South Carolina Historical Magazine

Volume 80 Number 2

April 1979

(ISSN 0038-3082)

PUBLISHED QUARTERLY BY THE
SOUTH CAROLINA HISTORICAL SOCIETY
FIREPROOF BUILDING
CHARLESTON, SOUTH CAROLINA 29401

CONTENTS

STATEMENT OF OWNERSHIP, MANAGEMENT AND CIRCULATION (Required by 39 U. S. C. 3685). 1. Title of Publication: *South Carolina Historical Magazine.* 2. Date of filing: October 12, 1978. 3. Frequency of issue: quarterly. 4. Location of Known Office: Fireproof Building (100 Meeting Street), Charleston, S. C. 29401. 5. Location of Publisher: same. 6. Publisher: South Carolina Historical Society, Fireproof Building; Editor, Elise Pinckney, South Carolina Historical Society; Managing Editor, Gene Waddell, South Carolina Historical Society. 9. The purpose, function and nonprofit status of this organization and the exempt status for Federal income tax purposes have not changed during preceding 12 months. 10. Total number of copies printed: average, 3,552, last, 3,640; Paid circulation, none; Mail subscriptions: average, 2,810, last, 2,697; Total paid circulation, average, 2,810, last, 2,697; Free distribution, none; Total distribution, average, 2,876, last, 2,757; Copies not distributed: average, 680, last, 843; Returns from news agents, none; totals, average, 3,552, last, 3,640. I certify that the statements made by me above are correct and complete, Elise Pinckney.

ROBERT MILLS'S FIREPROOF BUILDING

GENE WADDELL*

On 18 February 1822 Robert Mills sent the City Council of Charleston "four more arrangements" for the square that was to become the location of the Fireproof Building.[1] By writing that he was sending "more" plans, he indicated that he had earlier submitted at least another one. The Council probably received this earlier plan on 29 October 1821, when the project was first mentioned and was referred to a committee to determine "the probable cost of the same and the amount of Revenue to be derived from such improvement." [2] Charleston had no parks, and Mills evidently proposed this one to create the site he needed for the Fireproof Building.

On 20 December 1821, about two months after the City appointed a committee to study the project, the Legislature had passed a resolution authorizing the Board of Public Works to spend twenty-five thousand dollars to erect "fire-proof buildings at Charleston." The resolution gave the Board "full power to make an arrangement with the city council of

* Director, South Carolina Historical Society.

This article is written with an admiration for Robert Mills that derives partly from the pleasure of working in the Fireproof Building, a pleasure that is available to the public through the generosity of the County of Charleston, which leases the building to the Society for a nominal fee. I am also very grateful to Richard X. Evans for contributing the Papers of Robert Mills to the Society in 1978. This collection includes the rendering of the building which was reproduced on the cover of this magazine first in January 1979 and which is also reproduced here as Fig. 1. I am indebted to Charles E. Lee, Director, and to Dr. Charles H. Lesser, Assistant Director for Archives and Publications, South Carolina Department of Archives and History (hereafter SCDAH), for suggesting the potential of the South Carolina Treasury Records. I am also indebted to Dr. Margaretta Childs, Director of the Archives and Records Center, City of Charleston, for informing me of the recent accession of early minutes of the City Council. Dr. Kenneth Severens, Charles N. Bayless, A.I.A., and David Moltke-Hansen provided suggestions that I have incorporated.

[1] Papers of Robert Mills, SCHS 11-517; printed in H. M. Pierce Gallagher, *Robert Mills, Architect of the Washington Monument, 1781-1855* (New York, 1935), p. 199.

[2] Rough Minutes of City Council, 1821, MS volume with minutes from 4 Sept. 1821-29 Aug. 1822; Archives and Records Center, City of Charleston. The minutes for 29 October include a resolution thanking Mills for sending the Council a map of the canal he proposed for connecting Charleston and Columbia.

Charleston for the use of a lot on the public square . . . ." [3] Mills had been a member of the Board since 20 December 1820,[4] and he personally handled the negotiations for the property. His 18 February 1822 letter had also outlined how the City could profit by leasing the land rather than selling it. On 19 March 1822 the Council authorized the Committee on the City Square "to make such arrangements with Mr: Mills as may be necessary for locating a Fire Proof Building on the City Square. . . ." On 19 April the Council instructed the Intendant to "inform Mr. Robert Mills, the acting Engineer of the State, that Council will either sell the land at what it cost the City or contract for a special sum to erect the fire Proof Buildings."

Mills was going to great trouble to secure a lot on the square for two important reasons. The first is that all of the state offices which needed to be accommodated in the new building were located within a one-block radius of the intersection of Broad and Meeting Street; keeping them near their former locations and also near the city and district offices was necessary.[5] The state offices thus had to be near the center of an urban area, yet they also had to be secure against the kind of enormously destructive fires that had left no buildings standing in entire blocks of Charleston. Mills solved this difficult siting problem by convincing the City that it should create a permanent open space which could serve as a fire break. Security against fire was his second reason for choosing the square, and his intention is evident in the 20 May Council resolution

[3] *Acts and Resolutions of the General Assembly of the State of South-Carolina Passed in December 1820* (Columbia, 1821), p. 74 (hereafter *Acts and Resolutions*). This resolution and other documentation of the Fireproof Building's history was presented by Helen G. McCormack in "The Fireproof Building: New Home of the South Carolina Historical Society," this *Magazine*, 44 (1943): 205-211. Miss McCormack's research is on file in the Society (40-6-1).

[4] Beatrice St. Julien Ravenel, *Architects of Charleston* (Charleston, 1964), pp. 116-135; the chapter on Mills is the most comprehensive and accurate account of his work in South Carolina.

[5] "The officers to be accomodated in this building are the secretary of state, treasurer, comptroller general, ordinary, tax collector, register of mesne conveyance, master in equity, commissioner in equity, attorney general, surveyor general, &c." The former locations of most of these offices are known from the Charleston directory of 1825 and were given by McCormack, "Fireproof Building," p. 209. Mills planned for the agencies to occupy specific rooms in the new building. Commissioners of the Fireproof Building, SCDAH 4-1826-172-7. There was disagreement among the occupants, and the Commissioner in Equity was instructed by the Legislature to vacate the main floor rooms "fronting on Chalmers and Meeting Streets" because they were being assigned to the Secretary of State and the Surveyor General. Comptroller General's Report, Sept. 1826—1 Oct. 1827; MS notes by Helen G. McCormack, SCHS 40-6-1.

which authorized the Intendant "to sign a Contract with Mr. Mills for the sale of the Lot" and allowed for the stipulation "that no large building to endanger the security or exclude the light and air from the fire Proof Offices is to be built within 30 feet of the same." At the same meeting, the Council directed the City Treasurer "to pay Mr. Mills the sum of $200 for the several designs which he has drafted for the improvement of the City Square." Mills must have convinced the City that it needed the park to protect its own records even more than the State; the City Hall was not fireproof (see Fig. 9A).

The site had one further disadvantage when Mills first selected it. On one side it was bounded by a narrow alley that was lined with small, inflamable buildings. Three sides of the Fireproof Building would be safe, two facing the park and one on Meeting Street, but the fourth would still have been exposed. Mills had mentioned a "new street" in his 18 February letter. After consideration and on the motion of Frederick Wesner, the Council on 13 May requested the state-appointed Commissioners of Streets, Lanes & Lamps to approve widening the alley. The journal of this commission indicates that on the same day it approved "the Plan communicated to this Board by the City Council." The plan is affixed to the journal, and the caption is in Mills's handwriting. On 10 June the Council sent "the Plan for the widening of Beresford Alley submitted to Council by Mr: Mills" to the City Engineer to add exact property lines. The slightly revised plan was approved by the Commissioners on 2 August and was added to their journal. When Beresford Alley was widened and made an extension of Chalmers Street and when the park was completed, Mills had his ideal site.[6]

[6] Commissioners of Streets and Lamps, Journal, vol. 2 (1818-1866), 47, MS in Archives and Records Center, Charleston; copy in SCHS, 34-409. Washington Park was about to be enclosed by an iron fence designed by Frederick Werner on 18 Nov. 1824, while the Fireproof Building was still under construction (Ravenel, *Architects*, p. 140, n. 18). The fence was not attached to the building until after it was completed because the stone base of the fence adjoining the building on the south and the east differs from the marble that was used for the rest of the fence's base. Werner designed the six smaller gates, not the three larger ones which were added to the park when it was redesigned after his death. By 1 Sept. 1825, the city had spent $4,543.61 improving the square (*Courier;* notes by Helen G. McCormack, SCHS).

The original plan had pairs of walks which were comparable to the pairs of hallways in the Fireproof Building. The double walks were to serve multiple buildings just as the double halls served multiple offices. The other two corners of the square were to have a Federal courthouse and a building for the Academy of Fine Arts (Anna Wells Rutledge, *Artists in the Life of Charleston, Through Colony and State, From Restoration to Reconstruction* [Philadelphia, 1949], p. 139).

Mills expected Beresford Alley to become an important thoroughfare once a Federal Courthouse was constructed there. This expectation is probably why he placed one of the building's porticos and one set of its entrances on Chalmers Street. With the building oriented in a north-south direction, both porticos could also be seen from Meeting Street and all of the entrances were readily accessible from Meeting Street. Since the building was to contain at least ten state agencies, circulation was the most important consideration after fireproofing. To enable large numbers of people to be continually entering and leaving the building and to enable them to reach the specific office they needed by the shortest distance possible, Mills developed a plan with eight entrances, two on the ground floor and two on the main floor at both the north and the south ends of the building.

Each entrance opens into one of the two halls that are on the ground floor and the main floor (see Figs. 7, 8). These barrel-vaulted halls run in a north-south direction and divide each floor into three roughly equal sections. The two sections east and west of the halls are rows of three cross-vaulted rooms each. The central section has barrel-vaulted rooms north and south of an oval stairwell that runs from the ground floor through the main floor to the second floor. The two sets of halls both open into the stairwell and the eight rooms on these floors open into one or both halls. The rooms of the upper story are less regularly shaped, but the arrangement is similar. The overall plan allowed each room to receive light and air directly from the outside, and it allowed air to be drawn through each room, into the halls, and up and out through the skylighted staircase.

This ingenious plan solved many of the major problems that had confronted Mills when he began to design the building. The double hallways and central staircase enabled a visitor entering one of the eight separate entrances to go directly to any one of the offices on the ground or main floor without passing through any of the others. The halls provided horizontal circulation and the stairs provided horizontal and vertical circulation for both people and air. Warm, moist air was pulled through the building in the summer, lowering the temperature and the humidity so that moisture, which would have been a problem because of the masonry construction, was minimized. Light flowed into every space from two or more directions. The central stairs were lighted primarily from above, but some additional light entered through doors and windows which opened onto it. In the winter, when the outside doors were closed, the halls still received light through the fanlights, and light was reflected from the white plaster walls and ceilings of adjacent rooms.

