

GIBBES

66

ST. W.

## Ashley River

Tide Water

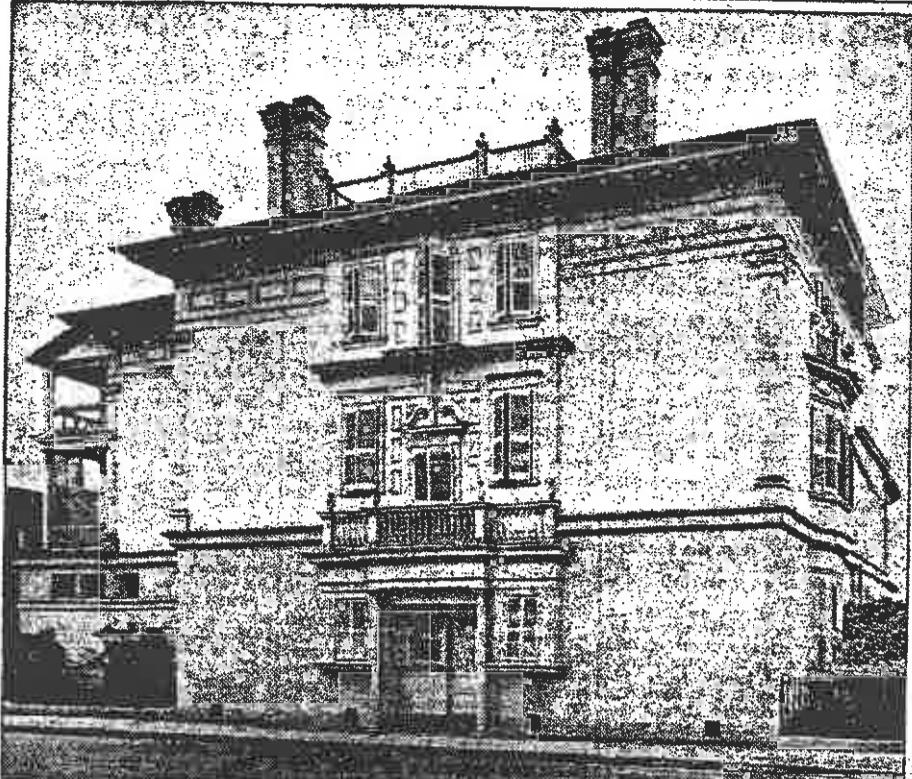
S. BAY ST. W.

1A

LEGARE ST. S.  
34

68

1902 Sanborn Map



53 SOUTH BATTERY SOLD—Mitchell Robinson today purchased the 14-room residence at 53 South Battery from Joseph D. Aiken for a reported \$32,000. The property includes six lots, two of which are occupied by the dwelling, which has been owned by Mr. Aiken for the last 15 years. (Photo by Jacobs)

### Two Gas Storage Tanks to Be Drained

Cleveland, Oct. 24 (UPI)—Draining of two liquified gas storage tanks, which remained intact after explosions and fire at the East Ohio Gas Co.'s plant, devastated a 50-block area, was ordered today as a precautionary measure.

In addition to the area already vacated, residents of 21 properties adjoining the plant were directed to depart while drainage operations are in progress.

Meanwhile, the number of known dead in last Friday's disaster mounted to 114 on the county coroner's records. Only 57 of these had been identified.



### Robinson Buys 53 South Battery Boulevard Lots

The 14-room dwelling at 53 South Battery, the property of Joseph D. Aiken for the last 15 years, was purchased today by Mitchell Robinson and his wife, Eva D. Robinson. The transaction was handled through C. T. Lowndes and company and although no figure as to the amount involved was released, it was reported to be \$32,000.

The property includes six lots: three on South Battery and three on Murray boulevard. It extends from South Battery to the boulevard, a distance of 306 feet on its eastern boundary and 301 on its western line. Frontage on South Battery is 148 feet, widening to 178 feet on the boulevard street line.

