

Legare Street Residence Remodeled Around 1900

By ROBERT P. STOCKTON

Built by William Harth between 1817 and 1825, the residence at 9 Legare St. was enlarged and remodeled in the Colonial Revival style sometime around the turn of the century.

The house will be featured Friday on a tour sponsored by Delta Delta Delta sorority.

Apparently built as a rental unit, the house was subsequently the home of Charles Macbeth, Charleston's Civil War mayor, and still later the home of U.S. District Judge William H. Brawley.

The site of the house was part of the estate of Charles Lining, who died in 1813, leaving it to his widow, Mrs. Polly Lining.

In 1815, the vacant lot at the corner of Legare and Gibbes streets, measuring 50 feet on Legare and 136 feet in depth, was advertised for sale at auction, along with the lot adjacent to the south, having the same dimensions.

The south lot was sold at auction on June 13, 1815, for \$1,300, to Archibald Dowling. The corner lot, however, was not conveyed until Sept. 9, 1817, when Mrs. Lining sold it to William Harth for \$1,500.

On March 2, 1825, Harth conveyed the property in trust to Neil McNeill, a merchant, and Archibald E. Miller, a printer.

The deed of trust was for two "Lots of land with the Buildings thereon," including the lot at the corner of Legare and Gibbes and a larger lot to the east on Gibbes Street.

The trustees, according to the deed, were to keep the buildings on the lots "tenantable" and to relay the rents therefrom to John Harth and his children. John Harth was evidently a relative of William Harth.

Both John and William Harth are

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listed in city directories as lumber merchants, with residences at 1 and 2 Gibbes St. John Harth is also identified as a planter.

By 1836, William Harth had left Charleston and the beneficiaries of the trust had filed a complaint in the Court of Equity stating that the property was unproductive and asking the court to permit its sale.

The court so decreed and on April 2, 1836, McNeill and Miller conveyed the "Lot with the three Story wooden House thereon ... at the corner of Legare and Gibbes Street," to Charles Macbeth for \$10,000.

Macbeth, the first owner known to have lived in the house, was a Charleston-born attorney whose firm, Macbeth & Buist, subsequently became Buist & Buist and eventually evolved into the present firm of Buist, Moore, Smythe & McGee.

Macbeth served twice in the S.C. House of Representatives, was the city recorder and was the mayor of Charleston from 1857 to 1865.

He is credited with preventing overzealous Southern patriots from burning down the city when it was abandoned to the Union forces in 1865.

Macbeth lived at 9 Legare St. and retained ownership until his death at Pinopolis in 1881.

After Macbeth's death, the property was acquired by Mrs. Marion E. Brawley, wife of William H. Brawley.

A native of Chester, Brawley, an attorney and Confederate veteran, moved to Charleston in 1874. He was

elected to the state legislature from Charleston in 1882 and served in that office until his election to Congress in 1890. He retired from Congress in 1894 to become the U.S. District judge for South Carolina. He retired from the bench in 1911.

Judge Brawley died about 1916 and the Legare Street residence subsequently went through several owners until it was purchased in 1977 by Dr. Thomas Bright Williamson, the present owner.

Nine Legare was originally a large single house, 3½ stories of wood on a high brick basement. The Sanborn insurance map of 1888 shows two tiers of piazzas extending along the south side and rear of the house, a two-story brick kitchen and other outbuildings in the yard.

The original portion of the house is three bays wide and five bays deep and has interior decorations in the late Federal or Regency style, with carved wooden mantels and room cornices typical of that period.

Subsequently, the house was enlarged by the addition of a two-story wing with bays on the south front of the house and a three-story rear wing, with bays on the south side. The piazzas were modified to curve around the bays of the rear wing.

At the same time, window cornices in the Colonial Revival style were added to the house.

The Colonial Revival style, popular at the turn of the century, used motifs from various American architectural periods, from the Georgian to the Greek Revival, combining and using such motifs, however, in ways not found in the prototypes.

The result at 9 Legare St. is a residence in the Colonial Revival style, retaining most of the original Federal-Regency features, with no pretense to being a true "Colonial" structure. The emphasis was on effect, not on academic reproduction.



(Staff Photo by Bill Murton)

9 Legare St., c. 1817-1825