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STEP BY STEP: A SURVEY OF THE HIERARCHY FOUND IN CHARLESTON
STAIRCASES WITH AN EMPHASIS ON SECONDARY STAIRS

A Thesis
Presented to
the Graduate Schools of
Clemson University and College of Charleston

In Partial Fulfillment
of the Requirements for the Degree
Master of Science
Historic Preservation

by
Leah Applewhite
August 2021

Accepted by:
Amalia Leifeste, Committee Chair
Laurel Bartlett
Carter Hudgins
Richard Marks

ABSTRACT

A secondary staircase is a stair built for the use of domestic workers to reach both utilitarian and non-utilitarian spaces of a structure. These service stairs may be found not only in the United States, but in many areas of the world. These staircases are also examples of dual circulation, meaning there are multiple ways to travel through the same space. The presence of these staircases is a sign of extreme wealth, as people who found the need for a secondary stair were wealthy enough to afford servants, or in the case of the American south prior to the Civil War, enslaved African Americans. It is the purpose of this thesis to study the placement, function and character of service stairs located in Charleston and how they changed through time. This thesis analyzes the floor plans of sixteen structures in order to study the differences of the service stairs through time and also the differences in their relationship with primary staircases. This thesis concludes that secondary staircases in Charleston did change with time. In the four early Georgian structures represented in this thesis, the secondary staircases were located in the center of the structure, usually placed between a fireplace chimney stack and a wall. In the remaining twelve structures, the secondary staircase was placed in the rear of the structure, close to dining rooms, butler's pantries, and side work yard exits. The reason for this shift in placement from a central and vertical part of the house to a rear placement could be a combination of several factors. These factors are the advancement of architecture, growing racial tensions, a lesser need for the enslaved to be located within the house, a change in urban density, and less intrusion upon the privacy of the enslavers. While not groundbreaking, the change in character of these staircases have the potential

to tell us about the changing of the attitudes of Charlestonians through time, both socially and architecturally.

DEDICATION

This thesis is dedicated to my mother, Paula Heller Applewhite.

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First and foremost, I would like to thank my thesis chair, Amalia Leifeste. Without your leadership, wisdom, guidance, and support this would not be possible. I would also like to thank you for the many lessons you have imparted on me through my time in graduate school. I owe much of my success to your dedication as an educator. Thank you.

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Jacob, thank you for being the best little brother I could have ever imagined. Grandma Connie, Papa David, Grandma Pat, and Papa Milton, thank you for the lessons you have instilled in me, and thank you for loving me unconditionally.

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CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

*“They belong to us. We belong to them.
They are divided out among us
and mingled up with us and we with them,
in a thousand ways”- Rev. John D. Adger¹*

Dual circulation is defined as the concept of one space having multiple ways to travel throughout it. This concept is not a new one and can be observed throughout history all over the world. Architecture has the potential to expose the social climate of the times. A study of dwellings that contain dual circulation specifically is a good way to examine who was and was not important and how they interacted with the built environment around them.

In Charleston specifically, dual circulation existed in many ways and in many different places. From the time of its founding in the late 17th century, Charleston was a slave society. Many wealthy Charlestonians gained their economic standing from owning rice fields that were cultivated by enslaved African Americans. These rice plantations that were home to hundreds of enslaved Africans could be found outside the city limits in more rural areas, however the city of Charleston was also home to many enslaved people. Large numbers of enslaved African Americans could be seen in the streets of Charleston daily, working or running errands for their owners. It was also common for some enslaved with a particular skill or specialty, such as iron working or carpentry, to be

¹ Bernard Edward Powers, *Black Charlestonians: a Social History, 1822-1885*, (University of Arkansas Press, 1994), 34.

rented out to another person. A smaller number of freed people of color was also observed within Charleston during the 18th and 19th centuries. Because of these factors, whites and blacks lived and worked in close proximity to each other in Charleston on a daily basis.

Despite a lack of physical distance, policies were put in place in attempt to create a degree of separation between whites and blacks. For instance, bells would ring in the evenings signaling for enslaved people to return to their masters. If they failed to do so, they would be met with harsh punishments.² Enslaved people were not permitted to read or to gather in large groups. These policies may be seen as examples of dual circulation, as enslaved and whites worked, shopped, and went about daily life in close proximity to each other but with levels of separation. This juxtaposition existed not only in public spaces but in the domestic life of black and white Charlestonians, as well. In the urban setting of a Charleston residential lot, the primary residence would be built only feet away from a work yard, containing stables and a kitchen house where enslaved people would work and live. Enslaved workers were not only to be found in the master's work yard but also within his house fulfilling domestic roles, creating the need for a secondary staircase.

The presence of a secondary staircase is the stamp of extreme wealth. People who found the need for a secondary staircase were people who were wealthy enough to own enslaved African Americans, or after the Civil War, were wealthy enough to hire

² Powers, "Black Charlestonians: a Social History, 1822-1885" page 43

servants. Not all wealthy people or slave owners had secondary staircases. A good example of this lies within the dwelling of Judge Robert Pringle at 70 Tradd Street in Charleston. By the mid-eighteenth century, Pringle was considered one of the most prosperous merchants in the city and later went on to serve in the Commons House of Assembly³. Despite Pringle's extreme wealth and prominence, his Tradd Street town house built in 1774 does not contain a secondary staircase. One could argue that the presence of a secondary staircase is indeed rare, and when they are notated in a structure, it is certain that the individual that built the structure was in the highest echelon of Charleston society.

These secondary staircases shifted from the center of a structure prior to the American Revolution to the rear after the war and may suggest a change in how Charlestonians viewed architecture and race relations. In the four early Georgian houses represented in this thesis, the secondary staircase was placed in the center of a dwelling with structural support from a fireplace stack on one side and a wall on the other and accessed an internal basement that reached all inhabitable floors of the structure, as well as an attic. These areas are existent in house forms that are without a secondary staircase, suggesting that these secondary stairs were placed in areas that already existed. Their internal and central location would also suggest that the enslaved were at the center of Charlestonian life, both literally and figuratively, while later staircases after the

³ Nicholas Michael Butler, "Pringle, Robert," *South Carolina Encyclopedia* (University of South Carolina, Institute for Southern Studies, January 26, 2017), <https://www.scencyclopedia.org/sce/entries/pringle-robert/>.

revolution, suggest that perhaps a level of separation was desired. This higher level of separation could be present due to increasing racial tensions, an increasing of urban density, a desire for privacy, or a decreased need for enslaved to be at the center of day-to-day life. This shift may also be due to the advancement of architecture, considering that after the popularization of the single house form in the late 1770s and into the early 19th century, secondary staircases are then observed in the rear of a structure.

Beginning in 1619, Charleston was a large port for the trading and selling of enslaved Africans. From 1619 through the ending of the Civil War and the outlawing of slavery in 1865, over 10.7 million enslaved people passed through Charleston⁴. Many historians agree that Charleston was the center for the American slave trade. Enslaved people didn't just pass through Charleston. Many came to the city to be purchased by Charlestonians. In the year 1750, over 1/4th of Charlestonians owned slaves. The lives of the enslaved in Charleston and that of their white counterparts were intimately intertwined, with enslaved people living and working in the homes and work yards of their masters. Reverend John D Adger, a native Charlestonian and missionary, said this of the relationship between whites and African Americans in Charleston in the 1850's, "They belong to us. We belong to them. They are divided out among us and mingled up with us and we with them in a thousand ways."⁵ Despite African Americans and whites existing together in a compact urban setting, the architecture of Charleston reflects a clear attempt to separate African Americans as they set out on their day-to-day tasks from their white counterparts. These

⁴Kenneth Morgan "Slave Sales in Colonial Charleston." *The English Historical Review* 113, no. 453 (1998): 905-27. Accessed July 11, 2021. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/578661>.

⁵ Powers, *Black Charlestonians: a Social History, 1822-1885*, page 60.

attempts are very clear in urban patterns and in the hierarchy within the architecture. By definition, primary and secondary stairs will show a differentiation in status and how pronounced it is. The characteristics of how that distinction is made when examining these primary and secondary staircases within the city of Charleston is worth careful investigation.

It is because Charleston was the epicenter of slavery, that it is deserving of an analysis that discovers how these enslaved people interacted with the environment around them. Even after the conclusion of the Civil War, many African Americans stayed in Charleston with many still occupying domestic positions in white households. This study was conducted in Charleston due to its close association with African American history and the author's access to historic records and discussions with people, such as committee members, who are familiar with the buildings. Charleston is also one of the first places in the country to contribute to the field of historic preservation, beginning with the purchase of the Joseph Manigault house by Susan Pringle Frost in 1920 in the name of the Society for the Preservation of Old Dwellings. Considering that there has always been a desire to protect the historic integrity of the city, and considering Charleston has among the highest levels of historic integrity remaining in the country, the chances of examining original 18th and 19th century staircases in their original state are much higher in Charleston than in many other cities. These secondary staircases have the potential to give historians, preservationists, and architects insight into the social structure of the city during the time in which they were built. Stairs are indeed functional, but their change in character and placement has the potential to tell something about both class and race.

When examining secondary staircases in Charleston, it is also important to mention the presence of small staircases that are often located under the primary staircase in many dwellings with raised foundations or with dug basements. According to Richard Marks of Richard Marks Restoration Inc., after an oral interview on April 1, 2021, almost all Charleston dwellings that were raised contain a small stair located directly under the primary stair that leads to the basement. Some of these basements would have access to an exterior work yard. Staircases such as these can be found in the houses of the wealthy and poor alike. These staircases may be considered “secondary” if a servant or enslaved person utilized it in order to reach the work yard without having to use the main entrance or exit. Despite these technically “secondary” staircases being present in many dwellings, there is still a clear distinction between these staircases and the secondary stairs studied in this thesis. Considering these stairs may also be found in the dwellings of the very poor, they would have been used by the owner of the house and therefore were not stairs built strictly for enslaved African Americans or servants. The social implications of these single-flight stairs are different than the pairs examined in this thesis.

CHAPTER TWO

LITERATURE REVIEW

Charleston Architecture

When assessing the placement, function, and character of service stairs in Charleston, it is important to first examine the larger architectural themes that can be observed in the city. An understanding of architectural forms and where staircases are typically located within these forms will help in assessing how they moved and changed throughout the dates observed in this thesis. This thesis will discuss Georgian, Federal, and Neoclassical styles of architecture, what influences created them, how they evolved through time, and how they relate to each other.

Hugh Morrison explains the history of architecture in his book *Early American Architecture: From the First Colonial Settlements to the National Period*. Morrison explains that Georgian architecture originates roughly in the late 17th century. Georgian architecture became popular in the American Colonies due to its popularity in England.⁶ Georgian structures in England could be observed throughout the 17th and early to mid-18th centuries, usually utilized by the middle class. The English were influenced by the Renaissance ideals of Italy, recreating an architectural epoch that had manifested itself in a succession of national styles through Europe. Several factors caused this English influence of Georgian style of architecture to be present in the American colonies.

⁶ Hugh Morrison and Roy Underhill, *Early American Community Structures: from Material Originally Published as the White Pine Series of Architectural Monographs, Edited by Russell F. Whitehead and Frank Chouteau Brown*, (National Historical Society, 1987)

Wealthy gentlemen took grand tours of Europe and saw the architecture for themselves, became inspired, and recreated the architecture in the colonies. Americans had also begun to utilize European architecture books where the Georgian form and style could be studied and then replicated.

In a discussion of the form of the Georgian home, Morrison explains that simple geometric forms were used, but that the compositions could never be stereotyped. While symmetry is a common characteristic observed in Georgian homes, it could be expressed in a plethora of different ways through windows, doors and room configurations⁷. The exterior of the common Georgian house more strictly follows the practices put in place by Palladio, while the interior experienced more variation in finishes and decorations. The largest contrast between the Georgian homes and their colonial predecessors is the treatment of the entrance hall. Georgian houses were built with a central passage that stretches from front to back with a stair hall behind an arch. Morrison goes on to explain that primary staircases within Georgian homes are wider than their predecessors and are often a straight flight at one side of the back hall that reached a landing.

South Carolina specifically saw the rise of Georgian houses as rice plantations became profitable in the early 18th century, and by 1760 indigo crops had brought a new wave of wealth to the colony. Architecture continued to advance in the state following the wave of wealth through first rice and then indigo crops. Drayton Hall, located in Charleston, is referenced as being ahead of its time for 1739, as other Georgian

⁷ Morrison and Underhill, *Early American Community Structures: from Material Originally Published as the White Pine Series of Architectural Monographs*, Edited by Russell F. Whitehead and Frank Chouteau Brown, 34

contemporaries through the country were not as advanced. Morrison references the differences between the Charleston Single and Double houses as contemporaries of Georgian architecture. The single house stood narrow end to the street in urban settings and is named 'single' for the fact that the building is only one room deep (or one room wide along the street face). The single house has a door at the street-facing façade which enters a long piazza. The entrance to the interior of the building is through a door midway down the length of the building which opens into a stair hall that separates front (or forward facing) rooms and back rooms. The double house had its entrance in the middle of the main façade with a central stair hall and double file rooms. The Georgian era double house in Charleston is similar in form to other Georgian homes in the country with simple and square forms and rooms with a primary staircase placed in the center from the main entrance.

William Pierson, Jr. explains that the Federal style could be observed all throughout the United States and maintains special characteristics of each region, yet each region still maintains the same preference for “complex shapes both in structure and in plan”.⁸ He maintains that the Federal style in the United States was adopted as a measure of patriotism. Federal style architecture maintains Roman and Greek influence. This influence can be seen in domes, columns, and symmetry. Americans sought out Architecture that could be related back to Greek and Roman times as it was reminiscent of the ideals that helped form the United States. Greece and Rome were the birthplace of

⁸ Pierson Jr. William H., *American Buildings and Their Architects: the Colonial and Neoclassical Style* (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1970)

the concept that man may elect those in charge and considering that the American Revolution had ended several years earlier, and tensions were increasing against the British again, the Federal Style of Architecture was the American way to express patriotism through nods to Greece and Rome.

Leland M. Roth explains that both Thomas Jefferson and Benjamin Henry Latrobe believed that Architecture should reflect the new reform happening in the nation, specifically post American-Revolution.⁹ There was little architectural innovation during the Revolution, and afterwards, the social and political climate could be observed in the new Federal style buildings. Latrobe was a student of classic architecture and largely denounced earlier Georgian forms. Many of Latrobe's structures were early examples of Neo-classical architecture, as they were modeled after Greek and Roman temples in strict form. In the Federal and revival style buildings, newly complicated forms meant that staircases had their own dedicated spaces within a structure unlike earlier colonial and Georgian houses. Placement of both the primary and secondary stair varies in later Revival and Federal houses because of the many variations of forms, however they are all placed consistently in halls, corridors or sections of the structure built specifically with staircases in mind.

⁹ Marian C. Donnelly and Leland M. Roth, *Architecture in Colonial America* (Eugene: University of Oregon Press, 2003).

Hierarchy of Spaces

When examining staircases and their changes through time, it is important to start with broad examinations of the difference in the hierarchy of spaces. The premise of the hierarchy of spaces is not a new one and exists in many ways and in many planes. The notion of a space existing in two parts, one more privileged than the other, is a reality that extends beyond Charleston. There is a large body of literature existing on this subject, as the hierarchy of spaces or spaces with dual purposes exist all around the world. This thesis will take into account the broad topics of study to better place the findings of this study into context. It is important to consider that primary and secondary staircases existed many years before the formation of the United States and may be observed all over the world. The concept of primary and secondary staircases did not only exist for enslaved and masters, but for servants and those they served. After an analysis of the general literature concerning the hierarchy of spaces, sources with information on secondary spaces within the American South and Charleston will be examined. While there is no literature in existence pertaining to secondary Charlestonian staircases specifically, a study on secondary spaces in areas where slavery existed will give a better understanding on how the enslaved would have maneuvered through spaces. Other sources that detail the common forms and styles of Charleston architecture will be included in the review of literature. These sources will help to identify characteristics of Charleston architecture that will be observed in the study and therefore create a better understanding of the role of the staircase within the structures. The purpose of this

chapter is to examine the concept of the hierarchy of spaces and the hierarchy of enslaved versus white spaces in the American South with an emphasis on Charleston.

Malcom William Quantrill and Alfonso Corona Martinez discuss in a publication the thoughts of the Italian architect Andrea Palladio on the subject of the hierarchy of spaces. The scholars believe the concept may have started with Palladio as he discussed the importance of small, medium, and large rooms. Palladio explained that small rooms must be placed next to more significant rooms used for entertaining in order to store less important items out of sight.¹⁰ This hierarchy of spaces can relate to rooms used more publicly and more privately (dining rooms vs. bathrooms) for the same occupants, but also has implications about social status. One may observe this concept in Charlestonian homes, considering the existence of butler's pantries, secondary staircases, and others.

Skipping forward several hundred years from Palladio's 16th century ideals, Louis Khan, a 20th century modern architect, had insight as to the formation of secondary spaces. Khan believed architecture should be "timeless but of its time", a phrase that personifies the purpose of this architectural study, as this survey will strive to study architectural changes as time progressed. Khan divided the spaces he designed into categories of places that exist merely for functional uses, and spaces that exist for functional as well as stylistic use.¹¹ This is a clear establishment of hierarchy, as one

¹⁰ Alfonso Corona Martínez and Malcolm Quantrill, "The Architectural Project", *Studies in Architecture and Culture* (College Station: Texas A&M University Press, 2003), 145.

¹¹ Amber Marie Anderson, "The Analysis of a Secondary Space: Bathrooms at Frank Lloyd Wright's Fallingwater" (2015) *Master of Science in Historic Preservation Terminal Projects*. 5. https://tigerprints.clemson.edu/historic_pres/5

space is more important than the other. Khan coined the idea that spaces are either “servant” or “served”. This can be interpreted as places within a plan where residents are meant to spend time vs. the spaces that are more functional or provide a support function (a bedroom vs. a closet or hallway), but it can be taken literally. A servant space might be a kitchen and a served space a dining room. Considering the buildings in which domestic labor is done by servants, or pre-Kahn’s time period, enslaved people, these distinctions start to carry messages about who occupies which spaces. This is a frame that is helpful when considering the architecture of historic Charleston.

Cary Carson, an American historian, discusses the concept of a hierarchy of spaces in the chapter entitled *Architecture as a Social History* within *The Chesapeake House: Architectural Investigation by Colonial Williamsburg*, a book he co-authored. Carson goes on to explain that few buildings in our society are open to everybody, or at the least not open to everybody, equally. Carson claims that access to spaces is defined by who they belong to, and by who waits on who they belong to. This ideal is similar to the earlier notion of Louis Khan when he divided spaces into two categories; an area for the served and an area for the people doing the serving. Carson now makes explicit the aspect of social control embedded in these architectural decisions, a shift from Kahn. Carson names staircases specifically as instrumental in the identifying who should be where. He claims that “by paying attention to the placement of placement of entrances, interior doorways, and corridors,”¹² how spaces were divided, and for whom becomes

¹² Cary Carson, *The Chesapeake House: Architectural Investigation by Colonial Williamsburg*, (University of North Carolina Press, 2013), 23

clear. Carson also explains the purpose of secondary staircases, existing so that “master and servant would not meet expectantly between floors.”

In examining staircases more specifically, in his book *At Home*, historian Bill Bryson explains the dangers of historic staircases. Bryson claims that some staircases are more dangerous by design than others. For example, staircases with “poor lighting, absence of handrails, confusing patterns on treads, risers that are unusually high or too low, treads that are unusually wide or narrow, and landings that interrupt the rhythm of ascent or descent are the principal design faults that lead to accidents.”¹³ This passage is significant, as it adequately describes many of the secondary staircases examined for the purpose of this study. Many of the dangers Bryson listed are applicable to the secondary staircases in this survey, while primary staircases remained much safer. This aspect paints a clear picture of who was important and who was not.

