CHARLES AUGUSTUS MAGWOOD HOUSE
61-63 Smith Street
Charleston
Charleston County
South Carolina

HABS SC-441
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WRITTEN HISTORICAL AND DESCRIPTIVE DATA

REDUCED COPIES OF MEASURED DRAWINGS

FIELD RECORDS

HISTORIC AMERICAN BUILDINGS SURVEY
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CHARLES AUGUSTUS MAGWOOD HOUSE

HABS No. SC-441

Location: 61-63 Smith Street, Charleston, Charleston County, South Carolina

The coordinates for the Magwood House are 32.465406 N, -79.562886 W. They were obtained through Google Earth in September 2015. There is no restriction on the release of locational data to the public.

Significance: Constructed around 1825, the Charles Augustus Magwood house is an example of the typical Charleston single house, a vernacular residential type that developed in Charleston, South Carolina at the end of the eighteenth- and beginning of the nineteenth-centuries.

Toward the end of the eighteenth-century, the center hall single house gained popularity in Charleston as an adaptation of the British town house made suitable for the city's narrow town lots and subtropical humid climate. The center hall single house is only one room wide, with two main rooms flanking a central stair hall. With its short axis parallel to and its long axis running back from the street, the single house capitalizes on the long, narrow lots typical of historic Charleston. The narrow footprint also improves cross ventilation, as it allows every major room to have windows on at least two facing walls. The single house is differentiated from earlier one-room-wide town houses by the addition of a single- or two-story piazza running the length of one of the two longer elevations. Piazzas most typically lie on the south side of a single house, where they are able to shield the house from the most direct sunlight throughout Charleston's long, hot summers.

The Charles Augustus Magwood house is a textbook example of this vernacular house plan, with its two-story piazza over a brick arcade and its long, narrow profile. It also exhibits the most preferred orientation of the Charleston single house. Its primary façade faces east, allowing the double-height piazza to wrap around the south and, originally, the west elevations, shielding the house both from the south and from the strong afternoon sun in the west.

The many alterations made to the Charles Augustus Magwood house since 1825 narrate the broader historical patterns of the Charleston peninsula. Originally built as a single family residence for wealthy slave owners, the property consisted of a main house and a rear dependency building. However, sometime before 1902, a hyphen, which is depicted in a Sanborn Fire Insurance map from that year, was built to connect the

main house to the dependency. The piazza was also extended so that it ran the length of the south elevation of the hyphen and terminated in the east wall of the dependency. This alteration demonstrates the change in the use of the two spaces, as, following the abolition of slavery, the dependency transformed from living quarters and workspace for household slaves to additional living space for the family in the main house.

The house underwent another major change in the 1930s, when it was transformed from a single-family residence to five distinct apartment units. In order to give every apartment a private entrance, the owner, Dr. Josiah Smith, removed the original central staircase and installed new staircases throughout the house. These transformations serve as a window into the broader economic and social atmosphere of Charleston in the 1930s, when the Great Depression exacerbated the long economic downturn the city had taken after the Civil War. In such an economic climate, the large, palatial residences of historic Charleston were often carved up into multiple residential apartments. This economic decline is clearly seen in the sharply decreasing value of the Charles Augustus Magwood house following the Civil War. In 1859, Charles A. Magwood's estate inventory valued the property at $12,000. Almost fifty years later, in 1905 the house and lot sold for a mere $5,300. The property value fell dramatically once again in the early 1930s, the midst of the Great Depression. The Read Phosphate Company purchased the house and lot for $6,331.53 in 1932, and then sold the property at a loss in 1935 for $4,250.

Description: The Charles Augustus Magwood house is a two-and-a-half story wood frame structure over a full English basement. It is a typical 'Charleston single'. Its primary street façade faces east, with a double piazza extending the length of the south elevation of the main house and hyphen. The main house is one bay wide (north-south) and five bays deep (east-west). A wood frame hyphen, which is roughly one-and-a-half bays wide (north-south) and three bays deep (east-west), connects the main house to the dependency building behind.

The English basement is constructed of load-bearing brick-and-mortar walls that have been stuccoed and scored to mimic stone. The wood frame structure above is clad in horizontal wooden weatherboard painted white. The red terne metal roof is gabled, with a triangular pediment protruding from its south facing slope. A distinctive fanlight centered in the triangular pediment lights the finished garret above. Two dormers flank the centered triangular pediment. All three are roofed with terne metal. There is a third dormer window positioned on the north slope of

the roof, above the center stair hall. The piazza is covered by a low shed roof, also clad in red terne metal.

