

# Preservation PROGRESS

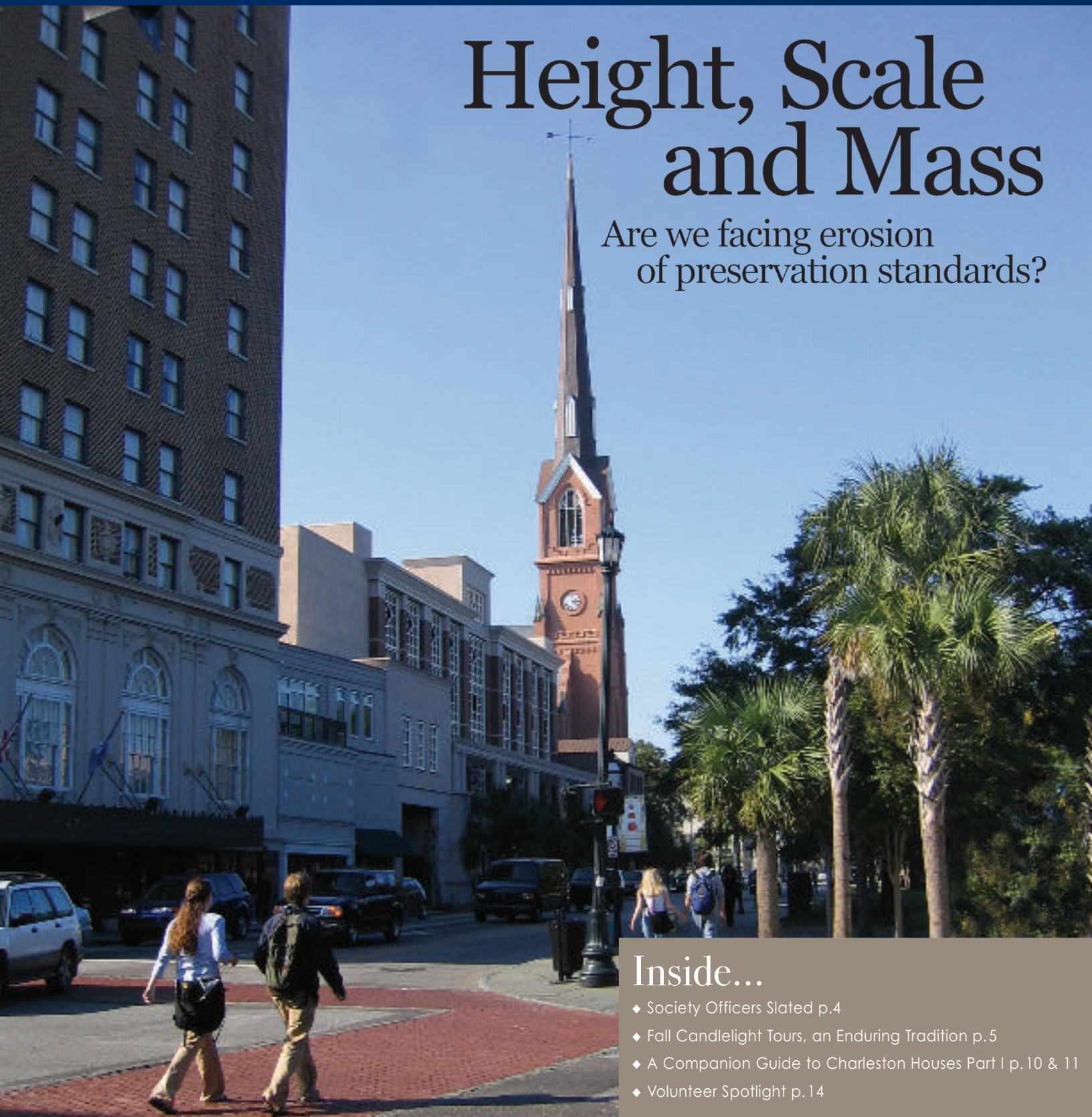
FOR THE PRESERVATION SOCIETY OF CHARLESTON



Fall/Winter 2005 • Volume 49 • No. 2

## Height, Scale and Mass

Are we facing erosion  
of preservation standards?



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*P r e s e r v i n g   t h e   P a s t   f o r   t h e   F u t u r e*



Glenn F. Keyes

## LETTER FROM THE PRESIDENT

As usual, things are busy at the Society. We've just completed another successful year of our Candlelight Tours of Homes and Gardens. Under the supervision of our very capable staff member Ginger Scully and board member Jane Locke, we have, once again, raised a significant amount of our annual income that supports our year-round preservation efforts. The six weeks of the tours requires a tremendous effort on behalf of many, many people. Our staff, led by Cynthia Jenkins, put in countless numbers of hours to make the event successful. In addition, it takes some 600 volunteers to serve as guides and a dedicated Tour Committee that works year-round to make it all happen. And, last but certainly not least, we have almost 200 very generous homeowners who open their houses for us. We feel very fortunate to have exceeded our 2005 tour budget and last year's ticket sales, especially in a year when visitors saw gas prices double. Thanks to all of you who contributed to the success of our 29th annual tour.

Cynthia, Robert Gurley and our Planning & Zoning Committee chaired by Caroline Poston have been active as our representatives in addressing the heavy development pressures on our fragile Historic District. We are seeing more and more large projects that have a huge impact on the traffic, scale and livability of our historic city.

There are currently 16 projects in different stages of planning and development within 7 blocks of Calhoun Street, from Concord Street on the east to Coming Street on the west. Some of the projects involve the College of Charleston and many are private developments. Most of these very large building projects will create a very different streetscape from the 18th and 19th century historic structures that dominate the peninsula and rarely exceed four stories.