In the summer, when all eight entrances to the building were open and all office doors were at least ajar, the whole building was flooded with light.

With his working drawings and specifications for the building nearly completed, Mills advertised for bids on 22 April 1822. The advertisement ran until 13 May,[7] the same day that the City had asked the Commissioners of Streets and Lamps to approve the widening of Beresford Alley. On 24 May the City Council, on the motion of Federick Wesner, attended Masonic ceremonies for laying the corner stone of the building.

Since the City had given its formal approval for the sale of the property only on the 20 May, no time had been lost in preparing the site. On 7 August Frederick Wesner was paid $500, and on 8 August Col. John Gordon was paid $1,500 for work they had already accomplished.[8] Wesner, a carpenter and architect-builder,[9] must have salvaged woodwork from the buildings which needed to be removed from the lot.

[7] McCormack, "Fireproof Building," pp. 206-207, n. 8.

[8] Treasury records in the SCDAH have been the basis for determining who all of the workmen were, what work they performed, and how much they were paid. Summaries of these records are available on microfilm, *South Carolina Archives Microcopy Number 7: South Carolina Treasury Ledgers and Journals, 1791-1865* (Columbia, 1970). Part of the payments appear in the journals and ledgers for the Treasurer of the Upper Division and part in the same records for the Treasurer of the Lower Division. The amounts paid through the Lower Division are listed in ledger B (Jan. 1802-Jan. 1827), p. 338, but the journal D for the Lower Division containing more detail for the period 1824-1834 is missing. All payments made for the Fireproof Building by the Lower Division were fortunately also recorded in even greater detail in a volume of audited accounts by the Comptroller General: Ledger, Treasury Department, Oct. 1821-Sept. 1847, Record of General Accounts, Chas. Treas., p. 59. The amounts of remaining payments (made in Columbia) are listed in the Upper Division ledger, Feb. 1821-Feb. 1825, p. 95. The missing names of workmen had to be filled in from Records of the General Assembly, Committee Reports and Petitions, from Treasury Receipts, Columbia, and from miscellaneous receipts and vouchers, 1800-1830.

[9] Frederick Wesner (1788-1848); cf. Ravenel, *Architects*, pp. 137-146. Wesner was an architect-builder and contractor more than a carpenter, although he is generally listed as the latter in building accounts and city directories. He designed the Medical College building which stood on Queen St., the two lower floors of the original Citadel building on Marion Square, the portico of the South Carolina Society Hall, and probably St. John's Lutheran Church. In addition to being well qualified and a member of City Council, he later became a Commissioner of Public Buildings for Charleston (footnote 12) and worked with Mills on other projects. In less than a week after the cornerstone for the Fireproof Building was laid, Wesner's work on it was interrupted by the "Late Intended Insurrection Among a Portion of the Blacks of this City" (discovered 30 May 1822).

Gordon, a bricklayer and also an architect-builder,[10] pulled down the buildings, cleaned the old brick for resale, dug trenches, and began laying the brick foundation. The only other payment made during 1822 was on 18 November to Rowe & White, stone masons,[11] indicating that they had already received some of the stone needed for the building. Since the cantilevered brownstone risers of the staircase had to be put in place as the brick walls were being constructed, at least part of them were probably on hand.

In January 1823, Gordon received $3,500, in March, $2,330, in August, $2,790 and in November $2,200. These payments indicate that the walls and vaulting were rising continually and rapidly. Gordon's only payment in 1824 was for $800 in June, and during July through November, payments were made to other workers for roofing, indicating that the main block was structurally complete by the end of 1824. Altogether, Gordon furnished and laid 947,500 bricks.

Also in January 1823, Mills received $500. The only other payment he received for his work on the building was $100 on 8 February 1825, when he was called "superintdt." Mills, however, did not personally supervise most of the construction. Until 1824, he was involved in several other projects, particularly the Asylum in Columbia. Between 1824 and 1828, he "devoted all his time, talent, and means" to producing and promoting his *Atlas* and *Statistics*.[12] He was also living in

[10] John Gordon (c. 1787-1835); cf. Ravenel, *Architects*, pp. 99-103. James Gordon and his younger brother, John, were both architect-builders and bricklayers. They designed and built the Second Presbyterian Church and the present Cathedral of St. Luke and St. Paul. The bricks for the Fireproof Building were probably all made on John's plantation, called Moreland, and on the Cooper River. A full account of Gordon's work is in the SCDAH Records of the General Assembly, Petitions, N. D. 484-23/24.

[11] John White; cf. Ravenel, *Architects*, pp. 174 and 186. White also worked as a stonecutter on Hibernian Hall and on the present Market Hall. The brownstone for the Fireproof Building probably came from New York, the source of the brownstone for the Market Hall. Rowe's first name was James; and a full accounting of the firm's work is in the SCDAH Records of the General Assembly, Petitions, N. D. 484-31/34; see also N. D. 484-27/30.

A summary of the types of stone used for the building is in Albert Simons, "The Fireproof Building: A Project in Preservation," this *Magazine*, 62 (1961): 52.

[12] David Kohn and Bess Glenn, *Internal Improvements in South Carolina, 1817-1828* (Washington, 1938), pp. 118-119. The quotation is from a MS. petition to the Legislature, South Caroliniana Library, Columbia. When Mills presented the Senate with a copy of "his Atlas," that body passed a resolution full of praise for his "zeal, industry, enterprize, and skill" (1 Dec. 1826; *Acts and Resolutions*, 1827, p. 12).

Columbia, so a local supervisor was needed. The one hired, John George Spidle, was a Charleston architect. He received his only payment, $300, on 12 December 1823.[18] He was not content with merely supervising

---

The Board of Public Works had been created on 18 Dec. 1819 as the successor to the Civil and Military Engineer. Mills's appointment to it ran from 20 Dec. 1820 until Dec. 1822, when the Board was replaced by two separate agencies, the Superintendent of Public Buildings, to which Mills was appointed, and the Superintendent of Public Works. David J. McCord, ed., *The Statutes at Large of South Carolina. . . .*, vol. 6, 1814-1838 (Columbia, 1839), 58-60, 124-128, 189, 202-203. Mills was supplanted by a political appointee almost immediately, and the office was soon abolished (*Acts and Resolutions*, 1825, p. 120). On 16 Dec. 1823, the Legislature appointed Mills and four others as "commissioners for completing the fire proof buildings now erecting in Charleston" (ibid., 1824, p. 107). During the same session, on 20 December, the Legislature appointed Mills, Wesner, and five others to the Commissioners of Public Buildings of Charleston (ibid., p. 93); the responsibility of this commision was to have charge of all buildings in the Charleston District except the Fireproof Building and Magazines and these buildings also when their construction was completed (ibid., p. 93 and see 1828, p. 40).

Mills's involvement in the construction of the Fireproof Building was continual in this variety of capacities and as a certifier for the work. He approved Rowe and White's work on 16 Feb. 1825 (Petitions, N. D. 484-29); he and John George Spidle approved John Gordon's work on 5 May 1825 (Petitions, N. D. 484-23). Mills was one of the five signers of the report by the Commissioners of the Fire Proof Offices, Charleston, to the Legislature for 1824, but he did not sign with the other four in 1827 (photostats in SCHS, 40-6-1, of documents in SCDAH; supplied by A. S. Salley, Jr.); he also did not sign the report for 1826 (Reports of Legislative Committees, 1826-172-08). He continued to serve, though, with the original members of the Commissioners until 1826 (and thus probably until 1827) because another document in the petition series (N. D. 484-19/20) is an account "with Wm. Rouse, Simon Magwood, Thos. Blackwood, Thos. Johnson, & Robert Mills Comssrs. Fire Proof Offices" for the period May 1824-Sept. 1826. This document has payments to him totaling $500 as "Superintdt."

[18] Spidle was probably routinely hired by the Commission as a result of procedures that were recommended in the 1821 Report of the Board of Public Works to the Legislature (reprinted in Kohn and Glenn, *Internal Improvements*). This plan is signed by Mills and three other members of the Board, and as State Architect and Engineer, Mills almost certainly was responsible for recommending the hiring of uninvolved supervisors to see that contracts were met. When Mills had decided on pursuing the profession of architecture, he wrote Jefferson a letter on 13 June 1808 which reads in part: "Being the first *american* educated architect, I have flattered myself that with suitable recommendation, & by a general advertisement in form of an address, I may procure business from other parts of the union. For the honor & benefit of my country I would desire to realize, and would run the risk of trusting the execution of my designs to a stranger; for tho' some alterations or mistakes might be made in the detail, these would not

the construction; the final report of the Commissioners of the Fireproof Building states "two Architects one conteracting the other as they had succeeded by appointment . . . created additional expense . . . ."[14] The report further states that since no other commission members understood how to make the necessary measurements and calculations to determine if specified quantities of materials had been used, Mills was hired for this purpose, "he being the original Architect, and allowed him $500 for such his attention and performance of measurement, the contractors paying their check survey or measurer themselves . . . ."

Exactly how much Spidle changed is as impossible to determine as is how much Mills changed back since he remained on the building commission. From the evidence available, particularly from Mills's rendering of the south front and from comparison with other buildings by him, he seems to have won out most of the time. Although there are numerous differences between the rendering and the finished building, most can be attributed either to Mills or to subsequent renovation. These differences will be considered in some detail later after the rest of the construction is outlined.

In March 1823 the stonemason John White of the firm of Rowe & White was paid $1,500. In June, he received another $1,000. There were no other large payments to the firm until 1826, when they received $2,500 in January and $1,000 in February.[15] The 1823 payments were probably for further work on the complicated staircase, for grey flag on the hall floors, and for brownstone window trim and thresholds. The remaining stonework, the brownstone capitals, portico entablatures, tenia, cornices, parapet, exterior stairs, and facing for the ground floor, had to wait until most of Gordon's brickwork was in place.

The iron work for the building was furnished by two firms. The first was Brodie & Evans, much of whose work proved defective. Their three payments were all in 1823: $328.46 in May, $282 in July, and $198.87½ in

---

be of such consequence as to destroy the general effect of the designs." *Presidential Papers Microfilm: Thomas Jefferson Papers* (Washington, 1974). Spidle's only payment for work on the building was signed "Wm. Rowse/agent for J. G. Spidle." SCDAH Treasurer—General Receipts, vol. 9, # 40.

Although Spidle is referred to as an architect, none of his works is known. He left a will that is dated 17 July 1844 and is recorded in the Record of Wills, Vol. 43, Bk. B, Charleston County. It was proved on 21 Feb. 1845. He left his house in Archdale St. to the widow of Dr. J. L. E. W. Shecut.

[14] SCDAH 4-1826-172-5.

