Bernard L. Herman

The Embedded Landscapes of the Charleston Single House, 1780–1820

C. C. Hines, a representative of the Philadelphia-based Insurance Company of North America, reported from Charleston in 1860: "There are more little, old, odd, awkward buildings here than I ever saw in one town before! Brick with tile roofs prevail tolerably well peppered with frames here & there. . . . Dwellings do not *look* so well as one would expect to see in so large a town."[1] Like many other visitors before and since, Hines was struck by the peculiarities of Charleston's urban landscape. "Old," "odd," and "awkward" are terms that evoke a sense of a local architecture which is at once curiously exotic and disquieting. Moreover, Hines extended these adjectives to the whole of the city and not just to one or two specific buildings. Hines concluded that the architectural landscape was a paradox. Charleston was large enough and old enough to warrant the expectation of an affluent cosmopolitan culture; the impression given by the city's houses, however,

suggested outdated manners and architectural constraint.

A prominent town house form that shaped Hines's impressions was the Charleston single house. Its distinctive features included a gable-end orientation to the street, a walled or fenced lot, and multiple outbuildings packed into a deep, narrow rear yard. The single house, more than any other Charleston building type, remains the urban dwelling that distinguishes the city's architectural character. But it also remains little understood. Why did the form develop? How did it compare to other Charleston town houses? How did it work as residence and statement of social order and economic values? To address these questions requires us to examine the dramatic rise of the single house and its defining impact on the streetscapes of late-eighteenth- and early-nineteenth-century Charleston.

Like Hines, we observe and then learn from

the buildings and environments we study. The use of architecture as evidence enables us to introduce new questions into the domains of social and cultural history, not to mention the "old" architectural history. Vernacular architecture studies approach buildings as the products of human interaction culturally. It combines the methods and perspectives of historical archaeology, cultural geography, social history, and folklife studies. We are engaged in a kind of above-ground excavation that seeks pattern through the rigorous recording of objects situated in multiple contexts. On one level, context is purely material: we seek to describe the object or site in terms of its physical attributes—material, fabrication, ornamentation, form, and color. On a second level, context consists of place and time. On a third level, our contextual investigations are cultural—we seek to evaluate the object or site in multiple domains including those identifying proxemic, functional, communicative, and symbolic interactions. Thus, contextual considerations begin with the "material" part of material culture and work toward the interpretation of culture.

Few house types are more closely identified with a particular place than the single house is with Charleston (fig. 3.1 and fig. 3.2). Basic characteristics of the single house have been identified by a number of observers. According to its most meticulous student, Gene Waddell, the essential single house is "two or more stories of the same plan with a central stair hall between two rooms on each floor and an entrance opening directly into the hall" (fig. 3.3 and fig. 3.4).[2] Waddell continues: "a Charleston Single House is a separate, multi-story dwelling one room wide and three across including a central entrance and stair hall. It also typically, but not necessarily, has its narrow end to the street, a piazza along one of its longer sides, and back wall chimneys."[3] Students of the single house tradition, however, typically emphasize the house with little regard for its larger, immediate contexts of lot, neigh-

Fig. 3.1. Charleston Single Houses, Hassel Street, Ansonborough, Charleston, South Carolina. Street elevations. Built c. 1840 to replace earlier houses lost in the fire of 1838, the Hassel Street dwellings represent the full development of the single house form as it appeared by the mid-nineteenth century. David L. Ames.

bors, and interiors. One author, discussing the single house, illustrates a facsimile of an eighteenth-century plan of the Pringle House on Tradd Street, with the notation that the piazzas, for some reason (possibly for clarity), have been expunged.[4] Also shorn from the house are all the other amenities such as outbuildings and gardens. But, as the Pringle House plat and many others like it suggest, the Charleston single house is not just a dwelling. Rather, the dwelling proper is only one element within the entire city lot with all of its architectural and landscape amenities. The Charleston single house, in fact, can be un-
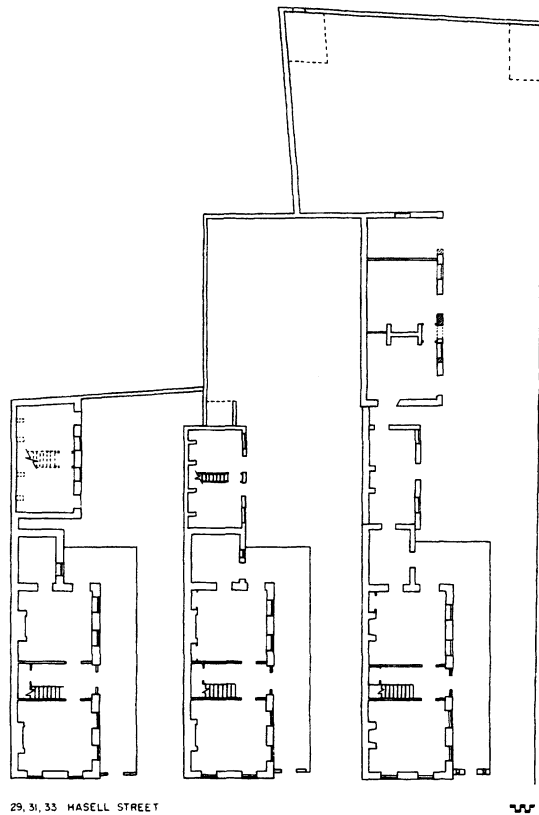
29, 31, 33 HASELL STREET

Fig. 3.2. Charleston Single Houses, Hassel Street, Ansonborough, Charleston, South Carolina. First floor and lot plans. Drawing courtesy of Gabrielle M. Lanier.

derstood best not as a building type, but as an architectural strategy focused on the maintenance of complex social relationships.