In Bernard L. Herman’s book, *Town House Architecture and Material Life in the Early American City, 1780-1830*, he expresses that town houses and their arrangements were ways of establishing power.¹⁴ Herman goes on to say that community climates are reflected in town houses, and this certainly can be said for the town houses utilized in this survey. The urban environment of Charleston saw African Americans and whites living in close proximity, yet still with sanctions of separations enforced. This same climate

¹³ Bill Bryson, *At Home: an Informal History of Private Life* (London: Doubleday, 2010), 23

¹⁴ Bernard L. Herman, “Town House Architecture and Material Life in the Early American City, 1780-1830” (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2012)

could be found in the homes of wealthy Charlestonians, considering they lived with African Americans only several hundred feet away, but insisted upon enforcing ways of separation including the secondary staircase. Herman asserts that buildings employ “a strategy that looks at individual buildings as options exercised by people making and communicating a sense of self and their environment”.¹⁵

Parallel Examples

The concept of dual circulation transcends Charleston, the American South, and the United States as a whole. Dual circulation, or the notion of two or more different ways to travel through and exist in one space, is found all over the world. It is important to analyze these different spaces outside the boundaries of the enslaved and the enslavers and acknowledge that it exists in many different facets, not only in the United States but in many different countries throughout world history.

The concept of a secondary staircase predates the United States. A close look into the floor plan of the palace of Versailles, the home to King Louis XVI and Marie Antoinette, showcases examples of a grand primary stair and a smaller and more modest secondary stair near it in each wing of the palace. Specifically, in the 1715 plans of the second floor and placed in the right wing sits the “The Grand Escalier”, a stair meant to be “a display of architectural bravado that combined a relatively new form of a staircase

¹⁵ Herman, *Town House Architecture and Material Life in the Early American City 1780-1830*, 32

design with a lavish decorative treatment”¹⁶ The purpose of this staircase was to impress those who entered into the wing of the palace and enabled them to reach principle rooms on the third floor. In the same wing, a winder staircase one fourth the size of the primary stair can be noticed. This shows that in the same small area of the wing of the palace, two different modes of movement were deemed necessary and installed. Considering there were no enslaved people at Versailles, this shows that secondary staircases are not exclusive to slavery, but to domestic help.

¹⁶ Carolyn Yerkes. "The Grand Escalier at the Château De Versailles: The Monumental Staircase and Its Edges." *The Princeton University Library Chronicle* 76, no. 1-2 (2015): 51-83. Accessed April 10, 2021. doi:10.25290/prinunivlibrchro.76.1-2.0051.

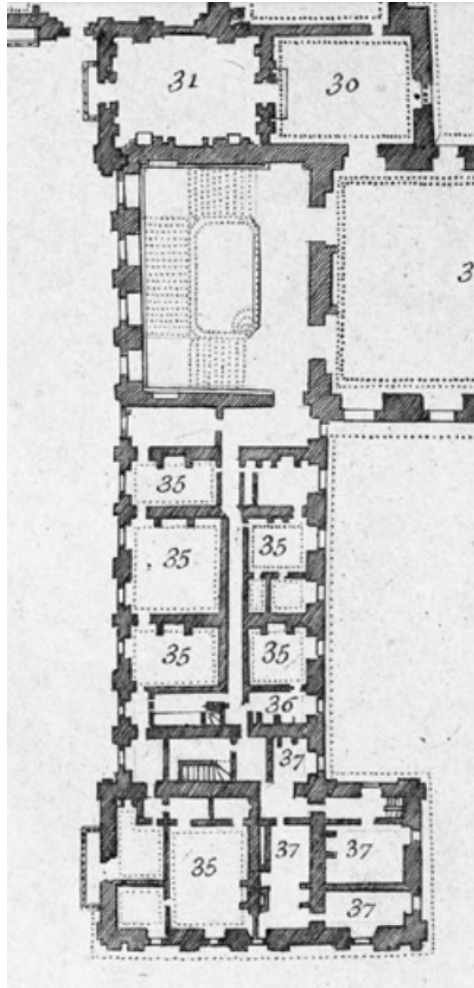


Figure 1: East wing of the palace of Versailles, dual circulation can be observed through primary and secondary staircases. Image from “Les Plans, profils, et elevations, des ville, et château de Versailles... dessinés et gravés en 1714 et 1715”

In Rory Sherlock’s article entitled *The Evolution of the Irish Tower-house as a Domestic Space*, he discusses the changing characteristics and roles of the tower house

through time. These tower houses were typically made from stone and consisted of square towers with a vaulted ground floor and several floors above. These towers often had attached enclosures and were built from 1400 AD to 1600 AD. Hierarchy of space can be observed in these buildings, as each floor had a principle room with lesser rooms above in attic spaces. Sherlock asserts that most Irish tower houses were “essentially physical framework designed to accommodate a hall and a number of private chambers in a single block. This arrangement was supported by a series of service areas located within the tower or within the bawn around it”¹⁷. In these tower houses in Ireland, there was a clear distinction between spaces that were meant for guests and areas that were less important and only used for utilitarian purposes.

The hierarchy of spaces through architecture may also be observed in England. In Brian W. McCuskey’s article entitled *Servant Surveillance and Middle-Class Transgression*, he explains the relationship between the domestic worker, their employer, and their surroundings in Victorian era England. He explains that the hall, or special anterooms were used to hold visitors while the master of the house was being fetched by a servant.¹⁸ These hallways or anterooms acted as a boundary between the outside world and the privacy of intimate rooms. This establishes that in these English dwellings, hierarchy of space was created by using certain rooms and spaces for holding areas and

¹⁷ Rory Sherlock. "The Evolution of the Irish Tower-house as a Domestic Space." *Proceedings of the Royal Irish Academy. Section C: Archaeology, Celtic Studies, History, Linguistics, Literature* 111C (2011): 115-40. Accessed June 30, 2021. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/41472817>.

¹⁸ Brian McCuskey "The Kitchen Police: Servant Surveillance and Middle-Class Transgression." *Victorian Literature and Culture* 28, no. 2 (2000): 359-75. Accessed June 30, 2021. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/25058524>.
glass Anderson, "Plotting William Byrd." *The William and Mary Quarterly* 56, no. 4 (1999): 701-22. Accessed March 22, 2021. doi:10.2307/2674232.

other rooms for more important tasks such as private family areas or areas meant for entertaining.¹⁹

Enslaved Spaces

Dr. Alexander Ormond Bouton wrote of a colonial Virginia in 1991.²⁰ He describes a city that went from a society with slaves, to a slave society. He explains that during the start of the eighteenth century, only 20 percent of the population consisted of enslaved individuals, while by the mid eighteenth century the percentage had risen to over 60 percent.²¹ During this time gap, Virginia experienced political stability and its establishment of strong and prominent families. Boulton describes a dwelling in Virginia built by William Byrd. Boulton explains that Byrd's slave quarters had a small economy of its own with enslaved owning livestock that was considered to belong to them. The majority of people enslaved by Byrd were trained as skilled workers and were allowed a small level of autonomy. Bouton continues on with a discussion of Thomas Jefferson and his seat at Monticello. While in Jefferson's private letters, he never strayed from the belief that slavery was inheritably wrong, this belief did not translate into life at Monticello, as Jefferson tended to keep beliefs that were controversial to himself to avoid losing votes. The once enslaved families and their descendants at Monticello can be traced in Jefferson's Garden and Farm book. From passages in the book, it is clear that

¹⁹ McCuskey "The Kitchen Police: Servant Surveillance and Middle-Class Transgression.", 14

²⁰ Richard S. Dunn "The William and Mary Quarterly 45, no. 4 (1988): 779-82". Accessed July 1, 2021. doi:10.2307/2936990.

Jefferson treated enslaved children as a community resource. This is evident considering the responsibility of taking care of them was evenly dispersed throughout the community. Jefferson created and encouraged a hierarchy within his enslaved population. Descendants of an enslaved woman named Betty Hemings, specifically, always occupied more important positions at Monticello. For example, her grandson Burwell was often entrusted with the keys to Jefferson's storage rooms. Many scholars believe Betty Heming's six children were the result of her relationship with Martha Jefferson's father, making her children Martha's half siblings. This may explain why the Hemings' descendants, although enslaved, had more freedom on the property than those enslaved related to Hemings. These sources, although referring to two examples of enslavement in Virginia specifically, stand to prove that the experience of enslaved varied from household to household, and could vary depending on skill set, family relation, or the personality of the master. These concepts are important to understand when examining secondary spaces, staircases specifically, and how enslaved African Americans would have interacted with these spaces.

The differentiation between broad patterns of living between urban slavery and plantation slavery is assessed, as they differ greatly. Understanding urban slavery, specifically, is important when examining how African Americans existed in their spaces along with whites, because the practices and architecture were much different than that of plantation life. Richard C. Wade wrote the book *Slavery in the Cities* in 1964 as an insightful study of how slavery operated in major southern cities with his research largely being on Savannah, Charleston, Louisville, New Orleans, and Charlotte, to give a few

examples. Wade explains that in cities, the demographic of enslaved often consisted of mostly women.²² This is because the positions that needed to be filled within the urban constraints of slavery were often domestic responsibilities. These positions would include sewing, cooking, tending to the laundry, taking care of the children, and the general cleaning and upkeep of the home. Considering that many urban settings still maintained small work yards, especially in Charleston, male enslaved individuals would still be needed to tend to horses and livestock but would not have been needed in such great numbers as they were on plantations where acres of crops needed to be tended. Wade also explained that in the years approaching the civil war, urban slave owners began to sell their younger enslaved males to planters, creating a surplus of women. He explains that this trend is noticeable even regarding free people of color. For example, in Charleston by 1860, there were 2,000 free women of color on the Peninsula and only 1,200 men.²³ Another important factor considered by Wade is the percentage of people enslaving African Americans. The percentage of ‘heads of families’ owning slaves throughout the south in the 1820’s was around 75 percent. As time progressed however, by the 1840’s, the ratio began to change, with many major southern cities seeing a decline in the percentage of slave owners. In Richmond, Virginia for example, the number dropped to below 50 percent of the population owning slaves, and New Orleans had dropped below 30 percent. The numbers of slave owners remained at 75 percent of the population until the Civil War. These numbers are important to keep in mind when

²²Richard C. Wade, *Slavery in the Cities* (O.U.P., 1964).

²³ This phenomenon is discussed at length in a body of literature located in Katie Stojsavljevic’s thesis “Housing and Living Patterns Among Charleston’s Free People of Color in Wraggborough, 1796-1877”

considering architecture, because it confirms the high likelihood of African Americans occupying secondary spaces, African American females specifically.

Wade continues on to explain the close quarters that enslaved people would have lived in, alongside their owners. Plantations allowed for many acres and spaces, often resulting in rows of slave dwellings. Enslaved people on plantations would have had little interaction with other enslaved people on neighboring plantations due to distance and would have had minimal interactions with whites that did not live on their plantation. This created few points of contact or interference within rural enslaved spaces. In juxtaposition, enslaved people in urban areas such as Charleston would have had many interactions with other enslaved people and lived in very close proximity to their white counterparts. He notes that in Charleston's 1848 census, there were on average 10 individuals to a plot. In one area of Charleston out of 2,666 dwellings, 2,226 were single family units with 601 of these single families owning at least 10 enslaved people. This helps to put the crowded social climate into perspective when examining secondary spaces, specifically staircases, and how they were constructed for whites to attempt to restore some power and organization to their complicated lives.

Enslaved Spaces in Charleston

More specific to Charleston, John Michael Vlach composed an article discussing the climate of slavery in urban settings in which he discusses the Aiken- Rhett house as a case study. Vlach acknowledges the hierarchy of spaces at play in Charleston, especially in the context of living and working conditions. Vlach states that “The slaveholder’s own residence was not only the largest and most centrally building but was also the most elaborately decorated structure. Its impressive scale and decorative features immediately made clear who was socially significant and, more importantly, who was in charge. Slave dwellings and workspaces such as kitchens, laundries, diaries, carriage houses, and stables were subordinated by being set to the side or rear of the main structure.”²⁴ This further establishes that architecture within Charleston was capable of expressing the social climate and explaining who was important.

There is a modest amount of literature that explains the experience of African Americans in Charleston. In a book entitled *Slavery in the City*, Clifton Ellis and Rebecca Ginsburg explain the complicated dynamics of Charleston’s many work yards located in the side or back lots of the main property. Ellis and Ginsburg explain these areas as “a material manifestation of the contentious relationships between masters and enslaved people.”²⁵ Ellis and Ginsburg describe slave owning Charlestonians as fearful

²⁴ John Michael Vlach. “The Plantation Tradition in an Urban Setting: The Case of the Aiken-Rhett Dwelling in Charleston, South Carolina,” *Southern Cultures*, March 14, 2021, <https://www.southerncultures.org/article/plantation-tradition-urban-setting-case-aiken-rhett-dwelling-charleston-south-carolina/>.

²⁵ Clifton Ellis and Rebecca Ginsburg, *Slavery in the City: Architecture and Landscapes of Urban Slavery in North America* (Charlottesville, Virginia: University of Virginia Press, 2017).

after the Stono Rebellion of 1739 and the Haitian Revolution of 1791-1804 that resulted in much bloodshed and violence. After the failed attempt at a slave rebellion by Denmark Vesey in 1822, a new era of paranoid Charlestonians ensued that encompassed their architectural choices and the layout of the Charleston backlot where enslaved lived and worked. For instance, large walls can be observed surrounding works lots, often containing broken glass or iron spikes. The authors continue on to explain that small pantries were built between work yard structures and the main dwellings, making them appear as one unified mass in plats, but in reality, offered some degree of separation. These backlots were also designed in a way that allowed slave owners to observe the slaves from their homes. One of the best and clearest examples of this is located at the Aiken-Rhett house in Charleston. From almost every room in the dwelling, there is a window that has views to the work yard, which occupies the back of the property. Thomas Pickney referred to enslaved people in within urban settings as the “most dangerous”. Perhaps the most compelling account that embodied the fear white Charlestonians felt of the enslaved people who inhabited their back yard came in the form of a letter written by Margret Izard Manigault in the early nineteenth century. “These horrible ideas obsess me at night when nothing interrupts them, and I almost envy those who have already died peaceably in their beds”.²⁶This personifies the constant fear Charlestonians felt of slave uprising, and this fear is apparent in the architecture and literature of the time. This concept is important to keep in mind when examining

²⁶ Powers, *Black Charlestonians: a Social History, 1822-1885*, 76

secondary staircases within structures, as that fear would almost certainly be translated in the way enslaved were permitted to travel throughout their master's homes.

CHAPTER THREE

METHODOLOGY

The first step in this study was to select historic dwellings that could potentially have dual circulation. These dwellings needed to be selected from a reputable source that lists Charleston houses, their year of construction, and their address. Two lists of buildings were chosen. The first list was selected from Christopher Tenny's thesis entitled *Crafting the Carolopolis Award: Expansion of the Physical Characteristics of Award Winners and the Preservation Society of Charleston's Published Announcements of the Award Since 1953*.²⁷ The second source that was utilized for its list of structures is the book *The Buildings of Charleston* written by Jonathan H. Poston for The Historic Charleston Foundation.²⁸ Once these lists of houses were obtained, a criteria was created in order to select dwellings for this survey. In order to be selected for the survey, the structure would need to be located in Charleston or Charleston County. The dwelling would need to have existing floor plans and have both a primary and secondary staircase. Finally, the structures would need to have been built from 1700 through 1900. Sixteen structures were selected that were found in the two lists utilized and that met the criteria. The next step was then to collect the floor plans for the selected structures in order to analyze them. Sources analyzed to collect the floor plans are the Vernacular Architecture

²⁷ Christopher Gene Tenny, "Crafting the Carolopolis Award: Expansion of the Physical Characteristics of Award Winners and the Preservation Society of Charleston's Published Announcements of the Award Since 1953" (2019) *Master of Science in Historic Preservation Terminal Projects*. 5. https://tigerprints.clemson.edu/historic_pres/5

²⁸ Jonathan H. Poston, *The Buildings of Charleston: a Guide to the City's Architecture* (Columbia, SC: University of South Carolina Press, 2014).

Forum, Historic American Buildings Survey documentation, and the McCrady Plats. Considering the scarcity of historic plans and that many plats only have squares to represent structures and not architectural details located internally, modern plans were incorporated as acceptable sources for this study. The plans that were created at a later time were scrutinized differently, acknowledging that they might depict non-original configurations. Both primary and secondary staircases in the floor plans were examined for their dates of construction, placement, configuration, access, how many floors they reached, and if they are external or internal, the depth of the tread of stair, as well as the width of the staircase.

Placement: Placement in this study will be defined using cardinal directions based upon the direction of the front entrance. For instance, if the staircase is located on the north, south, east, or west area of a dwelling. Placement will also be discussed in terms of where the staircase is located relative to the front door of the structure, for example, the front versus the rear of a structure.

Configurations: For the purpose of this survey, the staircase configuration will be defined as the type, meaning the shape, of staircase. Below is a list of the types of stairs, their definitions, and illustrations used for this survey. The definitions for the first three staircases were retrieved from the book *The Fundamentals of Building Construction: Materials and Methods* seventh Edition by Edward Allen and Joseph Iano.²⁹ The other

²⁹ Edward Allen and Joseph Iano, *Fundamentals of Building Construction: Materials and Methods* (Hoboken, NJ: Wiley, 2019).

types of staircase configurations were developed for this study to best describe the types of stairs found.

Configurations

Straight Run Stairs: A straight run staircase will run from straight from floor to floor with no turns.

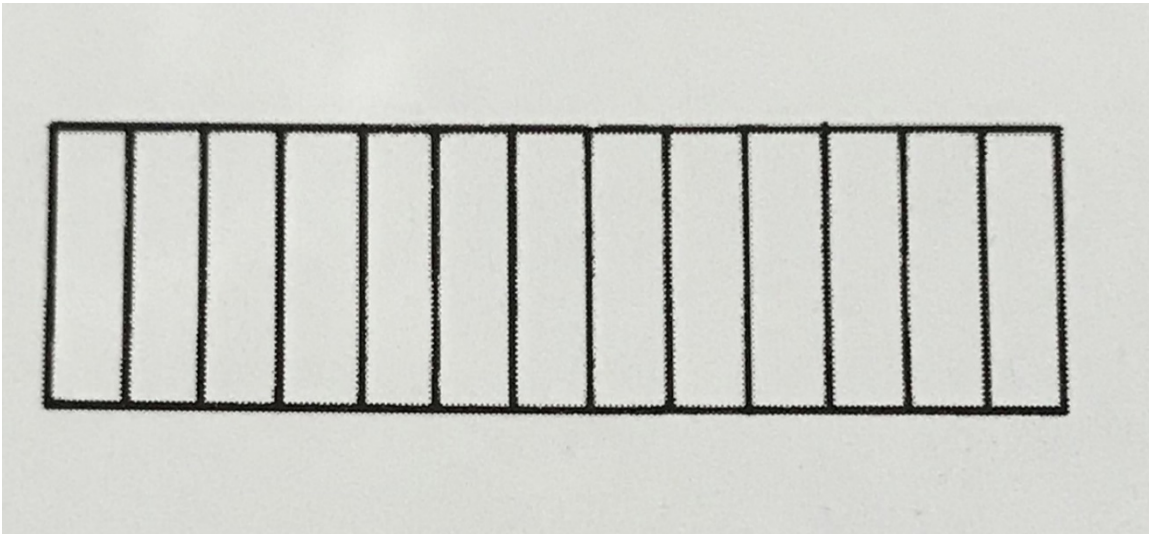


Figure 2: Straight run staircase, *Fundamentals of Building Construction*

L Shaped Stair: An L shaped stair consists of two straight run staircases and may have a landing or winders in between.