[15] Other small payments to the firm were $165.60 on 20 Aug. 1825 and $260.96 on 9 Jun. 1827.

November (for a total of $804.33½). These payments were for cast-iron window frames and sashes and wrought-iron chimney bars. Because $301.71 worth of the work was "not usable, some broken, and more in Number than required," the firm lost the contract to supply further ironwork. Consequently, nearly all of the ironwork was supplied by the second firm, John Johnson. Johnson received only two payments before 1826: $98.85 on 13 May 1824 and $1,000 on 13 January 1825. These payments were for new chimney bars, for some roof fittings, for the reinstallation of work that had been done improperly by Adolph Beckman in November 1824 and for new sashes and their installation. Most of Johnson's work had to wait until 1826, when he received $1,000 in January, $500 in April, $500 in May, $600 in June, and $849.34 in September.[16] These amounts were for sheet iron interior shutters; cast iron banisters for between the columns, for the exterior stairs, for the upper story hall, and for the lunettes; and wrought iron railings for the stairs and six wrought iron gates for the portico arcades. Lead was used to attach most of the ironwork to the masonry, and brass was used for the "beds" of the gates.

Most of the metalwork for the roof was supplied by other contractors. John Gordon's payments included $34.75 for "building furnaces for Coppering of Roof." P. Bacot received $2,009.55 for supplying copper on 27 May 1824, and William Sanderson received $651.33 on 17 July for "coppering roof." On 30 July J. R. Rogers received $109.29 for "sundries" for the roof; on 18 November, R. Downie received $248.90 "for Roofing" the porticos; and on 22 December P. Bacot received $392.15 for more copper, presumably for the porticos. Evidently the porticos were constructed about six months after the main block of the building.

On 1 July 1824 Frederick Wesner received another payment, the first since 1822. Since he was a carpenter and since no other carpentry work was paid for between 1822 and 1826, this payment of $1,000 would have to be for installing the joists, rafters and sheathing. The fact that these were installed by the middle of 1824 is significant because they obviously were an intentional part of the design, not a last minute economy measure. As of 12 March 1824, the Commissioners of the Fire Proof Offices (including Mills as one of the five signers) reported to the Legislature that $34,523.50 had been spent on the building and an additional $17,247.01 was estimated to be necessary "to cover the whole expense of the Building."[17] The Legislature appropriated the full amount.

[16] He received a small final payment of $204.25 in Feb. 1827.

[17] SCDAH; photostat furnished to Helen G. McCormack in SCHS, 40-6-1.

There are, in addition, other reasons for believing that Mills intended for only the lower two floors of the building to be fireproof. The building was designed much larger than the immediate requirements for space, and when it was first occupied, some of the unneeded rooms were offered for rent. Obviously, expansion was anticipated, but an expansion that would be more in personnel than in records. Of the twenty-four rooms, only four were absolutely proof against fire: the two in the center of the north and south fronts on the ground and main floors. These rooms alone had no fireplaces, an omission that was clearly intentional since it was not inevitable. These rooms, then, were for storing irreplaceable records and not for personnel to use as offices. Since every room on the upper floor had a fireplace, the whole floor was intended to be used for offices. In addition, the arrangement of rooms and hallways on the ground floor and main floor (basically square rooms) would have wasted space on the upper floor. The hallways did not need to extend all the way across the upper floor since it had no entrances. Each hall would have led to a dead end so Mills incorporated three of these spaces into the two central rooms to make them larger. Making them larger also enabled him to supply them with fireplaces that could tie into planned side chimneys. While the enlargement of these rooms made them more versatile, it would have made them extremely difficult to vault. There is, however, no sign that they or any other rooms on that floor were ever intended to be vaulted. If any serious consideration had been given to vaulting some or all of them later, they would probably have had ribs built into their corners, like all of the rooms on the lower floors. Without such supports tied integrally into the walls, vaulting could probably not have been inserted. If not from the beginning of the project, then, at least by 1823 when two-thirds of the walls were up, the decision had been made that the top floor would never need to be vaulted. Although this floor was not fireproof, any fire which started there could probably not spread to the floors below.

During 1825, the building was essentially completed except for a minimum of interior fininishing. John Gordon received $6,000 on 24 January 1826 largely for having covered the exterior with roughcast and the interior with plaster. Altogether, he applied 4,619 square yards of these coatings. Other large payments on the same date, early in 1826, indicate that Rowe & White, the stonecutters, had finished their work, and John Johnson, the iron worker, had done the major portion of his work. For painting and glazing, Adolph Beckman received $200.

During the remainder of 1826, the final trim work was completed. Wesner was paid $1,000 on 24 March for more carpentry, perhaps in

part for installing the locks furnished by John Strohecker on 18 February and for which Strohecker was paid $174.50. Johnson completed the remaining ironwork and received a total of $3,449.34 during 1826 for his shutters, railings, and gates. After March, all further payments to contractors were for less than $1,000, and on 11 December 1826 the Commissioners of the Building reported that "the interior of the Building is finished, and ready for the reception of the different Officers for which it was designed . . .;" "the exterior of the Building is finished within a few days work of the Painter & Smiths Work. . . ." Although payments of $2,356.81 were made in 1827, nearly all of this amount was for work that had been completed in 1826, when the appropriation had been inadequate to cover the bills submitted.[18] The total cost of the building, including $10,000 for the lot, was $53,803,81.

When the building was completed, it more closely resembled Mills's rendering than it does at the present time. The most important evidence for how the building looked is a photograph that was published in 1883 (Fig. 3).[19] At that time the building still had its pediments, the low parapet, and the curved stairs designed by Mills. Several writers have stated that the building was built without pediments and instead had its present raked blocking course,[20] but this photograph, the 1841 paint-

[18] SCDAH 4-1826-172-7. The final payments of under $1,000 each made during 1826 and 1827 were to: Robert Downie, $220.24 in Jan. 1826 and $7 in Feb. 1827; Jeremiah Condy, $8.40 for sheet iron in Feb. 1826; John Gordon, $500 in April and in Sept. 1826 plus $848.33 in Jan. 1827; Adolph Beckman, $106.62 in Apr. 1826, $100 in Dec. 1826, and $370.77 in Feb. 1827; Frederick Wesner, $582.87 in Sept. 1826; James Longdale, $7 for a door and frame; James Adkins, $16.50 in Oct. 1826 and $15.50 in Jan. 1827 as "keeper"; and John White, $650.00 in Feb. 1827.

One 1826 report also recommended that a full-time attendant be employed (Adkins) because "first, the name of Fire Proof invites the curious and the wanton, to visit, the one to view and the other to abuse it when no one has it in care; the painters & glaziers, the lock smith, & stone cutters accounts bear testimony to this abuse. . . ." (SCDAH Reports, 1826-172.)

Payment to the City for the lot was not made until about 4 March 1823, when James Alexander Black, chairman of the Commissioners of Public Buildings withdrew $10,000; he was also a former member of the Charleston City Council. SCDAH Treasury Records, General Receipts, vol. 8, receipt no. 8 for Mar. 1823. The Board of Public Works had declined to pay $10,000 from the original, initially inadequate appropriation.

[19] *Charleston, South Carolina in 1883 with Heliotypes of the Principal Objects of Interest in and Around the City and Historical and Descriptive Notices* (Boston, 1883), opp. pp. 2, 4, 6.

[20] Talbot Hamlin, *Greek Revival Architecture in America: Being an Account of Important Trends in American Architecture and American Life Prior to the War Between the States* (rpt. of 1944 ed. New York, 1964), pp. 49 and 347. William H.

ing of "Officers, Volunteer Fire Department" (Fig. 9B), and the 1852 View of Charleston all prove that the pediments were built and were intact in 1883. A detailed account of the 1886 earthquake damage indicates that the heavy brownstone cornices of the pediments fell off then and were not restored. Instead, the pediments were replaced by a parapet nearly twice the height of the one designed by Mills, and the building received its present jagged outline.[21] Mills's parapet is of brownstone, as is his cornice, and these two elements were intended to blend into one visual unit. The added height is stucco covered brick. The curved steps which were of brownstone so that they would blend with the facing of the ground floor were replaced with straight granite steps. Since the inside risers of brownstone had worn down so much that they needed to be covered with wooden treads, the exposed outside stairs had probably deteriorated even more. When the south steps were damaged by the earthquake, both sets were replaced.[22]

Pierson, Jr., *American Buildings and Their Architects; the Colonial and Neoclassical Styles* (New York, 1970), p. 393. Albert Simons and W. H. Johnson Thomas, *An Architectural Guide to Charleson, South Carolina, 1700-1900, in Manuscript Form* (Charleston, n. d.). Since raked blocking courses are not unusual in Greek Revival architecture and since Mills himself had used one for the design of his earlier Monumental Church in Richmond (1812), the attribution was with good reason, but was incorrect. Mills would have thought the Fireproof Building incomplete as it was rebuilt after the earthquake, because he wrote that his building was "crowned with a pediment." *Statistics*, p. 410.

[21] "Atlanta, Ga., December 11th, 1886. To the Companies Transacting Business in Charleston, S. C.: Herewith we hand you final report of the Inspectors, together with a List of Buildings that Should Come Down." H. C. Stockdell, James A. Thomas, Hutson Lee, Committee. This report notes that the north front had the "tops of portico rebuilt" and the south front had "tops of portico rebuilt; steps rebuilt." The east and west fronts are described as "good." The estimate of damage from the earthquake was $2,500 and the present condition is described as "Now OK." During the 1970-1973 renovation of the building, when the interior walls and vaulting were sandblasted no cracks were discovered. Albert Simons, final report, SCHS 40-6-2.

[22] The portico and stairs of the Asylum and the Fireproof Building were intended to be similar in most of their details and are nearly identical in height and depth. Two elevations of the Asylum are reproduced in Gallagher *Mills*, opp. p. 50, 52; the first is larger and is clearly earlier because of a mistake in representing the shadow of the central block against the right wing, a mistake that was not repeated in the second one. The first is now in the SCDAH; the second in the Papers of Robert Mills, SCHS. Both elevations and also two plans, (one opp. p. 52 in Gallagher; both in the SCDAH) show oval projections at the corners of the portico. These projections were to have formed the inside edge of the curving stairs, but they were not used for the Asylum. Instead, its portico's corners are squared off and the curving stairs are separate. Presumably, the granite chosen

The 1883 photograph also indicates that the Doric columns were not fluted, but there is good reason to believe that Mills did not change his mind about wanting them to be fluted. As they are, their diameter is several inches narrower than the ones on the rendering. As a consequence, their base width to height ratio is greater than the usual Greek

---

for the stairs was too intractable to trim each riser differently so that it would fit the inside edge. Mills's rendering of the Fireproof Building does not show ovoid projections at the corners of the portico, but the completed building used them and still has them. Mills evidently made the original rendering of the Fireproof Building before he had worked out the ovoid stair solution, so his initial design antedated the four drawings for the Asylum.

