

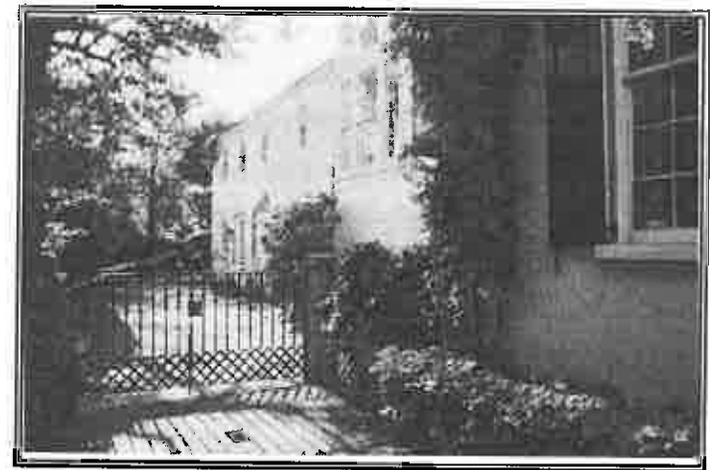


24 Church Street

A Federal House in Charleston

—
Introduction

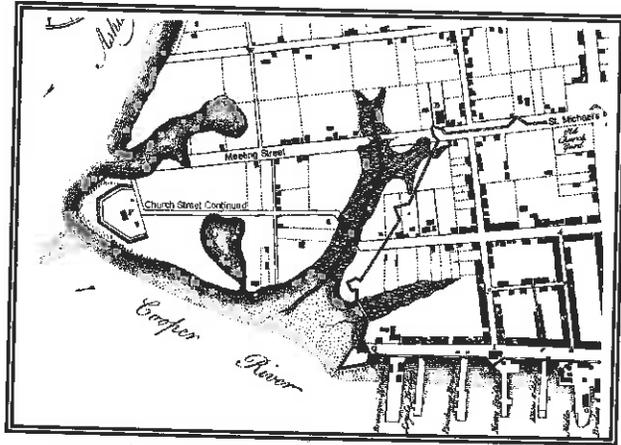
Despite its age, the house at *24 Church Street* in Charleston is not the first building constructed at this address. Although it is located on one of the city's most historic streets, this portion of Church was an extension to the original street. As a late-eighteenth century house on a mid-eighteenth century street in a late seventeenth century city, *24 Church Street* is nonetheless a very historic house. This residence is associated with some of the best-known families in Charleston and in the South Carolina Lowcountry, including the Fenwicks and the Izards. The house at *24 Church Street* is an excellent example of late eighteenth century Charleston architecture.



24 Church Street

Prepared by
Brockington and Associates, Inc.
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The Place



Church Street Continued in 1739

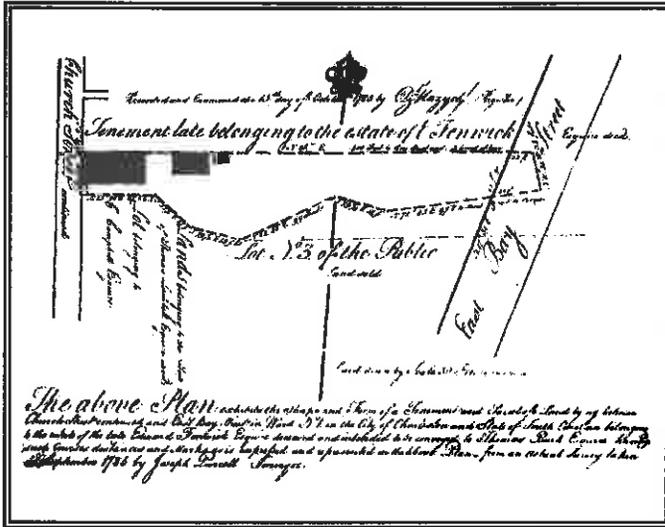
24 Church Street lies on an extension of Church Street, one of the original streets of the walled city of Charles Towne. When the original settlers of Charleston moved from their first settlement on the Ashley River to the city's present location on the peninsula, they feared attacks from the Spanish in Florida and from Native Americans. As a result, they created a city on the Cooper River side of the peninsula complete with fortified walls. The original fort stretched from Cumberland Street on the north to Water Street on the south, and west from the Cooper River to Meeting Street. As threats faded in the 1720s, the walls of the fort were removed and streets were extended. Water Street, at that time a small creek, was the southern end of the original fort. By the 1730s a road crossed the creek to form an extension of Church Street.

