

Physical Description

Exterior. The structure at 109 Rutledge Avenue is a three story, gable-roof, stuccoed brick single house with an enclosed three story piazza on the south facade. The eastern street facade of the building consists of two discrete units: the double-bay principal structural block of the dwelling with a closed-gable on the north and the single-bay secondary enclosed piazza with a flat roof on the south. The stucco on this facade is lightly scored at regular intervals to mimic the appearance of stone. The principal block of the east facade exhibits six two-over-two sash windows, two at each story, each with plain, slightly projecting squared lintels and capped with molded hoods. These hoods are executed in the Italianate style and feature a pronounced triangular closed pediment with rosettes on the flat brackets and in the tympanum.¹ Twentieth century wooden frame screens are affixed to each of these windows. Three circular tie rods, or earthquake bolts, are visible between the first and second stories. The closed gable is articulated in stucco with a flat, two-part cornice, and the tympanum is pierced by a small louvered ventilation opening capped with an Italianate hood similar to those of the windows. In recent years the piazza has been enclosed to provide for additional living space, so many of the previously exposed architectural elements of the piazza have been obscured by horizontal weatherboard. However, several of the slender tuscan columns which support the piazza can still be seen, and a portion of the turned post balustrade on the third story where a small portion of the piazza remains open to the outdoors. The piazza screen is remarkable as well reflecting the flamboyant ornamentation of the Victorian era in its elaborate wooden brackets and the colored and etched glass transom above the doorway featuring a bird motif.

The remaining facades of the structure at 109 Rutledge are somewhat irregular, reflecting change over time. The south facade is dominated by the polygonal swell of the enclosed piazza which is sheathed in German, or simple drop, siding. Windows on this facade are primarily mid-twentieth century one-over-one sash windows, with basic one-part molding in the architraves and cornerboards. The rear, or west facade of the structure is characterized by an irregular massing of both wood frame and brick additions constructed at various times. Projecting from the rear of the dwelling an early two-story, single-pile stuccoed brick addition, and resting upon this at the third story level is a later single-pile, one-story frame addition. Extending to the south of these additions is another single-pile, two-story frame addition featuring two-over-two window sashes and interior architrave moldings which suggest a late-nineteenth century date of construction. Like the south facade, cornerboards and window and door architraves are simple, one-part moldings with slightly projecting sills. A large wooden fire escape has been affixed to the rear of the structure, partially obscuring this facade. The traditional back of the house was the north facade which is nothing more than a blank stuccoed brick wall with minimal fenestration of six-over-six sash windows and virtually no decorative elements.

Of particular note on the property at 109 Rutledge is a two-story frame utilitarian outbuilding which appears to date to the late nineteenth century, with various more recent shed additions. Now used as a garage and for storage, the buildings appears to be a single-pile dwelling, which two rooms on each floor and presumably and centrally located stair. It is likely that this building accommodated servants in the late nineteenth century and possibly housed a variety of domestic activities related to the main house in front.

Plan and Interior. The plan of the dwelling at 109 Rutledge has evolved a great deal since the construction of the house in 1852 as a two-story single house with two heated rooms on each floor and a piazza on the south side. This very simple floor plan has since been enlarged to accommodate additional living space as well as modern amenities such as bathrooms and indoor kitchens. On each floor, the piazza has been enclosed to make one large room. The additions to the rear of the structure more than double the size of the house, providing two large rooms and space for bathrooms, closets and general access halls. Outstanding features on the interior of 109 Rutledge include four panel doors with the original hardware intact, three-light overhead transoms, and neo-classical mantelpieces throughout the structure.

¹ The rosettes on the first story use a bull's-eye motif, which varies from the rosettes of the second and third stories which use a floral motif.

Significance

The structure at 109 Rutledge Avenue is located within the Harleston neighborhood of Charleston, an area which includes over twenty city blocks in the lower western peninsula roughly bounded by Calhoun Street to the north, Coming Street to the east, Beaufain to the south, and the Ashley River to the east. Developed just a few decades after Charleston's first suburb of Ansonborough, the Harleston neighborhood was created in the 1770s by the subdivision of land that had originally been granted to Henry Hughes and John Coming by John Harleston, nephew of John Coming's widow.² Harleston laid out the streets in continuation of the linear grid plan of the Grand Modell, and named them after prominent contemporaries such as Hector Beringer de Beaufain, Sir Charles Greville Montagu, and John Rutledge.³ Although Harleston grew slowly during the late eighteenth century and early nineteenth century, the neighborhood experienced a building boom during 1840s and 1850s which resulted in the construction of a great number of new residences executed in a variety of popular styles, including Greek Revival, Gothic, and Italianate.⁴