The Charleston single house provides an opportunity to apply the idea of embedded landscapes—a concept developed out of Ian Hodder's work in contextual archaeology and Dell Upton's interpretations of eighteenth-century Virginia parish churches and houses.[5] Hodder draws a distinction between two types of contextual meaning. The first type, he notes, "refers to the environmental and behavioural context of action" where the meanings invested in an object

are discovered "through placing it in relation to the larger functioning whole." Second, Hodder continues, "context can be taken to mean 'with-text', and so the word introduces an analogy between the contextual meanings of material culture traits and the meanings of words in a written language." Hodder's contextual archaeology recognizes the "situated" nature of artifacts not only in time and place, but as importantly within relational fields of "meaning content" or discourse. The idea of embedded landscapes also builds from Upton's ideas of movement and the experiential dimension of objects. The plantation landscapes of colonial Virginia "embodied the principle of movement." As people moved through parish churches, courthouses, and the plantation countryside, they encountered an array of landscape experiences that both affirmed and contested social relationships within the larger community. As Upton remarks on the plantation house, "More important than being in a certain room was the route taken to get there, or how far along the formal route one progressed." Movement in these settings, whether processional or segmented, defined not only individuals but the structure of plantation society. Thus, the notion of embedded landscapes recognizes first how artifacts and their settings function as sites for the exchange of symbolic actions and, second, how the content of those actions reflected in the material world remain open to negotiation and multiple, intersecting interpretive possibilities.

Within a framework of embedded landscapes, we can study and interpret buildings as individual objects, as representatives of a type, or as ensembles.[6] The embedded landscape approach also provides for the study of the spaces and interstices within and between buildings, especially the kinds of spaces where action and interaction occur and relationships are defined in ways that socially and symbolically unify and divide people. For example, Lena Orlin discusses the sixteenth-century Tudor long gallery as an archi-
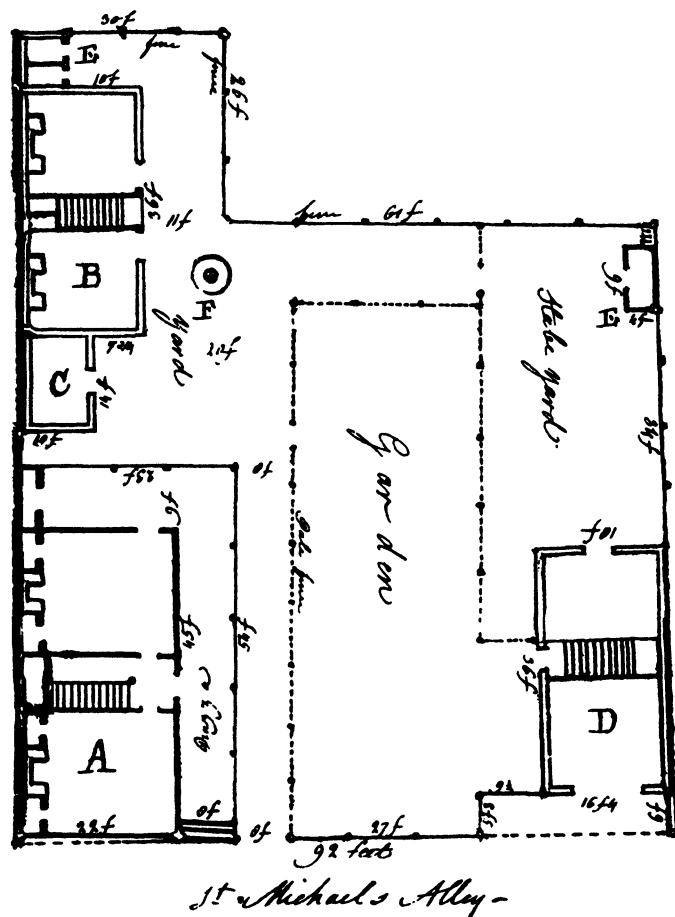
Fig. 3.3. Charleston Single House Lot Plan. 176 Meeting Street (late eighteenth century), insurance survey from Aetna Collection, RG 4 (Advertising and Public Relations Department), Series: Historical Files, South Carolina Folder. Courtesy of Cigna Archives, Philadelphia, Pennsylvania.

Fig. 3.4. Charleston Single House Lot Plan. Elijah Hall Bay House (c. 1780), corner of Meeting Street and St. Michael's Alley, survey plat no. 515 from McCready Plat Collection, City of Charleston, Charleston, South Carolina.
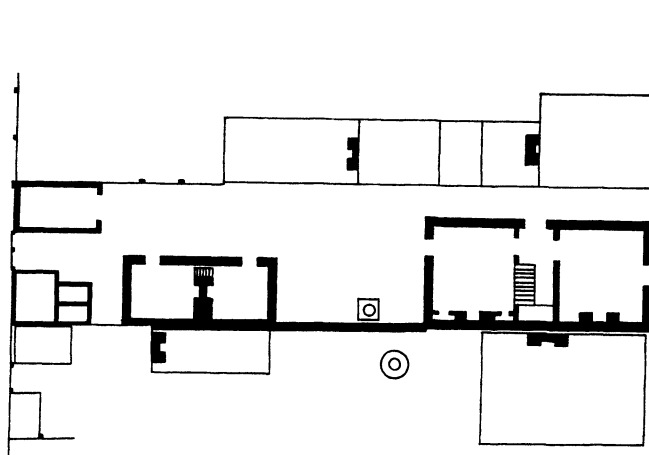
tectural space where people could be observed and yet maintain the privacy of visible, whispered conversations.[7] Similarly, prosecution witnesses in the trials following Denmark Vesey's foiled slave insurrection testified to seeing slaves converse in the street, on the wharves, in shops, and yards behind their masters' houses. Benjamin Hammett recounted the confession of his slave Bacchus: "Perault, when hauling cotton from my store, told Bacchus in the yard secretly that he wanted him to go to the Society with him." The society in question was composed of Denmark Vesey, Monday Gell, Smart Anderson, and other figures central to the planned revolt. Similarly, slave owners labored under the impression that their knowledge of their slaves' actions was complete. A white defense witness for Billy Robinson testified, "I live in a house in Elliot Street—there are two rooms on a floor the front occupied by Mr. Howe—the back by me—Billy occupies a room above the Kitchen and no one can go into his room without passing through my Kitchen—I never saw Perault go into Billy's room or into my Yard." What the testimony in these cases and many others like them underscored for Charleston's white population was their vulnerability. They saw conversations, but did not hear; they looked into their yards and kitchens, but did not see. The porous nature of urban places and their lack of control over the interstices of the city ultimately frightened Charleston whites as much as the betrayal they perceived in the plot.[8]

