

Chapter Four

The William Blacklock House

18 Bull Street-circa 1800

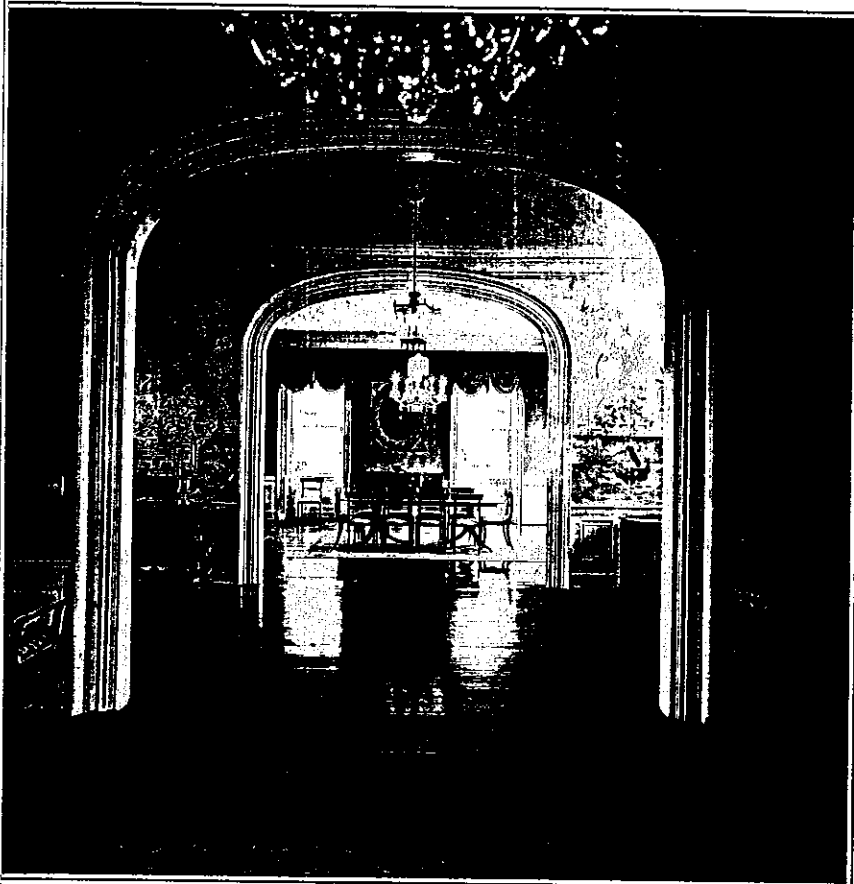
For years the house at 18 Bull Street existed in tranquil, solitary majesty, bordered by tidal creeks and marshes. Today, it is frequently forgotten that most of the land between this location and the Ashley river was a part of its estuary and is now filled land laid over the once great marshes of the Ashley. When this house was built in 1800 by wealthy wine merchant William Blacklock, this area of Harleston Village was virtually open country and the dwellings which were to transform it into a fashionable suburb were only beginning to appear. The architect of the house is unknown, although some have attributed it to Gabriel Manigault because of similarities with the now demolished Orphan House Chapel which is known to be his work. Although an amateur, Manigault was one of the finest Charleston architects of this time and designed many beautiful Charleston structures, including the United States Bank, now City Hall and the Joseph Manigault house. He was the first of Charleston's architects to use the Adam style. Certainly Blacklock's house was one of the most splendid of its time and is today an invaluable architectural treasure.

Blacklock house was one of the first houses in Charleston to be built in the Adam style, named for the brothers who developed its characteristic features. The style was much used by Charles Bullfinch, a prominent architect from Boston, who popularized it in America. It is often referred to as the Federal style in this country. The structure is of Charleston "grey" hand-made brick. The walls are eighteen inches thick. The double flight entrance stairway, supported by columns of Portland stone, rises directly from the sidewalk in townhouse style. Under the landing, the keystone

above the ground level entrance bears the date 1800, the year of construction. The house is built above a full-story basement and features arcaded door and windows with reeded marble keystones and trim. Spectacular fanlights and sidelights, arches of orange-red brick, and the wrought iron balustrade serve to enhance the striking facade. The house is built without balconies or piazzas.

