

L. L. Green

17 - 19 Exchange Street

Partly Before 1788

Partly 1829

When the settlement of Charleston was moved in 1680, from its temporary location on the west bank of the Ashley River to its permanent location on the peninsula between the two rivers, the new town was laid out on the highest ground available on the peninsula on the Cooper River. About the middle of the length of the bluff, Broad Street was laid out perpendicular to the river front, and this spot became the center of the settlement, the seat of government and of public defense through most of the colonial period.

Since "the Wharf of Charles Town", as this bluff was sometimes called, was quite exposed to attack, defenses must have been established at a very early date along the harbor front of the new town. It was probably after the expedition against Florida in 1702 that these defenses were greatly strengthened and enlarged, with the result that the whole length of the waterfront was eventually defended by a brick wall said to have been twenty feet high above the low water mark, five feet thick at the base, and rising to parapets four feet above the ground. At extremities of the wall, near present Market and Water Streets, were strong bastions named for Craven and Granville, two of the Lords Proprietors. At the foot of Tradd, and near the foot of Queen Street were smaller triangular projections known as redans.¹ At the foot of Broad Street, the center of the length of this defensive wall, was built a strong fort of semi-circular shape, called the "Half-Moon Battery", where was the barracks and headquarters of the guard.

Although this brick defensive wall, called the "Curtain Line," was the city's main defense against sea-borne attack, it was essential to the life of the city that the area be used for commerce as well, and no doubt these two conflicting claims to use

of the sea front produced many conflicts over the years. At any rate, outside the Curtain Line, virtually by 1700, the low-lying ground had all been granted to various individuals for the purpose of erecting landing places for cargo.² Their construction seems to have been from the earliest date, similar to what is still visible on Adgers Wharf, the same type which can be found in the Maritime Provinces of Canada even today; a crib of timber was sunk in deep water and filled with stone, and a wooden bridge thrown out to it from the shore line; the process being repeated until the end of the wharf stood in deep enough water for seagoing vessels. From the construction employed these structures were called at first not wharves, which seems to have referred to the area and not to the structures, but rather were called "bridges," the term being somewhat analogous to the related terms "terminal" and "pier."

On 15 July 1698, "the wharf before the town lot number 13 was granted to William Elliott (town lot number 13 had approximately the same East Bay frontage as the present Carolina Bank and Trust Company).³ On the map of 1739 this area is called Middle Wharf.⁴

Ebenezer Simmons, who had probably acquired it in 1743,⁵ had devised, by his will of 1763, to his son Ebenezer Simmons Jr., the area known as "Simmons Wharf, lying to the eastward of the Curtain Line on the bay of Charles Town."⁶ In 1768 the Commissioners for the Building of the New Exchange, which was to be erected upon the demolished Half Moon Battery, were forced to encroach upon the wharf area owned by Simmons in order to obtain enough room for this larger structure.⁷ In the same year, on 1 June, Ebenezer Simmons Jr. sold to John Champnays the balance of the wharf area, which lay to the eastward and southward of the Exchange, about 211 feet wide, and extended from the Curtain Line on the Bay, to the channel of Cooper River, at that time distant apparently 361 feet.⁸

In the hurricane of 1752, Granville Bastion is said to have been almost completely destroyed, while the parapet of the Curtain Line had been torn down almost

its entire length.⁹ Nevertheless, attack was now feared from the French, and there must have been some desire to put the defenses in better order, for in 1764, by Act of August 10, the House of Assembly passed a measure directing that buildings were not to be erected within 50 feet of the Curtain Line. (It may be noted, however, that the western line of these buildings is only about 30 feet from where the Curtain Line stood. (In the same act they directed, moreover, that "the moat on the Bay of Charles Town (was) to be filled up." This must have referred to the low lying ground between the Curtain Line and the various merchants' bridges, doubtless a depository for garbage and offal, as the excavations recently made under the old Exchange seem to indicate.¹⁰

The buildings as they now stand are clearly delineated on the Petrie Map of 1788; however, the rear part of this structure was apparently rebuilt in 1829, as evidenced by the marble plaque inscribed "Edmonston-1829," affixed to the west wall of the building.

