

RESEARCH SOURCES

Property address: 328 Meeting / Citadel Sq. Baptist Church

Tax Map #:

Sanborn Map

1861 Census

1886 Earthquake Sisters of Mercy, stone + dwelling / Brick

City Directory

Other Sources: 1856 - Bldg. date - (This is Chas)

Citadel Square Spire Will Get New Look

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By KERRI MORGAN
Of the Post-Courier staff

Nine months after Hurricane Hugo struck, Charleston's distinctive skyline is returning to normal as the historic city's splendid old church steeples are repaired.

But the celebrated spire atop Citadel Square Baptist Church at 328 Meeting St. will take on a slightly different appearance when it is rebuilt.

The city's Board of Architectural Review approved a plan Wednesday to restore some elements of the original steeple, an 1856 structure that was toppled by a tornado in 1885 and further damaged by the great earthquake of 1886.

Most notably, the new steeple will be more slender than its predecessor, which was built in 1887 and lasted until Hugo. Its height also will be lowered from 220 feet to 207 feet because engineers believe it will stand a better chance against strong winds at that level.

Architect George Lee said he tried to come up with a design that would incorporate elements of the two previous steeples. Jim Long, the church's minister of education and administration, called it a good compromise "that does not disturb the historical significance of the church."

In another matter, the board continued to have concerns about a plastic foam cornice system proposed to trim the Hawthorn Suites Inn under construction at 181 Church St.

The board gave final approval to the design in April but has twice withheld its approval of the cornice system, which is a plastic foam mold coated in fiberglass and stucco.

The project's architect, T.O. Doggett, said the sample he presented Wednesday was of an upgraded quality that is widely accepted by architects and building contractors. He said it gives the appearance of a true stone cornice and has superb durability.

Jonathan Poston of the Historic Charleston Foundation opposed the proposed cornice on the grounds that

historically accurate materials should be used because the building is a historic replication.

But John Meffert, executive director of the Preservation Society of Charleston, said while the material wouldn't be appropriate on a historic building, it is fine for a building constructed in the 20th century.

Board member Jeffrey Rosenblum, an architect, said he is not opposed to the system but wants to make sure that the crafting of the cornice will be properly executed.

The board voted to allow the hotel developers to obtain a final building permit. But it withheld approval of the cornice system and the design of a Church Street entrance that incorporates the doorway of the Charleston Sheet Metal Building, a warehouse that stood on the site until it burned in 1988.

In an unrelated matter, the board rejected a proposal to replace the two-story Loeb building at 204-206 King St. with a three-story building that would contain a street-level storefront and an inn on the two upper floors.

The Loeb building was damaged beyond repair by Hurricane Hugo and the board approved its demolition in February. The developers, GoHoBe Inc., in conjunction with Rick Widman of King's Courtyard Inn, believe a three-story building is appropriate because its neighbors and most commercial buildings on King Street have three stories, said Joe Schmidt, the project's architect.

But the Historic Charleston Foundation opposed the plan, saying the historical significance of the Loeb building should be respected. Poston said the foundation recovered many materials from the original building and would like to see them incorporated into the new structure. The first floor of the Loeb building was constructed of brick in 1887 and the upper floor, of wood with a metal-clad facade, was completed in 1894.

Poston said the two-story height should be maintained to preserve the "sense of rhythm on King Street." And board member Charles L. Wyrick agreed, saying it had provided "visual interest among the other three-story buildings."

Architectural Guide to Charleston

THE CITADEL SQUARE BAPTIST CHURCH c. 1855-1856 328 Meeting Street

"In the spring of 1854, 12 members of the First Baptist Church began plans to constitute a church to be planted in the upper part of the city. On May 29, 1854, joined by two members from the Wentworth Street Baptist Church (whose building erected in 1842, is now occupied by the Centenary Methodist Church) they organized as the Fourth Baptist Church, and worshiped in the Orphan House Chapel formerly located at Vanderhorst Street."

"In January, 1855, the Morris Street Baptist Church was dissolved and united with this church and the name was changed to the Citadel Square Baptist Church, because of its location." *Historic Churches of Charleston, South Carolina.* Edited by Edward G. Lilly. Compiled by Clifford L. Legerton. Legerton and Company, Charleston, S. C. 1966.

"Papers of the day name Jones and Lee as the architects. If Lee drew the plans, the church is one of his most important works in point of size, but less spirited than most of his designs. The Courier describes it as 'Norman with all the details and ornaments of that picturesque style, but without the extreme massive proportions'. It has suffered from the diminution of its steeple, the spire of which blew down in 1885, toppling outward in an arc with a roar heard above the hurricane." Ravenel.

This Neo-Romanesque design antedates Henry Hobson Richardson's essays in this style by a generation. Probably neither Jones nor Lee had ever seen a Romanesque church and their efforts in this case do not bear comparison with Richardson's distinguished work. Work which was the product not only of the discipline of his Beaux Arts training but also of his travels in France. Yet, this building is of historic interest as a pioneering effort which later in the century was developed with marked success by others.

Marion Square was so named in honor of General Francis Marion, "the Swamp Fox" who organized partisan resistance in the Low Country of South Carolina after the British forces captured Charles Town. However, with the

Old Citadel formerly occupying most of the north side, it has been popularly known as the "Citadel Square". This Champ de Mars is held as a parade ground and mall in custody by the Board of Officers of the Washington Light Infantry and the Sumter Guards, successors of the 4th Brigade South Carolina Militia.

With the battlemented walls of the Citadel on the north, Citadel Square Baptist Church on the east with its Romanesque attributes and St. Matthew's Lutheran Church towering Gothic mass on the west this square possessed a certain unity of character which still survives in spite of later accretions.

A.S.