

Physical Description

The structure at 69 Church Street, constructed in the mid-eighteenth century, is a three-story, double-pile, stucco-over-brick dwelling with a hipped roof clad in slate shingles. The primary, or east, elevation extends five bays wide along the sidewalk of Church Street and features a central entrance, nine-over-nine light double window sashes, bold stucco quoins at the corners of the facade, and a crowing central pediment resting on scrolled consoles and pierced with a semi-circular fanlight. The windows of the building have no molded surrounds, with flush lintels and plain sills that extend from the facade only slightly. The stucco on the primary elevation is scored to create the appearance of the stone, and the base of the structure is articulated with a stucco band that runs the circumference of the building. The central entrance on the east elevation features a six-panel door with a simple architrave and a single transom above with delicate tracery evoking that of the Federal Period.¹ Paired dormers pierce the roof of the house on the north, west, and south elevations, and two large interior brick chimneys, each with six cylindrical clay chimney caps reflecting the number fireplaces within, rise from the center of the roof on the north and south sides. The fenestration of the west, or rear, elevation has been partially obscured by the two bathroom tower additions constructed in the second half of the twentieth century to accommodate bathrooms with minimal intrusion into the well-preserved interior. But still evident on the west elevation are three bays of the original fenestration, much like the east elevation, with the exception of the central bay which features two elegant arched, double sash windows which light the interior stair case.

The interior plan of the structure at 69 Church Street is a variant on the center hall plan with flanking rooms, a plan known locally as a Charleston double house. This is most evident on the ground floor where the central hall extends the full depth of the building with the stair case rising from the rear, or west side of the hall. The center hall provides access into four flanking rooms, two on each side, roughly equal in size, with the chimneys rising from the shared walls on the interior of the flanking rooms. On the second and third floors, the plan is altered slightly in that the full width of the front of the house is occupied by two rooms without an intermediate hall. These two rooms are largely open onto one another creating the effect on one grand room extending the entire width of the house. The rear, or western side of the house on the second and third floor retains the center hall with flanking room arrangement. The four garret rooms, accessed by the stair hall, are significantly reduced in ceiling height and volume due to the sloping roof, but retain the general arrangement of the second and third floor. Projecting from the western rooms of the dwelling are small bathrooms, which are accessed by doorways cut into the original windows. And on the ground floor, the main structure is connected to the two-story kitchen house by a narrow one-story hyphen.

The ornamentation of the main dwelling is particularly elaborate, reflecting both the Georgian period during which the building was constructed, and the Federal period during which extensive renovations were undertaken on the house. Throughout all three primary floors in the building are extraordinary examples of fine woodwork, including mantelpieces, overmantels, wainscot, paneling, and cornices. A particularly noteworthy example is found on the second floor in the southeast, or drawing, room where a delicate Federal mantelpiece is graced with carved figures of Ariadne and Bacchus. Also of note is the woodwork in the first floor southwest parlour which dates to the Georgian period with various Federal period additions and has been left unpainted so that the crispness of detail and natural appeal of the wood can be discerned.

The kitchen building is located directly behind the main structure, flush with the north property line and oriented facing south, and linked to the main house through the aforementioned hyphen. The kitchen building is a single-pile, two-story, center hall plan stucco-over-brick structure with a two-story porch on the south side. The most notable exterior feature of the building is the lancet-arched windows and doors, a Gothic motif carried through to the extant privies located directly to the west of the kitchen house. The interior of the kitchen house reflects the historical utilitarian use, with minimal ornamentation and finished in common materials.

¹ This central entrance was replaced at the end of 2000 with a new door and a more elaborate surround based upon the architectural details of Robert Adam.

