

THE ALSTON HOUSE
172 Tradd Street
c. 1855
Home of Dr. and Mrs. P.J. Fischinger

This house is a fine adaptation of Greek Revival architecture. The massive fluted columns of the portico with richly ornamental capitals, follow the design of the Lysicrates monument at Athens. The property was acquired by Alexander Hext Chisolm in 1829 and the house was built in the 1830's. It was sold to William A. Alston in 1855 and moved around in the Alston family until 1920 when William Alston Pringle purchased it.

MUSIC SALON

"Young Noblewoman", attributed to Lavinia Fontana 1580, Bologna
Eleonora Atestina (D'Este) 1576 Frans Pourbus the Younger, 1604
Russia
Tapestry, "Crucifixion Scene", 1390 Patron, Jean Duc Berry, Paris
Brother of Louis XIII of France
Round black ormolou table, French Sevres plaque mid 1800's
On fireplace mantel, French clock 1850
Bust(s) children of M.A. _____?
Boulle style commode, French, brass, ivory inlays, mid 1800's
Gilt carved console, Italian, late 1700's
Court portraits 1848 Sevres, for Tuilleries
Over door (Portrait of George Sonol?)
Pair of Meissen Vases
Aubusson covered dining room
Small settle
2 tiny chairs (Beaubons vais Tapestry)
19th century: Thurn and Taxix
Clock - Sevres

DINING SALON

Two sets, French, chairs transitional, Louis XV, set early 1800's
Pollarded oak dining table, English, 1840
Baroque mirror, Italian, gilt, mid 1600's-1700's
Dutch flowers, early 1800's
"Apollo and Daphne", 1800's, after Bernini, alabaster
Mme de. Montespan French, F. Elle the Elder, 1695
Aubousson tapestry on floor, panels, 1700's also tapestry
2 German engravings, 19th century
Venetian Engravings, 17th century
Reflectory marble table, gilt carved base, late 1800's

STUDY

"St. Jerome", mid 1600's, Italian
"St. Philip", mid 1600's, Italian
Walnut carved console, North Italian, late 1600's
Marble top marquetry table, mid 1800's, French
Plaque of Gian Galeazzo Sforza (rightful hier of Sforza dynasty,
poisoned by uncle in 1495) and D.B. Savoy (mother and regent),
Italia, 1490-1495
Falconet signed set 1749-1775, Chateau mark, Petit Point
Renaissance plaques, Italian, late 1400's (on wall)
Set of 6 engravings, Vatican Inventory 17th century
Dante's Inferno 1800 - damaged during the war
Florentine Lady (bust) - 1800 century

GREEN SALON

"Mary Magdalen", Giovan' Giusep Dal Sole, late 1600's, Italian
"Sybil" Version, after Domenichino late 1600's, Italian
Aubousson tapestry settee, chairs mid 1800's
Major Meissen vases mid-1800's
Cloverleaf vitrine Vernis Martin, 1870
Green onyx pedestal 1870, bust Marie Antoinette, Pajou
Mirror over sofa, Venetian
Boulle style table, Spanish, "Alba" type, 1850
Grotesqui tapestry, Belgian, mid-1600's
Boulle style commodes, mid to late 1800's
Ormolou clock, 1856, Ch. Marly (Grand Prix at the Exposition)
Bisque figuerines, Konnrshiche Porcellan Manufaktur, 1800's
(German)
3 Meissen vases
Bacearat Chandelier

BREAKFAST ROOM

Rockingham tea set, English, 1800's
Chinese Cabinet, 1900
Anglo Irish, period table, 1800

HALLWAY

Chinese cabinet, 1800
"Judith with Head of Holofernes", Neopolitan early 1700's
Japanese cabinets, early and late 1800's
Famille Roseware, Chinese, 1800's
Carved stoneboy, Padova, 1700's
Chinese temple
Chien Lung Warriors, 1735-95, Chinese
Coromandel Screen
Chung Li Chuan (Chinese God) One piece wooden carving, 1800's
"Lucretia" attributed to Furini, early 1600's Florentine

