

Preservation PROGRESS



FOR THE PRESERVATION SOCIETY OF CHARLESTON

Spring 2007 • Volume 51 • No. 1

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2006 CAROLOPOLIS AWARDS

*Pictured Carolopolis Winner:
The Old Exchange Building*



Photograph by Rick Rhodes

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



LETTER FROM THE EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

Cynthia Cole Jenkins

In early March, a Letter to the Editor appeared in the *Post and Courier* outlining the expanding number of projects slated to be built along the Meeting/King/Calhoun Street corridor around Marion Square. It continues a discussion begun in the Fall/Winter 2005 issue of *Preservation Progress* in which the criteria of height, scale and mass were described in some detail.

Post and Courier • 134 Columbus Street • Charleston, South Carolina 29403

I read with concern recent Post and Courier articles announcing the surge in hotel construction and other new development along upper King Street. It may seem encouraging that the city's tourism outlook appears strong enough for developers to increase our hotel capacity by 25% in a very short period (it grew by only 11% over the last five years). However, the question is whether such intense development will destroy the historic character that draws tourists in the first place. This may become a classic example of killing the goose that laid the golden egg.

Specifically, the scale and mass of the proposed hotel projects, their proximity to one another, and the pace of the development are unprecedented. The Preservation Society believes that five large projects in two years within a five block radius is simply too much, too large and too fast. The result will have a detrimental impact on the fragile infrastructure of a historic peninsula, especially the traffic flow around King, Meeting and Calhoun Streets.

An imposing eight story 185-room hotel is proposed for 404 King Street on the site of the former Charleston County Library, with another 150 rooms proposed five blocks north at King, Meeting and Spring Street, and in between will be an additional 180 rooms at Meeting, Woolfe and Reid Streets. In addition, an expansion of the existing Holiday Inn on the southeast corner of Calhoun and Meeting Streets has also been approved.

The traffic studies required for these projects to receive approval are based on traffic criteria that are both outdated and do not consider the cumulative impact of these projects along the already congested King, Meeting and Calhoun Street corridors. This intense development is proceeding without adequate regard for the comprehensive scope and impact of these projects. If this is allowed to continue Charleston's authentic historic streetscape and possibly even the city's status as a National Historic Landmark may be endangered.

The beauty of Charleston has always been that she has embraced change and growth while honoring the integrity of her historic character. Making room to welcome new guests to the city is part of this necessary growth, and the Preservation Society has always supported sensitively placed and sensitively designed buildings as positive additions to the life of our city.

We have the responsibility as a community to protect the unique sense of place that is Charleston and to pass on to future generations a great cityscape that retains its architectural and historic integrity. The past thirty or so years have proven that historic preservation is a strong catalyst for economic development. Maintaining the economic balance without overwhelming the historic and architectural environment is crucial for our future.

Since then, we've learned the agreement between the City of Charleston and the U.S. General Services Administration has been dissolved. (The GSA is holder of all Federally-owned real property.) This puts into play for development almost the entire block surrounding the L. Mendel Rivers Federal Building, at 334 Meeting Street.

This magnifies our concern for the cumulative effect new development will have on an area overloaded with proposed projects slated for construction in the near future.

Our voice joins a chorus of complaints rising from residents and visitors alike who are frustrated by the traffic gridlock which threatens to discount the character, ambience and charm of the Charleston precious to us all. Please add your voice to those contacting City Council and the Mayor with expressions of concern. If you e-mail us at preserve@preservationsociety.org we'll pass your messages along for you.

I'm reminded of the words of Kenneth Chorley, president of Colonial Williamsburg Incorporated, who – in April, 1945 – addressed the Civic Committee in a speech entitled, "The Challenge to Charleston" saying:

"It takes vision to look ahead into the century and see what Charleston can be to future generations, and to define the work which must be undertaken if Charleston is to succeed in becoming that kind of city. ...Will your local citizens do now the things which, twenty-five years from now, will seem to be the things which obviously should have been done now? This is the challenge to Charleston!"

