S. B. THESIS
DESIGN FOR THE FAMILY MANSION OF A
SOUTH CAROLINA PLANTATION
by
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A DESIGN FOR THE FAMILY MANSION
OF A SOUTH CAROLINA
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Submitted by
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Candidate for
S. B. DEGREE.

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INTRODUCTION.

Upon considering the choice of a suitable subject for a thesis in Architecture, my ideas at once focussed upon the old Colonial mansions of the plantations of the South. Having lived in the heart of the tide-water region of South Carolina, I know well the beautiful effects that can be produced by the use of the Southern Colonial style, as this region is unequalled, except by the James River valley in Virginia, for its Colonial buildings. Hence it occurred to me to try to adapt this style to a modern home built on a plantation that has a long history, and to attempt to make the house typify the ancient traditions of its situation.

As I considered the subject further, I found that the idea grew more and more attractive to me. The old time customs and manners of life before the Civil War had always appealed to me and here was a chance to crystallize them into concrete form. In addition, there was also a practical side that influenced me. This was that, due to
the fact that wealth is returning to the South, many of the plantations are having their old mansions rebuilt, to serve as homes for the owners when visiting the estate for hunts or house-parties. Thus, the problem would be one not at all unlikely to occur to an architect practising in the South, as I expect to do.

With this reasoning, I decided definitely to make the subject of my thesis "A Design for the Family Mansion of a South Carolina Plantation." I chose as its location a plantation well known to me and upon which I have spent much of my spare time. I now give a short historical summary, to show the traditions of the place that I have tried to incorporate into my design.

HISTORY OF SITE.

From the time of the granting of the area of land known as Carolina by King Charles to a group of nine of his courtiers and the first settlements there in 1670, there arose a series of vast plantations over the lower part of the province. These stretched from Cape Fear on the north to Beaufort on
the south and, with the establishment of Georgia, were extended to Florida. They covered the network of flatland and winding rivers of what is known geologically today as "the low-country of Virginia, the Carolinas and Georgia."

The plantations were constantly increased in number, at first by outright gifts of land from the Lords Proprietors and later by sale, as the Lords soon fell into political and financial troubles, which finally ended in the English government ousting them from their ruling position and forming Carolina into a Royal Province.

Many of the plantations remain today although reduced in size, through division among the sons of later generations. Some few have gained fame in other parts of the country as show places. The great majority, however, with a history just as long as those known elsewhere, lie today unknown outside of local areas and unworked -- as the day of the plantation passed with the Civil War -- but held by descendants as the heritage that over two centuries has been handed down from generation to generation.

Among the numerous grants of the Lords
Proprietors was one for a large area of land lying along the Combahee River, at a distance of about forty miles from the city of Charleston. This estate became broken up into several plantations at some time between the years 1695-1700, and these plantations have existed as such down to the present day. The plantation that I have chosen as the location for my design is the one that borders upon the river; and on the same spot, where, in 1725, the first mansion was built, overlooking the Combahee, is where I intend to place the house of this problem. The mansion of 1725 was succeeded by others in 1760 and in 1795, if tradition is correct. In 1828 there was erected, on what was supposed to be the original site -- as near as can be ascertained from our old maps -- a new mansion, built -- with the exception of the bricks and the mahogany doors -- from the products of the plantation. This house stood until destroyed by fire in 1863, and nothing further was erected upon the site until 1880, when two small houses were built to serve as quarters for the overseer of the plantation and lodgings for the family when visiting the plantation on hunting trips from the city.
CONDITIONS OF PROBLEM.

With the above history in mind, it is now to be supposed that the present houses are to be demolished and a modern mansion is to be built on the old site. This house, while modern, shall yet fulfill the ancient traditions of both site and plantation and also take account of the method of living and customs of the country, servants' quarters, weather conditions, etc.

The conditions to be fulfilled are:

(1) The mansion is to be built in the Southern Colonial style, as in that form alone can be obtained the quiet yet dignified and aristocratic air that marks the best of the surviving plantation homes of the "low-country" and sea islands.

(2) While the mansion is pre-eminently a home, yet there must be included in it a business part; for, while it is a home, it is, at the same time, the center of authority of the plantation, from which the orders of the master come and to which reports of the varied activities of the estate must be made.

