

62

FAMOUS HOUSES

Of Charleston, South Carolina

By
Jack Leland

Edited by **Warren Ripley**

Photographs by **William A. Jordan**

Art by George Roberts

108 Mellish Court
Daniel Island, SC 29492
843.302.2978
roberts880198@bellsouth.net

Published By
The News and Courier
and
The Evening Post

A Post-Courier Booklet

Copyright, Evening Post Publishing Co. — 1970

Second Edition	—	1970
Third Edition	—	1971
Fourth Edition	—	1975
Fifth Edition, Revised	—	1978
Copyright Renewal	—	1978
Sixth Edition	—	1979
Seventh Edition	—	1981
Eighth Edition	—	1982
Ninth Edition	—	1984
Tenth Edition	—	1985
Eleventh Edition, Revised	—	1986
Copyright Renewal	—	1986

PREFACE

Most of the stories of the 62 houses described in this publication were published originally in The Evening Post newspaper during 1968 and 1969. The remainder were published subsequently in The News and Courier.

They were selected at random, as examples of the hundreds of architecturally, or historically, important residences in the City of Charleston.

Following initial publication of the series in The Evening Post, many of the stories were combined into a newspaper tabloid entitled "50 Famous Houses." Some 23,000 copies of this publication were sold.

The tabloid was revised in 1978. At this time 10 stories were added, nine from the original series and one (Ashley Hall) written especially for the revised edition. This booklet was published in the present size and on slick, more lasting, paper. In this format, and entitled "60 Famous Houses," the booklet went through six printings and sold more than 60,000 copies.

Revised again in 1986 and brought up to date, the 60 stories, with two additions (16 Meeting and 87 Church), have been republished as "62 Famous Houses."

A Post-Courier Booklet



101 Rutledge — Newspaper editor was slain in basement of this house.

Residence Was Scene Of Sensational Slaying

The "eyebrows" over the windows of the house at 101 Rutledge Ave. cast heavy shadows on the windows, giving the house a demure look that belies its role in the city's most sensational murder case.

For in its basement the editor of The News and Courier, Capt. F. Warrington Dawson, was shot to death about 4:20 p.m. March 10, 1889, by a young physician.

The story had just about everything to give it sensationalism. The three principals were Capt. Dawson, his children's 22-year-old French-speaking Swiss governess, Marie Burdayron, and 30-year-old Dr. Thomas Ballard McDow.

Capt. Dawson lived just around the corner on Bull Street in an elaborate mansion. Dr. McDow had recently come to Charleston. A native of Lancaster, S.C., he had previously practiced in upper South Carolina and Georgia. He was married to

a German woman who came equipped with a fairly handsome dowry.

Dr. McDow maintained his offices in the basement of 101 Rutledge and lived upstairs. Marie Burdayron was to testify at the trial that the handsome young doctor first propositioned her on Feb. 1, 1889.

She stated that McDow gave her a gold watch and a novel "Twixt Love and Law," a Victorian tale of a married man's passion for a single girl.

She also admitted going to a Negro house on Cannon Street with McDow, testimony that threw the crowded court room into laughter.

McDow's lawyer asked her: "Why did he take you there? Did you think he wanted to play croquet with you?"

Speaking in broken English, Marie answered: "Oh, no, not that." Then she asked the lawyer: "M'sieu, suppose we talk in

French awhile." The News and Courier account stated that Marie then left the stand, passing close to McDow and "he moved his chair to let her go by and hung his head and two thousand pairs of eyes were on them both."

From the time a "groundnut" (peanut) woman sounded the alarm, to the jury's verdict June 30, 1889, Charleston was in an uproar. The case was a partisan affair. Capt. Dawson, an Englishman who fought with the Confederacy, had combined the Charleston Courier and The Daily News to form the News and Courier in 1872. He was a powerful force in the community but not popular with the masses. McDow, a newcomer, and practically unknown, overnight became the symbol of the "little man" fighting the status quo.

He was small in physique and Dawson was a powerful, large man. There also was speculation that Dawson's "fatherly" interest in his children's pretty young governess might cover a deeper feeling. The Victorian age's double standard still prevailed and the doctor's dalliance with the governess might have carried no great social onus until it became published news.

McDow testified that Dawson, whom he had never met although their back yards almost butted, came to his office, threatened him with public denouncement and then attacked him with his cane. The doctor said he had been forced down on a couch and was being badly battered when he drew a pistol from his hip pocket and fired once.

The doctor tried to bury Dawson's body under the floor boards of a basement closet and it was three hours after the fatal shot that he went outside and told a policeman he had killed Dawson.

The trial attracted the largest crowds ever to attend a court hearing in Charleston. When the jury announced its verdict of innocent, the audience broke into cheers and continued cheering until the judge threatened to jail them all on contempt charges.

The unanimous verdict attracted strong partisan editorials locally and in out-of-town newspapers. The Savannah paper theorized that the jury (seven blacks and five whites) had destroyed a Negro argument that white juries would not convict whites but would convict blacks. The paper stated that the predominantly Negro jury had been given a chance to convict a white man and had failed.

The house itself is a typical antebellum Charleston single house of solid brick without pretension, although its eaves are undergirt by slightly fancy brickwork and the heavy overwindow "eyebrows" are in three styles. The wood decorations on the ends of the porches are late Victorian.

The house has a large garden with a particularly handsome palmetto tree and shrubs.

The house was purchased about 1926 by J.C. Elson who restored it. After World War II it was purchased from the Elson family by Mr. and Mrs. Edward P. Holcombe III and later was owned by Dr. and Mrs. Thomas L. Lucas and their son, Dr. Thomas L. Lucas Jr. of Anderson. They rented it as two units, one in the coach-house at rear and the other in the main dwelling.