

A Restoration On Bull Street

(EDITOR'S NOTE: First in a series of articles on the early dwellings of Bull Street. The second article will appear next Monday.)

By W. H. J. THOMAS

The broad, shaded thoroughfare that has carried the name of Bull Street since before 1790 shares a history of development, partial decline and occasionally hopeful restoration with a number of other mid-town streets that were once fashionable suburbs, with sizeable dwellings of notable quality, through much of the 19th century.

As with Charlotte Street, Chapel Street and portions of Radcliffeboro, the several blocks of Bull Street, running from Coming to the marshlands of the Ashley River, were a short distance from the old city boundaries and did not really see any active construction until after 1800 and usually much later, with the prosperity that slowly returned to Charleston in the late 1830s.

Bull Street got a distinguished start when William Blacklock built his handsome, Adam-style residence on the property now numbered as 18 Bull. The dwellings that followed were

usually constructed in a variety of late Adam-style or some stage of Greek Revival or 1850ish Victorian.

During this century the street had developed its pockets of trouble but still remained generally stable and sufficiently attractive. The city's architectural survey entitled "This Is Charleston" lists 22 houses as being of distinguished quality.

The four-story dwelling numbered 24 Bull, now being extensively renovated for five apartments by its new owner, was probably constructed in its final stage of building at took place just before the Civil War.

One might easily mistake for a house of the 1840s but is usually uncertain sort of evidence that may be used to date local buildings points to about 1858. Its bare facades, full-length piazzas and rather austere interior treatment places it squarely in the Greek Revival which was found useful over a stretch of years.

We find John F. Blacklock living immediately to the left in his fine brick house conveying this property with no mention of house, buildings or "improvements" (any sort) to Gustavus in 1853 for \$2,500. The

property in that transaction carried its present measurements of 57 feet on front and 190 feet in depth.

The city directories of this period list Street as living at 187 Meeting and it appears that he did no building on this property. Then in March of 1858 we find Street conveying the lot (still no mention of any house or improvements) to Benjamin Lucas for \$2,000. The price and the lack of mention of any building rather safely gets rid of the possibility of 24 Bull being constructed until after Lucas bought the land.

By listings of the 1860s we

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do find "Benj. Lucas, builder" and "John Lucas, a brickmason" in the house, then known as 6 Bull.

We do not find much on Benjamin Lucas, but his descendants would retain the house and property until the 1930s. He is variously listed as builder, contractor or as "city inspector, offices in Lower Guard House." He is probably the same Benjamin Lucas who acted as contractor on Memminger School.

For his own home — should

he indeed be the builder — he chose not the rather ornate early Victorian popular then, but a plain style and a high, narrow "single" house plan, with a three-story L extension on the rear and a long two-story brick dependency reaching back from the L into his deep yard. The heaviness of its quoins does place the dwelling somewhat in the 1850s.

The house would pass to Mary Reeves Lucas in the 1880s and was conveyed by her to Emma Lucas and Mary E. Lucas by a deed dated 1898. From this time up through the early years of the 20th century the house would be the quarters of the Lucas Academy, a school for young ladies with several Misses Lucas listed as instructors.

In 1930 Emma Lucas Smith conveyed the property to the Narva Corp., headed by H. H. Ficken, for "five dollars and divers other considerations". Five years later Narva sold it to Marie H. Honour, who developed it as the Honour Apartments.

In 1949 Marie Honour sold the property, with many of the furnishings, to Ruth H. McDaniel for \$17,500. Ruth McDaniel became a Mrs. Line and sold the property in 1963 to Everlena and Felix J. McNight for \$21,000.

Richard H. Jenrette of New York and Charleston, who is building the Mills House hotel at Queen and Meeting streets, bought the property in May of this year.

What had been a building with 11 apartments is currently being renovated as five large units. There will be one apartment on the first floor, one on the second, one on the third and two apartments in the long brick dependency.

A number of years ago a three-story addition was built from the L across the back of the main dwelling, roughly doubling its thickness. Plans call for retaining this addition which will now be stuccoed to blend with the main structure.

The chief interior rooms match the general style of the exterior of the Lucas house. High ceilings, broad plaster surfaces, simple ribbed cornices, with most effort toward ornamentation going to the mantles with their rounded cast iron fireplaces.

The restoration of such an imposing dwelling in a neighborhood not totally free of poor conditions and slightly derelict properties should tie Bull Street in more closely to other areas of the old village of Charleston that have made an effort to retain good standards.



APARTMENTS
photo by Smoak.)

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