

The Missroon House, circa 1808

40 East Bay Street

This three story brick edifice, now the headquarters of Historic Charleston Foundation, was probably built by Captain James Missroon after he purchased the property in 1808.

The building sits atop the Granville Bastion, the southeastern bastion, or fort, of the early walled city of Charles Town. The site of the Granville Bastion was first purchased in 1789 by Harry Grant, a British merchant, from the Commissioner of Public Lands. Grant sold the property in 1796 and it then passed briefly through the Kinloch and Fraser families before being purchased by James Missroon in 1808.

Captain Missroon and his descendants, involved in the maritime trade, built and occupied the house for sixty years and were responsible for amalgamating adjacent properties and adding a two-story office wing connected by a hyphen to the main house. There is a good amount of documentary information about the Missroon Family. This includes information on the funeral of James Missroon's nephew in the house in the 1820s, information from the Schirmer Diary about the marriage in 1844 of Henry Missroon to Claudia Holmes and Missroon's investment, along with merchants William Enston and James Adger in the building of a large steamship to ply between Charleston and New York.

Another piece of documentary evidence about the Missroon Family occupation is the room-by-room inventory of Margaret Missroon taken after her death in 1854 (apparently, while still residing in this house). The inventory describes a three story single house and is a bit confusing as it talks about a "front room" and a "back room." We believe that the front room refers to the piazza side and there is very fine furniture and six family portraits in the first floor front room (dining room). There is also information contained therein about gas light fixtures on both levels of the entry hall and a good description of the furniture in the "drawing room" on the second floor including "6 cornices gilt and curtains" which, of course, corresponds to the six window openings in the room. This "front" room would have overlooked a busy walkway that lead to the Southern Wharf.

Mrs. Missroon owned four adult slaves and three slave children at the time of her death and many of her possessions are mentioned specifically in her will. Most of the objects are chronicled in her estate sale which occurred in December of 1854. After the Missroon's sold the property in 1855 to John Milnor, the house went through several different owners over the next 50 years.

During the Civil War, one of the ships docked at the adjacent Southern Wharf, was the steam ship *Planter*. The daring and courageous story of Robert Smalls' seizure of this Confederate ship began in the pre-dawn hours of May 13th, 1865. Smalls, a slave and mariner, commandeered the ship loaded with Confederate guns, when its captain and others were ashore. He and fellow crew members took the ship from the Southern Wharf – just to the east of the Missroon House and sailed it north to another wharf to pick up their family members. They then sailed it into Charleston Harbor, through the Confederate lines, delivering the ship and its contents to the Union fleet, thus securing their freedom. Robert Smalls went on to a distinguished career in the Union Navy and in public service on the state and national levels.

After the Civil War, the house, like many others in Charleston, was damaged by the Great Earthquake of 1886. One important record of the house during this time period is the earthquake damage assessment. According to this document, the north, south and west sides of the building were “badly cracked over the openings” and the kitchen house needed to be rebuilt.

The original stuccoed dwelling, the central portion of the present structure, includes a third story lunette window surmounting a pedimented, tripartite window on the second story, an elliptical fanlighted doorway on the ground story, and stucco quoining. First converted in 1901 to a boarding house known as the Shamrock Terrace, the house also sustained extensive damage in the hurricane of 1911. We have several views of the house showing this damage. The property was listed as vacant until purchased by the Omar Temple from George Moffett.

Purchased by the Omar Shrine (a fraternal Masonic order) for its temple in 1925, Charleston restoration architects Simons and Lapham converted the house to their headquarters, adding a three story section to the north and wrapping brick columned piazzas on the south and east, surmounted by an expanded third story; these piazzas were later enclosed. During this work, Simons and Lapham completed an extensive excavation and photographic survey of the Granville Bastion, which we have on record.

The Omar Temple utilized the property for 75 years, before selling it to the Carolina Yacht Club in 1996. The Yacht Club then sold the property to Historic Charleston Foundation in 1996 for \$750,000.