

MORE STATELY

and on the 2d floor the bedrooms, with three large rooms in the attic. There are two interesting accessory buildings on the property, a carriage house and servant's quarters.



Carriage House

The Martin house is reputed to have had the first bathtub in the City of Charleston. It was a large tub, carved out of a solid piece of gray granite, and is located in the basement. When the bath tub was first put in, young friends came to frolic in its great watery depths. Some maiden ladies thought this all-over bathing very daring, and not quite modest! Mrs. Cutchin, the present owner, says that her father had it covered over, but that it is still there.

The architect of the house is unknown. It was built between 1835 and 1840 for Robert Martin, a wealthy Charleston merchant. He married Milberry Serena Daniel from Camden. They had six children. In the Historical Society archives is an old newspaper clipping of the tribute written about Mrs. Martin at the time of her death. It is quoted here because it shows so clearly what an indelible mark such a mistress leaves on her house. It isn't difficult, even now, to picture Serena Martin descending her stairway, clad in the regal black that all our ladies wore after the Confederate War.

"Mrs. M. Serena Martin, born in Camden, S.C., on the 17th May, 1808, died at Summerville, near Charleston, S.C., on the 20th February, 1877.

"These simple dates tell us the beginning and end of a life. The beginning was with God, the end was in Christ. Between, there breathes a life, that wondrous mystery - a human soul, a mystical individuality, a spiritual portrait - the portrait of a sweet and noble woman. It will do us good to look at this life, to catch the inspiration of a thought and gather the lessons of an example.

"Bright, beautiful, true, brave, and tender, Mrs. Martin began life with her husband in all the gentle courage, and mingled strength, and sweetness of her nature. With such a wife, such a man as Robert Martin, the upright gentleman and sagacious merchant, could not fail of success.

"They soon built for themselves a strong, tasteful, roomy, and sheltered home - a home of graceful comfort and quiet dignity, which the children of the house might remember with love and pride, and all friends recall with a grateful sense of its restful welcome. Here she reigned and ruled first with her husband, and after his death, alone. Here she taught her children to be good men and women; here

she gathered the young around her, and here she dispensed the bounty of an active life, gracious in authority, wise in kindness.

"During the siege of Charleston she was an exile from this home. She shared the toils and trials of her countrywomen of the South, with the generous fortitude which marked them all. When the war ended, she returned with impaired fortune, but still with a measure of comfort, to take her place among her friends, and to do her part in restoring the social life which had been so rudely shattered.

"As the years passed, her strength failed, and she was sick, but to the end she bravely kept her place, and was still ever the cheerful and gracious mother and friend to all who were gathered around her. And then at last there came a time when she placed her hand trustingly in the hand of her Savior, bowed her head reverently to God's great mystery of suffering, and so passed into her Father's unseen Kingdom - died from life into life, as the seed dies in the flower, as the child dies into the man, as today will die in tomorrow.

"In this our day of ambitious parade and feverish craving for publicity, it is well, we say, to look at and learn the lesson of this retired life, this brave bright spirit, this gracious dignity, this self-respectful content with duty and the right, this sound tradition, this wholesome social force which must ever be the grace and strength of the Church, and the sure safety of the Commonwealth."

The Martin house was sold to Mrs. Rosa G. Witte in 1878. Mrs. Witte sold it to H. F. Bremer in 1912. Mrs. Cutchin, the daughter of Mr. Bremer, has lived there for fifty years. She recalled that there were nine children in her father's family and every room in the house was used when they first lived there. Now, however, only Mrs. Cutchin and her sister and brother-in-law live there. The 2nd story and attic have been closed off, and only the basement and first floor are used. Mrs. Cutchin's deep love for her house shows in its immaculate appearance and its thick green lawn which is her particular care.

Standing in the walled yard in the rear of the Martin house, one can hardly believe that busy East Bay Street is only a few yards away. There is a quiet here, a combination of the huge old trees, the high wall, the deserted out-buildings, and the grandeur of the main house. It produces a sense of remoteness from the surrounding district, not only in feeling, but in actual distance. The sounds of the street are muted and the modern sights are blotted out by the uncompromising wall.

