

WILLIAM ENSTON HOME, COTTAGE No. 6  
900 King Street  
Charleston  
Charleston County  
South Carolina

HABS No. SC-688-B

HABS  
SC  
10-CHAR,  
354B-

PHOTOGRAPHS

WRITTEN HISTORICAL AND DESCRIPTIVE DATA

REDUCED COPIES OF DRAWINGS

Historic American Buildings Survey  
National Park Service  
Department of the Interior  
P.O. Box 37127  
Washington, D.C. 20513-7127

HISTORIC AMERICAN BUILDINGS SURVEY

WILLIAM ENSTON HOME -- COTTAGE No. 6

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- Location: 900 King St., Charleston, Charleston County, South Carolina. This building, located just south of Canterbury Avenue and the King Street entrance gate, faces southwest toward King Street.
- Present Owner: The Board of Trustees of the William Enston Home.
- Present Occupant: Daniel Richter.
- Present Use: Rent-free housing for the elderly poor
- 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.
- This house is one of the five new cottages built on the southern half of the property in 1927. Though based on the 1887 cottages, these newer buildings differ from them in several regards. The five 1927 buildings are themselves identical in most respects. Cottage No. 6 was chosen for documentation because of its relatively good condition and limited occupancy.

PART I. HISTORICAL INFORMATION

A. Physical History:

1. Date of Erection: 1927. According to the 1928 *Charleston Yearbook*, the five new cottages were built for a total cost of \$52,000.
2. Architect: Not known.
3. Original and Subsequent Uses: Four-person/family residence; currently houses one resident.
4. Builders, Contractors, Suppliers: Not known.

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5. **Original Plans and Construction:** No references to plans or early images have been located. Early textual references are included in the 1928 *Yearbook* and the *Charleston News and Courier*, March 28, 1932.

In their form, scale, massing, and materials, the 1927 cottages are based closely on the cottages of 1887 (see HABS No. SC-686-A). In essence, Cottage No. 6 is a two-story, brick, double cottage, oriented toward the southwest, with a cross-gabled, hipped roof, and a one-story, covered entry porch on its west side. Interior and exterior differences between it and the 1887 cottages are described in detail below.

6. **Alterations and Additions:** There have been no additions to the building, though some alterations have occurred. These include: an iron hand railing on the front porch steps (1965); gas heater fireplace inserts (ca. 1965-70); extensive repairs to walls, floor and sub-floor following termite damage (1982); and roof repairs involving new composition shingles, metal raking, gutters, and downspouts, put on after Hurricane Hugo (1989).

## PART II. ARCHITECTURAL INFORMATION

### A. General Statement:

1. **Architectural Character:** The 1927 cottages were modeled on the original 1887 buildings.

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) -- do 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 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.

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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). The interior is in fair condition, with some peeling paint and fallen plaster. The grounds, though regularly mowed, are somewhat overgrown.

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'-1" with a covered one-story entrance porch fitted into the re-entrant angle (west side). A two-story projecting pavilion is located at the center of the east side.
2. **Foundations:** The red brick basement walls are between 14" and 16" thick and faced with concrete plaster up to ground level.
3. **Walls:** Stretcher-bond red brick with white 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. Reinforced-concrete lintels and arches, with oversized keystones, appear above most openings.
4. **Structural System, Framing:** Load-bearing brick walls. Floors are supported by joists with X-form cross bracing visible in the basement. The roof is wood-framed and covered with composition shingles.
5. **Porches, Balconies:** Small, one-story entry porch on the 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 concrete steps bordered by low, concrete-capped brick walls and an iron rail. Walls are of the same stretcher-bond red brick with white mortar as the house, except for a small semi-circular, open alcove at the southern end, which features header-bond brickwork. The concrete-floored porch is entered through a reinforced-concrete, round-arched opening, with the number "6" incised into the oversized keystone. At one point the concrete is broken away and the re-bars are exposed. 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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At the center of the building's east side is a two-story, hipped-roof, projecting brick pavilion containing a back door leading onto the stairwell.