The two plans of the Asylum have stairs which extend forward at angles of 84° and 76°. An excavation at the base of the ovoid projection on the east corner of the Fireproof Building's south portico exposed brick foundations which indicate that its stairs extended forward at an angle of about 55°. The rendering of the Fireproof Building has the angle of the stairs at 90°, which if built would have almost completely blocked the sidewalk on Chalmers Street. The foundations of the building must have been too far advanced for the building to be moved further south when the final plan for widening Chalmers Street was adopted. Mills could have kept the semicircular cross-section, moved his steps back, and made them narrower. Instead, he enabled them to be broader by switching to an ovoid cross section. After solving this problem so deftly and in a way that was visually pleasing, he applied the solution where it was not needed, since the space in front of the Asylum stairs was not constricted. When a considerable additional expense would have been necessary to cut granite (rather than brownstone), he probably agreed that the extra amount was unjustifiable.

The rendering for the Fireproof Building and the smaller rendering for the Asylum are part of a set of at least six drawings on paper of similar size and type (Papers of Robert Mills, SCHS). Dated watermarks, discovered by Sallie Doscher, indicate that three drawings were prepared in 1827 or later and thus that all six are probably copies. The rendering inscribed "design for Genl. Hampton's House" is on paper dated 1827, and the renderings for the Fireproof Building and the Octagon Unitarian Church, Philadelphia, are on paper dated 1828. While Mills may have been preparing new renderings to represent his final intentions, it is more likely that he was copying his original presentation drawings. He definitely was not showing how the buildings were built. He probably was not showing how he would have preferred for them to have looked because the Fireproof Building and the Asylum have changes that can be safely attributed to him. For example, even though the Fireproof Building had been built with ovoid projections, he does not show them; and even though the Asylum had been built without these projections, he does show them. A comparison of the ironwork designs, surface treatment, window placement, etc., further suggests that he conscientiously tried to reproduce the original designs exactly (except for improving the quality of the drawing).

Mills's reasons for preparing these drawings are not known, but he may have planned to use them for two purposes: (1) He needed representations of his work because, as he wrote to Andrew Jackson on 15 Aug. 1829, he was "at present out

Revival maximum of 1:6, the ratio of the columns of Mills's rendering.[23] In addition, the brownstone capitals were carved with a recess of several inches to be able to receive the fluting. The change to a plain surface can probably be attributed to Spidle. The extra expense would have been a minute part of the total cost, but the effect would have made a tremendous difference. Mills was probably not present to object when the columns were covered with roughcast. To have afterwards removed the roughcast and replaced it would have been a much more substantial expense. Spidle can be blamed for this change because he definitely supervised the incorrect installation of the iron balusters between the columns. He was not aware that the balusters have different (reversed) designs on their opposite faces, and he installed them in a random pattern, a mistake that neither Mills as designer nor Johnson as maker would have been guilty of.[24] Spidle also spaced the balusters too close

---

of professional employment;" he had been seeking a position in Washington and perhaps elsewhere since about 1826. The public works program in South Carolina was ending, and he needed a portfolio to send around (Bess Glenn, *Some Letters of Robert Mills, Engineer and Architect*, Columbia, 1938, pp. 6 and 15). (2) He contemplated a publication to be entitled "The Architectural Works of Robert Mills" (Gallagher, *Mills*, pp. 168-171).

The combination of curved stairs and a classical portico is not unusual in 18th century English architecture. Mills probably knew the design of Isaac Ware's Wrotham Park (1754), which has a monumental four-columned portico on an arcaded basement with curved stairs at each end. Ware, in turn, was probably influenced by Ingio Jones, whose Queen's House, Greenwich (1616-1635) has curving exterior stairs. Jones may have borrowed the idea from Guiliano da Sangallo's Villa Medici, Poggio a Caiano (1480s). Mills's first-hand knowledge of Hoban's work on the White House was probably an influence on him also, and even though he found little to admire about the Charleston City Hall, he must have approved of the stairs. *Statistics*, pp. 408-410.

[23] Gene Waddell, "The Introduction of Greek Revival Architecture to Charleston," in David Moltke-Hansen, ed. *Art in the Lives of South Carolinians: Nineteenth-Century Chapters* (Charleston, 1979). Mills strove for effect, not exactness, in his use of Greek architectural detail. While his columns would have been correctly proportioned, they were not designed or built with entasis. The columns had no base and reasonably accurate capitols. They were intended to have arises and a hypotrachlion. The architrave and frieze are almost evenly divided by the tenia. Triglyphs were omitted, and as a result, the absence of an architrave for the main block of the building is not obvious. The positioning of the windows took precedence over an architrave.

[24] Each cast iron baluster appears to be two bars of wrought iron that have been intertwined at one point. On one face one of the bars projects beyond the other and on the other face the pattern reverses itself. The forty-eight balusters between the six columns (eight between each pair) were installed in a completely random order with no distinction being made whether one side or the other faced

to the columns for them to receive flutes; the balusters would have had to be removed and repositioned also.

How Spidle increased the expense of the building is unknown. Some of his changes may have been corrected. An addition that is likely his is the quoins of light colored stone which contrast unharmoniously with the brownstone facing. Mills's horizontal rustication was a design of greater simplicity, honesty (for a facing), and appropriateness. Similar bands on the arcade of the Asylum's portico have good effect. Spidle should probably be credited with incorrectly installing the brownstone facing. The stone should have been cut and positioned so that its grain was exposed to the weather. Instead, the stone was placed on end and the thin sedimentary layers have continually flaked. Mills would have been aware of this problem because his training had been almost entirely in the North and he had worked extensively with stone.

Another significant departure from Mills design was the enlargement of the windows in the third story and the omission of the string course. This also is attributable to Spidle because he was superintending construction in 1823 when the building had reached this level. Spidle would have had a good argument that the windows needed to be longer for the upper floor rooms behind the porticoes to be well lighted. These rooms are still the most poorly lighted ones in the building because their exterior windows are always in the shade of the porticos. Mills was not unaware of this situation, as the shadows on his rendering show, and he took it into consideration. He placed interior windows between each of these rooms and the skylighted stairwell. He was probably horrified that Spidle added two rows of lights to the bottom of his upper story windows and omitted his stringcourse. The smaller windows and stringcourse at the sill level (rather than floor level) were extremely important for the unity of his overall design. They created the effect of an attic story and together with the grooves Mills planned for the ground floor gave the building an overall horizontality. The taller windows now on the upper floor combine visually with the tall windows of the main floor and give an effect of verticality that is entirely contrary to what Mills would have achieved.

The smaller and squarer windows would have made an even greater difference on the east and west fronts. Mills conceived of his building as essentially a two-story structure on a high basement or pedestal. He

---

outward. (On the south portico, from left to right, they read aaaaaaab, aaababaa, bbbabbaa; on the north portico, aabaaaab, abaabbab, aaaaaabb). Mills would have had them arranged in a regular pattern, most likely an alternating one.

refers to what is in fact a full ground floor as a basement, and he says, "the columns rise the whole height of the building (comprising two stories)." [25] This attitude becomes extremely important for understanding his intention because when the ground floor is disregarded, the design of the upper stories has all the elements and the basic proportions of a triumphal arch. This derivation would have been even more evident if the upper windows had been smaller, and if the section between the thermal and the triple windows were still the color of brownstone (as in the 1841 painting of firemen; Fig. 9B). Even as the building is now, the elements are all present: the large central arch (created by connecting the thermal and triple windows within a recess); the flanking smaller arches (the two end windows); and the flanking rectangular windows of the upper story. The cornice and parapet contributed to the effect. Considering how effective the original design would have been, placing the side of the building along Meeting Street would have enabled anyone traveling along it to enjoy three major fronts.

The present form of the building also differs in a number of less significant aspects. The 1883 photograph shows that the balusters on the curved stairs were like those which remain between the columns. It shows that the roughcast was already ruled, again contrary to Mills' intention. The 1841 painting shows that the roughcast was not painted. The warm tan, undoubtedly similiar to the superbly weathered color of St. Philip's stucco, was in subtle contrast with the rich, mat brown of the stone.

When the rendering is compared with the present building, several further differences become noticeable. The superb grills for the ground floor windows were added to the design as well as to the building as an afterthought because they are attached with screws to the frames instead of being imbedded in the masonry. Since the design is good enough to be by Mills, there is no reason not to attribute them to him. The same can be said for the portico gates, which are rectilinear except for a row of bold and regular segments of circles set into them. Although the much thinner and irregularly curved ironwork above the gates is vigorously executed, the design is out of character with the rest of the building and is probably a substitution. The grills of crossed diagonal bars of iron in the central windows beneath the porticoes are probably by Mills, and wrought iron was substituted for the cast iron of the other grills for extra security. The design of the round headed windows on the main floor was changed from a fan with straight spokes to a simplified

[25] *Statistics*, p. 410.

Gothic pattern. Likewise, the garlanded fans above the doors were changed to interlaced Gothic arches. These too are probably by Mills because he used similar fans for windows in his Camden Court House rendering. This pattern is a holdover from Georgian architecture rather than an early example of Gothic Revival.[26]

To create the Fireproof Building, Mills drew broadly from his educational experiences. From Thomas Jefferson, he had absorbed an admiration for Palladio that he never abandoned.[27] Mills called Palladio "that great Master of Architecture," and he owned a French edition of Scamozzi's book on Palladio.[28] While Mills did not "consult" this or any other book for designs to adapt, he must have been especially attracted to one of the plates in particular and he must have been able to recall its overall effect.[29] This plate shows a three story building with a monumental, four-columned portico on an arcaded basement; one large window to each side of the portico on the main floor; one smaller window to each side on the upper story; and a string course at the base of the

[26] Gallagher, *Mills*, opp. p. 54. The two Gothic doors on either side of the fireplace in the southeast corner room of the third story are examples of 19th century Gothic detail. Only one of these doors is shown in the Historic American Building Survey plan (Fig. 8), but both are original.

[27] Fiske Kimball, *Thomas Jefferson, Architect; Original Designs in the Collection of Thomas Jefferson Coolidge, Junior, with an Essay and Notes* (Boston, 1916). Frederick Doveton Nichols, *Thomas Jefferson's Architectural Drawings, Compiled with Commentary and a Check List*, 3rd ed. (Boston and Charlottesville, 1961), see fig. 14 and 16 and nos. 154-155 and 411-413 for drawings by Mills.