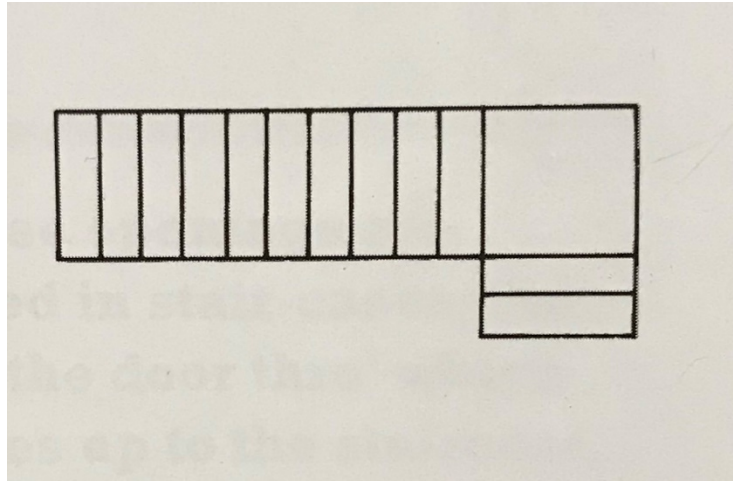


Figure 3: L shaped stair, *Fundamentals of Building Construction*

180-Degree Stair: Makes a 180-degree turn to the next level of the structure.³⁰

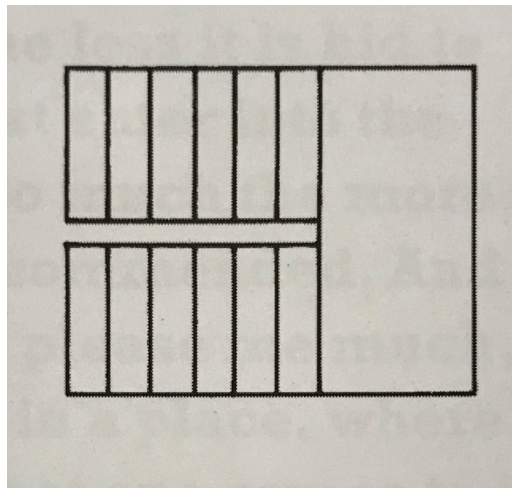


Figure 4: 180-Degree Stair, *Fundamentals of Building Construction*

Winder Stair: A winder stair consists entirely of winders that are either curved or squared.

³⁰ A 180- degree staircase may contain either winders or landing.

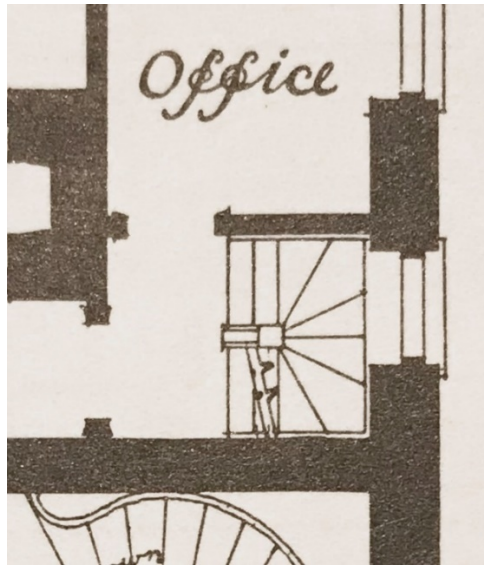


Figure 5: Winder Staircase, drawn by Albert Simmons for the Nathaniel Russel house in *Charleston Architecture*, page 264

Elliptical Star: A staircase with a continuous run of winder stairs arranged around an elliptical opening between floors.

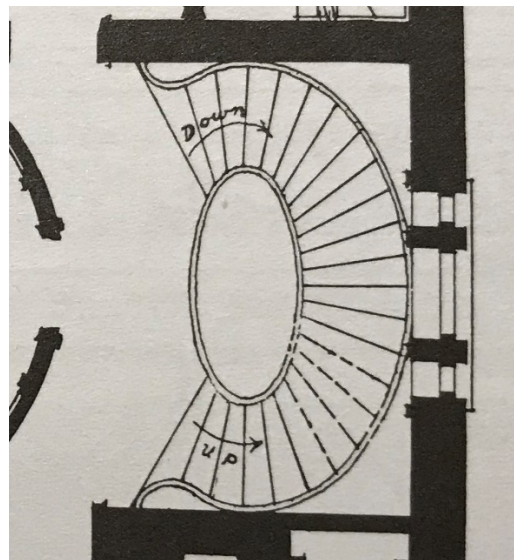


Figure 6: Elliptical Stair, drawn by Albert Simmons for the Nathaniel Russel house in *Charleston Architecture*, page 264

A “C” shaped stair has three runs of stairs connected by landings and 90-degree turns, ultimately making a 180-degree turn.³¹

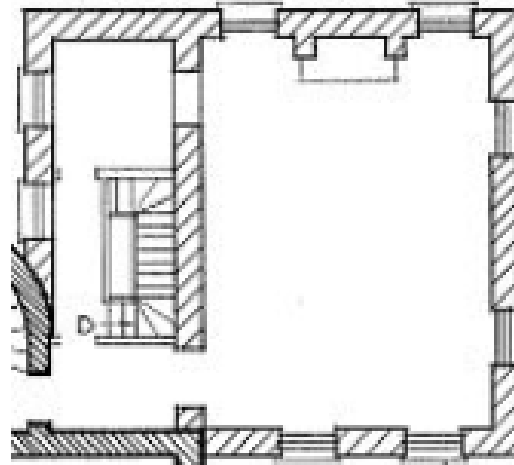


Figure 7: “C” shaped staircase, drawn by HABS for the second floor plan of the Christopher Belser house

The major types of staircases observed in this study are L shaped, winder, straight run, and 180-degrees, elliptical stair, and a C shaped stair.

- In addition to these staircase configurations, other terms have been added to best describe the types of staircases observed in this study. These terms include partial level, elaborated, and mirrored. Partial level is defined as a level that only reaches a mezzanine level, or a level that is typically between the ground floor and first floor. An elaborated stair is defined as a stair that contains decorative elements that are represented in the floor plans. A mirrored stair is a stair that has an identical run or flight on the opposite side that both lead to the same floor.

³¹ A C shaped staircase may or may not contain winders

Figure 9: List of structures selected

House Name:	Date:	Location:	Address:
Drayton Hall	1738	HABS, SC-377	3380 Ashley River Rd
Brandford- Horry	1752	EAoC, Page 52	59 Meeting St.
Miles Brewton	1765	EAoC, Page 51	27 King St.
El Dorado	1797	Charleston Architecture, 262A	220 Santee Gun Club Road
Simmons- Edwards	1800	VAF, Page 162	14 Legare St.
Capers Christian Shutt	1802	VAF, Page 60	90 East Bay St.
Joseph Manigault	1803	Charleston Architecture, 262A	360 Meeting St.
Christopher Belser	1806	HABS, SC-203	2 Amherst St.
Nathaniel Russel	1808	Charleston Architecture, 264A	51 Meeting St.
Aiken-Rhett	1811	Charleston Architecture, 265A	48 Elizabeth St.
Patrick Duncan	1816	Charleston Architecture, 264A	172 Rutledge Ave.
Benjamin Philips House	1818	VAF, Page 37	55 Church St
Robert Martin	1835	VAF, Page 245	16 Charlotte St.
William Gatewood House	1843	Richard Marks Restorations Inc.	21 Legare St.
Henry Gerdt's House	1859	Richard Marks Restorations Inc.	13 Pitt St.
Edward G. Voight	1887	VAF, Page 145	131 Broad St.

EXAMINATION

The next step in this process was to analyze aspects of the staircases that can be measured through plans without gaining access to any interiors. Placement, configuration, and width was examined. Access to these staircases was analyzed and what room of the dwelling the stairs are located in. The width of each of the stair as well as the depth of the tread was examined and compared. Because several of the plans in this study do not notate their dimensions, a ratio system was used to measure the staircase.

This was done by drawing a line the width of the staircase or the tread of the primary staircase first and then comparing those lengths to the lengths of the secondary staircase. The length difference was described as the primary stair being half, twice, three-times as large and so on.

Access: Access for the purpose of this study will be defined as how one would enter the staircase. This includes if the staircase has an external or internal entrance as well as what room of the structure the staircase is located in. Each of these factors was examined when considering the access. The number of floors the staircase reached was examined also. Other significant aspects of the staircases that could be seen from plans are notated in the analysis as additional features.

The results of this survey were recorded in a chart. The analysis chart organized the findings chronologically by the date of construction. The chart consists of the house name, the year of construction, address, placement, configuration, access, number of floors reached, if the stair was external or internal, and finally a column for additional features that do not coincide with any of the previous categories. Two of these charts were created. The first chart is an analysis of the primary staircases, and the second chart is an analysis of the secondary staircases. The charts can be found in Appendix A.

CHAPTER FOUR
ANALYSIS

Drayton Hall: 1738

3380 Ashley River Rd.



Figure 10: Front Façade of Drayton Hall, Drayton Hall website

Drayton Hall is a plantation house built in 1738 in the rural setting of the Ashley River. Drayton Hall stands at three and a half stories tall, with the front façade facing southwest and features a two-story portico which protrudes from and recedes into the dwelling. The portico has four white columns on each floor. The structure is built in the form of a double house in a Neo-Palladian style. Characteristics of Palladianism include classical forms and symmetry. Classical forms are defined as structures that have columns

and windows that are evenly spaced and that are reminiscent of Roman and Greek architecture. These characteristics can be found within Drayton Hall, specifically with the primary staircase located in the northeast portion of the structure. The primary stair is L shaped, elaborated, and mirrored. The mirrored aspect of the staircase solidifies the Palladianism, as both sides of the rear hallway are symmetrical. The elaborated features found within the plan are the banister of the staircase, constructed of carved mahogany and a flared first tread.



Figure 11: Under the first floor portico of Drayton Hall, Drayton Hall website



Figure 12 : Drayton Hall Stair Hall, Drayton Hall website



Figure 13: Basement of Drayton Hall with secondary staircase, photo by Tony

Sweet

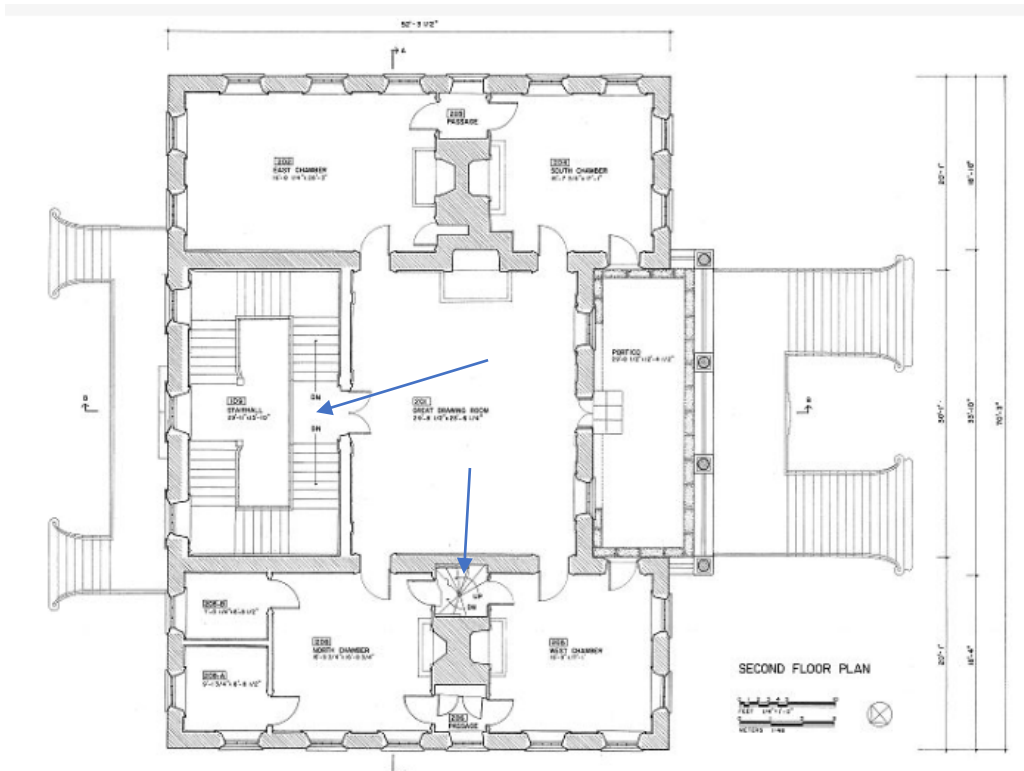


Figure 14: Second floor plan of Drayton Hall, *Historic American Buildings Survey* (HABS), blue arrows indicate the surveyed staircases

This primary staircase connects two floors, starting on the first floor and leading the Drayton family and their guests to the second floor. This staircase is in a position of prominence in the home, as it would be visible after walking in through the front door. The basement doubled as a kitchen with exits to the rear of the structure. The first floor contained a grand central room where a formal dining would have taken place on occasion, and more intimate family dining would have taken place in a back parlor, also on the first floor. The second floor grand hall was used for entertainment and was flanked by two

spaces used as intimate family spaces and bedrooms. The uppermost section of Drayton Hall has a half floor used as an attic.³²

The secondary staircase is located on the first floor and leads to all floors of the home, including the basement. This staircase is in the southeastern portion of the dwelling, may be accessed through the rear drawing room, and is built within a small stair hall located between the fireplace and the wall. This staircase is winder in its configuration and reaches all four inhabitable floors, including the attic and basement.

- Width: Primary stair slightly more than four times the width of the secondary stair.
- Tread Depth: Primary stair tread depth nearly twice as deep as the secondary stair.
- Floors Reached: Primary stair reaches first to second floor, secondary stair reaches all floors (4) from cellar to attic.
- Light (windows): Primary stair faces two windows on the first floor and three windows on the second floor. The secondary stair has no windows.
- Form: Palladian/Georgian double house

³² Drayton Hall "Drayton Hall: The Creation and Preservation of an American Icon," April 18, 2021, <https://shop.draytonhall.org/products/drayton-hall-the-creation-and-preservation-of-an-american-icon>.

Bradford- Horry: 1752

59 Meeting St.



Figure 15: Bradford Horry house north elevation, The Chipstone Foundation

The Bradford-Horry house, built in 1752, is an example of a three and a half story Georgian townhouse, also known as a “Double house”. Georgian style architecture includes rigid and symmetrical features. Georgian houses also contain Roman and Greek influence that can be noticed in the columns and cornices of the structure. More importantly, for the purpose of this thesis, is the Georgian form as opposed to the Georgian style. The Georgian plan includes no curvature, symmetrical windows and a five bay front façade. The dwelling has a double pile plan containing one large room and one smaller room on the second floor front, according to Jonathan Poston’s *The Buildings of Charleston*. The front elevation faces east and towards the street. The dwelling’s front and

back second floor façade showcases a piazza. After the structure was inherited by Elias Horry sometime in 1801, the piazzas were added on and the first floor, both of the front-room doorways were widened to create a double parlor plan.

This Georgian townhouse has a primary staircase consistent with that of a Charleston double house. Double houses usually maintain a primary staircase that is in the rear of the structure and centered with the main entryway. This can be said for the Bradford Horry house, as the staircase may be accessed from coming in the front door, passing two drawing rooms, and walking straight back through the stair hall. This staircase is 180-degree in its configuration, also consistent with a typical double house floor plan. The primary stair reaches two of the three and a half stories of the home.

The secondary staircase is located in the western section of the dwelling. Access to this secondary stair could be gained from a small stair hall located to the side of the center of the main stair hall. The secondary stair hall is built between the fireplace and the wall, revealing that the builders did not have to change the form of the structure to accommodate the stair. The staircase is a winder in its configuration, making it more compact and easy to place in such a small space. The stair tread depth within the secondary staircase is slightly smaller than half the size of the primary stair, creating very little room to misstep, as the secondary stair tread depth is much smaller than the size of the foot of any adults who may have been climbing it.

- Width: Primary stair is slightly more than double the width of the secondary stair.
- Tread Depth: Primary staircase tread depth is slightly more than double the depth of the secondary stair.

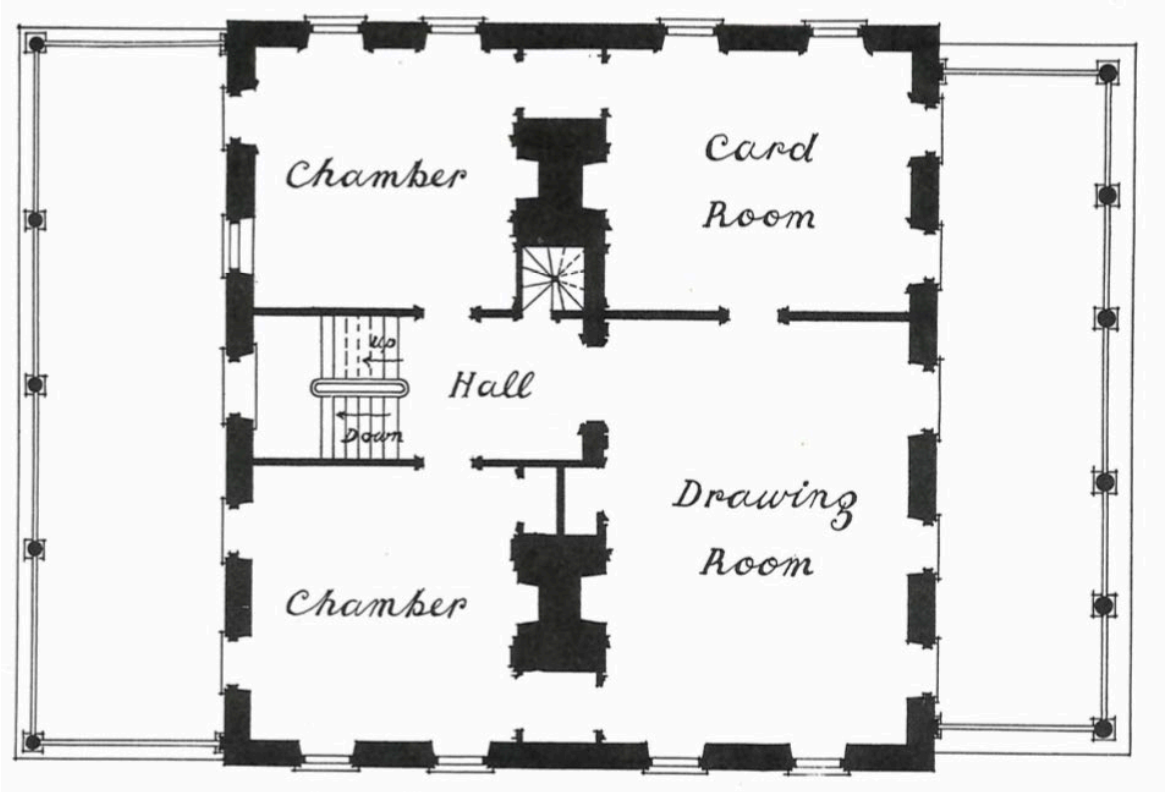
- Floors Reached: Primary stair reaches two stories and the secondary staircase reaches all three stories.
- Light (windows): For the primary staircase, a window located along the landing between the first and second floor. There are no windows lining the secondary staircase.
- Form: Georgian double house



Figure 16: Bradford Horry north façade and side of east façade, photo by the author

Figure 17: Second floor plan of the Bradford-Horry house, *Early Architecture of*

Charleston page 52



The Miles Brewton: 1765

27 King St.



Figure 18: Front façade of the Miles Brewton house, photo by the author

The Miles Brewton house, built in 1765, is an example of a Georgian double house. Georgian houses contain symmetry within the structure and Roman and Greek influence. Both of these aspects may be noticed in the structure's symmetrical doors and windows and also with the columns that line the first and second floor porches. Built as an urban townhouse, the structure stands two and a half stories tall. The front portion of the dwelling faces north towards the street. The first and second story of the structure maintains a porch, with a pedimented portico at the top of the second floor.