The idea of embedded landscapes also enables us to wrest landscape studies free from purely geographic considerations. Some embedded landscapes, for example, are defined not by place, but by mutual interests. Thus, the eighteenth-century mercantile landscape, particularly in the interior organization and furnishing programs for merchant houses, provided for the maintenance of economic and social ties throughout the North Atlantic rim and beyond. Other embedded landscapes signified deeply conflicted social and economic relationships in which pretended acquiescence alternated with acts of resistance. Leland Ferguson's study of slave life and material culture on South Carolina's Low Country plantations, for example, reveals the many ways in which slaves temporarily claimed for their own uses marginal spaces away from their owners' surveillance.[9] Thus, slaves established meeting places in the woods for worship, society, and refuge. The vulnerability of the larger landscape to ephemeral black claims, no matter how fleeting, was far more unsettling to white slave holders than the prospect of established slave settlements that could be overseen and regulated. Historian Rhys Isaac, in his study of eighteenth-century Virginia, described the same quality of embedded plantation landscapes where issues of social authority and vulnerability were periodically inverted.[10] The following discussion outlines two architectural contexts developed from the process of looking at the Charleston single house within a framework of embedded landscapes: the formal parlor and the overall organization of the house lot. The embedded landscapes of the parlor and the single house building and yard complex show that the single house functioned both to promote Atlantic mercantile culture and to express and enforce social hierarchy in a black majority urban slave society.

On the interior, the most formal room in the Charleston single house of the late eighteenth century was the drawing room, also known as the parlor or "best room." The location of the "best" room in the single house—a room identified through a close examination of internal finishes—followed one of two primary choices: either on the first or second floor, but always in the front or "street" side of the house. The choice of location relates directly to the overall functions of the house. The single houses along Church Street, for example, generally placed the drawing room on the second floor and over a ground floor office or shop which could be entered directly from the

street. Sociability literally and symbolically occupied a space above commercial endeavor. The pattern of placing the best room in the house on the second floor was shared throughout the urban culture of the North Atlantic rim, expressed in a variety of regionally and even locally identifiable house plans and styles ranging, for example, from the several designs adapted to town houses in cities like Philadelphia, Baltimore, Alexandria, London, Bristol, and Hull.

The second placement choice for the best room was in the first or ground floor front of the house. In eighteenth-century Charleston, the single houses where this option was most commonly exercised stood away from the commercial center of the city and along its predominantly residential fringe, for example, Orange and Legare Streets. Here builders of houses without commercial functions brought the best room down into a more intimate relationship with the street—a choice which speaks to the possibility of early neighborhoods defined by shared status rather than by a topographical proximity to trade or work.[11]

What did these drawing rooms look like, and more importantly how were their architectural values related to each other? The interpretive strategy of intrasite/intersite analysis (drawn from historical archaeology) provides a means for looking at the sociology of the best room in terms of its relationships to other domestic spaces within the house (intersite analysis) and to other comparable spaces in other dwellings (intrasite analysis).[12] Thus, we are addressing the proxemics and textures of the parlor in two contexts: the house and the city. These contexts are interconnected and reflect the movement of people as they encountered these spaces throughout the city. The experience of those architectural settings was nuanced by slavery, family, gender, status, wealth, community, and cosmopolitanism. Still, despite the variety of experience and perspective and the fleeting vagaries of fashion, there is an identifiable architectural pattern to the parlor.

Taken together, 90 and 94 Church Street in Charleston enable us to look at the appearance and placement of the parlor within the single house from the mid-eighteenth through the early nineteenth century (fig. 3.5 and fig. 3.6). The two houses (90 and 94 Church Street) were constructed in 1759 and 1760 as three-and-a-half story, center-passage plan dwellings with ground floor front commercial rooms entered directly from the street. The mid-eighteenth-century lot arrangement at 90 Church included a two-story quarter-kitchen, a domestic service building typically containing a kitchen and wash house on the ground floor, and a number of slave apartments upstairs. The lot at 94 Church included a narrow passage behind the house providing access to the neighbors' back-buildings on the interior of the block.[13] Although neither building individually retains all of its first period interior finishes, together they provide an overall impression of how early single houses were decoratively and functionally considered. The Leger House at 90 Church was provided with a

