

35 Legare Street: History

By: Shannon Devlin, HCF Preservation Intern

Updated: 07/15/14

Introduction

The original settling of Charleston was in 1670. This first area, a little further inland on the Ashley River than the current peninsular city, was called Charles Towne in honor of King Charles II of England. Charles Towne would, eventually, evolve into Charleston. Carolina was funded by eight royal supporters known as the Lord Proprietors; one Proprietor heavily associated with Charles Towne was Sir Anthony Ashley Cooper, Earl of Shaftesbury.¹ However, as Emma Hart acknowledged in *Building Charleston*, “the town was moved in 1678 at the behest of the colony’s Proprietors. At its second founding, the ‘Grand Modell’ grid plan, conceived by Carolina’s Proprietor Lord Anthony Ashley Cooper provided a tidy template for future growth.”² According to Robert Rosen, author of *A Short History of Charleston*, there were at least 100 houses at this new site by 1682.³ In being an original Grand Modell lot, having strong French Huguenot ties, exemplifying independent land owning women in a male dominant society, and boasting a garden designed by Loutrel Briggs, 35 Legare Street is an exquisite property rich in Charleston history.

The Grand Modell

Grand Modell lots, as evidenced from the image of the map were quite large; sometimes encompassing an acre or more of land. There were three granting phases for these lots as defined by Bates and Leland in the *Proprietary Records of South Carolina*. They were from 1678-1679, 1680-1689, and 1690-1698. The earliest plots were laid out near the wharves on the current East Bay Street and subsequently moved inland from there. The plot of land which would have encompassed 35 Legare Street was laid out during the

¹ Jonathan H. Poston, *The Buildings of Charleston: A Guide to the City's Architecture*, (Columbia, S.C.: University of South Carolina Press, 1997), 16.

² Emma Hart, *Building Charleston: Town and Society in the Eighteenth-Century British Atlantic World*, (Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 2010), 1.

³ Robert N. Rosen, *A Short History of Charleston*, 2nd ed, (University of South Carolina Press: Columbia, 1997), 12.

final phase as lots #226 and #227; it was originally conveyed from the Proprietors to Joshua Redwood on June 12, 1694.⁴ By this third phase when lots #226 and #227 were laid out, much of the lower peninsula had been plotted out.

By 1690, Charles Town was the fifth largest city in the colonies with 1,000 to 1,200 residents. At this time the Charleston Neck was populated with plantations. The city walls were constructed by 1704, however, were removed in 1719 to allow for expanding development.⁵

By the 1730s, Charleston was increasingly growing, as Hart wrote, at a “steady pace of expansion” which “established by 1750 was a reflection of Charleston’s numerical superiority over other towns founded by the colony’s white settlers. Although a number of urban places existed in early South Carolina, none achieved the size and stature” of Charleston.⁶

Huguenot Ties and the St. Julien Family

The early history of 35 Legare Street followed a similar path as the city for the first few generations of ownership. Carolina was known as a religiously and politically tolerant colony and thus welcomed the immigration of individuals with various beliefs. The Proprietors of Carolina even went as far as to advertise with pamphlets in European countries boasting the mission of the colony to attract more immigrants to the new world. One of these people groups was French Huguenots who, following the revocation of the Edict of Nantes in 1685, emigrated from France into neighboring countries or colonies accepting of their Protestant beliefs. It is documented that at least one third of these pamphlets were distributed in France to target Huguenots. Even prior to the revocation of the Edict, due to increasing persecution, in April of 1680, 45 Huguenots arrived in South Carolina aboard the *Richmond*.⁷

⁴ Susan Baldwin Bates and Harriott Cheves Leland, *Proprietary Records of South Carolina*, Vol. 3, (Charleston, SC: History Press, 2005), 163.

⁵ Poston, *The Buildings of Charleston*, 17.

⁶ Hart, *Building Charleston*, 2.

⁷ Edgar, Walter B, *South Carolina: A History*, (Columbia, SC: University of South Carolina Press, 1998), 50.