Ownership of 172 Tradd Street

Alexander Hext Chisolm -

Acquired the property in 1829

House built 1834 - 1836 (established)

Sold to

William A. Alston - from All Saints Parish in 1855

in 1864 belonged to John Ashe Alston

went to sisters Fanny and Helen Alston

and then to their brother Dr. Rowland A. Alston in 1920

to William Alston Pringle (Administer for Estate) who

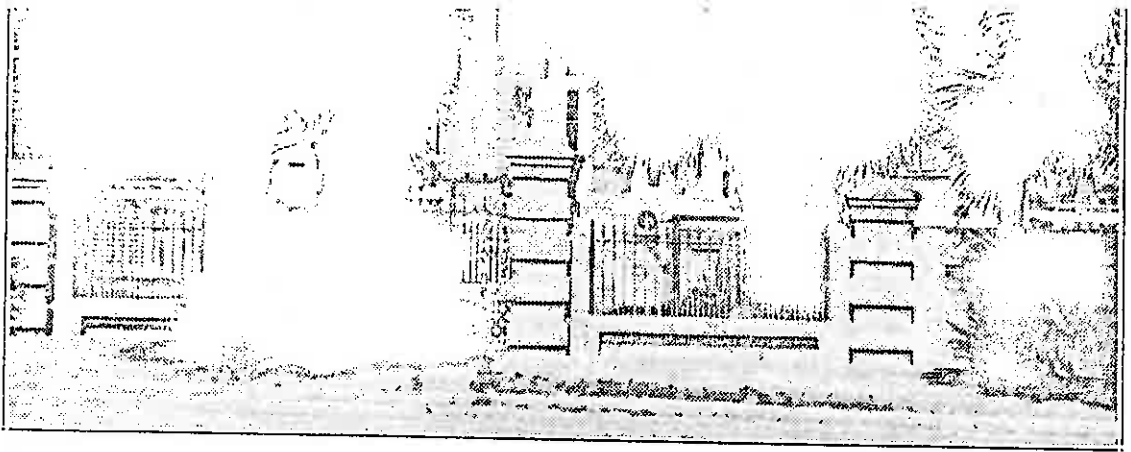
Sold to Rosa P. Richards in 1924 at her death

passed to Mr. F. Richards.

Sold to Peter Samuel Bee in 1940

Sold to A Rhett DuPont in 1966 who died in 1972.

Sold to Dr. & Mrs. Daniel Dean in 1974.



Alston House, Now Frederick Richards Home, Spared by Fire of 1861, is Fine Example of Greek Revival

The house at 172 Tradd street, known as the "Alston House", is a fine adaptation of Greek Revival architecture. The massive fluted columns of the portico, with richly ornamented capitals, follow the design of the Lysicrates monument at Athens.

Decoration on the pediment is simple. From the small iron-railed balcony on the second floor over the entrance, one gazes down on recumbent grayhounds, with alertly lifted heads, which guard the steps below.

The forceful and generous personalities of the period reflected their qualities in the building of their homes. Bespeaking the gracious hospitality of the times, the handsome doorway opens into a hall eighteen feet in width, flanked by wide doorways with carved lintels and doors three-quarter inch thick, which lead to large perfectly proportioned drawing-rooms. A graceful circular stairway, unsupported save where it joins the wall at one side, ascends to the upper floor. Passing under the stairs, an arched doorway gives entrance to the back hall. Niches in the wall provide space for statuary.

Dining rooms and the library open on this second hall. Walls of the dining room are paneled about four feet up and all mantels are of white marble. The kitchen, pantry and other utility rooms are at the rear.

Tradition says that the Alston House was built by Alexander Hext Chisolm, the builder of Chisolm's Mill. At the time of its erection, the grounds, which were surveyed by Edwin B. White, extended to Savage street on the east. Rutledge avenue was not continued through this part of town until the property passed into the hands of Mrs. Fanny B. Alston, the widow of John Ashe Alston, who deeded sufficient land to the city for this purpose.