Fig. 3.5. Peter Leger House (90 Church Street), c. 1759–60; Alexander Christie House (92 Church), c. 1805–7; Cooper-Bee House (94 Church Street), c. 1760–65. Church Street elevations. Developed individually, these single house lots represent building activity ranging from the mid-eighteenth through the early nineteenth centuries. David L. Ames.
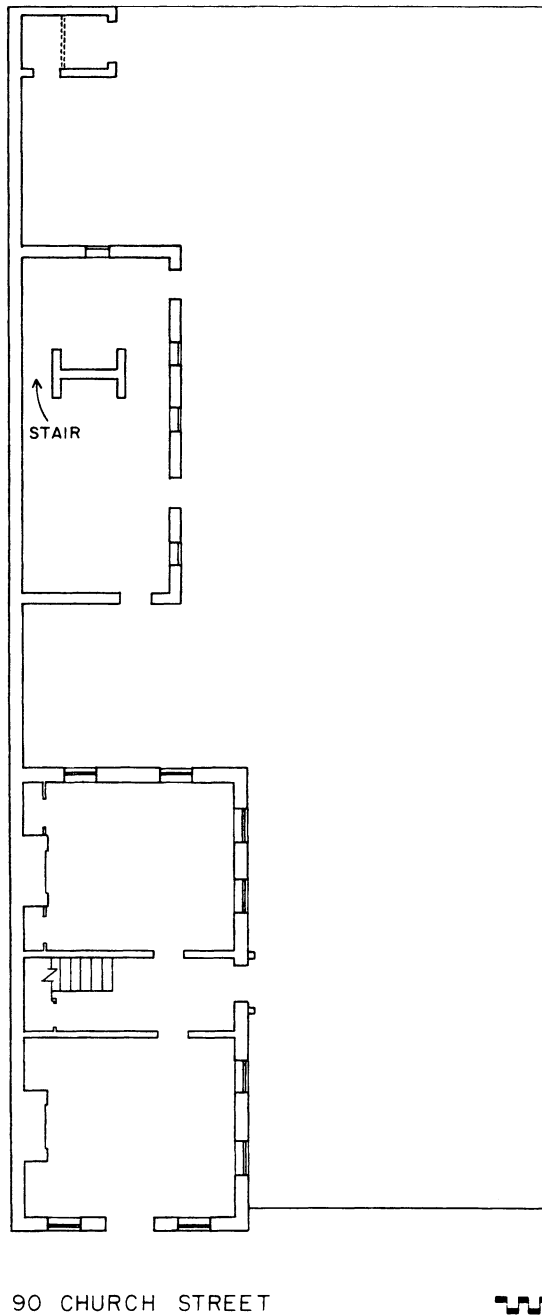
90 CHURCH STREET

Fig. 3.6. Reconstructed c. 1760 plan of 90 Church Street. Drawing courtesy of Gabrielle M. Lanier.

Fig. 3.7. Single House at 90 Church Street. First-floor front "office," or commercial room. Built with a door leading directly from the street into the first-floor front room, 90 Church Street represents single houses that incorporated both commercial and domestic functions.

fully paneled heated office or counting room (fig. 3.7).[14] The stair in both buildings was an open string arrangement, and, in the case of the Cooper House at 94 Church, it was finished with heavily-turned balusters, paneled soffits, and elaborately carved cornice. In the progression of spaces that extended from the street to the outbuildings in the yard, the plainest ground-floor spaces in the main block of both houses were the paneled dining rooms that stood between the entry passage and the dooryard shared by the dwelling and the kitchen. On the second floor, the hierarchy of rooms ran from the front best parlor overlooking the street

below (and, as in the Cooper House, provided with a small balcony), the passage and stair, and to a rear dining-room chamber looking out onto the backbuildings, service yard, and garden. The third floor, considerably less finished than those below, contained two secondary sleeping chambers. The creation of a spatial and functional hierarchy which combined commerce, social life, and domestic operations into a functionally and symbolically effective building bound the Church Street houses and others like them together into a larger urban landscape.

The parlor or drawing room reflected the highest degree of aesthetic investment in an interior hierarchy of finishes that visually conveyed the relative importance of individual rooms.[15] In the single house, the placement of the parlor or drawing room at the front of the house juxtaposed the most formal room with the public world of the street. In all instances, however, that juxtaposition was mediated by contrived paths of access. For single houses where the best room occupied the second-floor front, access could be gained only by entering the house through a formal entrance facing the street, down the piazza, passing through a second formal entry into the stair passage, and ascending the stairs to the upper floor. In comparable dwellings where the best room occupied the ground floor, access was regulated through a route leading from street to piazza to entry to parlor. Both routes required the privilege of invitation or intimate familiarity. Within the house itself, the best room defined one extreme of a hierarchical spatial text glossed with ornament. No visitor could mistake the best room for a front office, chamber, or everyday back dining room. That hierarchy was articulated only through the visual relationships between the rooms. The quality of detailing in the best rooms might differ from house to house, but within each house the hierarchy of detail clearly communicated decorative and social hierarchy.

Following a comparative reading of multiple houses, we can explore the architectural evidence of parlor culture and its general currency in and beyond Charleston. The second-floor drawing room of the Peter Bocquet House on Broad Street in Charleston, for example, finds its equivalents in the best rooms of houses on Legare, Church, and Broad Streets (fig. 3.8). At the same time, the quality and type of finish evident in the Bocquet House speaks directly to a transatlantic culture of mercantilism and fashion observed, for example, in the Blaydes family house in Hull, England (fig. 3.9). Those same concerns are reflected again in the con-

Fig. 3.8. Peter Bocquet House, 95 Broad Street. Second-floor drawing room interior, c. 1770–72. Like the majority of Charleston's eighteenth-century single houses, the Bocquet House placed the best room on the second floor directly over the business premises below.

Fig. 3.9. Blaydes House, High Street, Hull, England. Built in the early eighteenth century, extensively enlarged in the mid-eighteenth century, and remodeled to a lesser degree in the early nineteenth century, the Blaydes House retains a larger portion of its second-period interiors. The mantel and overmantel shown here are located in a first-floor reception room. Courtesy of the Royal Commission on the Historical Monuments of England © Crown Copyright.

temporary parlors of northern New England. Even as tastes change, style (what Upton defines as "a system of common understanding, within which the active participants of a society can operate in a coordinated manner, however imperfect that coordination might be") remains constant.[16] The use of composition or stucco ornament in Charleston parlors of the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, for example, finds precise analogs in comparable parlors in distant cities as well as in other

Charleston houses. Composed of a mixture of resin, glue, linseed oil, and whiting steamed, beaten into a stiff paste, and pressed into molds, composition ornament elements were applied to woodwork ranging from door casings to mantels.[17] Scenes depicting classicized rustic dances, individual figures draped in Grecian costume, or decorative elements based on floral swags, garlands, baskets of fruit, and sheaves of wheat provided a coherent and broadly continuous backdrop for best rooms throughout the late-eighteenth-century North Atlantic world. The overall effect is dizzying; we start to see the interiors of the houses as artifacts both of local society (defined by place and class) and a more diffuse Atlantic community (defined by exchange relations, emulation and mutuality, and the knowledge of manners). Thus, the embedded landscapes of early Charleston town houses possess local outsides and global insides.