These 45 immigrants were part of a group of 81 original Huguenot families to arrive in South Carolina as a result of the revocation of the Edict of Nantes.⁸ The St. Julien family, one of the 81, fled secretly from France directly following the revocation in 1685.⁹ As a result of their exile from Vitre, France, their estate was confiscated and leased by authorities. The St. Julien family arrived in South Carolina shortly thereafter; in the Proprietary records of South Carolina, there is a recording of a Peter (father) and Peter (son) de St. Julien in Berkeley County from July 22, 1690 solidifying this point.¹⁰ Peter, the son, purchased the property encompassing the 35 Legare Street lot, known then as the Grand Modell lots #226 and #227 sometime after 1694. These lots not only encompassed the current parcel at 35 Legare, but included the land along Legare Street until it butted with Tradd Street and stretched more than half way to current day Lenwood Boulevard. While it is unknown how Peter (Pierre prior to immigration) used the lots during his ownership, it is known that upon his death in 1719 he willed the property to his children. He writes in his will, "I give to my two sons Paul and Henry, a lot and a third of a lot which I own by the side of White Point, in the city of Charles Town, the said lots joining Mr. de La Consiliere bounding on Mr. Legare, which lot and third of a lot they are to part amicably between themselves."¹¹

Peter de St. Julien, the son who purchased the Grand Modell lot in Charles Town, was a merchant who married Elizabeth Le Serrurier, another French Huguenot refugee in Charles Town, around 1690. Interestingly enough, Peter was such a prominent Huguenot that he had a hand in various Huguenot controversies in the area. For example, he played a vital role in a parish controversy at St. Denis on the Cooper River in the early eighteenth century. The Huguenot congregation at St. Denis Parish had petitioned the Huguenot Threadneedle Street Church in England for a Huguenot pastor; however, it was because the request was made by Peter de St. Julien on their behalf that the request was granted. The

⁸ Edward Manigault, *Register of Carolina Huguenots: A Partial Listing of 81 Refugee Families*, (Piedmont, CA: www.lulu.com, 2007).

⁹ Bertrand van Ruymbeke, *From Babylon to Eden: The Huguenots and Their Migration to Colonial South Carolina*, (University of South Carolina Press: Columbia, S.C., 2006) 59.

¹⁰ Susan Baldwin Bates and Harriott Cheves Leland, *Proprietary Records of South Carolina*, Vol. 3, (Charleston, SC: History Press, 2005), 130.

¹¹ Wills of South Carolina Huguenots (Probate Court of Charleston County Rec., 1671-1729, 110), *Edited Will Transcript of Pierre de St. Julien de Malacare II*, Will made in South Carolina, 2nd June 1718, Translated from French by R. Wilson, pp 40-42.

pastor he requested, Pierre Stoupe, did arrive in St. Denis parish in 1717 per that request.¹²

It is quite unique for the St. Julien family to have owned the property, most particularly the large Grand Modell lot for as long as they had. The property was passed from Pierre to two of his sons Paul and Henry. They then split the land prior to 1771 between various descendants. The land, as visible from the provided plat, was divided amongst St. Julien heirs - including Ravenells, Marions, and Moultries. However, the lot where 35 Legare is located was willed to Elizabeth Damaris de St. Julien at some point prior to 1771. Elizabeth Damaris de St. Julien married William Moultrie in 1749; they retained ownership of the Legare Street plot until 1771.

Women's History

Another interesting theme interwoven between the owners of 35 Legare Street is the trend of independent, land owning women in a male dominant society. The lot from early on was owned by women, as evidenced by Elizabeth Damaris Moultrie being willed the property and playing a key role in the ownership of the property. Six women owned and operated the property throughout its life time. They owned it for a total of 167 years out of the 320 years of ownership; more than half of the life of the property! While it was not rare for a women to own land, it was not typical either. These six women had a heavy hand in the ownership at 35 Legare. There are four of note: Elizabeth Damaris Moultrie, Elizabeth Williams, Rebecca Screven, and Louisa McCord.

Elizabeth Damaris de St. Julien Moultrie was willed the property as part of her inheritance in the St. Julien family. It is unknown if she was willed the property from her father Peter de St. Julien or if it came from her either her Uncle Paul or Henry as per the stipulations in Pierre de St. Julien's will. Either way, she maintained control of the property from around the 1750s until she and William Moultrie sold the property in 1771. In the conveyance deed she was consistently mentioned in partnership with Moultrie instead of Moultrie being the sole conveyor. While this is not necessarily uncommon, it is not typical. It is evident from the verbiage that she held high stakes in the land.

¹² van Ruymbek, *From Babylon to Eden: The Huguenots and Their Migration to Colonial South Carolina*, 59.