In addition, the basement beneath appears to be almost half full of rubble of an earlier building, and this fact, coupled with its handsome, regular, and sturdy construction would seem to prove that the date of the plaque is its construction date. The northern bay, however, is of a much cruder and coarser type of construction and it has been badly damaged at least once, probably by the earthquake of 1886. It appears always to have been intended for rough-casting, and the mortar is of poorer quality, the bricks of less regular shape and hardness, and more coarsely laid, than in the newer portion.

It seems possible that John Champneys built this earlier portion of the building, but this would place it before 1777, (and we have no proof thus far until the 1788 map) for in that year he left the colony for England, since he was unsympathetic to the Revolutionary Party. He is shown as one of those banished from South Carolina in Josiah Smith's Diary of 1780-81.¹²

* On 25 March 1784, Daniel Stevens, Sheriff of Charleston District, conveyed to

Roger Parker Saunders "Champneys Wharf and Bridge with the stores and houses thereon." In this deed is redited a suit against John Champneys by "Thomas Smith and Isaac Motte, (who had survived on Thomas Loughton Smith as Executors of Benjamin Smith deceased)" which had been brought on 26 April 1774. Presumably delayed by the Revolutionary War, adjudication had not been made till after its end.¹³

The year of Champneys' return to South Carolina is not known. It may have been as late as 1788 -89, for he received special exemption from banishment by act of the Legislature in that year, and he became a citizen March 25, 1789.¹⁴

It is not altogether certain that Champneys actually lost the whole wharf, and there seem to be other transactions here into Champneys as late as 1800.¹⁵ However, by the latter date it is in the hands of many different owners, several of whom each own one of the brick stores (rather regularly designed to be about 20 x 40 feet, outside dimensions, and two stories high) intended to serve both as warehouse and merchandise rooms for the small-scale importers of that day. After 1800 there appears to be an accumulation of these properties into the hands of the highly successful Patrick Duncan, who built for his town house the villa now serving Ashley Hall. Apparently after he retired, he sold his holdings there in 1819 to Charles Edmonston, probably on credit, for a confirmation of the sale is date 1825. Charles Edmonston also acquired property on this wharf from Jeremiah Yates and Jacobson, assignees of John R. Rogers, and from John Robinson, Daniel Perkins, George Gibbon Ann Hutchinson and Patrick Mooney, all in the year 1825. And he even acquired some from Mordecai Cohen in 1829.¹⁶ The Rogers deed and the Cohen deed appear to be for the two southern bays of this property.¹⁷

Charles Edmonston was most successful self-made merchant. In his will¹⁸ he tells us he was born in the town of Lenwick in Shetland, on 20 June 1782; and he must have come to Charleston when a fairly young man; perhaps he had been a clerk of the Scotsman Patrick Duncan. At any rate he took out naturalization papers in Char-

leston on March 26, 1810,¹⁹ and the same year, December 16 he married a local lady, one Mary Pratt,²⁰ who survived him. About the year 1818 he began acquiring properties along the lower part of East Bay Street, and in 1828 he built for himself the beautiful mansion now number 21 East Battery. He apparently continued to prosper and had one of the leading import-export businesses of the city until he found himself over-extended in the panic of 1837. At that time much of his property and in particular his chief revenue-producing real estate, the buildings on Champneys (or rather Edmonstons's) Wharf, and the two bridges there, were sold to satisfy his creditors. Among them were the leading banks of the town: The Bank of South Carolina, the State Bank, the Union Bank, the Planters & Merchants Bank, and the Bank of Charleston, to whom he owed \$120,000 and perhaps more.²¹

About this time his fine house was sold to Joseph Alston, who gave it to his son, in whose descent it has remained.

Although Charles Edmonston never recovered his former affluence in full, he made a considerable recovery, and remained in business on the Bay, trading as C. Edmonston & Col²² almost until his death, which occurred in 1861.²³ After he had lost the East Battery mansion he moved to a smaller but still comfortable home on Legare Street, now number 18.

The range of buildings on the wharf, though not all owned by Edmonston, extended eastwardly in an unbroken double row and included the present offices of Barnwell, Whaley, & Stevenson's own offices, at least until the sale consummated in 1839.