The furnishings of the drawing room or parlor reflect an archaeology of etiquette revolving around competitive and convivial exchange relations—most of which was regulated by the rules of polite discourse. Francis Simmons's estate inventory for his house on Legare Street lists the furnishings of the second-floor drawing room: card tables, tea table, fourteen cane-bottom chairs, three settees, carpet, and accents such as chimney ornaments described as "elegant." Angus Bethune's front parlor overlooking Broad Street held fourteen mahogany chairs, two card tables, tea tables, and sofa. At least one painting graced the wall, while plated candlesticks and chimney ornaments attested to the affectations of a culture of refinement. Card tables, however, were not just objects of polite discourse—they were an arena for the complex competitive world of trade and social rank in a society where the distance between the counting house and the dining table was minimal. Visitors and residents knew the rules and understood the visual and material world which often encoded those rules.

Merchants in other cities furnished their par-

lors in comparable ways. Joseph Spear, a Baltimore merchant who specialized in supplying shipboard diets with "navy Bread," lived in a three-story rowhouse two rooms deep and entered by a stair hall to one side.[18] The "Front Room Down Stairs" reflected his intention of using this space as the formal heart of the house. In his drawing room he placed a dozen mahogany chairs, two card tables, tea table, and sofa along with other lesser objects. Again, furnishings describe three modes of competitive social discourse: card playing, tea ceremonies, and conversation. Similarly, in the houses of eighteenth- and early-nineteenth-century Portsmouth merchants, ample evidence survives providing us with a sense of the internal architecture, furnishings, and sociology of the house. The house of Margaret and Thomas Manning incorporated architectural elements that reflected both local preference and cosmopolitan taste.[19] The exterior of the Manning House more closely followed the precedent set by other local merchant mansions raised in the late colonial period. With its plain clapboard exterior, heavy frame skeleton, hipped roof, and kitchen ell, the center-passage plan Manning House kept to local custom in its use of materials, plan, and its orientation to the street and nearby waterfront. The interior rooms included a parlor furnished with a heavily molded mantel highlighted with carved floral festoons, entry with an open stair, and paneled dining room and kitchen fireplace walls. The Mannings' parlor furnishings included carpeting, card tables, gilded mirror, ten chairs, two settees, and a sofa. Branched candlesticks, chimney ornaments, brass andirons, and other decorative items completed the parlor setting. Although architecturally less elaborate, the dining room both continued and combined the material display of commerce and sociability. A secretary and worktable stood alongside a sideboard, pembroke table, a set of ten leather-bottom chairs, and an extensive array of china and glassware ranging

from a japanned knife tray to a silver-edged coconut cup.

In Norfolk, Virginia, merchant Moses and Elizabeth Myers's large brick house, erected in 1796, similarly connected local design preferences with those of the larger Atlantic trading community.[20] The ornate composition ornament in the Myerses' drawing room and adjacent salonlike passage echoed the Mannings' earlier architectural sensibility. Where the Mannings commissioned ornately carved mantelpieces for their parlor and the best chamber above, the Myerses drew on the late-eighteenth-century craze for composition ornament. Their parlor mantel was graced with applied swags, bosses, and classical figures. In terms of furnishings, the Myerses' parlor, like the Mannings', followed a similar pattern of card tables, seating furniture, and appropriately tasteful decorative details, based in large measure on the visual language of Neoclassicism. Philadelphians Stephen and Mary Parrish Collins pursued exactly the same strategy: a best room located on the second floor at the front of the house and furnished with the same forms of competitive entertainment and conversation: card tables, mahogany chairs, sofa, and ornaments such as glass candlesticks and "Chinese Jars."[21]

The continuities suggested by these furnishing strategies were reflected in the architectural detail of houses and translated into social exchange that extended beyond the best room. The dining room and parlor, for example, offered an important venue for face-to-face negotiations, one where the competitive culture of trade was expressed through the rituals of sociability.[22] The dining room table provided the arena for one aspect of these competitive exchanges, one in which the tabletop metaphorically functioned as a representation of the city itself. As prescribed in the popular literature of genteel society, the dining table offered a regular rectangular, or sometimes oval, field free from irregular topography and previous constructions that marred

the city proper.[23] The table was divided into place settings equally distributed around its perimeter. Public points defined by serving dishes, candlesticks, and centerpieces were interspersed with individual places. The host and hostess occupied opposing ends of the table, and their company (often all men) was placed between them. In theory all the guests enjoyed equal access to the trade of the table and the transactions associated with conversation and etiquette. In reality, preferred seating (expressed, for example, in proximity to the host's seat of power) defined a topography of unequal access and authority.

The dining table, like the city plan, was a scene for exchange relations. Both were settings where objects were set in social motion. How individuals comported themselves in the parlor or counting house depended on a thorough knowledge of the rules of material as well as verbal discourse. Success was determined by the diners' ability to negotiate and conclude "trade" in an arena of competitive display that embraced domestic objects ranging from chairs to ceramics. Once seated at the table, or once standing in the counting house or on the vendue range, the ability to perform socially and commercially (and the two were not very far apart in the eighteenth-century Atlantic world) distinguished the players and provided the means to ascendancy or downfall. The flow of conversation along the lines of acceptable topics, the use of wit without resorting to insult or crassness, the ability to substantively inform and amuse enabled the dining-room participants to compete at the table. Similarly, the knowledge of how to eat—using the soup spoon for soup, accepting service, and even chewing—further defined the place of the individual in a competitive context which required knowledge as well as ability. The rituals of the dinner table mirrored the world of trade in the process of negotiation. Success in trade arose in part from the ability to negotiate advantage, a process in the counting house that drew on a

complex knowledge of markets, profits, and competitors, as well as the forms of etiquette. Success at the dining table also reflected a similar competitive desire for gaining social advantage, but here the mannered skills and subtleties of sociability superseded knowledge of the marketplace. As two elements in an embedded landscape, the architectural settings and actions of trade and table informed and reinforced each other.

