

'Little Brick House' Built Near Mansion

By ROBERT P. STOCKTON

When and why Edward Sebring built the little brick house at 139 Ashley Ave., is open to speculation.

Sebring bought from William Murray, planter, for \$2,000, the property on which the house stands, on May 17, 1836.

The property is described in that deed as a lot in Cannonsborough, measuring 70 feet in front on Thomas Street (now Ashley Avenue) and 145 feet in depth.

Adjacent to the south was the large lot at the northwest corner of Thomas (now Ashley) and Boundary (now Calhoun) Street, on which Sebring built his substantial mansion, now 268 Calhoun St., around 1838.

Sebring, a New Yorker, amassed a sizeable fortune in Charleston, first as a draper on Broad Street and later as president of the Bank of the State of South Carolina.

It is possible Sebring built 139 Ashley to live in until his mansion was built, but there is no evidence to support or refute this theory.

The city directory of 1837-38 does not list Sebring's home address. The 1840-41 directory lists him simply in Cannonsborough.

The 1849 directory lists him as living on "Boundary continued," as that part of Calhoun Street was then called.

Another possibility is that Sebring built 139 Ashley as a rental unit, since the house is too well finished to have been an outbuilding to his mansion.

Architectural features of 139 Ashley

The News and Courier

Do You Know
Your Charleston?

offer no clues of the construction date, as they are mainly of types used in Charleston houses from the late 1830s through the Civil War period.

The house is a typical Charleston single house in form, consisting of 2½ stories of brick, stuccoed, with a gable roof and two tiers of piazzas.

Notable features include the decorative window cornices of terra cotta on the street facade.

The upper part of the front facade is finished with a cornice of courses of brick, a motif repeated on the short pilasters which are a typical feature of gable-end Charleston houses of the antebellum period.

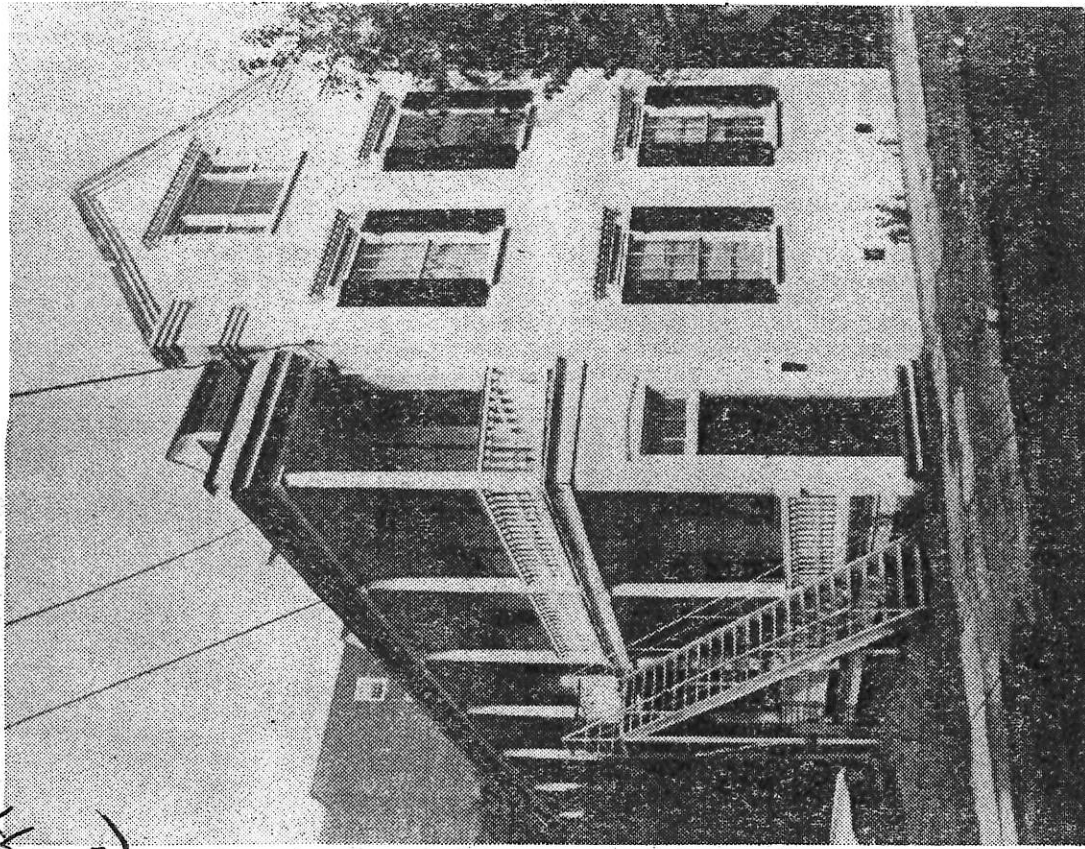
The piazza entrance is rather narrow and has a transom and a door surround in the Greek Revival style, with "ears" of wooden molding.