The earliest reference we have to a building at *24 Church Street* is from the 1770s. Edward Fenwick acquired a lot (probably in the 1760s) on the east side of what was then "Church Street Continued." Originally, the lot extended from the east side of Church Street to East Bay Street and the Cooper River. No houses were located on the back portion of the lot. Instead, Edward Fenwick's lot lay alongside Fort Mechanic, one of the original coastal fortifications for the City of Charleston.

We do not know precisely when Edward Fenwick bought the land on lower Church Street or when he built his original tenement there. As the owner of a vast estate, however, Edward Fenwick clearly built on the lot as an investment. He had several rental "tenements," or houses built, throughout Charleston. In 1779, for example, when the executors of Edward Fenwick's estate were trying to find a way to pay the bequeaths he left in his will, the court noted that the estate included "the lots on the Bay of Charles Town whereon were two tenements lately burned."

Today, Edward Fenwick's tenement no longer survives, apparently the victim of a fire. No maps or plats show the configuration of the original tenement, and we can only speculate as to when it burned. A 1785 plat shows the building and lot that is now 20 Church Street. The plat shows the main house with its kitchen behind; directly to the north, on what is now 22 and *24 Church Street*, the plat identifies

a “Tenement late belonging to the estate of E. Fenwick Esquire, deceased.” It is likely that the building was there at the time, though it apparently burned shortly thereafter, perhaps in 1785 or 1786.



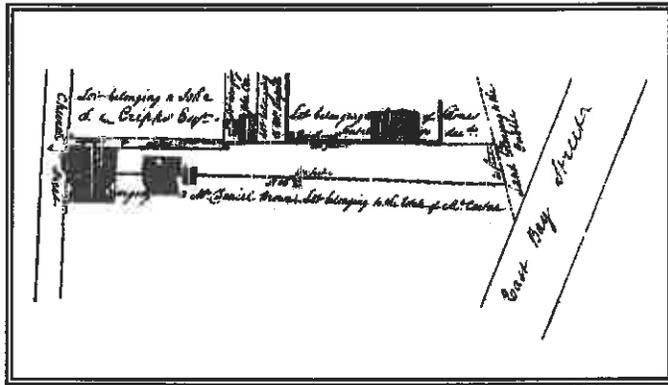
Edward Fenwick's tenement in 1785

The kitchen of the Edward Fenwick tenement, however, survived the fire. The Historic Charleston Foundation noted that the present house at 24 Church Street “incorporates a kitchen which, with its substantial brick fireplace openings and original hewn timber framing, could date from before the fire of 1785.”



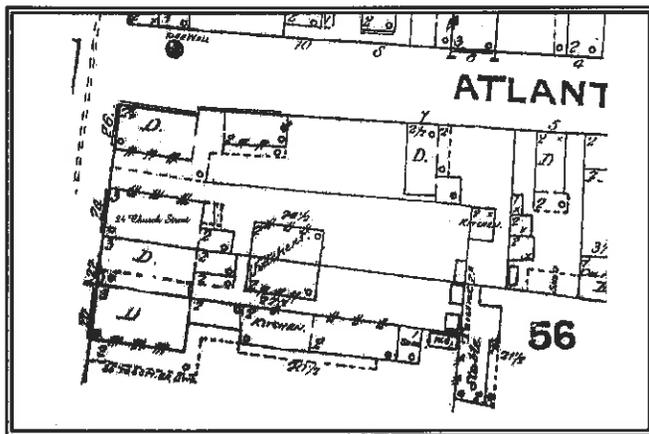
The Kitchen at 24 Church Street

The present house at 24 Church Street likely was built by a member of the Izard family, perhaps in the early 1790s. After receiving the property from Walter Izard, Ralph Izard the Younger sold the property in 1796 to Archibald Murdock. A plat drawn in 1796 shows two buildings adjoining each other on the east side of Church Street, clearly 22 and 24 Church Street, with matching kitchens behind. According to the plat, the property belonged to Ralph Izard, who intended to convey it to Archibald Murdock. Whether Ralph or Walter Izard built the house, and whether either of them ever lived there, remains a mystery. The drive that separates 24 and 26 Church Street was already in place, and remained an important defining feature of 24 Church Street into the twentieth century.

