

Trio Of Houses Reflects Mid-Century Prosperity

NRC
May 16

(EDITOR'S NOTE: Twenty-second in a series of articles on the early dwellings along Beaufain and Wentworth streets. The twenty-third will appear on Monday.)

By W. H. J. THOMAS

The three brick dwellings that stand closely placed together at 64, 66 and 68 Beaufain St. were constructed at a time when the economy of the city was beginning to show a general prosperity that resulted from new business prompted by the success of the railroads and inland trade, a continuing success with staple agriculture and an adequate foreign trade.

The property naturally gave way to expansion of neighborhoods and it was during this period that the early Charleston Green district reached a full development. It was also during the late 1840s and 1850s that this general prosperity and neighborhood expansion led local businessmen into developing rows or groups of separate but very similar houses for resale, a practice apparently new for this largely suburban area. It is interesting to note that many of these homes constructed by investors were quite large, well-finished residences, but the prosperity of local persons may have made this quality of product necessary.

Each of the remaining groups in the city shows a good reflection of fashion for that time, as builders were obviously concerned with interesting buyers, while the more typical conservative Charlestonian building for himself was happy to utilize general patterns of earlier generations.

A local gentleman who appears to have been quite active in the development of lots and the construction of a fair number of dwellings for speculative purposes was Francis Quinlan McHugh. An attorney at law, McHugh through the 1840s was purchasing lots all along Beaufain Street and up Coming Street, buying four, five or six vacant lots at a time, then selling each with a new home on it within a year or two.

On Oct. 6, 1849, McHugh paid \$3,000 for that portion of the north side of Beaufain now occupied by the three stucco-faced brick dwellings. The lot extended on the street side 147 feet from Coming to Kirkland Lane, up Coming 53 feet, then west 227 feet, and 180 feet along Kirkland Lane.

Some construction had taken place by 1851, because on Dec. 10 of that year, McHugh conveyed the most westerly portion of this parcel to Thomas Divine, a mason, for \$2,500.

As stated in the deed, the property as conveyed with "the further consideration that Said Thomas Divine Shall forthwith build on the eastern line a dwelling house and out building with flat roofs and without any windows or openings on said East line and also that the Said Thomas Divine completes forthwith the Buildings erected by him for Said F. Q. McHugh in Beaufain Street according to agreement for which said Divine has been already paid in full."

It appears the two similar houses at 64 and 66 Beaufain

Do You Know Your Charleston?

were built for McHugh and may be dated 1852, since they are mentioned as under construction during the previous year. We find McHugh listed as a resident of 64 Beaufain

in the city directory for 1852. Since the property at 68 Beaufain was conveyed to Divine before construction of a house, it would be most accurate to call Divine the builder of this somewhat different two-story residence.

On April 8, 1853, the house at 64 Beaufain was sold by McHugh to Thomas N. Gadsden (listed as a broker and auctioneer), a businessman whose im-

