

Lecture 1: “The Architectural Styles of Charleston”

Teacher Script

Use the following information as a guide for teaching the “The Architectural Styles of Charleston” MS PowerPoint presentation.

Slide 1: The Architectural Styles of Charleston

- A. Today’s lecture will provide us with a brief overview of architectural styles that can be found in Charleston.
- B. In addition to designing buildings so they may stand the test of time, architects also design buildings to be beautiful and functional.
- C. Architects will copy styles and construction methods that are popular in other parts of the world in order to appeal to buyer’s tastes and local preferences.

Slide 2: What does it mean if a building has a certain “architectural style”?

- A. The styles listed on this slide can all be found in Charleston.
- B. However, there are many other architectural styles throughout the world that will not be addressed in this unit.
- C. The following slides will show visual examples of each architectural style listed below.

Slide 3: What are “character defining features”?

- A. The character defining features of a building are the architectural elements that make a building unique.
- B. For example, the J.M. Connelley Co. building, located at 309 Meeting Street, was constructed in 1894 for Jesse M. Connelley’s funeral business. Today, the building houses several condominiums. The following provides descriptive information about the character defining features of 309 Meeting Street:
 - a. The three-story brick building is trimmed in buff-colored “Tennessee stone,” possibly limestone, with two granite pedestals on either side of the front stairs and marble disks flanking the large arch surrounding the front door.

- b. The roof is standing seam metal and a tall lightning rod with a weather vane on top extends from the top of the east elevation parapet.
- c. It is designed with several features of the Richardson Romanesque style which was popular in the late-19th century.
 - i. “Characteristics of the Richardson Romanesque style include the use of rough-faced masonry in the arches, sills, lintels, belt courses and other details, contrasting with the smooth brick wall surfaces, and the use of paired and tripled round-headed windows under both flat and round arches.”¹
- d. Stained glass windows also grace the second and third floors.

Slide 3: Georgian (1700 to 1790)²

- A. This style was predominant in Great Britain and the North American colonies from 1714-1820. The term “Georgian” refers to kings George I, George II, and George III of England. (*Illustrated Dictionary of Historic Architecture*, edited by Cyril M. Harris, page 249)
- B. This architectural style derived from the public architecture of Roman antiquity characterized by symmetrical facades and interior plans and decorative elements such as pedimented door surrounds, multi-pane sash windows, and cornices.³
- C. Defining characteristics:
 - i. Oval Lights
 - ii. Triangular Pediment
 - iii. Columned Portico
 - iv. Windows symmetrically balanced with the center door

¹ Wevonneda Minis, “Life after Death,” *Post and Courier* August 6, 2006, page 1D, From property files accessed at the South Carolina Room, Charleston County Public Library, Charleston, SC.

² The dates used for the period of significance of each architectural style were found in: Jonathan H. Poston, *The Buildings of Charleston: A Guide to the City’s Architecture* (Columbia, SC: University of South Carolina Press, 1997).

³ Poston, *The Buildings of Charleston*, 654.

- v. Raised Foundation or Basement

D. Building Examples:

- i. Drayton Hall

- a. Built in 1738 by John Drayton as part of a rice and indigo plantation.
- b. The National Trust purchased Drayton Hall from the Drayton family and now runs the property as a house museum.
- c. Located at 3380 Ashley River Road in the Ashley River Historic District.

- ii. Miles Brewton House

Slide 4: Federal (1790 to 1820)

- A. The term “Federal” style is what Americans call “Neoclassical.”
- B. This architectural style is typified by a symmetrical façade with semicircular or elliptical fanlights over the front doors, which are often incorporated into a more elaborate door surround that commonly includes a decorative crown or small entry porch.⁴
- C. This style, like Georgian, is heavily influenced by symmetry. Federal style buildings are often arranged as a simple box, two or more rooms deep, with doors and windows arranged in strict symmetry. (*A Field Guide to American Houses*, Virginia & Lee McAlester, page 153)
- D. Defining characteristics:
 - i. Decorative Cornice work
 - ii. Elliptical Transom or Fanlight
 - iii. Low Pitched Roof
 - iv. Ironwork Balconies
 - v. Spiral Stair
 - vi. Geometric Rooms
- E. Building Example: Nathaniel Russell House

⁴ Poston, *The Buildings of Charleston*, 653.

