

King Street Survivors: Nineteenth in a Series

Southern Lumber Company on King Street Extension *In Love with Charleston Homes for 68 Years*

BY C. W. CHILDRESS

We know what things should look like in Old Charleston. We help homeowners do it right. — William (Will) Albrecht, CEO of Sales Operations

On a cold day in January 1861, Capt. Benjamin Aldert, sailing out of port in a revenue cutter, spotted the Union ship *Star of the West* entering Charleston harbor to re-supply Fort Sumter. At his identification Citadel cadets fired two shots at the *Star of the West* in the channel off Morris Island, the first shots of the War Between the States. The vessel departed. On April 12 war began with troops firing on Fort Sumter. It was not long before Capt. Aldert became the Confederate pilot of a harbor gunboat and a blockade-runner known for fearlessness and fidelity, a captain with many narrow escapes. His father had taught him the ways of the sea around Charleston.

About 1809, when he was 15 years old, the Dutch boy Sikke Aldert thought, "I'll run away." Sikke had been taken to sea by his cruel stepfather, where he was severely mistreated. The boy escaped at the first opportunity, but his love of the sea never changed. Making his way to America, Sikke was naturalized in Philadelphia in 1822 and then traveled to Charleston.

Six years later Aldert, by then a pilot in Charleston Harbor, married Mary Anderson, whose forebears fought valiantly in the Revolutionary War. They had six children and lived on Stoll's Alley, where they owned all the land on the tiny street that connects East Bay and Church. Sikke piloted in Charleston Harbor for 40 years, owning a number of boats that included the schooner *Marion*, the number one boat in harbor listings. His fascinating nineteenth-century logbook, with its "Rules for Working a Day's Work" and pages of instruction and practice in navigational problems, was donated to the Charleston Museum by his great-great-granddaughter Joye Albrecht Shuler.



This 1959 photograph is of Southern Lumber Company's main office building, built in 1945 on King Street Extension.

Benjamin Sikke Aldert, Sikke's son, was to become the fearless Confederate harbor pilot who attacked and boarded many Yankee gunboats. After the war he piloted the steamer *Seagull* that ran between Charleston and Baltimore. He bought a "big house" located at 28 Main Street, Sullivan's Island, where he and his wife, Kate Flynn, raised seven children and were beloved and esteemed in the community.

One daughter, Cora, lived in a smaller house behind the "big house" with her three daughters and one son. At age ten, during the Great Depression, Cora's son, Herman Albrecht, Jr., began helping to support his mother and three sisters with three newspaper routes. He later attended Murray Vocational School and studied wood-working.

Southern Lumber Company Begins and Grows

We couldn't just hand Southern Lumber to the third generation on a silver platter, saying "Take it and go." If we did that, they would never get the respect of our guys. My father, Herman Albrecht, taught us to "do it, and bring 'em through it." So all three of them sat here with me to learn general ledger, accounts payable, payroll and balancing our check-book. What they got beginning at 15 and 16 year olds out in the yard they thoroughly learned by experience. Our third generation is rolling with energy and fire. To know our business, you have to grow up in it. — Joye Albrecht Shuler, CFO and Secretary of Southern Lumber Co., second generation

Around 1937, Herman married Eloise Seabrook Van Ness, the daughter of William

Van Ness of Palmetto Sign Co. He worked for William Gable Millwork and Lumber Yard doing custom millwork and window sashes. In a workshop he built in 1939, Herman opened his own business manufacturing quality window sashes. He was hard-working, humorous and filled with stories. Always aiming for top quality, he rented a waterfront warehouse off East Bay Street. During the World War II he and a partner supplied the Charleston Shipyard with lumber for buildings and maintenance and huge timbers for shipbuilding. In 1945 he bought land on King Street Extension where the company remains today.

In 1952 Herman and Eloise built a house on the front beach of the Isle of Palms at 2708 Palm Blvd. Soon they were raising their children — Herman III, Thomas, Benjamin and Joye — full-time on the island, and in due time the four children completely learned the lumber business. Eventually this second generation returned to work at Southern Lumber Company, each one with different strengths. In time their children, the third generation, learned the business as teenagers. Herman retired in 1979, leaving Southern Lumber in the capable hands of the second generation.

