

WILLIAM ENSTON HOME, COTTAGE No. 2
900 King Street
Charleston
Charleston County
South Carolina

HABS No. SC-686-A

HABS
SC
10-CHAR,
354A-

PHOTOGRAPHS

WRITTEN HISTORICAL AND DESCRIPTIVE DATA

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Historic American Buildings Survey
National Park Service
Department of the Interior
P.O. Box 37137
Washington, D.C. 20013-7127

HISTORIC AMERICAN BUILDINGS SURVEY

WILLIAM ENSTON HOME -- COTTAGE No. 2

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Location: 900 King St., Charleston, Charleston County, South Carolina. This building is located near the northwest corner of the property, facing southwest toward St. Martin's Court and King Street.

Present Owner: The Board of Trustees of the William Enston Home.

Present Occupant: Presently unoccupied.

Present Use: Rent-free housing for the elderly poor; vacant at present.

Significance: The William Enston Home is an early example of benevolent, philanthropic housing for the elderly. Funded by a bequest of 1859, the complex was built between 1884 and 1888, with additional structures put up in 1893, 1927, and 1933. With its neat rows of detached, double cottages, set amid spacious, landscaped grounds, the Home provides an unusual and well-preserved example of nineteenth-century picturesque, suburban planning concepts adapted to this type of institutional function. On the regional level, few buildings in the Romanesque Revival style were built in this part of South Carolina; the Enston Home provides one of the pre-eminent local examples.

Cottage No. 2 is one of the first five buildings built on the site in 1887. Nineteen nearly identical cottages were built here in 1887 and 1888. Cottage No. 2 was selected for documentation because of its relatively good condition and current lack of occupants.

PART I. HISTORICAL INFORMATION

A. Physical History:

1. Date of Erection: 1887. According to the *Charleston Yearbook* for 1887, ground was broken for the first five cottages on March 9, 1887. The buildings were further discussed in several extant letters of 1887 between the trustees, the architect, and the builder. Early applications state that the cottages were to be ready for inmates on November 1, 1888. By February 1889 all cottages were fully occupied.
2. Architect: W. B. W. Howe, Jr., with local contractor Patrick Culleton supervising on site. Howe was paid \$1,800 for his work at the Enston Home. The son of Episcopalian Bishop William Bell White Howe, Sr., Howe was born in Charleston in 1851. Between 1868 and 1872 he studied for his bachelor's degree at the College of Charleston. In 1875 he received his master of arts degree from that

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institution.

Professionally active as a surveyor, engineer and architect in Charleston during the 1870s and 1880s, Howe later worked in Knoxville, TN, and Spartanburg, SC, where he built houses, schools, churches, banks, and warehouses. His Charleston designs include the Vestry Room for St. Michael's Church (1883), the Charles H. Drayton House (1884-85), and the Poppenheim Commercial Building (1891; though nothing remains but its facade, this last is, along with the Enston Home and Stevenson and Curl's 1890-92 Circular Congregational Church, among the best examples of Romanesque Revival architecture in the city). At the time of his design for the Enston Home, Howe was employed in Savannah, GA, as chief engineer for the combined Savannah, Florida and Western, and Charleston and Savannah Railway Companies. He was professionally associated with College of Charleston classmate William Hume Simons during the 1870s, and in the late 1890s, with A. C. Olney. Howe died on February 11, 1912, in Flatrock, NC, and is buried in Charleston.

Sewage and plumbing systems were designed by civil and sanitary engineer Rudolph Hering of Philadelphia. Hering was also instrumental in determining the orientation of the cottages (see overview, HABS No. SC-686).

