

Antebellum Mansion Lost Portico In 1886 Earthquake

(42nd in a Series)

By JACK LELAND
Evening Post Staff Writer

The antebellum mansion at 13 East Battery literally lost its face in the great earthquake of 1886 and saw a long-lost portion of its once massive portico uncovered by Hurricane Gracie in 1959.

When Charleston was shaken by the massive earthquake, the tall columns crumbled. The soaring roof of the porch, an extension of the main roof, remained cantilevered out over the arch-supported first floor piazza.

It was considered economically unfeasible to restore the pillars, what with the poverty forced on the former Confederate, bastion by revenge-minded Northerners, so the damaged porch roof section was taken off. The gable end was sealed with brick from the ruined columns and the big house has stood ever since looking out over the seawall.

When Hurricane Gracie brought 100-mile an hour winds to Charleston in 1959 one of the victims was a huge tree in the yard next door to 13 East Battery. The big tree toppled and its roots loosened the earth beneath it as they were forced up by the weight of the falling tree.

Workmen clearing the area discovered one of the capitals of the tall columns in the earth beneath the base. Apparently the force of its fall in 1886 had driven it into the soft earth. Time and nature combined to cover it and a tree grew around it, covering it with its base.

It is one of Charleston's tallest waterfront houses. On the night of April 11-12, 1861, Charlestonians stood on its

wide roof to watch the start of the Civil War. It apparently escaped injury during the Union siege of Charleston. It also was not harmed when a huge Confederate cannon was blown up at the intersection of East and South Batteries while the Southern forces were evacuating the city in 1865.

The explosion of the cannon sent a large chunk of its barrel through the roof of 13 East Battery where it still remains. But Number 13 did not suffer.

The quoins at the corners and matching work on the first floor porch supports were typical of 1845 when the house was built. Brick for its thick walls came from brickyards on Lowcountry rivers. Heart pine went into its sills and flooring and intricately designed ironwork adorns the balcony stretching across its front.

The house is a variation on the Charleston single house pattern, necessarily so because its builder was faced with a problem of placing a mansion-sized dwelling on a lot whose narrowness better fitted it for a small cottage.

He achieved success by placing the entry at the street end, under the portico. Then he flanked it with a carriage entrance also under the portico and beneath part of the house itself. The entry hall is a long one extending to the center of the house where a stair affords access to the upper floors.

The drawing room is one of the largest in the city, occupying the full width of the house. It has fireplaces at either end and its windows provide magnificent views of the historic harbor. French windows lead to the piazza and to the third floor balcony.

From the piazza one is able to see the full sweep of Charleston Harbor and its historic sites — Fort Sumter, Fort Moultrie, Fort Johnson, Castle Pinckney, Rebellion Roads, Morris Island and others.

During the era when Charleston's Negro street vendors pushed their little vegetable and seafood carts along the streets to provide door delivery, residents of 13 East Battery used their own homemade elevator system.

A sturdy wicker basket would be lowered over the side of the big porch. Dicker-

ing for purchases was done from this superior height and then the produce-laden basket would be pulled up by rope.

The iron fence, gate posts and an iron balustrade around the piazza all were destroyed in the earthquake.

The rear portion of the house is narrower than the front which occupies most of the lot's width. This back section consists of a long extension with narrow porches, the construction of house space permitting a narrow side garden.

The carriage house at the rear of the lot has been converted into an attractive garden apartment.

The house is known as the William Ravenel House from its builders and longtime owners. It was purchased in the 1930s by the late Frederick R. Baker who occupied it as a residence for many years. His heirs sold it in 1965 to the present owners, Mr. and Mrs. William H. Corry.

Residence Built Before Civil War Lost Portico In 1886 Earthquake

The antebellum mansion at 13 East Battery literally lost its face in the earthquake of 1886 and saw a long-lost portion of its once massive portico uncovered by Hurricane Gracie in 1959.

When Charleston was shaken by the massive earthquake, the tall columns crumbled. The soaring roof of the porch, an extension of the main roof, remained cantilevered out over the arch-supported, first-floor piazza.

It was considered economically unfeasible to restore the pillars, what with the poverty of the former Confederate bastion following the Civil War, so the damaged porch roof section was taken off. The gable end was sealed with brick from the ruined columns and the big house has stood thus ever since.

When Hurricane Gracie brought 100-mile-an-hour winds to Charleston in 1959, one of the victims was a huge tree in the yard next door to 13 East Battery. The big tree toppled and its roots loosened the earth beneath it as they were forced up by the weight of the falling tree.

Workmen clearing the area discovered one of the capitals of the tall columns in the earth beneath the roots. Apparently the force of its fall in 1886 had driven the capital into the soft earth. Time and nature combined to cover it, and a tree grew over it, enclosing it with its roots.

13 East Battery is one of Charleston's tallest waterfront houses. Early in the morning of April 12, 1861, Charlestonians stood on its wide roof to watch the start of the Civil War. It apparently escaped injury during the Federal siege of Charleston. It also was not harmed when a huge Confederate cannon was blown up at the intersection of East and South Batteries while the Southern forces were evacuating the city in 1865.

The explosion of the cannon sent a large fragment of its barrel through the roof of No. 9 East Battery, but No. 13 was not damaged.

The quoins at the corners and matching work on the first floor porch supporters were typical of 1845 when the house was built. Brick for its thick walls came from brickyards on Lowcountry rivers. Heart pine went into its sills and flooring and intricately designed ironwork adorns the balcony stretching across its front.

The house is a variation on the Charleston single-house pattern, necessarily so because its builder was faced with the problem of placing a mansion-sized dwelling on a lot whose narrowness better fitted it for a small cottage.