Cynthia C. Jenkins
Executive Director



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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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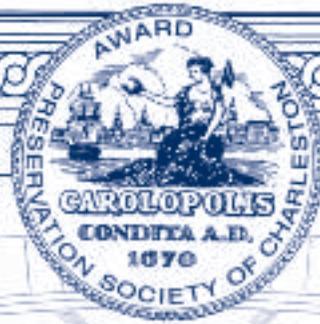
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2006 CAROLOPOLIS AWARDS

The Preservation Society held their 2007 Annual Membership Meeting and presentation of the 2006 Carolopolis & Pro Merito Awards at Charleston Place's Riviera Conference Theatre on February 1st. Because of scheduling conflicts at the venue, this year's ceremonies were observed somewhat later than the usual January date. But the minor postponement had no detrimental effect on the standing-room-only crowd that came in support of this much-anticipated yearly event. For 2006, the Society presented twelve Carolopolis Awards and one Pro Merito Award to those properties exemplifying outstanding achievement in exterior preservation, restoration, rehabilitation or new construction in the city.

Members, guests and invited honorees heard Society president Steven Craig recount the many challenges and achievements of the Society during the past, eventful year. Also in compliance with the Society's charter, the slate of previously nominated officers for 2007 was officially elected to serve during the current calendar year.

Markers & Awards Chairman Jim Wigley presented a Carolopolis plaque to each awardee following a description of the property and the work program in its historical context given by Executive Director Cynthia Cole Jenkins. The crowd was given a photographic tour of each property – showing it both before and after the work program being recognized. Following the award presentations, a lavish reception followed in celebration of this year's salute to the 2006 preservation and protection of Charleston's architectural heritage.



front row left to right

- Laurie Tarleton
- Richard Halsey
- Jane S. Smith
- Charles Sullivan
- Judy Tarleton
- Bev Seinsheimer
- Thomas Bennett
- Margaret von Werssowetz
- Alton G. Brown III
- Lynn Hanlin
- Olin Chamberlain

back row left to right

- Sharon Kucharski
- Tim Reese
- Melinda Laurens

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2006 CAROLOPOLIS AWARDS

PRO MERITO

This year, a single Pro Merito or "For Merit" award was granted (for exterior restoration) in addition to the Carolopolis Awards given for exterior restoration, exterior preservation, new construction, and exterior rehabilitation..

EXTERIOR REHABILITATION

Exterior Restoration is defined as the act or process of accurately depicting the form, features and character of a property as it appeared at a particular period of time.

37 CHURCH STREET
George Matthews House
Charlestowne
1970 Carolopolis

George Matthews, son of Charleston merchant Anthony Matthews, constructed this two and one-half story stucco over brick Georgian style residence c.1743. A two-story brick kitchen house and a masonry double privy are original to the property.

The exterior restoration work included repairing or replacing deteriorated windows, replacing the deteriorated second floor piazza decking, and removing the second floor piazza screening. In addition, the wrought iron balcony was restored, the exterior stucco was repaired and a 20th century folding lunette window was replaced with a compatible Georgian design. An intrusive 20th century hyphen was removed and replaced by a smaller, more compatible two-story stucco hyphen.

The work program was designed by the owners, Cindy and Ben Lenhardt and completed by David Hoffman of Edgewood Builders.



CAROLOPOLIS

This year, a 2006 Carolopolis Award went to the following under these categories:

EXTERIOR RESTORATION

5 LIMEHOUSE STREET
Charlestowne

This two-story, frame Charleston single house was constructed c.1840. In the mid-twentieth century the house underwent extensive alterations that included the enclosure of the east bay of the first floor piazza nearest the street, the unsympathetic relocation of an original window to the enclosure, and the relocation of the entrance to the north end of the street facade.

The restoration work program included removing the piazza enclosure and constructing an appropriate piazza screen entrance with pilasters and a simple entablature. The work program was designed by E.E. Fava, Architects and completed by Harper James Finucan, Inc. The property is owned by Joyce and Lawrence Haber.

2006 CAROLOPOLIS AWARDS

EXTERIOR PRESERVATION

Exterior Preservation is defined as the act or process of applying measures necessary to sustain the existing form, integrity and materials of an historic property.