In 1848 while 20 Charlotte Street was abuilding, Ellen Aiken and her husband spent the year abroad. There they bought chandeliers, gold mirrors, and bedroom sets ornamented with vignettes of scenes of Switzerland. Should you call on Mr. Albert Simons, Senior, you will see some of his grandmother's charming things.

The Joseph Aiken house, 20 Charlotte Street, presents a completely different aspect than the Martin house. Here the design is more definitely Greek, with Greek motifs incorporated into every detail. The front of the house is domin-

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ated by a handsome portico, supported by four tall white columns. The original lotis-lear capitals of these columns were copies of those on the tower of the Winds in Athens. These capitals were replaced by a later owner with extremely unfortunate tin substitutes. The beautiful wrought iron grillwork between the columns is designed in the Greek honeysuckle pattern with a Greek key border at the bottom.



The balcony on the second floor repeats this same graceful design. It is used again on another smaller balcony on the west side, overlooking the garden. Wide marble steps and a flagstone piazza lead to an exceptionally fine example of the carved Greek Revival doorway with decorative etched glass panels surrounding the door.

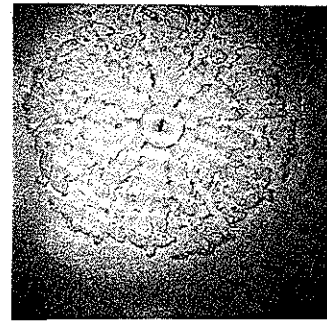


Greek Revival Doorway

In an area about four feet square, below the second story front east window, a difference in the brick is apparent. Here a shell fragment struck the house during the Confederate War. The shell came from the Yankee long range gun, the Swamp Angel, stationed near Morris Island, a piece of ordnance which had remarkable range for its time. The Swamp Angel was one of the earliest long-range guns. A platform was built on sandbags in the swamp for the artillery. General Gilmore, of the Union Forces, sent a requisition to headquarters for "twenty men, eight feet tall, to stand in six feet of mud." Apparently, he got them, says Admiral Simons.

The central hall of the house, while wide and attractive, seems vaguely lacking. Then one realizes that no stairway is to be seen. The stair is located at the back of the hall in a very unusual placing. It is barely visible from the entrance. On the east side of the hall are two beautiful adjoining rooms, separated by an arch. The arch is surmounted by an ornate carved pediment. The woodwork and molding in the Aiken house, with the exception of the one

archway decoration, is wide but plain. This was done intentionally to draw attention to the carved gold mirrors and elaborate chandeliers.

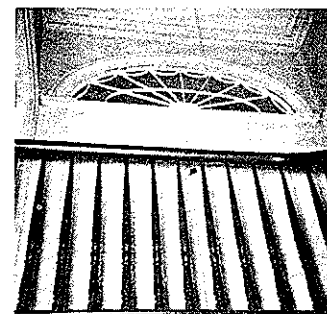


Molded Plaster Medallion - Chandelier is Gone

These were part of the original decorating plan. Unfortunately, all the chandeliers were sold after the house passed out of the hands of the Aiken family, but the mirrors, curtains, paintings and furniture are owned and used by the descendants of Joseph Aiken. The proportions of the room are palatial. The feeling of height, which the Greek Revival architecture stressed, is increased by the present lack of decoration in the rooms.

On the west side of the hall are two more rooms, originally parlors but now bedrooms, smaller than those on the east. These rooms are separated by an interesting arched loggia and a small dressing room. The dressing room, proving itself adaptable, has been converted into two bathrooms.

The Aiken house is owned presently by Mr. William J. Bates of Delaware. He is in the process of redecorating the house. He plans to convert the second floor into three apartments. The general plan of the second floor is the same as the first with a central hall and three rooms on each side. One singularly interesting feature on this floor is a wide false double door with a fanlight over it on the landing at the top of the stairs. Only one side of the "double" door opens, and on the other side of it is a wall and single door complete with molding.



