

## Urban Architecture in Colonial Charleston

### Assignment:

With your fellow group members, you will be creating a lesson to be taught to the other half of the class. Your group will design a 5-10 minute lesson about urban architecture while the other group will teach you about colonial Charleston's plantation architecture.

### Directions:

1. Make sure everyone in your group knows what their role is.
  - a. Roles:
    - i. Curriculum Specialist – This role is responsible for making sure the lesson that is being taught includes all of the required information. You are the primary designers of the lesson. Be sure to consult with the Quiz Masters to include the same information in the lesson that is being asked on the Quiz.
    - ii. Teacher – This role is responsible for being the main spokesperson for the group when it comes time to teach the lesson. It is up to you to teach the lesson clearly with energy. In addition to teaching the lesson, you must also work with your other group members as the lesson is being designed so that you are familiar with the information. Go over the quiz before you teach the lesson to make sure all of the information is being covered.
    - iii. Quiz Master – This role is responsible for designing the quiz that will be given to the other half of the class at the end of the lesson. It is very important that you work with the Curriculum Specialists and Teachers in your group as the lesson is being created so the quiz includes information that is being taught in the lesson.
2. Either on your own or as a group read the following narrative: “Urban Architecture in Colonial Charleston.” This narrative will provide your group with all the

information and pictures you will need to create an educational lesson. After each member of the group has finished reading, continue on to step #3.

### “Urban Architecture in Colonial Charleston”

By the 1730s and 1740s, Charleston’s economy was supported by the success of crops such as rice and indigo. After the American Revolution, sea island cotton would also become a thriving crop grown in the lowcountry. [For the purposes of this lesson, the term “lowcountry” refers to the coastal plains of South Carolina surrounding Charleston]

The crops being grown on the plantations had a direct connection to the merchants living in Charleston’s urban center. While planters were concerned with the growing of the crops, merchants made their money selling and transporting from Charleston’s harbor to other areas of the world, specifically England.<sup>1</sup> There was constant interaction of life and business between the city and the surrounding plantations. Families would travel back and forth between their town homes and plantations to the point that plantation owners considered themselves to be “Charlestonians” just as much as those living within the city limits.<sup>2</sup>

Before the Revolution, it was quite common for wealthy men to establish plantations in addition to their businesses in town. Later, there would be more of a class distinction between planters and merchants, but at this time most prosperous men conducted business both in and out of town.<sup>3</sup> In the 1760s, Charleston merchants were among the most successful tradesmen in the North American colonies.<sup>4</sup>

Charleston’s first merchants were agents sent from England to handle trade between colonists and local Indian traders and later goods produced by African slaves on plantations. These agents exported deerskins as well as rice and indigo to merchants in England. After acquiring enough money, many of these agents established themselves as merchants, usually

---

<sup>1</sup> George C. Rogers, Jr., *Charleston in the Age of the Pinckneys* (Columbia, SC: University of South Carolina Press, 1969), 11.

<sup>2</sup>Samuel Gaillard Stoney, edited by Samuel Lapham and Albert Simons, *Plantations of the Carolina Low Country* (Charleston, SC: Carolina Art Association, 1939), 25.

<sup>3</sup> Stoney, *Plantations of the Carolina Low Country*, 25.

<sup>4</sup> Rogers, *Charleston in the Age of the Pinckneys*, 11.

near Charleston's port.<sup>5</sup> Charleston merchants also had influences further inland at local country stores located along the rivers and creeks. These stores were so profitable because waterways were the most a major mode of transportation for goods and supplies during the 18<sup>th</sup> century.<sup>6</sup>

One of the most easily recognized differences between plantation and urban architecture in colonial Charleston is the placement of each building on a lot. Where plantation homes had acres of land to be set upon, urban buildings were constructed more closely to one another as the city's population grew.

The house located at 17 Chalmers Street, is called the "Pink House" since it was constructed of pinkish Bermuda stone. (See Figure 2-24) Built circa 1712, the Pink House is one of the earliest examples of colonial construction that can still be seen today in Charleston. Notice how closely the buildings are in relation to one another. The design of the existing roof, known as a "gambrel" roof, is a mid-eighteenth century alteration. It is believed to have been changed when the chimneys were being upgraded. It was very common for people to modify their homes whenever styles or finances changed. The roofline of the Pink House most likely mirrored that of the building to the right before it was changed.<sup>7</sup>

---

<sup>5</sup> Rogers, *Charleston in the Age of the Pinckneys*, 11.

<sup>6</sup> Rogers, *Charleston in the Age of the Pinckneys*, 12.