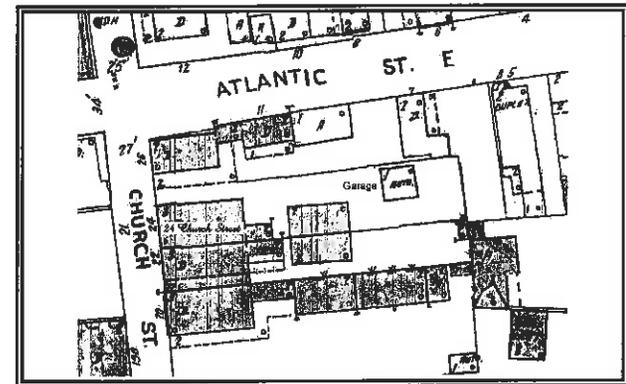


24 Church Street on a plat from 1796

Maps from the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries show the evolution of the house and the lot. In 1888 the three-story house had a two-story wing on the south side of the rear, with a small enclosure, perhaps a porch, on the north side of the rear. The kitchen, which was connected to the kitchen behind 22 Church Street, remained separate.

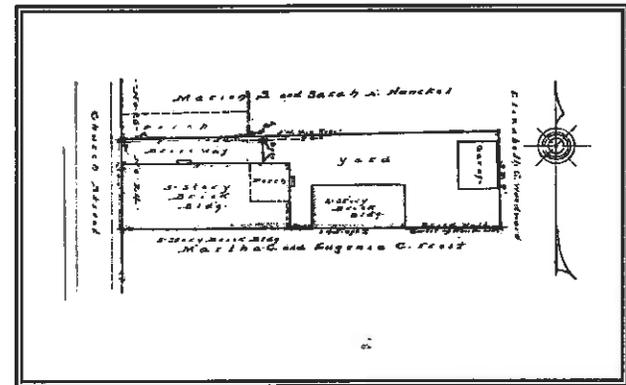


24 Church Street in 1888



24 Church Street in 1942

In 1902 the kitchen remained separate, but the small enclosure on the north side of the rear was removed. More changes took place by the 1940s. A 1942 map shows a one-story automobile garage near the rear of the lot, while a 1945 plat shows that the garage was moved to the back edge of the lot. The kitchen remained separate, however, and a porch was rebuilt on the north side of the rear of the house.



24 Church Street in 1946



The People

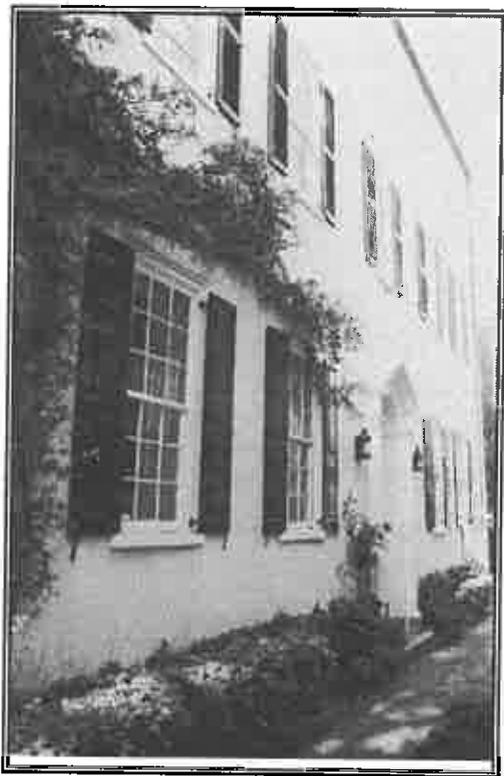
Edward Fenwick appears to have been the original owner of the lot where *24 Church Street* now stands. Edward was the son and heir of one of the Lowcountry's most prominent men. His father, John Fenwick, was born in England in the late seventeenth century and immigrated to the Carolina colony in 1703 when he was in his late 20s. He became very active in both the civil and military affairs of the new colony. John Fenwick was one of the leaders in stopping a French attack on Charleston in 1706-1707, and remained active in the colony's militia until he died in the 1740s. He began serving as a representative to the Colonial Assembly in 1707, and served nearly continuously until his death; he also served on a number of colonial commissions including commissioner of the peace for Colleton County, bridge commissioner for St. Paul Parish, road commissioner for Johns Island, and many others. Although active in South Carolina, John Fenwick retired to England and died there in 1747.

For those with an interest in historic buildings in Charleston, John Fenwick is best known for Fenwick Hall on Johns Island. This two-story brick house was built in the middle eighteenth century, and remains as one of the finest and most important Georgian plantation houses in the South Carolina Lowcountry.

In 1747, Edward Fenwick inherited all of his father's property. Edward went on to amass a great amount of land in the Lowcountry, adding 11,000 acres to the 13,000 acres that he received from his father. One of Edward Fenwick's prizes was Johns Island Stud, a horse farm that he operated at Fenwick Hall. He bred and imported thoroughbreds, many of which he brought to South Carolina from his trips to England.

