

17 Legare

July 2, 2014

The house located at 17 Legare Street is an excellent example of an early tenement originally constructed as a rental property in downtown Charleston. The simple two-story house was updated in the mid-19th century to include a front addition as well as a Greek Revival piazza. Its exceedingly set back location on the lot is a rare feature in the densely laid out downtown area, and much of the original and early architectural details in the house still remain. The house's significance is also enhanced by its association with prominent citizens of Charleston throughout its life including Anthony Toomer and Thomas Purse.

The house was constructed by Anthony Toomer, a Revolutionary War Veteran and master builder, between the purchase date of the land on November 8, 1797 and Toomer's death in October 1798. Toomer, born in Charleston in 1742, was a Captain in the Revolutionary army and was a prisoner of the British upon the fall of Charleston in May of 1780.¹ As a very successful bricklayer, he was one of the wealthiest tradesmen in Charleston, having a \$13,000 estate and thirty slaves by the time of his death.² He possessed enough money to lend to citizens such as Charles Pinckney, the eminent doctor David Ramsey, and the planter Daniel DeSaussure.³ Much of this wealth came from his interest in town development as a long-term investment plan.⁴ Toomer owned a variety of properties, including that at 17 Legare, around the city on which he built dwellings to sell and rent to an increasingly demanding public. Demand for homes and rooms to rent in the British Atlantic increased considerably over the 18th c. Workers who couldn't afford city property or who eventually wanted to move to the country found a temporary position ideal. Additionally, instead of living full time in the urban environment, many of the rural gentry chose to spend their leisure time in the city while maintaining their country residences. Toomer was actively involved in this market, his Archdale Street tenements advertised as being up for sale or for rent for SC£350 per annum in 1773.⁵ 17 Legare appears to have been such a residence as well, hosting many families throughout its lifetime. Toomer was also concerned with improving the city, likely both for civic pride and to increase the value of his own properties.⁶ He later represented St. Philip and St. Michael Parishes in the First and Second Provincial Congresses and in the South Carolina General Assembly. He died on October 10, 1798 at the age of 56 and is buried in the Burying Ground of the Circular Congregational Church.⁷ In his will, dated to November 3, 1797, Toomer left his property at 17 Legare to his daughter Mary, who married Daniel Remousin. A subsequent deed, that passing the property to Harry Grant on April 26, 1811, and the notice of the sale in the Charleston Courier state that there was a dwelling on the property Toomer devised to his daughter described as a two-story wooden dwelling house, brick kitchen, etc.⁸

¹ "Maj. Anthony Toomer," [findagrave.com](http://www.findagrave.com/cgi-bin/fg.cgi?page=gr&GRid=37227249), last modified May 18, 2009, <http://www.findagrave.com/cgi-bin/fg.cgi?page=gr&GRid=37227249>.

² Emma Hart, *Building Charleston: Town and Society in the Eighteenth-Century British Atlantic World* (Charlottesville, VA: University of Virginia Press, 2009), 123.

³ Ibid., 125.

⁴ Ibid., 83-84.

⁵ Ibid., 86.

⁶ Ibid., 163-64.

⁷ "Maj. Anthony Toomer."

⁸ Robert P. Stockton, "17 Legare St.: 'Tenement' of the Times," *News and Courier*, September 27 (unknown year, ca. 1974-83), n/a. Article obtained through the Historic Charleston Foundation's Margaretta Childs Archives, LEGARE.017.1.

The original structure of 17 Legare, a simple two-story, two-bay wooden house with beaded weatherboard siding and a low pitched roof, was built as a tenement investment shortly after Toomer acquired the unusually deep and narrow 40 by 296 foot lot on Legare Street from John Bonnoilt in 1796 for the sum of 665 pounds sterling.⁹ A distinguishing feature of this dwelling is its position on the lot, set back from the early carriage way. The two-story frame house was constructed in the Adam style that was popular at the time.¹⁰ The beaded weatherboarding covering the original structure dates to its original construction in the late 18th c.¹¹ Most of the interior of the original house, including the Neoclassical wainscotting, mantel, and staircase remain in the house.¹² The wainscotting is delicately paneled with bands of guilloche and hash-mark patterns. The Federal period mantel has croisettes (a carry over from the Georgian period) and pilasters.¹³ The main staircase is original to the house as well, with slender urn-shaped newels and stick balesters.¹⁴ It possesses an unusual feature: the handrail terminates into the underside of the doubled-back staircase rather than continuing and turning on the landing. This unusual element can also be seen on the staircase of 35 Legare, the Rebecca Screven House. Many of the pegged six-paneled doors are also original features. The ornamentation found in the drawing room dates from the original construction date as well as from the renovations of the 1840s. The panelling and chair rail are of the late 18th c. Federal style, while the cornice and door surrounds are crafted in the bolder Greek Revival style of the 1820s – 40s. The depth of the front dining room fireplace dominates the room and recalls the house's 18th century origins. The sense of space in the room is further enhanced by the tall ceilings and large nine-over-nine panel windows. An accomplished portrait artist used this room as a studio in the early 20th century, and a large mirror over the mantel descended from the Prioleau family who occupied the house from 1951 to 1975.¹⁵ The kitchen is a recent addition with a chimney based on that found in the Naylor's family home in Tours, France.¹⁶