122 EAST BAY STREET Old Exchange Building French Quarter

In 1767 the Commons House of Assembly voted to construct an "Exchange and Customs House and a new Watch House" on the site of the original Half Moon Battery. The design contract was awarded to architect-draftsman William Rigby Naylor and the building was constructed by Peter and John Horlbeck c.1767-71.



From 1783-1818 the building served as both the Exchange and as Charleston's city hall, and was the site of the ratification Convention of the United States Constitution in 1788. In 1818 the Exchange was conveyed to the federal government who established a post office in the building. By the early twentieth century the building suffered from poor maintenance by the federal government. In 1912 the building was threatened by demolition to make way for a private development. It was through the efforts of the Daughters of the American Revolution that the building was rescued from this fate. Negotiations began soon after and, in 1921, the federal government deeded the building to the South Carolina State Society of the Daughters of the American Revolution with the Rebecca Motte Chapter as stewards. From 1921 to 1976 the Daughters of the American Revolution used the building as their headquarters and also rented space to individuals.

The exterior preservation work program was designed to correct the effects of 225 years of exposure to a harsh coastal environment and the effects of improper earlier repair techniques. The work program was designed by Liollo Architecture and completed by Steir, Kent, & Canady, Inc. The property is owned by the Rebecca Motte Chapter of the Daughters of the American Revolution.

1 AIKEN STREET Eastside

This two-story frame Charleston single house, located at the northwest corner of Aiken Street and Hampden Court, was constructed c.1853. The building had undergone several modifications prior to being purchased by the current owners in 2004.

The exterior work program involved removing faux brick material and exposing the original siding. The owners were able to salvage much of the siding on the east and south facade. The original windows were repaired or replaced and the piazza was rebuilt with salvaged columns and balusters. A new piazza entry with a parapet and a bracketed entry hood was constructed incorporating elements from similar houses in the neighborhood. The work program was designed by Shelley Clark-Glidewell, Architect and completed by Gill and Keith Blandford. The property is owned by David Richardson.



2006 CAROLOPOLIS AWARDS



177 MEETING STREET
The Madren Building
Commercial District

This four-story, masonry double building was constructed c.1840. From 1950 to 1995 it housed the Madren Paint Company. In the 1980s the west end of the north facade was modified to serve as an entrance court for the bank building at the corner of Meeting and Market Streets. The exterior work program concentrated on reversing the effects of these inappropriate earlier modifications. The elastomeric coating was carefully removed and the building received a tinted lime wash that matched the building's original color.

The work program was designed by Joseph K. Oppermann – Architect, P.A. consultant to QORE Property Sciences and completed by Huss Inc. The property is owned by First State Management Corp., LLC.



2 WOOLFE STREET
Eastside

Constructed c.1845, this frame, two-story Charleston single house occupies the north-west corner of Woolfe and Nassau Streets. Prior to purchase by the current owners, the property had suffered extensive fire damage and had remained vacant for several years.

The preservation work program involved replacing the burned porch decking, columns and balusters with in-kind material; repairing or replacing damaged siding and repairing or replacing existing windows. The work program was developed and completed by the owner Leon Detzler.



2006 CAROLOPOLIS AWARDS

NEW CONSTRUCTION

New Construction is defined as the act or process of construction of a new building that is completed, and is architecturally and aesthetically an asset within the context of the existing streetscape and neighborhood.

232 ASHLEY AVENUE

Cannonborough-Elliottborough

Located at the northeast corner of Spring Street and Ashley Avenue, this three-story, mixed-use building is a reinterpretation of Charleston's traditional corner store style. The building is designed to accommodate a commercial use on the first floor with residential use on the upper floors.

It succeeds as a corner building in part because its height and scale are compatible with the two and three story buildings that are characteristic of the Cannonborough-Elliottborough neighborhood. The building's mass respects the pivotal importance of its corner location.

The building was designed by Byers Design Group and completed by completed by M Design + Development. The property is owned by Michael Brewer.



