



Charleston County may put several buildings back in private hands, including 88 Broad St. (right), 90 Broad St. (which includes both the cream-colored building in the center and the small infill building to the right) and green-colored 96 Broad (left). ALAN HAWES/STAFF

## Buildings entering another chapter

Two-century-old Broad Street buildings bound for private use

They were built to house families, law practices and a branch bank of the United States, and they later were used for everything from a Hebrew orphanage, a synagogue, more offices, a bar, a fraternity house and who knows what else.

Soon, the two-century-old masonry buildings at 88, 90 and 96 Broad St. will witness yet another chapter in their already rich lives.

Bought by Charleston County before it constructed the large new judicial center, the county now wants to put them back into private use.

From the outside, the buildings look as well maintained as any of their neighbors along Broad Street. From the inside, there's some fixing up to do.



ROBERT BEHRE

Architecture and Preservation

As county Capital Projects director Dan Chandler tours the three buildings, he watches his step to avoid bits of broken glass, plywood patches over floors and other debris, such as old tile flooring, bits of wallboard and assorted litter.

"We didn't do anything inside these buildings," he says. "We were basically looking just to weather-proof them."

The county bought them because the job of constructing its new \$40-million judicial center would have been overly disruptive to anyone trying to live or work inside them at the time.

It spent more than \$1 million to align windows,

See BUILDINGS, Page 7B

## Buildings entering new chapter

BUILDINGS from Page 1B

repair or replace roofs, repair stucco, restore a balcony floor and repaint large sections. Chandler says the work was meant to maintain them in good shape until they could be returned to private use.

The work has pleased preservationists, especially when compared to the deterioration that happened to similar buildings across the street acquired during the federal courthouse expansion. "I think they've been very well preserved and protected, and I think they did a great job with the move and the exterior," says Jonathan Poston of the Historic Charleston Foundation.

"They're all very important because they're all part of the really great late 18th to 19th century streetscape of Broad Street," he adds.

The most expensive part of the work involved 96 Broad, because the county spent more than \$800,000 to move it about 75 yards from its old location north-

west of the historic county courthouse to a vacant lot on Broad. The work involved building a new foundation and completely replacing its pan-tile roof.

The county searched for similar tiles and finally settled on tiles from South Yorkshire, England, Chandler says. Also, it added quoins, or dressed corner stones, to its Broad Street facade and gave the building copper downspouts and gutters. The county also added a wrought iron balcony to the second floor of the Broad Street facade. The door leading to the balcony originally opened onto the house's piazza, which had been lost many years ago.

"We wanted to do something that was lasting," Chandler says of the repairs. "We didn't want just to patch the buildings."

Poston says the most historic of the three buildings is 88 Broad St., the Hebrew Orphan Society building, "because of its historical relevance to the establishment of that benevolent society and to Charleston's Jew-

ish history."

In recent weeks, several dozen people have walked around inside the three buildings to see if they would be interested in fixing them up and moving in.

County Council is accepting offers through Jan. 14 and will decide what to do then. Once the fate of the three buildings is decided, then the county also will figure out what to do with 92 and 98 Broad St. — its other two historic buildings on the block that it owns but no longer needs.

Whoever takes them on might be able to build modest additions in the rear for elevators or restrooms, Chandler says.

Currently, the interiors of the buildings are a mixed bag. From room to room, they have altered floor plans and differing levels of dropped acoustical ceilings. In fact, most rooms don't resemble historical buildings but rather buildings that have been repeatedly adapted during the last half-century for different people.

Another big question is whether preservationists will have any say in the renovations. The Historic Charleston Foundation had approached the county about

granting historic easements for the interiors — legal agreements that would allow the foundation to review, and possibly reject, any work deemed damaging to surviving historical details inside.

Poston says the foundation is still very interested in working with the county on such easements, especially for the Meyers Peace House at 96 Broad, which still has rooms with surviving

plaster, wainscoting, molding and mantels.

"All of them have some historic fabric, but the Meyers Peace House is going to be more crucial than the others," he says.

It's unclear what the county will do. Some council members seem disinclined to sell them because the county might need them in the future.

Either way, the renovation and reopening of the buildings is expected to mark one of the final chapters in the county's decade-and-a-half-long effort to expand its courtrooms and other judicial workings at Broad and Meeting streets.

"It would be nice to see them in active use," Poston says.

Robert Behre covers Charleston County. He can be reached at 937-5777 or by e-mail at rbehre@postandcourier.com.