In 1855, the place was sold by Mr. Chisolm to William Algernon Alston and it was during Mr. Alston's occupancy that the destructive fire of 1861 raged across the city from the foot of Hasell street, on the east side, to the Ashley river at the west end of Tradd street.

Due to the fact that all available men were either in service or at training camps, the fire department was disorganized and the conflagration, whipped by a strong wind, gained rapid headway. Many fine residences and public buildings were destroyed; and at the west end of Tradd street, only two wooden structures remained, one, the Alston residence and the other, a house three doors west of the present corner of Rutledge and Tradd streets, used by the Confederates as detention quarters for federal prisoners, who were being held in reprisal where they would be under the bombardment from Morris Island.

For non-payment of taxes, the Alston house was sold on December 15, 1871, by W. W. Taft, then county auditor, to John E. Alston, who by his will, conveyed it to Mrs. Fanny B. Alston.

Mrs. Alston, however, not caring to avail herself of this tax title, and to claim sole ownership, en-

deavored to carry out terms of the will of William Algernon Alston, who, prior to its having been sold for taxes, had bequeathed the property to her and to her children, in the proportion of one third for herself and two thirds for the children.

According to the divisions made in her will, nineteen-fifty-fourths of the property, which included the homestead, fell to her daughters, Fanny and Helen, share and share alike. Later, by the will of Fanny and Helen Alston, their brother, Dr. Rowland A. Alston, became heir to the residence.

Dr. Alston died in 1920, and the Alston house was sold by William Alston Pringle, administrator for his estate, to Rosa P. Richards (Mrs. Frederick Richards). Upon the death of Mrs. Richards, the dwelling passed into the hands of Mr. Richards who with his family still reside there.

The handsome old residence with its exquisite garden designed by Mrs. Richards, is one of the show places of Charleston. In the spring hundreds make pilgrimages to enjoy the wealth of bloom to be glimpsed through the iron gates at the entrance to the grounds.

(The information in this article was collected by the Federal Writers Project of the Works Progress Administration at Charleston, engaged in writing the South Carolina Guide.)

Handsome Rice Mill Stood On Tradd Street Site

(EDITOR'S NOTE: Third in a series of articles on Charleston's historic commercial and industrial buildings. The fourth article will appear next Monday.)

By W.H.J. THOMAS

One of Charleston's more important industrial areas during the early 19th century was located on a mill pond that has now become the western end of Tradd Street.

What now remains of this

Do You Know Your Charleston?

complex is a three-story brick-and-masonry building that has been adapted for modern use but more than 100 years ago was but one unit in one of the largest rice mills in South Carolina.

When industry first came to Charleston it appeared in the form of an immediate relation of agriculture. Lumber mills and rice mills would be among the first units to be found in Charleston and the property where the warehouse of Chisolm's rice mill now stands had a direct