The early families of wealth in Charleston created a network through marriage, and the early ownership history of *24 Church Street* reflects many of these alliances. Edward Fenwick's father, John, was married to Elizabeth Gibbes, the daughter of Governor Robert Gibbes. Edward Fenwick was married twice, each time forming an important alliance. His first wife was Martha Izard, the daughter of Ralph Izard, scion of one of the early and important families in Charleston. His second wife was Mary Drayton, the daughter of Thomas Drayton, whose parents created Magnolia Plantation on the Ashley River and whose family built Drayton Hall, also on the Ashley. His son and heir, also named Edward, resulted from the second marriage, as did his daughter Mary. Mary married Walter Izard. Together, Mary and Walter inherited "the northernmost tenement of the said easternmost part . . . of my lot in Charleston known by the number 204 with the dwelling House and Buildings thereon." This was the property that is now *24 Church Street*, which they received in 1775 at Edward's death.

Despite their family connections, the Fenwicks and the Izards were on opposite sides of the American Revolution. While the Izards were strong supporters of American independence, the Fenwicks remained loyal to England. The second Edward Fenwick, in fact, led a company of Loyalist dragoons during the Revolutionary War. As a result, his property was taken under the Confiscation Act of 1782. The Izards, having supported the patriot side, retained control of the Church Street property.



24 Church Street

We do not know if Mary and Walter Izard, the daughter and son-in-law of Edward Fenwick, ever lived in the tenement on Church Street. Under Edward Fenwick's will of 1775, Walter Izard had a life estate in the house, a "Tenant by courtesy of England." In 1784, after the American Revolution, Walter Izard received clear title to the tenement from Edward Fenwick's son, also named Edward. At some time thereafter, Walter conveyed the property to his kinsman Ralph Izard "the Younger."

As discussed above, we do not know whether Walter or Ralph Izard built the house at *24 Church Street*. However, a 1796 plat of the lot shows the house that exists today. Between the 1790s and the early twentieth century, the house has had very few owners. Unfortunately, we know correspondingly little about the people who lived there. Ralph Izard the Younger sold the house to Archibald Murdock, a blacksmith in Charleston, in 1796. Murdock had little time to enjoy the house, however, as he died in 1800. His estate sold *24 Church Street* to George Chisolm, a factor in Charleston. This suggests that he was a man of substantial means; factors were crucial to keeping Charleston a viable city; they were the linchpin in the economy between the surrounding plantations and the outside world.

Chisolm remained in the house for 15 years. In 1815, he sold the house and lot to John Ward, who served as the trustee of Mary Ward Motte. Mary Motte was the wife of Francis Motte, a member of a well-established family in Charleston and Georgetown Counties. The Motte family held the house for several decades, but it seems that family divisions created problems for them. In February 1852 Joshua Ward Motte filed a bill of partition against a number of other family members, asking the court to force the sale of the property. In May of that year, John W. Cheeseborough and William Patton bought the house at auction.

We know little about John W. Cheeseborough and William Patton. However, they later declared that they bought the house as trustees of the children of John and Jane Cheeseborough. Things did not work quite as they planned, however, as John Cheeseborough and his daughters died. Jane Cheeseborough remarried, and became Janie Holmes. In 1910, Janie Holmes sold the back part of *24 Church Street* to Julia Grimke Young, and in 1916 sold the front part including the house to Margaret P. Rees. Since then the house has changed hands four times.



The Architecture

The exterior of *24 Church Street* has changed little since it was built in the 1790s. It is a good example of both the Federal style of architecture and a Charleston single house. Like other single houses in Charleston, *24 Church Street* is three stories tall and one room deep. It faces the side rather than the street. The Federal style was expressed through restrained facades and minimal exterior decorations; the style emphasized balance and symmetry. The facade of *24 Church Street* meets all of these standards. It has a central entrance flanked by two single windows on each side on the first floor, while the second and third floors have five windows each. Unlike the earlier Georgian style of architecture, the facade is very flat; almost nothing projects from the front of the house.

The only exception is the door surround. Although restrained, the doorway has small round pilasters supporting an open-bed pediment. The door opening is recessed behind the facade, and is set within an arched opening. A semi-circular fan light sits above the single door. This doorway has been restored, but otherwise the house retains its Federal style.

In addition, much of the original interior Federal style detailing remains. The only exception is the central staircase, which was built in the mid-nineteenth century. As the Historic Charleston Foundation notes, it remains “an excellent example of a late 18th century Federal style Charleston single house.”



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