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## 'Fire Loan' Financed Construction

(EDITOR'S NOTE: Fourteenth in a series of articles on recent restorations in Ansonborough. The fifteenth will appear Monday.)

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Staff Reporter

The double, three-story dwelling at 22-24 Wentworth St. was constructed about 1840 by an enterprising attorney at law with quite sound architectural taste who built half-a-dozen substantial brick dwellings, still standing in the mid-town area, during the 1840s and 1850s.

Francis Quinlan McHugh made one of his earliest purchases in July of 1840 when he bought the vacant lot on which 22-24 Wentworth now stands for \$2,000 from a Sarah Russell. He took out a "fire loan" from the State Bank of South Carolina (these mortgages arranged for the rebuilding of the northeast portions of the city leveled in the fire of 1838) for \$7,500, with the stipulation that McHugh construct a three-story brick residence.

McHugh built a double tenement dwelling separated by a common wall, with the obvious intention of selling one and keeping one for himself, as the one to the west was somewhat wider than its sister and also had more yard and passage space about its entrance. The full lot measured 50 feet along the street line, extending 104 feet back to the old Ansonborough boundary wall. McHugh gave the west portion of the building and lot 30 feet and the east portion of the building and lot 20 feet.

To divide his building on the interior without having to unbalance the exterior proportions, McHugh placed his dividing wall up against the window line of the east portion, thus gaining about two feet of room space for his side.

On Sept. 28, 1843, he sold the east building to William Matthiessen for \$3,550. He retained 24 Wentworth in his own name for another ten

years (he moved to Beaufain Street about 1849), then selling it as well to Matthiessen for a consideration of \$4,750, this conveyance taking place on April 19, 1853. McHugh was also responsible for the construction or financing of the buildings at 63, 64, 66 and 68 Beaufain.

From Matthiessen, the tenement passed to Isaac Moise, a resident of Richmond County, Ga. He conveyed it to George M. Theus in trust "for the sole and separate use and benefit" of his wife, Hetty L. Moise. Theus then transferred the property to Mrs. Moise on Sept. 28, 1858, for a consideration of \$10.

The property next went to Samuel Lord Jr., an attorney, who in turn sold it to Bridget Gardner for \$3,000 on July 25, 1879. Miss Gardner married a Mr. Byrns and sold the double house to a Mrs. Catherine McLaughlin for \$3,100 on April 22, 1902.

Mrs. McLaughlin died in the 1920s, leaving the property to

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her four children. It was conveyed from her estate to her son, John F. McLaughlin, for \$6,500 on Oct. 1, 1940. After John McLaughlin's death (his will was probated in 1951), the property passed to his wife. Historic Charleston Foundation purchased the property in 1966 from Marguerite Behlmer McLaughlin.

It was sold by the Foundation in May of 1969 to its present owners, Mr. and Mrs. James O. Denby of Upperville, Va., who recently completed full restoration of the first and second floors and a partial restoration of the third floor.

The tenement built by Francis McHugh had the general floor plan of two rooms and a center hallway to each floor on either side of the center dividing wall. The surface exterior is of Charleston gray brick, laid in Flemish bond

with flat brick arches above the windows (the arches of the front facade have now been covered in stucco to appear as stone lintels).

With the exception of brick relief courses between the second and third levels and a slight roof parapet, the only exterior ornamentation is limited to four cast-iron parapet insets showing the state palmetto tree. The parapet treatment is not unusual here, but the most commonly found ornament for this period for the iron insets was the popular Greek anthemion design shown in a radiating cluster — and this use of the palmetto would be rare.

When the Denbys purchased this double dwelling, its interior was in poor repair, with various partitions dividing up the principal rooms into reduced units. There was no plumbing, no apparent baths, no kitchens and only the "barest sign of wiring", being in the form of a few aged fragments strung along the baseboards.

Mr. and Mrs. Denby wished to make the three-story building into a single family dwelling, and had doorways cut through the old common wall to join the rooms of east and west side. Retaining the original fine-grained black marble mantles and the Grecian panel molded door and window framings, they were able to utilize the first story as sitting room, dining room, library and kitchen, with rear hallway, two stair halls and two separate staircases.

The second story was restored as four bedrooms with two baths, and here we find what probably remains of the original 1840 plasterwork in the form of a modified ribbed cornice in the front rooms, apparently the sitting rooms when the double residence was built.

Mr. and Mrs. Denby have restored only one room on the top story of their dwelling, referring to this level as "a project for the future." Restoration work is presently continuing on the large rear garden.



22-24 WENTWORTH WAS BUILT IN 1840  
Restoration continues on double residence. (Staff Photo by Swain)