<sup>7</sup> Jonathan H. Poston, *The Buildings of Charleston: A Guide to the City's Architecture* (Columbia, SC: University of South Carolina Press, 1997), 65).

Fig. 2.24 17 Chalmers Street, Pink House. Photograph by author. 3 Mar. 2010.



The Colonel Robert Brewton House, located at 71 Church Street is often referred to as the oldest surviving example of a Charleston single house. (See Figure 2-25) The term “single house” is used to describe houses constructed with a central hallway and one room on either side. In Charleston, single houses are positioned with the side end of the house facing the street. The grand home, constructed circa 1721-41 by a wealthy politician and merchant, shows that people were building in the same architectural styles that can be found in plantation homes throughout the lowcountry.<sup>8</sup> Although today the building has a modern coating, it was originally covered in stucco, which is a form of plaster that is used on the exterior of a building.<sup>9</sup>

**Fig. 1.25 71 Church Street. Photograph by author. 3 Mar. 2010.**



<sup>8</sup> Poston, *The Buildings of Charleston*, 72-73.

<sup>9</sup> Robert A. Young, *Historic Preservation Technology* (New Jersey: John Wiley & Son, 2008), 426.

The image of “Rainbow Row” is one of brightly colored buildings that are frequently photographed by tourists. However, they did not always appear this way. The buildings located at 79-107 East Bay Street are some of the best examples of wharfside construction from the early-eighteenth-century. The diverse roof styles make it easy to see the buildings were constructed at different times. The buildings were used for both residences and the businesses of wealthy merchants. Often families would live in the upper floors while business was conducted on the first floor. The proximity to the docks made this location ideal for merchant use.

During Charleston’s early years, colonists constructed buildings on lots that were placed very close together. This method of city planning was based on English building traditions that the colonists were familiar with. While not all English building traditions were favorable to the lowcountry climate, Charleston continued to lay out street patterns with closely spaced lots.

The term “Rainbow Row” came about during the 1930s when decorator and preservationist Dorothy Porcher Legge restored the buildings and painted them in the bright pastel colors you see today. These colors, popular in Colonial architecture found in the Caribbean, were not original to the buildings when they were first constructed. (See Figures 2-26 and 2-27)

**Fig. 2.26** Rainbow Row before 1930, 79-97 East Bay Street looking south. From Historic Charleston Foundation. Photograph.



**Fig. 2.27** Rainbow Row. Photograph by author. 3 Mar. 2010.



Rainbow Row is an interesting example of how historic buildings are affected by human interaction over time. This stretch of buildings have become one of the most recognizable images of Charleston, and they raise an interesting question that deals with how we are to represent historic buildings: Do you restore a building to what it would have originally looked like or do you allow every layer of history to show?

3. Read the following directions that go with the role you have been assigned:

a. Curriculum Specialist

- i. Before you begin designing the lesson, make a list of what you think are the most important facts and pieces of information from the narrative. Use this list to help you decide what information should be included in the lesson.
- ii. Share the list with your other group members. Ask them if they have suggestions for adding or removing any other details.
- iii. Brainstorm ideas for how the lesson should be presented. Be creative! The following are all examples of teaching methods that can be used:
  1. Perform a skit
  2. Write a story or song
  3. Draw a picture or cartoon strip
  4. Present a lecture
  5. Guide a discussion
- iv. Once you have decided how to present the lesson, begin designing it. Be sure to continuously look back to the list you made in the first step of your directions so you include all the important information. The lesson should last between 5 and 10 minutes.

b. Teacher

- i. After the Curriculum Specialist group members create the list of important facts from the “Urban Architecture in Colonial Charleston” narrative, take the list and become familiar with it.

These facts will be the information you will be required to teach to the class.

- ii. Work together with the Curriculum Specialist group as they design the lesson.
- iii. When the lesson has been completed, decide who will be presenting each part. Practice teaching the lesson to your fellow group members multiple times so you will be experts on the information and will be able to answer any questions the rest of the class may have.

c. Quiz Master

- i. Make a copy of the list of important facts from the Curriculum Specialist group for your own use.
- ii. Use the information on that list to create a 10-question quiz about “Urban Architecture in Colonial Charleston.”
- iii. The questions may be arranged in any of the following forms:
  - 1. Multiple Choice
  - 2. True/False
  - 3. Short Answer
  - 4. Matching
- iv. Once the quiz questions have been written, create an answer key to go along with the quiz.
- v. The quiz must be completed and turned into the teacher by the end of class so copies can be made for your class members to take the quiz tomorrow.