

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places
Inventory—Nomination Form

For NPS use only

received **MS** 9 1983

date entered

See instructions in *How to Complete National Register Forms*
Type all entries—complete applicable sections

1. Name

historic William Robb House

and/or common Episcopal Church Home for Women

2. Location

street & number 12 Bee Street NA not for publication

city, town Charleston NA vicinity of ~~congressional district~~

state South Carolina code 045 county Charleston code 019

3. Classification

Category	Ownership	Status	Present Use
<input type="checkbox"/> district	<input type="checkbox"/> public	<input type="checkbox"/> occupied	<input type="checkbox"/> agriculture
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> building(s)	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> private	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> unoccupied	<input type="checkbox"/> commercial
<input type="checkbox"/> structure	<input type="checkbox"/> both	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> work in progress	<input type="checkbox"/> educational
<input type="checkbox"/> site	Public Acquisition	Accessible	<input type="checkbox"/> entertainment
<input type="checkbox"/> object	<u>NA</u> in process	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> yes: restricted	<input type="checkbox"/> government
	<u>NA</u> being considered	<input type="checkbox"/> yes: unrestricted	<input type="checkbox"/> industrial
		<input type="checkbox"/> no	<input type="checkbox"/> military
			<input type="checkbox"/> museum
			<input type="checkbox"/> park
			<input type="checkbox"/> private residence
			<input type="checkbox"/> religious
			<input type="checkbox"/> scientific
			<input type="checkbox"/> transportation
			<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> other: unoccupied

4. Owner of Property

name Batson Hewitt

street & number 321 East Bay Street, Box 492

city, town Charleston NA vicinity of state South Carolina 29402

5. Location of Legal Description

courthouse, registry of deeds, etc. Charleston County Courthouse Annex

street & number 2 Courthouse Square

city, town Charleston state South Carolina 29401

6. Representation in Existing Surveys

title Inventory of Historic Places
in South Carolina has this property been determined eligible? yes no

date 1983 federal state county local

depository for survey records South Carolina Department of Archives and History

city, town Columbia state South Carolina 29211

7. Description

Condition

excellent
 good
 fair

deteriorated
 ruins
 unexposed

Check one

unaltered
 altered

Check one

original site
 moved date _____

Describe the present and original (if known) physical appearance

The William Robb House is located in the Cannonsborough section of Charleston South Carolina, on the fringe of the Medical University of South Carolina campus. The location is a primarily residential area adjacent to the northern limit of the expanded Charleston National Register historic district. The three-story classical revival mansion was built ca. 1858 by William Robb, part owner of the East Point Rice Mill. The property still retains its nineteenth century lot size. The major additions and interior alterations to the house date from 1920-1927 and reflect the property's important subsequent affiliation with prominent Charleston philanthropist William King McDowell. Through McDowell's actions and endowments the house was used as Mercy Maternity Hospital (ca. 1920-1927) and the Episcopal Church Home for Women (ca. 1929-1982).

The William Robb House is a square, three-story masonry and frame residence with a closed brick foundation. The main house is dominated by a classically detailed three-tiered portico on the south elevation.

The exterior walls are of brick laid in Flemish bond with tuck-pointed mortar joints and brick quoins on each corner. The house has five bays on its north and south elevations, three on its west side, and four bays on its east elevation. The fenestration on each elevation is symmetrically arranged with six-over-six wooden sash windows and sandstone lintels. The north (rear) elevation features large arched stairlights on the second and third floors, with corresponding arched sandstone lintels. The hipped roof is covered with slate shingles and is pierced by four interior corbeled brick chimney stacks. The cornice is boxed with frieze and brackets.

The facade (south elevation) features a three-tiered portico with the levels arranged in ascending complexity of their classical order. The first story of the portico is Greek Doric, with fluted Doric columns and a metope and triglyph entablature. The second story piazza is a Roman Doric order, with fluted columns and a dentiled entablature. The third story features Corinthian columns and a dentiled entablature with acanthus leaf modillions. The first story of the portico has no balustrade while the second and third floor porches have balustrades with turned Renaissance balusters. All three floors on the southern elevation have a central entrance to the portico. These entries feature doorways with coved pilasters, a seven-pane rectangular transom, and dentiled entablature. Each door also has five-paned rectangular sidelights. The west elevation (Ashley Avenue side) contains recessed brick panels for each bay. The panels feature cast-iron tie rods on the exterior.

Exterior additions and alterations include various aluminum awnings and a free-standing fire escape on the west elevation. A one-story wing containing an institutional kitchen and connecting the main house to the original dependencies has been added to the north elevation. The most significant alteration consists of a one-room apsidal chapel with a parapeted Dutch gable added by 1942 to the east elevation of the house for use by the residents of the Episcopal Church Home for Women. These additions have a minor impact on the original nineteenth century integrity of the William Robb House.