1500 OLD TOWNE ROAD

Charles Towne Landing

Completed in 2006, this 12,600 square foot Visitors Center is located at Charles Towne Landing, the site of the first permanent European settlement in the Carolinas. It replaced a 60,000 square foot collection of buildings constructed in 1970 for South Carolina's tri-centennial celebration. In considering a design approach, it was decided not to attempt a speculative recreation of an earlier building type that could be easily misunderstood as being an authentic part of the site's history. Instead, they chose the natural landscape as the inspiration for their design. The building embraces the pond, floating over it on piles, allowing the natural landscape to fill back in underneath, with minimal interruption to natural drainage or vegetation.

The building was designed by Liollo Architecture in association with Meredith Drakeford – Drakeford Architects and constructed by Complete Building Corporation. The property is owned by the South Carolina Department of Parks, Recreation, and Tourism.

2006 CAROLOPOLIS AWARDS



86 JONATHON LUCAS STREET
Hollings Cancer Center Tower addition

This addition to the Medical University of South Carolina's Hollings Cancer Center was completed in 2005 and houses a variety of research functions. The design is contemporary yet respectful the adjacent c.1913 Georgian Revival style facade.

The Hollings Cancer Center Tower addition demonstrates that institutional architecture can exceed beyond the ordinary. It shows us that the challenges of multiple functions and a demanding location can produce buildings that are efficient in function and vibrant in design. The work program was designed by HOK and completed by M.B. Kahn Construction Company. The property is owned by the Medical University of South Carolina.



EXTERIOR REHABILITATION

Exterior Rehabilitation is defined as the act or process of making possible a compatible use for a property through repair, alterations, and additions while preserving those portions or features which convey its historical, cultural or architectural values.

200 COMING STREET
Cannonborough-Elliottborough

Constructed in 1930 by the Catholic Diocese, the Gothic influenced Immaculate Conception School was originally a two-story building with fourteen classrooms attended by African-American students. A third story with seven additional classrooms was added sometime prior to World War II. The building is an early twentieth century example of fireproof construction and had long been abandoned when it was purchased in 2002 by the current owners for redevelopment as housing for the elderly.

All of the rehabilitation work on the historic building was accomplished in accordance with the Secretary of The Interior Standards for Rehabilitation.

The architects were challenged with designing 42 new residential units that would be compatible with the historic school building and compatible in height, scale and mass with residential structures in the adjacent Cannonborough – Elliottborough and Radcliffeborough neighborhoods. The building was designed by Whitney Powers of Studio A, Inc. and Jerry Ballinger, LLC and completed by Fairway Construction. The property is owned by Affordable Equity Housing.

2006 CAROLOPOLIS AWARDS

248 COMING STREET
Cannonborough- Elliottborough

248 Coming Street is a two-story, frame Charleston single house constructed c.1859. Originally constructed as a single family residence, the property had been converted into a duplex in the 1950s and the exterior had been clad in asbestos shingles. The restoration work program included removing the exterior stairs and converting the building back into a single family residence. The work program was designed and completed by the former owner David Drummond. The property is currently owned by Maureen Ginty.



25 EAST BATTERY - tack house and stable
Charlestowne

The tack house and stable at 25 East Battery were accessory buildings for an earlier c.1830s three-story, Greek Revival style residence that originally occupied the site. The work program focused on the rehabilitation of tack house into guest quarters with a new kitchen and bathroom being inserted into the first bay of the stable to the rear.

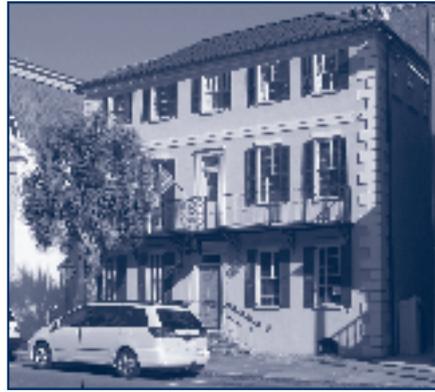
An 1865 photograph depicting an historic carriage way and trellis provided the documentation for the reconfigured driveway and the new entry. The work program was designed by Glenn Keyes Architects and Sheila Wertimer, Landscape Architect and completed by Jim Rhode Construction. The property is owned by Reba and Harry Huge.

