

Blake's Tenements Built In 1700s

By ROBERT P. STOCKTON

Daniel Blake's Tenements at 2 and 4 Court House Square were the 18th century equivalent of the modern speculative duplex development.

The word "tenement" in the 18th century had not acquired the negative connotations of more recent times: A tenement, in the 18th century, was any kind of rental unit, however humble or grand.

Blake's Tenements, completed sometime between 1760 and 1772, were neither humble nor grand, but somewhat equivalent to a pair of upper-middle-class townhouses or condominiums of the 1970s.

They were built as a speculative investment, as the Hon. Daniel Blake, a member of the Royal Council of South Carolina and one of the province's wealthiest planters, did not intend to live in either residence.

A grandson of a governor of the proprietary period, Blake was born in 1731 and while still in his 20s inherited Newington Plantation, a tract of 1,833 acres on the Ashley River, besides other property. By inheritance, purchase, marriage and royal grant, he accumulated nearly 12,000 acres and died in 1780 leaving an estate valued at 10,000 pounds.

Blake's Charlestown residence was the finely finished mansion, now known as the Daniel Huger House, at 34 Meeting St. The Blake mansion was temporarily the residence of South Carolina's last royal governor, Lord William Campbell, who was married to Blake's niece, the former Sarah Izard (who was also the cousin of Blake's wife, the former Elizabeth Izard).

The site of Blake's Tenements was originally part of Lot No. 313 in the "Grand Modell" of Charlestown, which lot was granted to his grandfather, Gov. Joseph Blake, in 1696.

Lot No. 313 was devised by Gov. Blake to his son, Joseph Blake, who by his will, dated in 1750, devised it among other real estate to his two sons, Daniel and William.

William Blake and Ann, his wife, in June, 1760, sold their interest in Lot No. 313 to Daniel Blake for 5,250 pounds, "lawful current money of the Province."

The property is described in the 1760 deed as measuring 150 feet on Market Square (now Court House

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(Staff Photo by Brad Nettles)

Blake's Tenements

Square), "opposite to the North front of the State House (now the County Court House)," and 150 feet on Meeting Street.

In June, 1772, preparatory to going to England for a three-year stay, Blake divided and sold this property, which then contained several houses.

The westernmost part of the property, measuring 45 feet on State House Alley (now Court House Square) and 133 feet in depth, he sold to John Stanyarne, a John's Island planter.

The 1772 deed recites that since he acquired full interest to the property in 1760, "Daniel Blake hath greatly improved the westernmost part of the said lott by building thereon two substantial brick tenements together with convenient out buildings..."

It further recites that he "hath since purchased a piece of parcel of

land to the westward of the said lott with a passage leading from the said lott and buildings thereto which said piece or parcel of land is at present used as gardens to the said two tenements."

The two brick tenements and connecting gardens sold for 15,000 pounds, "current money of the Province."

Blake's Tenements are considered among Charleston's best examples of the 18th century Georgian style of architecture. The double building is listed on the National Register of Historic Places and in the Historic American Building Survey.

The building rises three and one-half stories over a high basement. The material is Carolina "grey" brick, laid in Flemish bond on the street facade and in English bond on the sides and rear.

Brickwork on its east side is less

finely finished because that wall abutted the west wall of an earlier, two and one-half story building, the outline of which can still be seen.

Each tenement is three bays wide, with identical doorways, centered, with consoled pediments, multi-light transoms and paneled double doors.

The facade is unified by the low pitched hip roof, with dormers and exterior chimneys, a double string course of brick under the third level windows and the bilevel shallow terrace with wrought iron railings, extending across the lower level.

The railing, with its scrolled center panel, chamfered newels and undulating top rail, is considered an outstanding example of 18th-century colonial ironwork. The treads and platforms of the steps are of an English stone called nautiloid, after the sea shells imbedded in it.

A barrel-vaulted passage, through the center of the building, has service doors to the two basements. Blocked up windows in the south wall of the basement indicate the elaborate front steps were an afterthought, although an early addition.

Windows originally had six lights to a sash in the basement and third level and nine to a sash on the first and second levels. Windows have segmental arches with radiating voussoirs; spandrels between the wooden window frames and the segmental arches are bricked.

The floor plan of each tenement is that of a modified Charleston "single house," a single room wide, with two primary rooms divided by a central stairhall.

Unlike most single houses, in which the main entrance is into the stairhall, the main entrance of each tenement is into a reception room, behind which is the stairhall and a slightly smaller room.

The reception room and the drawing room above it, in each tenement, are the most elaborate, with wainscoting, molded chair rails, paneled walls and wood cornices.

The eastern tenement retains wooden mantels in the Georgian style, while those in the western tenement have been replaced with mantels in the Adamesque style, with garlands and classic figures.

The building was acquired by Charleston County in 1967 and is currently used for county offices.