In 1772 Elizabeth Williams purchased the lot from Benjamin Huger. Williams is, in fact, the likely builder of the house. She is confirmed through city directories as residing on Legare Street in 1790 and 1794. This documentation solidifies the idea that the house was built by this point. Architectural details in the house also support this idea. The stringer details and turned balusters on the staircase at 35 Legare are often present in Georgian structures. Some of the doors in the house, as well as their hardware, also date from the period. This strong evidence in the tangible architecture as well as in surviving documents evidence for the construction of the building prior to c. 1790.

While not much survives about the life of Elizabeth Williams, what does survive speaks to her independence and feminine strength in a male dominant society. Elizabeth was married to Joseph Williams (1703-1768) and despite the fact that he died nearly thirty years before her was able to give her two daughters – Sarah Scott and Rebecca Screven. Her dower, while the record is illusive at this time, seems to have been enough so that she was able to purchase the Legare Street property and plausibly erect a substantial house only four years after his death. This independence and sustainability from a female head of household was unique in eighteenth century Charleston.

Elizabeth passed this ideal to her daughter Rebecca Screven. Screven was willed the property in 1796 following her mother's "long and painful death" at age 70 as her gravestone documents. While Screven was recorded year after year for living on Lynch Street in the city directories upon her death in 1836 she calls the house at 35 Legare Street her home. The only available documented evidence for Rebecca Screven shows that she was receiving letters and living on Lynch Street. It seems as though at the time of her mother's death she had already settled on Lynch Street, hypothetically with her husband, and did not want to move her family to the Legare Street house. There is a possibility that the 35 Legare property was set up as a rental unit while Screven was living on Lynch Street. Whatever may be the case, the property remained in Rebecca's name until her death in 1836 and is listed in her will as her house.

Louisa McCord purchased the property in 1879 and resided there for 47 years. Not only is she the longest female resident at the property, she is also the most well

documented. While her sole ownership of the property attests to her feminine independence, her documented achievements only strengthen this point. She was related to various well known individuals. For example, her father was Langdon Cheves, Bank of the United State's President, and her husband, Edward McCord, was the editor of the *Statutes at Large of South Carolina*. This job would have entailed compiling historic statutes – even dating back to the Colonial era – into one volume and shows that his career would have been as either or both a historian and lawyer. Louis, not to be lost in the interesting jobs of her immediate family, was one of the most well known female authors during the antebellum period in South Carolina. This career path coupled with her land ownership exemplifies the trend of strong, independent women owning the property at 35 Legare Street in a typically male dominant society.

Loutrel Briggs Garden

Charleston is, as James Cothran recognized in his book *Charleston Gardens and the Landscape Legacy of Loutrel Briggs*, “often described as ‘a city set in a garden’” and “has a rich garden tradition dating back to colonial times.” Similar to the historic architecture that makes up the historic city, gardens have also gone through various phases of design, flourishes and lags. However, the most cohesive period of urban garden design was when Loutrel Briggs (1893-1977) practiced in Charleston. As Cothran continued to write, “the gardens Briggs designed in Charleston throughout his career are appropriate to the climate, architecture, historic setting, and lifestyle of the city. Briggs’ gardens reflect a wonderful sense of scale, combining house and garden into a unified whole.” What is unique about Brigg gardens is that although they are private, they support the architecture of the house in that setting, but also stretch to the street where glimpses are viewable through small openings in iron gates or brick walls. Briggs utilization of historic and modern elements (both hard scape and plant material) create a sensitive partner to the historic homes in downtown Charleston. Loutrel Briggs, while certainly not the first landscape

architect to design in Charleston, is credited with the firmly defining and refining “Charleston’s Garden Style.”¹³

Briggs was born in New York City in 1893 to Frank and Ella Briggs. At Cornell University Briggs enrolled in the Outdoor Art Program to pursue his passions as a landscape architect. He flourished during his time there and laid a solid foundation for which he could build his career on. He began practicing landscape architecture in New York City following graduation from Cornell in various ways – including teaching. In 1929, following an inspiring visit in 1927, Briggs opened a practice in Charleston, South Carolina, at the age of 36. It seems as though he moved to Charleston for a combination of two things: the first to pursue landscape design, the second for a love affair. He married Emily Crompton Barker soon after his arrival in 1929. His first commission in Charleston was for the design of the gardens at the William Gibbes House at 64 South Battery. While Briggs was not always residing in Charleston, he and Emily did stay during the winter months as an escape from the cold northern winters and as a result had a steady flow of work in Charleston.