He achieved success by placing the entry at the street end, under the portico. Then he flanked it with a carriage entrance, also under the portico and beneath part of the house itself. The entry hall is a long one extending to the center of the



13 East Battery — One of Charleston's tallest waterfront houses.

house where a stair affords access to the upper floors.

The drawing room is one of the largest in the city, occupying the full width of the house. It has fireplaces at either end, and its windows provide magnificent views of the harbor. French windows lead to the piazza and to the third-floor balcony.

From the piazza one is able to see the full sweep of Charleston Harbor and its historic sites — Fort Sumter, Fort Moultrie, Fort Johnson, Castle Pinckney, Rebellion Roads, Morris Island and others.

During the era when Charleston's Negro street vendors pushed their carts along the streets to provide door delivery, residents of 13 East Battery used their own homemade elevator system.

A sturdy wicker basket would be

lowered over the side of the big porch. Dickerling for purchases was done from this superior height and then the produce-laden basket would be pulled up by rope.

The iron fence, gate posts and an iron ballustrade around the piazza all were destroyed in the earthquake.

The rear portion of the house is narrower than the front which occupies most of the lot's width. This back section consists of a long extension with narrow porches, the constriction of house space permitting a narrow side garden.

The carriage house at the rear of the lot has been converted into an attractive garden apartment.

The house is known as the William Ravenel House from its builders and long-time owners.

Residence Built Before Civil War Lost Portico In 1886 Earthquake

The antebellum mansion at 13 East Battery literally lost its face in the great earthquake of 1886 and saw a long-lost portion of its once massive portico uncovered by Hurricane Gracie in 1959.

When Charleston was shaken by the massive earthquake, the tall columns crumbled. The soaring roof of the porch, an extension of the main roof, remained cantilevered out over the arch-supported first floor piazza.

It was considered economically unfeasible to restore the pillars, what with the poverty forced on the former Confederate bastion by revenge-minded Northerners, so the damaged porch roof section was taken off. The gable end was sealed with brick from the ruined columns and the big house has stood thus ever since looking out over the seawall.

When Hurricane Gracie brought 100-mile-an-hour winds to Charleston in 1959, one of the victims was a huge tree in the yard next door to 13 East Battery. The big tree toppled and its roots loosened the earth beneath it as they were forced up by the weight of the falling tree.

Workmen clearing the area discovered one of the capitals of the tall columns in the earth beneath the base. Apparently the force of its fall in 1886 had driven it into the soft earth. Time and nature combined to cover it and a tree grew around it, covering it with its base.

13 East Battery is one of Charleston's tallest waterfront houses. On the night of April 11-12, 1861, Charlestonians stood on its wide roof to watch the start of the Civil War. It apparently escaped injury during the Union siege of Charleston. It also was not harmed when a huge Confederate cannon was blown up at the intersection of East and South Batteries while the Southern forces were evacuating the city in 1865.

The explosion of the cannon sent a large chunk of its barrel through the roof of 9 East Battery where it still remains. But No. 13 did not suffer.

The quoins at the corners and matching work on the first floor porch supporters were typical of 1845 when the house was built. Brick for its thick walls came from brickyards on Lowcountry rivers. Heart pine went into its sills and flooring and intricately designed ironwork adorns the balcony stretching across its front.

The house is a variation on the Charleston single house pattern, necessarily so because its builder was faced with a problem of placing a mansion-sized dwelling on a lot whose narrowness better fitted it for a small cottage.

He achieved success by placing the entry at the street end, under the portico. Then he flanked it with a carriage entrance, also under the portico and beneath part of the house



13 East Battery — One of Charleston's tallest waterfront houses.

itself. The entry hall is a long one extending to the center of the house where a stair affords access to the upper floors.

The drawing room is one of the largest in the city, occupying the full width of the house. It has fireplaces at either end and its windows provide magnificent views of the historic harbor. French windows lead to the piazza and to the third-floor balcony.

From the piazza, one is able to see the full sweep of Charleston Harbor and its historic sites — Fort Sumter, Fort Moultrie, Fort Johnson, Castle Pinckney, Rebellion Roads, Morris Island and others.

During the era when Charleston's Negro street vendors pushed their carts along the streets to provide door delivery, residents of 13 East Battery used their own homemade elevator system.

A sturdy wicker basket would be lowered over the side of the big porch. Dickering for

purchases was done from this superior height and then the produce-laden basket would be pulled up by rope.

The iron fence, gate posts and an iron balustrade around the piazza all were destroyed in the earthquake.

The rear portion of the house is narrower than the front which occupies most of the lot's width. This back section consists of a long extension with narrow porches, the constriction of house space permitting a narrow side garden.

The carriage house at the rear of the lot has been converted into an attractive garden apartment.

The house is known as the William Ravenel House from its builders and longtime owners. It was purchased in the 1930s by Frederick R. Baker who occupied it as a residence for many years. His heirs sold it in 1965 to the present owners, Mr. and Mrs. William H. Corry.

EBATTERY.009.7a-c Print, Photographic

Historic Charleston Foundation

Copyright Charleston Museum photograph



Description

Three photographic reprints of photographs of 9 East Battery (Robert William Roper House), taken prior to the 1866 earthquake:

a: Southeast elevation. View of portico. Several people are assembled on the grounds. East elevation 13 East Battery with its Tower of the Winds Corinthian columns is also in view. (Columns were later destroyed by the earthquake.)

b: West (rear) elevation. People and a horse are assembled in the garden. Sailing ship can be seen faintly in background.

c: Southeast elevation. View of portico. Several people are assembled in the garden.