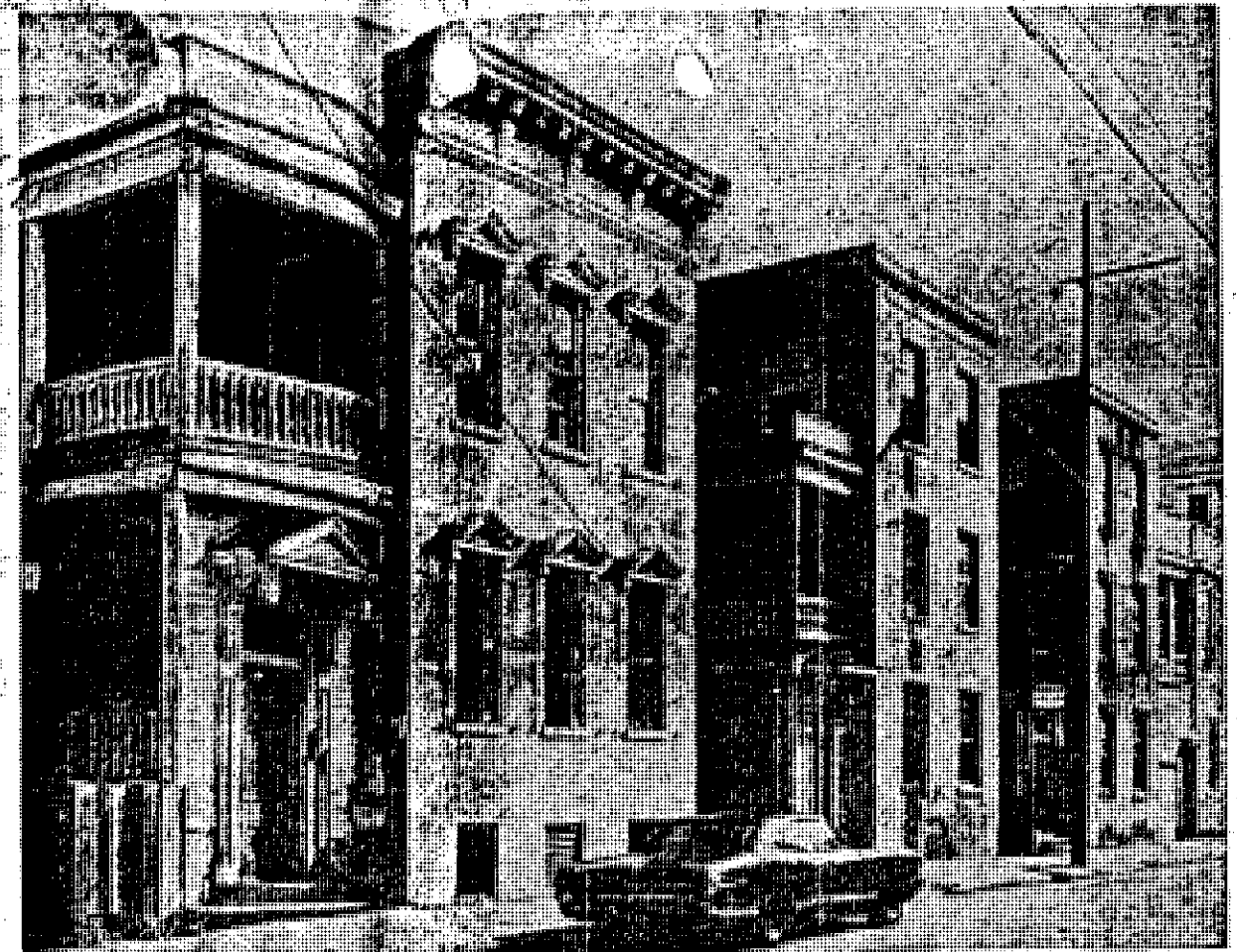
pressive real estate transactions at mid-century fill 21 pages of the index for conveyances for Charleston during this period.

Gadsden, a long-time resident of South Battery, does not appear to have occupied this house during his ownership but kept it as an investment.

A few days after this conveyance, Divine also sold his dwelling at 68 Beaufain (where he is listed as a resident in 1852, along with Michael Divine and John Divine, also both masons), this transaction on April 19, 1853, the purchaser being Theodore Huchet, a local merchant, who paid \$9,000 for the property. Huchet's family lived there until 1879 when it was sold to the Peoples National Bank for \$2,600.

It was also in the 1850s that McHugh sold the middle dwelling at 66 Beaufain to Mary McHugh. From this date, Francis McHugh is listed as occupying a residence on the south side of Beaufain, this being 63 Beaufain, the two-and-a-half story brick and stucco dwelling that was constructed about 1849; listed through this period in the name of Maria Theresa McHugh.

The narrowness of the three



THREE DWELLINGS WERE BUILT IN 1850s

64, 66 and 68 Beaufain developed by Francis McHugh. (Staff Photo by Burbage)

lots dictates that the dwellings be of "single house" plan, but even then the two buildings put up by McHugh appear to have a special slimmness — and this at a time when the squat design was popular. Each is made with bricks

laid in common bond and with thick brownstone lintels and sills in the windows (that concession to fashion), with a slight decorative ribbing near the parapet. The long piazzas are more shallow than usual but this is not out of keeping

with the narrowness and height of each building. The carved wooden overhang above the entrance of 66 is probably a post-Civil War addition.

The smaller house at 68 Beaufain, with its pressed tin

window ornaments (and the "flat roof" that McHugh seemed to consider worthy of mention), takes advantage of a slightly larger lot to spread itself out and enjoy the more popular proportions of the period.