(3) Southern custom demands that the separate sleeping quarters for the negro house servants be under
On the second floor:- six to eight bed rooms, three or four bath rooms, sewing room, linen closet.

On the third floor:- spare bed-rooms, bath, storage space and weather observatory.

**DESCRIPTION OF SITE.**

To show why, in the solution of this problem, certain rooms were placed in certain positions, I now give a short description of the physical conditions of the site.

The residence portion of the plantation is a narrow rectangular strip of land lying between the county road on the south and the river on the north. The eastern and southern sides of the estate are thickly wooded and the rest of the plantation -- cotton fields, rice fields, etc. -- stretches off to the west, along the river. The house is located about one hundred feet from the river bank. The entrance drive swings in from the road and turns in front of the house, through an angle of ninety degrees, in order to be parallel to the river. It then runs west and finally turns out to the road again, thus
another roof, yet not so far away as to cause delay, if they should be wanted suddenly, while not actively engaged about the house.

(4) Owing to the remote location of the plantation, a long time would elapse before outside aid could arrive, in case of any trouble or disturbance. Hence, the hall should have the commanding position on the lower floor. The gun-room should have a private stairway to the second floor, having as its prototype the secret stairs that many of the Revolutionary plantation homes possess.

(5) On account of the semi-tropical climate, all stories should be as high-studded as possible. Piazzas should be provided, both deep and of large area, so as to shelter the exposed rooms from the intense heat and also because in summer the piazza becomes the living room for the entire family.

(6) The following rooms are desired:

On the first floor:- main hall (to serve both as stair hall and living room), reception room, ball room, library, coat room, gun room, den or trophy room, pool room, owner's office, kitchen, pantry, laundry, storage and service rooms, rear stair hall, etc.
making the outline of an irregular letter U, with its base towards the north. Between the arms of the U is a grass lawn of about forty acres. This lawn and the mansion are hidden from the county road by the belt of woods on the southern boundary. The entrance drive, or the eastern arm of the U, follows approximately the bends of a small creek which, flowing to the river, finally widens out into a lagoon that separates the drive from the forest on the east. A direct view of the lagoon from the house is prevented by a clump of trees at its point of juncture with the river. Beyond the western arm of the U another creek flows into the river, and along its banks a screen of woods forms the western boundary of the residence section proper. Beyond this screen lie the stables, field-hands' quarters and the cotton fields.

From this description, it will be seen that, upon entering the plantation, a person drives through the main gate and into a wood with no outlook on either side. The forest border ends abruptly and then the mansion suddenly appears, in almost direct elevation, across a quarter-mile of unbroken lawn
framed in on both sides by a heavy growth of live oaks and long-leafed pine.

The approach from the river is similar in character, as bends in the stream and flanking trees keep the house from being seen until directly opposite.

SOLUTION OF THE PROBLEM.

With the above physical conditions and personal requirements in mind, I attacked the problem. The two elevations, north and south, were the only two that needed to be considered. Both would be seen upon first approach in direct elevation and from a comparatively far distance. To make any marked accent in the long, low, unbroken sweep of the pines that form the sky-line, the building must be high and have mass enough to count as a focal point in any position.

The requirements calling for very high stud-ded rooms closely grouped about a central hall to form the main body of the house were found to give a mass satisfactory to the eye, upon being capped by a high-pitched hip roof. The demands for separate servants
quarters and office space were satisfied by outside pavilions connected to the main house by arcades. In order to counteract this increase in length of the elevation, which tended to make the total mass appear too low, I placed an octagonal tower in the center of the roof of the main building. I thus obtained a satisfactory block elevation of sufficient mass and good composition, as the eye was led in from the outer minor parts to the central section with its main axis marked by the tower.

It being determined that the office and the servants' quarters lay outside the main building, attention was next given to locating the required rooms in the central block.

As the main hall was desired to be the chief feature of the lower floor, it was placed on the main axis, extending entirely through the house and having the other rooms grouped around it. Of these, the more important ones were placed to the north and east, in order to avoid the intense heat that a southern outlook is subject to in the lowlands. The result of this limitation was that the reception room and library were placed to the southeast and the ball-room to the northeast, giving the last men-
tioned an outlook both across and down the river, while the first two faced down the main drive, along the edge of the lagoon. The dining room and breakfast room balanced the ball room on the further side of the hall. They thus occupied the coolest quarter of the house -- the northwest -- having a vista through the garden and across the river to the opposite shore. On the southwest, the less important rooms -- the gun-room, den and pool-room -- were grouped together, all connected with each other and all opening into a cross hall, which separates them from the dining room and gives connection between the main hall and kitchen. The kitchen, pantry, etc. are isolated in a one-story projection on the west, which is balanced in plan and elevation by the conservatory or palm room on the east.