The primary staircase is located in the rear of the structure, centered by the main entrance. This staircase is 180-degree in its configuration, also consistent with most double house staircases. The staircase reaches only two stories of the two and a half stories of the structure.

The secondary staircase in the house is in the western portion of the dwelling. The secondary staircase can be accessed by a small stair hall located to the side of the front entry way. The stair hall and the secondary staircase follow the forms of the other early Georgian homes from this study, as it was built in the area between a wall and a fireplace. This placement allows for the builders to maintain the same form for the structure without alteration for the presence of a secondary staircase. The stair is winder in its configuration, allowing it to easily fit in a cramped area.

- Width: The width of the primary staircase is double the width of the secondary staircase.
- Tread Depth: The primary stair tread depth is more than double the size of the secondary stair tread depth.
- Floors Reached: The primary staircase goes from the first to second floor while the secondary staircase reaches all floors of the house.
- Light (windows): The primary staircase has three windows that line the landing between the first and second floor. The primary staircase does not have windows lining it.
- Form: Georgian double house

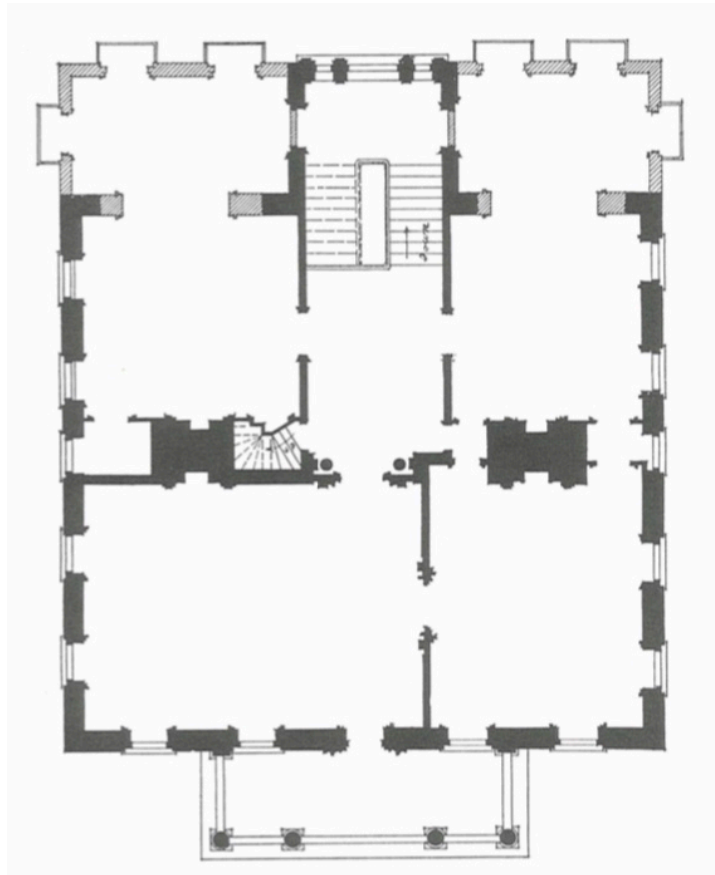


Figure 19: First floor plan of the Miles Brewton house, *Early Architecture of Charleston*

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El Dorado: 1797

South Santee River

El Dorado was a plantation house built in the rural setting of Charleston County. The structure was built to be the home of Major General Thomas Pickney and his wife, Frances Motte Middleton. The structure was destroyed in a fire in 1897 and only exists in ruins at the time of this publication. The dwelling stood at just one and a half stories tall, consisting of a raised basement and a first floor only. Because the structure does not contain the same number of floors as the other structures and the form is unusual, it may not be considered a house with Georgian form, although there are Georgian features noticeable in the only photo of the house in existence. Georgian features include symmetry which can be found in the windows of the front façade and also in the symmetrical fireplace positions. The other feature that made the dwelling appear Georgian in its style is its columns which are commonly used in Georgian architecture. More importantly, for the purpose of this thesis, the unusual floor plan for El Dorado shows a central wing with two drawing rooms on either side with fireplaces located on the external wall. The central hall is flanked by two back sections that are identical. These sections mirror each other in the central placement of a fireplace and both contain staircases which are differing in their placement and configuration. Because this structure was very rural and no longer stands, it is not possible to determine the cardinal placement of the dwelling.



Figure 20: Only known photo of El Dorado before its destruction, Charleston Museum Archives

Because little literature exists on El Dorado and its architectural features, based upon the first floor plan it can be inferred that the primary staircase may have been located in the left most wing of the structure. This staircase is straight run and can be accessed from the front room of the side wing. It is possible that this staircase would have only accessed the basement of the structure.

The secondary staircase within El Dorado is located in the right wing of the structure from the main entrance and could have been accessed in a central and small stair hall between a fireplace and a wall. The staircase was a rounded winder staircase and follows the trend of other Georgian secondary staircases in this study as the winder configuration allowed for construction in the small and cramped stair hall.

- Width: The width of the primary staircase is roughly the same width as the secondary staircase.
- Tread Depth: The primary staircase tread depth is double the tread depth of the secondary staircase.
- Floors Reached: The primary stair and secondary stair descended into the basement.
- Light (windows): The primary staircase had three windows lining it, while the secondary staircase had no windows lining it.
- Form: Possibly Georgian

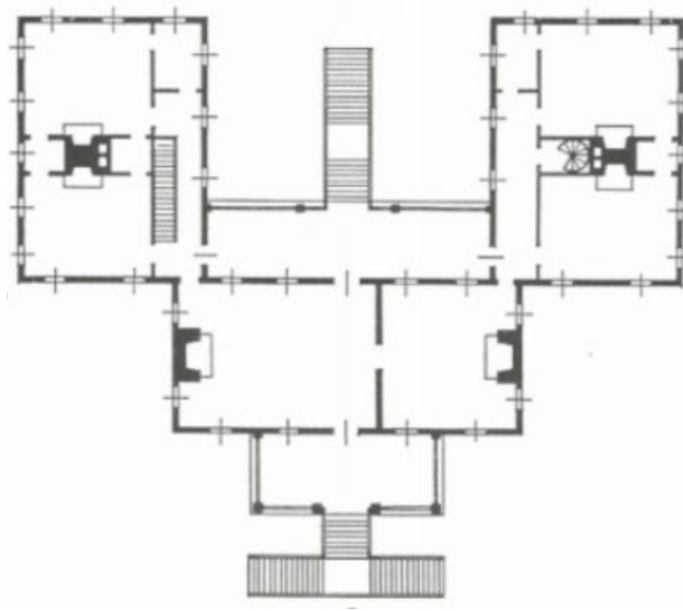


Figure 21: El Dorado Plantation first floor plan, *Charleston Architecture* page 262A

Simmons-Edwards: 1800; Dual Circulation added 1820s-1830s

14 Legare St.

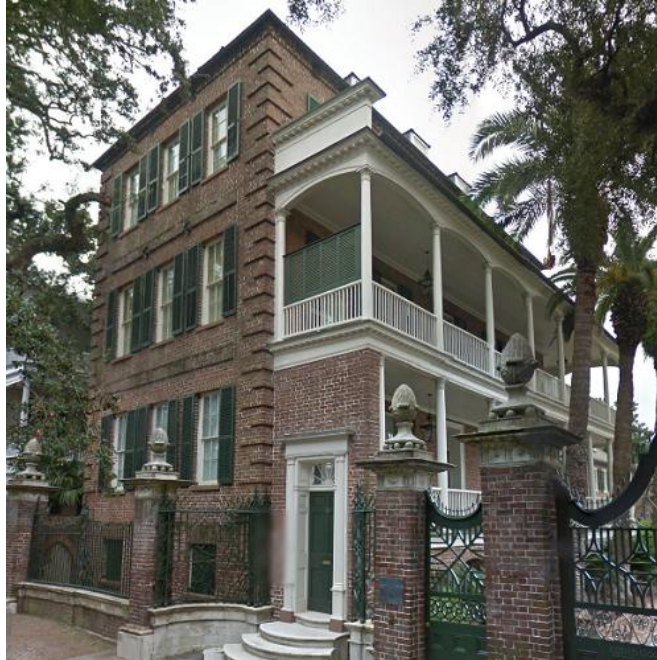


Figure 22: Entrance to Simmons-Edwards house, photo by the author

The Simmons-Edwards house is a three and a half story urban townhouse built in 1800 for wealthy planter Francis Simmons. The front façade faces west. The dwelling is a Charleston Single house in its form, maintains the typical form consistent with a single house, and has a piazza on the first and second floors. Those form characteristics include a street entrance to the piazza through a piazza screen, an entrance into the entrance hall from that piazza, and is one room wide with three rooms making up the length. The dwelling is Federal in its style. Federal style characteristics consistent with the Simmons-Edwards dwelling includes an ornamental plaster boarder around the top of the second-floor piazza. The structure is three bays wide and five bays deep, also consistent with the form of a single house. The home is known as the “Pineapple Gate house” due to the

decorative sandstone acorns ordered by George Edwards to adorn the fence on the exterior of the home sometime after 1816.

The primary staircase in the Simmons-Edwards house is 180-degree in its configuration, which is common for that of a single house. The placement of this staircase is also common for that of a single house, as it is located in the rear of the structure and is accessed through the main entrance through the stair hall.

The secondary staircase is located in an 1820s or 1830's addition to the property. Even though the staircase is not original to the structure, it is still historic and represents the dual circulation that would have occurred in the household after the addition was built. The Edwards family built the addition and based upon their wealth and the time period of the construction of before the emancipation of the enslaved, it can be inferred that enslaved individuals would have utilized the staircase. Because of this, it is included in the scope of this thesis. The secondary staircase is in the rear of the structure as opposed to the center as seen in earlier dwellings, specifically the eastern part of the structure. The staircase is also 180-degree and located in a back stair hall of the structure.

This shift in placement is significant, as it demonstrates that by the nineteenth century, secondary staircases were constructed in designated areas of a structure as opposed to places that would not affect the form of the structure in earlier Georgian homes. The stair was added on in the back portion of the dwelling, primarily because the footprint of the main house was already complete. As an addition, the stair was built outside of the main block of the house. Other interpretations (including those that relate to other single houses, as will be discussed) are that shifting stairs to the back portion of

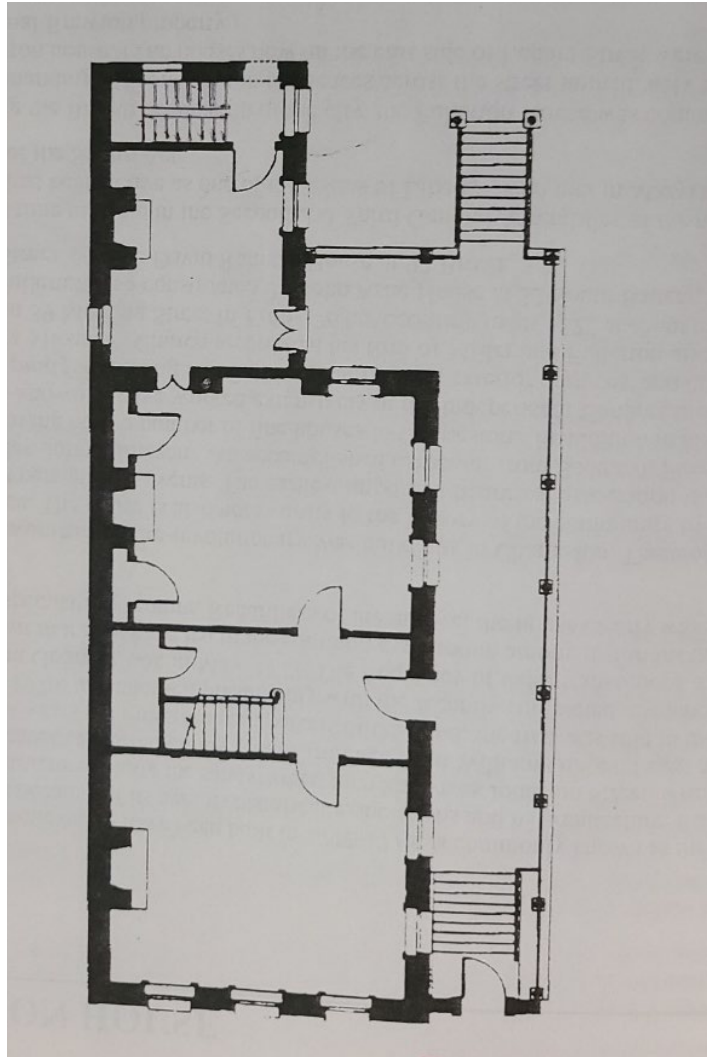
the lot may be the result of fear of having enslaved people in such close quarters to white counterparts, or perhaps to enable the enslaved to be closer to the work yard and kitchen house. Through the placement of this secondary stair, a shift can be seen in architecture from the earlier homes in this thesis.

The floor plan of the Simmons-Edwards house was drawn by the Vernacular Architecture Forum sometime in the 1990's, and since this stair was not part of the original building, but a later campaign, it is not depicted. After an analysis by Charleston architecture expert Richard Marks of Richard Marks Restoration Inc., a secondary staircase was drawn in the appropriate place.

- Width: Secondary stair is one third smaller than the width of the primary stair.
- Tread Depth: The tread depth of the primary staircase is double the tread depth of the secondary staircase.
- Floors Reached: The primary staircase reached from the first floor to the second floor, and the secondary stair reached all floors of the structure.
- Light (windows): The primary stair contained a window lining the landing between the first and second floor, and the secondary stair hall was lined with two windows.
- Form: Single house

Figure 23: First floor plan of Simmons Edwards house, *Vernacular Architecture*

Forum (VAF) 162



Casper Christian Schutt: 1802

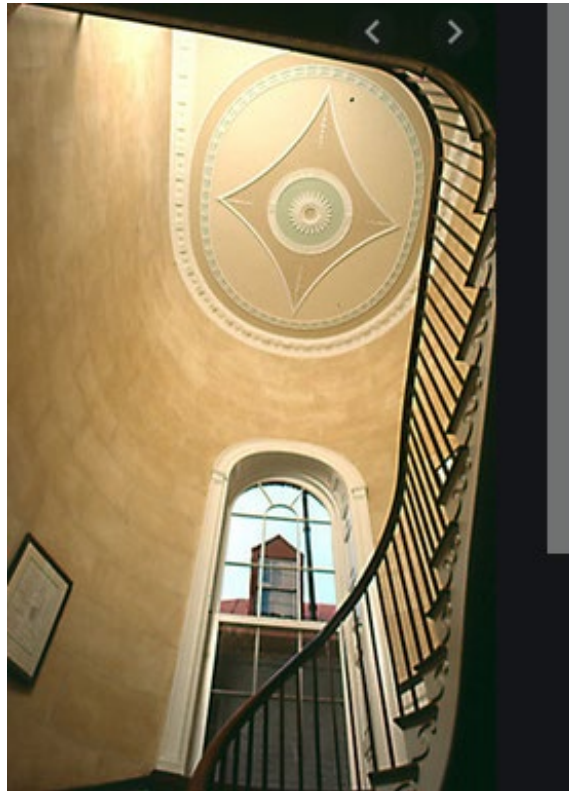
51 East Bay St.



Figure 24: Casper Christian Schutt house circa 1940s, Historic Charleston Foundation

The Casper Christian Schutt house was built in 1802 as a large-scale single house. The structure is an urban townhouse that stands three stories tall with the front façade facing east towards the street. The east and south elevations maintain stucco while the north elevation is clad in original brick. The triple-tiered piazza has graduating orders of Doric, Ionic, and Corinthian columns. The dwelling is built in the Federal style, and aspects of this can be seen in the plaster freezes and cornices above the door architraves as well as in the curvature of the primary staircase.

Figure 25: Primary staircase and plaster medallion of the Casper Christian Schutt house, photo by Glenn Keys Architects



The crown jewel of the Casper Christian Schutt house is the curved elliptical stair located in the north section of the dwelling. The staircase reaches three floors of the structure and is situated under a grand plaster ceiling.

Access to this staircase would have been gained upon entering through the front entrance gate (piazza screen) of the structure and walking through the outdoor hallway created by the piazza to the rear. This placement is common within Charleston single houses, however, the configuration of this highly decorative staircase is not. This curved elliptical staircase configuration within the single house is much more ornate. Earlier

single and double houses have 180-degree primary stairs, therefore this dwelling is a good example of the evolution of the sophistication of the character of the single house stair, as this highly decorative staircase appears to have replaced the typical 180-degree one.

The secondary staircase within the structure is 180-degree in its configuration and is located in the southern region of the structure. Access to this secondary staircase may be gained by walking through a back parlor and entering a small stair hall. The placement of this staircase further establishes a differentiation between Federal style dwellings and earlier Georgian style dwellings. The secondary stair in the Georgian style dwellings are located in the center of the structure without influencing the form. In the Federal style dwellings, the secondary staircase is located in the rear of the structure in an area built specifically for the secondary stair often creating a volume that is separate from the main massing of the building.

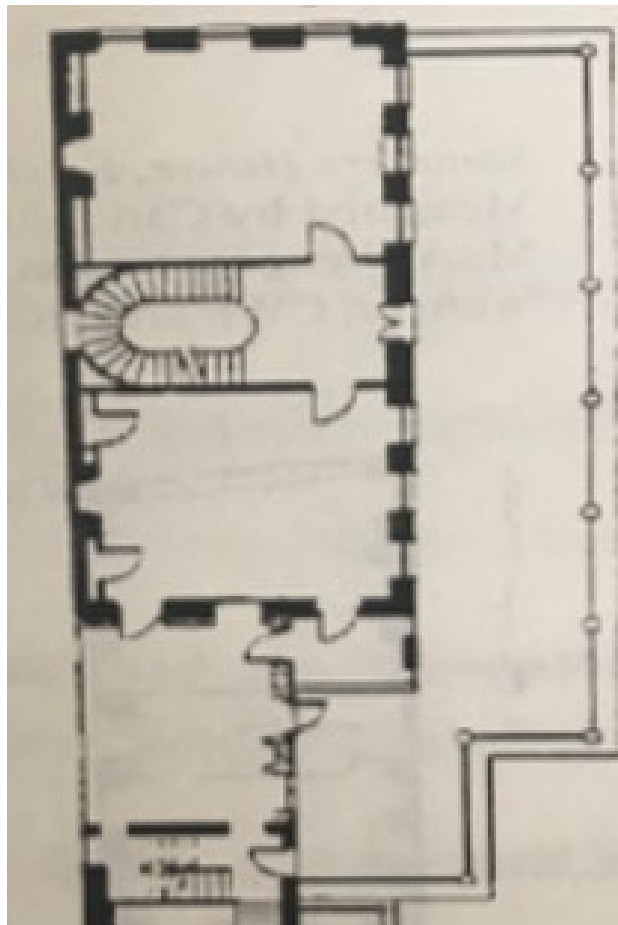
The intention of the access of these staircases remains the same, however, as with both Federal and Georgian style dwellings, the secondary stair was meant to be placed in an area that would not have been visible. In the case of the Casper Christian Schutt house, this is through a secondary parlor and through a small stair hall.