The connections suggested between tabletop and the plan of the mercantile city, however, do not stop with these comparisons. We need to mention two other key types of tables—those for tea and those for gaming. The connection between dining table, counting house, and card table is easy to establish.[24] The players situate themselves symmetrically around the perimeter of the card table and either play individually or in partnerships. The language of bidding, betting, bluffing, counting, and winning or losing are all those associated with the language and practice of trade. Unlike the dining table with its hierarchy of seating, the card table provides equal access to a field of competitive action. Here the focus of attention is more on the transactions of gaming and less on the niceties of dining etiquette and conversation.

Tea table topography, however, represents an entirely different terrain.[25] No less competitive and requiring considerable prior knowledge and ability to perform, the tea table appears to have been the domain of women. What distinguishes the tea table is its conspicuous asymmetry and social imbalance when in use. The circular table provided a pedestal for display where tea pot, creamer, sugar bowl, tea canister, cups, saucers, sugar tongs, and spoons were all set out for admiration. Their placement, while artful, did not provide for equal access to a field of discourse. Tea drinkers did not sit around the tea table in the same way that guests occupied their places at a dining table or in the manner that players faced each other across a card table. Instead, the host-

ess occupied a chair placed slightly askew to the center of the table and served her guests from a very different attitude of resident authority. Guests sometimes occupied chairs near the tea table or stationed themselves on chairs and settees around the parlor. The overall effect was one of studied casualness where the culture of the salon prevailed. In the world of urban exchange relations, the tea table and its array provided a field for the competitive trade in intimacy and manners. The emphasis on casual display by both hostess and guests relied on a sensibility that reified etiquette and social knowledge. Like gaming and dining, taking tea tended to occur in an architecturally constant setting defined by the best rooms in the house. The interior detailing of the parlor, drawing room, and dining room, then, possessed the quality of a landscape where major topographical features remained the constant setting for shifting forms of social relationships.

The ways in which different table top "terrains" intersect with one another and with the larger worlds of house and city remain largely unexplored. The material differences between the organization, appearance, and placement of dining, card, and tea tables suggest social as well as functional distinctions. Each offered a different "terrain" demanding different discursive skills; each realized its larger significance only when in use. The sociology of use, however, remains unresolved. Tea, as social behavior, changed through the eighteenth century. Largely the domain of women in the colonial period, the domain of the tea table opened to men in the early national period. But, even as men increasingly participated in taking tea as a heterosocial event, the seat of authority remained feminine.[26] Card playing in the home provided a considerably less gendered field for the display of social knowledge. "Card playing," observed Gerald Ward, "fulfilled a significant role in the relationship between the sexes. Card parties were often mixed, and the games allowed women to compete with men on equal

terms, an otherwise rare occurrence."[27] Formal dining also changed in the post-Revolutionary decades, and dinners where women conversed shoulder to shoulder with men became more common. Variation and change in the sociology of tea, card, and dining tables suggest larger changes in the early American urban landscape where social life may not have been so rigidly divided as we suppose.

Investigations of the parlor and its social *topos* reveal only one embedded landscape of the Charleston single house. The second landscape introduced here focuses on the whole of the Charleston single house lot. The notion that Charleston lots take on the aspect of urban plantations is wonderfully introduced by Richard C. Wade, who observes that the single house "'compound' was the urban equivalent of the plantation. Like its rural analogue, it provided a means of social control as well as of shelter; it embodied the servile relationship between white and black; and it expressed a style of living appropriate to its setting."[28]

The extended single house plan consisted of a series of interconnected functional zones that communicated with one another and with the street via a number of routes (fig. 3.10). The main house abutted but did not front the street. Access from the street into the single house, therefore, followed one of two routes: from the sidewalk onto the piazza or from the sidewalk or street and down the carriage way. The piazza route led to the main and most formal entry into the stair passage, to a secondary entry into the breakfast room, or to a set of steps at the far end of the piazza which led down to the dooryards of the backbuildings. While these two options directed traffic of varying levels of formality and familiarity directly into the house, a third, the carriage way, provided a different avenue of access. The carriage way, admitting both wheeled and pedestrian traffic, led into the single house compound at street level. Pedestrians—slaves, for instance—

Fig. 3.10. View from the Single House Yard toward the Street. Access in and out of the single house compound included the carriage way and piazza. David L. Ames.

entering by the carriage way literally passed beneath the gaze of the occupants of the main house as they went about their business at the rear of the house or among the backbuildings (fig. 3.11). Carriages or horses carrying social equals entered nearly at eye level with the piazza. Passengers and riders stopped at the rear steps, stepped down into the yard, then up onto the piazza, and back toward the main entry. This mode of entry was only slightly less formal than entry from the sidewalk. In all instances the organization of the single house unit ran from street to backyard wall in a pattern of decreasing formality, declining architectural detail and finish, and increasing dirtiness. Similarly, single house organization shifts from predominantly social to predominantly utilitarian spaces.[29] These linked domestic spaces existed in and defined a highly stratified and processional urban plantation landscape.[30] In this world of symbolic stature, the slave's eye-view of the "big" house spoke to very different relationships and forms of movement than those defined by the master's and mistress's guests and business associates.

