; the original stairs was likely where bathrooms and storage areas are to the west of the main stair.

³³ Deed book Z86, page 324

³⁴ Deed book A112, page 187

³⁵ "MUSC Gets Historic Home," Evening Post, March 14, 1977, at 4-C

³⁶ "Hospital Benefactor Miss Wickliffe Dies," The State, Dec. 27, 1979, at 2-B

³⁷ Edward C. Fennell, "Request To Demolish Building Is Denied," News and Courier, Oct. 13, 1978, at 15-C