Mr. Robinson is operator of Milch's Loan office and Robinson's Bicycle shop at 460 King street. He resides at 332 President street. The purchase was an investment.

Several real estate agents have estimated that the six lots, exclusive of the huge residence, are valued at approximately \$31,000.

The residence is a mixture of architecture with Georgian elements prevailing. The three broad plazas extending across the southern side provide an unobstructed view of the Ashley river, and the "beauty" of the late afternoon sky and water.

It is three stories, and built almost entirely of brick covered with stucco. On the north, the windows are "dummies" covered with blinds, light being provided by transoms at the top.

The original main entrance was on the south side, facing the garden, but when the house was occupied by Henry Frost, who acquired it in 1884, a street door was cut in the north hall.

A large central hall goes through the house with a large room to the west on each floor and two rooms to the east. The cabinet work back of the dummy windows is hand-some and skillfully executed.

The western portion of the residence is of mercantile ancestry, having been erected about 1816 and operated first as a general store, specializing in fishing supplies. A wharf extended from the rear of the building to the water and was known as Daugherty's wharf after its purchase in 1828 by Joseph Daugherty.

When the store was built, marsh-land and water of numerous small creeks covered the site now occupied by many of Charleston's most elaborate and expensive homes.

The land on which the house stands was originally a part of a tract owned by Edward Blake, who owned considerable land in that section of the city, as well as many plantations in this state and Kentucky. He gave it to his son, John.

The grounds for a city dwelling today are very large, extending 148 feet on South Battery, 306 feet on the eastern boundary, 178 feet on Murray boulevard and 301 feet on its western line.

### Negro Wins Own Case In Condemnation Suit

Harold Gadsden, a Colleton county negro, yesterday in the United States district court acted as his own counsel and won a \$700 verdict for 4.25 acres of land the government was condemning for use as a part of the Walterboro air base. The jury was dismissed after this the only jury trial case of the week.

Gadsden testified and then argued to the jury. He pointed out that the government appraisal of the property had been \$349. The case was a part of an action against 26 acres, the other awards being uncontested or previously settled out of court.

So convincing was Gadsden's argument that the jury stayed out but a few minutes and returned with a verdict awarding Gadsden \$700 for the land.

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Evening Post 10/24/1944

# Demolition On South Battery Delayed

By MARGARET M. WILCOX  
Staff Reporter

The Board of Architectural Review denied a request to demolish 52 South Battery for a period of six months at the mutual agreement of both the proponents and opponents of the proposal.

Twelve persons attended the meeting last night to protest the demolition, claiming it would destroy the integrity and character of the neighborhood and the historic area.

Developer W. S. FitzSimons, owner of Restoration Inc. and owner of the property, said he was quite willing for the board to grant a six-month delay to give historic groups an opportunity to suggest alternative plans or to purchase the property for a reasonable price.

Although FitzSimons' future plans for the site were not at issue last night, he said he intends to construct two double houses there as part of a development he is building between South Battery and Murray Boulevard.

He said he has studied the present house and it is an ante-bellum structure dating from 1845-50. Originally built in the Greek Revival style, he said it has been altered and mutilated by additions and excavation of necessary windows and various matching detail work. It is now vacated, but was most recently occupied by residents of five apartments.

The house is not considered historically valuable, he pointed out. He said he has been given an estimate of

\$75,000 to restore it properly, but said he was not averse to selling it to someone else who wanted to restore it.

Mrs. S. Henry Farnsworth and attorney Joseph H. McGee Jr. appeared on behalf of the Historic Charleston Foundation to ask a six-month delay. McGee said the house was of a scale complementary to the historical area in which it stands and it would be a great loss to the area because it could not be rebuilt on a similar scale.

He suggested that it could be renovated to make the five apartments into luxury dwellings.

