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King Street Buildings Constructed In 1834

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John Gordon, member of a local family of architects and builders, was the building contractor for the construction of the two buildings at 290 and 292 King St. in 1834.

Rebuilt after the great fire of 1838 and now masked by subsequent remodelings, the two buildings were constructed for two dry goods firms as a joint project.

Miller, Ripley & Co. (Horatio Miller, Samuel P. Ripley, George N. Miller and Henry C. Bissell) of Charleston and New York purchased in

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late 1833 and early 1834 three lots at the southeast corner of King and Society streets.

On Feb. 4, 1834, Miller, Ripley & Co. entered into an agreement with William M. Tileston & Co. (William M. Tileston, Charles N. Spofford and William H. Haseltine) of New York, to finance jointly the erection of two stores on the three lots.

March 21, 1834, Miller, Ripley & Co. entered into a contract with John Gordon, a local builder, to construct two three-story brick stores with a common wall between them.

Gordon and his brother James had designed and built the Second Presbyterian Church and St. Paul's, Radcliffeboro (now the Cathedral of St. Luke and St. Paul).

On this project, he was engaged as builder only, as the plans had been drawn in New York by an unidentified designer.

The building contract called for two brick stores, each fronting 24 feet on King Street, three stories high, with a granite front on the first story and granite sills and caps for windows and doors.

Bricks from a building and chimneys on the property were to be re-used in the foundation, but the remainder of the structure was to be of first-quality brick, with exterior brickwork pointed "whole Tuck." The roof was to be slate.

After the stores were built, Miller, Ripley & Co. conveyed to William M. Tileston & Co. the southernmost building (now 290 King) and lot for \$17,705.35, the sum being half the cost of buying the lots and erecting the double building.

The great fire of April 27-28, 1838, swept through the neighborhood, destroying the double building. The April 30, 1838, Charleston Courier reported that it was to be rebuilt "with the utmost expedition."

Tileston and his partners sold the southernmost lot to William S. Miller of New York for \$6,000 in 1838. He conveyed it in February 1839 to George N. Miller of Charleston for \$20,000.

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Staff Photo by Bill Jordan

290 and 292 King St.

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On the same date, George N. Miller acquired the adjacent property on the corner of King and Society from his partners in Miller, Ripley & Co. for \$20,000.

Both lots were described in the February 1839 deeds as having buildings, and the purchase prices would indicate substantial ones. The boundary between the lots was described as running down "the center of the partition wall of the Stores erected thereon."

It is evident the double building with a common wall was rebuilt by February 1839.

The 1834 building contract called for a three-story double building. The newspaper account of the 1838 fire said the building was four stories in height.

The double building is in fact 3½ stories high, with the appearance of a four-story building on the Society Street side and "eyebrow" windows in the half story on the King Street side.

The southern tenement (290 King) was remodeled by Samuel Johnston, who purchased the building and lot from George N. Miller. Johnston, according to The News and Courier, July 29, 1883, added a plate glass storefront and otherwise had the building "fitted up in handsome style."

Johnston's remodeling possibly included the pressed-metal window cornices and surrounds on the facade. It was possibly then, also, that the interior was converted to display or warehouse space, with a skylight and balustraded wells piercing all floors.

Miller sold the corner building and lot in 1852 to Thomas D. Condy as trustee for Madam Clementine H. Bernard. Her family sold the property in 1912 to the Wentworth Realty Co., a Sottile family firm that merged in 1976 with Pastime Amusement Co., the current owner.

The corner building retained its Greek Revival appearance until about 1950, when the building was stuccoed and wide fluted pilasters were applied between openings, which were reduced in size. The eyebrow attic windows and the brick cornice were obscured.

Johnston retained 290 King until 1909, when he sold it to J.H. Anderson. The property subsequently went through several owners until 1977, when it was purchased by A. Maynor Hardee.

The earliest documented occupants of 290 King were Booraem & Co., dry goods merchants, c. 1838 and Smith & Bryce (Joseph A. Smith & James Bryce), hardware merchants, c. 1840-41.

Miller, Ripley & Co. was the initial occupant of 292 King, which subsequently was occupied by Smauel R. Marshall & Co. (Samuel R. Marshall, Edward C. Marshall & Julius J. Wescoat), wholesale and retail hardware merchants, c. 1875-1880.