Presidential Papers Microfilm: Thomas Jefferson Papers (Washington, 1974). On 3 Oct. 1806 Mills wrote thanking Jefferson for "an introduction & recommendation to Mr. Latrobe. . . . My Present ideas of this noble art & science [architecture], which are dramatically opposite to those I entr'd M. L's office with, I trust are founded on the dictates of Reason & Nature, because these are the only true foundations of correct taste & real beauty." (Mills was about twenty-five when he thus lectured Jefferson). When Mills asked Jefferson to recommend him on 13 Jun. 1808, Jefferson wrote a carefully worded letter which implies that all he knew from personal experience about Mills was his exceptional ability as a draftsman. Jefferson certainly allowed Mills to use his architectural books while he was President and Mills was working on the White House with Hoban. Jefferson certainly admired Mills's ability or he would not have employed him as a draftsman. There is no indication however that Jefferson tutored Mills, and the content and formality of their correspondence makes this unlikely (although Fiske Kimball, in his introduction to Gallagher's *Mills*, p. ix, says Jefferson took Mills "into his family in 1803").

[28] Gallagher, *Mills*, p. 154 and see p. 24.

[29] Ottavio Bertotti Scamozzi, *Le Febbriche e i Disegni di Andrea Palladio* (New York, 1968 reprint of the 1796 Italian ed.); bk. 2, pl. XLI. See Gallagher, *Mills*, p. 170, for Mills's approach to design.

upper story windows. Some of these elements are very common in the work of later architects; the combination is too extraordinary to be coincidental. While there are also almost as many differences as similarities, this plate is probably a prototype for the Fireproof Building and for many of his courthouse designs. Essentially, the Fireproof Building is a Palladian block with its attached portico. Mills even thought of the sides of the building as flanking "wings."[30] He also studied Palladio's *Four Books* carefully and almost certainly derived the cantilevered stone staircase from another of Palladio's designs.[31] Palladio's extensive and imaginative use of vaulting must also have influenced him as well as Latrobe.

From Latrobe, Mills learned the technique of vaulting, and he absorbed a basic vocabulary of design elements.[32] Latrobe gave Mills an

[30] *Statistics*, p. 410.

[31] New York, 1965 reprint of the 1738 ed.; bk. I, pl. XXXII F and bk. II, pl. VII. I am indebted to W. H. Johnson Thomas for the suggestion that the Fireproof Building was essentially Palladian and to Robert Stockton for passing the insight along to me.

The oval staircase simplified the problem of connecting stories of unequal height. Mills was able to connect the shorter distance between the ground floor and first floor (8′ 10″) with a semi-circular flight of stairs and the longer distance between the main floor and the top floor (14′ 2″) with a combination of a semi-circular flight and a straight flight. As a consequence of adopting the oval plan and of placing halls to either side of it, the rooms to the north and south are substantially narrower than those to the east and west.

[32] Edward C. Carter, II, ed.-in-chief, Thomas E. Jeffrey, Microfiche ed., *The Papers of Benjamin Henry Latrobe*, Microtext ed. (Clifton, N. J., 1976). Mills started working with Latrobe in 1804 (35/G5) and supervised the construction for several of Latrobe's Philadelphia buildings, mainly his Bank of Philadelphia (with Gothic vaults of stone) and the Markoe House (which had a central oval staircase lighted from above). Latrobe kidded Mills about imitating his "acquiline" mouldings (58/A13); the Fireproof Building's cornice is basically similiar to the one Latrobe designed for the Philadelphia Waterworks (300). Latrobe's brick vaulting for his fireproof addition to the Federal Treasury Building (58/G2) is probably the closest precedent for the vaults of the Fireproof Building (closer, for example, than the Charleston Powder Magazine or the basement of the Exchange although these also may have influenced Mills).

Latrobe characteristically used recesses, and Mills adopted them for many of his buildings. The recesses for the windows on the north and south fronts serve to make the openings appear to be the same size as the doors. The solution of using recesses to unite the thermal and triple windows on the east and west fronts appears in several of Latrobe's drawings. Latrobe probably adapted the window solution from a design by Robert Adam for the end blocks of Fitzroy Square, the east side of which is illustrated in John Summerson, *Georgian London*, 3rd ed., (Cambridge, Mass., and London, 1978, pl. 31a). Adam's design has the basic elements of a triumphal arch

appreciation for the tradition of simplified, but carefully proportioned exteriors that is particularly identifiable with the work of Robert Adam. A comparison between Monticello and Latrobe's Burd House provides a useful contrast.[33] Jefferson's building is still essentially Georgian in its use of elaborate cornices and heavy door and window frames; the wall surfaces are backgrounds for this applied ornament. Latrobe's house uses plain, narrow cornices and replaces heavy trim with recesses; the wall surface is emphasized and subtle shifts in the wall plane create the major design elements. Before meeting Latrobe, Mills preferred the heavy mouldings; after working with him, he dropped nearly all applied ornament.

Mills begins his own description of the Fireproof Building by saying that "It is designed in the simple Greek Doric style, without any ornament, except that afforded by the porticoes which face each front." [34] The simplicity is a successful illusion.

---

and is probably the prototype for the east and west fronts of the Fireproof Building. Latrobe adapted the window combination for the Bank of Pennsylvania in 1798 and later used it in a design competition for the New York City Hall (1802). The size of the Bank was enlarged too much for his design to be utilized; compare pls. 12 and 13 in Talbot Hamlin, *Benjamin Henry Latrobe* (New York, 1955). Although neither design was used, Mills undoubtedly had studied both. The Bank was built with a glazed monitor that is similar to and probably the source for the ones by Mills for the Asylum and the First Baptist Church, Charleston. The present monitor on the Fireproof Building shows in the 1883 photograph and may be older.

[33] For an illustration of the Burd House (1800-1801) in Philadelphia, see Fiske Kimball, *Domestic Architecture of the American Colonies and of the Early Republic* (New York, 1966 reprint of the 1922 ed.).

[34] *Statistics*, p. 410.

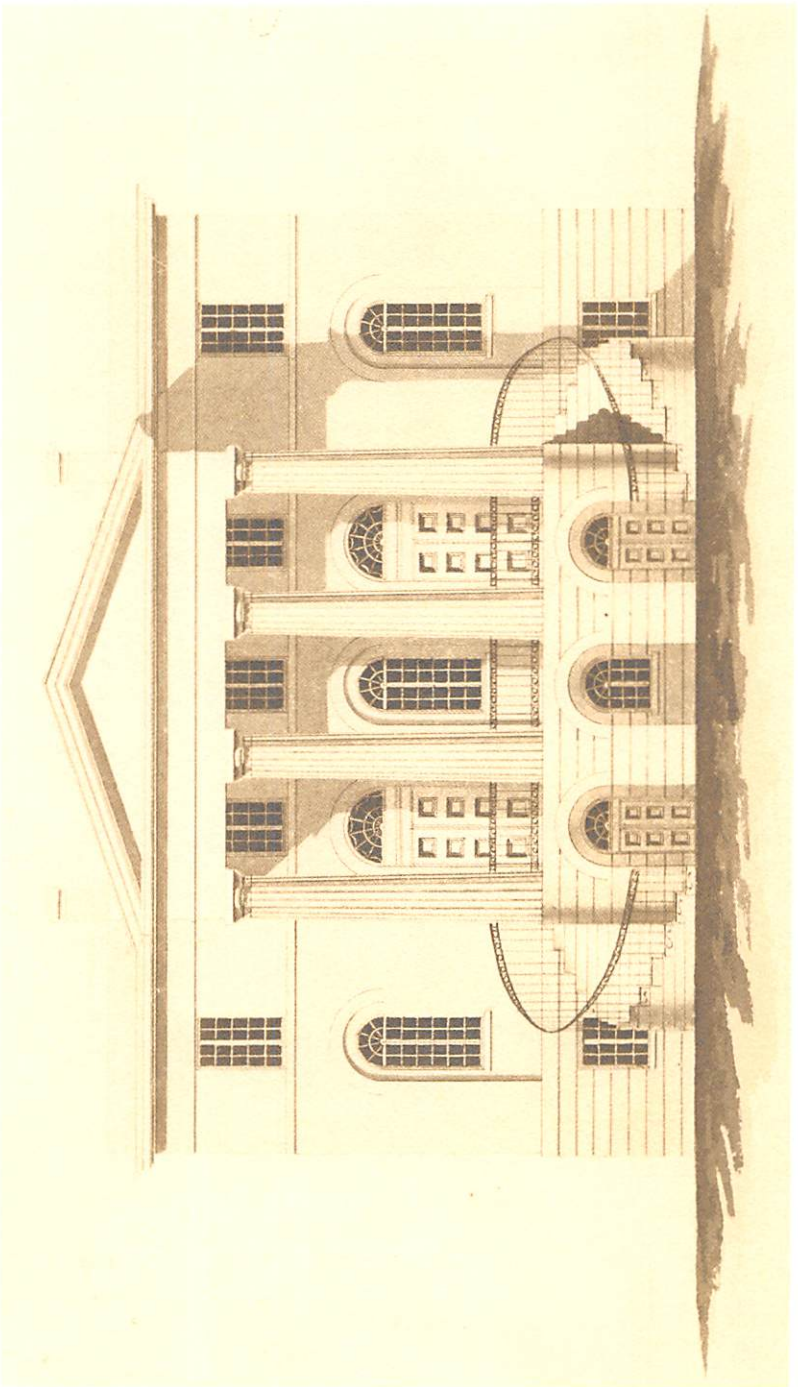


FIG. 1. "Fireproof Public Offices Charleston, S. C." Rendering by Robert Mills of the Fireproof Building (1822-1826); on paper watermarked 1828. Papers of Robert Mills, SCHS.

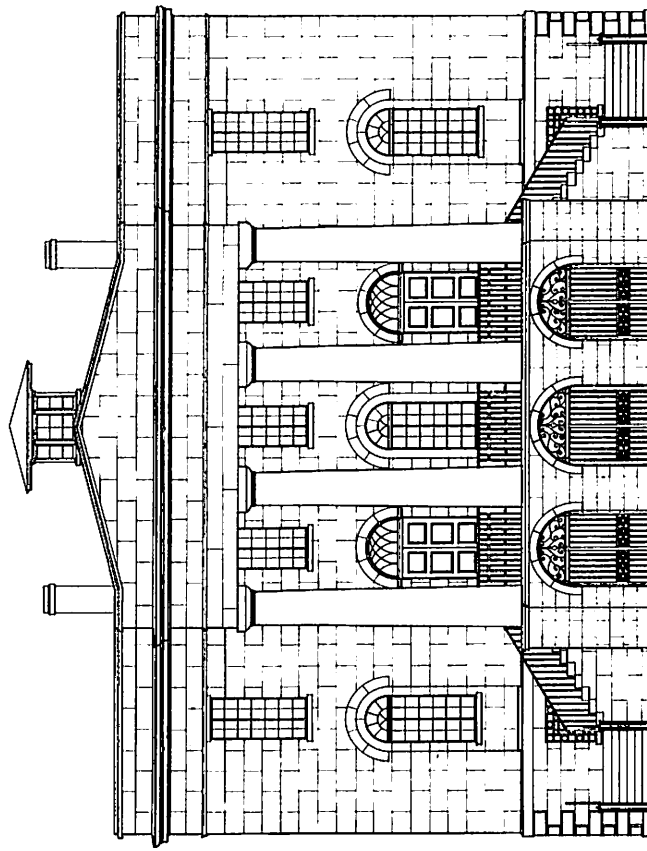


FIG. 2. "County Records Building." South elevation of the Fireproof Building (by M. Benoit Halsey, HABS, 1934).