6. Chimneys: Two internal brick chimneys (without the corbelled caps of the 1887 chimneys) at the north and south center of the roof.

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 each side. Capped by a wood lintel and a single-light transom, the door features plain brass hardware (hinges, lock, knob, door bell), and a double, wood screen door with turned metal grills.

On the east side is a two-story, projecting pavilion containing the back door to the house. This door has two wood panels with one light of wire mesh glass and a screen door. It is capped by a semi-circular transom and reinforced concrete relieving arch.

- b. Windows: Windows in the 1927 cottages are generally the same as those in the 1887 cottages. The primary differences are found in the fenestration patterns on the north and east sides (the change being necessitated by the different locations of chimneys and back doors). Also, basement windows in the later houses, with brick relieving arches, are raised about 12" above ground level.

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 (now boarded up).

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. Originally covered with painted metal shingles, the roof was re-done with composition shingles following Hurricane Hugo in September 1989.

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 bolts.

- 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 the peak of the west gable is a five-pointed, crocketed concrete finial.

C. Description of Interior:

1. Floor Plans: Similar in their massing, the plans of the 1927 and 1887 cottages differ significantly. From the west-side front porch of the 1927 house one enters a wide central hallway and directly faces the building's stairwell and back door. This arrangement allows for breezes to flow directly through the house. On either side of this hallway are self-contained, two-room apartments, consisting of a bedroom with fireplace and a kitchen (entered from the bedroom). The bath and toilet are in the northeast corner of the building. This plan is repeated on the second floor.

One other noteworthy feature of the interior is a curved corner wall, facing the staircase on the first and second floors.

Following the original buildings by almost forty years, it is no surprise that the 1927 interiors exhibit more efficient plans and more simplified, "streamlined" detailing (e.g., the stair balustrade, the curved corners). In this they might be said to reflect at least a basic awareness of rationalist trends current in 1920s architecture.

The basement has a concrete floor and is divided by brick walls into five rooms and a hallway.

2. Stairways: Wood stairs with landings between floors, located on the east side of the house, running from basement to attic. The dark stained and varnished wood balustrade features simple, squared newels, rails, and vertical balusters.
3. Flooring: 2" pine boards running east to west, painted dark brown.
4. Wall and Ceiling Finish: Walls in all rooms (including stairs, halls, kitchens, baths, and bedrooms) are lathed and plastered, with dark stained, narrow, vertical-board wainscoting. Walls are painted off-white. Ceilings are smooth plaster, painted off-white. In the bedrooms are narrow wood moldings, stained dark, about 18" from the ceilings (possibly intended as picture rails).
5. Openings: Interior door and window surrounds are dark stained wood. Most interior doors are dark wood, four-panel types; bathroom doors are pebbled glass over wood panel. Screen doors stand between the bedrooms and the hallways. All four kitchens include built-in, screen-doored storage cabinets.
6. Decorative Features and Trim: In addition to the stair rails, wainscoting, and moldings noted above, the four bedroom fireplaces feature simple wood surrounds and bracketed mantels. All are now filled with gas heater inserts.

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7. Hardware: Interior door handles, hinges, and light switch plates are of plain brass.
8. Mechanical Equipment:
  - a. Heating, Air Conditioning, Ventilation: Heating was originally provided by four fireplaces, one in each of the four bedrooms. These all now have gas heater inserts installed. Four coal chutes along the building's east side empty into two basement storerooms. Unlike the 1887 cottages, there is no basement fireplace.

Air conditioning is provided by a single window-mounted unit on the first floor, south side.

A vent in the flat portion of the hipped roof, which in summer would have drawn hot air from the lower floors, 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 has been electrically lit since its construction.
  - c. Plumbing: There are baths and toilets on each floor and running water in each of the four kitchens. All water pipes are set within the walls.

### 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. 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.