It is during this period in 1852 that Mrs. M. R. McMakin⁵ replaced the two-story frame structure that had existed on her property at 109 Rutledge Avenue with a much finer two-story brick dwelling.⁶ Mrs. McMakin, residing at 96 Church Street, appears to have rented the property during her period of ownership. Little is known about this early brick structure, but it appears that the dwelling received a complete renovation in the late nineteenth century which included the raising of the structure to three stories, probably in the mid-1870s as evident from the Victorian Italianate details found throughout the structure, most noticeably on the facade.⁷ Only a few decades later around the turn of the century, the two-story frame addition to the rear of the structure was added.⁸

In 1896 the property passed to Benjamin E. Bicaise, in whose family it would remain for nearly a century. The Bicaise family were established gunsmiths and locksmiths during the latter decades of the nineteenth century, including Benjamin's father, B. P. Bicaise, with whom Benjamin worked during the 1870s and early 1880s until landing a job as an assistant engineer for the Charleston Fire Department in 1882.⁹ During the nearly thirty years that Benjamin and his wife, Mary, lived in the house at 109 Rutledge, Benjamin would rise in the ranks, earning the title of Assistant Chief and Supervising Engineer of the Charleston Fire Department.¹⁰ Following Benjamin's death in 1923, his son Benjamin, Jr., a clerk with

² "The Village of Harleston," Jonathan H. Poston, *The Buildings of Charleston*, Columbia: The University of South Carolina Press, 1997, p. 479. John Coming's widow and John Harleston's aunt, Mrs. Affra Harleston Coming, inherited her husband's land west of the city and deeded the southeastern portion to the parish of St. Philip, and the northeastern portion, later known as the Free School Lands.

³ *Ibid.*, p. 480.

⁴ *Ibid.*

⁵ The identity or occupation of Mrs. M. R. McMakin, or "McMackin," is unknown. She is absent from the 1852 and 1855 Charleston City Directories, but she appears in the 1856 Charleston City Directory as Mrs. M. R. McMackin, a resident of 96 Church Street. After 1856 no record of a Mrs. M. R. McMakin, McMackin, MacMakin, or MacMackin is found in Charleston City Directories for the period of her ownership of the house at 109 Rutledge (before 1852-1896).

⁶ City of Charleston Ward Books, Ward 4, 1852. Note: The street number "109" was ascribed to the property around the turn of the century. Before that time the street number was "83."

⁷ This date is suggested by the extant architectural evidence, most especially the Victorian Italianate wooden brackets and window hoods, two-over-two windows, four panel interior doors, and the exterior doors leading onto the piazza. Architectural elements similar to these at 109 Rutledge can be found throughout the city of Charleston on buildings dating to the 1870s and early 1880s. It is unclear whether this "renovation" replaced or built upon the existing two-story structure, but if this earlier was incorporated into the new structure, there is no extant architectural to indicate so. It should be noted that the Ward Books for the City of Charleston document a two-story brick structure on this site until 1946, when the structure changes to three stories. However, no architectural evidence can be found to support this building evolution save a thin horizontal crack in the stucco between the second and third stories on the north facade. Apart from this crack, the similarities are profound between architectural elements on the various stories, both on the interior and exterior, including window sashes, moldings, hardware, and doors. For the purposes of this essay, therefore, the rather confusing and somewhat dubious information obtained from the Ward Books has been set aside in favor of the physical evidence which strongly points to a single date of construction for the entire three story structure.

⁸ This date is based upon the extant architectural evidence.

⁹ Charleston City Directories, 1875, 1882.

¹⁰ Charleston City Directories, 1896-1916. During this period Benjamin's wife, Mary, is also identified in the city directories as "Mercy A." and "Mamie."

Standard Oil Company, takes up residence with his mother at 109 Rutledge Avenue, which at that time appears to have been still a single-family residence.¹¹ By 1930, however, the structure at 109 Rutledge has been divided into three separate apartments, with Mary Bicaise and her son living on the top floor.¹² During the next five decades the house continued to be occupied by members of the Bicaise family, including Mary Bicaise, Benjamin E. Bicaise, Jr., and Paul Bicaise and his wife Dera, in addition to various tenants unrelated to the family. Various adaptations to the structure were made during this period, presumably to accommodate the division into self-sufficient apartments. The enclosure of the south piazza appears to have occurred during the 1940s.¹³

After passing in the course of 80 years from Benjamin E. Bicaise, to the Estate of B. E. Bicaise, and then to Dera Bicaise, the property was sold out of the Bicaise family in 1979 to Larry T. Savage. Savage retained ownership of the property for twenty years until selling it to Gerhard Obenaus in 1998. The property has most recently come under the ownership of Alan M. Tanenbaum, who purchased the house and lot at 109 Rutledge Avenue in June of 1999.

¹¹ Charleston City Directories, 1923-1927.

¹² Charleston City Directory, 1930.

¹³ This date is based upon the extant architectural evidence.