A two-story piazza runs the southern length of the house, stepping in at the hyphen and continuing along its south elevation before terminating in the east wall of the dependency. The piazza is supported by a brick-and-mortar arcade that runs the length of the south and west elevations of the main house. The arcade is on level with the English or walk-out ground-floor-level basement, and the two levels of the double piazza correspond with the first and second stories of the wood frame structure. The interior face of the arcade, as well as the sides and peaks of the brick arches, are stuccoed and scored to mimic stone, just like the exterior walls of the English basement. However, the exterior face of the arcade is not stuccoed but painted white.

The Charles Augustus Magwood house is Greek revival in style. Simple Tuscan columns and turned wooden balusters ornament the double piazza. The main entry, located in the center bay of the south elevation of the main house, features two wood paneled French doors. The elaborate door surround features guiauche molding and a repeating Gothic arch motif. The fanlight overhead and the flanking sidelights are intricately ornamented, featuring a delicate diamond-circle motif. On the interior, the house boasts original plaster and trimwork, including intricate ceiling medallions.

Several early 20th century alterations, probably dating to 1905 when Charles and Margaret Gibson renovated the home, are apparent throughout the house. These can be seen in the two-over-two window sash, the triangular pediment window hoods visible on the east elevation, and the altered street entrance. What was once probably a simple piazza screen and door leading into the ground floor arcade is now an elaborate brick alcove framed by a Romanesque arch and paved in hexagonal floor tiles. The building number, 63, is engraved into the keystone of the Romanesque arch.

Alterations were made in the circulation pattern concurrent with the division of the house into five apartments, circa 1930. There are traces of these staircases and entrance doors visible in the house today, though Historic Charleston Foundation reconfigured the major openings and provided a temporary stair in the historically accurate position within the original stair hall prior to selling the house to the current owner in 2009.

History: In March of 1818, Simon Magwood, an Irish-born merchant and Lowcountry plantation owner, purchased the two northernmost of four adjoining lots along Smith Street from the estate of James Carson. A

Joseph Jenkins purchased the two southernmost parcels at the same time. It is unclear exactly when Magwood constructed 63 and 67 Smith Street. It is known that he built 63 Smith Street for his son Charles Augustus Magwood sometime around Charles' marriage to Rebecca O'Hara in 1820. Immediately after his marriage Charles Magwood took up residence on Queen Street, indicating that the Smith Street residence was not complete at that time. The Charleston City Directory of 1825 lists both Simon and Charles Magwood as living on Smith Street. Therefore, the Charles Augustus Magwood House was clearly constructed sometime before 1825.

This date is further corroborated by striking architectural similarities between the Magwood homes at 63 and 67 and the Jenkins House at number 59 Smith Street. Jenkins had constructed a house, 59 Smith Street, on his parcel by June of 1824, when he sold the dwelling and its outbuildings. Some trimwork and other architectural elements – including ceiling medallions, fireplace mantels, and exterior ornamentation – at the Jenkins House are identical to details seen at the two Magwood Houses. This suggests that the same master carpenter and/or specialty craftsmen worked on all three residences. This strengthens the theory that all three residences were built around the same time in the early 1820s.

Given common practice at the time of its construction, it is unlikely that there was any architect, in a modern sense of the term, involved in the construction of the Charles Augustus Magwood House. It is most probable that Simon Magwood, and perhaps Charles as well, worked in conjunction with a master carpenter to design the house, drawing heavily from local building customs and popular architectural pattern books. It is known that Simon Magwood owned slaves who worked as tradesmen, including three carpenters - Adam, John, and Harry - and two painters – Guy and York. It is possible that these slaves were involved in the construction of 63 and 67 Smith Street. It is also possible that Magwood hired these men out to Joseph Jenkins to work on his home at 59 Smith Street. Though merely speculation, it could be one explanation for the identical trim work seen at 59, 63, and 67 Smith Street.

Though Charles Augustus Magwood took up residence at 63 Smith Street in 1825, he did not take over full ownership of the property until his father's death in 1836. At that time he also inherited Magwood's Wharf, his father's stores on East Bay Street, and a lot in Islington, a small village that was once situated about where modern day Cannon Street approaches the Ashley River bridges in Charleston.