Today Southern Lumber Co. has 75 families represented within the company, and as Joye Albrecht Shuler, now CFO and General Secretary, says, "Our 75 families are truly one family in mind and spirit because we want to produce the most perfect products possible. If you bring it to us, we can duplicate it. Some of our great people have



PHOTOGRAPHS BY BLAIR HALFORD

The chief operating officers of Southern Lumber Company, Will Albrecht, Thad Shuler, Joy Shuler and Ben Albrecht, Jr., stand in front of a mahogany fireplace in their showroom.

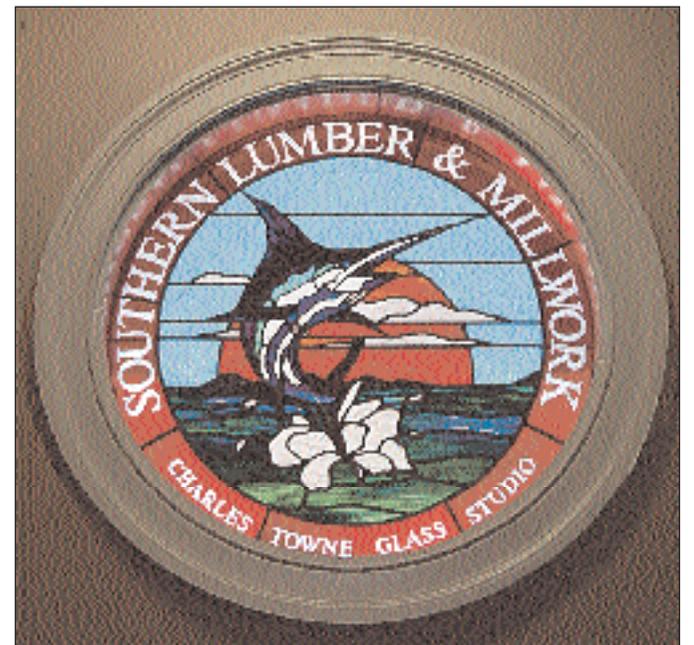
worked here 30 to 40 years."

In Love with Charleston's Homes

Bring us a piece of molding from your old house, and we will grind the knife to cut it for you from 50-year old planers and new computerized digital planers. They plane reproductions with no difference between your old molding and the new piece. It goes in as a rectangle of wood and comes out a perfect replica. Will envisions it, I design it, our craftsmen produce it, and Thad makes sure it is of the finest wood and arrives on time.

— Benjamin (Ben) Albrecht, Jr., CEO of Manufacturing Operations, third generation and 'Architect of Molding'

Today architects, custom home contractors and homeowners often meet first with William (Will) Thomas Albrecht, Jr., CEO of Sales Operations. Compelling and knowledgeable, Will gives guidance on the Old Charleston look of wooden balusters, railings, columns, moldings, shutters, doors and windows, knowledge accrued by three generations of superb millwork craftsmen. Will then takes ideas and antique examples to his cousin Ben Albrecht, who is Southern Lumber's technical expert in manufacturing specialty millwork. Ben scans the item into the computer, redraws it to scale, sends the information to



A fine example of Southern Lumber Company's Charles Towne Glass Studio's work displayed in their King Street showroom.

produce a template for a steel knife to cut the actual specialty molding or specialty piece of wood milled so smooth "it feels like a baby's butt." Then, to the amazement of customers, Southern Lumber's craftsmen perfectly produce that item.

Thaddeus (Thad) Theodore Shuler, CEO of Inventory Operations, returned recently from working in Europe to bring international experience in streamlining businesses. He has finely honed the delivery of millwork to customers and made

sure Southern Lumber's products are second to none. He has introduced recycling leftover materials to make furniture or chips in the making of plywood, as well as other green ideas. He makes sure materials are delivered on time, correct, organized, stacked and covered. "We don't drop the ball," says Thad, who insists on perfect inventory control within Southern Lumber's family environment. After 68 years Southern Lumber Company moves forward with fearlessness and fidelity.