What has only been suggested here is the interpretive potential of the single house from the perspective of the slave quarter. The typical Charleston quarter of the late eighteenth century consisted of a two-story building with either a center or back wall chimneys. Ground-floor spaces were dedicated to cooking and washing functions. Upstairs, based on the little surviving architectural evidence we have, the quarter was divided into a number of living units including what appear to be common heated spaces and much smaller (in one instance only seven feet square) sleeping chambers. Windows were simply shuttered and left unglazed. The cramped slave living spaces seem to have served as little more than uncomfortable sleeping closets. For slaves the most likely arenas for social exchange included the work spaces in kitchens and wash houses, work yards, and the interstices of the city ranging from market stalls to riverside wharves.

Fig. 3.11. Backbuildings, Aiken-Rhett House, Elizabeth Street, Charleston. Built and enlarged during the first half of the nineteenth century, the Aiken-Rhett backbuildings compose a yard of two facing ranges. On the left are the kitchen, washhouse, and storage rooms with second-story quarters; on the right stand the carriage house and stables with second-story quarters and hay loft. David L. Ames.

What we have only begun to surmise, however, is how African-American space worked in the embedded landscapes of Charleston. For example, in the years after Denmark Vesey's revolt in 1822, the black majority's ability to move through the city increasingly drove a fearful white population to seal those cracks and contain physical movement, sight, and sound. Betrayed as much by urban space as their slaves, white Charlestonians constructed new masonry garden walls to replace old wooden fences and sealed rear doors and window openings that communicated with alleys and neighbors' yards.

Still, the Charleston single house lot did not simply ape a low-country plantation landscape. Plats of early Charleston illustrate a third set of embedded landscape relations that look outward to the trading world of the Atlantic. Many of the houses located along East Bay and its side streets possessed backlots occupied not by quarters, stables, and gardens, but by two- and three-story brick warehouses. Even the most sophisticated town house projects like Vanderhorst Row included one or two domestic support buildings close to the house and then ranks of commercial buildings crowding the expanse between kitchen and waterfront. The possible forms of the urban plantation associated with the Charleston single house reconciled the mercantile landscapes of the port city in yet another context. The urban complex, defined by the whole of the single house lot in all its possibilities, linked the local to the global in complex ways. In Bristol, for example, eighteenth-century town houses presented the face of regular brick terraces popularized in London. Typically these houses incorporated an entry that contained the stair to the upper stories as well as providing passage to the lot behind the dwelling. The organization of the domestic and working environments behind the Bristol town house extended into a number of divided and discrete spaces and buildings. Here, covered pas-

sages or piazzas connected the back of the house to separate kitchens that backed onto work yards furnished with stables, storehouses, and privies. Unlike the Charleston single house, the image the Bristol town house projected at the street resonated with the metropolitan culture of the capital city, but the organization of the houselot found its counterparts in provincial urban ports like Charleston.

Exploring the embedded landscapes of Charleston through the example of the single house is a process that begins with looking at buildings. Through the close examination of construction, plan, and ornament, we begin the process of using buildings to help us ask questions about context and landscape. How do the spaces contained and defined as house, table, yard, and city intersect as symbolically nested environments? The questions that buildings raise are those that address material realities of physical movement, decorative hierarchy, and functional space—realities that are dynamic, not static. The social and symbolic dynamics of buildings are about people and about how people organized aspects of their world through objects and their use. Thus, the discovery and interpretation of embedded landscapes cannot rely on architectural evidence alone. To reclaim and understand historic environments demands evocation of past lives reflecting diverse experiences ranging from Billy Robinson's kitchen quarter to Peter Bocquet's drawing room. The placement and appearance of dwellings, rooms, and yards find meaning through the ways in which their inhabitants furnished and used those spaces and the varying status and circumstances surrounding the embedded landscapes of everyday life. Thus, the Charleston single house yields the substance, messiness, complexity, and often conflicted sensibilities we seek to study and comprehend in vernacular architecture.

Notes

1. Letter, C. C. Hines to E. G. Ripley, Apr. 16, 1860, from Charleston South Carolina. Aetna Collection, RG 4 (Advertising and Public Relations Department), Series: Historical Files, South Carolina Folder. Courtesy Cigna Archives, Philadelphia, Pennsylvania.

2. Gene Waddell, "The Charleston Single House: An Architectural Survey," *Preservation Progress* 22 (2) (Mar. 1977): 4–8.

3. One of the most detailed descriptive treatments of a Charleston single house is Harriet P. and Albert Simons, "The William Burrows House of Charleston," *Winterthur Portfolio, III* (Winterthur, Delaware: Winterthur Museum, 1967), 172–203.

4. Mills Lane, *Architecture of the Old South: South Carolina* (New York: Abbeville Press, 1989), 70–72.

5. Ian Hodder, *Reading the Past: Current Approaches to Interpretation in Archaeology* (Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Press, 1986), 118–46; Dell Upton, *Holy Things and Profane: Anglican Parish Churches in Colonial Virginia* (New York: Architectural History Foundation, 1986), 205–19.

6. These approaches have been demonstrated in other works on other architectural traditions. The concept of house types, for example, is a mainstay in Jay Edwards, "The Origins of Creole Architecture," *Winterthur Portfolio* 29 (2/3) (Summer/Autumn 1994): 155–89. The ensemble model is advanced in John Vlach, *Back of the Big House: The Architecture of Plantation Slavery* (Chapel Hill: Univ. of North Carolina Press, 1993), 193–94.

7. Lena Cowen Orlin, "The Tudor Long Gallery and the Progress of Privacy," lecture, department of English, Univ. of Delaware, Newark, Delaware, Sept. 20, 1995.

8. Edward A. Pearson, "Designs Against Charleston: The Trial Transcript of the Denmark Vesey Conspiracy of 1822," MS in preparation.

9. Leland Ferguson, *Uncommon Ground: Archaeology and Early African America* (Washington, D.C.: Smithsonian Institution Press, 1992).

10. Rhys Isaac, *The Transformation of Virginia, 1740–1790* (Chapel Hill: Univ. of North Carolina Press for the Institute of Early American History and Culture, 1982), 323–57.