2006 CAROLOPOLIS AWARDS

96 BROAD STREET
Meyer-Peace House
Commercial District

Originally located at 8 Courthouse Square, this three-story Federal style building was built c.1783-93 as a sugar bakery by Philip Meyer, a sugar manufacturer and prominent Revolutionary War patriot. In the early 19th century Meyer's son-in-law Joseph Peace practiced law here with his partner, Landon Cheves, future South Carolina congressman and President of the first United States Bank. The building was purchased by Charleston County in the mid-twentieth century for use as office space. In 1998 it was moved to its present location to make way for the new Charleston County Judicial Center. Purchased in 2005 by the current owners, the building was completely rehabilitated as law offices and a rear addition was constructed.

The design goals for the addition were to create a structure that was subordinate in height, scale, and mass to the historic structure and would be constructed with minimal impact on the historic fabric. The work program was designed by VDL Associates, LLC and completed by Harper James Finucan, Contactor. The property is owned by the Young Trust.



New rear addition

PURE. LUSH.
COSMOPOLITAN. SOUTHERN.
(You know, Like you.)

Chef Bob Waggoner's exciting new menu at the Charleston Grill is based on the idea of four unique styles or "Quadrants" – Pure, Lush, Cosmopolitan and Southern. From light and simple to rich and indulgent, the new menu at Charleston Grill will have people talking all over town – if they stop eating long enough to speak, that is.

CHARLESTON GRILL

New menu. New look. And an all-around lighter touch.

2 2 4 KING STREET

8 4 3 . 5 7 7 . 4 5 2 2

COMPLIMENTARY PARKING

WELCOME NEW BOARD MEMBERS

In lieu of a "Volunteer Spotlight," this issue of *Preservation Progress* recognizes that the Society's Board of Directors is an all-volunteer group of leaders. Their year-long tenure serving on the Board is invaluable to the function of the organization, and their commitment and dedication are crucial to the Society's success. Indeed they are volunteers extraordinaire. For 2007, we welcome four new board members and proudly introduce the first two of them to the membership in the following brief profiles:



Deborah Lee Bordeau hails from Hampton, Virginia. She attributes her interest in historic preservation to growing up in Virginia's fascinating Tidewater area where history and architecture are very much respected and revered. In fact, she chose to independently study architectural history while she pursued her (1994) B.A. degree at Randolph-Macon Woman's College where her majors were political science and art history. She received a scholarship to attend the University of Florida's Preservation Institute on Nantucket Island in Massachusetts.

Ms. Bordeau moved to Charleston with the intention of finding a career in preservation, but she discovered she could make a greater contribution to her passion for helping others by pursuing fundraising. She was one of the four founding co-chairs of the Society's Medallion Circle. She has worked for Historic Charleston Foundation, the Lowcountry Open Land Trust, and she now serves as Director of Development for the Department of Neuroscience at the Medical University of South Carolina.



Steven P. Stewart was born and raised in southern California and lived there until 1966. He studied economics at Texas A&M University, graduating in 1975 with a B.A. degree. He also did his graduate work at A&M – studying public administration, building construction, architecture, and civil engineering. His first major project as a designer/builder was College Station, a development northwest of Houston, Texas (1977-1988). As a developer, he undertook several other projects throughout Southern California from 1989 to 2004.

He "supposedly" retired to Charleston in 2004. Earlier, he and his wife, Dr. Mary Caroline Stewart, had made frequent visits to The Holy City as vacationers, and they were patrons of the Fall Tours of Homes & Gardens. Perhaps this inspired them as almost immediately they embarked on the ambitious restoration of 60 Montagu Street with its outbuildings and gardens, Mr. Stewart is one of the principals (alongside Richard Marks) in Preservation Partners, LLC. They are also pursuing the restoration of 13 Pitt Street. Both properties were featured on the Society's well-attended Hard Hat Luncheon for members in the summer of 2006. (Watch for details of an upcoming follow-up tour in the summer of 2007.) ■

Look for more highlites on New Board Members in the next issue of Preservation Progress.