Piazza columns are plain Doric; balusters are simply turned.

Windows are six lights to a sash. The house is two bays wide, with a tripartite window centered in the gable.

The main portion of the house is five bays wide, with the central bay on first and second levels a doorway with multi-light transom and sidelights.

(See Page 2-B, Column 1)



(Staff Photo by D.J. Johnson)

139 Ashley Ave.

Continued From Page 1-B

Dormers with simple gables light the attic.

Piazzas, in typical fashion, continue around the rear of the house, terminating at a narrow rear wing, one bay square, which is an original feature of the house.

The floor plan is that of the typical Charleston single house, with two main rooms and a central stairhall on each floor.

Interior details are simple, with plain woodwork and plaster work, and mantels in the pillastered Greek Revival style.

Sebring conveyed the lot "with the dwelling house" on Thomas Street and the mansion at Thomas and Boundary to his wife, Gertrude, in 1870.

Mrs. Sebring, in 1890, sold 139 Ashley to Clifford H. Sim-

mons for \$1,600.

Simmons sold the property to Charles Pons Aimar for \$1,600 in 1905. Aimar had also bought the Sebring mansion in 1882 and had acquired the property to the north, at Ashley Avenue and Mill Street.

Aimar died in 1927, leaving his property to his widow, Leonarda J. Aimar and his daughter, Agatha Aimar Simmons.

In 1952, Mrs. Simmons acquired from her father's estate the several adjoining lots with the buildings thereon, known as 268 Calhoun St., 139 Ashley Ave. and 31 and 33 Mill St.

Mrs. Simmons conveyed the property at 139 Ashley to the Timrod Corporation in 1956. The Timrod Corporation is the current owner, according to tax records.

File.
~~147 R. W. 3 ML~~
~~W. H. C. Co.~~



REPORT

BEHRE
5/22/0

& Preservation

100

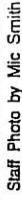
MUSC

The university estimates it would cost more than \$1.5 million to fix up and move the two houses, and with \$116 million in other capital needs they fall low on the priority list, he says. It appears an outside group likely will have to save them, if they are to be saved. Sauer says the houses' site is being considered for a new building for a

Jenkins says if the school needs more classroom space, renovating the old high school would be the

The other endangered S.C. sites include the Old Tuberculosis Hospital in Greenville, the Pointsett Bridge in Greenville, the Carnegie Free Library in Gaffney, Bamberg's Main Street business district, Oakhurst in Newberry, the J.J. Lawton Sunday School Building in Lawrenceville, the Civil War Stockade in Greenville and the Old Slave Mart in Charleston.

Robert Belire may be reached at 937-5549 or by fax at 937-5579. His e-mail address is rbelire@landcourier.com and his mailing address is 184 Columbus St., Charleston S.C. 29403.



See MUSC, Page 6-B

Preservationist group appealing to MUSC

By JASON HARDIN
Of The Post and Courier staff

Preservationists are hoping a mildly worded letter to the president of the Medical University of South Carolina will achieve what they say years of talk has failed to achieve: Force the school to quit neglecting three of its historic buildings.

The buildings, which include houses at 141 and 141½ Ashley Ave. and the former High School of Charleston on Rutledge Avenue, have been decaying for years and "are threatened by demolition by neglect," wrote Cynthia Jenkins,

executive director of the Preservation Society.

The three vacant buildings recently were added to a list of the most endangered buildings in South Carolina.