Two of the projects front Marion Square and are proposed to be eight stories and will have a significant impact on the Old Citadel and St. Matthews Lutheran Church, both Category 2 buildings. If you travel in this area regularly, you know the traffic is already difficult and at times seems to be approaching gridlock. The cumulative effect of all these new projects will not only reduce the livability of our city but threatens the integrity of the city's historic and architectural character. Because of this, the Society believes that the City should conduct a comprehensive traffic study to evaluate the impact of all of these new projects and to address the issues before any more projects are approved.

Typically, the City requires a traffic study for an individual project, but these do not take into account any projects "not already on the ground." In other words no new project will address the impact that an adjacent proposed project will have on the overall traffic. Some rapidly developing South Carolina cities have individual developers contribute to a traffic study fund to access the impact of all proposed development on the surrounding neighborhood and the city in general.

The City of Charleston last prepared a traffic plan for the peninsula in 2001 while the city's comprehensive plan, Charleston 2000, is also five years old. The Traffic Plan will not be addressed until some time in 2006, or later. A lot has happened in Charleston in the last five years and the pressures are only mounting. We must carefully plan for, and control, the rapid development occurring along this vital corridor of the peninsula. Maintaining the characteristics and historic integrity of our National Register historic districts is critical for Charleston's continuing recognition as one of America's great 18th and 19th century cities.

As we come to the close of another calendar year, I want to thank you for another great year at the Society. In this issue you will find the proposed slate for our 2006 Board of Directors. Dr. Jane Tyler and her Nominating Committee have put together a great slate of committed preservationists. My thanks to those board members who are completing their term of service. Your work and support has made the Society stronger than ever.

Thank you all for the opportunity to have served as your President for these past two years. There is still much to be done. I hope each of you will stay involved and invite others to help the Society as we advocate for Charleston to be the best it can be.

Glenn F. Keyes  
President



## 2005 Board of Directors &amp; Advisors

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*The Preservation Society of Charleston was founded in 1920 with its purpose being to cultivate and encourage interest in the preservation of buildings, sites and structures of historical or aesthetic significance and to take whatever steps may be necessary and feasible to prevent the destruction or defacement of any such building, site or structure, such purposes being solely eleemosynary and not for profit.*

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# Johns Island's Legendary Fenwick Hall Heard History, "Jazz and Juleps" in May



Guests line up to hear a background history of Fenwick Hall Plantation before touring the house.

On May 7, 2005 two hundred friends and supporters of the Preservation Society of Charleston gathered at the privately owned Fenwick Hall Plantation on Johns Island for a fundraiser that benefited the Society's mission and programs. The Jazz and Juleps themed lawn party included tours of the 18th century plantation house now in the early stages of a multi-year research project and renovation. Guests heard delightful jazz performances by Ann Caldwell and Peggy Lewis, and there was a balloon pop for prizes donated by several local businesses.



Bob and Lynn Hanlin won the balloon pop Grand Prize of a night's stay at The Sanctuary on Kiawah Island.

## The Society's Spring "Journey to Mt. Vernon" Featured "behind the scenes" Tours and Insights

This past April, twenty-six members and friends of the Preservation Society joined Executive Director Cynthia Jenkins, Special Events Chair, Susan Dickson and Tour Consultant Liz Tucker on a three-day Journey to Mount Vernon. The group which gathered in Virginia was a wonderful mix of Society members from Charleston and from across the country as well. Some of the highlights of the trip included: a wreath laying ceremony at President Washington's tomb, a private tour and cocktails with Mt. Vernon's Executive Director Jim Rees, a "behind the scenes preservation tour" of Kenmore Estate in Fredericksburg, and a tour of privately owned Oak Hill Farm (James Monroe's former estate) given by the present homeowners. The trip was a monumental success and was thoroughly enjoyed by all!



Dr. Biemann Othersen and Leilani DeMuth pause at President Washington's tomb.



Jim Rees leads the group on a tour of Mt. Vernon's beautifully landscaped grounds.

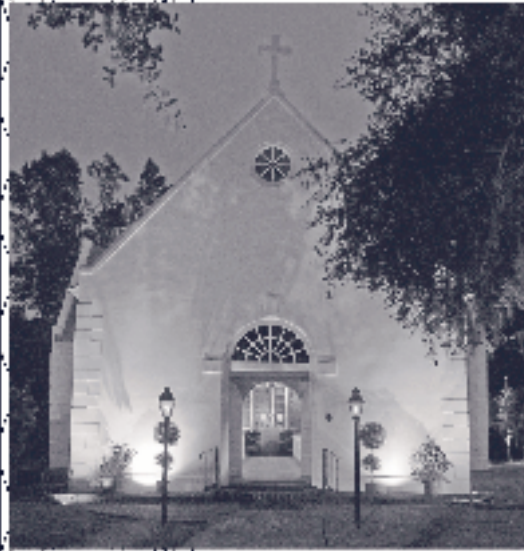


Oak Hill Farm's owner, Tom DeLashmutt greets tour guests.



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## Society Officers Slated for the Coming Year

The Nominating Committee presents the following names to serve as the Society's officers and standing committee chairs for 2006. The election will be at the Society's January 19th meeting (Carolopolis Awards) held in the Riviera Theatre, 227 King Street, at 7:00 p.m.