Despite his sporadic dedication to Charleston early on in his career, due to various corporate changes, Briggs became fully dedicated to design in the city during the 1950s. In 1958 he finally purchased a Charleston property as his primary residence: 3 Ladson Street. At his home on Ladson Street he converted the carriage house into his design office. Following his permanent settling in Charleston Briggs devoted himself to garden design here until his death in 1977.

During his final design period in Charleston Loutrel Briggs designed the garden at 35 Legare Street. In 1961 the Smythes commissioned Briggs to design the garden adjacent to the house. While further research needs conducted to determine if the vegetation dates to the time of the Briggs design, it is confirmed that the symmetrical and intricate brick hard scaping still present on the property is the original materials placed by Briggs in 1961. Briggs designed a space, as evidenced in the original drawing, that respected the historic

¹³ James R. Cothran, *Charleston Gardens and the Landscape Legacy of Loutrel Briggs*, (Columbia, SC: University of South Carolina Press, 2010), 1 & 5.

tradition at the site through choosing sensitive forms and timeless patterns to, in the words of Briggs, “[maintain] the traditional charm of Charleston and the surrounding Low Country.”¹⁴ He, as was his goal with each house design, cultivated a strong connection between his designed garden and the existing house.

Cotheran lists characteristic of Briggs work in Charleston and many are found at the Legare Street garden. For example, he used apt materials for walkways, walls, and bed edges, conveyed unity and a good sense of scale, and finally, and perhaps most importantly paid “attention to construction details that define and sustain a design and ensure visual continuity throughout time.” Historic materials were also incorporated here. Briggs “relied on basic principles of good design such as proportion, repetition, unity, and scale” for all designs; this is especially conveyed at 35 Legare.¹⁵ For the design at Legare Street, Briggs combined his knowledge of horticulture and architecture to design a garden that would complement the historic house yet retain the charm of the large Legare Street lot.

¹⁴ Loutrel Briggs, *Charleston Gardens*, (Columbia: University of South Carolina Press, 1951), ix.

¹⁵ Cothran, *Charleston Gardens and the Landscape Legacy of Loutrel Briggs*, 77.

35 Legare Street Chain of Title

Year	Grantor (Seller)	Grantee (Buyer)	Citation	Bldg mentioned/Comments
2014	Salley B. Davidson	Historic Charleston Foundation	Property Card	
1982	Henry B. Smythe	Salley B. Davidson	Property Card	
1951	Fredrick A. Traut	Henry B. Smythe	Property Card	
1926	Louisa McCord	Fredrick Traut	N33 111	2-1/2 story wood
1880	Ellison A. Smythe	Louisa McCord Smythe	L18 8	2-1/2 story wood
1880	Louisa McCord (estate)	Ellison A. Smythe		2-1/2 story wood
1879	James S. Gibbes	Louisa McCord	U17 12	2-1/2 story wood
1872	Charles B. Cochran	James Gibbes	D16 312	2-1/2 story wood
1853	Richard Roper	C.B. Cochran	U12 562	2-1/2 story wood
1849	Alonzo J. White	Richard Roper	V11 353	2-1/2 story wood
1839	Mary Jane Fraser	Alonzo J. White	A11 251	2-1/2 story wood
1836	R.C. Geyer ex. of Rebecca Screven	M. J. Fraser	N10 402	2-1/2 story wood
1792	Elizabeth Williams in will	Rebecca Screven & Sarah Scott, daughters	Will C 321	No mention of house
1772	Benjamin Huger	Elizabeth Williams	Lease (HCF)	No mention of house
1771	William Moultrie	Benjamin Huger	S6 11	35 Legare St. plot

35 Legare Street: Timeline

1685 Pierre, later know as Peter, de St. Julien immigrates to Charleston and purchases lotts #226 & #227 sometime after

1694 Js^a Redwood purchased Grand Modell lotts #226 & #227

1718 Peter de St. Julien divides the two lots between his children and wills the area encompassing the current lot at 35 Legare to his son Peter

1730-1771 Elizabeth Damaris de St. Julien inherits the property from her father Peter de St. Julien