Attorney Delbert Myers appeared representing a number of residents of the South Battery area. He called

the house the last in the Old and historic section and asked that the fact that it is not historically important be outweighed by the sentimental

effect its demolition would have on the quaint and beautiful character of the neighborhood.

He presented letters signed by seven nearby residents and others interested in preservation and petitions signed by about 30 residents, all opposing the demolition.

Mrs. Joseph R. Young, president of the Preservation Society echoed the previous remarks about the value of the scale of the building. She said she believed it was built in 1816, instead of 1840, as a mercantile establishment.

Rivers T. Dennis Jr., FitzSimons' attorney, said however that the 1816 building was a frame house which was no longer standing on a plan drawn in 1831.

In other action, the board approved renovations and additions to a carriage house at 9 Water St., erection of a sign at 127 Meeting St.,

and construction of a side door on the Tradd Street side of 29 Legare St.

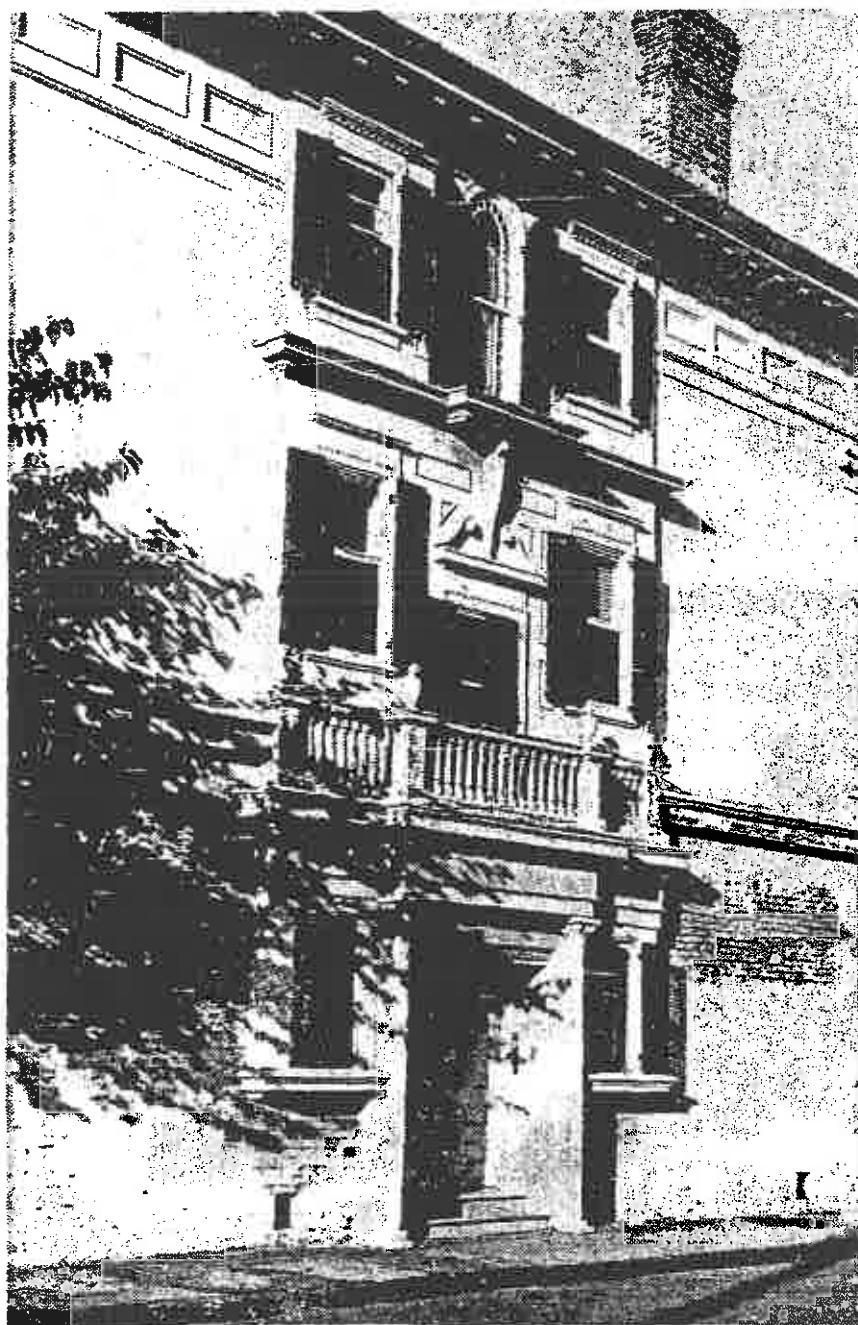
It denied a request to paint 43 Society St. in a bright yellow color and suggested that the owner consult with the Historic Charleston Foundation on a more suitable shade or color. It agreed to act later on the recommendation of architect Albert Simons on removal of certain cornices at 11 Wentworth St. and deferred action on demolition of 21 State St. and removal of a wall at 5 George St.