- Width: The width of the primary staircase is slightly more than three times the width of the secondary staircase.
- Tread Depth: The tread depth of the primary staircase is slightly more than three times the tread depth of the secondary staircase.

- Floors Reached: The primary staircase reaches the second floor from the first, and the secondary staircase reaches all floors of the house.
- Light (windows): The primary staircase has a large window lining it between the first and second floors, while the secondary staircase does not have windows lining it.
- Form: Single house

Figure 26: First floor plan of the Capers Christian Shutt house, *Vernacular*

Architecture Forum page 60



Joseph Manigault House: 1803

350 Meeting St.



Figure 27: Joseph Manigault back façade, South Carolina Picture Project

The Joseph Manigault house was built in 1803 as the townhouse for wealthy rice planter, Joseph Manigault. Gabriel Manigault, Joseph's older brother, was the architect of the three-story, Federal style house. The structure's front façade faces north. The dwelling maintains Federal features through its white columns on the two-story piazza on the southern façade of the structure. The west end showcases a semicircular two-story piazza, and the east end contains a curvilinear bay. The curvature of the dwelling through the bays and the piazzas is a key characteristic of Federal architecture in opposition to its predecessor, Georgian architecture, which contains little curvature in the form of its structures. The second floor would have been used mostly for entertaining as the drawing

and withdrawing room were located on the second floor. The room to the farthest west of the dwelling on the second floor was the only private space, acting as a bedroom for the Manigaults. The first floor west parlor was used as a dining room, while the room directly adjacent to it was a private library.



Figure 28: Joseph Manigault cantilevered staircase, HABS



Figure 29: Joseph Manigault house front façade, South Carolina Picture Project

The most impressive feature of the structure is its primary staircase. The primary staircase is one of the first cantilevered stairs in the city, making it the centerpiece of the dwelling. A cantilevered stair is a staircase that gets structural support from the exterior wall only and is instead held together by an anchor stair on the top and bottom with each stair in between supporting the last. The stair is considered a great architectural feat for 1803, and to increase the grandeur of the space, an elaborate plaster medallion was added on the ceiling directly above the staircase. The configuration of this elaborate elliptical staircase shows how much the primary staircase was meant to impress and dazzle guests, and the placement of the staircase in the northern part of the dwelling directly by the main entrance also solidifies this fact. The Manigaults wanted the primary stair to be the first thing seen when walking in the door.

The secondary staircase configuration is also winder, but its placement, size and access demonstrate that it was intended for strictly utilitarian use and not meant to be seen. The secondary staircase is in the eastern portion of the dwelling. To access the secondary staircase, one would need to enter into the Butler's pantry, (a strictly utilitarian area) and then enter into the stair hall from a very small door. This secondary staircase leads to the basement which contained an exit to the work yard and reached both the second and third levels of the home. The secondary staircase reached all floors to enable the enslaved people to perform their expected duties while the Manigaults and their guests, using the primary stair, would have only needed to reach the areas needed for entertainment and rest. The staircase was built in an area that only would have been seen by the Manigault enslaved people. According to Joseph Manigault's 1840's will, at the time of his death he owned 24 enslaved African Americans at his townhouse property alone.³³ This secondary staircase placement stands in stark contrast with that of the primary staircase which was intended to be the most dazzling feature of the structure.

³³ Manigault family. Manigault family papers, 1685-1971. (1068.00) South Carolina Historical Society

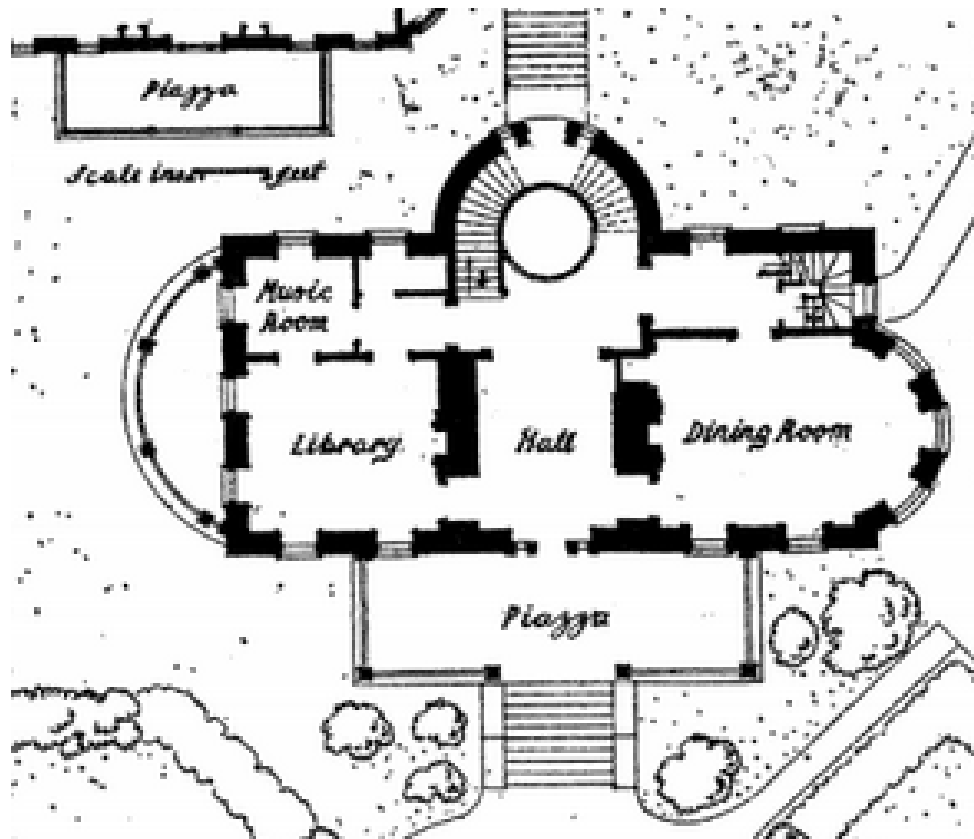


Figure 30: Joseph Manigault house first floor plan, *Charleston Architecture*

- Width: The width of the primary staircase is double the width of the secondary stair.
- Tread Depth: The depth of the tread within the primary stair is just over a foot while the tread depth of the secondary staircase is slightly more than ten inches.
- Floors Reached: The primary stair goes from the first to second floor and the secondary stair reaches all floors.

- Light (windows): The primary stair has a large window lining the landing from the first to second floor, and the secondary stair has one small window on the first floor.
- Form: Federal

Christopher Belser: 1806; 1830's Secondary Stair

2 Amherst St.



Figure 31: Christopher Belser dwelling southern façade, HABS

The Christopher Belser house was built in 1806 in the Federal style, with an unusual house I house form, and stands two and a half stories tall. The curved bay of the structure enforces its Federal style architecture, as Federal style utilizes curvature and symmetry. The first-floor plan is identical to the second-floor plan, with the only exception the drawing of the piazza adjoined to the first floor. The front façade of the structure faces south. According to Richard Marks of Richard Marks Restorations Inc., the secondary staircase to this structure was added in the 1830s at the same time the piazzas were added onto the structure. Even though the secondary staircase is not original to the 1806 structure and was built twenty-five years later, it is still considered in the

realm of this study because it is historic and would have been used for a secondary means prior to the emancipation of African Americans after the Civil War.

The primary staircase within the Christopher Belser house is 180-degree. This staircase configuration allowed for a grand appearance within the structure. The placement of the staircase faces north and could be accessed directly for the main stair hall. This staircase was intended to be seen by all who entered the front door, as it is in direct line of vision upon entering the structure. The staircase only reached two stories of the structure with no basement access. This contrasts with the secondary staircase which would have accessed all levels of the structure. This is because the secondary staircase was most likely utilized by enslaved African Americans based upon the financial standing of Christopher Belser and also due to the time period of construction. Prior to the construction of the secondary staircase, it is likely that there was a small stair or ladder under the primary stair that would have reached the basement. The attic would have likely been accessed from a small opening on the second floor ceiling. These enslaved people would have needed to access the entire structure in order to reach workstations, while the family members would only have needed to access areas of private family usage and entertainment. The floors that each stair reached is a clear sign of the roles intended for those using them, with the basement and attic for utilitarian use, the first floor used for private family use, and the second floor for entertainment.

The secondary staircase within the house is in a small stair hall to the side of the main stair, also in the northern portion of the structure. The secondary staircase access

could only be gained by first entering into the 1830's addition to the structure and then entering into a small stair hall. The two stairs are located near each other, relative to the other Federal buildings studied. This placement within the small stair hall establishes that the staircase was not meant to be seen, while the primary staircase was placed within the line of vision upon entering the dwelling, establishing a clear difference in importance. This is also a factor of the secondary stair being a later addition.

The secondary staircase is a C shaped straight run stair. This C shape secondary staircase differs from the early Georgian houses that had mostly winder secondary staircases and later Federal style dwellings that usually contained 180-degree secondary staircases. Considering that the secondary staircase was constructed twenty-five years after the dwelling was constructed initially, the structure shows how configurations of these secondary staircases changed from secondary stairs built in the earlier part of the nineteenth century.

- Width: The primary stair width is double the width of the secondary stair.
- Tread Depth: The tread depth of the primary stair is three times the tread depth of the secondary stair.
- Floors Reached: The primary staircase reaches from the first to second floor, and the secondary stair reaches all floors.
- Light (windows): The primary staircase has a large window lining it and the secondary staircase has one smaller window lining it.
- Form: Federal

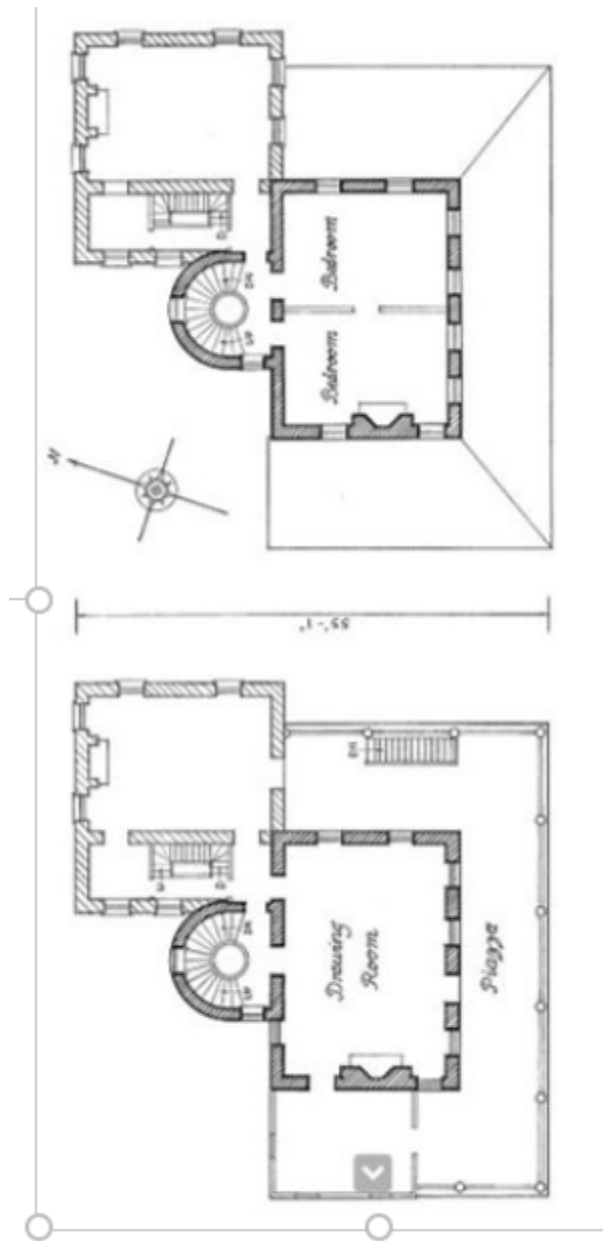


Figure 32: First and second floor plan of the Christopher Belser house, *Historic American Buildings Survey* (HABS)

Nathaniel Russel: 1808

51 Meeting St.



Figure 33 :Nathaniel Russel House, photo by Glen Keys Architects

The Nathaniel Russel house was built as the primary residence for wealthy Rhode Islander and merchant Nathaniel Russel in 1808. Standing at three stories tall and facing east, the Federal style structure is a rectangle in form with a projecting four-sided bay that rises all three stories of the structure. The most prominent Federal feature of the structure is the grandiose three story free flying staircase.



Figure 34: Primary staircase within the Nathaniel Russel dwelling, Historic

Charleston Foundation



Figure 35: Southern façade of the Nathaniel Russel dwelling

The primary staircase of the Nathaniel Russel house is famous architecturally throughout the city for its extravagance and grandeur. The staircase is in the northern area of the structure, is an elliptical in its configuration, and reaches all 3 stories of the structure. Based upon the level of ornamentation found on all three floors of the structure, it can be inferred that each floor was used for entertainment in some capacity, with more

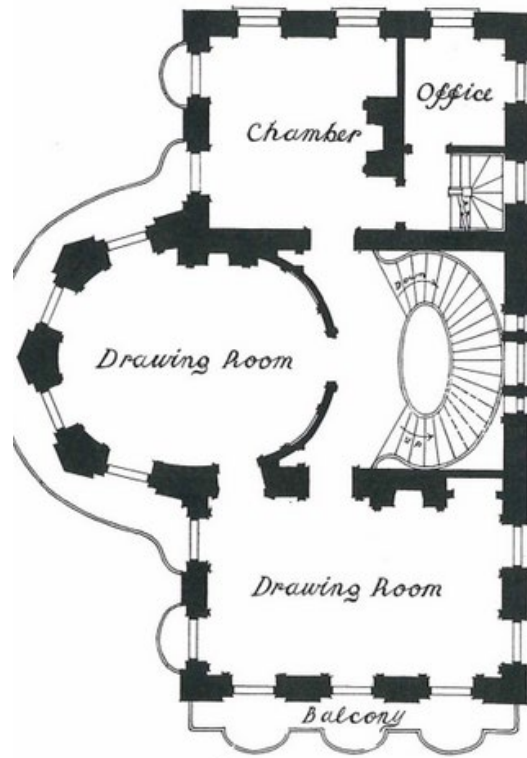
public spaces towards the front of the structure and private family spaces in the rear. This cantilevered primary staircase was three stories for the Russels and their guests to reach the more “pleasant” spaces of the structure without having to stray from the primary staircase built to impress. The staircase is cantilevered. The guests of the Russels would have encountered this staircase upon entering the dwelling and walking through the reception room to the main hallway. The placement and configuration of this staircase show that Nathaniel Russel used this primary staircase to convey his wealth and gentility through the architecture of his home.

The secondary staircase within the Nathaniel Russel house is not original to the 1808 construction. A floor plan from the late nineteenth century shows the original winder secondary staircase in the rear of the structure that could be accessed from a small stair hall in the western area of the dwelling. The placement of this staircase in the rear is consistent with the other Federal secondary staircase placements represented in this survey. This secondary staircase was removed sometime in the early 20th century, and a replacement was built in the same area in the 1950’s after the Historic Charleston Foundation acquired the dwelling. The part of the secondary staircase that goes from the third floor to the attic is original and still intact. Because this portion of the original secondary staircase remains and the original is documented in historic records, it can be observed and used in the scope of this study.

- Width: The width of the primary staircase is three times the width of the secondary staircase.
- Tread Depth: The tread depth of the primary staircase is one foot and four inches, and the tread depth of the secondary staircase is ten inches.
- Floors Reached: The primary staircase reaches three stories of the home, while the secondary staircase reaches all three stories including the attic and basement.
- Light (windows): There is a large window that lines the primary staircase, and the secondary staircase has one smaller window lining it.
- Form: Federal

Figure 36: Second floor plan for the Nathaniel Russel dwelling, *Charleston Architecture*,

26



Aiken-Rhett: 1820

48 Elizabeth St.

Figure 37: Southern façade of the Aiken-Rhett dwelling, Historic Charleston Foundation



The Aiken-Rhett house was built as a large-scale Charleston double house in 1820 by John Robinson. The modern front entrance to the structure faces west towards Elizabeth Street, and the original front entrance to the home faces south. The original primary staircase placement was consistent with the typical form of a single house, with the primary stair standing in the middle of the structure upon entrance from the piazza. This can be known because the original configuration of the house is well documented. The Robinsons sold the structure to William Aiken in 1827, and by 1833 Aiken did major renovations. These renovations included the building of a secondary staircase by the dining room, the change of the configuration of the house so that the entrance to the home was from the west instead of the south, the expansion of the second-floor parlor with the addition of pocket doors, and the addition of a partial height marble stair that

reached 1.5 stories of the structure. The changes can be seen in the floor plan of the house below. It is certain that the secondary stair and the center marble stair are not original as their placement and configuration are not consistent with that of a typical configuration found in a single house. The additional marble staircase added on the west of the structure reaches from the modern entrance between the basement and first floors and reaches to the first floor only. More alterations to the structure were made in 1858 to construct an art gallery. The dwelling stands three stories tall and was originally built in the Federal style but was modified in 1836 to Greek revival style.

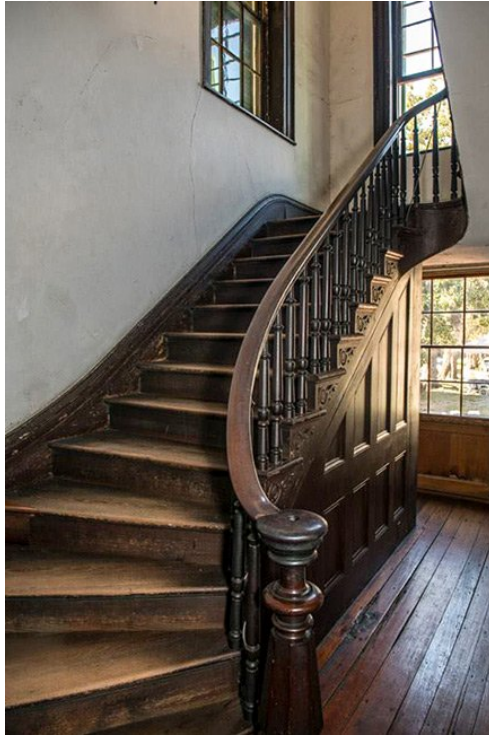


Figure 38: Aiken-Rhett dwelling secondary staircase, South Carolina Picture Project



Figure 39: Aiken-Rhett house 1830's addition of entry staircase that reaches from first to second floor, HABS

The primary staircase is a partial staircase, as it only reaches one floor. The staircase is straight run in its configuration and elaborated, as the detailing of the banister of the staircase is visible from the plan. The primary stair was built as an addition to the structure by the Aikens in the 1830s and was intended to impress guests as they entered the structure from the newly configured entrance from Elizabeth Street. The staircase is made entirely of marble, an expensive material even by today's standards. The primary stair, located in the western portion of the structure, would have been the first thing Aiken family guests would have seen upon entering the structure.

The secondary staircase is located in the eastern portion of the structure towards the rear of the dwelling and is 180-degree in configuration. This alone creates a major distinction between this staircase and the primary stair. The primary stair would have been visible immediately upon entering the structure while the secondary stair is tucked away in the rear of the structure. The secondary stair is placed by the dining room in a small hallway. Secondary staircases were sometimes placed in areas by a dining room or kitchen so that the enslaved people, who would have served the Aikens and their dinner guests, could have fulfilled their duties of serving in the dining room and then be filtered into a staircase nearby that would allow them to reach the other floors of the structure without being seen.

