

## Historic Carolina

## LONGSTREET THEATRE

JESSICA NASH Staff Writer

Once upon a time, bleary-eyed freshmen stumbled through the rigors of early-morning calisthenics in the building now known as Longstreet Theatre. And budding young scientists pondered the mysteries of bacteriology and agricultural chemistry inside this imposing edifice on Sumter Street. Yes, Longstreet hasn't always been Longstreet, and the theatre by any other name has had quite a past.

Under Dr. Augustus Longstreet's presidency in the 1850's, university trustees approved funding for the construction of a new chapel, to be called College Hall, away from the campus center. This project was doomed from the start, though. According to Nancy Ashmore Cooper of the Institute of Southern Studies, it took forever to build, the construction company went bankrupt, and the roof blew off several times.

The chapel's first—and last—sermon in April of 1855, exposed cacophonous acoustics. According to Edwin L. Green's History of the University of South Carolina, "...Ordinary speaking could not be heard from the stage, owing not to an echo but to a general confusion of noise



## There's a long story behind USC's grand theater

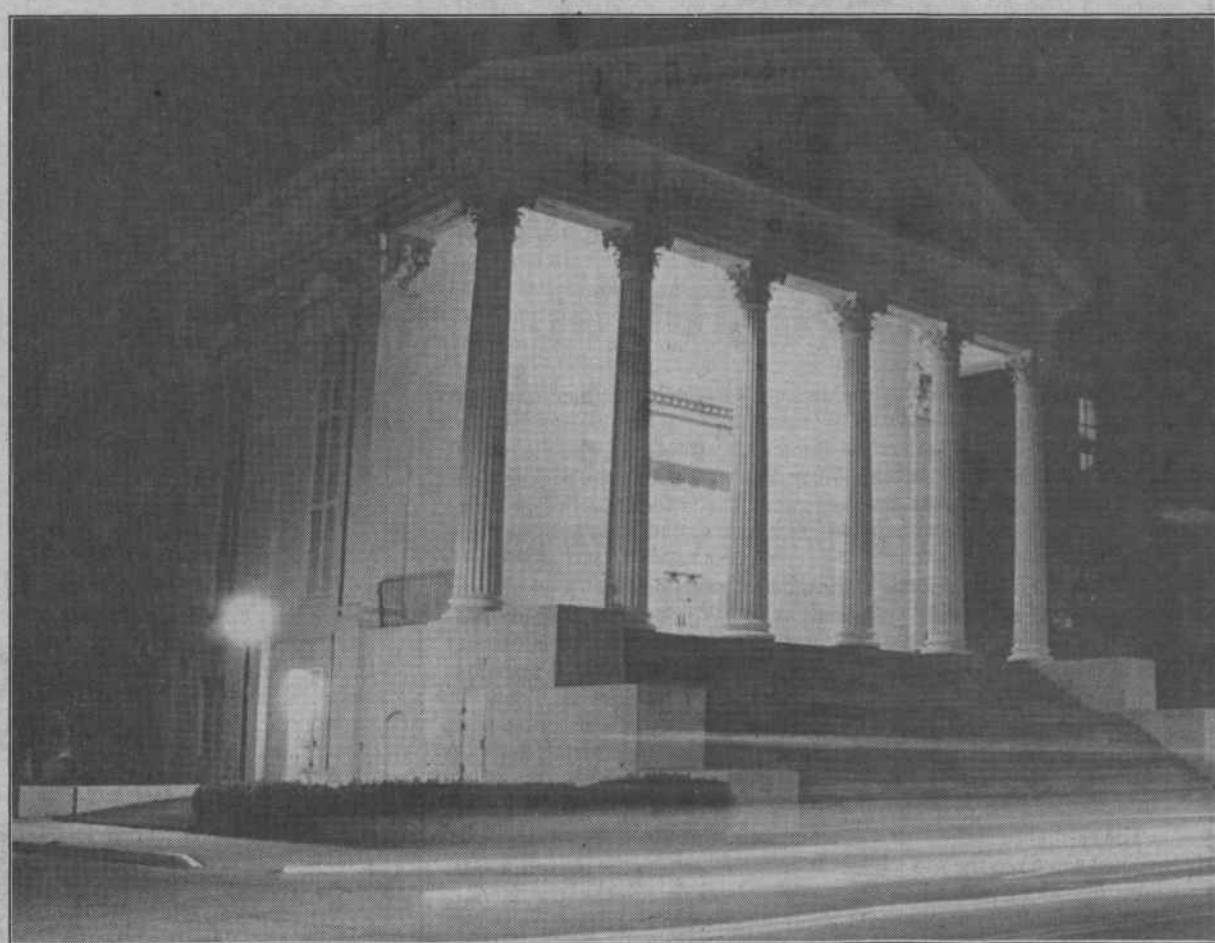
es when the hall was filled with an unquiet audience." A building committee also claimed that College Hall was "entirely unsatisfactory, not elegant, not well built," says Green. This cemented the project's reputation as a disaster.