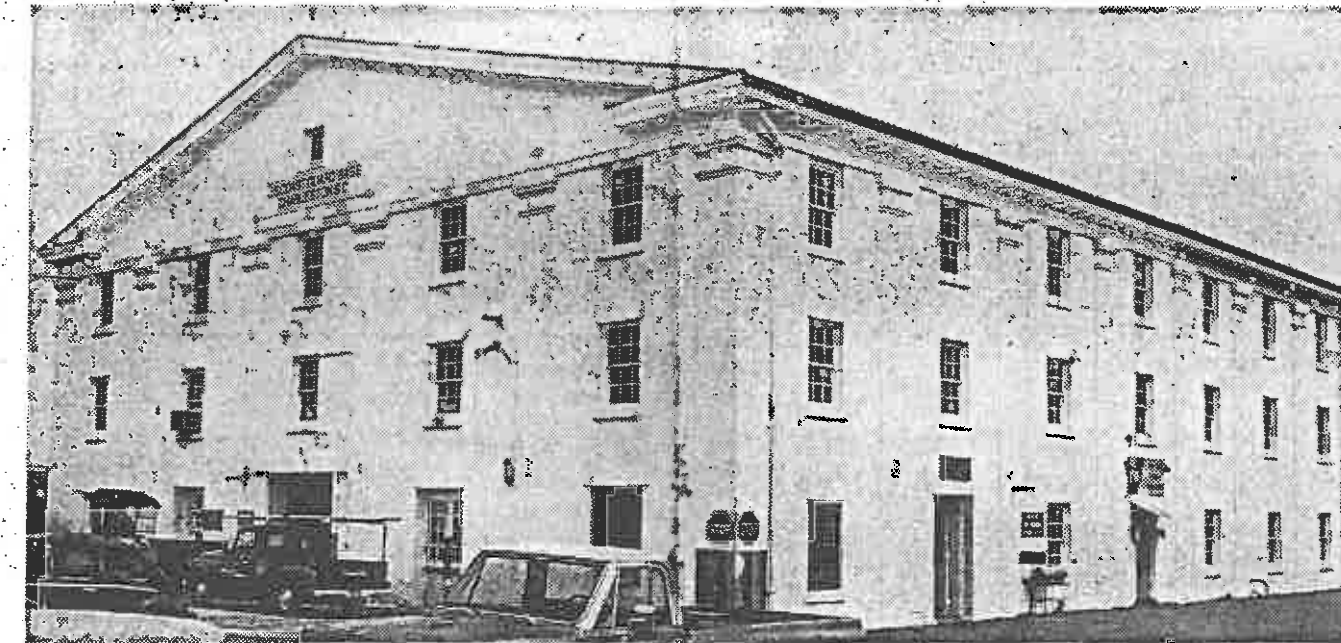
connection to both lines of business.

It appears that this area on the Ashley first went into development in 1817 when a Joshua Brown made a mill pond between the causeways that extended in that year from the western ends of Tradd and Broad streets. He had bought from City Council the acreage from the channel of the Ashley River up to the high-water line.

The property was next acquired by John Duncan in 1819. He operated a saw mill there until the building was burned in 1826. Duncan probably began filling the mill pond with sawdust, for in another decade the fill would almost be completed.

Several years after the saw mill burned the property was purchased by the Chisolm family. Around 1830 they constructed the mill that would saw lumber but also was turned over for the pounding of rice when the season's harvest came due.

In 1836 Alexander Hext Chisolm bought out the shares of the rest of his family and continued to operate the mill. It was about this time that Chisolm built for himself the handsome dwelling that stands near the mill property. Today



RICE MILL WAREHOUSE REMAINS FROM 19th CENTURY
Building is now part of U.S. Coast Guard base. (Staff Photo by Evans.)

it is numbered as 172 Tradd St.

The construction of Chisolm's rice mill is believed to have given rice culture a bit of a boost during the early decades of the 19th century. Both before and after the Civil War period, rice continued to

be a source of great wealth to the tidewater areas even if it did not achieve the volume enjoyed during the 18th century. The erection of steam power mills, such as Chisolm's, or Bennett's mill, part of which was built in 1844, or West Point Mill in

1860, stimulated the industry and further centered it around Charleston.

By the early years of the 20th century rice culture had almost wholly disappeared. The destruction brought by hurricanes to the banks of the field, the labor difficulty,

and the competition of cheap Louisiana and Texas rice combined to eliminate what had long been such a source of prosperity to the Lowcountry.

Chisolm's mill was damaged by fire in 1859 and it is uncertain how completely it was

rebuilt, one source suggesting that it was more or less taken down to its foundations. Early photographs show it as a large four-story brick structure, ornamented with rustications, and extra pediments and served with arched openings. It was designed to be as handsome an edifice as any industry could hope for, but the significance of rice to the Lowcountry people no doubt justified this elegance.

The Chisolms sold the mill property in 1894. Following a storm of 1911, in which the main building was badly damaged, all but the warehouse was pulled down.

In 1914, when the government was seeking a site for its lighthouse headquarters, the property of the mill was purchased for \$60,000 from the late Andrew B. Murray and the West Point Mill Co.

Prior to this the lighthouse service had maintained its aids-to-navigation depot and docks for many years at Castle Pinckney and the headquarters offices in the Exchange building at the east end of Broad Street.

