

William Hartz House

178 St. Philip Street

c. 1816

The large, fine Charleston single house at 178 St. Philip Street stands on Lot 35 of the Rugely Tract. It has bounced back and forth between owner-occupied and rental over more than 200 years.

Rowland Rugely owned a large section of Radcliffeborough. In 1765 he came to South Carolina with a loan from his father and the promise of help from the colonial governor, Lord Charles Montagu. Gov. Montagu awarded him the office of register, and in 1769 he became a member of the Royal Council. He purchased several large tracts of land around Charleston but never developed them.



Mr. Rugely executed a will on December 22, 1776, leaving one-half of his lands to his brother Henry and the other half to his other siblings William, Mathew, Ann, Francis, and Elizabeth. He died a few days later, and over the next twenty years, the title to the property became impossibly confused: the different groups of heirs did not agree on the disposition of the property; different trustees were selected to market the properties, but the trustees were not always willing to serve; deeds were not recorded properly; many of the eventual owners lived in England; and one of the trustees even died without having made arrangements for the property. Eventually, all the possible claimants agreed to hire John Robinson to complete any of the earlier sales (if he could) and to market the rest of the lots to finally settle Rowland Rugely's estate.

Patrick Duncan paid 402 guineas for Lot 35 of the Rugely Tract and the adjacent lot that fronted King Street¹ on January 15, 1819.² Lot 35 on St. Philip Street already included a substantial house. An ad of February 23, 1819, listed a house for sale that was across the street from Mr. Morton Waring's house (179 St. Philip St.) and bordering William Aiken's property (176 St. Philip St.) to the south; those descriptions pinpoint the location as Lot 35. The house was two-stories with piazzas on two sides on a high, brick foundation and had been built *three years earlier* (c. 1816).³

¹ Lot 20 would become 561-563 King Street.

² Deed book B9, page 98

³ City Gazette, Feb. 23, 1819, at 3

Given the extremely confused title of the Rugely Tract, Mr. Duncan in January 1819 possibly was simply confirming an earlier sale of the two lots which had never been consummated or at least had never been recorded. If so, the deed would have recited the pay for two empty lots and would not have included anything for the house that Mr. Duncan perhaps added; for comparison, in June 1818, William Aiken had paid almost the exact same price for the two adjacent lots to the south, and there is no evidence that either of those lots had any improvements.⁴ Therefore, it is possible (but unproved) that Mr. Duncan had “bought” the vacant Lots 35 and 20 for 402 guineas (paying virtually the same as Mr. Aiken was paying for the two vacant lots to the south) and added the first house by 1816 before confirming the earlier sale in January 1819 (reciting the original price even though a house had already been added to the lot by Mr. Duncan).

Very quickly after buying the lots (or recording his ownership), Mr. Duncan sold just Lot 35 (57' by 163') to **Dr. Samuel Wilson** for \$4750 on March 27, 1819.⁵ On April 16, 1819, Dr. Wilson gave the property to his son, **Alexander Baron Wilson**,⁶ in trust for the benefit of Alexander Wilson and Alexander's children.⁷ The gift of the house was perhaps motivated by the expected arrival of Dr. Wilson's grandson, Alexander Baron Wilson, Jr., on September 28, 1819.

How exactly Mr. A.B. Wilson expected to use the house is unclear. He was living in the house for the 1820 census, but he listed it for rent on July 26, 1821, and described it as having four upright rooms with two garret rooms and outbuildings; the house was located across the street from Mr. Waring's house.⁸ Possibly, the house was not rented out after all; Mr. A.B. Wilson, listed as a planter, was residing on the property at least by 1829 and seems to have remained until his death on November 20, 1840. His will⁹ left the St. Philip Street house to his wife, Sophia Shepheard Wilson.¹⁰

Thereafter, his family seems to have resided in the house periodically until at least 1852. In that year, according to the ward books, the property included a two-story, wooden house. The house must have been nice since it was appraised at \$4000 in 1852 while the neighboring brick house at 176 St. Philip was appraised at \$3000 and the wooden house at 174 St. Philip came in at \$2000.

In 1855, an ad listed “[t]hat delightful RESIDENCE” with two-and-one-half floors three doors south of Cannon Street with outbuildings and a return address at the Wilsons' house on Radcliffe Street.¹¹ John E. Bowers occupied the house at least from 1859 to 1861. In 1868, there was a house with

⁴ Deed book Z8, page 330

⁵ Deed book B9, page 235

⁶ Mr. A.B. Wilson was born in 1793 and died on November 20, 1840.

