

Freneau Was Early Resident Of House

By ROBERT P. STOCKTON
Special Writer

The early 19th Century house at 32 George St. was once the home of Peter Freneau, prominent Charleston journalist, merchant and shipowner and Jeffersonian politician.

The structure, three stories of frame on a high brick basement, was originally a hip-roofed house, which acquired a Greek Revival parapet style roofline.

Now the home of Mr. and Mrs. Morris E. Moon, the house was turned into apartments many years ago, but retains much of its original Adamesque architectural detail.

The house follows the traditional Charleston "single house" plan of two primary rooms to a floor, flanking a central stairhall.

The most elaborate room is the former drawing room on the second level, which retains an elaborate cornice of carved wood, with details including gougework stars, candlelight dentil molding, and applied ovals with gougework stars.

Slender pilasters flank the chimneypiece, which, however, is lacking the original mantelpiece.

An Adamesque mantel in the front room of the basement or first level is probably the original mantelpiece of the drawing room.

That mantel is of wood, with applied gesso motifs in the Adamesque style, including an urn in the center-block, floral ropes in the sunk panels of the pilasters and pastoral figures in the cornerblocks.

The mantel also has a fluted frieze and a dentil course, carved in wood.

The former drawing room also has wainscoting in the Adamesque style, with shallow sunk panels outlined in thin raised molding and with a chair rail featuring gougework stars and triglyphs.

The drawing room's entrance door has a wooden entablature with cyma recta molding, gougework stars and dentils.

Other rooms of the house retain simple architrave surrounds on door and window openings, chair rails of plain beaded boards (some with enriched crown molding), and plain Federal mantels. Some mantels have been replaced with wooden mantels in a simplified Gothic Revival style.

The staircase, intact from the second level to the fourth, has slender turned newels and a "grip" type handrail.

Several original, six panel doors have survived. Batten doors are found on closets on the fourth level.

Peter Freneau never owned the house and lot, but apparently rented it from Elizabeth Robinson, who purchased the lot, apparently vacant, from Florian Charles Mey, in April 1796, for 250 pounds Sterling.

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Staff Photo by Stephanie Harvin

32 George St.

The News and Courier

Do You Know
Your Charleston?

away from seeing any actual work

gation.

...Freneau

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Elizabeth Robinson is not listed in city directories of her time, implying that she did not reside in or near the city.

Peter Freneau is listed as residing at the location, then known as 13 George St., for the first time in the 1801 directory, and continued to live there until his death in 1813.

Freneau was a native of New Jersey and of Huguenot descent. His brother was Philip Freneau, the so-called "Poet of the Revolution."

Peter Freneau arrived in Charleston in 1782 and soon established his prominence in the journalistic, polit-

ical and commercial life of the city.

He was co-owner of the Charleston City Gazette and Daily Advertiser, a broker in land and merchandise and a ship owner. Two of his ships, the John, which plied between Charleston and New York, and the Washington, which operated in the Madiera trade, were captained by his brother, Philip Freneau.

Philip Freneau was also a regular contributor to his brother's newspaper, editorially devoted to Jeffersonian politics.

Peter Freneau served South Carolina as secretary of state and as a state legislator. In 1800, he managed Jefferson's presidential campaign in South Carolina.

Elizabeth Robinson died in 1812, bequeathing the house and lot in George Street to her friend, Peter Freneau, with the condition, however, that he pay to her niece the value of the property.

Freneau, however, was unable to pay the legacy, and consequently the property was sold at auction. Freneau continued to live there, however, until his death on Nov. 9, 1813.

Despite his social, political and commercial prominence, Freneau died near bankruptcy, according to his biographers. That may explain why he rented, rather than owned his home.

Authorities Probing Two Sunday Fires

North Charleston firemen and police are investigating two fires which occurred Sunday.

First Assistant Fire Chief Lewis Tittle said the first fire occurred about 6 a.m. at a two-story tire and auto service store at 5017 Rivers Ave. He said the building had been unoccupied since a fire there about a month ago.

Tittle said the fire gutted the second floor of the structure and that