Simons told the board that several hundred photographs of historic Low country buildings, to be used in setting design standards, are sitting unused in the city engineer's office. He was authorized to ask the Gibbs Art Gallery if it would catalog and assume custody of the photographs.



the Northwestern University Traffic Institute.

THE CHARLESTON Museum Planetarium will hold its last public showing of the season tonight at 8 p.m. The topic will be "The Wonders of Space."



53 SOUTH BATTERY MAY BE DESTROYED

Section of house may date from 1840s. (Staff Photo by Swain)

## BELGIAN HEAVYWEIGHT ARRIVES IN PORT

The 565-foot Belgian bulk carrier Tielrode left an anchorage at Rebellion Roads last night to berth at Columbus Street Terminals. The Tielrode, which has a cargo carrying capacity of 17,000 tons, is one of the largest dry cargo vessels to tie up at downtown docks. She is to discharge a cargo of steel from Northern Europe. (Staff Photo by Swain)

# Dwelling's Fate Still In Doubt

By W. H. J. THOMAS

The three-story 19th century dwelling at 53 South Battery, occupying an unusually large lot that reaches through to Murray Boulevard on its south side, has found its way into the news in recent months as a possible site for a group of townhouses.

An original proposal to construct several units with two flush to South Battery would have required the demolition of the dwelling which has most likely stood—in one form or another—on this site since the 1840s. A new proposal eliminating the residences that would require demolition won approval in a recent planning and zoning commission meeting and construction has now begun to the south of the quite shabby dwelling that was long associated with the Frost and Aiken families.

Arguments in opposition to destruction of the 19th century house brought forth the old unanswerable questions concerning the true building date and true value of period dwellings in the lower portions of the city that are not outstandingly fine or closely associated with important persons and events of the city's history but have become pleasingly familiar sights and cannot be called obtrusive.

The old Frost residence on South Battery appears to straddle all of these problems in such a way that any decision is difficult. No one would really like to see another early house come down in a city that has lost more than it has kept, but many will feel that the heavy cost of restora-

tion for its cut-up and insignificant interior might not be justified while far better homes and commercial buildings all over the city are endangered by their poor condition.

It has been set forth that the west end of the house dates from as early as 1816 and was of "mercantile ancestry". This was apparently operated as a general store specializing in fishing supplies. At this time a number of creeks cut in here from the Ashley River channel. These remarks concerning 53 South Battery's origins appeared in an article in The News and Courier in May of 1937.

Records offer a fair amount of proof that this is not true and that a very early frame building that served as a store is not physically part of the present house. The most persuasive piece of evidence is a plat of 1831 showing the property cut into several parcels with the location of present house actually split down the middle by two owners. A small building stands a little too far to the west and no house of size is shown.