Money was not available at this date to construct all the buildings necessary for the service and we find the offices remaining in the Exchange.

These funds be in the 1930s ministrations built up near the mill.

The lighthouse with the U.S. in July of 1930 maintained of Chisolm on its present site.

Today the divided on the holding machine exchange, and its brick work approximately 20 with what plentiful supply rods between e at roof level details aspects still bricks of the English bond a west wall in 1

The roof is of construction with wooden braces the length of 1 up among the be seen a re days when the still used for the A rice chute openings is seen beams and in just beneath may be seen dark brown rice remained from time.

Chisolm Mill's Solid Construction Drew Critic's Praise

By ROBERT P. STOCKTON

That architectural criticism is a long-standing tradition in The News & Courier is illustrated by a report of the rebuilt Chisolm's Mill in an 1859 edition.

The report, which appeared in the issue of The Charleston Daily Courier of June 9, 1859, may have been written by William Gilmore Simms, who wrote similar pieces for Harper's.

Architectural reviews which appeared in The Courier in the 1850s were meticulously detailed and reveal much about the construction of the time.

The mill, one wing of which survives on the grounds of the Coast Guard base at the west end of

Tradd Street, was rebuilt after its predecessor, built 33 years previously, burned in January 1859.

The Chisolm family began rebuilding immediately, according to The Courier's story, and the building was nearly completed when the story appeared.

The "extensive and elegant" new mill was built on the foundations of the old. It was 55 feet long, 80 feet wide and four stories high.

According to The Courier, "The architecture is somewhat in the Italian style. The south and north fronts have a pedimented centre, with two wings.

"All the openings have semi-circular heads, and the angles are rusticated. Belting or string cours-

es run around each story. The south front presents an imposing doorway; and over the front pediment or gable is placed a bell turret, surmounted by a tasteful vane."

The building, as described, can be seen now only in photographs, as all but one wing has disappeared, and that contains few of the architectural features described.

At the foundation, the walls of the building were 30 inches thick, the first story 24 inches, the second and third floor 18 inches and the fourth floor 14 inches.

No wood was used in the construction of the walls, The Courier said.

"They are composed entirely of brick, hydraulic cement, sand, and

The News and Courier

Do You Know
Your Charleston?

stone lime. They are laid in the style of the good old times when bricks were bricks, mortar was mortar, and wood was wood; when strength was not sacrificed to time, and people were willing to pay for good material, and contractors would use no other sort."

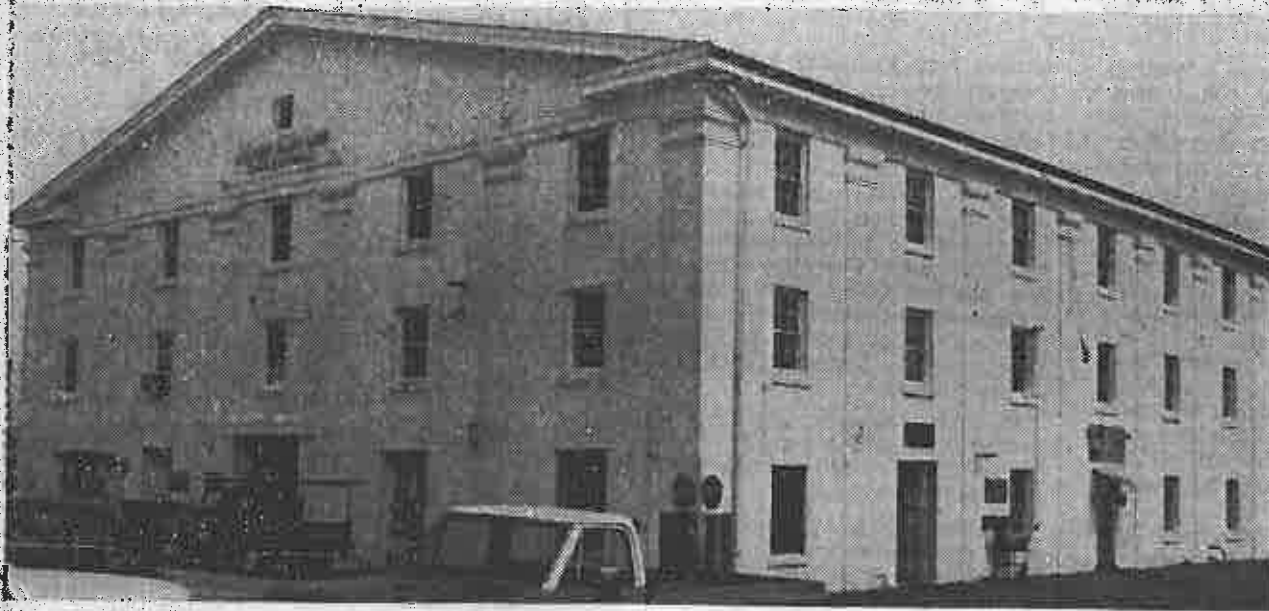
This was followed by a chauvinistic note: "We may be here allowed to remark that no city in the Union is richer in specimens of the manner in which brick walls should be constructed than our venerable city."