Like his father, Charles Augustus Magwood was a wealthy merchant and planter. At the time of his death in 1859, his estate included a house and outbuildings on Sullivan's Island, an unfinished house and lot on Bull

Street, and a 600-acre plantation on the Combahee River. His will and inventory also refer to six slaves that resided at the house on Smith Street. In addition to these properties, he owned Kuhnhart's and Edmonston's Wharves along the Cooper River at some point during his life. Examination of Charles Augustus Magwood's real estate holdings reveals that his business interests closely integrated plantation agriculture in the South Carolina Lowcountry and mercantile interests in the city of Charleston.

Charleston Augustus Magwood continued to live in the house on Smith Street until his death in 1859. In 1860, of the five heirs, Simon's three unmarried children– Henry M., Helen Witherspoon, and Elizabeth Caroline Magwood – took up residence in the Smith Street house.

In 1860 Henry, Helen, and Elizabeth Magwood entered a trust agreement to maintain Smith Street as their joint residence. The siblings remained in the house until 1867, when they purchased a second house on Franklin Street. They then moved into the home on Franklin Street and operated the Smith Street house as a rental property. The siblings continued to live on Franklin Street until the earthquake of 1886, when the Franklin Street property suffered significant damage. The Smith Street house escaped relatively unscathed, and the siblings once again made it their primary residence. At least one of the three unwed siblings remained at the Smith Street property until 1905, when Elizabeth Magwood and her sister Mary Ann Lucas (nee Magwood) of Brunswick, Georgia, sold the house to Margaret E. Gibson for $5,300.

Margaret E. Gibson, nee Margaret Eugenia Sweegan, was the wife of Charles McDonald Gibson, a prosperous vegetable grower who had moved to Charleston in 1881. Margaret and Charles Gibson made several updates to the Smith Street residence, including changing out the window sash in favor of the two-over-two window sash which remains at the residence. It was also likely the Gibson's who installed the existing window hoods and reconfigured the street entry. A contemporary description of the house described it as a "'splendid home on Smith Street, Charleston, counted among the really fine homes of that beautiful city.'" By 1930 Charles Gibson was suffering from health and/or financial problems. In 1932, Margaret Gibson sold the Smith Street property to Read Phosphate Company for $6,331.53.

During the three years that the Read Phosphate Company owned the property, Mrs. Alice Youngblood operated 63 Smith Street as a boarding house. In 1935, the Read Phosphate Company sold the house to a Dr. Josiah Smith.

When Josiah Smith purchased the house in 1935, he subdivided the main house and the outbuilding into five separate apartments: three in the main house and two in the dependency. Smith never resided at 63 Smith Street, living instead at 60 Montague Street

Dorothy and William R. Watson rented one of Josiah Smith's apartments at 63 Smith Street beginning in about 1944. They purchased the property in 1961 and made few changes, continuing to operate the house as a rental property.

In 2008 the Historic Charleston Foundation (HCF) purchased the property to prevent a condominium development on the double-lot. HCF hoped to sell the property to a preservation-minded individual who would return the home to single-family use. Toward this goal, the foundation began reversing some of the 1935 alterations. Most significantly, the HCF Revolving Fund financed the reconstruction of the central stairs in what they believed to be their original configuration. A temporary staircase in rough carpentry now runs from the first-floor to the finished garret. The stairs do not continue down into the ground floor, as it was decided that the exterior, ground-level entry in the center bay of the south elevation originally provided the only access to this part of the house.

In 2009, HCF sold the home to Gracye Davis. Ms. Davis is currently carrying out extensive renovations that will return the main house to a single-family residence. She will continue to rent out the two apartment units in the dependency building.

Sources:

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"Charleston, 1902." *Digital Sanborn Maps 1867-1970*. ProQuest, LLC, 2001-2013. Charleston County Public Library.

"History of Harleston Village and Nearby Neighborhoods." Charleston: Charleston County Public Library, 2015. http://ccpl.org/content.asp?id=15842&action=detail&catID=6062&parentID=6046. Accessed June 24, 2015.

Historian:

Meredith Wilson, Clemson University/College of Charleston Graduate Program 2015 summer intern and member of the 2016 graduating class.

Project Information:

This project was completed by the 2015 graduating class of the Clemson University/College of Charleston Graduate Program in Historic Preservation under the direction of Professor Carter Hudgins and Assistant

Professor Amalia Leifeste. The entire graduating class generated photos and measured drawings that were organized and edited by Amber Anderson, Sarah Sanders, and Laura Lee Worrell. Taylor Johnston conducted property research, and Sarah Sanders provided an architectural description of the property. Meredith Wilson synthesized Johnston's research and authored the historical report. The documentation was submitted to the 2015 Peterson Prize student drawing competition.