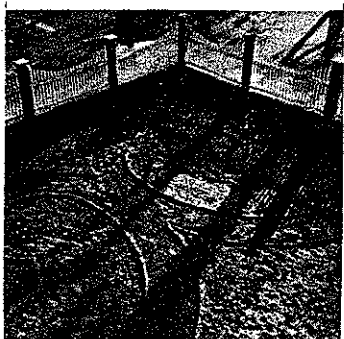
Wide False Double Door with Fanlight

Since the owner plans to live on the first floor himself, he is redecorating that now. He has not fully completed his plans for the second floor. Mr. Bates has almost completed the east front parlor. He will begin next on the room adjoining it. His unusual plan for the large central hall calls for a royal blue ceil-

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ing with gilded molding and a large mural painted on the wall. He has already had a large mural painted above the mantel in his bedroom. He is considering a similar treatment for the wall in the stairwell. The owner has done all the interior decoration planning himself.

The garden of the Aiken house is laid out in a lovely formal pattern. It has been cleared and replanted with decorative flower beds, which will make a nice display in the spring.



Flower Bed - Lovely Formal Pattern

The property also included a carriage house which has been converted into ten apartments known as 100 Alexander Street. This property has recently been sold off. It is separated from the main house by an ordinary concrete block wall.

The Robert Martin house and the Joseph Aiken house belonged to the same family, as they belong to the same architectural era. In 1848, Joseph D. Aiken married Ellen Martin, Robert Martin's daughter. Joseph and Ellen were second cousins, for Robert Martin's mother was Margaret Aiken. Robert Martin built the "Aiken" house next to his and gave it to the young couple as a wedding present. To Joseph Aiken has been attributed the design of this house, but this is without foundation. The architect was James M. Curtis.

While law was his profession painting and sculpture were the pleasures of his leisure hours and, in the opinion of his contemporaries, could have been his fortune. The house was originally hung with his paintings, and sculptured busts of his wife and children were prominently displayed.

Joseph and Ellen Aiken had six children, of whom one was William Martin Aiken, the Supervising Architect of the Treasury during the Cleveland administration. The only Aiken grandchildren were the children of Serena Daniel Aiken, who married Dr. T. Grange Simons. They lived in 20 Charlotte Street in the early years of their marriage. The rest of the children of Joseph and Ellen Aiken died without issue.

The Aiken house passed out of the family in 1889, when it was sold to Anna Shingler. The Shingler family sold it to Dr. I. Ripon Wilson in 1929. Mr. Bates bought it from the Wilson family in 1962.

Robert Martin also built another house similar in construction to the Aiken house for another daughter, Henrietta; she married Edward Barnwell Means. This house was located nearby on Alexander Street but has burned down. With such

a close concentration of the family within a few blocks, it does not require much imagination to see the Martin and Aiken houses as the scene of many delightful gatherings. Joseph Aiken was a first cousin of Gov. William Aiken, whose house stands a few blocks away on Elizabeth Street. The family was prominent not only in Charleston, but throughout the State. Many of the leading men, who shaped history in that golden era preceeding the Confederate War, were probably entertained at Joseph Aiken's house. What a festive appearance it must have presented to the approaching guest, its magnificent double parlors lit with hundreds of candles, their gleaming light reflected in the tall gold mirrors. Standing now in the empty front drawing room of the Aiken house, one can easily see there a group of those resplendent ladies and their attentive escorts, assembled for a musical evening or perhaps a ball.

The days of their glory are gone, but their dignity and beauty remain. The two houses stand aloof, reminders of the more graceful past.

They stand as an enduring monument to the integrity and taste of the family that built them. They testify to the worth of a generation which, with tight lips after the war, could say.....

"Build Thee More Stately Mansions, Oh My Soul"

(A great deal of assistance with terminology was supplied by Mr. Read Barnes, architect for the Lining House.)



SHIPMATE - CAST ADDED *

ELSPETH VIEWS

Elsbeth, it is good to see you back. How was Hospital Rock?"