8. Significance

Period	Areas of Significance—Check and justify below			
<input type="checkbox"/> prehistoric	<input type="checkbox"/> archeology-prehistoric	<input type="checkbox"/> community planning	<input type="checkbox"/> landscape architecture	<input type="checkbox"/> religion
<input type="checkbox"/> 1400–1499	<input type="checkbox"/> archeology-historic	<input type="checkbox"/> conservation	<input type="checkbox"/> law	<input type="checkbox"/> science
<input type="checkbox"/> 1500–1599	<input type="checkbox"/> agriculture	<input type="checkbox"/> economics	<input type="checkbox"/> literature	<input type="checkbox"/> sculpture
<input type="checkbox"/> 1600–1699	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> architecture	<input type="checkbox"/> education	<input type="checkbox"/> military	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> social/
<input type="checkbox"/> 1700–1799	<input type="checkbox"/> art	<input type="checkbox"/> engineering	<input type="checkbox"/> music	<input type="checkbox"/> humanitarian
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> 1800–1899	<input type="checkbox"/> commerce	<input type="checkbox"/> exploration/settlement	<input type="checkbox"/> philosophy	<input type="checkbox"/> theater
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> 1900–	<input type="checkbox"/> communications	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> industry	<input type="checkbox"/> politics/government	<input type="checkbox"/> transportation
		<input type="checkbox"/> invention		<input type="checkbox"/> other (specify)

Specific dates ca. 1858; ca. 1920 **Builder/Architect** Unknown

Statement of Significance (in one paragraph)

The William Robb House is located in the Cannonsborough section of Charleston South Carolina. The residence is significant for its association with William Robb, partner in the East Point Rice Mill, and with philanthropist William King McDowell. The house, as built by Robb ca. 1858, embodies classical revival stylistic elements. The remodeling of the interior of the house dates from ca. 1920 and reveals the important twentieth century adaptation of the house by McDowell for use as Mercy Maternity Hospital and, after 1929, the Episcopal Church Home for Women. Whereas the William Robb House reflected the prosperity of the nineteenth century South Carolina rice industry, it later became a local symbol of reform ideals which drew on the legacy of the progressive movement.

Additional Information

From its introduction to South Carolina in the seventeenth century through the nineteenth century, the cultivation and production of rice played an important role in the state's economic, political and cultural development. As rice planting increased through the nineteenth century so too did the commercial rice milling industry. In the nineteenth century Charleston became the center of the rice milling industry in South Carolina.¹ By 1849 South Carolina produced over 70 percent of the nation's rice or 1.5 million pounds.² This large and lucrative rice trade attracted many investors including James Robb, a merchant, and James McLaren, an engineer.

A contemporary diary noted on January 24, 1846, that "'Mr. McLaren has bought Napiers old mill and is going to establish a Rice Mill—it is said Jas. Robb is concerned.'"³ The 1883 Charleston City Yearbook further stated that Robb and McLaren "about 1846 erected thereon an improved steam rice mill, and conducted there a large and profitable business."⁴ The mill was located on the Cooper River on Gadsden's Wharf and was known as the East Point Mill. By 1849 James Robb's son, William, was employed at the mill as a clerk.⁵ James Robb died in 1859 and by that time his two sons, William and James Robb, Jr., had become the joint owners of the East Point Mill.⁶

The area of Charleston known as Cannonsborough was a center for the rice milling industry in South Carolina; in addition to the Cannonsborough and West Point mills, it included the substantial homes of two wealthy millers, Jonathan Lucas and Governor Thomas Bennett.⁷ It was in Cannonsborough, on Bee Street, that William Robb bought the land for his house from Thomas Condy in March 1858 for \$5,200.⁸ Robb built his house shortly afterwards, for the 1860 Census listed William Robb on Bee Street with his Scottish wife, two children and two female Irish maids.⁹ The census further reveals that Robb owned real estate worth \$18,000.¹⁰ The house as built by Robb certainly attests to the "large and profitable business" begun at the East Point Mill. The 1861 Census for the City of Charleston shows that the William Robb House was the only brick building on Bee Street.¹¹

9. Major Bibliographical References

see continuation sheet

10. Geographical Data

Acree of nominated property 1

Quadrangle name Charleston

Quadrangle scale 1: 24000

UMT References

A 17 598592 3628000
Zone Easting Northing

B
Zone Easting Northing

C

D

E

F

G

H

Verbal boundary description and justification The boundary of the William Robb House nomination is shown as the red line on the accompanying Charleston County Tax Map, Tax Map number 460-15-2, which is drawn at a scale of 50 feet to the inch. The nominated property includes the house and the associated historic outbuildings.