### 2006 Executive Committee Nominees

President - **Mr. Steven Craig**  
First Vice President (Planned Giving)-  
**Mr. Robert Prioleau, Sr.**  
Second Vice President (Property) -  
**Ms. Lois Lane**  
Treasurer - **Mr. Derrick DeMay**  
Recording Secretary - **Mrs. Shay Evans**  
Immediate Past-President -  
**Mr. Glenn F. Keyes**

### Advisors

Mr. Wilson Fullbright  
Mr. Norman Haft  
Mrs. Jane Thornhill  
Mrs. Elizabeth Young

### 2006 Board of Directors Nominees

Planning & Zoning -  
**Mrs. Caroline Poston**  
Fall Tours - **Mr. Kevin Eberle**  
Publications - **Mr. Will Cook**  
Membership - **Mrs. Jane Locke**  
Book/Gift shop - **Mrs. Diane McCall**  
Special Events - **Mrs. Susan G. Dickson**  
Markers & Awards - **Mr. Jim Wigley**  
At Large - **Mr. Fleetwood Hassell**  
**Mr. Steven Dopp • Ms. Sally Smith**  
**Mrs. Sarah Horton • Mrs. Connie Wyrick**

### Going Off the Board

Immediate Past-President -  
**Dr. Jane Tyler**  
Second VP - **Mr. Trenholm Walker**  
Secretary - **Mrs. Janelle Othersen**  
Markers & Awards -  
**Mr. Harrington Bissell, Jr.**

## FOR HOMES THAT MADE HISTORY...Thank you.

From the Battery to the Beaches, to the Old Village of Mount Pleasant, the perseverance and passion of the Preservation Society of Charleston are what keep our city alive and vibrant while insuring the history of our city and its buildings are kept intact. We, at Daniel Ravenel Real Estate, support the Preservation Society and highly commend them on their hard work and success in honoring the Lowcountry's material and cultural heritage. We thank you for helping Charleston, our great city, continue to be one of the most historical and preserved cities in the United States.



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## 29TH ANNUAL FALL CANDLELIGHT TOURS: A NEW LOOK AT AN ENDURING TRADITION

After the 2005 Fall Candlelight Tours of Homes and Gardens drew to a close, *Preservation Progress* looked back at the history of these popular tours and offers a new perspective on the role such tours may play in the society's future.

The tradition of giving house tours in Charleston to benefit preservation efforts actually dates back to the 1930s. Many of the Society's founders were instrumental in organizing these first efforts which borrowed heavily from the tours being given of "the Natchez Trace" in Mississippi. However, the concept of the Preservation Society hosting candlelight tours in Charleston on an annual basis didn't come along until the mid-1970s.



Senior Guide Joe Johnson shepherds tour guests through the 1885 Charles H. Drayton House as dusk falls along The Battery.

In 1976, in response to requests from city officials and tourist industry representatives, the Preservation Society of Charleston launched the first series of Fall Candlelight Tours to commemorate the Bicentennial and to benefit the Society's ongoing preservation efforts. Since that time, the Society's fall tours have become an important standing date on the calendar of preservationists all over America and they have been a significant contributor to the growth of Charleston's economy. The Society continues to owe debts of gratitude to past presidents Jane Thornhill and Liz Young, Society staff, and scores of volunteers who, early on, set high standards for the tours.

Helga Vogel, longtime Society volunteer and former staff member was organizer of countless tours. She vividly recalls the annual quest for tour volunteers and the nearly year-long process of recruiting interesting Charleston homes and gardens to present to the public.

"The 1976 Fall Tours started small," she remembers, "There were only six evenings to plan with some 50 houses and gardens. Still, that seemed an awesome task. We started looking for homes and gardens many months in advance of the tours."

This year, our Twenty-Ninth Annual Fall Candlelight Tours of Homes and Gardens still honored this proud tradition, but the tours have grown exponentially. The 2005 tour season, under the direction of Ginger Scully, Director of Tours and Special Programs, featured nineteen days of tours with over 175 properties.

According to the society's Executive Director Cynthia Jenkins, "This is an amazing organizational feat that could not be accomplished year after year without an inspired staff, the generosity of many historic house and garden owners, plus a host of dedicated volunteers. We're very grateful."

Today's tours continue to be the Society's primary annual fund-raising project. As *Preservation Progress* reported in January 1977, annual receipts from the 1976 tours roughly exceeded \$8,000. The 1980 tours netted \$23,000. Annual receipts now total nearly \$300,000. Preliminary figures for the 2005 tours indicate another major leap forward in tour revenues in testimony to their growth and success.

Although the Society will continue its tradition of fall tours to promote historic preservation awareness and to benefit its preservation programs, Executive Director Cynthia Jenkins views the role tours will play in the Society's future as changing in the years to come. "As we continue to grow our endowment and membership base," she predicts, "we will hopefully be able to rely less on the fall tours as a primary revenue source and be able to pursue alternate directions for preservation advocacy." ■

## HOW DO REVENUES OF OUR FALL TOURS TRICKLE DOWN INTO THE PRESERVATION ETHIC THROUGHOUT AMERICA?

The Society's Fall Candlelight Tours provide us with the opportunity to use Charleston's historic neighborhoods and restored structures as a "historic preservation classroom." Charleston's national recognition as a pioneer in saving and restoring its heritage of outstanding 18th and 19th century architecture brings preservationists and interested citizens from other parts of the country to our city every year. They come to learn from and be inspired by our long struggle to preserve one of America's most important Colonial cities.

Today, the city itself exhibits how neglected, derelict parts of any community can be made not only livable, but be economically viable as well. As a result, the American Preservation movement has followed much of the same path Charleston has trod in its preservation efforts over the past eight decades. Shining examples are all around us; our initial effort in the 1920's to save a single outstanding example of architecture from demolition (the Joseph Manigault House), the adoption of the first Historic District Zoning Ordinance in 1931, the restoration of the Ansonborough neighborhood in the 1950s and 60s, and in the 1970's the revitalization of the King Street business district. Along the way Charleston fought hundreds of potential projects that would have destroyed its historic and architectural character.

Cynthia Jenkins recalls two favorite victories, "One ridiculous but true proposal was for the James Island Connector to join the peninsula at the foot of Broad Street. The Society vehemently argued against that idea and won. Also, developers considered building the round Holiday Inn on Meeting Street just south of St. Michael's Church. That's difficult to even imagine — but it's true."