⁷ Deed book C9, page 318

⁸ Southern Patriot, July 26, 1821, at 3

⁹ Charleston Co. Will Book I and J (1839-1845), page 106

¹⁰ The Wilson family name remains a part of Charleston more than 150 years later because of his wife and his family's involvement in developing Wilson's Farm, a neighborhood generally between King St. and Rutledge Avenue along Carolina, Fishburne, and Sumter Street.

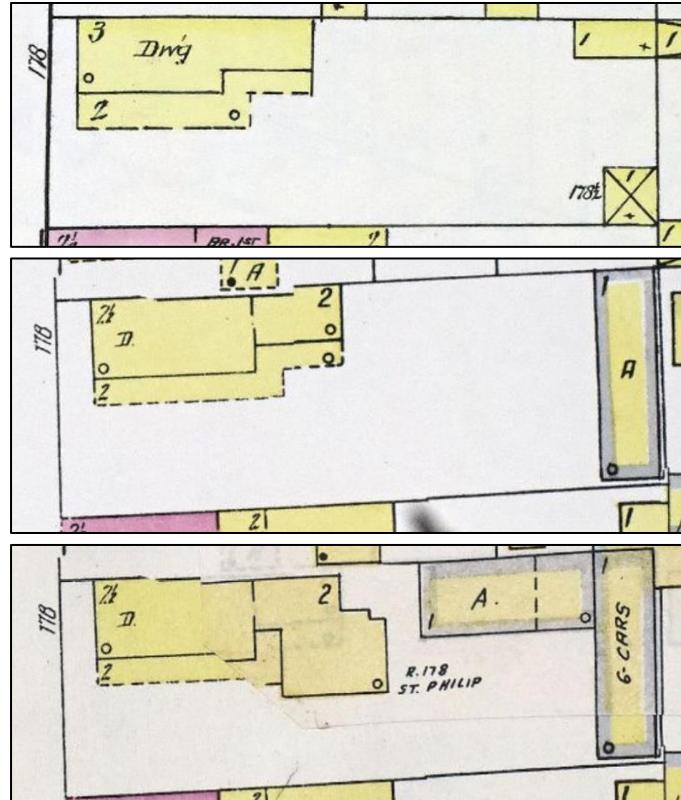
¹¹ Charleston Courier, Feb. 27, 1855, at 3

“four square rooms and two attics; double piazza” that was listed for rent.¹² By 1872, the house was being rented out with ads for one and two room units available.¹³

Eventually, the family of Mr. and Mrs. A.B. Wilson decided to sell the house and needed to get court permission to proceed with the liquidation. A lawsuit was brought among the Wilson family to which William Hartz was a party for unknown reasons. An ad in late 1877 described the house as 2 ½ stories or wood with four main rooms and two in the attic with double piazzas.¹⁴ **William Hartz** bought an existing house on July 10, 1878, for \$1200.¹⁵

According to a blurb in the newspaper in September 1878, “The large frame residence on the east side of St. Philip street, four doors south of Cannon street, is being completed.”¹⁶ The blurb did not specify whether the project involved building a new house, but a real estate listing on December 29, 1877, had described the house as 2 ½ stories with double piazzas and four main rooms with two more in the attic; no mention was made of any damage to the house at that time that would have justified a teardown.¹⁷

Much more important is that construction and woodwork details confirm the house dates to 1816 with the reworking limited to some aesthetic matters such as the door in the piazza screen, the



The main portion of 178 St. Philip was remained largely the same with significant additions to the rear of the house and in the yard. In 1888, two, small dependencies stood at the rear corners of the lot. By 1944, a garage had replaced them, and by 1951 a large addition had been made to both the rear of the house and the garage.

¹² Charleston Daily News, Feb. 21, 1868, at 3

¹³ Daily News, Nov. 5, 1872, at 3; Daily News, Dec. 31, 1872, at 3

¹⁴ News and Courier, Dec. 29, 1877, at 3

¹⁵ Deed book L17, page 160. His relatively low purchase price is perhaps explained by his having already had some fractional interest in the house through the distribution of A.B. Wilson’s estate. Although he was a party to the lawsuit among the Wilsons seeking permission to sell the house, his relationship to the Wilson family—if any—is unknown.

