

Do You Know Your Charleston? 50 LAURENS

Laurens Street Home 'Reborn' After Fire

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By ROBERT P. STOCKTON

The Federal-style house at 50 Laurens St. could be called "The Phoenix" since it was reborn after a near-disastrous fire a few years ago.

Built c. 1807-08 by John Strong Adams, the three-story frame house was rehabilitated by its present owners, Mr. and Mrs. Albert Ward, after a fire in March 1974.

The restored house will be featured Oct. 26 on the Ansonborough house and garden tour sponsored by the Preservation Society of Charleston.

The Wards were in the process of restoring the house when an early-morning fire, fed by a brisk wind, destroyed the interior of the third floor and badly charred the Federal style woodwork of one second-floor room.

The brick walls of the kitchen house survived, although the frame interior and a roof which had been finished the same week were totally destroyed.

Ward, whose hobby is woodworking and cabinetmaking, replaced the mantels, the upper part of the staircase and other woodwork with his own handiwork.

The fire uncovered evidence that the house originally was a 2½-story structure with a hipped roof, in a style more compatible with its early-19th century building date.

It is evident that the full third floor, with its Greek Revival period parapet roofline, was added some years after the house was built.

The fire would have been a good excuse to remove remaining portions of the third floor and replace the hip-roofed half story, Ward said.

The full third story, however, afforded more space and light than would have been possible in a hip-roofed half story, so Ward opted to restore the full third story.

Ward also removed the damaged second level of the piazzas, retaining a balustrade around the resultant deck. A six-light transom was added above the second floor doorway to provide light for the stairhall.

The site of the house was historically part of the lands of Christopher Gadsden, just above Ansonborough. Identified as Lot No. 18 of the Gadsden lands, it was one of several lots belonging to Gadsden's estate which were sold at auction on May 21, 1807.

John Strong Adams was the highest bidder for Lot No. 18, purchasing it for 500 guineas.

On May 14, 1808, Adams had Samuel A. Ruddock, city

surveyor, draw a plat of the property.

The plat shows Adams' "Mansion House" of wood, a brick kitchen, a wooden coach house and wash house, and a garden on the property.

The plat reveals the floor plan of the house: two rooms to a floor, divided by a central hall, with chimneys on the back side and a piazza or piazzas across the front.

Adams, apparent builder of the house, was evidently an Irishman, as his will, probated in 1812, mentions property in the Village of Randalstown, County of Antrim, Ireland, which was to be divided among his mother and siblings.

After Adams' death, his Laurens Street property was acquired by Elizabeth Ryan, wife of Peter Thomas Ryan, administrator of Adams' estate in South Carolina. Mrs. Ryan then sold it to her husband.

After Ryan's death, the property was sold at auction on Jan. 7, 1819. An advertisement of the sale, which appeared in the Courier on the same date, describes the property:

"The dwelling house is two stories high, with garrets, on a high brick foundation, covered (roofed) with slate, and having an excellent marble staircase in front, and all elegantly finished.

"The out offices are a brick building, 2½ stories high, covered also with slate, calculated for a kitchen, servants' rooms, wash house, carriage house and stable, well finished and glazed. On the premises are a Well and good cistern.

"This property is in one of the most pleasant and healthy situations in Charleston, and would make an excellent residence for a planter."

The house retains the flight of marble steps leading to the first floor piazza, mentioned in the advertisement.

Original features also include the fanlighted main entrance, with its unusual chamfered pilasters, and in the interior, a Federal mantel with candlelight molding, pilasters, and some cornices with "candlelight" molding, dentils and gaugework, and Federal-period wainscoting.

The house was purchased in 1819 by John Schulze, who sold it in 1828 to Bartholomew Gaillard, trustee of the marriage settlement of George H. Ingraham and Mary Rachel Ingraham.

The Ingraham name is on the iron gateway to the property. The property remained in the Ingraham family until after the Civil War.