"Fall Tour revenues together with membership dues provide the Preservation Society with much needed funds to continue our most important role; that of preservation advocacy," Cynthia Jenkins concludes. "And each year, the successful results of our advocacy reach far beyond the boundaries of the Ashley and Cooper rivers into to the historic built environments of our whole nation." ■





# THE PASSING SAGA OF MARION SQUARE

As controversy surrounds the many planned changes for the streetscape surrounding Marion Square, it might be illuminating to take a look back at the site as it was in days of yore. In fact, early views of the square looking north, south, east and west reveal a far more pastoral setting than even the 1940-era view (right).

It's worth remembering that Marion Square was originally developed as a muster ground for the State Arsenal (designed by Frederick Wesner and erected in the wake of the Denmark Vesey slave insurrection plot of 1822). The arsenal became the South Carolina Military College in 1843. The Old Citadel, as it is now called, eventually extended the full length of northern side of Marion Square. The original building endured many additions and alterations before the school was relocated to Hampton Park in 1922.



Photo courtesy: Historic Charleston Foundation.



*Seated left to right:*

Bev Seinsheimer  
Sharon Kucharski  
Charles Sullivan

*Standing left to right:*

Thomas Bennett  
Jane S. Smith  
Richard Halsey  
Lynn Hanlin  
Alton G. Brown III  
Melinda Laurens  
Judy Tarleton  
Laurie Tarleton Moore  
Olin Chamberlain

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## ◀ LOOKING NORTH

This undated northern view, possibly taken during the late 19th century after an addition of a fourth floor to the central quadrangle, includes a glimpse of the west wing which is where the Charleston County Library was built in 1960.  
**Photo: courtesy of South Caroliniana Library Archives.**

## LOOKING SOUTH ▶

Then, as now, civilians of all ages enjoyed watching cadets from The Citadel drill on the parade grounds (here, still on Marion Square). Note the much lower pedestal for the monument to John C. Calhoun (erected in 1887) and how the southern streetscape is still dominated by private residences of two, three and four stories in height.

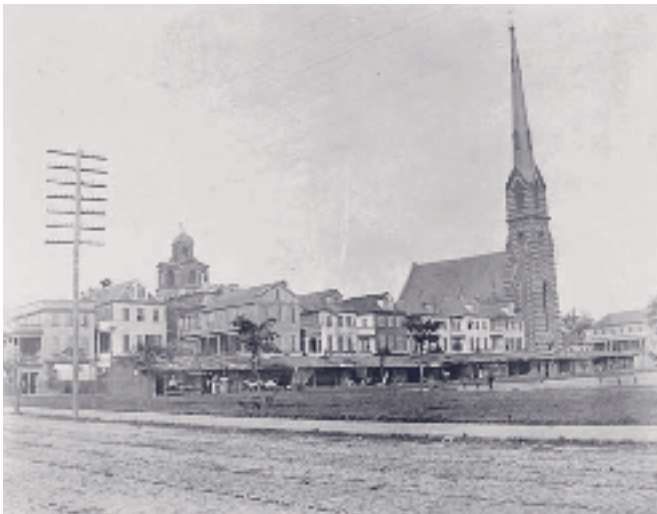
**Photo: courtesy Historic Charleston Foundation.**



## LOOKING EAST ▶

Here, in a much later photo, the monument to Calhoun has been “elevated” to new heights (in 1896). Still dominating the square are the foreshortened church steeples of the 1875 Citadel Square Baptist Church — the original toppled by a hurricane in 1885 — and the never-completed spire of Second Presbyterian Church, built in 1811. In the distant background rise the jaunty spans of the original Cooper River Bridge.

**Photo: courtesy Historic Charleston Foundation.**



## ◀ LOOKING WEST

This view was taken in 1886 - shortly after the Great Earthquake on the night of August 31st of that year. Still in evidence are some of the temporary sheds that were thrown up as shelters for thousands of city residents still fearful of returning to their unstable homes by night. Aftershocks continued to be felt in the city for weeks after “the great shake.” What the photograph also captures, however, is the overall residential scale of the buildings surrounding the old Charleston Orphan House (razed ca: 1954) and the 1872 “German Lutheran Church” with its bold polychrome coloration.  
**Photo: courtesy of the South Caroliniana Library Archives.**

## Helpful Answers to A Preservation Q & A:

**Q.** We sometimes overhear carriage drivers talk about Charleston's "Holy City" Height Ordinance—that no building can be built higher than Charleston's tallest church steeple. Is that just an urban myth? If not, then, what does our height ordinance actually say?

**A.** Sometimes it's difficult to separate what is a tradition from what is fact. According to City Ordinance, the allowable height for new construction actually varies throughout the city depending on the zoning designation of any particular parcel of property. That's true for areas zoned for commercial use as well as in a residential zone district.

But the basic issue in contention is more complicated than simply a matter of height. The mass of a building, even if it is technically lower than a neighboring church steeple can unhappily compete with the slender mass of that historic steeple and become completely overwhelming. That's why preservationists are continually discussing the interrelated subjects of height, mass and scale.

**Q.** What are some of the city's obvious height exceptions we often hear referred to as "anomalies?"

**A.** The Peoples Building (on Broad Street), Ft. Sumter House (at the Battery), and the Francis Marion Hotel and the Mendel Rivers Building (on Meeting Street) are a few of the historic anomalies that are often cited. On the other hand, anomalies aren't all bad. They can add variety to the streetscape and some (but not all) have valuable historic and/or architectural integrity all their own. Anomalies can, in fact, enhance a streetscape—as long as they remain the exception and not become the rule. Clearly, anomalies are inappropriate yardsticks for measuring future development in historic districts.