206 Center Street c. 1865, Old Village of Mount Pleasant

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 Ravelle Sotheby's International Realty, 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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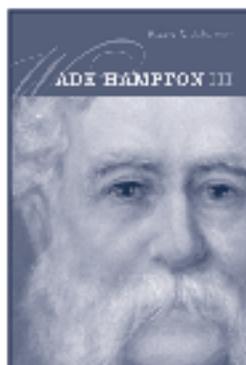
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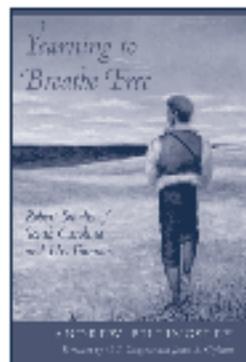


Wade Hampton III

Robert K. Ackerman

"At long last we have a definitive study of Wade Hampton III, who dominated South Carolina in the second half of the nineteenth century and whose moderate racism has intrigued us ever since. Ackerman presents us with a rare objective account of the planter, soldier, and political leader." —A. V. Huff, Jr., Furman University

392 pp., 16 illus., cloth, \$39.95



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Robert Smalls of South Carolina and His Families

Andrew Billingsley

Foreword by U. S. Congressman James E. Clyburn

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Baroness of Hobcaw

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Mary E. Miller

"Miller doesn't shy away from the more complex aspects of Belle's biography, offering a direct treatment of her relationships with a string of male and female lovers. The vigorous style and well-paced action carry us along for an engaging ride with a woman who embraced life with verve and vigor." —Susan Miller Williams, author of *A Devil and a Good Woman, Too: The Lives of Julia Perkin*

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GERSHWIN IN CHARLESTON

By Harlan Greene

Editor's Note: As a prelude to the upcoming renovation of the historic Dock Street Theater, and a postlude to the Medallion Circle's "Gershwin in the Garden" party on May 20th at The Confederate Home, we offer the following "background" on the man and his music. Visitors to the Holy City for any length of time note that George Gershwin's music seems to haunt the hotel lobbies and popular watering holes where the "standards" of American popular music are still celebrated and enjoyed. Even as Spoleto Festival USA and its local companion, Piccolo, come to town and bring a host of international musicians with them—a generous helping of Gershwin tunes is usually served up with this artistic banquet. What is the connection between this brilliant American composer of the 1920s and 30s and the city of Charleston, South Carolina? The answer is very much a part of Charleston's fascinating lore and our city's artistic legacy to the world at large.

In July 1934, a glamorous New Yorker arrived at a shack with no electricity on Folly Beach. When he'd leave a few weeks later, he'd have in his valise and in the tunes whistled under his breath something that would change and challenge world musical history. It was not just the meeting of George Gershwin and the Carolina Lowcountry, but the beginning of a journey that would magnify Charleston's image internationally.

The city at this time was already noted for its arts scene, a lot of it due to native DuBose Heyward who had published the novel *Porgy* in 1925. Based on the very real Sammy Smalls, a crippled African American beggar who rode Charleston's streets in a cart pulled by a goat, the book was a story of love and loss. Heyward set the tale of the crippled Porgy and his woman, Bess, in a dilapidated tenement at 89-91 Church Street. It was a best seller and, in 1927, Heyward and his wife Dorothy adapted it for the New York stage. Everyone who saw it, including the King and Queen of England, thought it something new and exciting.

The immensely popular and sought-after musician George Gershwin had read the book in 1926 and immediately wrote Heyward about making it into an opera. He was then considered the king of popular music, the maker of fabulous melodies, and scorer of Broadway shows. He had so much to do, and so much to learn, he told Heyward, that it would take a while before he could turn his attention to *Porgy*.

The time arrived in the summer of 1934 when George and his cousin Henry Botkin camped in a rustic cottage near DuBose Heyward's summer house. Heyward took George around the Lowcountry and up to North Carolina. Like diving into Folly's surf, Gershwin plunged right into the singing and praying at black churches; Heyward, astonished, thought it looked less like an introduction than a homecoming. Charlestonians journeyed out to the beach to see this bearded New Yorker, gone native, and Gershwin came and played snatches of what he called America's best music at some Charleston cocktail parties.