Chisolm's Rice Mill, as rebuilt, was capable of turning out more than 175 barrels of clean rice every 24 hours, having 36 mortars and pestles.

On the east side of the mill was an engine house, three stories high which The Courier said was "fitting up in a style of elegance in keeping with the finish of the beautiful engine, from the extensive establishment of those very ingenious and skillful machinists, Messrs. J.M. and T.D. Eason."

This was a beam engine, with a cylinder of 26 inches in diameter and five feet stroke, equal to 200 horsepower. The beam was supported by a single column 33 inches in diameter and 13 feet high.

It was the largest engine ever made in Charleston.



(File Photo)

Wing Of Chisolm's Mill

Jan 30, 1978 NNC

"We are sure," The Courier said, "the Messrs. Chisolm will never have to regret they did not have their machinery constructed outside of home. The several pieces... are made with a skill that cannot be surpassed."

In addition to the giant steam engine, made by the Eason firm of Charleston, other machinery for the mill was built by Cameron & Co. of Charleston and by workmen employed directly by the Chisolms. Some machinery was bought from the North.

The boiler house, east of the engine house, contained two separate sets of five boilers each, so that

when one set of boilers was undergoing repairs or cleaning, the mill could continue to operate.

Other smaller buildings on the mill premises included firing houses where barrel bands were made and a small gas house and gas storage for the manufacture of gas for the mill.

On the west side of the mill was the storehouse, three stories high and 90 by 100 feet, capable of containing 150,000 bushels of rice in the rough.

Rice was brought to the mill storehouse in boats and lifted from the vessels by a system of elevators operated by a separate steam engine.

Tradd St. Home Suits Eclectic MUSC Official

Dec. 20

By HERB FRAZIER
Post-Courier Reporter

Peter J. Fischinger's new home in the South is as eclectic as the man with international interests.

He and his wife, Alexandra, are moving from Baltimore to an ornate Greek Revival-styled house built in 1836 at the western end of Tradd Street for rice mill owner Alexander Hext Chisolm.

A four-column, two-story portico flanks a wide entrance framed with 10 panes of Bohemian-crafted cranberry glass with floral etchings. Sunlight through the panes casts a rosey hue on a pine floor near a spiral staircase set against a semi-circular wall.

The staircase is the centerpiece of the 13-room house that Fischinger began moving into Monday. Next month, he will move into the newly created job of vice president of research at the Medical University of South Carolina.

The house has continental styling that gives an immediate sign of quality and a fitting place for his objects of antiquity, Fischinger said.

Within days, it will reflect his passion for oil paintings from the 16th to 18th centuries, French furniture and music from the baroque period and Mrs. Fischinger's love for Meissen porcelain.

They also enjoy gardening and are patrons of the arts who support classical singers and musicians. Their home will be a showcase for that talent and their handiwork with plants, he said.

The walled garden around the white house, in time, will blossom to be a colorful setting for summer parties with fine wines. Fischinger is a wine connoisseur and a member of the centuries-old Chevalier de Tastevin, a wine tasting society in the Burgundy wine growing region of France.