¹⁶ News and Courier, Sept. 25, 1878, at 4

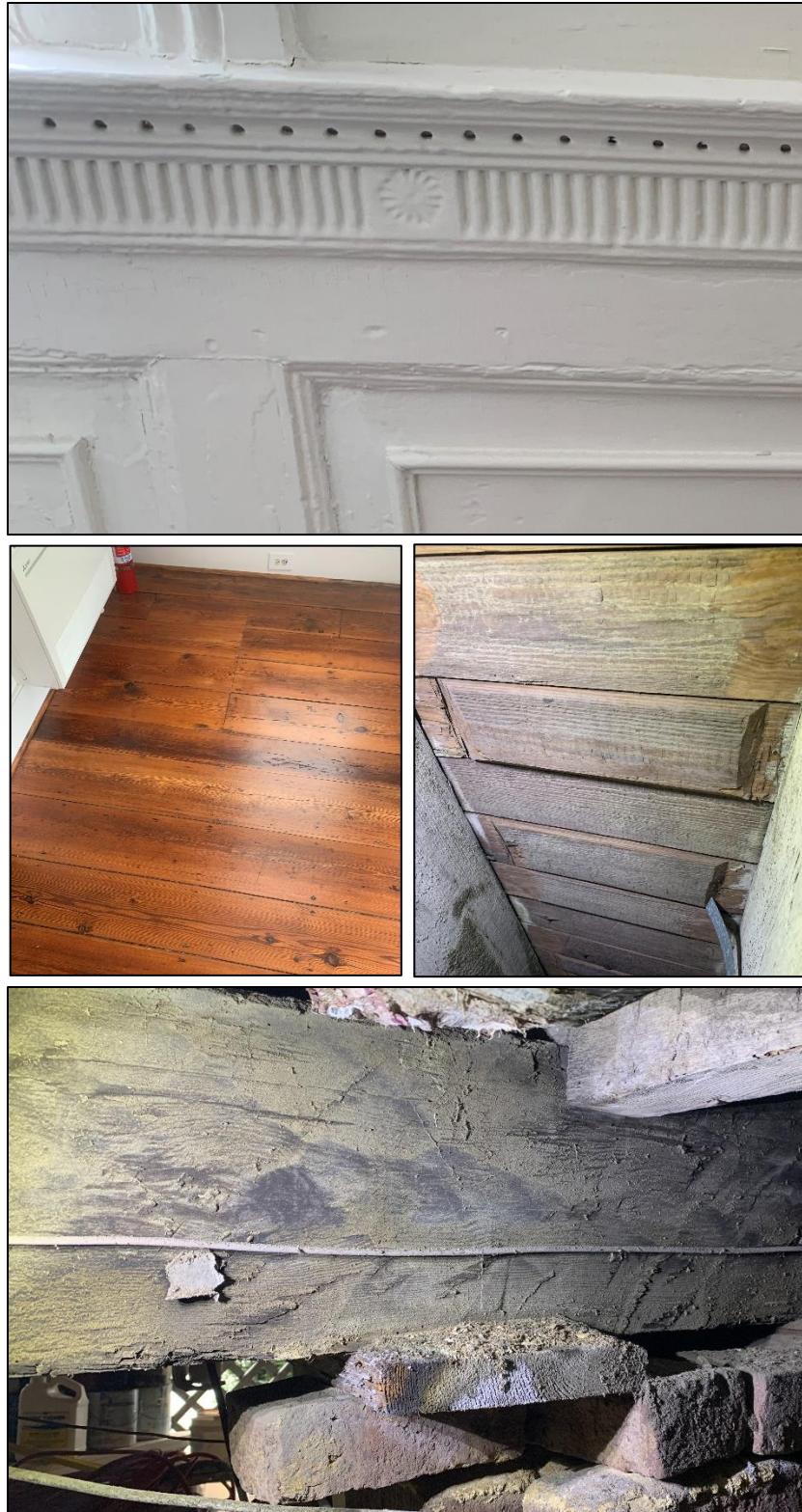
¹⁷ News and Courier, Dec. 29, 1877, at 3

two-over-two windows, and the window caps. The wainscoting in the front room and entrance hallway has very high-quality details including unusual sunburst patterns along the gouge work. That style of woodwork is consistent with a high-end, early 19th century house.

Although the flooring on the first floor has had narrow floorboards installed (perhaps during the 1878 remodeling), the original, wide, pine boards still exist in the attic. In addition, the first-floor floorboards are visible from under the house. Before milled lumber was available in the 1840s, each board was hewn to mesh with the joists resulting in a flat surface on the opposite surface; the floorboards of the house clearly display that trait. Likewise, the sills are covered with marks showing that they too were hand hewn.

Mr. Hartz¹⁸ lived there in 1879 to 1887. He was a young man when he bought 178 St. Philip Street; he was born on July 28, 1848, making him only 30 when he bought the house. He was a partner with his uncle William Ufferhardt in Ufferhardt & Co., dry goods merchants at 222 King Street.