1749-1771 Elizabeth Damaris de St. Julien marries Major Colonel William Moultrie and at some point during this period conveys the land to William

1771 Benjamin Huger purchases the property

1772 Elizabeth Williams purchases the property

1796 Rebecca Screven inherits the property from Elizabeth Williams, her mother

1836 R. C. Geyer, executor of Rebecca Screven following her death, conveys the property to Mary Jane Fraser

1839 Alonzo J. White purchases the property

1849 Richard Roper purchases the property

1853 Charles B. Cochran purchases the property

1872 James Gibbes purchases the property

1879 Louisa McCord (later Smythe) purchases the property

1886 The structure survives the great earthquake of 1886

1926 Fredrick Traut purchases the property

1951 Henry B. Smythe purchases the property

1961 The Smythes hire Loutrel Briggs to plan the grounds

1982 Salley B. Davidson purchases the property

1984 An exterior preservation easement is donated to Historic Charleston Foundation as a tool for preserving the historic nature of the house

2014 Historic Charleston Foundation purchases the property as a preservation necessity

35 Legare Street: Property Description

The Elizabeth Williams House was constructed prior to c. 1790 and has evolved throughout the years into the present house at 35 Legare Street. Various alterations over time to the house, dependency, and gardens all merge to form the uncommon single house rich in history. The house was constructed during the ownership of Elizabeth Williams as a central hall single house. The stringer details and turned balusters on the staircase attest to its age. A rear two story brick dependency has complimented the house since at least the late nineteenth-century; it is connected but not incorporated with the house. As it remains today, the house is wood framed with a weatherboarded exterior. Originally the front façade would have had two bays punctuated with nine-over-nine windows and it has been suggested that these windows are still present on site and are used in the brick dependency. In the late nineteenth-century two-over-two bay windows were added on the first and second floors in conjunction with the unique pressed tin tiled mansard roof. These additions are just some of the unique elements that contribute to the remarkable history of 35 Legare Street.

Not only is the house an architectural gem, but the story of those who have owned the property is quite interesting. The property dates to the implementation of the Grand Modell plan for Charleston by the Proprietors in 1694. The two lots, #226 and #227, were owned for three generations by the St. Julien family, which was one of the original 81 Huguenot families to flee France following the revocation of the Edict of Nantes in 1685. The property was also owned for a majority of its lifetime by women; while this is not necessarily rare, it is unique and adds yet another layer to the rich history of 35 Legare.

The garden at 35 Legare Street adds yet another fascinating layer to the property. The garden was designed by Loutrel Briggs in 1961 for the Smythes. While further research needs to be conducted to determine whether the vegetation dates to the time of the Briggs design, it is confirmed that the symmetrical and intricate hardscaping still present on the property is original material placed by Briggs. As evidenced in the original drawing, Briggs designed a space that respected the historic tradition at the site by choosing sensitive forms and timeless patterns that, in the words of Briggs, “[maintain] the traditional charm of Charleston and the surrounding Low Country.” He cultivated a strong connection between his designed garden and the existing house, as was his goal with every design. While the current garden needs cultivation, the foundation of the Briggs plan is still present and, in conjunction with the original drawing, the garden could bloom beautifully to once again compliment the house.

35 Legare Street: Constructed Prior to c. 1790

Despite heavy research on the property at 35 Legare, a documented construction date is still unknown. Yet, the coupling of historic documents and an architectural analysis of 35 Legare Street has pointed to at least a plausible construction period.

In a lease agreement, presumably, for the subsequent release after a years passing Elizabeth Williams purchased the property from Benjamin Huger on September 12, 1772. Williams is confirmed through city directories as residing on Legare Street in 1790 and 1794. This documentation solidifies the idea that the house was built by this point.

In support of the idea that the house was built prior to or during the ownership of Williams are architectural details in the house. The stringer details and turned balusters on the staircase at 35 Legare are often present in Georgian structures. Some of the doors in the house, as well as their hardware, also date from the period.

Therefore, it is suggested at this time that the house at 35 Legare Street was constructed prior to 1790. The residence and ownership of Williams from 1772-1796 suggests as much, as do the architectural details in the house. Despite this evidence, a specific, documented, construction date is yet unknown. Hopefully through continued research on the property, further evidence will be uncovered that will lead to a more solidified construction date.