During the Civil War, College Hall was used alternately as a stable, an arsenal, and a hospital, as were other campus buildings. The modern-day "Green Room," where actors wait backstage, once served as a morgue. (Fun to think about between scenes.) The state legislature met in College Hall temporarily after the war, but the acoustics forced them out.

In the 1880's, extensive renovations turned the virtually abandoned chapel into science classrooms and a gymnasium. From then on, even the name "College Hall" slipped into oblivion, and Longstreet Theatre was known simply as "the old gym," says Cooper.

During campus-wide renovations in the mid-1970's, the inside of the old gym was gutted and the acoustics completely redone to make room for the theatre department's new "theatre-in-the-round." This project did leave the exterior Roman Revival facade intact, though. The old gym was reborn as Longstreet Theatre.

In 1980 the theatre was the venue for a debate among presidential candidates in the Republican primary. Almost 200 students waited outside, hoping to see a future president. And now the entire Hootie-lovin' world can catch a glimpse of Longstreet's Corinthian columns on the cover of Cracked Rear View. There have even been occasional rumors of ghost sightings—perhaps some disgruntled Confederate dead left over from the theatre's hospital heyday.



ROBERT WALTON The Gamecock

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## 19th century Charleston artist on display at USC

## Staff Reports

If you're interested in South Carolina history, you're in for a pleasant surprise at McKissick Museum. A series of 140 glass-plate photographic prints of 19th century Charleston life and architecture will be on display at the museum from Sept. 17-Oct. 29.

George LeGrange Cook, a photographer of the 80's, uh—the 1880's, is the featured artist. His work is the best photographic record of Charleston culture post-Civil War.

Most photographers made their

fortunes shooting portraits during the 19th century. Because of this, cultural scenes are rarely depicted in photography from this era.

Cook was the exception to the rule. He was the son of the well-known Southern photographer, George Smith Cook, the only Civil War photographer for the Confederacy. Because of the common bond of photography, Cook became a close friend of the famous Union Civil War photographer Matthew Brady and managed Brady's studio for a time. George LeGrange Cook took over his father's Charleston studio in

1880 and began to experiment outside portrait photography.

Country landscapes, architecture, business life and leisure activities are all included in the exhibit. It also includes several images of buildings damaged by the 1886 earthquake. Cook made a name for himself with his "earthquake views," as he sold nearly 200 different pieces to the public.

"Visitors will be encouraged to see beyond the nostalgic scenes and view the photos from the perspective of 19th century Charlestonians, keeping in mind that everything is contemporary

in its own time," said Jay Williams, the museum's chief curator. "Keeping that perspective fosters an understanding of how 19th century Charlestonians responded to events and to their environment."

The glass-plate photographs are part of USC's South Caroliniana Library collections. Local historian Harvey Teal, who has researched South Carolina photography, contributed to the McKissick collection.

McKissick exhibits are free and open to the public.

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