"Noisy and full of nosey nurses determined to bathe you at the drop of a feather. I cant tell you how good it is to be out of that haven of mercy and cleanliness. Some attractive doctors, that's all there is to it. But the food, all dead, all cooked! You cant imagine how I suffered. No drink, worth mentioning."

"Never mind Elspeth", I replied hastily, "you're out! We need your viewing for our next issue."

"I cant help you. Can't even you see my wing is still in a cast? That nice Mr. Campsen let me ride on the top of his boat to get down to the Battery. He's getting quite gaga about me. Still it was a wearying trip for an invalid gull but sheer guts did it. I knew

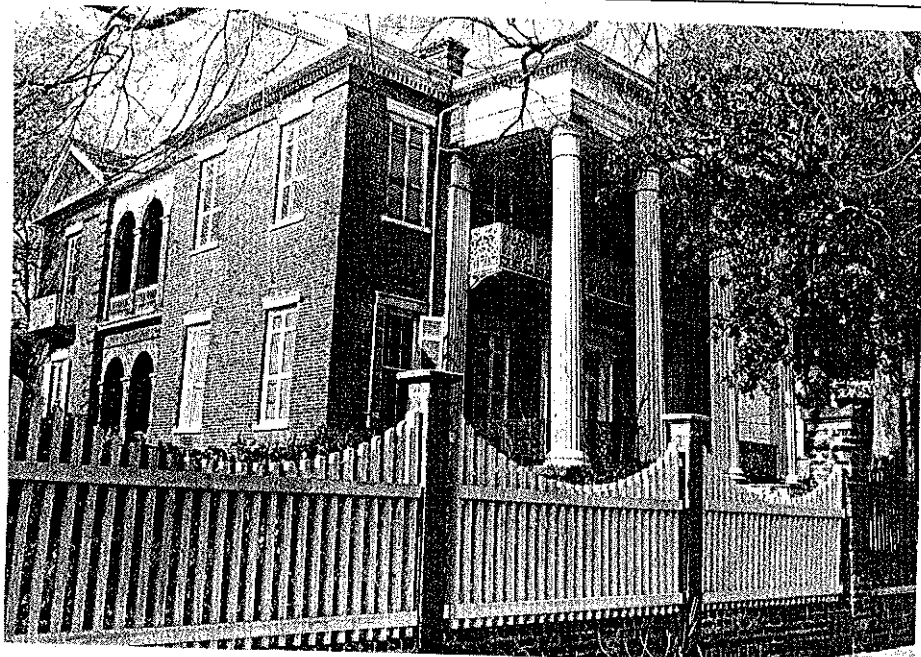
**Cast resulted from hitting obnoxious East Bay billboard.*

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20 Charlotte St.



Staff Photo by Stephanie Harvin

Italian loggia is visible on the west side of 20 Charlotte St.

Greek-Revival Mansion Was Built As Nuptial Gift, Adorned With Art

By LISA DENNIS
Post-Courier Reporter

The mansion at 20 Charlotte St. is one of many historic homes that have fallen into disrepair and been divided into one-room apartments for students.

However, the owner, James Asimus of Australia, has done extensive restoration work on the property and hopes to use the house as his private residence.

The two-story brick dwelling, known as the Joseph Aiken House, was built in 1848. Robert Martin bought the property in 1837. When his daughter, Ellen Daniel Martin, married her second cousin, Winnsboro native Joseph Aiken, the house at 20 Charlotte was built as a wedding gift.

The design of the house, which also includes a large basement and attic, has been attributed to Russell Warren (who is believed to have designed the similar Kerrison Mansion at 138 Wentworth) and also to Aiken, who was an accomplished amateur artist. A planter and a prominent lawyer in Charleston, Aiken also was interested in architecture. However, a photograph of 20 Charlotte listing the name of James M. Curtis and the word "architect" leads to the inference that the construction may have been Curtis' work.

Whoever is responsible for the design executed a sophisticated plan. With the shutters open, the home is well lit and sunny, spacious, but with a good degree of privacy, and possesses easy communication between principal rooms and service areas.