**Q.** As Preservationists, what can ordinary citizens do to keep proposed anomalies from becoming the norm?

**A.** There are a number of ways you can help. Write or call members of City Council and constructively speak your mind. Address members of the Board of Architectural Review, as well. Contact the Mayor. Attend BAR meetings (posted on the City of Charleston's website), and watch for Preservation Alerts sent out from your Preservation Society requesting more specific action.

# Height, Scale and Mass

## Preservation Progress asks: Are we facing

The steeple of St. Matthew's Church and the Calhoun Monument.



It is insidious — like the fig vine that creeps seductively (and attractively) up the wall of a typical Charleston garden. Then, suddenly, almost overnight the wall's very structure is obliterated, completely covered in a green tangle of leaves, its basic contours and fundamental lines muted and camouflaged beyond recognition. Charleston gardeners know this object lesson all too well.

So it is with the guardianship of Charleston's architectural heritage. With every height variance granted for new construction, every zoning change, every new building designed to accommodate the ever-growing number of people who visit here or move to Charleston permanently — the erosion occurs.

Height, scale and mass may not be concepts most Charlestonians deal with on a daily basis. But these are some of the basic tools by which we, as preservationist, defend the architectural legacy handed to us by our founders.

In a letter Susan Pringle Frost wrote to William Sumner Appleton, founder of the Society for the Preservation of New England Antiquities (now archived in Boston, Mass) she said, "In this commercial day and generation it takes lots of courage and nerve to make headway on the preservation of these splendid old homes; the financial end of the game makes so much stronger appeal to the vast majority than the sentimental end and it is uphill work." The date was June 30, 1920.

"In Miss Sue's day," said Preservation Society Executive Director Cynthia Jenkins, "the battles were to save historic buildings from neglect and demolition. Although these issues are still a concern, other Preservation issues — even more difficult — face us today. Some of the definitions are abstract to many of us. For example, one issue is keeping the scale of an enormously successful historic district from being overwhelmed. By inappropriate new constructions there's terrific pressure to build taller, out-of-scale buildings, accommodate more and heavier traffic, find housing for a growing college, and welcome evermore visitors. Today's Charleston is victimized by its own architectural, cultural, and visual success. As a result, it is rapidly losing its special sense of place."

The Society is concerned that the former Charleston County Library site ( 404 King Street) and the west side of King Street from Vanderhorst Street to Calhoun were exempted from the ordinance reducing the "3X" area to a height limit of 55 feet. As it is now written, buildings in the "3X" area are allowed to be three times as tall as the distance from the center line of the street to the edge of the building (90 feet and maybe taller). Leaving this zoning intact would allow the now-empty former Charleston County Library to be replaced with a 186-room hotel estimated to be eight stories in height.

City planners and developers routinely use the anomalies of the Francis Marion Hotel and the spire of Saint Matthews Lutheran Church as justification for supporting tall buildings —



Traffic congestion at King and Calhoun Streets



# Mass In the Holy City

## g an erosion of our preservation standards?

ignoring factors such as building mass and (the 1922 hotel's predating the height ordinance) in the discussion. In addition, the Society cannot justify the height limit for the area south of Spring Street and north of Woolfe Street to remain at 100 feet. It should be reduced to 80 feet for the same reasons of height consistency.

Another uphill push concerns new construction. The Society opposed a rezoning from General business (GB) to Urban Commercial (UC) that would allow replacing the building housing Millennium Music and other shops with a multi-story condominium with 52 residential units and an office complex of unspecified size reaching a height of possibly eight stories! This area includes 366, 368, 3701/2, 372 King Street and 24, 26, and 28 Burns Lane. The proposal would allow the residential density to increase from 23 units per acre to 43 — without any specific information on the height, scale and mass of the project. And, no traffic study has been made to discern the impact of this change on the already stressed traffic patterns of King Street, Calhoun Street, and Burns Lane. In fact, the Society requested at both the City Planning Commission and City Council this proposal for rezoning be deferred until a comprehensive traffic impact study can be conducted and made available for public review.

"No tiny bit of this beauty in any remote section of our city is too insignificant, or too unimportant in its integral part of the whole setting, to be worth saving," wrote Society founder Miss Sue Frost in a *News and Courier* letter to the editor dated March 9, 1928.

Height, scale and mass provide the basic framework to evaluate the appropriateness of proposed new construction within the boundaries of the historic district. This framework along with the criteria for evaluating buildings, districts, sites and objects on the National Register for Historic Places, the Secretary of the Interiors Standards for Rehabilitation, plus plain common sense provide the everyday tools used in preservation advocacy today. While the Preservation Society of Charleston tilts at the economic windmills of change in the 21st century, perhaps now is a good time to review the standards we set down for ourselves only a few decades ago. ■

### What We Believed in 1974

The City of Charleston approved "The Historic Preservation Plan" in 1974. These are a few of its tenets:

■ "Charleston's heritage of other nonresidential structures is extraordinary.... A vital part of the total city scene — and not to be rudely tampered with — is the skyline, which is punctuated with the beautiful steeples of historic churches. They contribute immeasurably to the general harmony of building heights, which is only occasionally spoiled by modern intrusions." - Pg. 12.

■ "To the north, Marion Square takes up a full city block at the intersection of two of the most heavily traveled streets in the city. More open than White Point Gardens, the square offers a variety of visual experiences. Because of the intensive development of surrounding properties, Marion Square provides a welcome relief from the congestion of the city." - Pg. 13.

## Sixteen Major Projects That Threaten the Downtown Historic District

The following projects that have been either completed, approved, or proposed involve a concentrated area from the South Carolina Aquarium to Coming Street (approximately 7 blocks), and does not include the hospital district at the west end of Calhoun Street.