3. Original and Subsequent Uses: Designed as a two-family residence, later remodeled to make four single-person units, the building is currently vacant.
4. Builders and Suppliers: W. F. Bowe, contractor. According to letters between Bowe and the trustees, Bowe was to complete the first five cottages by August 1, 1887, at which point the trustees would decide whether or not to employ him in the construction of "other buildings of the same character not less than ten in number." On August 1, the Trustees wrote Bowe to express "their great disappointment" in his failure to complete the work on time. In a response of August 11, Bowe attributed his failure to complete the project "to there being no brick in Augusta . . . owing to excessive rains." (However, in an earlier letter dated July 23, 1886, Charleston brick maker Samuel Sanders wrote to inform the trustees that he could deliver up to 300,000 of his kiln-fired brown bricks to the Home, so it is not clear why Bowe turned to brick makers in Augusta.) By August 19, Howe's assistant Patrick Culleton had been contracted to build the next fourteen cottages. Total cost for all nineteen cottages was \$94,090.

The plumbing contract was awarded to John F. Tobin.

5. Original Plans and Construction: Sanitary engineer Rudolph Hering's 1886 *Report on a System of Sewage for the William Enston Home* mentions section drawings of the cottages, although these have not been located. Architect Howe provided the following description of the cottages in the 1887 *Charleston Yearbook*:

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It will be observed that the cottages face towards the South and West and are placed with respect to each other, so as to receive the full benefit of the South-west or prevailing Summer breezes while they are in a great measure sheltered from the North-east winds in winter. The buildings may be briefly described as double cottages, divided by a central hall and arranged with a view of being occupied if desired by two families. On the first floor, to which access is had from the front porch, and on either side of the hall is a living room and kitchen, while the second floor is arranged so as to give four good bed rooms, one small room, which may also be used for this purpose if desired, and a bath and toilet room. The large attic affords ample storage space for the occupants, and the basement contains two large rooms and one small room fitted up for the storage of fuel, and the corresponding space opposite for the cistern. Hot and cold water is supplied on each floor, and the drainage without being elaborate, is as nearly perfect as careful attendance to its details, good material and workmanship can make it.

Each of the larger rooms is provided with a fire-place fitted with a large grate and an ash trap and chute, through which dust and ashes may be discharged into a receptacle provided for that purpose in the basement. The rooms, except the kitchens, are lathed and plastered; the finish is all of yellow pine stained and varnished; the kitchens are ceiled with narrow boards and finished to match the rest of the woodwork.

The cottages are built of brick and stone and are covered with a metal roof.

Early steel-engraved images of the cottages appear in the 1887 *Yearbook* (frontispiece), the 1889 *Proceedings on the Occasion of the Dedication of Memorial Hall* (38), and the *Pine Forest Echo* (July 15, 1892, 105). Two color postcards, dating from around 1900 and showing the cottages, grounds, and Memorial Hall, are included in the collection of the South Carolina Historical Society (file No. 30-01, "900 King Street").

6. Alterations and Additions: The rooftop finials and chimney pots appearing in early engravings are no longer present.

According to the *Charleston Yearbook*, electric lighting and gas cooking stoves were installed in 1918; new baths, plumbing, and fixtures followed in 1922. In 1928, the *Yearbook* reported that the cottages had just undergone a \$19,000 renovation. This involved "replastering, . . . the installation of kitchen sinks on the second floors, . . . thoroughly renovating and repairing the electric lights, and

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screening all buildings." This was probably the point at which the second-floor rear bedrooms were first converted to kitchens. The ground-floor sitting rooms then became bedrooms, thus providing four separate apartments -- consisting of kitchen, bedroom and shared bath -- in each cottage.

Other additions over the years include an iron railing on the front porch (1965), new gas cooking stoves and fireplace inserts (ca. 1965-70), a door cut between the south-side, ground-floor bedroom and kitchen (ca. 1975), and the enclosure of the stairwell between the ground floor and basement (ca. 1985). The roof was redone, with composition shingles and metal raking, gutters and downspouts, following 1989's Hurricane Hugo. At this time the rooftop attic vent was sealed over.

In a letter to Mayor Courtenay dated August 19, 1887, architect Howe discussed certain modifications to the plans proposed by Courtenay. These included the addition of dormer windows in the cottage roofs, designed for the purpose of converting the attics into living rooms. Howe advised against this plan due to its projected cost. The dormers were never added, though this exchange is of interest as an illustration of the mayor's active interest in the design of the Home.