List all states and counties for properties overlapping state or county boundaries

state NA code county NA code

state NA code county NA code

11. Form Prepared By

name/title John Hildreth Mary Watson Edmonds, John Wells
South Carolina Dept. of Archives and
organization Preservation Society of Charleston date March 14, 1983
street & number 147 King Street telephone (803) 723-5879
city or town Charleston state South Carolina 29401

12. State Historic Preservation Officer Certification

The evaluated significance of this property within the state is:

national state local

As the designated State Historic Preservation Officer for the National Historic Preservation Act of 1966 (Public Law 89-665), I hereby nominate this property for inclusion in the National Register and certify that it has been evaluated according to the criteria and procedures set forth by the National Park Service.

State Historic Preservation Officer signature

title Charles E. Lee
State Historic Preservation Officer

date 7/28/83

For NPS use only

I hereby certify that this property is included in the National Register

Keeper of the National Register

Entered in the
National Register

date 9/8/83

Attest:

date

Chief of Registration

United States Department of the Interior
Heritage Conservation and Recreation Service

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Interior: The interior of the William Robb House largely reflects its adaptation by William King McDowell ca. 1920 for use as Mercy Maternity Hospital. Originally built with four rooms to a floor around a central hall, the house still retains its central hall and many of its original nineteenth century elements.

Predominant among the original elements is the central stair, with two half turns, running for three floors. It is an open string stairway with turned mahogany balustrade and an octagonal newel post. All windows in the house are intact and retain their original panels and architrave molding. Original pine flooring is evident throughout the house as is evidence of the original stenciled ceiling in the front entrance hall. All three levels of the house retain their original ceiling heights: fourteen feet on the first floor, twelve feet on the second and third floors.

A foyer was created ca. 1920 in the entrance hall by the installation of a beaded board partition with transom and two panels of decorative etched glass. This foyer also has an elaborate plaster cornice molding and ceiling medallion.

The front parlor and large dining room are to the left of the central hall. The plaster cornice moldings in these two rooms, and throughout the house, are adaptations of the original moldings and date from ca. 1920. To the right (east) of the central hall on the first floor is a secondary hall leading to two bedrooms, an elevator and St. Mary's Chapel. The one-room chapel with apse contains a vaulted plaster ceiling and a double leaf entrance door with semicircular transom.

The second and third floor plans are identical. Two winding secondary halls branch off the central landing. Six bedrooms and two baths per floor are arranged symmetrically off the two secondary halls. The central landing and hall area contains an office and sitting room as well as an entry to the portico on each floor. All rooms have plaster walls and intact plaster cornice moldings.

The major changes on the interior since ca. 1920 relate to the installation of a sprinkler system and other fire prevention measures.

Surroundings and Outbuildings: The William Robb House was built with two brick dependencies: a carriage house and kitchen building, both of which are extant. Both buildings are two-story detached structures with hipped, slate roofs and voussoir-arched windows located on the northern edge of the lot with an Ashley Avenue address. These dependencies have been converted into residential use and are connected to the main house by a breezeway to the one-story kitchen wing addition.

The property retains its original lot size. The central portion of the ornamental iron fence with stuccoed brick piers and cast-iron urns remains. The stuccoed brick fence foundation is intact along the Bee and Ashley street sides of the property. The front yard features many original plantings as well as the distinctive stork sculpture installed ca. 1920 as a symbol for the Mercy Maternity Hospital.

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With the construction of the St. Francis Xavier Infirmary in 1882 and the subsequent move in 1913 by the Medical University of South Carolina to facilities on Calhoun Street, the Cannonsborough area slowly changed to reflect this new institutional use. The William Robb House was individually affected by the neighborhood's transition. After Robb left Charleston around 1875, the house passed through several owners including Colonel R. C. Gilchrist and United States Representative George Legare.¹² In April of 1920, however, Francis I. Logan sold the William Robb House to the Mercy Maternity Hospital for "Ten dollars and other considerations."¹³ The home was remodeled for its new use and operated as Charleston's first maternity hospital until 1926. The improved facilities at the surrounding institutions, however, led to Mercy Hospital's decline. The president of the Mercy Maternity Hospital board in 1926 was William King McDowell, and on August 17, 1926, he purchased the William Robb House for \$30,000.¹⁴

William King McDowell (1872-1929) was both a successful businessman and civic leader in Charleston. His professional accomplishments were many and included his activities as founder and president of the Charleston Coca-Cola Bottling Company (1901-1929) and president of the Exchange Banking and Trust Company (1905-1924). McDowell gave equally of his time to philanthropic activities. He was a charter member and first president of the Charleston Rotary Club, president of the Charleston chapter of the Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals, and president of the local chapter of the American Red Cross. The most visible lasting evidence of McDowell's charity, however, is the William Robb House.¹⁵