1. Ansonborough Fields — Possibility of two 50-room hotels
2. 300 Concord Street — 30 new condominiums adjacent to Laurens Place.
3. 33 Calhoun Street — another condominium project with 32 units.
4. 100 Calhoun Street — a new office complex just completed.
5. 11 & 13 George Street — Clemson Architectural Center—encompassing 22,000+ sq. ft.
6. 21 George Street —YMCA Property - at George and Society Street with +/- 71 condominium units.
7. College of Charleston Basketball Arena — at Meeting Street between George Street and Burns Lane
8. Holiday Inn Historic District — at the southeast corner of Calhoun and King Streets proposed to add 37 additional guest rooms and undetermined convention and meeting space along Meeting Street.
9. Millennium Music —at the southeast corner of Calhoun and King Streets is under consideration as a possible eight story building that will include two floors of retail, parking and fifty-three residential units.
10. 404 King Street — Old Charleston County Library Site — on Marion Square. A "full-service" hotel proposed by Bennett & Hofford.
11. 54 St. Philip Street — addition to the Simons Art Center — at the southeast corner of Calhoun and St. Philips.
12. New College of Charleston Science Building — at the northwest corner of Coming and Calhoun Streets.
13. 24 St. Philip Street — New Parking Garage, Cafeteria, Dormitory, Apartment and Retail Space at George and St. Philip Streets with 400 dormitory beds and 18,000 sq. ft. of retail space, and parking for 580 cars.
14. 340 Meeting Street — Rivers Federal Building Site.
15. 80 St Philip Street College of Charleston dormitory, recently completed.
16. 81 St. Philip Street — Parking garage, recently completed.



# A COMPANION GUIDE TO CHARLESTON HOUSE TYPES

by Gene Waddell

Editor's Note: Distinguished historian, author and long-time friend of the Preservation Society, Gene Waddell has been a frequent contributor to *Preservation Progress*. His first essay on *The Charleston Single House* appeared in 1977. In 1983 his analysis of *Greece and Rome in Charleston* was a fascinating look at the city's classical influences. In Part I of this comprehensive review of the Holy City's domestic architecture, he discusses Charleston's standard architectural forms — as a primer for residents, visitors, and a whole new generation of dedicated preservationists. His latest publication is the two-volume *Charleston Architecture 1670-1860* (Wyrick & Company), available at the Preservation Society Bookstore.

## HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

The essential characteristics of Charleston houses are easily taken for granted until you compare Charleston with any other city. When you compare Charleston to Savannah, for example, the typical house is a row house that resembles row houses in London, New York, Baltimore, and elsewhere. Although Charleston has very few row houses today, the row house was characteristic of Charleston prior to 1740. Even though the typical urban house in Charleston is now “detached”—that is separated out from a row—there are important similarities between the Charleston house and row houses generally: whether it is part of a row or separate, the most prevalent Charleston house—in keeping with the English style—is multi-storied and designed for single-family residence. The typical English and American house was occupied by a single family. By contrast, the typical French house of the same period would have accommodated a different family living on each floor.

When you compare Charleston to the oldest parts of New Orleans, the differences are striking. New Orleans has many houses with courtyards, whereas Charleston has almost no houses with courtyards. The French and Spanish settlers of New Orleans based the plans of their houses primarily on the Greco-Roman tradition of the courtyard house. Most houses in ancient Greek and Roman towns and many Roman villas had courtyards. Where Roman influence was strongest—particularly in Spain—the courtyard house continued to be built and eventually reached Spanish colonies. The courtyard form was conducive to the development of apartment arrangements favored by ancient Romans.

## CHARLESTON'S EARLY ROWHOUSES

Charleston was the only English city in North America that had city walls. Quebec had walls, but it was French. New Amsterdam or New York had walls and still has Wall Street, but it was Dutch, and it soon outgrew its walls. Charleston was a walled city from 1680, when it moved to its present location, until 1717, after the Yemassee War made it safe to remove the palisade around the land side of the city. This was a crucial period in Charleston's architectural development, as land available for building during this period prior to the wall's removal was very limited.

When Charles Town moved from Albemarle Point to Oyster Point, the lots were initially large—averaging about a half-acre each—but because most settlers preferred waterfront lots, existing acreage was quickly subdivided. By 1711, when the earliest map was made that shows houses, much of the walled area was occupied by continuous rows of houses. As with row houses elsewhere, they were built flush with the sidewalk and occupied the full width of the front of the lot. This arrangement maximized access to public roads and waterways.

One of the row of houses that shows on the c. 1710 map by Edward Crisp was Sindrey Row, which was built by William Rhett from 1709-1711, using funds from the estate of Elizabeth Sindrey. The records for constructing this row of five houses survived in the estate records, and consequently we know a great deal about it even though the houses themselves burned in the 1778 fire. The row shows in the 1739 view of Charleston and also in the 1774 view of the city.

The Crisp map and several later maps that show the locations of individual houses indicate that row houses were constructed throughout the 18th Century. These houses closely resembled row houses that were being built at the same time in London. Legislative acts of 1713 and 1717 encouraged the construction of row houses by stipulating that a builder leave “toothing,” which is an irregular edge



Rainbow Row, early 20th century from the Preservation Society's photo archives.

left at the corner of a brick house so that later houses could tie into it. The builder of a new house next door was required by law to reimburse the original owner for half the cost of the wall shared by both houses. This law is yet another indication of the prevalence of row houses relatively soon after Charleston was settled and of an early preference for this type of house.

Judging by the position of the chimneys and doors of Sindrey Row, each house had a stairhall that ran along one side, and the stairhall served as a circulation space from the front of the house to the back, from downstairs to upstairs, and for access to a shop on the front of the house. It was still usual for people to live above their shops or to rent out space in their house for a shop, and this had been customary in Roman, Medieval, and Renaissance cities.

