

Dwelling Cost Man His Bride

It's known as "O'Donnell's Folly" but it's one of Charleston's handsomest dwellings.

The house at 21 King St. also may have been the birthplace of the South Carolina Poetry Society and in it at one time lived the woman who was the inspiration for "Melanie" in Margaret Mitchel's "Gone With the Wind."

For about 25 years in the 1960-1980 period, this house was the site of the annual "Winter Games and Rout" of the Piping and Marching Society of Lower Chalmers Street, a Charleston philosophical society.

The kitchen wing of the house dates between 1725 and 1750. The library section, built about 1800, was restored in 1887 after the 1886 earthquake. The main house was built between 1852 and 1856.

It is the main house that catches the eye, its late Italian Renaissance styling soaring skyward and its well-balanced proportions offsetting rather heavy decorations on the facade.

A close examination of the house discloses many "extras" built into it by the Irish immigrant, Patrick O'Donnell. The huge timbers, thick brickwork and other structural details are much stronger than

usually found in buildings of its day. That may be why it survived the earthquake when the 1800 library collapsed.

At any rate, O'Donnell set out to build a house for his bride-to-be, a house that would stand out in an area of outstanding houses.

And so he did, but at the cost of his love.

For — so the legend has it — the house was so long in the building that O'Donnell's fiancée married someone else, leaving the Galway Irishman with a tall house and many bedrooms, but no wife to help fill them.

O'Donnell lived there until his death in 1882 and died a bachelor. He left all his estate to be administered by a priest named "Father Tom Burke of the Order of St. Dominick" and to be used for the good of the poor of his native Galway.

Even in that most charitable effort, O'Donnell was doomed to defeat. The executor of his estate made off with most of the money. Father Burke died in 1883 and when the Bishop of Galway sued the executor there was no money left.

Sale of O'Donnell's real estate finally netted about \$12,000 for the starving Irish.

At his death he had owned six other houses, all within a shillelagh toss of 21 King.

The house was bought by a fellow Gael, Thomas Riley McGahan, an unsuccessful member of the great California Gold Rush of 1849. McGahan had arrived in Charleston in 1853 and was in the dry goods business when the Civil War began. He spent the war on various blockade runners. He was on the *Cecile* when she sank and on the Confederate Cruiser *Fox* when she made a daring daylight run through the Federal blockade off Galveston.

His wife was Emma Fourgeaud whose ancestors escaped from the massacre by slaves in Santo Domingo. Margaret Mitchell was a cousin of McGahan and was so impressed with the romantic tales of the flight of the Fourgeauds that she patterned "Melanie" after McGahan's wife.

Thomas Pinckney bought No. 21 in 1907. His daughter, Josephine, was then 12 years old. She grew up in the house and it was here, or at a Gibbs Street residence, during the so-called "Charleston Renaissance" era that the Poetry Society of South Carolina was formed.

Mr. and Mrs. Frederick Rutledge Baker obtained the house in 1937. It was purchased in 1962 by Mr. and Mrs. L. Louis Green III who completely restored the dwelling.

The lot is one of the oldest land delineations in the state, being granted to John Stevens in 1695. It was bought in 1722 from William Wallace by Thomas Lamboll. For many years the Lambolls lived in the house immediately south, No. 19 King. The City of Charleston subsequently bought No. 19 and sold it to O'Donnell who, as part of the purchase contract, moved it northward about 18 feet to permit Lamboll Street to be straightened.

The dwelling probably was designed by Edward C. Jones, a Charleston architect, whose work it strongly resembles.

The architect achieved the effect of an 18th century Venetian palazzo exterior wrapped around a cross-ventilated New York Brownstone townhouse interior set behind a typical Charleston array of wide piazzas.

The piazzas balance an unusually large entrance hall which provides a magnificent stairway along the northern wall.

The entry door is a massive one, standing above a flight of brownstone steps that were made unusually steep to be in correct scale with the building. An Italian "false perspective" architectural stratagem was used to make these appear larger than they are. The foot of the stairs is splayed well beyond the normal length, pushing the bottom stone abutments beyond the center line of the pilasters. These panelled pilasters and heavy classical entablature form a handsome door surrounding.

The second-floor window surrounds contain carved shells and other sea motifs.

The cast iron gas lamps are antiques and the two hitching posts were cast from old patterns of the 1800 era.



21 King — O'Donnell's Folly is a handsome dwelling.