- Width: The width of the primary staircase is double the width of the secondary staircase.
- Tread Depth: The depth of tread on the primary staircase is a little over one foot while the depth of the tread for the secondary staircase is slightly over eleven inches.
- Floors Reached: The primary staircase reaches from the main entrance to the first floor, while the secondary staircase reaches all floors of the structure.
- Light (windows): The primary stair is placed in front of two windows that are in front of the main entrance and the secondary staircase has one window lining the landing between the first and second floor.
- Form: Double house

Figure 40: The first and second floor plan of the Aiken Rhett dwelling, *Charleston*

Architecture, 265A

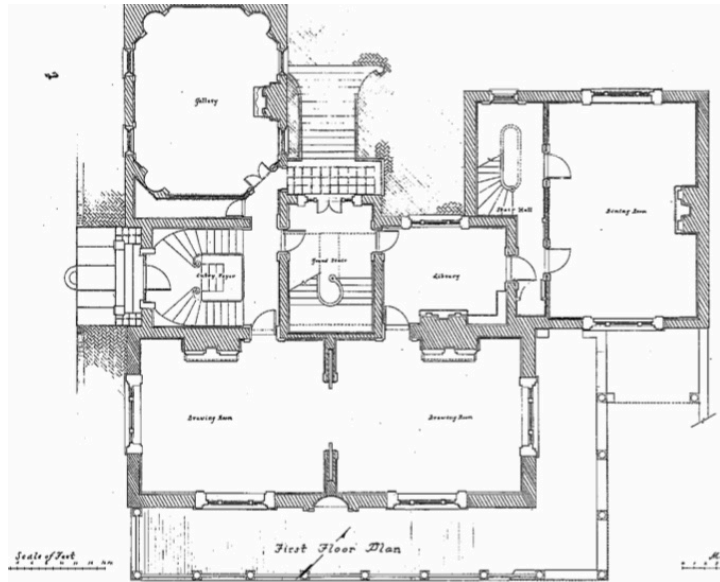
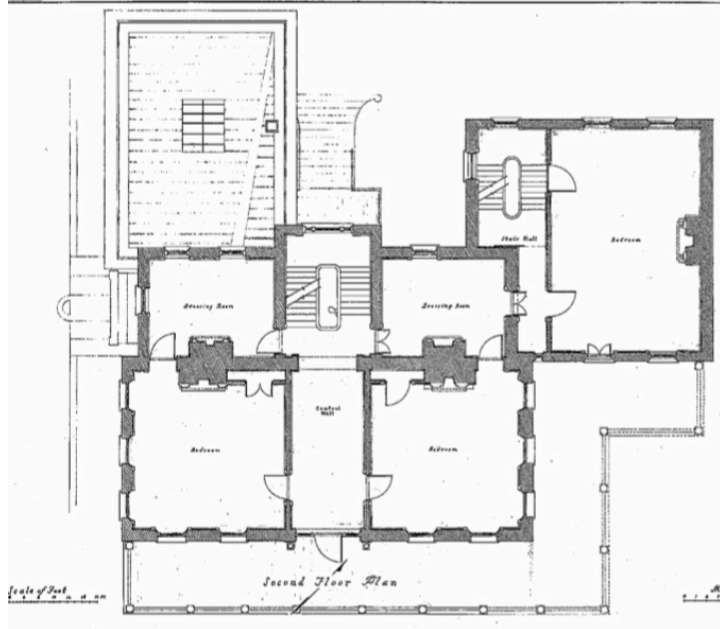


Figure 462A. Aiken-Rhett House; first floor plan (HABS SC 10-CHAR 177, sheet 3)



Patrick Duncan: 1816

172 Rutledge Ave.



Figure 41: Patrick Duncan House in 1977, Historic Charleston Foundation

The Patrick Duncan house was built in 1816, stands 3 stories tall, and faces north from the front entrance. The structure is adorned with Regency style influences like an elliptical primary staircase, curved walls and doors, round-headed openings and grandiose porticos. The dwelling also has Greek revival elements, such as the pediment above the second floor piazza and third floor portico. The dwelling also maintains ionic columns, another feature of Greek revival style architecture.



Figure 42: Primary Staircase of the Patrick Duncan house, Historic Charleston Foundation



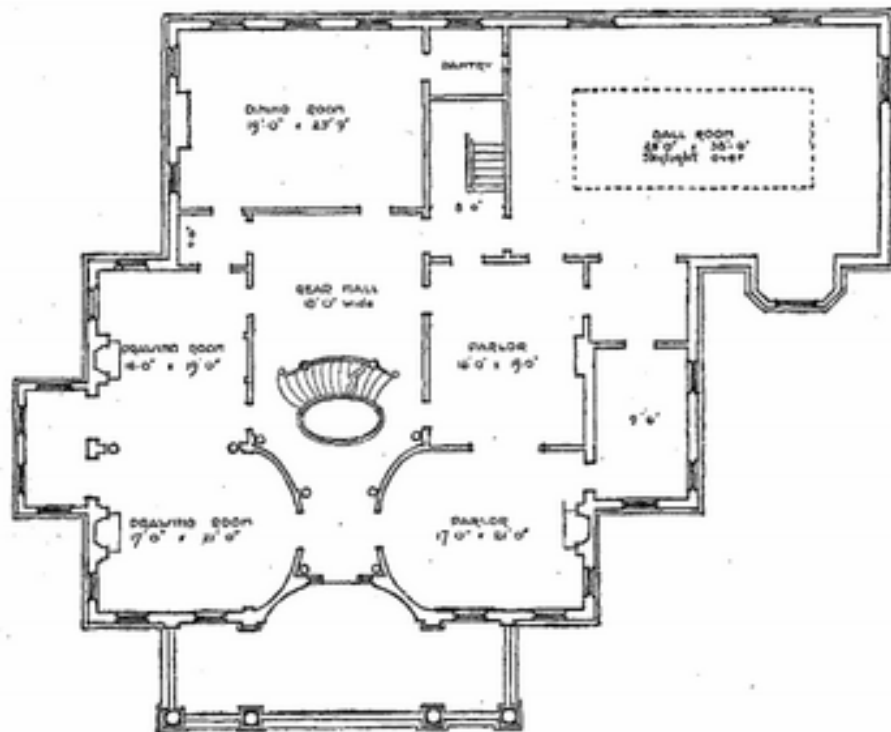
Figure 43: Second floor of the Patrick Duncan house, Historic Charleston Foundation

The primary staircase within the Patrick Duncan house is a three-story elliptical staircase. The elliptical configuration is very grand and visually pleasing, establishing a show of wealth for those who view it. Based upon the floor plan, it appears that many of the entertainment spaces were on the second floor, while the third floor was used as a more intimate space for bedrooms. The first floor may have been more utilitarian. The primary staircase is in the front entry way of the structure and is visible upon entry. The staircase is elaborated in the plan as well, as the decorative elements of the curvature of the balustrade is visible. The elaborate elliptical configuration and central placement establish that the builder of the dwelling wanted the staircase to be seen and admired.

The secondary staircase is a simple straight run staircase. This configuration is in stark contrast with the configuration of the primary staircase. The stair is in the rear of the structure by a pantry and the dining room. The placement of the staircase shows that the builders thought it was important for the people who were utilizing the secondary staircase, presumably enslaved African Americans, to have easy access to the spaces related to eating and serving food. This further establishes the stair as strictly utilitarian. The simple configuration and placement show that the staircase was not meant to impress, establishing that the secondary stair was far less important than the primary stair.

- Width: The primary stair width is slightly less than double the width of the secondary staircase.
- Tread Depth: The tread depth of the primary staircase is twice as big as the tread depth of the secondary staircase.
- Floors Reached: The primary staircase reaches three stories while the secondary staircase reaches all floors of the structure including the basement and attic.
- Light (windows): The primary staircase has multiple windows lining the walls that surround it on all three floors while the secondary staircase has no windows lining it.
- Form: Greek Revival

Figure 44: First floor plan of the Patrick Duncan house, *Charleston Architecture*, 264A



Benjamin Philips: 1818

55 Church St.



Figure 45: The Benjamin Philips house, Historic Charleston Foundation

According to Jonathan Poston in his book, *The Buildings of Charleston*, the Benjamin Philips house is “a three-and-a half- story weather boarded frame dwelling built by a Charleston merchant in the late Neo-classical style on the site of the eighteenth-century town dwelling of an Ashley River planter. It is notable for its unusual plan, which is an early divergence from the Charleston single house. The arched and fan lighted front

door leads to a side passage that provides access to a front room originally for business, and thence to the rest of the building with its residential spaces.”³⁴ The structure is a divergence from a single house plan slightly, as the main entrance to the structure is directly from the street. In a traditional single house, the entrance is after first entering in through a piazza and then through the front door. The front façade of the structure faces southeast.

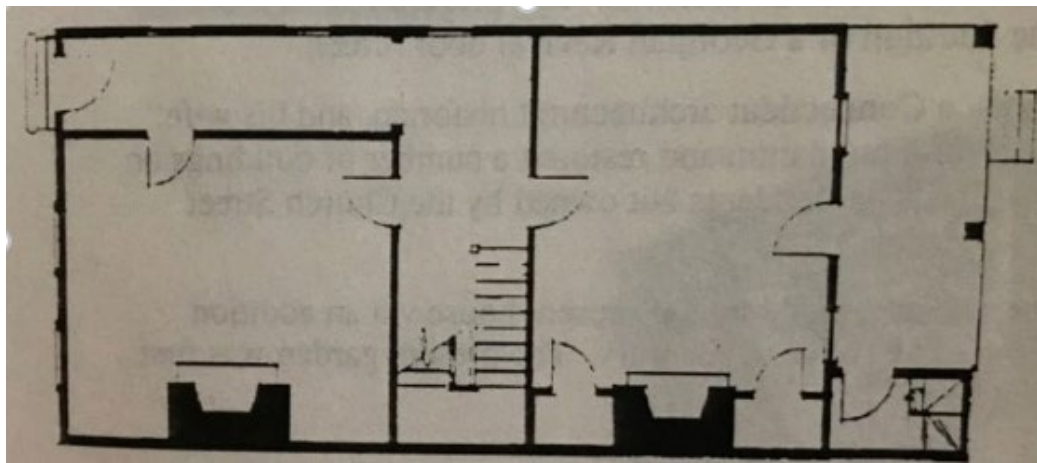


Figure 46: The Benjamin Philips house second floor plan, VAF guide page 155

³⁴Poston, *The Buildings of Charleston: a Guide to the City's Architecture*, page 52



Figure 47: Front façade of the Benjamin Philips dwelling, Historic Charleston Foundation

The primary stair is a 180-degree staircase with a landing, common as most single house primary staircases consist of a 180-degree configuration. The placement of the staircase is also typical for a single house, as it is in the central hall of the building. In a typical single house layout, access to the staircase is directly through the front door of the house (after the piazza screen and walk along the piazza). The structure shows the staircase placement was typical for the single house floor plan -the center of the dwelling- but it is not in clear view when entering in the front door as is common. Instead, the

primary stair is accessed through a hall from the front door. This makes the staircase less prominent. The primary stair only reached two floors, as the people utilizing it would have only needed to access spaces for entertaining and bedrooms.

The secondary staircase of the Benjamin Philips house is winder in its configuration; this is consistent with earlier single house secondary stair configurations as they can be built on a small scale and placed in a small area. The staircase is in the rear of the structure; this is presumably so that the stair user may reach the work yard easily. The staircase could be accessed through a small stair hall in the rear of the structure. This level of separation between the stair hall and the rest of the structure further demonstrates that the people using the stair were also meant to be separate from the rest of the structure.

- Width: The primary stair is slightly less than double the width of the secondary staircase.
- Tread Depth: The depth of the tread on the primary staircase is three times larger than the depth of tread on the secondary staircase.
- Floors Reached: The primary staircase reached 3 stories of the structure and the secondary staircase reached 3.5 floors of the structure.
- Light (windows): The primary staircase has a large window lining the landing between the first and second floor while the secondary staircase had no windows lining it.
- Form: Altered single house

Robert Martin: 1835

16 Charlotte St.

The Robert Martin house was built in 1835 and stands three stories tall. This double house was built in the Greek revival style and was made to function as a townhouse. Doric columns support the piazzas that are on the first and second floor. The main entrance faces southwest.



Figure 48: Front façade of the Robert Martin house, HABS

The primary staircase located within the Robert Martin house has a 180-degree turn with a landing between floors. This is a common configuration for single and double houses. The staircase placement is also located in a common place for single and double

houses, as it is positioned in a central stair hall in the middle of the structure. Access to this staircase could be gained from entering the front door. This central placement of the staircase meant that it was meant to be seen and utilized by the family and guests of the family. The primary staircase reached two floors of the structure. It is likely that the front areas of the dwelling were used as more public spaces for entertaining while the back portions of the structure were more private and utilized just by the family.

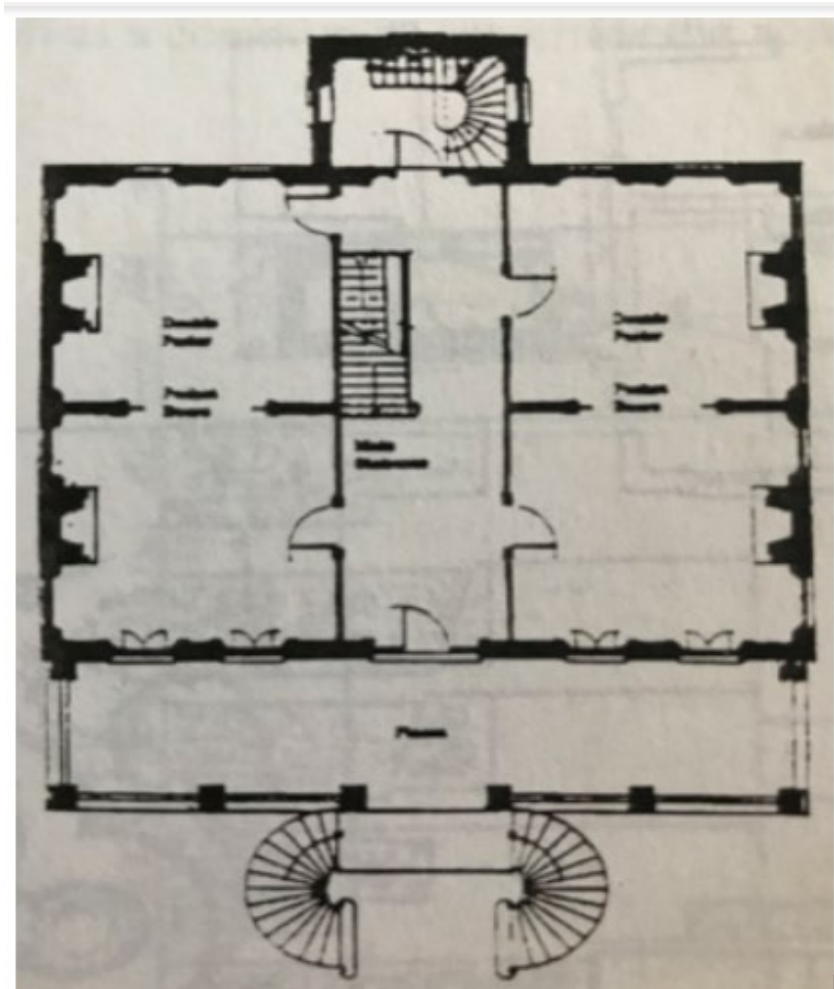
The placement of the secondary stair within the structure is unusual. While the stair placement in the rear is not unusual, the stair is in its own small wing of the structure. The small and separate stair hall is representative of the level of separation intended between the family and the enslaved people on the property. To access the stair hall, one would need to walk to the rear of the structure and open the door to the separate wing of the house. One would need to seek out the staircase, while the primary stair would be visible upon entrance to the structure. This further establishes the difference in importance of the secondary stairs. The configuration of the secondary staircase is L shaped and elaborated. It is unusual to find an elaborated secondary staircase and the configuration is also rare for a secondary stair. This secondary stair has a greater presence in the plan than all other secondary stairs considered in this thesis.

- Width: The width of the primary staircase is double the size of the secondary staircase.
- Tread Depth: The tread depth of the primary staircase is only slightly larger than the stair tread depth of the secondary staircase.

- Floors Reached: The primary staircase reaches all three floors of the structure while the secondary staircase reaches all three floors in addition to the attic and the basement.
- Light (windows): There are no windows lining the primary staircase but as it is positioned in the center stair hall, light from the main entrance would have been utilized. The secondary stair has two windows lining it.
- Form: Double house

Figure 49: The first floor plan of the Robert Martin house, *Vernacular Architecture*

Forum (VAF) page 245



William Gatewood: 1843

21 Legare St.



Figure 50: William Gatewood house east elevation, Historic Charleston

Foundation

The William Gatewood house was constructed around 1843, stands three stories tall, and is facing east. The dwelling was built in the Greek style; this can be seen within the large Tuscan columns that support the piazzas with “paneled plinth bases on the second story matching the marble plinths under the window architraves”.³⁵ The piazza on the southeastern portion of the structure is masked from the street view by a fenestrated brick wall to ensure the privacy of those utilizing it.

The primary staircase within the Gatewood house faces east and is a straight run staircase with a landing in between. According to G.P. Schafer Architects, the detailing on the primary staircase is original. While the configuration of the staircase is not extravagant, the additional detailing within the stair is, ensuring that the staircase was indeed not just for utilitarian purpose, but also to impress guests. The placement of this staircase would also confirm this notion, as it would be both visible and accessed from the front entrance. While the room functions of the dwelling historically are not known exactly, it can be assumed that entertainment spaces were possibly on all three levels of the structure. This can be inferred because the primary staircase reaches all three stories of the structure. Based upon room functions of contemporary dwellings, it is possible that the front rooms on each floor were used for entertainment while the rooms closer to the back would have been more private spaces for the family to use.

³⁵³⁵ Poston, *The Buildings of Charleston: a Guide to the City's Architecture*, 157



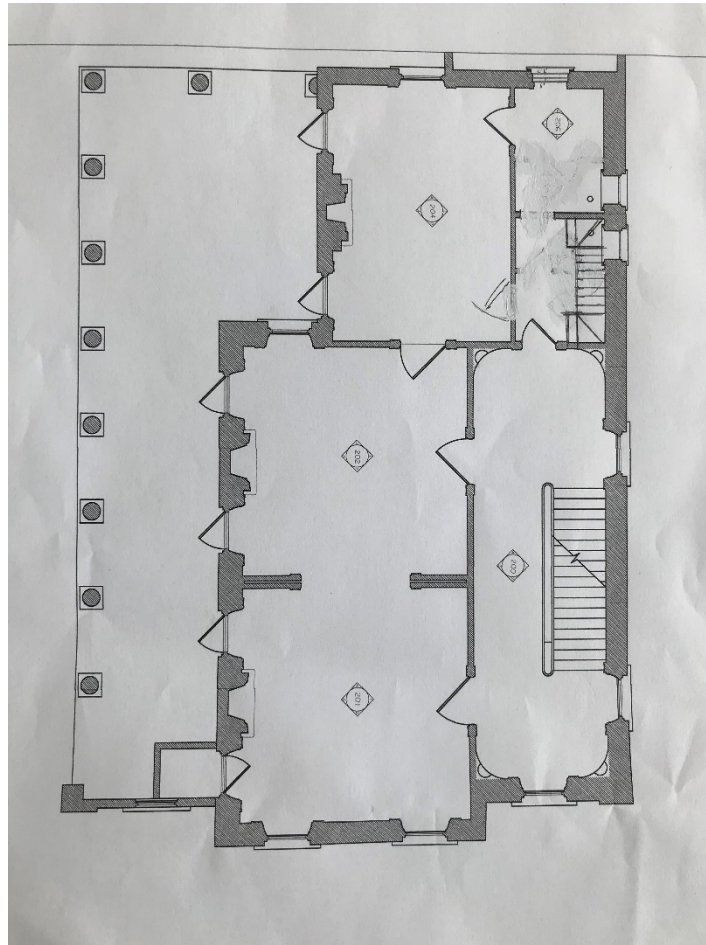
Figure 51: Detailing on the primary staircase within the Gatewood house, G.P. Schafer

Architects

The secondary staircase within the Gatewood dwelling is C shaped and consists of only winders. This staircase is situated in a stair hall on the west end of the structure in the rear. The placement of the staircase in the rear is consistent with many of the secondary staircases after around 1780, as there is a shift in where the builders wanted their enslaved people and servants to have access. One would gain access to this staircase by walking to the back of the structure and entering a small stair hall. This is in juxtaposition to the primary stair that is accessible from the front door. This shows that the secondary stair and those intended to utilize it were not meant to be seen.

