

Blacklock House 'One Of Greatest'

By ROBERT P. STOCKTON

In a city of great houses, the William Blacklock House at 16-18 Bull St. ranks among the greatest.

One of the city's handsomest houses in the Adam style, the mansion is a national historic landmark, so designated by the National Park Service.

It was among the earliest houses built in Charleston Village, a suburb laid out in the latter part of the 18th Century by the Harleston family.

William Blacklock, a wealthy merchant, bought Lots 121 and 122 in the plan of Charleston, from Mrs. Ann Lord on Sept. 24, 1794.

These large lots, on the north side of Bull Street and extending to Pitt Street on the west, included the site of the present house. In 1799, he acquired the adjacent lot at the corner of Bull and Coming streets, and thus owned all the the north side of Bull Street between Coming and Pitt streets.

Blacklock apparently built his house about 1800. The city directory of 1800 (the survey of which was taken in 1799), lists his store on Craft's South Range and his home on Tradd Street.

The "Plan of the City of Charleston," of circa 1800, shows a substantial dwelling on the approximate location of the present house.

Evidently through some oversight, Blacklock is not listed in the city directory of 1801. However, the 1802 directory lists his store on Craft's Wharf and his

"dwelling house corner of Bull and Coming Streets."

The 1803 directory lists him, simply, on Bull Street.

Blacklock's house is a symbol of Charleston's so-called "Golden Age," the period between the depression caused by the Revolution and that caused by the War of 1812.

It was a period of general prosperity in Charleston and saw the rise of such merchant princes as Blacklock, Adam Tunno and Nathaniel Russell.

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It was also a time of enthusiastic building activity, with fine mansions being erected in the new style of architecture based on the designs of the Adam brothers of England.

A rather feminine style of graceful curves and sinuous traceries and delicate decorations, the Adam style gives even the massive bulk of the Blacklock House an air of lightness and almost of movement.

Constructed of Carolina "grey" brick, which is actually brown, the house has two basements, having been built at a time when the area was still veined with creeks and marshes.

The facade is one of the city's most

imposing and dominates the streetscape. Its broad expanse is broken by a wide projecting central bay, which frames with red brick arches the central doorway and two flanking windows.

The doorway, one of Charleston's most beautiful, fills the central arch with woodwork with fine Adam detail, a fan-light with scalloped tracery and side-lights with linked oval tracery.

The arch is complemented by a larger one in the central pediment, containing a large fanlight. A large rectangular window on the second level balances the expanse of the two arching features.

All windows except the rectangular central one have contrasting red brick headers and inset keystones.

A double flight of marble steps, with wrought iron railings rise from the sidewalk to a square terrace which is supported by marble columns.

On the rear, piazzas once overlooked the gardens on the north side of the house. A high terrace now overlooks the garden.

The house's interior layout follows the traditional double house plan, with a central hallway with flanking rooms on each floor.

The rear rooms are made slightly smaller than the front by the expanse of the stairhall, with its curving staircase.

A subsequent owner installed wide sliding doors connecting the front rooms and central hallway in the first floor, and installed Italianate marble mantels.

(See Page 10-D, Column 2)

...Blacklock House

Continued From Page 1-B

These mantels were replaced with Adam style mantels during the recent restoration by the College of Charleston Foundation, which owns the property.

The other primary rooms retain their original mantels and woodwork in the Adam style.

The property also retains a kitchen building in the Gothic Revival style and massive driveway gates on both sides of the house.

Filled with furnishings of the appropriate period, the mansion is used for faculty dining and receptions by the College of Charleston.