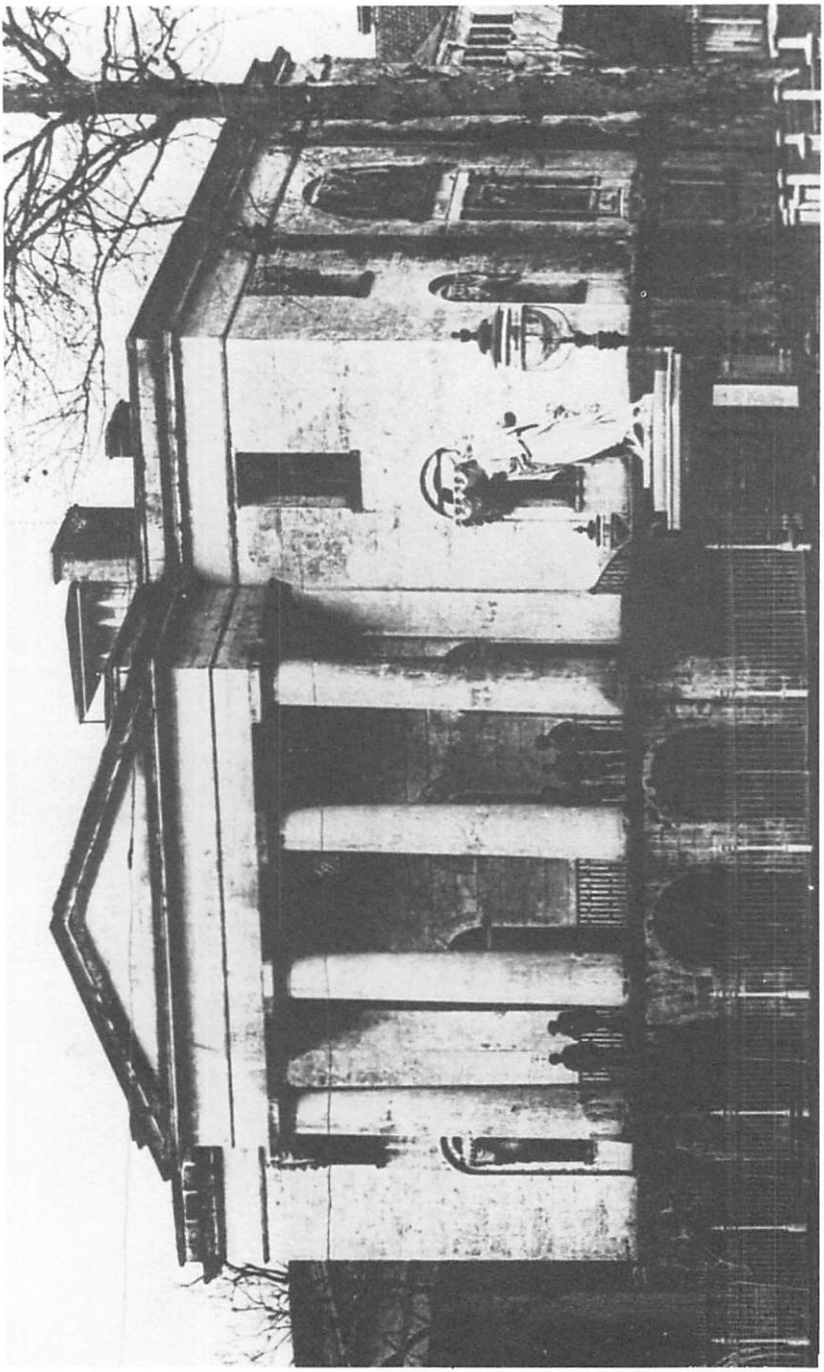


FIG. 3. The Fireproof Building before the 1886 earthquake damaged its pediment and steps (from *Charleston in 1883 . . .*).

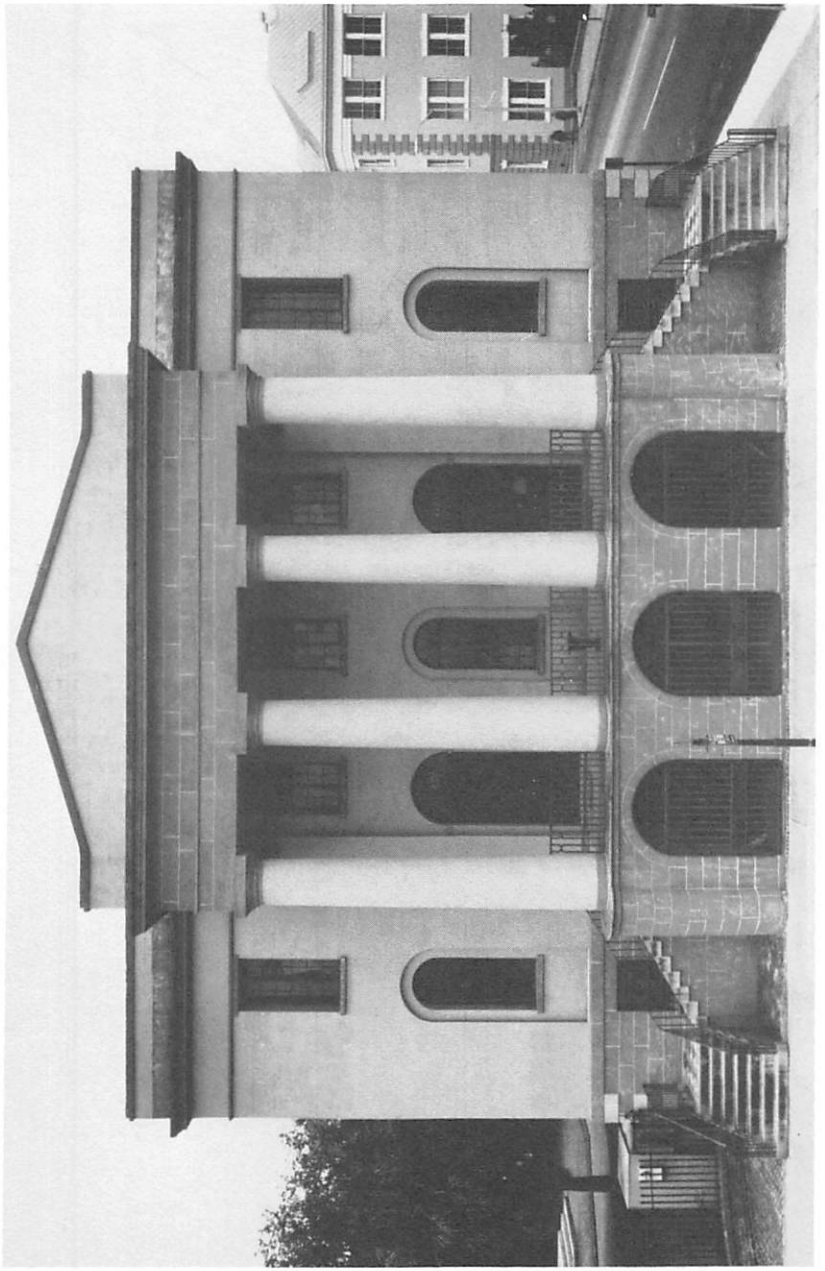


FIG. 4. North front of the Fireproof Building.

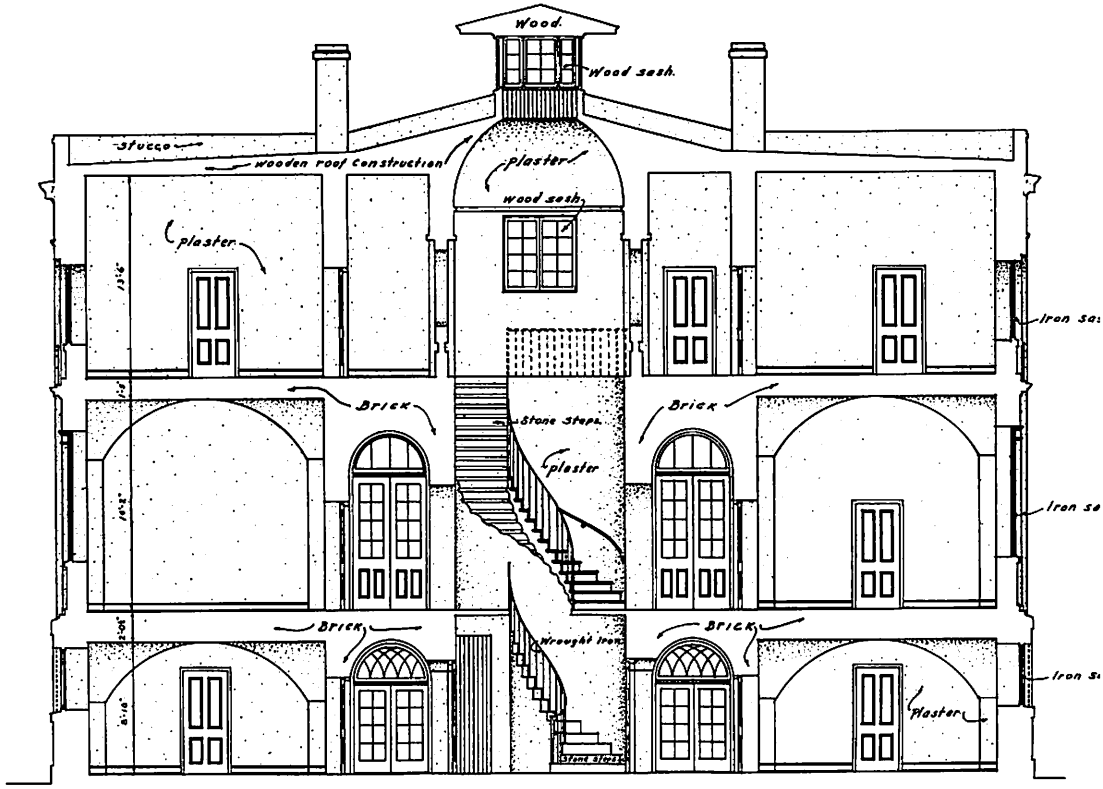


FIG. 5. Section of the Fireproof Building (by Stephen Thomas, HABS, 1934).

