

THE FARMERS' AND EXCHANGE BANK
c. 1853 - 1854
141 East Bay Street

The Farmers' and Exchange Bank was designed by Francis D. Lee, one of the city's renowned eclectic architects. He uses the unpointed horseshoe arch, reminiscent of the Mosque at Cordova.

The interior detail was even more lavish and exotic than the exterior. Some of this is now lost to sight. In order to utilize the building practically it was necessary to make two stories of the lofty bank lobby with its exaggeration of decoration. As much as possible the interior embellishments have been retained--the remainder is carefully "stored" in situ within new interior walls.

With its unusual Moorish design this building has long been recognized as of utmost importance to Charleston and to American architecture. It has been described, somewhat facetiously, as "Hindu Gothic". This would imply that Lee drew his inspiration from such English manifestations of the Mogul style as Sezincote in Gloucestershire and the Brighton Pavillion both derived from Daniel's Oriental Scenery. However, the character of this bank is not derived from India but from the opposite end of the Moslem spectrum, Spain of the Moorish occupation. This exotic and romantic world had been popularized in this country by Washington Irvin's The Alhambra. A revised edition of this book with illustrations by Felix O.C. Darley was published by George P. Putnam, New York in 1851. It is much more likely that this work was accessible to Lee than any of the English adventures in "Hindu Gothic".

In 1969 request was filed for a permit to demolish it. As crisis stage was approaching Senator Ernest F. Hollings stepped forward and purchased the building for his law firm. The very considerable restoration was carried out by the architectural firm of Lucas and Stubbs Associates.

A.S.