Soon after the great fire of 1740 in Charleston, Othniel Beale built a row of four houses in what is now called Rainbow Row (on present day East Bay), and he placed open arcaded passages from the street through to the backyard of each house or pair of houses. His reasons for putting open passages through the ground floor of his row of house were to provide direct access for residents of the house to a private entrance and direct access for slaves to their quarters in the backyard. A shop on the ground floor at the front of each house had a separate entrance on the street. These houses do not have a central hall, and there was no easy way to provide adequate light for a central hall of a house with common walls on both sides. Since the usual place for a side hall was taken over by the arcade, the stairs were placed in the back room of the house. Ordinarily in early London row houses, the chimney was located in between the front room and back room so that its stack could be used for both rooms, but in these Charleston examples the chimneys were usually located in the common walls.

Some row houses constructed late in the 18th Century or early in the 19th Century consist of individual houses with the Single House plan, but common walls and archways through from the street to the yard. The best surviving example is the Post-Revolutionary row of four houses at 22-28 Queen Street (Johnston's Row). At each end of a row, the last house was attached on only one of its sides, and the other three sides could be used for windows.

The next stage in the development of the typical Charleston house was to have a short row of houses that consisted of only two houses—a semi-detached pair of houses sharing one common wall. This enabled every room in both houses to have direct light and ventilation from two sides, and it enabled a central stair hall to have front windows on each floor. Placing the stair hall in the center meant that a central chimney could not serve the front and back room; each room had to have a separate chimney stack, and these stacks were placed against the fire wall on the property line. Some of the earliest Single Houses are thus semi-detached pairs of houses, with plans that are reversed.

It was only one step further to entirely detach every house to provide light and air for three sides for every room, but the possibilities were not immediately taken



advantage of. The earliest Charleston Single Houses usually had a largely or entirely blank wall on the property line, and this wall served one of the main functions it had when similar houses were part of a row; it continued to be a firewall. When wooden piazzas began to be placed on the sides of houses in place of wooden porches that were formerly placed across the fronts, a firewall was needed to keep a fire from spreading from the burning piazza of one house. Initially, if there was a window on this wall, it was usually only a stair window.

Evidence that the Single House is a detached row house is indicated by its sitting on the sidewalk, by an often nearly windowless wall along one side of the lot, and by the projection of its chimneys into the rooms in the same position as for the chimneys of a house with common walls. That this arrangement developed in Charleston rather than elsewhere is indicated by its prevalence in Charleston alone and by its complete absence from the houses shown on the waterfront view of 1739. If this type of house had been brought from the Caribbean, it would have arrived earlier than 1739, and at least one example of it would have been built on the waterfront as the city expanded to the north.

## TYPES OF SINGLE HOUSES

A half century was required for the Single House to develop its full potential exclusively as a residence. About 100 single houses had commercial ground floors. About 1,000 examples of the exclusively residential Single House survive. The finest examples were constructed between about 1790 and 1810 during the Adam Period, most notably examples at 14 Legare Street and 20 Montagu Street.



16 Legare Street, the Amaranthia Elliott House.

In 1789, Amaranthia Elliott contracted to have a "Single House" built at 16 Legare Street, and the contract for this house survives. It lists all of the most important characteristics for the type. Two carpenters agreed to build a "dwelling house commonly called a single house three stories high . . . with two rooms on a floor and an entry leading to a staircase in or near the center... with two stacks of chimneys so as to allow one fire Place in each room . . . , also with a Piazza . . . round the south side and east end[.]". In addition, there was to be built "a good Kitchen and wash house . . . with a proper stack of brick chimneys in the centre . . . , the said building to be of sufficient height to admit of servants apartments above[.]".

Two important characteristics are not mentioned in the Elliott agreement, but both show on a plat made four years later for a similar Single House at 76 Meeting Street. The more important of these two characteristics is mentioned in a letter written in 1817, and it stated that "in the principal streets, as in all towns of crowded population, the buildings have an end to the street." As the writer noted, Charleston houses would look less different than those in other urban areas if they were side by side rather than widely separated. In other words, he recognized the similarity of the Single House to the row house. Single Houses were placed as far apart as possible by positioning them alternately on a property line at the front corner of a lot, thus creating the typical pattern of houses with gardens on the street.

Eventually, nine distinctly different types of Single Houses developed including the prototypical row house of the early 18th Century and one-storied versions

of the late 19th Century. The earliest fully detached Single House continued to have a business on their ground floor and a residence above.

From around 1740-1860, the design of the classic Single House varied greatly. Although early and late examples have nearly all of the same characteristics, the typical 18th Century Single House was three storied and had a hipped roof, and the typical 19th Century Single House was two storied and had a gabled roof. Both generally used the attic for bedrooms, adding a half-story of extra space. In both cases, the kitchen was in a separate building.

During the Antebellum period, one of the principal variants of the Single House had an attached kitchen. Instead of having two chimneys on the long wall on the property line, one chimney was placed in between the back of the house and the attached kitchen so that the same stack could serve both the back room and the kitchen. About 500 examples of this type survive.

Most of the residents of houses with attached kitchens probably did their own cooking rather than having one or more slaves to cook and wash, but except for the location of the kitchen, the plans of nearly all Charleston houses were substantially similar with the great majority of them built in wood for coolness, if not economy. The main differences architecturally were in scale and lavishness of decorative treatment.

After 1865, the one-storied version called the Freedman's Cottage was widely built in the northernmost parts of the city. These cottages were given the plan of a separate kitchen building (with a central chimney), but they have the same sitting as a Single House (at a front corner of the lot), and they usually have a piazza and a piazza door on the street. Approximately 400 examples of this type survive out of a total of approximately 2,400 examples for all nine types of Single Houses.

