



(Staff Photo by Brad Nettles)

56 Pitt St., Harleston Village

Petitions Ask Demolition Of Fire-Damaged House

By ROBERT P. STOCKTON

One of the major houses in Harleston Village, the structure at 56 Pitt St., is endangered.

The house was damaged by fire in July 1977, and the owner of the property, the Roman Catholic Bishop of Charleston, is seeking to demolish it.

Petitions are circulating among parishioners of the Charleston churches, asking that permission be granted to demolish the structure.

Under the City of Charleston Zoning Ordinance, the Board of Architectural Review would have to approve the proposed demolition.

Demolition is opposed by the city's various preservation groups, who contend that the structure is architecturally and historically valuable to the city.

The house is rated in Group 2 of the city's Historic Architecture Inventory, with the recommendation that it be preserved.

Apparently the house was built as an investment by Richard Brenan, who in 1817 purchased a lot at the southeast corner of Boundary (now Calhoun) and Pitt streets, measuring 107 feet on Boundary Street and 237 feet on Pitt Street.

Brenan built the three-story brick structure now known as 207 Calhoun St. for himself, as he is listed as living there in the city directory of 1822.

On a portion of his property fronting on Pitt Street he built the dwell-

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ing now known as 56 Pitt St., a 2½ story frame building on a high, brick basement.

In March 1822 Brenan conveyed the lot, measuring in front on Pitt Street, 76 feet and in depth, 109 feet, to William F. Lee and Stephen Lee, in trust for their mother, Mrs. Keziah Lee.

The purchase price, \$7,500, would indicate a substantial house on the property at the time.

Mrs. Lee was the wife of Thomas Lee, who was a judge of the Court of Common Pleas, solicitor for the Southern Circuit of South Carolina, cashier of the S.C. House of Representatives, comptroller general of South Carolina and U.S. district judge.

Lee was also president of the Bank of South Carolina and a deacon of the Unitarian Church. He is buried in the Unitarian Churchyard.

Lee is listed as residing at Pitt Street in the City Directory of 1822.

He died in 1839 and his widow died in 1854.

Mrs. Lee's will, dated Feb. 10, 1853, directed that "my dwelling

house ... in Pitt Street ... be continued to be occupied as a dwelling house for Six Months after my decease without rent, by my Son and Grandchildren now living with me."

After the six-month period, the property was to be sold.

Accordingly, her two sons, as trustees, sold the property in September 1854 to Catherine Porcher and Selina Porcher. Described in the deed as a lot "with the Dwelling House and outbuildings thereon," it sold for \$8,000.

The Porchers continued to own the property until around the Civil War period, after which it was owned by Mary Cogswell.

Fifty-six Pitt is a double house (so-called because it is double the size of a Charleston single house), with a central hall and four primary rooms on each floor, in the original portion.

The house is rather plainly finished on the exterior, the major architectural feature being the large pediment on the south facade, with an oversized fanlight.

The gable-roofed structure has two tiers of piazzas on the south facade, overlooking a large garden area.

On the rear of the house is a 19th century addition which almost doubles the size of the house.

In the interior are architectural decorations in the elaborate Adamesque style. Mantels have been removed by the owner.

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