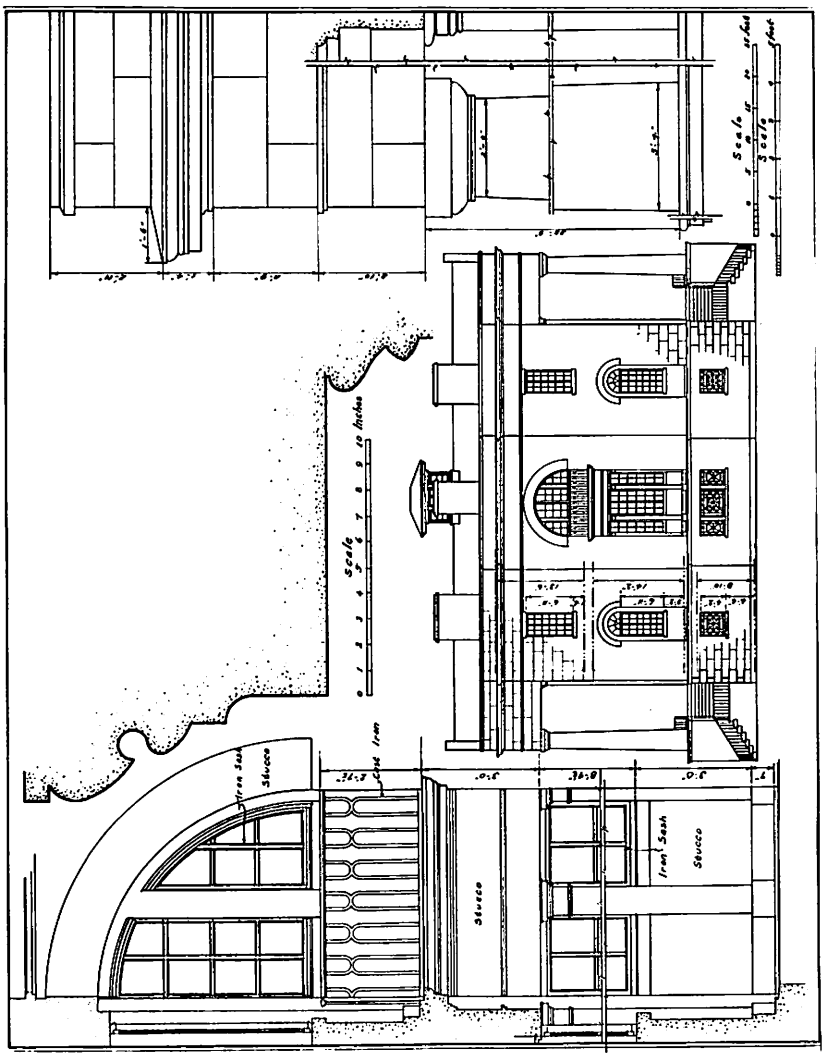


FIG. 6. East front and details of the Fireproof Building (by L. K. Montgomery, HABS. 1934).

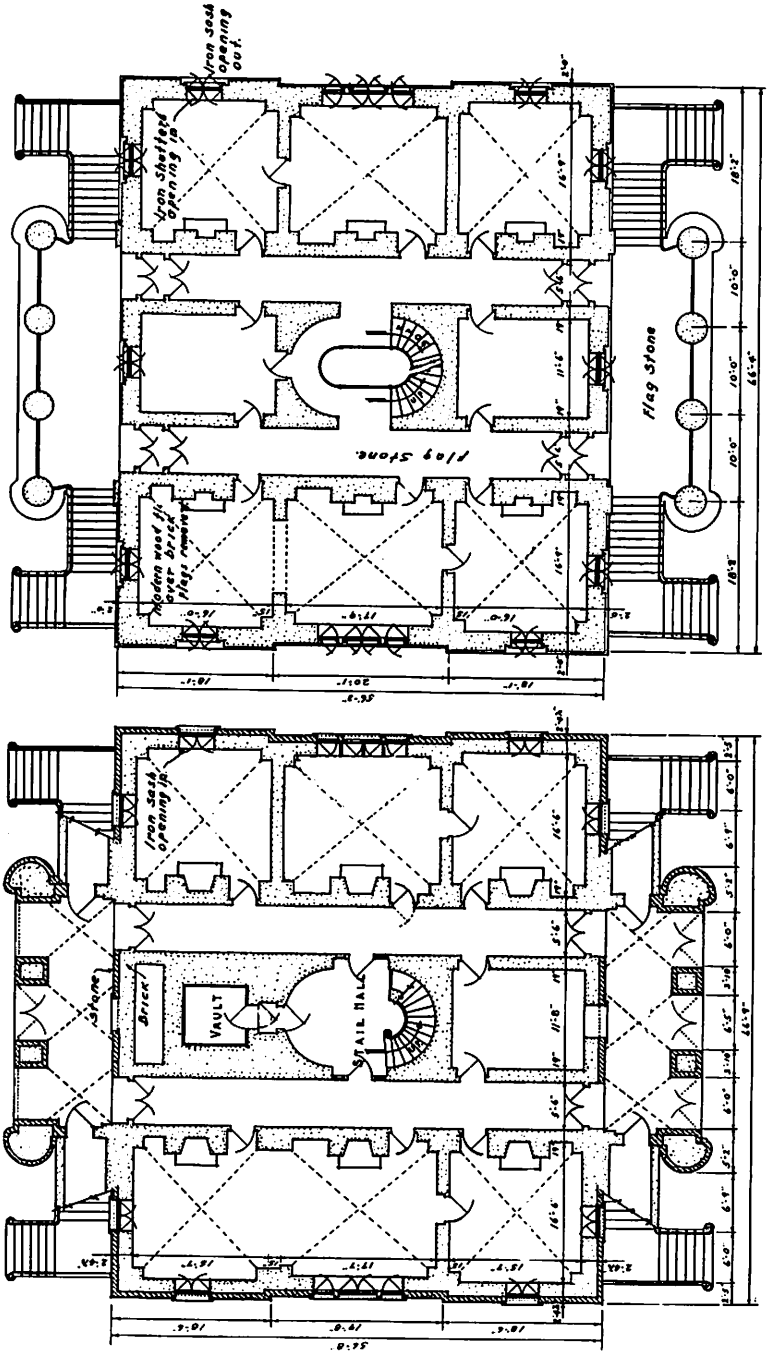


FIG. 7. Plans of the ground and main floors of the Fireproof Building (by Stephen Thomas. HABS. 1934).

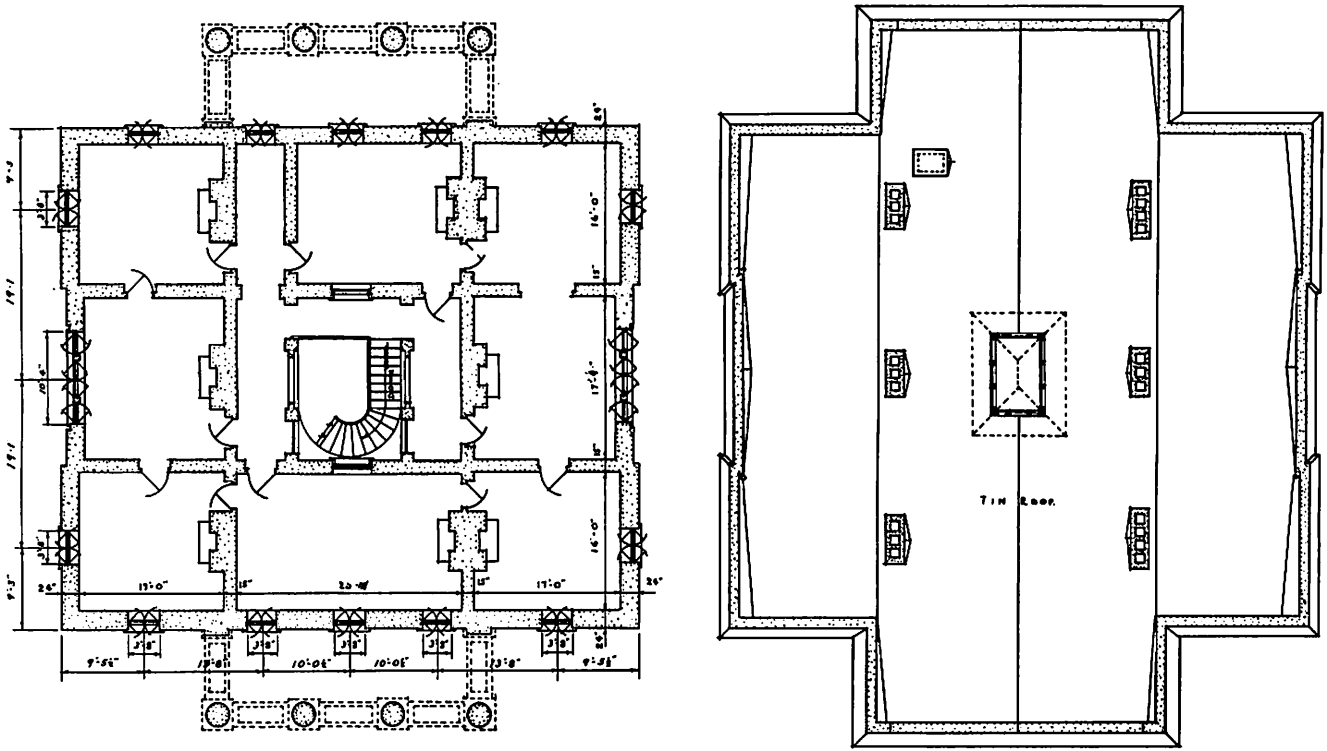


FIG. 8. Plans of the upper floor and roof of the Fireproof Building (by Stephen Thomas. HABS, 1934).