## PIAZZAS

The 1739 view of Charleston shows no piazzas along the side of any house, but it shows wooden balconies across the fronts of many houses. The word "piazza" was used in Charleston at least as early as 1700, when a legislative act was passed to permit the construction of piazzas over public sidewalks—that is, on the front of a house. This gave the residents of the house outdoor living space, and it shaded the sidewalk, provided protection from rain, and consequently was encouraged by law. The 1739 view indicates that many people took advantage of this law, but the placement of wooden balconies on the fronts of houses evidently facilitated the spread of fire, and after the great fire of 1740 destroyed the most valuable two-thirds of the town, front porches ceased abruptly to be built. Soon thereafter, similar wooden porches began to be built between fully detached houses. This new arrangement provided a private passage with similar functions. It was similar in form to the earlier front porches, but similar in function to the open archways that ran thorough rows of houses. Moving the porch from the front to the side of the house was made possible by continuing to place a long wall on the property line and leaving space on the opposite side for a yard or drive.

The word piazza has many meanings, and its meaning has often changed. Since the piazza is one of the principle characteristics of all types of Charleston houses, it is worth noting how the word came to be applied to the unique form of the Charleston piazza. The earliest known meaning of the word refers to a city square surrounded by buildings—the Italian piazza. As the Oxford English Dictionary indicates, the English architect Inigo Jones designed Covent Gardens in London as a square largely surrounded by row houses with arcaded ground floors. The English assumed that piazza referred to the arcade rather than to the square, and this is how arcades such as those of the Exchange Building in Charleston and the arcades on the side of Jefferson's Monticello came to be referred to as piazzas. The word in English refers to any kind of passage, and the arcaded passage through Beale Row and the front porches over Charleston sidewalks also fit this new definition and were also called piazzas. It was only when the porches along both the south and west sides Charleston houses became the predominant type of passage that the word piazza in Charleston came to be used exclusively to refer to an L-shaped structure that served as both a passage and a porch.

The piazza door has been aptly compared to a garden gate, and it is a vestige of the type of Single House that had a commercial entrance that required a private entrance to be located on the side. Most visitors are understandably baffled when they go through a piazza door and are still outside. This vestige of multiple uses and the unusual definition of the word piazza only make sense when all stages of the development of this uniquely Charleston porch are considered. ■

**Coming in Part II: Mr. Waddell discusses Double Houses, Twin Parlor Houses, Other House Plans, and Characteristics of Charleston Houses.**





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## Holiday Shoppers and Book Lovers Attend Book Signing Party Dec. 1st

Once again, the Preservation Society Annual Book Signing Party was a huge success, attracting a full house of holiday shoppers and book lovers to our 147 King Street store on the evening of Thursday, December 1st. Many of our best-known local authors were on hand to personally sign their latest books — for buyers who planned to give autographed copies as Christmas gifts or to enjoy owning them as treasured additions to their own libraries.

The Book Signing featured nearly forty distinguished Society member authors whose works encompass a wide variety of topics related to Charleston including historic preservation; architecture; social and cultural history; gardening and natural history; biography; art; culinary arts and history; children's literature and military history. The entire retail shop was fully stocked, as well, and ready for shoppers to find that "something special" for this year's Yuletide gift-giving. Light refreshments were served which added to this festive Society event and it was a great start to the holiday season.

*The Preservation Society wishes to thank  
the following restaurants for the delicious food  
served at the Annual Book Signing Party*

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## IN MEMORIUM

The Society was deeply saddened to learn of the passing of renowned electronics engineer Daniel Heyward Hamilton in Hyannis, MA, last June. He was 87. Hamilton was remembered here in a memorial service at the Huguenot Church for his key role in developing our nation's first air attack early warning system in the 1950s (called the DEW line). He had many close ties to Charleston and South Carolina and donations in his memory directed to the Preservation Society were greatly appreciated. Mr. Hamilton was always proud to say he was the nephew of Miss Susan Pringle Frost, founder of the Preservation Society. Mr. Hamilton will be missed by friends and family both here and all over the globe.



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# Volunteer Spotlight:



## Mrs. Angus "Mickey" Baker



At the young age of 92, Mickey Baker always has the time and energy to tell a story about Charleston. You might recognize Mrs. Baker as one of the city's most dedicated volunteers. Every spring and fall for the past twenty-five years she has volunteered her time guiding tours of some of Charleston's most beautiful homes and gardens. She is a wealth of information on Charleston's history, properties and its people. Mrs. Baker always enjoys the opportunity to meet visitors from around the country and the world who come to experience Charleston's beauty and charm.

Mrs. Baker was born in Georgia and moved to Charleston in 1935 when she took an administrative position at the old Navy Yard. As a newcomer to the city, she was inspired by the early work of the Preservation Society of Charleston as they actively worked to "hold old houses together." Mrs. Baker has been a Society member for many years and continues to show her dedication to Charleston's rich past and promising future through her volunteerism.

Jane Locke, Society Board Member and Chair of the Fall Tour Committee, recalls a conversation Mickey once had with a new volunteer: "The woman was a bit apprehensive about whether she would make a good docent, since she was new to the area, but Mickey assured her that she too was a newcomer and that she had mastered it. After the volunteer had left, Mickey told me that she was indeed still new to the area after all she had only been in Charleston for sixty eight years! We had a good laugh over that."

Mrs. Baker's sense of humor and love for people (one of her many charming qualities) is what makes her adored by all. She once told Mrs. Locke that she "learns something new everyday and that is what keeps her young." The Board of Directors, staff, and members of the Preservation Society of Charleston would like to thank Mickey Baker for her continuing dedication to our organization and for the knowledge and enthusiasm that she shares with all.

Jane Locke (left) and Ginger Scully (right) flank the indomitable "Mickey" Baker, volunteer extraordinaire, during Fall House and Garden Tours.



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Photo courtesy of Winterthur, Gavin Ashworth



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