- Width: The primary staircase width is double the size of the width of the secondary staircase.
- Tread Depth: The tread depth of the primary staircase is slightly larger than double the tread depth of the secondary staircase.
- Floors Reached: The primary staircase reaches three floors while the secondary staircase reaches three floors in addition to the attic and basement.
- Light (windows): There are multiple windows on each floor that line the primary staircase while the secondary staircase has one window that lines it.
- Form: Side Hall

Figure 52: First floor plan of the William Gatewood D house, Richard Marks Restorations, Inc.



Henry Gerdts: 1859

13 Pitt St.



Figure 53 : Henry Gerdts house, southwestern view, Historic Charleston Foundation

The Henry Gerdts house was built just before the start of the Civil War in 1859 as a two and a half story Greek Revival style structure and faces south. The dwelling is a side-hall form, as the entrance to the structure is directly from the street and leads to the main stair hall. Elements of the Greek revival style are seen in the columns that support the double tiered piazza on the western façade of the structure. The columns that support the first floor piazza are Ionic and the columns that support the second floor piazza are Corinthian. The front façade of the structure is ornamented with brownstone lintels and sills, as well as brick corbelling. The Gerdts house is significant as it showcases the

evolution of dwellings connected to their back dependencies. Typically, years after the initial construction, structures were built with hyphens that would connect the main dwelling to their dependencies, while the Gerdts house was built attached to its dependencies originally with a firewall for separation.

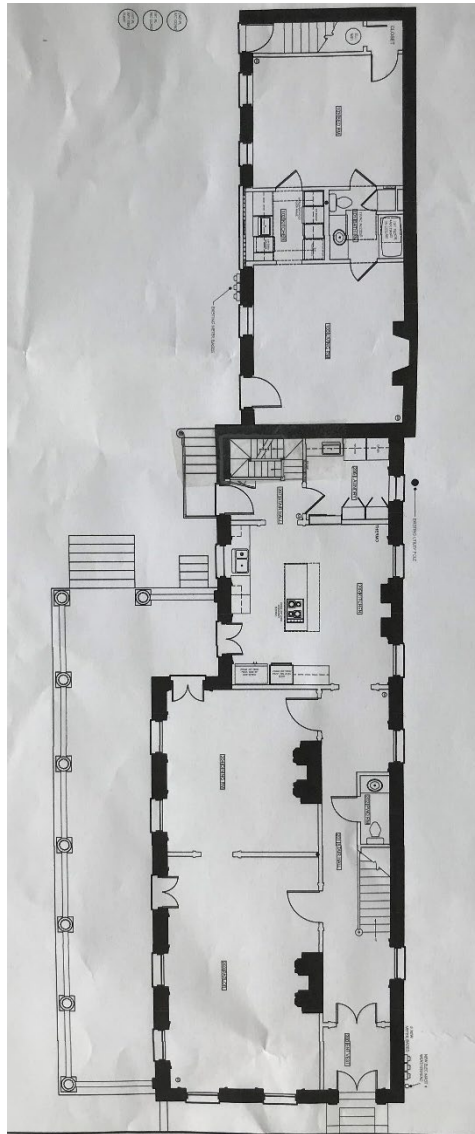
The primary staircase within this study is located in the southern portion of the dwelling, in the front stair hall. One would access this staircase by walking in the dwelling directly from the street, going through decorative double doors, and entering into the main stair hall. This type of access and placement is common among stair-hall house forms such as this. The staircase is straight run and elaborated. The detailing of the balustrade of the staircase is visible from the floor plan. While the straight run configuration is not necessarily known for being decorative, the stylistic details of the stair visible from the plans show that it was meant to be seen and utilized by guests and family members. The placement of the stair in the center entrance also shows that it was meant to be seen. The primary staircase only reaches the second floor, likely because it was unnecessary for family members and guests of the Gerdts to reach the utilitarian area of the attic. It is likely that historically the entertainment spaces would have been on both the first and second floors towards the front of the structure, with more private areas for the family towards the rear, such as bedrooms or less ornate withdrawing rooms.

The secondary staircase within the Gerdts house is 180-degrees in its configuration. It is in the northern area of the structure towards the rear. This placement of staircase in the rear is common after the nineteenth century as builders began to move the circulation of their enslaved people and servants to the rear of the structure. This placement of the stair

would have made it much less visible than the primary stair that could be accessed directly from the front door, establishing the marginalization of those using the secondary stair. The secondary stair may be accessed from a very small stair hall in the very back of the structure. This is in heavy contrast to the access of the primary stair straight through the front door. Because the rear portion of the structure is a 21st century addition, the staircase located in that area of the structure was not analyzed for this thesis.

- Width: The primary staircase is double the width of the secondary staircase.
- Tread Depth: The depth of tread on the primary stair is slightly less than double the depth of tread within the secondary staircase.
- Floors Reached: The primary staircase reaches two stories while the secondary staircase reaches 2.5 floors of the structure.
- Light (windows): There is one window that lines the primary staircase and no windows lining the secondary staircase.
- Form: Side Hall

Figure 54: First floor plan of the Henry Gerdts dwelling, Richard Marks Restorations, Inc.



Edward G. Voight: 1887

131 Broad St.



Figure 55: Northern Façade of the Voight house, Historic Charleston Foundation

The Edward G. Voight dwelling was built in 1887, facing north. The structure is a two-story Victorian Single house, complete with a prominent bay window and door overhang on the north façade. This dwelling was one of a row of Victorian dwellings built in place of structures that had been destroyed in the fire of 1861. The dwelling is unique in that the entrance is directly from the street when the typical entrance for a Charleston single house is first into a piazza and then into the center stair hall.³⁶ A two-story piazza adorns the west side of the dwelling, along with a “gingerbread” exterior

³⁶ Poston, *The Buildings of Charleston: a Guide to the City's Architecture*, 300

trim. According to Jonathon Poston in the book *The Buildings of Charleston*, it is only one of five dwellings in Charleston that still contains its stencil work on the ceiling. The dwelling is an outlier in the study as it is the only one built after the Civil War and the emancipation of enslaved African Americans. This is important as there is a question about if the attitude toward free domestic servants was different than enslaved domestic servants. The primary staircase of the Voight dwelling is straight run in its configuration. The staircase configuration is not necessarily ornate but based upon the Historic Charleston Foundation's report that the stair is made of walnut and never painted shows that the stair was meant to impress visitors upon entrance. The staircase is in the northern part of the structure and may be accessed by walking directly into the front door. The stair only reaches the second floor. This could potentially be because the primary stair style was too high to be placed in the basement, a utilitarian space.

The secondary stair within the Voight dwelling is in the southern portion of the dwelling, in the rear. This placement shows that after the emancipation of African Americans, secondary staircases were still being placed in the rear of the structure. Access to this staircase would be gained by walking through an informal parlor and into a small stair hall. This shows that the staircase would be far removed from sight while the primary staircase would be seen imminently upon entrance. The stair is a rounded winder stair, a common configuration for staircases placed in small stair halls.

- Width: The primary staircase width is double the width of the secondary staircase.
- Tread Depth: The primary stair tread depth is slightly more than double the depth of tread on the secondary staircase.
- Floors Reached: The primary staircase reaches the second floor from the first floor and the secondary staircase reaches all floors of the structure including the attic and the basement.
- Light (windows): There is one window lining the primary staircase and no windows lining the secondary staircase.
- Form: Single House

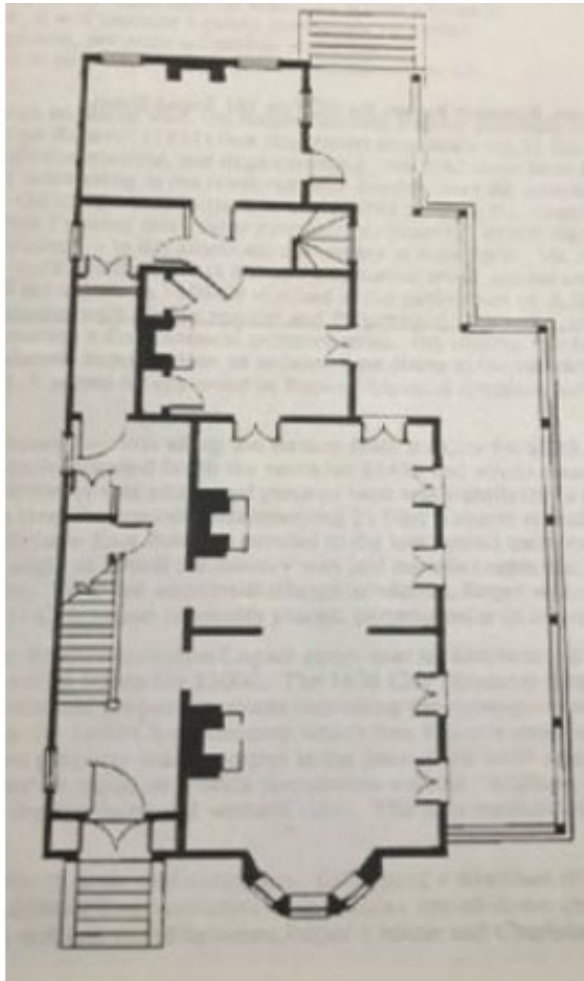


Figure 56: Edward G. Voight house first floor plan, VAF guide

CHAPTER FIVE

FINDINGS

In the data collected in this survey of primary and secondary staircases in Charleston from 1700 through 1900, the pattern emerges that secondary staircases in the Georgian period were located in the center of the structure, and over time as architectural form evolved, they moved to the rear of the structure. The most significant finding is that the changing of house form or the changing preference of a floor plan influenced the secondary staircase the most. In the earliest dwellings, four of those considered were a double house in form, meaning two symmetrical rooms on either side of a central hall running completely through the ground floor. This form was a simple geometric massing seen from the exterior, not altered by the presence of a secondary staircase, as floor plans of double houses without secondary staircases are the same. The presence of the secondary staircase in pre-1800 structures did not affect the form, suggesting that architecture had not evolved enough to incorporate areas built specifically for secondary staircases or that the emphasis on pure geometric massing, seen from the exterior, was valued in high style architecture of the period.

Evidence that double house form was not affected by a secondary staircase is noticeable when considering where these stairs were placed. In four of the structures in this survey, the secondary staircase was placed between a fireplace and the wall. This small area was used for the secondary staircase, as it would not require change to the double house form and also would not take up much square footage in the structure. This placement was also utilized as it allowed for more structural stability of the secondary

stair. In two of the four structures, the primary staircase width was double that of the secondary stair, in one the width was less than double of the secondary stair, and in one the width was four times wider. In three of the four structures, the depth of tread of the primary stair was double that of the secondary, and in one the depth of tread was less than double the depth of tread. Because these stairs were placed in an area that already existed in a double house form, it shows that prior to the late eighteenth century, architects and builders within the city had not to build specific areas for these stairs.

Below, the floor plans for Drayton Hall, Bradford-Horry house, Miles Brewton house, and El Dorado plantation show secondary staircases placed between a wall and fireplace.

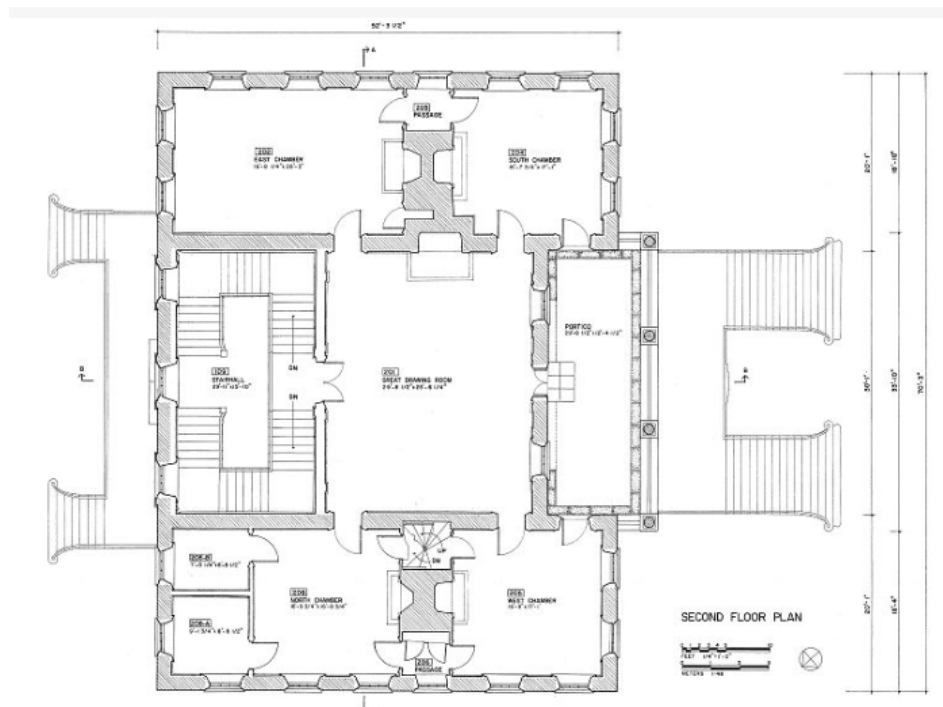


Figure 57: Second floor plan of Drayton Hall, *Historic American Buildings Survey* (HABS)

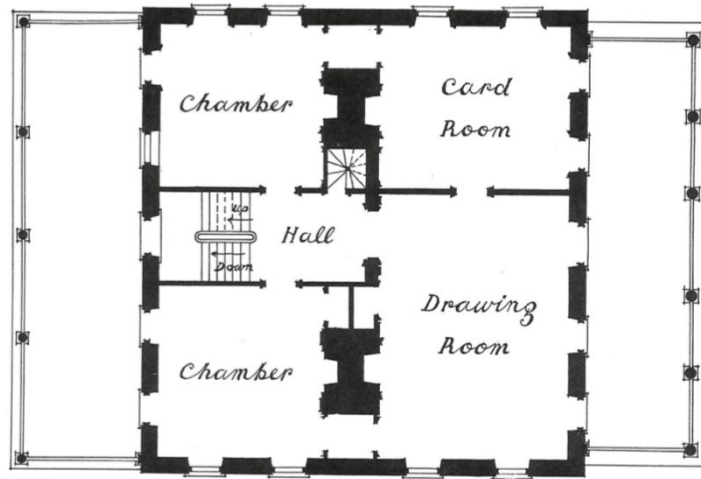


Figure 58: Second floor plan of the Bradford-Horry house, *Early Architecture of Charleston* page 52

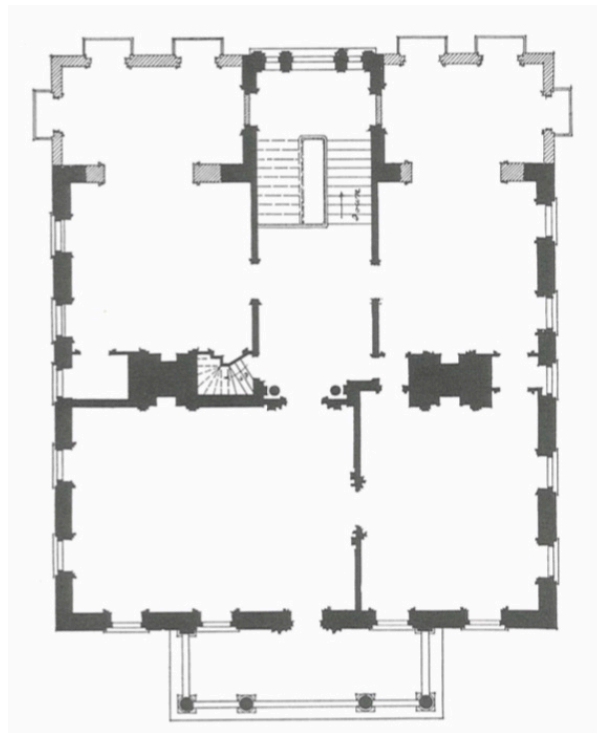


Figure 59: First floor plan of the Miles Brewton house, *Early Architecture of Charleston* page 51

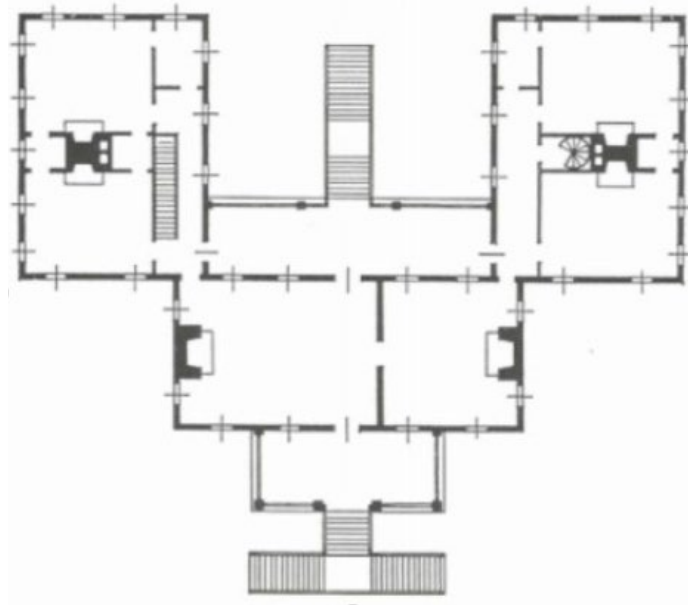


Figure 60: El Dorado Plantation first floor plan, *Charleston Architecture* page 262A

After the American Revolution in 1781 and with the rise of Federal style architecture, house plans and secondary staircase placement began to change. This trend is evident in the remaining twelve structures in surveyed, starting with the Simons-Edwards house built in 1800. By this time, single houses had begun to be built in Charleston. The urbanizing city and the single house form brought with it advancement in architectural form and the change in secondary staircase placement. From the late eighteenth century and onwards, secondary staircases began to be built in the rear of the structure as opposed to the center. These stairs were most commonly part of the massing of the main house, or a larger volume associated with workspaces.

A factor for the secondary staircases that changed through time, along with their location, is their access. In their original central location, users of the staircase would

need to enter a middle parlor or even a central stair hall to access the secondary stair, while in dwellings after the late eighteenth century, they would be required to walk to through the entirety of the structure to reach a back parlor or stair hall in order to access the secondary staircase. In most cases, the later secondary staircases were placed in rear locations closer to the dining room, exterior kitchen, or butler's pantry. This change in access and placement may speak to the changing ways in which enslaved African Americans worked domestically in Charleston and the evolution of the way that the property was used, with a work yard in the back of the lot farthest from the street. The change in access may mean that Charlestonian homeowners may have initially been comfortable recognizing enslaved workers as central to their domestic lives, and central access was needed. Later, a rear placement may mean that enslaved workers, though still critical to affording the lifestyle the wealthy homeowners enjoyed, were preferred to be less visible, occupying a separate zone in the building.