The opera premiered in October 1935 and many snooty opera critics criticized it; Heyward and Gershwin lost money; Gershwin died (of a

brain tumor) in 1937; Heyward died (of a heart attack) in 1940 and the beach house Gershwin stayed in was destroyed in a hurricane about the same time. After Gershwin's untimely death, Hollywood tried (and failed) to get the name of Folly changed to Gershwin Isle.

By the mid 1940s, the tide turned; *Porgy*, in his goat cart went on to achieve every artistic success possible – being the first American opera to play in LaScala, Milan's premiere opera house and being sent abroad to Russia and beyond as "good will ambassador" by the USA state department in the 1950s. Everywhere it went, people laughed and cried and were moved at the tragedy and triumph of a lone beggar who glimpsed love on Charleston's streets. It helped the careers of people like Leontyne Price, Anne Brown, Todd Duncan, Maya Angelou and even Sidney Poitier and Sammy Davis, Jr., who starred in the film version.

And in 1970, art triumphed over history; with the city's 300th birthday, the staging of *Porgy and Bess* to an integrated audience allowed the city to confront old racial divides. All were brought together in a story that continues to transcend the time and place of its creation, and literally gives Charleston a place on the world stage. Heyward's and Gershwin's *Porgy and Bess* is hailed as one of the greatest works of art of any time or country. ■

Harlan Greene is a Charlestonian. He is a well-known author, historian, archivist and tour guide who is a Lifetime Member of the Preservation Society of Charleston.



George Gershwin, Dubose Heyward and Ira Gershwin pose for this group portrait in 1935. Photo courtesy of SC Historical Society.

The Karpeles Surprise

This Low-Profile Museum Is Home to a Treasure Trove of Rare, Historic Documents

By J. Michael McLaughlin



The Karpeles Manuscript Museum dominates the corner of Spring and Coming Streets with its gleaming white Corinthian columns.

The Karpeles Manuscript Museum at 68 Spring Street is one huge surprise package for historians – be they amateurs or professionals. The initial surprise for many might be that this formidable repository of rare and historic documents located in the heart of Charleston’s peninsula is there at all. Although the facility officially opened to the public in 1995, Karpeles is not exactly on the main glide path of the Holy City’s most popular tourist attractions and many locals have simply never ventured there. Others may have never even heard its name. Toward that end, be advised the correct pronunciation is “carp-less” (in two syllables, emphasis on the “carp”).

Another surprise is the building itself. The gleaming, white, temple at the northeast corner of Spring and Coming Streets was begun in 1856 for the Methodist Episcopal Church. According to architectural historian Gene Waddell, it was a faithful copy of the Temple of Caster and Pollux in Rome, as recreated by Italian architect Andrea Palladio. The building’s designers were local architects Louis J. Barbot and John H. Sayle. During the Civil War, the building was used by both Confederate and Union forces at different times. In 1868, it was officially named the St. James Methodist Church, but it was widely known among locals as the “Spring Street Church” until 1946 when the old “St. James” name was reinstated.

Through the years, time and the elements were unkind to 68 Spring Street.

The building was heavily damaged in the earthquake of 1886, but repairs were made by 1888 and it continued to serve the needs of its congregation until Hurricane Hugo passed over the Charleston peninsula in 1989. The violent storm’s 135 MPH winds ripped the roof off the sanctuary and the interior pews and galleries were virtually ruined by the subsequent rains. This time, the devastation to the building proved to be too great a burden for the small congregation and they offered the property for sale.

Enter: David Karpeles, a Minnesota-born real estate investor who had amassed a fortune in California providing affordable housing for the rising tide of baby boomers coming of age in the quarter-century after W.W. II. His was the kind of wealth needed to save 68 Spring Street from the wrecker’s ball. And 68 Spring Street was just the kind of classical edifice David Karpeles was looking for to expand his growing network of manuscript libraries. Under his direction, a \$300,000 restoration was begun and the structure reopened as The Karpeles Manuscript Museum in Charleston.

