

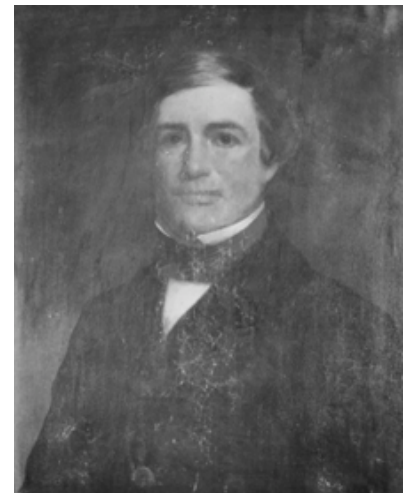


169 WENTWORTH HISTORY

A refined Greek Revival residence with deep Harleston roots, 169 Wentworth reflects Charleston's early growth through architecture, family ties, and original Charleston history. Evolving over time into an iconic modern Harleston Village home.

169 Wentworth Street is a distinguished early example of Greek Revival residential architecture in Charleston's Harleston Village, built on land that once formed part of the extensive Harleston Green holdings. The property was originally owned by Robert Dewar Simons, who held several parcels in the area and subdivided this lot from the broader Harleston property. On June 22, 1831, Simons conveyed the parcel, which measured 120 feet along Rutledge Avenue and extended approximately 212 feet along Wentworth Street, to Elizabeth Corbett for \$1, a transaction that appears to have been a conveyance within the family. Simons was married to a member of the Corbett family, linking the ownership directly to the Harleston lineage.

Although the 1831 deed made no mention of structures or "improvements," a residence was standing on the site by 1840, when Elizabeth Corbett sold part of the property for \$1 to her nephew, Dr. John Beaufain Irving. The deed described the parcel as "the Lot and Land on Harleston Green on which his residence stands," confirming that the dwelling was already in place. Because Dr. Irving was listed as residing in the home as early as 1837, it is likely the house was constructed around that time. Corbett does not appear in city directories as living at this address, suggesting she may have built the home as an investment or rental property rather than for her own use. Dr. Irving's brief recorded ownership (followed by a quick resale) has long contributed to confusion in the home's early documentation.



John Beaufain Irving

THE HISTORY OF 169 WENTWORTH

Originally from Jamaica, Dr. Irving studied medicine in Philadelphia before settling in Charleston. In addition to his medical career, he served as Sheriff of the Charleston County District and was secretary of the South Carolina Jockey Club for thirty years. He was also the author of *A Day on the Cooper River* and *History of the Turf in South Carolina*.

Architecturally, the house reflects the confident restraint of Charleston's Greek Revival period. It is a two-story frame residence set on a high brick basement, clad in broad, leveled weatherboard siding. An unusual reeded cushion belt course divides the basement from the upper floors, while the cornice, along with the two-tier rear piazzas, is enriched with medallions. The porches feature Tuscan columns, and it is believed the front entrance was originally taller and more elaborate, possibly extending two stories. Inside, the detailing remains modest but refined, including simple plaster cornices, circular ceiling medallions, and restrained wood trim. The floor plan differs from the typical central-hall arrangement, with smaller rooms and a stair hall to the north and two larger adjoining rooms to the south. Later changes include cast-iron mantels likely added after the Civil War and a staircase installed in 1912, replacing an earlier spiral stair.

With ten owners since Dr. John Beaufain Irving and a remarkably intact Greek Revival design, 169 Wentworth Street offers a vivid reflection of Harleston Village's early growth and Charleston's lasting architectural tradition.

Sports-Loving Doctor Was Owner Of 169 Wentworth St.

(EDITOR'S NOTE: Fourteenth in a series of articles on the dwellings along Beaufain and Wentworth streets. The fifteenth will appear on Monday.)

By W.H.J. THOMAS

The property on which stands the two-story frame dwelling house presently listed as 169 Wentworth St. was early a possession of Robert Dewar Simons.

He was owner of several parcels of the Harleston Green property which extended over so much of the west portion of what is now mid-town Charleston. From this he cut a large lot and sold it on June 22, 1831, to Elizabeth Corbett for \$1. The lot measured approximately 120 feet along Duffield Avenue and extended along Wentworth for about 212 feet.

