

A PROPOSAL TO JOHN AND MARGARET THORNTON

AN ARCHITECTURAL CONSERVATION 'MANUAL OF PRACTICE' FOR OWNERS OF SIGNIFICANT HISTORIC HOUSES

INTRODUCTION

Historic Charleston Foundation is pleased that the Pineapple Gate House (Simmons-Edwards House) is now in the hands of owners who are proceeding carefully to insure the conservation and preservation of this important house. A National Historic Landmark, the Pineapple Gate House is one of the nation's most significant historic houses. The Foundation holds a conservation easement on the exterior of the building and anticipates that, after years of neglect, the house will again receive the care and maintenance necessary to its survival and demanded by its stature.

In light of the conservation and restoration work contemplated, Historic Charleston Foundation would like to propose a partnership that would, using the conservation of the Pineapple Gate House as its laboratory, produce a replicable template to guide owners of similarly remarkable sites in the long-term stewardship and understanding of their properties.

BUILDING A TEMPLATE

As the first step in this project, Historic Charleston Foundation would undertake the comprehensive study and analysis of the Pineapple Gate House. A team of experts will be assembled representing architectural, conservation and historic preservation skills and disciplines.

Analysis of the house will include documentation and explanation of the evolution and history of the house and its outbuildings. This analysis will delineate changes and alterations made to the house over the course of the last two centuries as well as identify those aspects of the house that are original to it.

In addition, an archaeological investigation may be undertaken to provide information about the history and use of 12 Legare Street, the now-open lot to the south, and how it relates both to history of the Pineapple Gate House and future uses of the lot.

The purposes of the investigation would be twofold: first, to provide precise, accurate information about the history of the house and second, to create a model, or template of a process, that owners of other historic houses would find useful in guiding them as they undertake similar restorations.

Historic Charleston Foundation would make immediate use of all of the information gathered during the study in administering its conservation easement of the property and, as it does for all its easement properties, advising on best preservation and restoration practices.

CREATING PRODUCT

We propose to produce a series of products not normally the result of a private conservation effort.

- 1) Measured Drawings. A set of measured drawings of the Pineapple Gates House would be created. These drawings would a) document the building in its current condition, and b) identify changes made to it over the last two centuries.
- 2) A Manual of Practice. Second, and perhaps most critical to the replicability of the process, a 'Manual of Practice' would be created. This manual would offer a step-by-step guide to how to organize and carry out the investigation, interpretation, and restoration of a significant historic house. This manual would be the result of an analytical investigation by nationally recognized experts and describe the processes owners of historic houses should follow to insure there preservation. The manual would outline a process that would include, but not be limited to:
 - Assemblage of a team of expert consultants capable of providing the best advice and guidance;
 - An exhaustive investigation of the history of the house;
 - Documentation of the architectural evolution;
 - Investigation of the archaeological aspects of the property;
 - A thorough consideration of alternative strategies for forging a restoration plan;
 - And, finally, the pursuit of the restoration plan to completion.

ADDING VALUE

The investigation will have a substantial impact on the practice of architectural conservation in Charleston – and for that matter anywhere in the Atlantic basin. Restorations of significant historic houses, while they accomplish the goals set for the conservation and restoration of the house, have historically failed to shape the art and craft of restoration. The application of considerable talent and time on a site achieves the desired immediate result, but failure to publish the results of the ‘how and why’ of the restoration process forces the reinvention of the restoration process at nearly every project. The results of a century of restoration efforts in the United States have yet to create a body of methods that reinforces good practices or that prevents new owners from making the same errors made more than a half century ago.

DISTRIBUTING THE PRODUCT

The audience for this manual would, of course, include other Charlestonians, but would have much wider distribution and implication. As mentioned earlier, no such manual or template currently exists. In summary form it would be of interest to publications such as The National Trust for Historic Preservation’s *Historic Preservation*. Its availability through the Foundation would provide opportunities for training seminars and workshops on a national level. In this venue, circulation of a case study would allow homeowners and practitioners alike to understand the how and why of the restoration effort.

The results of the research undertaken at the Pineapple Gate House would become a chapter in a book that the Foundation will publish through the University of South Carolina Press (publisher of the Foundation’s research monographs). Each chapter in this book would present an historic summary as well as a summary of the results of architectural and archaeological research. The goal of this series would be to build a significant database of thoroughly documented historic houses. The book will be used as a source of designs for contemporary interpretation (in much the same way as the design books of the eighteenth century served to disseminate good design broadly). It will also support restoration efforts in Charleston, particularly in those instances where the lack of original materials and finishes leave the way open to conjecture and interpretation.

CONCLUSION

We offer this partnership as an opportunity for your anticipated work on the Pineapple Gates House to have a lasting and important influence on the field of historic preservation. The opportunity to study a house of this significance, much less use it as a model for similar efforts, is a very exciting prospect. Historic Charleston Foundation looks forward to further discussions regarding this project and its role in the preservation and conservation of this important house.

Carter L. Hudgins, Executive Director
HISTORIC CHARLESTON FOUNDATION