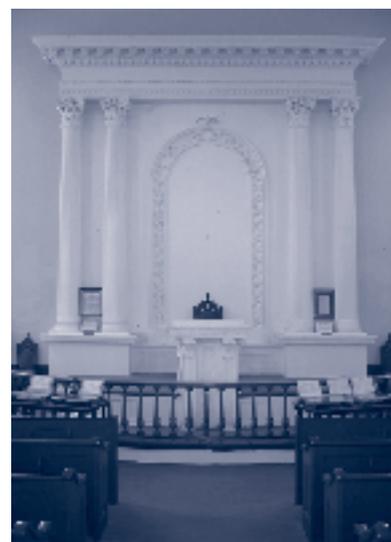
The first spark that ignited Karpeles’ interest in collecting historic manuscripts reads like a movie plot.

Karpeles and his family were enjoying a visit to a Pasadena art museum in the late 1970s when a chance encounter reawakened David Karpeles’ long-held dream of becoming a teacher – a dream he’d put aside while his real estate career skyrocketed. As the family strolled past one particular exhibit Karpeles’ son came face-to-face with a letter penned by the actual hand of the genius Albert Einstein. The boy was struck by the fact that the document was self-edited, tentatively reworded in many places and rather a mess as neat penmanship goes. In other words, the boy discovered, it was not so very much unlike some of his own writings. Thus, he was fascinated and wanted to know more. He was inspired. He learned.

This spontaneous bridge built across “insurmountable distances” of fame, history and time told Karpeles historic documents might be a way to reach (and

teach) many others like his son. A passion for collecting rare and historic manuscripts was born. He began to think of historic manuscripts as written building blocks of our world. And what better way to understand the enormity of such a complicated subject than to examine these individual construction elements one building block at a time.

Karpeles began collecting documents from the worlds of history, exploration, cartography, religion, art, music, politics, science, literature and medicine. And he was only getting started. He (working with agents collecting on his behalf) was soon scouring the auction catalogues and the salons of



The chancel today.



Museum exhibits line the walls of the former sanctuary.

manuscript dealers all over the world. Karpeles found himself competing successfully with world-class collectors like Malcolm Forbes and others for trophies like Abraham Lincoln's original draft of the Emancipation Proclamation, the original hand-written United States Bill of Rights, Richard Wagner's manuscript copy of the Wedding March from the opera Lohengrin, and pages of personal correspondence from Gandhi, Napoleon and Mary Queen of Scots. Some of the documents were whimsical and fascinating (like movie contracts from the heyday of Hollywood). Others recall great tragedy (like the musings of assassin Lee Harvey Oswald). Each in its own way illuminates a moment in our history.

The next logical step in Karpeles' mission was to share this wealth of knowledge. In 1983, the first Karpeles Manuscript Museum opened in Montecito, California. This was a free-admission venue where both children and adults could see and discuss revolving exhibits gleaned from the Karpeles collection. After only fifteen years, the collection had grown to more than a million documents. Frequently the exhibits were arranged and presented in themes appealing to specific audiences ranging from grade schoolers on field trips to literary scholars doing research.

Very soon, this concept was expanded to other small cities. With the exception of Charleston, all the locations were chosen because of personal or family connections to Karpeles. Today, there are Karpeles Manuscript libraries in Jacksonville, Florida; Tacoma/Seattle, Washington; Buffalo/Newburgh, New York; Santa Barbara, California; Duluth, Minnesota; Wichita, Kansas; as well as Charleston, South Carolina.

Exhibits circulate on a regular basis – staying at one location for three months. Here in Charleston (through June) is an exhibit called "Letters from the Pen" featuring writings from famous people incarcerated throughout history. This fall (July through September) "19th Century American Authors" will be on display. From October through December, the museum will present documents of "First Ladies." ■

Hours of operation for the Karpeles Manuscript Museum:

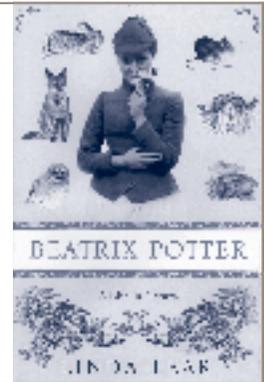
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