

*Do not use any kind of tape
to tape runners to the floor,
to other runners or to
anything else.*

AUGUSTUS RICHARDSON TAFT HOUSE
57 Laurens Street
c. 1836
Residence of Mr. and Mrs. Giulio della Porta

2014

This property is being preserved through a protective easement.

Historic Charleston Foundation holds an easement on house and garden (the garden area was purchased by Taft to be used for his wife's garden). The area has never been built on and the easement assures it never will be.

This tall and stately townhouse is an excellent example of the early Greek Revival style houses that began to appear in Charleston in the 1830's and would continue to be built in the decades of the 1840's and 1850's. Although numerous examples of the Greek Revival style were built in Ansonborough in the 1840's (following the fire of 1838 which destroyed entire blocks of houses) this is one of the few surviving dwellings of this earlier period which reflects the transitions in style from the Federal or Adamesque to the classical inspired motifs.

In general, later Greek Revival houses have a heavier and more masculine appearance. This house retains a lightness and grace associated with the architectural styles of earlier decades of the 1800s. Classical inspired motifs (such as the modified Greek Key used as an ornamental band at the entrance) were beginning to appear.

The dwelling is constructed of black cypress, the heartwood of the native bald cypress) which was used extensively in the 18th and 19th centuries for construction and interior paneling. This is one of the few houses remaining in the city which employs this durable native wood.

The house was built by Augustus Richardson Taft, a Charleston businessman, who was in partnership with Benjamin Howland from Massachusetts. Howland lived two doors away at 75 Anson. It was owned for over a century by the Stoney family of Charleston (with the exception of the 6 months from April 1865 to October 1865 when the house was taken over by the Freedman's Bureau and occupied by an unknown number of freed slaves.) In the 1970's, the house was purchased and renovated by the Walkers. Mr. Walker formerly served as Executive Director of Historic Charleston Foundation.

The current owners fell love with Charleston when they visited some years ago and soon opened The Hidden Countship on Burnes Lane and purchased this house nearby on Laurens Street. A total renovation has been completed blending the character of a Charleston side hall house with the family's Italian heritage.

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ENTRANCE HALL

Charleston Magazine has a picture article about the house in the January 2014 issue. The paint color of first floor rooms is a handmixed Velvet Grey. The floors throughout have been returned to their original color.

Framed Engravings, Views of Rome, by Giovanni Battista Piranesi (1720-1778), line the stair wall in the entrance hall
12 prints, by Andrea Del Sarto (1486-1530), biblical scenes

FRONT PARLOR

During the period from the 1830's to the 1860's, the planning of Charleston houses underwent some fundamental changes. Builders retained such features as piazzas to provide shade and give space for outdoor living, and they continued to place the houses with the narrow end toward the street, but they also began to experiment with new arrangements of rooms. Here you find an early example of a side hall plan. By placing the entrance passage along a side wall, space was created for adjoining or double parlors which could be used separately or together to create a spacious suite of rooms. The finer houses of this period began to exhibit bold plaster work that reflects classical motifs. (Note the wide plaster cornice and medallion). The mantels were often crafted in marble and cast-iron stoves (shaped to fit into the fireplace) were installed as the chief source of heating.

The furnishings are a mix of inherited family furnishings and art with added period reproduction pieces designed by Mr. della Porta. Three original black marble fireplaces are located on the first floor. Mr. della Porta discovered the marble, black Portoro marble with gold veining, came from a quarry not far from his home in Italy.

Painting, above mantel, by a Flemish XVI century artist, oil on canvas, "The Trader's Nightmare" had been hanging in the della Porta home in Umbria.

"Holy Nativity," oil on wood, Italian, c. 1500

Portrait, Nicola Berio, Count in Gubbio (Umbria) 1792

"The Peaceful Eyes of a Franciscan Monk," Italian, 1840

Nobleman (unknown), Italian, c. 1800

Portrait, full length of General Lee by John Carroll Doyle , Charleston artist

Coffee table, the top is a fine example of pietre dure, mosaic work done in colored stones associated with Florence.

Dresser, Piemontese, walnut, c. 1700

Bust, Princess Ippolita Maria Sforza is a family piece. It was sent, like a photograph today, to show the daughter "marriage ready" to the parents of the man who became King of Naples. They married.

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REAR PARLOR

Painting, above the mantel, "Tradd Street in the past" by John Carroll Doyle
Nobleman (unknown), Italian, c. 1800

"Inspired by an Angel," Giovanni Lanfranco (1582-1647) Baroque artist

Paintings, Italian, landscapes, with religious vision, Italian, c.1600

Portraits, of family of Count Ferdinando Berio (aristocratic Gubbio family), by
Umbrian painter, late 1800

Cupboard, from the della Porta home in Umbria alongside the mantel holds a collection
of 20th c. ceramics

DINING ROOM

Dining Chairs, Umbrian, 18th c style. Reproduced by Luciano Rotini of Citta de Castello
and imported by the della Porta family.

Dining Table, hand painted, typical of 14c Tuscan and Umbrian pieces, also by Rotini
Chandelier, by Rotini

Sculpture, by Italian artist, Ambrogio Pozzi, entitled "Presenza"

4 Paintings, Italian, landscapes, late 1700

Portrait, Count Guiseppe Berio Montesperelli - Umbrian artist, c. 1800

KITCHEN

The covered ceiling was removed revealing the original timbers, reminiscent of Italian
country kitchens. Island and cupboards were built in style of old Umbrian kitchens by local
firm, copied from the Umbrian wall cabinet holding wine.

Chandelier by Umbrian blacksmith, Alberto Alunni

Trio of prints, "The grand chemin de la posterite" by Benjamin Roubaud (1811-1847,
French artist and caricaturist

Exit house by way of kitchen door. Visit garden and pool area.

GARDEN

Note the Olive tree at the bottom of the stair. The garden design is Italian, symmetrical
and classic. The center pool is surrounded with box wood in a pleasing pattern. The center
statue is the only French piece on the property.

Podocarpus bushes outline the garden perimeter and enclose a classical grass lawn. The
stone throne sits in the rear. 24 Italian cypress trees surround pool area and there is a carved
teak pergola at far end of pool

Return to street by garden gate.