PART II. ARCHITECTURAL INFORMATION

A. General Statement:

1. Architectural Character: Taken as a whole, the site is given a rather institutional character through the uniformity of the cottages, their arrangement in rows, and their orientation (all facing front to back toward the southwest, rather than face to face across the streets). Considered separately, however, the cottages in their massing, scale, and individual features (e.g., chimneys, porch, small doors and windows) read as residential units.

The cottages appear almost cubical in their massing, save for the short ells projecting from the west sides and the steeply pitched, hipped roofs with cross gables. One-story, covered entry porches fill the re-entrant angles of the L-plans.

While the round-arched windows and entries link the cottages stylistically to the then-fashionable Romanesque Revival, the elaborate brickwork seems related to that found on contemporary Queen Anne structures in other East Coast cities. Rich surface textures and effects of light and shadow are provided by the belt coursing, mousetoothing in the west gable-end peak, and the corbelled chimney caps, cornice and window heads.

2. Condition of Fabric: The building is in fair condition overall. The exterior is fairly well maintained, and the structure seems basically sound. The building, however, is suffering from some wood-rot (particularly in the window and door frames) and

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possibly termite damage. The interior is in poor condition, with peeling paint and fallen plaster throughout. The grounds, though regularly mowed, have an overgrown, untended appearance.

In September 1989, Hurricane Hugo caused extensive damage to all Home buildings and landscape. The roofs of the cottages were redone, and while this has prevented further water damage from occurring, the repairs were not entirely in accordance with the historical integrity of the site. Most other repairs have been postponed while the board negotiates the transfer of the property to the Charleston Housing Authority.

B. Description of Exterior:

1. Overall Dimensions: The two-story, L-plan building measures 34'-2" x 31'-3" with a covered one-story entrance porch fitted into the re-entrant angle (west side).
2. Foundation: The red brick basement walls are between 16" and 18" thick and faced with cement plaster up to ground level.
3. Walls: Stretcher-bond red brick with red mortar. The curved wall of the entrance porch features header-bond brickwork. Corbelled brick beltcourses circle the house at the first-, second-, and attic-floor levels, and at the bottoms and tops of the first- and second-floor windows. Decorative mousetooth and herringbone pattern brickwork provides textural variation on the west gable end and front porch. Molded concrete lintels and arches, with oversized keystones, appear above most openings.

Although Howe specified stone, all trim appears to be concrete.

4. Structural System, Framing: Load-bearing brick walls. The floors are supported by joists. The roof is wood-framed and covered with composition shingles.
5. Porches, Balconies: Small, one-story entry porch on west, or King Street, side. Located in the space between the main block of the building and the ell, the porch is approached by a slate flagstone path and eight slate steps. The steps are bordered by low, concrete-capped brick walls and an iron rail. Porch walls are of the same stretcher-bond red brick with red mortar as the house, except for a small semi-circular, open alcove at the southern end, which employs header-bond brickwork. The concrete-floored porch is entered through a round-arched opening with concrete voussoirs and an oversized keystone; the keystone has the number "2" carved into it. Other features of the porch include battered walls on the northwest and southwest sides, and an open balcony above its roof (entered from the second-floor hallway).

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6. Chimneys: Three tall, rectangular, red brick chimneys, one rising from the interior, and two located along exterior walls (on the north and east sides). All have corbelled caps. The two exterior chimneys feature belt coursing and vertical brick patterning near their tops.

7. Openings:

a. Doorways and Doors: Two exterior doors. On the building's west side is a wood double door with two panels below and a wire mesh window above on either side. Capped by a wood lintel and a single-light transom, the door features engraved ornamental brass hardware (hinges, lock, knob, and door bell), and a wood double screen door with turned metal grills.

On the north side a similar, though shorter (one light over one panel on each side) wood double door, with the same type of hardware and screen door, leads into the building's stairwell. This door is capped by a round-arched transom and concrete relieving arch with oversized keystone and ornamented springers.

b. Windows: Most of the windows are double-hung sash, two over two lights, with concrete sills and lintels. Some are capped by round concrete arches, with wood-framed, fixed, multiple lights filling the arch. On the west side of the building, beneath the gable end at attic level, is a semi-circular lunette with compound brick relieving arch. On the north side, opening onto the landing between the second floor and attic, is a double-hung sash window set beneath a round concrete arch; the top of the arch is filled by fixed, multiple lights, some of yellow stained glass.

