

THE ROBERT MURRAY HOUSE
42 South Battery
c. 1829
Home of Mr. and Mrs. Robert Johnson

1997

The first notice of this 3 story masonry house occurred in 1829 when it was listed in the will of Robert Murray. The building has been kept intact since that time with the exception of the kitchen annex. The attachment of this portion was built in 1880. The first deed to the property as "Mr. Mackenzie" lands in 1772 describes wooden structures.

ENTRANCE HALL

The mirrored window on the stair landing is a practical and decorative solution to hiding a neighboring building that is too close and too drab. The marbleizing risers on the stairway also serve a 2-fold purpose, an interesting ornamental detail as well as disguising the scuff marks of an active family.

Demi-lune side table, with carved apron

SITTING ROOM

South Battery looked directly across the mud flats to the Ashley River before the 1909 landfill. The busy maritime traffic associated with William Gibbes wharf during the first part of the 19th century took place just west of this property. Further research may indicate an additional use for this property other than a family residence. The long windows and change of wainscotting height indicate possible interior alterations.

The handsomely paneled chimney wall in the Georgian style may very well date from the original construction of the house. However, the ceiling cornice was added by the current owner. The furnishings are a selection of period pieces from family and others acquired by the owners.

Double chest, very popular in Charleston, many built by
Charleston furniture makers

Settee and matching arm chairs, with inlay of light wood and
mother of pearl, from owners' family

Chest of drawers, Federal style

Spindle back side chairs, Gothic design allusion, date from
Victorian age, belonged to great grandmother

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DINING ROOM

The niche was built using an outside window space and the ceiling moldings were added in this century. The wallpaper came from the collections of Historic Charleston Reproductions (corner of King and Broad Streets). This arm of the Foundation receives royalties from purchases and these monies help further preservation work.

Sideboard, bought in Charleston, many years ago at auction.

Recent cleaning after Hurricane Hugo revealed a label in the left top drawer which reads, "This piece of furniture was used at the coronation ceremony at Westminster Abbey 9th August 1902."

Engraving, Audubon's wild turkey, above sideboard. This came from an early folio done by Havell in England in 1836. Audubon had close ties with Charleston. He visited here often and formed long lasting friendships in our community.

Oriental chest, Korean

Dining table, period reproduction, custom made by a local craftsman a few years ago. It can be extended to seat 22 and Mrs. Johnson enjoys being able to seat her entire family.

KITCHEN

Hurricane Hugo brought in 4 feet of water so this room along with the entire first floor required a good deal of work. The ceiling design is handpainted, taking the colors from the dining room wall paper. Colorful masks lend a decorative air to this high tech work space.

EXIT by rear door to garden.

GARDEN

The garden was originally designed by Loutrel Briggs, the foremost Charleston garden architect who worked in the mid-20th century.

A new reflecting pool has recently been completed. Notice the focal point of the pool: a copper statue by Jim Palmer, Jr. called "Carolina Ivy". He included a poem in the sculpture itself.

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As the visitor enters the driveway gate there is a botanical feast in view immediately. Flowering planted pots and a joggling board line the piazza. The driveway is composed of brick and crab orchard stone and its west side is lined with a mass of varied trees and shrubs which mask the length of the house next door. Trees: Leland cypress, Mary Nell holly, magnolia bay and underplanted with azaleas, holly fern, aspidistra and others.

The cypress and holly trees were planted after the 1989 hurricane as much smaller specimens, only about as tall as the horizontal pipe that is attached to the neighboring house. Careful attention and heavy fertilizing have created this fine stand.

An herb garden is composed of a diamond of cesserium (like variegated boxwood) with rosemary in the middle, silver germanders in the corners and strawberry plants about. Two extraordinary crepe myrtle trees stand on either side of the walkway with a healthy stand of bamboo on the opposite side of the driveway.

To the right is the grandchildren's play area, and the little hedge alongside keeps them out of the flower bed.

The garden proper is encircled with a gracefully curved, brick-edged perennial bed. A lush "greensward" fills the center.

The new reflecting pond has been placed at the rear wall underneath the rose arbor. Notice the lovely statue, a group of pelicans in flight, which has a very special meaning for the family. It was done by Bachman Smith IV, a 24-year-old graduate of the University of the South at Sewanee where he was an art major. He and the owner's son have been lifelong friends. A garden piece by Bachman Smith was commissioned by the owner a few years ago. But it was not fulfilled until recently when Bachman created this metal sculpture as his senior project which earned first prize. He designed it in memory of a mutual friend who was tragically killed, so the pelicans will be treasured for many reasons.

Note the scattered pieces of garden statuary and the large clumps of aspidistra that are used so effectively as underplanting and accented areas. The trunks of the pair of very tall palm trees are encircled with honeysuckle vines. The rear wall arches are covered with "potato vine," solenum. A fine collection of camellias and azaleas are placed in the beds along with a wide assortment of perennial and bedding plants. The tall, narrow tree on the west is a Will Flemming holly and near it is a Gordonia. Itea and wild honeysuckle are included.

Many trees in this garden and the neighboring ones were lost in the hurricane and the growing patterns of many shrubs and plants have not yet recovered. New ranges of sunlight and shade effect garden surprises each season.

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