The house is a traditional double house with a wide hallway flanked by two rooms on either side. Its interior reveals period elegance in the elaborate gesso trim and woodwork, cypress paneling and heart pine sills and flooring,

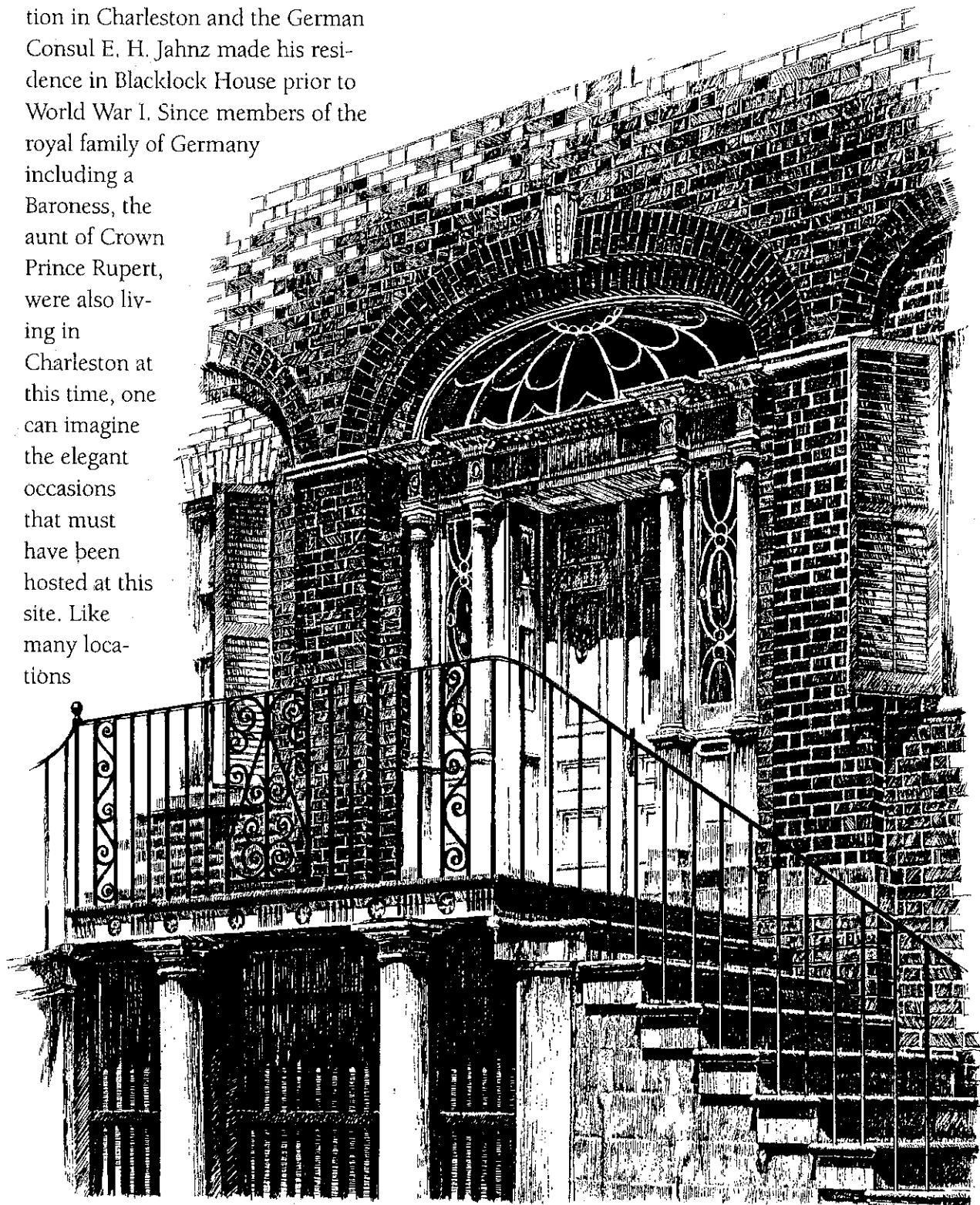
Main Rooms—
Blacklock House



Tommy Thompson

and a very magnificent vaulted ceiling over the stairwell. The plaster work in the vault is especially fine. The mantles in the great rooms on the main floor and the floor above include lovely examples of the French Imperial style. Full length glass doors and the large porch on the rear of the building were added in 1973 when the house was restored by the College. To the rear of the house, a very old brick outbuilding in gothic revival style is said to have at one time been the most elegant privy in the City. This type of facility had been dubbed a "necessary" by Thomas Jefferson, a more polite title. A small house, also gothic revival, occupies part of the spacious rear yard and was probably the servant quarters. Adjoining this, there is a small but elegant carriage house. Originally, the yard was much shallower and bordered on a navigable creek that flowed to the nearby Ashley River. William Blacklock constructed a dock on the creek and many of his imports were delivered to his house by river and creek shipment. The lovely rose garden at the rear of the back yard was given by Pierrine Byrd, an alumnus of the College, who has