The next owners both used the house as a rental



¹⁸ He died on December 10, 1907. News and Courier, Dec. 12, 1907, at 2

property¹⁹ instead of as a personal home. First, Mr. Hartz sold the house to Mrs. **Adela Behncken** on May 28, 1891 for \$4000.²⁰ She held it briefly before reselling it for \$3600 to **Louisa Myers** on February 6, 1896.²¹ **Lena Oppermann** had it devised to her by Louisa Myers (formerly Louisa Kuch) in June 1912. The connection between Ms. Oppermann and Ms. Myers is unknown, but they were possibly mother and daughter. Oddly, from 1899 to 1912, the house was rented in part by Daniel Vincent,²² such long-term occupation typically indicates a family connection to the owner, but Mr. Vincent has no known relationship to Ms. Oppermann.

Beginning in 1914, the house was returned to owner occupancy. It was listed for sale as a large house in March 1914,²³ and Ms. Oppermann sold it to **Sea View Realty Co.** on April 23, 1914.²⁴ Sea View Realty Co. almost immediately flipped the house on July 3, 1914, to **Bessie Fechter**.²⁵ The Fechters lived in the house, and in 1916, Aaron Fechter also operated a business selling shades for buildings from it.²⁶ When Ms. Fechter died on May 2, 1920, her children Jennie Baumrind, Lillian F. Shimel, and Aaron Fechter joined in combining the heirs' interests in their father, **Hyman Fechter**, on February 21, 1923.²⁷

How exactly the interior of the house was configured at the time is unclear. Although the Fechters lived in the house themselves, the house was placed up rent when the family relocated to Rutledge Avenue about 1921. In a rental ad in 1924, the house was described as having 11 rooms, including two kitchens, and that the house was good for two families, suggesting that the conversion to a duplex had already happened.²⁸ The Fechters possibly converted the house into a multi-family dwelling before offering it for rent.

On June 30, 1928, Mr. Fechter's own probate estate conveyed the house²⁹ to **Abe Appel**,³⁰ and he almost immediately put the house in the name of his wife, **Ida Appel**.³¹ The Appels made the house their home until at least 1957. During their ownership, it seems that the house was both owner-occupied and a rental at the same time, with the Appels in one part of the house and tenants in another part.³²

¹⁹ News and Courier, May 6, 1894, at 3 (advertising the "very desirable residence" for rent)

²⁰ Deed book H21, page 118

²¹ Deed book W22, page 83

²² Daniel was born June 25, 1845. He died May 5, 1911.

²³ News and Courier, March 17, 1914, at 5

²⁴ Deed book M26, page 351

²⁵ Deed book W27, page 34

²⁶ News and Courier, Oct. 31, 1916, at 3

²⁷ Deed book G31, page 548

²⁸ Evening Post, Sept. 13, 1924, at 10

²⁹ Deed book F30, page 182

³⁰ Mr. Appel (born Abraham Ubfal) was born in Poland on March 15, 1890; emigrated on March 16, 1921, to New York City; married Ida Goldberg (b. Mar. 3, 1900, in Poland) on November 21, 1922; and died on December 25, 1962.

³¹ Deed book B34, page 282 (recorded July 14, 1928)

³² Apparent renters include William and Gertrude Harrington (1930); Isadore Solomon (1934); and Philip and Bella Berlinsky (1938-1940).

By the time of the 1944 updates to the Sanborn Insurance maps, the house had had a garage added along the back property line. By the time of the February 1951 update, a large addition had been made to the rear of the main house³³ and the garage and been greatly expanded.

Alonzo and Mary Lee Messam acquired the house for \$20,000 from Mrs. Appel on October 19, 1970.³⁴ **Mary Lee Messam** received her husband's half-interest in the house on November 11, 1985, for assuming the mortgage.³⁵ Throughout the Messam ownership, the house seems to have been used as a rental property with at least two units.³⁶

William A. Bennett bought the house for \$130,000 on September 17, 1997.³⁷ An limited liability company owned by the Bennett family, **178 St. Philip Street, LLC**, received the house on April 14, 1998.³⁸ Throughout the early twenty-first century, the house was occupied by renters, often College of Charleston students. More recently, the house has been converted to a short-term rental property.

³³ Note: City building permits exist starting in the 1930s, so the date the addition was made can be pinpointed by reviewing the records in the City Archives.

³⁴ Deed book H95, page 238

³⁵ Deed book N149, page 120

³⁶ Oddly, the house seems to have attracted long-term tenants. One long-term tenant predated the Messams' ownership and continued for many years; Ms. Mary J. Gaillard was residing in one unit in 1968 and was there in 1987. Ms. Rosetta Welch was in another unit at least from 1975 to 1989.

³⁷ Deed book B290, page 598

³⁸ Deed book V300, page 230