Historical Significance²

The earliest documentation of the structure at 69 Church Street is a deed dated 1761 in which Rebecca Roche, widow of Jordan Roche, relinquished her dower in the property to her husband's nephew, Francis Roche, including the "Brick House Messuage or Tenement and out Houses thereon Erected." It is believed, however, that the house may date to as early as 1745, when the previous owner, Richard Capers, who inherited the property from his father probably in 1718, married his third wife, Mary Ann Maybank. While under the ownership of the Roche family, the house at 69 Church was rented to Jacob Motte, Public Treasurer for the colony, who lived in the commodious three-story house from 1761 until his death in 1770. The Public Treasurer was appointed by the Assembly and the office was second in importance only to the Governor. As Public Treasurer for the colony, Motte was the personal keeper of the provincial government's funds, a duty which naturally led to his serving in similar capacity on a private level in Charleston. This occupation as local banker proved particularly lucrative for him, as there were no official banks in the city of Charleston until the 1790s. It was during Jacob Motte's tenure that the house at 69 Church Street was used as a temporary meeting place for the Commons House of Assembly before the construction of the statehouse. In 1778, the grand house became the residence of James Parsons, member of the Provincial Congress and of the Secret Committee of 1775.

During the early nineteenth century, probably during the ownership of O'Brien Smith between 1800 and 1811, the house underwent extensive renovations on both the interior and the exterior in the style of the day. It is thought that it was during this renovation that the house acquired its three-story piazza on the south side of the house and extending around to the rear of the building. It also appears that at this time the central entrance was relocated to the north-most bay of on the east elevation of the house, and the first floor front rooms were reworked to create a double parlour, an arrangement which remained until the 1971 restoration of the house by the Cecils. The house appears to have undergone addition renovations sometime in the mid-nineteenth century while under the ownership of John Pyne and his family, as evident from the Greek Revival elements that were present in the house until the aforementioned Cecil restoration and from the lancet-arches in the outbuildings, a feature which reflects the Victorian fascination with Gothic architecture and style.

After sustaining severe damage from the Union Bombardment during the Civil War, the dwelling at 69 Church Street was purchased in 1869 by Eliza Middleton Huger Smith, widow of William Mason Smith. Mrs. Smith was the mother of well-known Charleston author Daniel Elliott Huger Smith, and grandmother of renowned local artist Alice Ravenel Huger Smith, who lived in her grandmother's house at 69 Church Street for most of her life. One of South Carolina's most important twentieth century artists, Alice Ravenel Huger Smith is best known as an artist of the Charleston Renaissance, and particularly for her vibrant watercolors depicting South Carolina lowcountry life. But she was also an avid preservationist and used her art to document and to celebrate the unique culture and architectural fabric of the city, publishing several books on the subjects. Her contributions in the field of art and preservation in Charleston have made Alice Ravenel Huger Smith one of the most significant women in Charleston history.

The house remained in the ownership of the Smith family for over a century, during which very little of the structure was altered. In 1970, the house was purchased by Mrs. Anthony Cecil who undertook a major renovation and project in 1971. Mrs. Cecil sought to return the house to its' eighteenth century appearance, on the exterior removing the three-story piazzas and returning the east entrance to the central bay of the house. Mrs. Cecil also removed Greek Revival elements on the interior of the structure, and restored the central hall on the ground floor. The most recent owners, Dan and Ellen Kiser, have been undergoing further restoration at 69 Church Street in an effort to return the building as close as possible to its' eighteenth century form. This has included the reversal of some of the less sensitive 1970s alterations, the reconstruction of the door surround to the front entrance in manner of the Federal period, and the enclosure of the hyphen between the main dwelling and the rear kitchen building.

² The following statement of significance is based in part on *The Buildings of Charleston* by Jonathan Poston and part on the secondary materials contained within the Historic Charleston Foundation archives. It should be noted that no original research has been done in the preparation of this statement.

The structure at 69 Church Street, two-and-a-half centuries old, is an outstanding example of early Charleston residential architecture, and is a property that greatly contributes to the Old & Historic District both architecturally and historically. It is one of the earliest and most extensive dwellings in Charleston and has been associated with some of the most important people in the history of the city, as well as in the state of South Carolina. Furthermore, the house is significant as an example of twentieth century preservation philosophy in the restorations undertaken by the Cecils and Kisers during the last thirty years.