achieved a national reputation in gardening and especially in rose culture. One bed in the rose garden features a beautiful miniature pink rose named "Pierrine" in her honor. The garden is dedicated to her husband, George Byrd, also a College alumnus.

There has long been an important and prominent German population in Charleston and the German Consul E. H. Jahnz made his residence in Blacklock House prior to World War I. Since members of the royal family of Germany including a Baroness, the aunt of Crown Prince Rupert, were also living in Charleston at this time, one can imagine the elegant occasions that must have been hosted at this site. Like many locations



BLACKLOCK HOUSE, CHARLESTON, S.C. JANUSZ NEDZI ©1991



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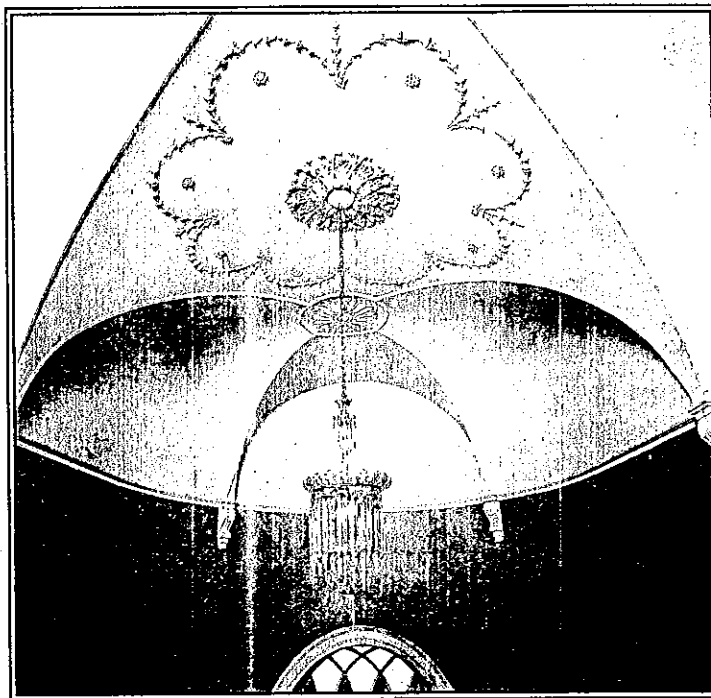
Mantel-Blacklock House

on the campus, Blacklock house has served as the setting for many movies, perhaps the best known being the television production of *North and South* in which Elizabeth Taylor played the madame of a bordello in the house. The house also possesses one of the two ghosts that have been reported with some frequency in connection with College buildings, the other being Twelve Glebe Street, discussed later in this volume. The Blacklock ghost allegedly lives on the

top floor and appears late in the afternoon when people are alone in the house. No one has stated who the ghost might be or had any communication with it.

