

**THE SWORD GATE HOUSE**

**1992**

**32 Legare Street**

**c. 1808**

**Home of Mr. and Mrs. Joseph T. Newton, III**

This site and dwelling are named for its magnificent wrought iron Sword Gates which are one of Charleston's most admired and photographed landmarks. They provide the principal entrance to this imposing Federal townhouse which is set amid formal gardens enclosed by a high brick wall.

The property's history begins with the "Grand Model of Charles Towne" - which was the Colonial plan for laying out the city. The plan specified the physical layout of the city and called for relatively wide carriage ways and numbered city lots. It was drafted in the 1670's in London and was officially adopted in the 1680's. A copy of the plan (dated 1725) and a list of grantees has survived in the possession of the South Carolina Historical Society. This particular site represents Lots No. 264 and No. 224 on the original plan.

By 1720, this lot was in the possession of Solomon Legare, a Huguenot goldsmith who immigrated to Charleston from France to escape religious persecution. They were among hundreds of thousands of French Protestants (including many skilled artisans and members of the bourgeoisie) who fled France and resettled in the West Indies and the American colonies in the 17th and 18th century. Soon after arriving in Charleston, Legare began acquiring land and became one of the colony's most wealthy citizens. The renaming of the carriage way from "Johnson Street" to "Legare" Street provides a clue to his standing in the community.

The property was sold before the war of 1812 to two German-born merchants, Jacob Steinmetz and Paul Emil Lorent who demolished the buildings and proceeded to construct (in 1818) the existing dwelling. The magnificent avenue of magnolias was planted in the 1800's. The house is divided today into two separate units. The frame portion is maintained as a private residence. The stucco portion (which faces Tradd Street) was formerly a residence and small inn.

In 1819, the property was sold to Andrew Talvande and his wife who operated a boarding school for young ladies in the house. The high brick wall was said to have been constructed after one of the young ladies eloped with a suitor whom her parents had forbidden her to marry. Recent research indicates that the wall was built long before this elopement was supposed to have taken place, but this romantic story persists.

## GARDEN OF THE SWORD GATE HOUSE

### Page 2

The famous "sword gates" are named for the Roman swords positioned at their mid-section and spears placed horizontally (trademark symbols of authority). They are said to have been ordered as a part of the grill work for the Guard House in 1838, but were rejected as too expensive. The gates were purchased and installed at this location in 1848. The gates were designed by Charles F. Reichardt, a German architect, and executed by Christopher Werner, a noted Charleston ironworker.

This estate has changed owners many times and the property has been added to and improved. While in the ownership of the Allston family (1905-29), Hervey Allen, the popular novelist, resided here and collaborated with DuBose Heyward on the book Carolina Chanson.

### ENTRANCE HALL

Interior decoration of this room reflects the original use of the house as a French girl's school by Mme. Talvande.

Needlepoint rug

Pair of French Louis XVI fauteuils or armchairs, 18th century

French gilt mirror, 18th century

Baby grand piano, Cunningham Piano Company of Philadelphia

Collection of impressionist landscapes.

### DRAWING ROOM

Crystal chandelier

Bronze bust of Robert E. Lee

Bronze statues by 20th century artist, Frederic Remington.

Collection of enamel boxes in French ormolu-mounted cabinet,  
19th century

Collection of English and French reproduction furniture

Japanned English table with candle slide

French carpet

Portrait of members of the Newton family by local artist, Bill  
Jamison

French bombe commode with marble top, 19th century

18th century English portrait in the style of Gainsborough

### DINING ROOM

Handpainted Chinese silk wallpaper

Set of Chippendale style dining chairs

English mahogany sideboard with inlay, c. 1790

Sheraton style mahogany dining table

Adam style gilt mirror

English secretary-bookcase, mahogany, c. 1790

English mahogany chest, c. 1770

English mahogany and veneer chest, c. 1790

Chippendale reproduction child's chair

Crystal chandelier

**GARDEN OF THE SWORD GATE HOUSE**

**Page 3**

**HUNT ROOM**

Oriental carpet

Leather chairs and sofa

Collection of antique rifles and swords

English desk with elaborate inlay, 1790, mahogany and rosewood

Portrait of Mr. Newton hunting titled "Missed Shot" by William

Koelping, 1984

Collection of English hunt prints