The two stories feature gracious rooms marked by particularly lofty ceilings. A center hall runs back to a circular staircase. On the east side of the first floor, are a drawing room, dining room, pantry, kitchen and service staircase to the rear.

West of the center hall are two large chambers — one perhaps originally a library — and a connecting recessed Italian loggia, now enclosed but probably intended as an open porch overlooking a formal garden.

On the second floor there are five chambers of good size, a center hallway and a similar connecting loggia on the west.

The architect fully embraced the decorative boldness of the Greek Revival style for exterior and interior. The full-height unpainted portico, the full-length doors and windows,

Do You Know Your Charleston?

the egg-and-dart and waterleaf door trim, thumb-mold marble window lintels and dentil cornice work all follow the robust practices of Greek Revival.

The rooms continue the bare, broad-surfaced approach of this particular style. The marble mantels remain unadorned by carving, and decoration is limited to a plaster cornice and high baseboards. One of the more unusual features is the elaborate pediment over the double doors leading from parlor to dining room. Almost Egyptian in expression, it repeats a modified anthemion (honeysuckle ornament) pattern.

The anthemion pattern and Greek fret are repeated in the cast-iron balconies and original front gate, which are still intact. The capitals of the four front columns were a variation on the "tower of the winds" design with acanthus and lotus leaves. These are now missing.

In the rear of the spacious yard are the old carriage house and servants' quarters, though these have been altered considerably and are no longer part of the property. Servants also lived in the basement.

Joseph Aiken is listed as an attorney in city directories before the Civil War, but then became financial agent for Gov. William Aiken, a wealthy planter. Following the war he was a cotton merchant and acted as agent for a line of steamers.

In "Thomas Grange Simons III, His Forebearers and Relations," Rear Adm. R. Bentham Simons writes: "Joseph was quite an artist and having the talent for painting and sculpture, furnished his rooms ... with works from his own hand, such as oil paintings of birds, fishes, etc. for the dining room, while the parlor contained beautiful specimens of waterfalls and other landscapes. Nearby on pedestals would be seen busts of his wife and daughters, the work of his own chisel."

The property at 20 Charlotte was officially conveyed in trust to Aiken by his father-in-law in 1851. Aiken's widow then sold the house to Ann

Amelia Shingler for \$10,000 in 1889. For a number of years it was the residence of W.H. Shingler of the firm of Hesse and Shingler, cotton and naval stores agents and commission merchants.

The home was purchased in 1929 by I. Ripon Wilson, whose family lived there for more than 30 years. In 1961 he sold it to Earl M. Carter and William J. Bates. The following year Carter transferred his ownership to Bates.

In 1964 it was purchased by Richard J. Bryan. Bryan, like Aiken, is an artist and the room he lived in for several years was overflowing with paintings, many of which remain in the upstairs hall.

During Bryan's tenure, rooms were let to lessen the financial burden of maintenance. He sold the house to Asimus in December 1980.

Asimus, who also owns other properties in Charleston, has a special affection for 20 Charlotte, says his mother, who resides in the mansion much of the year.

Being an Australian citizen, Asimus may live in the United States only for three-month intervals, but he hopes one day to make Charleston his home.

Mrs. Asimus says her son has invested a great deal in restoring the mansion, but it's a slow process. Asimus had the roof completely redone and the front columns strengthened and straightened, with new capitals on top. In addition he's had all the windows unstuck, reweighted and reglazed. The huge original doors have been sanded and repaired; cracked plaster has been recovered.

Unfortunately, Mrs. Asimus says, delays cause the completed work to need refreshing. One sad example of this is the formal garden that Asimus took great pains to restore. Mrs. Asimus says the yard was completely overgrown and filled with rubbish when her son purchased the property. He had it dug out, cleaned up and replanted with flowering plants and trees. Now, only a couple of years later, the garden again has lost its definition and fallen into neglect.

However, Mrs. Asimus says, no matter how many delays or pitfalls she and her son encounter, the restoration will continue in efforts to restore the home to its original majestic beauty.