The east portion of the lot was owned at the making of this plat by one Joseph Daugherty who kept a wharf from the rear of his property projecting into the river channel. He had purchased the lot in 1826. The west side of the property was bought by an Isaac Sedgwick Bailey and only when these separate parcels came under single ownership do we find evidence of one dwelling of size.

Not until we come upon the ward books of 1870 do we

find a description of a three-story dwelling, this being listed under the joint ownership of Mrs. Anna L. Smith and Charlotte M. Alston. As the house had a fair assessment in this listing it must have been decent enough to have been built on its own rather than incorporating an earlier store building.

When we get to the physical attributes of the general structure itself we find the walls laid in American bond with pressed brick of the high-colored Philadelphia variety. It is possible, therefore, despite its post-Civil War treatment, to see the house as dating from the 1840s or 1850s, con-

### Do You Know Your Charleston?

structed on the "single" house plan with the front entrance and piazza side facing toward the water.

On June 30, 1883, the house and property were sold in the name of the before-mentioned ladies to Henry W. Frost for \$11,500. A few years later we find Frost purchasing additional adjoining lots from the estate of Henry A. Middleton to give his land boundaries that would reach 148 feet on South Battery and run in several hundred feet to the water.

Frost is believed responsible for the major renovations (he may even have nearly leveled the earlier brick building) that give it the present Victorian Italianate expression. Tradition has it that he brought

a northern architect down to redesign his home in the fashion of the late 19th century. The architect's lack of familiarity with the region may explain his closed-in treatment of rooms and stairs.

Henry William Frost was a very substantial exporter of sea island cotton and head of a firm with both Charleston and Savannah offices. He came from a line of gentlemen of the law and clergy but chose to follow a business career and took a position in the merchant firm of Gourdin, Matthiesson and Co. here. He formed his own cotton business in 1880.

Frost served in the Confederate army and later married Miss Susan Frances Hampton Preston. We find him conveying the house to her in trust in 1887. The Frosts sold the property in 1929 to a retired textile industrialist Joseph Daniel Aiken.

Aiken had been born in Winnsboro and raised in Charleston. At the age of 15 he was sent off to Phillips Exeter in New Hampshire to prepare for Harvard. It appears that he disliked the academic situation and left Exeter to work for the next 50 years in New England textile mills. Upon his retirement he spent his winters at 53 South Battery until selling the house in 1944 to the Robinson family. He then moved to an apartment nearby, living to the age of 91 and leaving a bequest of \$750,000 to The Citadel for expanding the campus by filling its marshlands.

In 1945 the three-story residence was further altered to make five apartments. Several months ago it was purchased by Restoration, Inc., for purpose of development.

When remade by Frost the exterior of the dwelling was given the fashionably romantic attire of an age that believed that women and houses were not properly dressed unless they wore an abundance of clothing. The architect of 53 South Battery chose to supply this abundance with an Italian touch.

The main entrance with its stained glass side window is flanked by small columns of a composite order, wooden pilasters of a Roman Ionic variety are placed at corners at second and third story levels, and an assortment of balconies, urns and bay windows with festoons complete the treatment. Formerly a sort of false widow's walk railing was placed on the rather valuable slate roof.

The interior plan has little to offer, with the lack of a central hallway proving to be a real shortcoming. One enters the small front entrance and finds oneself in a narrow cabinet situation and confronting a stairway without much chance of movement.

What is left of the main rooms after all the alterations is equally uninteresting — a little water leaf pattern in the dining room and a few pieces of cut glass in doors and windows. We find on the north side that a number of windows are dummies with only the transoms admitting light.

The house is presently on the market while action is delayed.