- i. Built in 1808 by Charleston merchant Nathaniel Russell.
- ii. Historic Charleston Foundation purchased the Nathaniel Russell house in 1955. It is now run as a historic house museum.
- iii. Located at 51 Meeting Street in downtown Charleston.

Slide 5: Greek Revival (1820-1861)

- A. The Greek Revival style was generally in use from 1820 to 1975.
- B. It is inspired by the simpler classicism of remnants of Greek buildings in Greece and southern Italy.
- C. Characterized by simpler forms and a lack of decoration, it often employs low gable roofs, pediments, plain columns, and simple window and door architraves often embellished with anthemion motifs.⁵
- D. Greek Revival style has less decoration than the Georgian and Federal styles.⁶
- E. Defining characteristics:
 - i. Low Gable Roofs
 - ii. Pediments
 - iii. Plain Columns
 - iv. Simple Window and Door Surrounds
- F. Building Example: Hibernian Hall
 - i. Built in 1840 by Thomas U. Walter and is home to the Hibernian Society, which is an Irish benevolent society.
 - ii. Located at 105 Meeting Street in downtown Charleston.

Slide 6: Italianate (1837 to 1900)

- A. Italianate is an architectural style derived from the picturesque movement of the mid-nineteenth century, featuring such details as roof balustrades, bay windows, arched porches (arcades), double bracketed cornices, and polygonally shaped walls.⁷

⁵ Poston, *The Buildings of Charleston*, 654.

⁶ Virginia and Lee McAlester, *A Field Guide to American Houses* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, Inc., 1984), 179.

⁷ Poston, *The Buildings of Charleston*, 655.

- B. Italianate houses are not particularly common in Charleston; however, there are several examples around the city that have Italianate characteristics.
- C. Defining characteristics:
 - i. Two to three stories
 - ii. Low pitched roof with widely overhanging eaves having decorative brackets beneath
 - iii. Narrow round-headed windows
 - iv. Often with square cupola or tower⁸
- D. Building Example: Colonel John Algernon Sydney Ashe House (1853)
 - i. Built in 1853 by John A. S. Ashe, a wealthy, planter, banker and South Carolina politician.
 - ii. This building is “one of the few major surviving Italianate buildings erected in Charleston before the Civil War.”⁹
 - iii. Located at 26 South Battery in downtown Charleston.

Slide 7: Queen Anne (1860-1916)

- A. The Queen Anne style, which is a sub-group of the Victorian style, was more prevalent in the Northeastern states; however, the Sottile (Suh-tilly) house is a perfect example of this style.
- B. The Queen Anne style derived after the work of the English architect Richard Norman Shaw and featuring an irregular plan and varied elements, including bay windows, cross-gabled roofs, oddly shaped porches, and often jigsaw-cut wood decoration and spindle work.¹⁰
- C. Defining characteristics:
 - i. Steeply Pitched Roofs of Irregular Shape
 - ii. Patterned Shingles
 - iii. Cutaway Bay Windows, and other ways to avoid a smooth-walled appearance

⁸ McAlester, *A Field Guide to American Houses*, 211.

⁹ Poston, *Buildings of Charleston*, 271.

¹⁰ Poston, *Buildings of Charleston*, 657.

iv. Asymmetrical Façade with partial or full-width porch

v. Stained glass and bright paint colors¹¹

D. Building Example: Wilson-Sottile House

i. Built in 1891 for Charleston merchant Samuel Wilson.

ii. The building is one of the best examples of the Queen Anne style in Charleston.

iii. After being sold to Albert Sottile in 1912, the Sottile family gave the house to the College of Charleston in 1964.

iv. Located at 11 College Street on the College of Charleston campus.

¹¹ McAlester, *A Field Guide to American Houses*, 263.