11. Studies on the relationship of occupation and status related to places of residence and work are explored in Richard M. Bernard, "A Portrait of Baltimore in 1800: Economic and Occupational Patterns in an Early American City," *Maryland Historical Magazine* 69 (4) (Winter 1974): 341–60; Nan A. Rothschild, *New York City Neighborhoods: The Eighteenth Century* (San Diego: Academic Press, 1990); Mary Schweitzer, "The Spatial Organization of Federalist Philadelphia," *Journal of Interdisciplinary History* 34 (1) (Summer 1993): 31–57. In these studies and others exploring similar evidence and issues, there is little sense of the architectural context.

12. William Turnbaugh and Sarah Peabody Turnbaugh, "Alternative Applications of the Mean Ceramic Date Concept for Interpreting Human Behavior," *Historical Archaeology* 11 (1977): pp. 90–104.

13. Information on the three Church Street properties is contained in an excellent continuing series of newspaper articles, "Do You Know Your Charleston," by Robert P. Stockton, on the history of Charleston

property and architecture. See "'Bee House' Improperly Named," *Charleston News and Courier,* Jan. 28, 1980; "Dubose Heyward Lived Out Back," *News and Courier,* Feb. 12, 1979; and "'Single House' Is St. Philip's Rectory," *News and Courier,* Feb. 5, 1979. All articles are contained in the research files of the Historic Charleston Foundation. I am grateful to Jonathan Poston and Thomas Savage for sharing this material.

14. The amenity of the heated and decoratively treated commercial room in the Leger House was not found in all single houses with commercial spaces. Many more likely had simple board paneling and shelving and no fireplace. An example of the latter feature is at 77 Church Street.

15. Edward Chappell, "Looking at Buildings," *Fresh Advices: A Research Supplement* (Nov. 1984): i–vi.

16. Upton, *Holy Things and Profane,* 101–2.

17. Carl R. Lounsbury, *An Illustrated Glossary of Early Southern Architecture and Landscape* (New York: Oxford Univ. Press, 1994), 89–90. Mark Reinberger's continuing work on the history of eighteenth-century composition ornament fully explores both the technology and application of this decorative material.

18. Joseph Spear inventory, Baltimore County, Maryland, Inventories (1809–11), no. 26, Oct. 27, 1810, 474–75.

19. Thomas Manning Estate, Docket 9908 (1819), Rockingham County Recorder of Wills, Exeter, New Hampshire.

20. Indenture between Moses and John Myers and William B. Lamb and Richard Drummond, trustees, Deed Book 18 (1820), 11–12, Recorder of Deeds, Norfolk, Virginia.

21. Stephen Collins inventory, File 98, Book X (1794), 140, Philadelphia Probate Records, Philadelphia, Pennsylvania.

22. For British parallels, see Peter Borsay, *The English Urban Renaissance: Culture and Society in the Provincial Town, 1660–1770* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1989); Dan Cruikshank, *Life in the Geor-*

gian City (London: Viking Press, 1990); Sylvia Collier and Sarah Pearson, *Whitehaven, 1660–1800: A New Town of the Late Seventeenth Century; A Study of Its Buildings and Urban Development* (London: Her Majesty's Stationery Office, 1991).

23. Barbara G. Carson, *Ambitious Appetites: Dining, Behavior, and Patterns of Consumption in Federal Washington* (Washington, D.C.: American Institute of Architecture Press, 1990), 103–35; Mark R. Wenger, "The Dining Room in Early Virginia," in *Perspectives in Vernacular Architecture, III,* ed. Thomas Carter and Bernard L. Herman (Columbia: Univ. of Missouri Press, 1989), 149–59.

24. Benjamin A. Hewitt, *The Work of Many Hands: Card Tables in Federal America, 1790–1820* (New Haven: Yale Univ. Art Gallery, 1982). For the etiquette and rules associated with card playing, see especially Gerald W. R. Ward, "'Avarice and Conviviality': Card Playing in Federal America," in Hewitt, *The Work of Many Hands,* 15–38.

25. Rodris Roth, "Tea Drinking in Eighteenth-Century America: Its Etiquette and Equipage" (1961), reprinted in *Material Life in America, 1600–1860,* ed. Robert Blair St. George (Boston: Northeastern Univ. Press, 1988), 439–62; Diana diZerega Wall, *The Archaeology of Gender: Separating the Spheres in Urban America* (New York: Plenum Press, 1994), 122–25, 138–44. For an excellent archaeologically based study of the material culture of Charleston's eighteenth-century urban elites, see Martha Zierden, "Just Imported: The Archaeology of Urban Life in Eighteenth-Century Charleston," paper read at the Society for Historical Archaeology annual meetings, Washington, D.C., Jan. 6, 1995.

26. David S. Shields explores the social history of eighteenth-century tea and tea table society in "Tea Tables and Salons," in *Civil Tongues and Polite Letters* (Chapel Hill: Univ. of North Carolina Press, forthcoming).

27. Ward, "Avarice and Conviviality," 29.

28. Richard C. Wade, *Slavery in the Cities: The South 1820–1860* (New York: Oxford Univ. Press, 1964), 61.

29. James Deetz summarizes Lewis Binford's tripartite definition of function in his *In Small Things Forgotten: The Archaeology of Early American Life* (Garden City: Anchor Press/Doubleday, 1977), 50–52. A parallel discussion appears in Jon Goss, "The Built Environment and Social Theory: Towards an Architectural Geography," *Professional Geographer* 40 (4) (1988): 392–403.

30. Wade, *Slavery in the Cities,* 55–79. Dell Upton's treatment of articulated, processional landscapes in colonial Virginia provides a vital sense of the types and meanings of physical movement in hierarchical landscapes. See "White and Black Landscapes in Eighteenth-Century Virginia," reprinted in *Material Life in America,* ed. Robert Blair St. George, 357–69; see also Chappell, "Looking at Buildings," which offers a more intimate means of identifying hierarchical landscapes contained within houses.