The second floor was treated in the following manner. The main hall of the lower floor was repeated on this floor, but here was divided into a morning room and the stair hall proper. The stair hall, which is to the north, is lighted by a Palladian window on the staircase landing and the
morning room has a French window opening upon the upper southern piazza. The cross hall, running above the lower cross hall, divides the bed rooms into four groups -- the northeast consisting of bed room, nursery and bath, the southeast of bed room and dressing room, and the north-and southwest of two bed rooms and a bath to each group. In addition, a sewing room is provided, opening off the morning room. The private stair from the gun room ascends to this floor along the west wall of the main hall and a service stairway is provided at the end of the western cross hall.

The third or attic floor is reached by a continuation of the main staircase. Three bed rooms, a bath and a large storage room, are provided. A spiral staircase in the center of the hall leads to the weather observatory located in the tower.

With the plans fully fixed and the elevations determined in block, my next efforts were directed to the application of Colonial detail. The piazzas called for in the requirements would naturally be placed on the exposed side and hence in elevation the south side is treated with a two
storied piazza -- the lower colonnade being of the Doric order, the upper of the Ionic order. It is of ample depth to protect the rooms, and the central four columns are stepped out and carry a triangular pediment to mark, on the elevation, the great halls of the interior. All windows have simple Colonial frames, and, to give an accent to them, stone lintels are placed above each one. This also causes an interesting variation in the red brickwork with white wood trimmings, of which the mansion is built.

The north façade marks the main hall by a four column Corinthian portico. All lower story rooms on this side are lighted by high arched windows with sills at the floor line -- the prototype of which can be found in Maryland and Virginia homes. The three windows on the right light the ball room, and of those on the left, two light the dining room and one the breakfast room. The second story windows are plain and rectangular, similar to those on the south, but having keystones in their lintels to correspond with those in the arched lower windows. All rooms are planned to have at least two windows.

Both the north and south pediments are
pierced by round oculi to light the storage rooms under the pediments, and, in addition, a semi-elliptical oculus is broken through the roof above the north pediment, in order to obtain light for the attic hall and staircase.

The attic rooms are lighted by tall dormer windows, those on the south being made narrower than those on the north, in order to counteract the lowering effect on the façade of the horizontal lines of the piazzas.

From the kitchen and palm room, arcades are extended to small dependent houses. This treatment was often used in Colonial plantation estates, as examples may be found at Mt. Vernon, Claymont Court and Woodlawn in Virginia alone. The western house that connects with the kitchen is given over to the house servants' quarters. The servants are thus within a convenient distance of the main house and protected from the elements while getting there. At the same time, the custom that the two races shall not live under the same roof is kept unbroken. On the lower floor of the servants house is a living room and also the laundry of the mansion. The top floor is given up to bed rooms and a bath.
The balancing pavilion was utilized for the business office of the estate. The owner passes from his library through the conservatory and along the arcade. He then enters the main room of the pavilion which serves as the general office, where reports are received and orders given as to the varied activities. Opening into this office are the owner's private office and a waiting room, for the farmers and overseers until admitted to the main room. The other stories are devoted to storage and business files, etc.

The sections were taken on the two main axes of the house and were developed chiefly to show the interior Colonial details. These were gathered chiefly from various well-known Colonial houses of South Carolina, Virginia and Maryland.

LIST OF DRAWINGS.

The following drawings will be submitted to illustrate the solution of this problem.

(1) General sketch plan of estate.
(2) First floor plan -- Scale 1/8" = 1'.
(3) Second floor plan -- 1/8" = 1'.
(4) Third floor plan - Scale 1/8" = 1'.
(5) Elevation from river - Scale 1/8" = 1'.
(6) Elevation from lawn - Scale 1/8" = 1'.
(7) Longitudinal section of main house -
    Scale 1/3" = 1'.
(8) Transverse section of main house -
    Scale 1/4" = 1'.

Respectfully submitted,

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