Basement windows, with brick relieving arches, appear at ground level.

8. Roof:

a. Shape, Covering: Hipped roof with cross gables (gable ends on the south and west sides), and a tent-like peak at center. An engraving in the *Pine Forest Echo* (July 15, 1892) shows a peaked, three-globed finial -- which possibly served as a lightning rod -- rising from this peak. Originally covered with painted metal (probably tin) shingles, the roof was re-done with composition shingles following 1989's Hurricane Hugo. While the *Pine Forest Echo* illustration shows the cottage bearing a shingle roof, a more recent article in the *Charleston News and Courier* (March 10, 1987, 1-A) describes the cottages as being covered by "red seamed-metal roofs"; this suggests some sort of sheet material. Storms and aging would have necessitated many roof repairs over the hundred years since the cottages were built.

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Inside the attic, the roof slopes inward from floor level. At the perimeter of the attic floor are beams, fastened to the floor with iron bracing straps.

- b. Cornice, Eaves, Raking: There is a corbelled brick cornice. Eaves are shallow. On the west gable the concrete raking ends in small, pedimented caps. New metal raking and gutters are found elsewhere on the building. Rising from between concrete volutes at the peak of the west gable is a five-pointed, crocketed concrete finial.

C. Description of Interior:

1. Floor Plans: The 1887 houses were renovated in 1927, as the five new cottages were being built, and so they now deviate somewhat from Howe's description (quoted above, section A.5.). The first-floor living rooms were used as bedrooms after this time, while two of the upstairs bedrooms were converted to kitchens. Additionally, there are now baths and toilets on both the first and second floors. This makes for four separate apartments, two on each floor, consisting of bedroom in front (west) and kitchen at rear (east), with shared bath and toilet at the rear center.

The concrete-floored basement is divided by brick walls into three rooms and a hallway.

2. Stairway: A wood stairway, with landings between floors, runs up the center of the building's north side, leading from basement to attic. The balustrade is of dark stained and varnished wood with heavy, turned newels, drop pendants, turned post and block lattice balusters, and carved, ornamental brackets.
3. Flooring: 3 1/2"- to 4"-wide pine boards, running east to west, painted dark brown.
4. Wall and Ceiling Finish: All rooms, except bathrooms and ground-floor kitchens, are lathed and plastered and painted off-white. Portions of the walls have been repaired with sheetrock. Halls and stairs feature vertical board wainscoting stained dark brown and varnished. The other rooms (again excepting the bathrooms and ground-floor kitchens) include 12"-high molded dark wood baseboards, and narrow dark wood moldings (possibly intended as picture rails) located about 12" from the ceilings. Ceilings are textured plaster painted off-white.

Walls in the bathrooms and ground-floor kitchens are of yellow pine, tongue-and-groove boards, placed vertically, stained dark brown and varnished. The kitchen ceilings are finished with narrow boards stained to match the walls.

5. Openings: Door and window surrounds are dark stained wood. Doors are stained dark, and consist of four panels, two over two. There are built-in storage cupboards with screen doors in the ground-floor kitchens. Bathroom doors are of pebbled glass over wood panel.

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6. Decorative Features and Trim: In addition to the stair balustrade, moldings and wainscoting noted above, the four bedrooms have fireplaces with dark stained wood mantels and surrounds.
7. Hardware: All interior and exterior doors feature brass hardware (hinges, knobs, etc.) engraved with floral designs.
8. Mechanical Equipment:
 - a. Heating, Ventilation: Heating was originally provided by fireplaces. There are five fireplaces in all: one in each of the four bedrooms, plus one in the basement, which may have been intended for a communal kitchen. The four fireplaces on the first and second floors now have gas heater inserts installed. Three coal chutes along the building's east side empty into a basement storeroom.