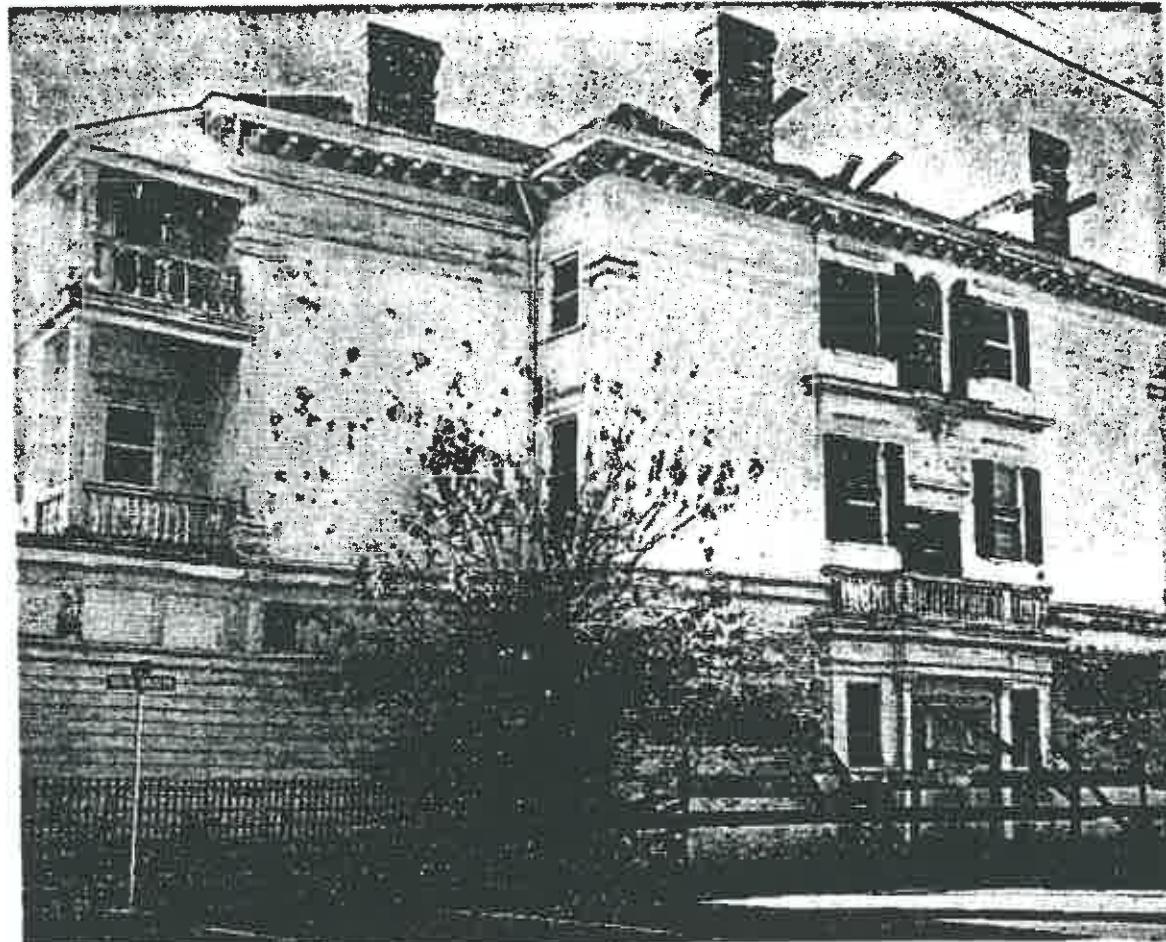
News & Courier

6/16/1969



**TOWNHOUSE SITE**—53 South Battery, a 129-year-old house being demolished to make way for a group of townhouses. The new buildings will be built by the property's owner, Restoration Inc. The develop-

ment firm bought the property early this year and offered it for sale to the Preservation Society or any individual willing to restore the building. According to available records, it was built in 1840 by



William Algernon Alston of Rose Hill Plantation, Waccamaw, a prominent Georgetown planter. The west end of the structure is believed to have been built around 1816. Several other portions of the

building were added later. In 1945 it was divided into five apartments after having remained vacant for many years. (Staff Photos by Swain.)

EP 11/5/1969