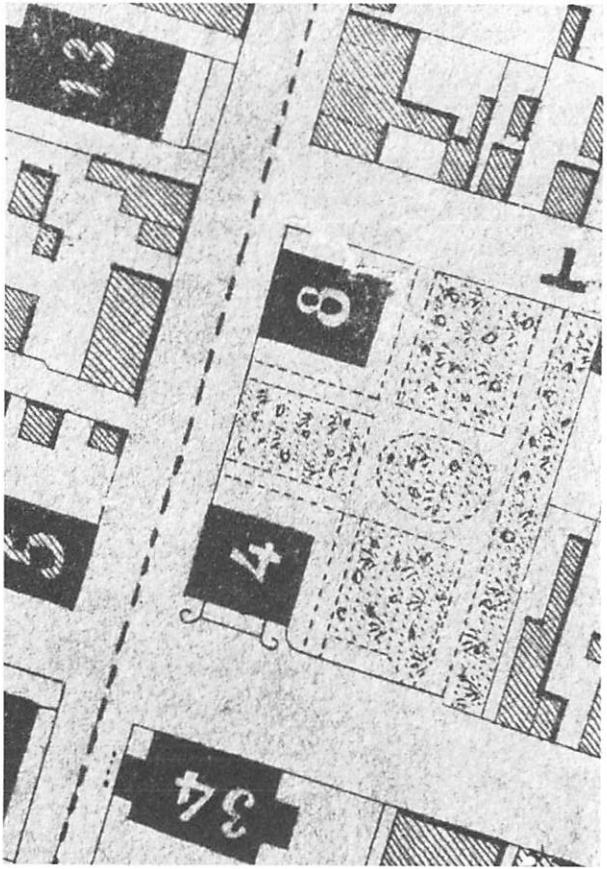
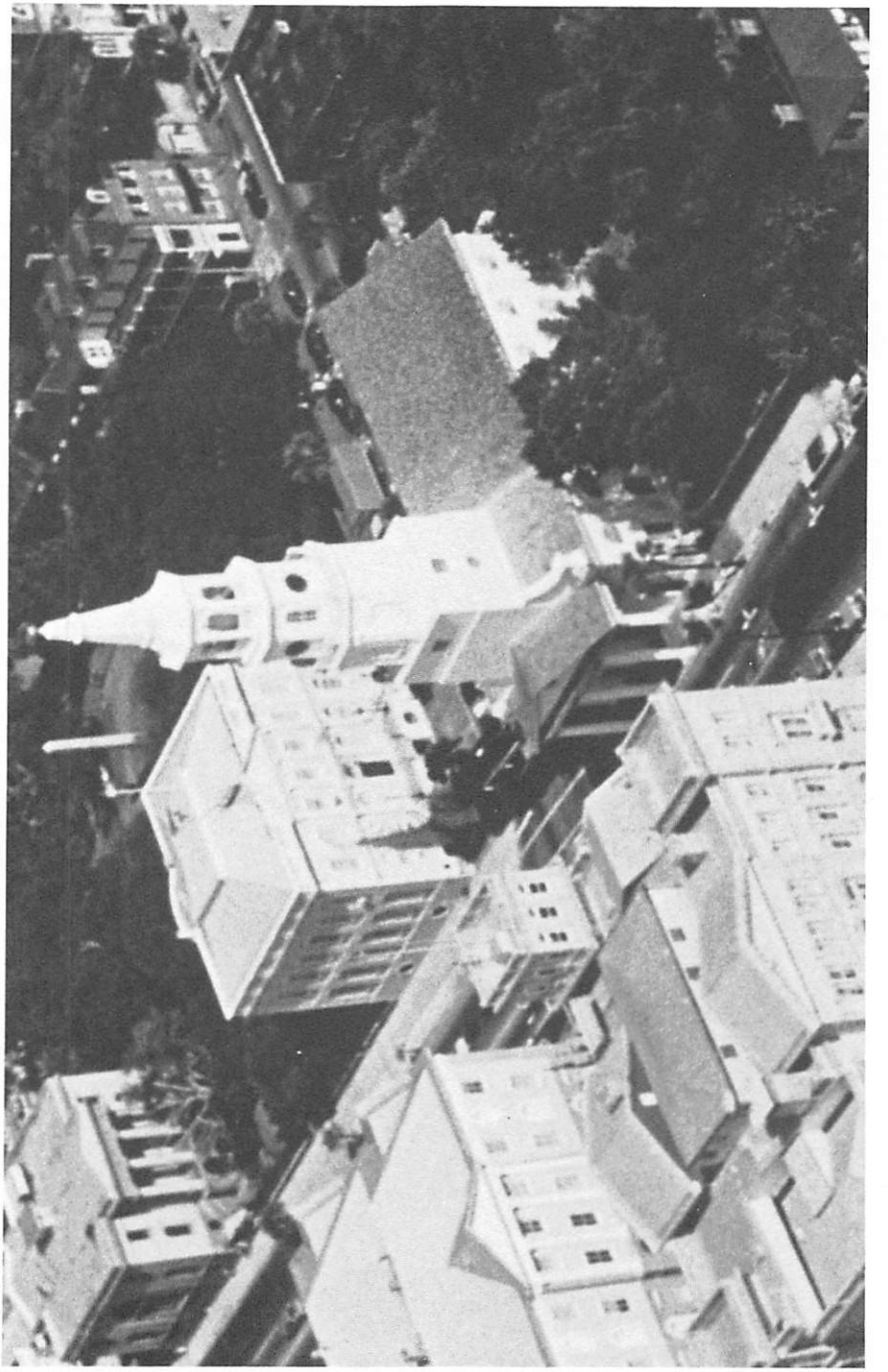


FIG. 9A (left). Plan of Washington Park with nearby buildings: 4—City Hall; 5—Court House; 8—Fireproof Building; 13—Hibernian Hall; 34—St. Michaels Church (from the 1852 map of Charleston by Bridgens and Allen).

FIG. 9B (above). Fireproof Building in 1841; from the painting of "Officers, Volunteer Fire Department." (Reproduced with permission of the City Council of Charleston.)

FIG. 10 (opposite page). Aerial photograph of the buildings near the intersection of Broad and Meeting Streets (by John Doane; reproduced with permission of the Charleston Post Card Co., Inc.).



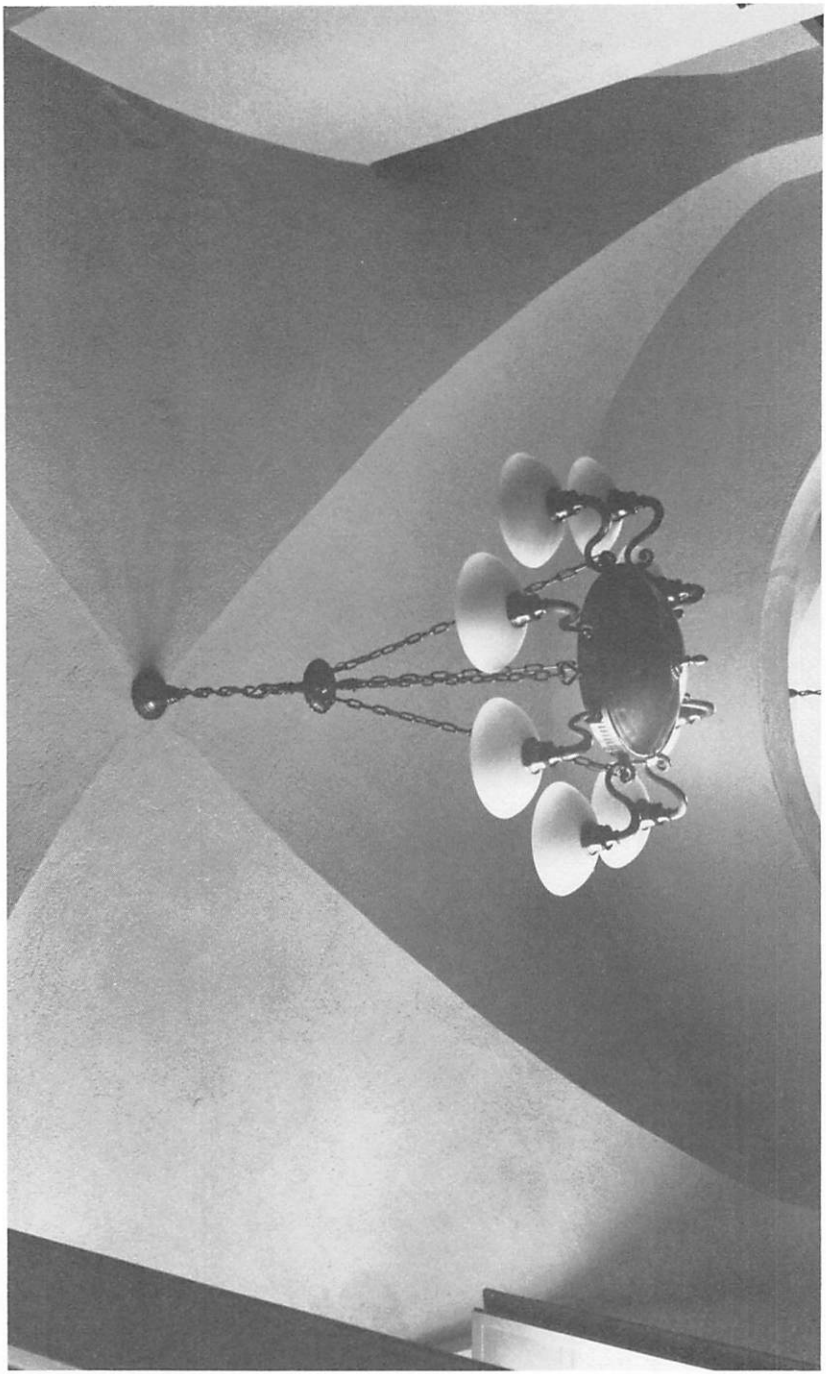


FIG. 11. Vaulting of the main floor of the Fireproof Building.

FIG. 12. Stairwell of the Fireproof Building.

THE FEATHER BED ARISTOCRACY: ABBEVILLE DISTRICT IN THE 1790S

MARY KATHERINE DAVIS *

"Until sometime after the Revolution, the social and financial prestige of a family was measured by the number of feather-beds owned. . . . The ambition of every mother apparently was to give a daughter at marriage or by will at least one feather-bed."

—H. L. Watson

When Governor James Glen travelled through the South Carolina upcountry in 1753, he offered the following observations of the few scattered inhabitants:

> . . . their lands are good, and when cleared yield plentifull Crops of Corn . . . some of them also have good Gangs of Horses, many of them abound in Children, but none of them bestow the least Education on them, they take so much care in raising a Litter of Piggs, their Children are equally naked and full as Nasty. The Parents in the back Woods come together without any previous ceremony . . . there is not a Minister within a hundred Miles of them, so that I am affraid others must answer for their Ignorance and crimes.[1]

Sophisticated gentlemen viewed dismal, pathetic sights in the hinterlands—vulgarity, impudence, illiteracy, poverty, and indolence. The people "delight[ed] in their . . . low, lazy, sluttish, heathenish, hellish Life," and were loathe to change.[2] To coastal residents, the interior of the province was useful only as a buffer to protect the more civilized settlements from Indian attack.

A missionary to the Sand Hills and Piedmont, equally unimpressed with the character of the settlers, was much concerned with the state of their souls. In 1766, Charles Woodmason, an intinerant Anglican minis-

* A doctoral candidate in the Department of History at the University of South Carolina.

[1] "Governor James Glen to A Gentleman of the Council, October 25, 1753," Papers in the British Public Records Office Relating to South Carolina, Vol. XXV, 349-357, South Carolina Department of Archives and History.

[2] Richard J. Hooker, ed., *The Carolina Backcountry on the Eve of the Revolution: The Journal and Other Writings of Charles Woodmason, Anglican Itinerant* (Chapel Hill, N. C., 1953), p. 52.