After McDowell purchased the house, it went unused for one year until December 5, 1927, when McDowell, "actuated by motives of charity," gave the William Robb House to the Church Home and Orphanage.¹⁶ The William Robb House replaced the site on the southwest corner of Spring and Ashley Streets then used by the Church Home. The Church Home and Orphanage was organized in 1850 by the Episcopal Church Diocese of South Carolina and has been located in Charleston since that time.¹⁷

The Episcopal Church Home for Women operated out of the William Robb House from the fall of 1929 until 1982. The Church Home regularly housed and provided nurses for twenty women from all parts of South Carolina and was supported by Episcopal churches and donations from around the state.¹⁸

Architecture: The William Robb House is representative of the finer antebellum residences of Charleston, expressing through its architecture the ambition of the city's residents, the architectural sophistication of its architects and builders, and the skill of its craftsmen. The three-story, central-hall, double-pile plan, derived from Georgian prototypes and adapted for great and small residences through the nineteenth century, is used here in great scale and with noble proportions. The three-tiered portico, derived from Greek and Roman precedents, is a highly sophisticated and eloquent design, demonstrating a mastery of the classical orders and their application. Each of the orders--Greek Doric on the first level, Roman Doric on the

Continued.

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Architecture, continued.

second level, and Corinthian on the uppermost--has proportions and details appropriate to that order, worked out with great skill. The brickwork of the house is expressive of a high quality of brickmasonry, with delicate Flemish bond, tooled joints, and quoins worked out in corbeled brick. The original and later interior details in wood and plaster are of comparable quality and are consistent with the exterior details. The adaptation of the residence for institutional use has had small impact on the significant architectural features.

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- "Do You Know Your Diocese?" The Diocese 66 (January-February 1963): 10, 14.
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- "The Schirmer Diary." South Carolina Historical Magazine 76 (October 1975): 250-252.
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Footnotes

¹R.F.W. Allston, "Memoir on the Introduction and Cultivation of Rice in South Carolina," in The Proceedings of the Agricultural Society of South Carolina, From 1839 to 1845-Inclusive (Columbia, S.C.: Summer and Carroll, 1846), pp. 36-39, 44-45; A.S. Salley, "The True Story of How the Madagascar Gold Seed Rice Was Introduced into South Carolina," in Rice and Rice Planting in the South Carolina Lowcountry, ed. David Doar (Charleston, S.C.: Charleston Museum, 1936), pp. 51-53; Yearbook, 1883, City of Charleston (Charleston, S.C.: News and Courier Book Presses, 1883), pp. 435-437; Ernest M. Lander, Jr., "Antebellum Milling in South Carolina," South Carolina Historical Magazine 52 (July 1951): 128-132.

²Sam B. Hilliard, "The Tidewater Rice Plantation: An Ingenious Adaptation to Nature," Geoscience and Man 12 (June 1975): 61-62.

³"The Schirmer Diary," South Carolina Historical Magazine 76 (October 1975): 250.

⁴Yearbook, 1883, p. 437.

⁵Ibid., pp. 436-437; Charleston City Directory, 1849, p. 99.

⁶Henry A. DeSaussure, "Death Records (1829-1865)," South Carolina Historical Magazine 59 (July 1958): 178; Charleston City Directory, 1859.

⁷Samuel Gaillard Stoney, This is Charleston: An Architectural Survey of a Unique American City, 3rd ed. (Charleston, S.C.: Carolina Art Association, 1976), pp. 22, 128, 129; National Register nominations for Jonathan Lucas House and Governor Thomas Bennett House, National Register Files, S.C. Department of Archives and History, Columbia, S.C.; Lander, p. 130.

⁸Deed Book F-14, p. 39, Charleston Register of Mesne Conveyance, Charleston, S.C.

⁹Population Schedules of the Eighth Census of the United States, 1860. (Washington, D.C.: National Archives Microfilm Publications, 1967), microcopy 653, roll 1216 [South Carolina: Charleston District, City of Charleston, ward 6, p. 90].

¹⁰Ibid.

¹¹Charleston City Council, Census of Charleston, 1861, pp. 15, 41, 221. (Charleston Library Society, Charleston, S.C.).

¹²Charleston City Directories, 1874-75, 1875-76, 1879; Deed Book G-26, p. 245, Charleston Register of Mesne Conveyance.

Footnotes, continued.

¹³

Deed Book Z-29, p. 114, Charleston Register of Mesne Conveyance.

¹⁴

Deed Book Z-31, pp. 150-151, Charleston Register of Mesne Conveyance;
News and Courier (Charleston, S.C.), March 30, 1929, p. 8.

¹⁵

News and Courier (Charleston, S.C.), March 29, 1929, p. 1; March 30, 1929, p. 8.

¹⁶

Deed Book Y-33, p. 139, Charleston Register of Mesne Conveyance.

¹⁷

Ibid.; "Do You Know Your Diocese?" The Diocese 66 (January-February 1963): 10.

¹⁸

Ibid.