A vent in the flat portion of the hipped roof, which in summer would have drawn hot air up from the lower floors, thus ventilating the entire house, was covered over when the roof was repaired in 1989. An iron-grilled vent is located between the two attic windows on the south side.

- b. Lighting: The house is electrically lit. There are no fixtures of interest. According to the 1902 Sanborn Fire Insurance Company map for the area, the Home was at that time lit by oil. This was almost certainly the original lighting arrangement.

Mayor Courtenay proposed electric lighting for the Home in 1882 (see overview, HABS No. SC-686). While the grounds were electrically lit by 1905, the cottages were probably first electrified in 1918: the 1918 *Yearbook* cites an expenditure of \$877.30 for "installing electric wiring and lights in buildings."

- c. Plumbing: There is a single bath and toilet on each floor. The four kitchens all have running water. According to architect Howe's description in the 1887 *Charleston Yearbook*, the cottages were supplied with hot and cold running water to the second-floor bath and water closet (originally the only bath and toilet) and the ground-floor kitchens. Drinking water was channeled from the roofs to a cistern located at the northeast corner of the basement.

The superintendent's report for June 24, 1901, mentions inmate complaints of cistern water causing illness. On February 13, 1908, the houses were tapped into the city mains, at which point the cisterns were probably drained and sealed (as they are now). All pipes, now as originally, are external, unboxed and visible along the walls. A claw-foot iron tub upstairs

probably dates from 1922.

Hering's 1886 report includes a detailed proposal discussing the type of fixtures and arrangements to be used at the Home (10-11); this is discussed in detail in the overview (HABS No. SC-686).

D. Differences Noted Between the Cottages Built by Bowe and those Built by Culleton:

As noted above (section A.4.), cottage Nos. 1-5 were built by W. F. Bowe, while the next fourteen -- Nos. 11-15, 21-25, 32-35 -- were erected the following year by Patrick Culleton. While cottage Nos. 1-5 are virtually identical, a comparison of cottages No. 2 and No. 22 yielded the following differences:

- The north-side chimney on No. 22 is shorter and less ornamented than that on No. 2.
- The chimneys on No. 22 have three clay pots atop them, probably added sometime during the 1970s; those on No. 2 have no pots.
- The transom over the back north-side door of No. 2 employs a heavy center post; this post is absent from the transom in No. 22.
- There is a greater quantity of stained glass (red, yellow, and blue) in the north-side, stair-landing window in No. 22 than in No. 2.
- Newel posts on the stair balustrade are rather conical in No. 22, more bulbous in No. 2.
- Fireplace mantels and surrounds in No. 22 are more rectilinear in form, and slightly less elaborate, than those in No. 2.
- The built-in cabinet in the south-side, ground-floor kitchen, screen-doored in No. 2, has a wood panel door in No. 22.

Most of these differences are probably attributable to the builders having used different suppliers.

PART III. SOURCES OF INFORMATION

See overview (HABS No. SC-686).

PART IV. PROJECT INFORMATION

Documentation of the William Enston Home was undertaken during the summer of 1993 by the Washington Office of the Historic American Buildings Survey (HABS) of the National Park Service. The principals involved were Robert J. Kapsch, HABS/HAER Division Chief, and Paul D. Dolinsky, Chief of HABS. The project was sponsored by the Historic Charleston Foundation, Lawrence Walker, Executive Director, and Jonathan H. Poston, Director of Preservation Programs. Additional support was provided by the Charleston Housing Authority, Don Cameron, Director, and the Enston Home Board of Trustees, Park Smith, Chairman. The measured drawings were executed under the direction of Frederick J. Lindstrom, HABS Staff Architect.

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The field recording was conducted by Project Supervisor Douglas S. Anderson and Architecture Technicians John M. Biggs and M. Douglas Godfrey. Under the direction of Alison K. Hoagland, HABS Senior Historian, the historical report and written building surveys were produced by Keith L. Eggener, the 1993 Sally Kress Tompkins Fellow of the Society of Architectural Historians and HABS. Recognition should also go to Paul Helton, Superintendent of the William Enston Home, for his cooperation and assistance.

ADDENDUM TO:
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