In early Georgian structures, the secondary staircase configurations are consistently similar winder configurations. These configurations were utilized for secondary staircases, likely because they had the capability to be built easily in confined areas. Considering the secondary stair would need to fit in a small area such as between the wall and fireplace in an early Georgian double house, a winder configuration was most appropriate as they could easily be placed in these small stair halls. As time went on, more variety began to develop in the configuration of secondary staircases. The advancement of architecture brought on the establishment of areas within a dwelling built specifically for secondary stairs, and therefore different types of configurations were

utilized as more space was allowed for the stair. These configurations through time would sometimes be L shaped, straight run, C shaped, or 180-degree, depending on the individual dwelling. Winder configurations were still utilized after the Georgian period as well in certain dwellings such as the Joseph Manigault house, but unlike the Georgian period other configurations could be seen.

An important factor when examining staircases is the depth of tread. A stair tread is the horizontal portion of the stair on which people place their foot when climbing or ascending the stairs. Because the depth of the tread is where people place their foot, the depth of tread has the potential to make a staircase safe or unsafe. The wider the depth of tread is on a staircase, the more room one has to place their foot on the stair, and therefore the more room one has for a margin of error if a misstep is taken or one loses their footing. Because the depth of a stair determines safety, it is telling to compare the depth of tread for primary and secondary stairs in a structure to determine which staircase is safer. For all sixteen sample houses, the depth of tread of the primary staircase is larger than the depth of tread for the secondary staircase. While this finding was inferred prior to the study, it is significant to know by what margins the secondary stair depth of tread is smaller than the primary stair depth of tread. In three structures surveyed, the tread depth was measured by hand. These houses include the Joseph Manigault house built in 1803, the Nathaniel Russel house built in 1808, and the Aiken-Rhett house built in 1820. In all three of the secondary staircases that were measured by hand, the depth of tread was not as narrow as originally thought. In the Joseph Manigault house and the Nathaniel Russel house, the secondary staircase depth of tread was 11 inches while the primary staircase

depth in both was slightly over a foot. While the secondary stair depth of tread in both houses are smaller, it is only by two inches. In the Aiken-Rhett house, the depth of tread for primary and secondary stair is different by an even smaller margin. The depth of tread for the primary stair is slightly more than one foot, while the secondary stair tread depth is 11 and a half inches. For these structures, the tread depth of the secondary stair is smaller than the primary stair, but only by two inches. By today's building standards, a staircase depth of tread must be at least 11 inches, therefore all of three of the secondary stairs measured meet the minimum requirement. In the other twelve secondary stairs, exact measurements could not be made, however the depth of tread could be compared to that of the primary stairs. In the remaining staircases, the depth of tread of the secondary stair is half the size of the primary stair in nine of the structures and is less than a third of the size in four of the structures. While the findings are not revolutionary, they are significant as they prove that the primary stair within the sample houses were safer, and by a slimmer margin than originally thought. The depth of tread differences in the sample houses would also lead to the inference that the width of tread variation could depend on each individual builder or could have also depended on the style or period of the house.

The width of a stair is important when examining the character of a staircase. While the width of the staircase does not determine its safety, it does contribute to the experience one has when ascending and descending. A wide staircase may be described as spacious or luxurious, while a narrow staircase may be described as cramped, crowded, confined or tight. While the width does not make the stair safe or unsafe, it directly impacts the feeling one may have when utilizing it. Therefore, the width of a stair

has the potential to tell whose comfort was considered and whose wasn't. It was presumed prior to the study that a secondary stair could be expected to be narrower than a primary stair, and this inference was confirmed in this thesis. All of the secondary staircase widths in the sample size were either half or one third of the width of the primary staircase. This confirms that the comfort of the people utilizing the secondary staircase, presumably enslaved African Americans prior to the Civil War and hired servants after, was considerably less important. Considering that the primary staircase in all the sample houses were at least double the width of the secondary stair, it is clear that the comfort of those utilizing the primary stair was a priority over those using the secondary stair.

Despite the changes of architecture and the changes of the social climate, the floors that secondary staircases reached did not change. All the secondary staircases represented in this thesis reached all floors of the structure, including a basement and attic when present within a dwelling. This establishes that the people utilizing these secondary staircases were intended to perform functions that would require them to reach all the utilitarian areas, whereas the people utilizing the primary staircases would not need to reach these areas and therefore had an elevated status in the dwelling.

In the four early Georgian homes represented in this thesis, they are in areas that are without any natural light. All four staircases are not located near windows or doors. In the remaining twelve staircases, only two of them are in areas without a natural light source. In total, out of sixteen secondary staircases surveyed, ten are located near sources

of natural light. More secondary staircases had access to natural light than originally assumed prior to this study.

CHAPTER SIX

CONCLUSION

The purpose of this thesis is to analyze if and how secondary staircases changed in placement, character, and function through time. The analysis of the sixteen floor plans represented in this thesis concludes that secondary staircases did indeed change in their placement from a central location to a rear one. This shift is due to the change in desire for different house forms. Initially, in Georgian double houses, secondary staircases may be observed in an area between a fireplace stack and the wall and would reach from an internal basement through all inhabitable floors to the attic. This placement for service stairs was replaced with vertical access to a rear secondary staircase that was closer to a work yard and kitchen. The exact reason for this shift is not discernable through this research but could be due to a combination of factors explained at length below.

A first possibility is the sophistication of architecture which developed as Charleston became more economically viable. After Charleston was established in 1680³⁷, architecturally the city existed somewhere between a medieval city and a “modern” one. The city felt medieval in the sense that horses, cattle, and pigs ran rampant through the unpaved streets.³⁸ Humans also contributed to the disarray of the city, as there was a question on where to place privies and other manners of waste disposal. Architecturally, structures in early Charleston were built based upon English influence. Early Charleston houses were built from oak or pine, usually stood one to two stories in

³⁷ Robert N. Rosen, *A Short History of Charleston* (University of South Carolina Press, 2021), 32

³⁸ Peter A. Coclanis, "The Sociology of Architecture in Colonial Charleston: Pattern and Process in an Eighteenth-Century Southern City." *Journal of Social History* 18, no. 4 (1985): 607-23. Accessed April 18, 2021. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/3788252>.

height, and contained steeply pitched roofs, low ceilings and small windows³⁹. These early structures were often one room deep. In Charleston's 80 acres in 1700, the population was only 1,200 people.⁴⁰ The lack of people and presence of simple structures for inhabiting shows that prior to the 18th century, the Charleston economy had not flourished and neither had architecture.

After the dismantling of Charleston's walls in 1718, Charlestonians began to develop a more sophisticated city.⁴¹ In the 1720s, Charlestonians began building fences and pens for livestock. By the 1730s, efforts to create a sewage and draining system had developed, improving the cleanliness of the city dramatically. Gardens also began to be planted in Charleston during this time, improving the smell and appearance of the town. Rice and indigo plants began to become more profitable by the 1740s, and as the cities' wealth developed, so too did architecture. The Georgian form of architecture often associated with English gentility began to become popular in Charleston. These houses usually stood as a square shape, one and a half to two stories tall, and were two rooms deep with a number of full sash windows. These houses were built on elevated basements to avoid the smells and dirt from the street and were larger than earlier structures.⁴² In these early Georgian houses, secondary staircases could be found in the center of the structure. The secondary stairs in early Georgian homes are in places that did not affect

³⁹ Henry Glassie, *Pattern in the Material Folk Culture of the Eastern United States*, (Univ. of Pennsylvania Press, 1971)

⁴⁰ Powers, *Black Charlestonians: a Social History 1822-1885*, 27

⁴¹ Peter A. Coclanis, "The Sociology of Architecture in Colonial Charleston: Pattern and Process in an Eighteenth-Century Southern City." *Journal of Social History* 18, no. 4 (1985): 607-23. Accessed April 18, 2021. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/3788252>

⁴² Coclanis, "The Sociology of Architecture in Colonial Charleston: Pattern and Process in an Eighteenth-Century Southern City."

the form of a double house, oftentimes in the space between a wall and fireplace. This suggests that while architecture had advanced from the earliest medieval-like Charleston structures, forms had not become sophisticated enough to be built with areas specifically for secondary stairs.

The population of Charleston more than doubled from 1740 to 1770 as did its wealth. By 1770, the white population of Charleston was the wealthiest group of people in British North America. During this time period, the popularity of the Charleston single house flourished. Although the Charleston single house could be found, although sparsely, prior to the 1770s, afterwards they dominated the Charleston landscape. The single house was similar in form to that of an English “I House”, with the main differentiation being that the entrance into a single house is first from a piazza and then into the center stair hall. The flourishing of the single house is due to the flourishing of Charleston’s economy. At this time, Charleston’s wealth was controlled by a small percentage of white planters, merchants, and lawyers. When these individuals became wealthier, the presence of the single house increased as they chose the single house form for their homes. It may be surmised that this choice for a single house was due to the long and narrow lots available for purchase in Charleston. In these single houses, secondary staircases are observed in the rear and in their own separate wings. This demonstrates the advancement of architecture to include specific areas for secondary stairs, while in earlier Georgian forms the stairs were placed wherever there was room in a preexisting form. In this way, the sophistication of architecture from simple, square double houses to more

sophisticated single houses and onward created a shift in secondary staircases from the center of a structure to the rear of a structure.

It is possible that lot size contributed to house form and in turn, placement of secondary staircases. The Grand Model of Charlestown published in the late 17th century shows narrow lots from the very beginning of Charleston history; however, it would have been possible for an aspiring Charlestonian to purchase two lots side by side to create more room for a larger structure. Larger lots in Charleston allowed for the building of double houses and other larger house forms than the single house. In these double houses, there was room to place secondary staircases in a central location between a fireplace stack and the wall. In more narrow lot sizes, single houses were built with less convenient space centrally for a secondary stair. Therefore, the secondary stair was moved to the rear of the structure where there was more room. Prior to the American Revolution, there may have been more access to more lots to build double houses that were compatible with a central secondary stair. After the American Revolution, as Charleston became more wealthy and more populated, individual narrow lots were purchased and Charleston single houses were built to fit within them, moving the secondary stair to the rear of the structure where they could comfortably fit. Further research on lot sizes through Charleston's history is outside the scope of this thesis and may benefit as the subject of further research.

Lot sizes, and therefore house form affecting staircase placement, may also be due to the large growth of Charleston's population in a short amount of time. Charleston's population more than doubled from 1740 to 1770, and again from 1820 to the eve of the

Civil War in 1861.⁴³ By the Civil War, Charleston's population had grown to more than forty-thousand people. The population had grown so much that the "neck" of the city, a suburb that was Charleston's only land boundary, was annexed with the prospects of continuous growth.⁴⁴ By this time, the economic viability of Charleston had slowed significantly, however the population had already grown exponentially. This growth in Charleston population could have led to the increase in the numbers of long narrow lots being sold and therefore increased the number of single houses being built. Because of the increase of single houses, there was therefore a likely increase in rear secondary staircases.

The movement of a secondary staircase to the rear of a structure after the American Revolution could also be due in part to an increased desire for privacy. A secondary stair in the rear of a house would ensure enslaved would be farther from intimate places and private conversations and may be summoned from a work yard when needed as opposed to already being in the center of the home. There is evidence that in some instances a level of separation for privacy was desired in a domestic setting in southern society. The Tallwood house in Virginia and how its punkah fan was used is a good example of this. Punkah fans were brought from India first to England and then to the United States to be installed in a dining room to alleviate pesky bugs and the heat while eating.⁴⁵ Enslaved people pulled on ropes to move the Punkah fan. At the Tallwood

⁴³ Wade, *Slavery in the Cities*, 44

⁴⁴ Henry A. M. Smith, "Charleston and Charleston Neck: The Original Grantees and the Settlements along the Ashley and Cooper Rivers," *South Carolina Historical and Genealogical Magazine*, 19 (January 1918), 41–43 (of 3–76). Smith discusses John Bird's property on pp. 37–39, 55, and Christopher Smith's property on pp. 41–43.

⁴⁵ Dana E. Byrd. "Motive Power: Fans, Punkahs, and Fly Brushes in the Antebellum South." *Buildings & Landscapes: Journal of the Vernacular Architecture Forum* 23, no. 1 (2016): 29-51. Accessed July 10, 2021. doi:10.5749/buildland.23.1.0029.

house built in 1803, there was a small room separate from the dining room where an enslaved person would stand to operate the Punkah without being in the same room as the master. This meant there was a clear desire by the master to separate the enslaved from the formal space of the dining room. While this example is not taken from a source from Charleston and this small space built for the operation of the punkah is rare, it does show that the desire for privacy between an enslaved person and a master did exist in southern society. While the scope of the literature used in this thesis does not utilize sources that fully explores the measures taken by masters to ensure their privacy from their workers or enslaved, it still may be one of the contributing factors when considering the movement of secondary staircases to the rear of a structure.

One cultural factor to consider when examining the movement of secondary staircases from the center of a structure to the rear is the growing discomfort with the close proximity in which enslaved and whites lived. The Stono Rebellion, the largest slave insurrection in British North America, took place in 1739 along the Stono River. A band of around 20 enslaved African Americans stole weapons and began to make their way to Florida to ensure their freedom.⁴⁶ This rebellion garnered fear from white slave owners in South Carolina, and by 1740 the Negro Act was established in South Carolina that prohibited African Americans from congregating, learning to read, moving freely and earning their own money. Some years later, starting in 1791 and through 1804, the Haitian Revolution also took place. This was yet another reminder to Charlestonians that

⁴⁶Birgit Brader Rasmussen "Attended with Great Inconveniences": *Slave Literacy and the 1740 South Carolina Negro Act*. *PMLA* 125, no. 1 (2010): 201-03. Accessed April 9, 2021. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/25614450>.

slave revolt was indeed possible. Fear of slave revolt continued to grow in Charleston after Denmark Vesey, a freed man of color, was tried and found guilty for allegedly attempting to stage a slave revolt in Charleston in 1822. This revolt was said to have the potential of involving thousands of enslaved people who would kill slaveholders and flee to Haiti for their safety and freedom. Vesey was ultimately found out and executed for his alleged involvement and the revolt never came to fruition.

Fanny Kemble, after a visit to Charleston, stated that she “should prefer going to sleep without the apprehension of my servants cutting my throat in bed”.⁴⁷ Charleston native Thomas Pinckney claimed that “house servants are the most dangerous”.⁴⁸ While the fear of enslaved people in close proximity to whites is not the singular cause of the movement of secondary staircases from the center of a structure to the rear of a structure, it is important to acknowledge as a cultural shift that could be one of the contributing factors that resulted in the movement of these secondary stairs that were built primarily for enslaved African Americans.

Another factor to consider when examining the movement of secondary staircases from the center of the structure to the rear may be the changing roles for African Americans in the city. In the earlier Georgian structures, the secondary staircase could be in the center of the structure, usually between a wall and a fireplace. From this location, enslaved people would have central access to a home. This access would include both public and private areas. The staircases in these earlier homes would have reached a

⁴⁷Clifton Ellis, *Rebecca Ginsburg, Slavery in the City: Architecture and Landscapes of Urban*, accessed April 18, 2021, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/j.ctt1s17pdd.9>, page 92

⁴⁸Ellis, “Slavery in the City: Architecture and Landscapes of Urban ...,” page 99

basement, which may have contained a warming kitchen and also an exit that would enable an enslaved person to access the work yard. From the basement, the enslaved person would then have linear access to the other floors of the structure, putting them literally and figuratively at the center of everyday life for their white counterparts. This central location suggests that enslaved people were needed in all areas and aspects in order to run a household. From this central location, an enslaved person may reach a formal drawing room with the same level of ease as reaching a more private back bedroom or sitting room, suggesting that their presence was relied upon not only when owners were entertaining guests but also when doing ordinary day to day activities such as getting dressed or having tea. After the Georgian period, these secondary staircases were no longer built in a central location and could often be found in the rear of a structure. A closer look into what kinds of spaces were in the rear of these structures may be telling of the changing roles for African Americans in the city. Most of the rear spaces located in houses after the Georgian period have a culinary purpose. These rooms could be a dining room, a butler's pantry, or a rear exit that would lead to a separate kitchen house in a work yard. An example of this is found in the Joseph Manigault house built in 1803. The secondary staircase is located in the butler's pantry where the enslaved would finalize meals, and next to the dining room where the enslaved may serve the food and disappear back into the butler's pantry. The secondary stair located in the butler's pantry would enable the enslaved to access all floors of the house without being seen. Another example of this is the Patrick Duncan house built in 1802, where the secondary staircase is located in a small hall in the rear by the pantry and the dining room. In other post

Georgian structures where room purposes have not been identified concretely, it is known that the rear based secondary stairs usually lead to the work yard, where a kitchen house most certainly would have been located. When examining the differentiations of rooms surrounding secondary stairs in Georgian houses in comparison to later structures, later houses filtered enslaved people and servants in areas where they could both have rear access as well as close access to dining rooms and butler's pantries. The change in placement of these secondary staircases from a central access point to access points near work yard exits, kitchens and pantries suggests that the role of the enslaved and servants changed from a central role to homeowners lives to culinary based roles. Instead of the enslaved being present in all areas of the house, it could be possible that around the 1770's and onward, enslaved people were needed less for all aspects of daily life for Charlestonians and needed more for meal preparation and presentation.

The purpose of this thesis is to assess the placement, function, and character of service stairs in Charleston and how they changed through time. In the early to mid-eighteenth century, Georgian double houses had secondary staircases in the center of a structure, oftentimes built between a fireplace and a wall with a winder configuration. As the formation of the single house developed by the 1770's and onward, secondary staircase began to be placed in the rear of dwellings. This thesis concludes that the changing desires in a floor plan ultimately led to the change in location for secondary staircases. This could be due in part to owners desiring a level of separation from enslaved workers out of fear of uprising or out of tension, the changing role of enslaved people and servant's roles being moved from entertainment and resting areas to

specifically the kitchen and dining rooms, a desire for privacy from the enslaved, the differing lot sizes in Charleston, or simply because of the sophistication of architecture. This study of staircases is simultaneously a study on the evolution of architecture over a nearly two-hundred-year time span in Charleston. The evolution of the secondary staircase, its placement, configuration, access points and an evaluation of how many floors it reached is useful as it showcases the change in architecture. The staircase changes also show how people and attitudes change. Architecture can explain the social climate and how it changes through time, and this notion is reflected in the conclusion of this data set. While this study is not groundbreaking in the finding of the movement of the secondary staircase from a central placement to a rear placement, it contributes to what can be known about the built environment of Charleston and how people existed in that built environment.

The rise of a staircase is the vertical space between one stair step to the next. The rise of a staircase is a factor when determining its safety. Considering that the rise of the staircases was not studied in this thesis due to the inability to measure this element through a floor plan, a future study of secondary staircase risers would help complete the narrative concerning how safe these secondary staircases were for those utilizing them. This study consists of sixteen dwellings in total. A closer examination of a larger sample set with a larger number of structures would enable a more robust set of data. Out of the sixteen structures examined, two are in a rural setting within Charleston County. It could be beneficial to compare urban secondary staircases with that of rural secondary staircases to study their relationship and if they changed in a similar way through time.

The scope of this thesis focuses on Charleston County alone, and an examination of secondary staircases in a different city could prove to be informative. It is unknown if the changes mentioned in this thesis can be observed in other parts of the United States, and therefore further research that evaluates secondary staircases in another city may contribute to a larger narrative. Lot sizes may have contributed to the movement of secondary staircase and the rise of the Charleston single house specifically, but further research is necessary to confirm this. The history of the changing lot sizes may also be an insightful subject for further research as it would contribute to the chronological narrative of architectural history within the city. A greater study on if and how owners created privacy for themselves amongst enslaved people would also help to further answer the question definitively if privacy were a factor in the changing placement of secondary stairs. The scope of this paper spans from 1700 through 1900, and an analysis that consists of a longer period would tell a more complete narrative on the history of the staircase in Charleston.

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