Dressed in a blue shirt and pants and Duck shoes, Fischinger unloaded a rented truck he drove from Baltimore. He piled boxes, carefully wrapped paintings and house plants in an empty room and on the porch.

As he moved in, the Craven family moved out. Charles C. and Martha Craven, who restored the Tradd Street home, have bought the 18th-century Lowndes Grove plantation at the west end of St. Margaret Street.

Fischinger, 51, holds medical and Ph.D. degrees from the University of Illinois. He was deputy director of the National Cancer Institute and until recently directed the government's fight against AIDS, a job that dealt with research and policy that affects AIDS patients in the workplace.

Excellence in his avocations and profession is no accident.

"I like to do things to the best, within reason," said Fischinger, former director of the National AIDS Program Office in Washington, D.C. "But the human intellect can only do so many things. There isn't enough time to be a real Renaissance man because the amount of information, past and present, is overwhelming."

Fischinger and his wife, a former opera singer, share "a lot of interests and part of that is a restoration and preservation of antiquities. We aren't anything more than caretakers of (art) for the next generation."

He is also the caretaker of a new initiative at MUSC to attract more money for biomedical research and raise the university's profile in the field of scientific investigation.

Fischinger said he doesn't plan to put a greater emphasis on AIDS and cancer research because of his professional background. "I'm going to be looking toward excellence and placing research at MUSC at the cutting edge."

He will fill a newly created position of vice president of research. His salary will be \$125,000 annually.

The new title of vice president of research has created some concern among department heads at MUSC who have similar levels of responsibilities but don't have vice presidential status.

Because of that concern, the board of trustees earlier this month as-



Staff Photo by Herb Frazier

Fischinger stands near spiral staircase in his home.

See MUSC, Page 4-B

...MUSC

Continued From Page 1-B

sig. a committee to consider a reorganization of the administration. It is possible that the committee could recommend a division of administrative duties that could warrant three new vice presidents. The committee will report to the full board in February.

Fischinger is aware of those concerns and the problems they could bring in developing professional relationships at MUSC.

"I've been discussing things to try to develop a sense of communication," he said. "I imagine some diplomacy will be needed, but I'm no stranger to diplomacy."

The proposed Hollings Oncology Center and the irresistible opportunity it offers to create a new research-treatment facility attracted Fischinger to MUSC.

The \$16 million center is planned for the quadrangle at Calhoun and Barre streets. No date for completion has been set.

As the center grows, it will attract the best cancer researchers in the world, and "it will be good for (medical) students to see the best and to see how rigid their criteria are," he said.

It will take years to build a reputation for the cancer center and increase funding for research, Fischinger said.

"I see it as a long-term commitment."

172 TRADD STREET SERVES AS A LANDMARK AND MEMORIAL

By Samuel G. Stoney

Alexander Hext Chisolm's house deserves special notice for itself, and in particular for its impressively handsome portico. It serves also as a landmark and a memorial. It marks the beginning of one of the city's expansions, and the limit of one of its catastrophies. It is a poignant reminder of two of the fine buildings Charleston has lost.

The expansion began in 1817 when Joshua Brown made a mill-pond between the causeways that then extended the west ends of Tradd and Broad streets. He had bought from City Council the acreage from the channel of the Ashley back to the high water line. This ran from the corner of Tradd and New Streets roughly parallel to the future course of Rutledge Avenue.

John Duncan got the property in 1819 and ran a saw mill at its west end (by the river) until he was burned out in 1826. Three years later, the Chisolm family got the mill site and pond. The mill they built sawed lumber (as had Duncan's) but it also pounded rice, a very practical arrangement, as the rice business was rather strictly seasonal.

DUNCAN had probably started filling the pond at its west end with sawdust. The Chisolms had rice chaff as well for the purpose. By 1836, when Alexander Hext Chisolm bought out the shares of the rest of his family and prepared to build this house, the fill had been extended to receive it. Some of the present generation can remember when parts of the pond were left. The last was filled in and built over some time ago.