"These important buildings in Charleston's architectural history have been neglected by MUSC since Hurricane Hugo in 1989. Today, eleven years later, these buildings are still threatened, and one stands on the verge of partial demolition," Jenkins wrote this week to MUSC President Dr. Raymond Greenberg.

John Sutusky, MUSC's interim vice president for finance and ad-

ministration, acknowledged the school has done little to maintain the buildings.

But with MUSC in the middle of a budget crunch, expenses such as whether to maintain historic buildings become judgment calls, Sutusky said.

The university has deferred \$75 million in maintenance to its campus, as needs pile up without funds to meet them, he said.

"We have responsibilities at the university that are greater than just preservation of historic property, as important as that is," he said. "We have needs that are critical for people and students ... and

we can't meet them."

Still, plans are under way for each of the buildings, although preservationists might not be entirely pleased.

The school is hoping to put together a deal that would offer \$100,000 to anyone who is willing to move and restore the 180-year-old house at 141½ Ashley Avenue, Sutusky said.

MUSC is considering using that land, as well as land by the 150-year-old house next door, for a heart and vascular center.

The school would move the second house about 50 yards to make room for the facility, which still is

in the early planning phase, Sutusky said.

Jenkins said the former high school is the building in the most jeopardy.

Sutusky confirmed that, saying the school is in the very early planning stages of building a parking garage on land partially covered by the building.

Studies showed rehabilitating the building would be too costly, he said. However, the school could at least save the building's facade, he added.

The school probably will select a design firm in October, then re-

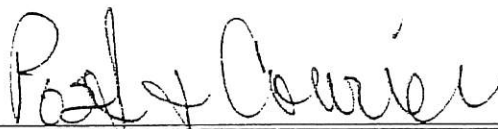
serve at least 16 months for planning. That will give nearby residents, preservationists and others a chance to weigh in on the final plan, Sutusky said.

In addition to writing the letter to Greenberg, the Preservation Society circulated a preservation alert to its members.

They were asked to write their own letters to Greenberg or to The Post and Courier.

The group also directed its letters to Charleston Mayor Joseph P. Riley Jr. and to city council members.

Jason Hardin covers Charleston city government. Contact him at (843) 937-5549 or at jhardin@postandcourier.com.



Editorials

Sunday, August 13, 2000

Save endangered properties

Three Charleston buildings are listed among the state's most endangered historic structures, and all are owned by the Medical University of South Carolina.

MUSC should respond to the alarm sounded by the Preservation Society of Charleston and the concerns expressed by the Historic Charleston Foundation.

The declining state of the former High ir,2
,10p School of Charleston and two historic houses on Ashley Avenue must be addressed before conditions worsen.

The high school has been vacant since 1985, and has suffered a gradual deterioration that preservation advocates have likened to demolition by neglect.

MUSC should take overdue steps to incorporate the building into its expansion plans, restoring it to provide needed classroom space or for some other appropriate use. Merely maintaining its facade isn't an acceptable alternative.

And the medical university should drop any idea of using the site of two historic houses at 141 and 141 1/2 Ashley Ave. for new construction by moving the historic structures. The houses should retain their original setting. If MUSC can't adapt the houses for office space, it should make them available to a purchaser who is willing to keep them intact.

As the Preservation Society points out in a letter to MUSC President Ray Greenberg, the antebellum houses on Ashley Avenue have been neglected since they were damaged by Hurricane Hugo.

Despite the neglect, each remains worthy of being restored. The Alston House, for example, still retains important elements of its early 18th century interior.

If further ignored, the future il,2
,10p of all three structures is dim. As a spokesman for Palmetto Trust for Historic Preservation said: "These places are in the 11th hour of their existence."

Preservation and re-use of the high school would retain something of the scale of the neighborhood that already has been overshadowed by massive medical buildings nearby. Preserving the two houses on site would respect the historically residential character of the neighborhood - much of which has been eroded by university expansion.

MUSC should look to the College of Charleston, which

has successfully incor-porated restored historic structures, including dwellings, into its expansion program.

The Preservation Society says the restoration of the buildings will enable MUSC to "be a role model for the community." It's a challenge the Medical University should be willing to accept.