This was apparently a conveyance within the family, as Simons was married to the former Miss Harleston Corbett, through whom the ownership of the property first came.

There is no mention in the

deed of any building or "improvements" being on this lot, but on Nov. 12, 1840, when Elizabeth Corbett sold a portion of her property to Dr. John Beaufain Irving for \$1, the property was described as "that Lot of Land on which his residence (Irving's) stands." This leaves open the question of whether Mrs. Corbett (who never seems to have lived along Wentworth) built the present house or whether Irving did the construction.

City directories list Dr. Irving as living here after 1837 and this may be another family connection sale. It is interesting to note that he sold the house just a few days after purchasing it from Mrs. Corbett.

Dr. Irving was an interesting figure even for his time, a man of letters and family who was not always expected to follow the profession they trained for. He was born in Ironshore, Jamaica in 1800 of a family that had been previously settled in Charleston. He was educated at Rugby and Cambridge, and apparently he was intended for the ministry but, as Dr.

Joseph I. Waring writes in his history of medicine in South Carolina, Dr. Irving's "love of sports directed him to a less exacting calling".

Irving came to the United States, studied medicine in Philadelphia (Dr. Waring reports that he does not seem to have taken a degree) and then came to Charleston. At one time he was sheriff of Charleston, then a rice planter, the 1837 directory lists him as a factor, and the 1840 directory as the assistant

Do You Know Your Charleston?

cashier for the Southwest Railroad. He is probably best remembered for his interest in horse racing and for his several literary works. For 20 years he was secretary for the S.C. Jockey Club and wrote "History of the Turf in South Carolina", a work on the theater, and the classic "A Day on Cooper River".

With the Civil War, Dr. Irving experienced financial difficulties and moved to New Jersey, where he was also

active in horse racing. He lived until 1881.

His home was probably built about 1837, judging from its appearance and from his change of address at that time. Many of the features of the exterior might lead one to believe it dates from the 1820s, but the size of the windows (four feet, five inches wide and six feet, eight inches in height) does point more to the late 1830s.

The house is built on a quite high brick basement and is faced in a broad, leveled weather boarding. Dividing the basement from the upper floors is an unusual reeded cushion belt course in wood. The cornice of both the main house and the two-tier piazzas to its rear are in modillions.

The columns of both front and rear porches are Tuscan and the front porch formerly was double in level and roofed. The front entrance stairs are not original but were added some 20 years ago.

Interior features of the dwelling are quite consistently of the 1830s and 1840s, with decorative treatments limited to a modified plaster cornice

in each room, circular ceiling medallions and simple wooden framing and baseboards about the four main rooms.

The door plan, however, varies somewhat, not being a double house split down the center by a central hall, but rather consisting of two small rooms and a stairhall to the north and two large adjoining rooms to the south. The ornate mantels in the two main rooms are cast iron, probably added after the Civil War. The staircase, replacing a spiral stairs, was installed in 1912.

It was on Nov. 21, 1840, that Dr. Irving sold his house to William B. Smith, a merchant, for \$500. Ten years later Smith sold the dwelling to Edwin L. Kerrison, one of the founders of what is now Kerrison's Department Store, for \$6,500, this conveyance being dated Dec. 31, 1850.

Kerrison and his co-partner in business, Hermann Leiding, took a mortgage on the house in 1867 but then transferred the house to Charles Kerrison, as trustee, to sell it because of "losses occasioned by the Civil War." It was purchased for \$4,500 by Edwin Kerrison's



DWELLING PROBABLY BUILT ABOUT 1837
Served as home of Dr. John Beaufain Irving. (Staff Photo by Burbage)

wife. The family maintained this house up to the start of the present century, when on Nov. 21, 1904, Eleanor H. Kerrison sold the property to Alexander M. McIver.

It was purchased from the McIver estate on Feb. 14, 1936, for \$3200, by Little B. Proctor. She in turn sold it to John T. Mundy for \$20,000. It was next purchased by

Mamie L. Iglerton on Oct. 2, 1952.

The present owners, Mr. and Mrs. Henry G. Smith, purchased the period dwelling in April of 1962.