Chisolm, when he built, was in his middle 30s. He may still have had ideas of matrimony, which he never committed however throughout his long life. The original plan of his house suggests a well-to-do bachelor "doing himself" extremely well by building a handsome residence on a most handsome, agreeable and, to him, convenient site. It overlooked the only way, by land, to his mill and its village.

The site was one to please all concerned, owner, architect, and the passer-by on land or by water.

The Ashley came up to the other side of Tradd Street.

It would do so until the fill

of the boulevard pushed it well away after 1909.

Until the Confederacy, only one house was built to the west, so the portico and the windows offered a splendid view of a good stretch of the river with the dark woods of the other shore to point up sunsets. The breezes from across the river made this western fringe of the town notably comfortable and healthy.

LIKE too many other distinguished Charleston houses, this one seems to have no record left of an architect. In 1836, however, Charles F. Reichardt had conveniently arrived here. A German, he had been trained as an eclectic architect according to the straightest sect before he arrived in America.

Particularly, he borrowed from the classic buildings of Greece. A couple of years after he got here he used Corinthian order from the Choragic Monument of Lysicrates as the prototype for the majestic colonnade he placed across the side of the Charleston Hotel to glorify that part of Meeting Street.

Chisolm's house has the same ornate order, some-

what smaller, but impressive enough, for its portico. It seems just possible that the house may have been a runner-up for the hotel. The foliage, flowerettes and tendril-like volutes on their capitals imitated the marble of the Greek structure in skillful carved wood. Since the hotel has been lost, we can take the house as its monument.

The plan was also skillful. It was shaped originally like a Greek cross with blunt arms. The portico made up the one to the south, the principal rooms filled out those to the east and west. Lesser rooms were put away in the north arm.

The entrance door, as in a "single house", opens directly into the stair. Spiralling gracefully up against a semi-circular wall, this stair needs no landing, such as those the "single house" require thus saving room while pleasing the eye.

The doors, following the style of the period, are made with one long single panel. Extraordinarily, they are nearly three inches thick. Charmingly, they have white porcelain knobs, painted

with little sprigs of flowers.

A LATER owner has filled in the northern corners of the cross with rooms that increase the usefulness of the house, but did not add to its appearance.

The house can serve as a fitting memorial for two mills built by the Chisolms. The first burned in 1859. They promptly rebuilt on its foundations in "somewhat of an Italian style," a fine big four story brick structure, ornamented with rustications, and extra pediments, and served with arched openings throughout.

Like Bennett's Mill on the Cooper and West Point up the Ashley, it was fittingly monumental to process South Carolina's well-nigh sacred staple.

After the Confederacy, as rice forsook this coast for the west, the milling was discontinued.

The Chisolms sold the property in 1894. Disused, it fell into disrepair. It was badly damaged in the storm of 1911, and later taken down. The big contemporary warehouse at the Coast Guard station gives some idea of the scale of the mill. Now its best memorial perhaps is this former home of one of the family that created it.

THE CONFLAGRATION of 1861 makes this house another landmark. Starting over by the Cooper, the flames spread a wide belt of destruction over to the Ashley. They burned out just to the east of this house, leaving it and one other to the west standing to themselves on Tradd Street.

In 1855, its builder sold the house to William Algernon Alston of All Saints Parish, one of the most noted family of rice planters in Georgetown District. Three generations of his family used it as their town house first, as a permanent residence later. They kept it until 1924. From then until 1940 it was the home of the late Mr. Frederick Richards and his family. Since that year it had belonged to Mr. Peter Samuel Bee.

THIS IS the third in a series of articles by Samuel Gaillard Stoney, local historian, architect, author and raconteur. The bearded Mr. Stoney is widely acknowledged as an authority on Lowcountry and South Carolina history. Literally a fountainhead of information on Charlestoniana, he is the author of "This is Charleston," "Charleston: Azaleas and Old Brick" and "Plantations of the South Carolina Lowcountry."



THE ALEXANDER HEXT CHISOLM HOUSE AT 172 TRADD STREET

(Staff Photo by Jessie O'Connell)

1960s?