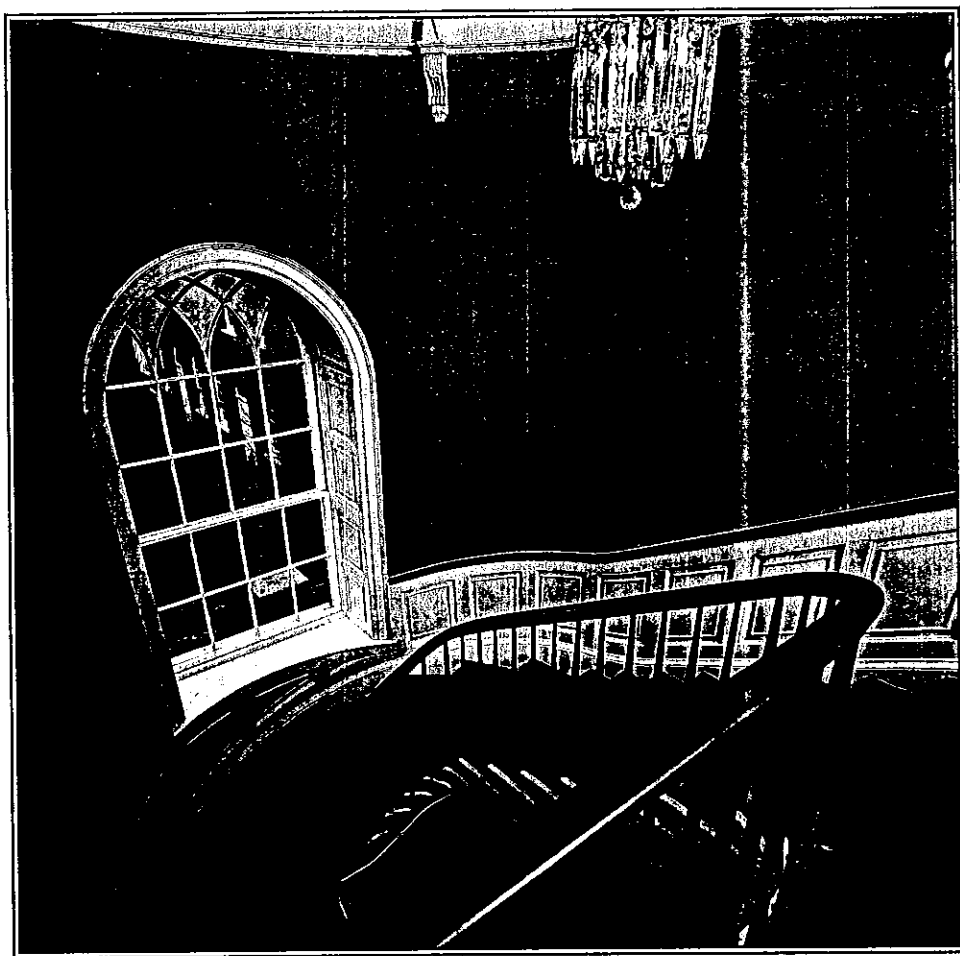
In 1958 a permit for the demolition of Blacklock house was granted but fortunately was never used. At that time the house was an apartment complex. In 1971 the College of Charleston Foundation acquired the house as a gift through the generosity of Richard H. Jenrette of New York

and Charleston. By 1973, the College completed the restoration of the home and it has since been used by the College and the Foundation as the site for meetings, receptions and faculty gatherings. Although it was severely damaged in 1989 by Hurricane Hugo, it has been restored to its original condition. In 1974, the Blacklock House was designated a National Historic Landmark by the National Park Service and it is listed as exceptional in *The City Of Charleston's Historic Architecture Inventory*.



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Vaulted Ceiling
Blacklock House



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Stairwell—
Blacklock House