



# PRESERVATION SOCIETY of CHARLESTON

—FOUNDED 1920—

**28 Charlotte Street**  
**Sarah Jane Clifford House**  
**c. 1905**  
**Residence of Fred and Ann Hester Willis**

**Revised 2012 SFL**

## **House History**

The 3 ½ story, Neoclassical Revival style residence at 28 Charlotte Street may be the newest addition to the block, but both its infrastructure and design is quite unique among its neighbors. The house was constructed using a technique called “balloon framing,” popular around the turn of the twentieth century among all social classes for its low cost, simple but strong construction. With this method, wall studs fastened to the sill plate of the foundation run continuously to the roofline, rising the entire height of the structure and allowing the construction of the roof prior to setting foundations for intermediate floors. The floor joists are also one length, running the full length of the house. All framing members of 28 Charlotte Street are heart pine. The twentieth century residence sits on a full basement, nine feet in height, which served as coal storage and a place for the hot water furnace for the house’s radiators. A two-story piazza sits beneath large dentiled eaves and a double dormer window with robust pilasters. Fronted by steps made of King of Prussia marble, the principal entry of the structure bears a brass plate housing both the doorbell and the home “intercom,” both connected to the master bedroom upstairs by galvanized pipe. Smaller galvanized pipe is located throughout the house as it was used to supply gas to gas-light fixtures. Parquet flooring throughout the house is finished in herringbone pattern and contrasting inlay borders common for the period.

This property was part of the lands held by the Mazyck family before 1803. In the early 19<sup>th</sup> century this area was chosen for residential development by wealthy Charlestonians who were seeking the peace and quiet of a suburban area. Although this house only dates to the early 20<sup>th</sup> century, remnants from the property’s prior history still remain. A two-story frame cottage, constructed at the rear of the property in 1875 most likely by Catharine E. Bennett, still stands and is used today as two one-bedroom apartments.

Sarah Jane Clifford, widow to Charleston dentist Alvin R. Clifford, purchased the property from the Bennett family in 1882 and within the next two decades, constructed a new residence on the property.<sup>1</sup> Directories during this time suggest that Mrs. Clifford was perhaps living in the two-story cottage while the main residence was being constructed. After 28 Charlotte's completion, she occupied her new house for only a short period and sold it in 1906 to a family that would inhabit the new dwelling for over thirty years. The house at 28 Charlotte Street has only gone through five families since its construction and has remained a single family residence for its entire history. The only significant structural change that has been made to the house since its construction was the enclosure of an original two-story piazza in the northwest corner of the house during the late twentieth century.

A two-story frame cottage was constructed at the rear of the property before 1852 and is shown on the Bridgens & Allen Map of the city of Charleston dated 1852. Sometime after 1879 the cottage was moved forward on the property. In 2010 the current owners relocated the cottage to its original location as shown on the 1852 city map. The owners added a modern component to the cottage and completely renovated it into a two bedroom, two and a half bath cottage to use as guest accommodations. As part of the relocation and renovation of the cottage the current owners added a patio behind the main house constructed with brick from the original chimneys of the cottage. Guest will be able to view the patio as they exit the house.

#### **ENTRANCE**

- The front steps are made of King of Prussia marble, mined near Philadelphia, PA
- The iron fence was manufactured in Portland, Indiana by the Ward Fence Company
- Note the brass plate housing both the door bell and the home "intercom" which is simply galvanized pipe connected to the master bedroom upstairs.
- Smaller galvanized pipe is located throughout the house as it was used to supply gas to the gasoliers.

#### **Room Descriptions**

##### ***HALL / LIVING ROOM / DINING ROOM***

- The hall newel post lamps are original to the house and were made by an artisan associated with the Tiffany Company. The stained glass window is also original to the house. The floors throughout are parquet with the more important public rooms of the house exhibiting a herring-bone patten with dark inlaid borders. Ceiling height for both the first and second floor is 11 ½ feet with 9-foot pocket doors.
- One of the early owners of the house installed the matching pair of chandeliers in the living room (known as the front parlor) and dining room. Her husband was in the maritime trade and brought them back from Italy.
- The current owner removed the two-dimensional Victorian-style wallpaper which covered every wall and ceiling. The color of the parlor walls and upstairs

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<sup>1</sup> *Charleston City Directory, 1880*, Charleston, South Carolina, Ancestry.com.

bedroom walls is a result of the glue absorbed into the plaster while the plaster was still damp. A finish coat of plaster was never added as it was unnecessary, knowing that the final finish would be wallpaper, which, incidentally, was deep red in color.

- The grand piano is an American Mason-Hamlin, manufactured in Boston, MA in 1908 and restored to its present condition in 1971.
- There are seven working, coal-burning fireplaces in the house. The most elaborate mantel is in the living room with white-glazed ceramic tiles with gold tracery. The gilt-frame mirror above the mantel has been in the home for more than sixty years. The dining room and family room mantels are of tiger oak; note the detailed carvings on the dining room mantel.
- Each window has a brass “button” with a number indicating its position as shown on the original construction drawings. Each window also has an interior window screen with matching brass numbers (the screens are not in place).
- The double pedestal dining table is Hepplewhite in style, and the side chairs are modern.
- The three silver coffee and tea services are family sets.
- The portrait is a 19<sup>th</sup> century oil that is a reproduction of an earlier French portrait.
- Also note the Art Deco bronze statuary and the tripod plant stand with carved gargoyle heads.

### ***KITCHEN / FAMILY ROOM***

This area has been reconfigured from original rooms of the house and a porch. The floorboards indicate where the family room ended and the pantry and kitchen began. The pull-up door in the floor leads to the old cistern which the owners have converted into a large pantry after originally using it as a wine cellar. The cistern collected rainwater which was siphoned to the kitchen via a lead pipe connected to a hand pump.

The north side of Charlotte Street is the highest point on the peninsula, allowing this home to be built with both the cistern and full basement free of flooding, even during Hurricane Hugo.

The cabinets are maple, stained to compliment the mahogany on the facing of the kitchen island. The ceramic work was completed by contemporary English ceramist, Mary Rose Young, except for the large, non-floral pieces in the middle which were completed by Georgia artist, Blair Mann.

In the family room, you will see the small table in front of the couch; it is made from the heart of pine boards of the original coal bin in the basement.

Note the rear butler stairs that led from what was the pantry to the second floor.  
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