After he acquired the property in 1830, Thomas F. Purse made many changes to the property. He bought an adjoining piece of ground in 1831 that measured 39 feet by 132 feet, bounding on the south of the rear portion of the lot, pictured as a formal garden on a plat of the property in 1841. He constructed the two-story brick masonry addition to the front of the house, also visible on the plat.¹⁷ Furthermore, he added the one-story piazza with slender columns, a dentiled cornice, and a Greek Revival transomed screen on the southern elevation in ca. 1840.¹⁸ With the addition of the side piazza, Purse also refashioned the principle entrance, adding a broad fanlight and sidelights on either side of the door. These renovations continued in the primary rooms, largely changing the aforementioned mantels and woodwork, adding a mantel in the transitional style of the 1830's in one room and a later

⁹ "Anthony Toomer's House, ca. 1797-1798," Festival of Houses and Gardens, Annual Tour of Houses given by the Historic Charleston Foundation, ca. 1984-89.

¹⁰ "Garden of the Anthony Toomer House," Festival of Houses and Gardens, Annual Tour of Houses given by the Historic Charleston Foundation, 2010.

¹¹ "Anthony Toomer's House."

¹² Jonathan H. Poston, *The Buildings of Charleston: A Guide to the City's Architecture* (Columbia, SC: University of South Carolina Press, 1997), 245-46.

¹³ "17 Legare: 'Tenement' of the Times."

¹⁴ "Anthony Toomer's House."

¹⁵ Ibid.

¹⁶ "Anthony Toomer House," Festival of Houses and Gardens, Annual Tour of Houses given by the Historic Charleston Foundation, ca. 2002.

¹⁷ "17 Legare: 'Tenement' of the Times."

¹⁸ Poston, 246.

Greek Revival style mantel in another room.¹⁹ The 1840 Federal Census indicates that there were a total of 15 people in Purse's household; this included 6 free white persons and 9 slaves. The census also indicated that he was employed in commerce.²⁰ Thomas Purse, born in 1807, was an active member of the Friendship Tent, Independent Order of Rechabites of Charleston Neck.²¹ Additionally, he appears to have been a supporter of slave emancipation, helping freed slave Priscilla North emancipate her two young children and interceding at a slave auction to save freedwoman Dye Johnson and her son James from being sold.²²

Dr. Amory Coffin, a prominent doctor, owned the house in the mid-19th c. An 1838 miniature of his portrait by the Charleston artist Charles Fraser was exhibited at the The Fraser Gallery in 1857. Coffin leased the house to Madame Victor Petit and her daughter, Hermina, from 1855 to 1857. They used it as the premissis for their School for Young Ladies during this time. By 1855, private education of Charleston's youth had passed from the Santo Domingans to enterprising immigrants such as the Belgian-born Petit family, who had arrived in 1853. The family had many qualifications that led to their immediate success in Charleston teaching young females: they spoke French, Victor Petit composed music, and Hermina Petit had sung for European royalty. Though Victor Petit died in 1856, Hermina and her mother continued teaching by founding a finishing school at 17 Legare that offered "all the branches... for a finished education. French will be exclusively spoken." Once the house was sold in 1857, the Petit's school moved to a different location, but they were put out of business by the Sass daughters, Mary and Jane, who worked at the Misses Murden School for Children at 23 Legare.²³

A photograph of the house displaying damage from the 1886 earthquake as well as the 1886 city directory indicate that Errington Burnley Hume inhabited the property at this time.²⁴ However, his family shortly before taking up residence at 17 Legare, as late as 1884, Hume resided a few houses south at 13 Legare.²⁵ The 1880 census shows an extended family of nine people of the Pringle family as well as Errington Hume and his family, having married Eliza Pringle, the head of household's daughter.²⁶ The directory lists his occupation as a lumber and stave dealer. Errington B. Hume Jr., born on June 12, 1886, continued to occupy the house in the early 20th century. Records from 1905 indicate that he was a student.²⁷ The 1900 and 1910 censuses show that though Errington Jr. was living in 17 Legare with his grandparents, the Pringles, and his extended family, the Hamiltons, in 1900 he was no longer living in

¹⁹ "17 Legare: 'Tenement' of the Times."

²⁰ "1840 United States Federal Census about Thomas F. Purse," *1840 United States Federal Census* [database on-line], Year: 1840; Census Place: *Charleston, South Carolina*; Roll: 509; Page: 25; Image: 654; Family History Library Film: 0022508, Ancestry.com, 1840.

²¹ *Journal of the Senate of the State of South Carolina, at its Annual Session, Commencing Nov. 26, 1849* (Columbia, SC: A.S. Johnston, 1849), 30.

²² Larry Kroger, *Black Slaveowners: Free Black Slave Masters in South Carolina, 1790-1860* (Jefferson, NC: McFarland & Company, Inc., 1985), 65-76.

²³ Sarah Fick, "Historic Schools of Legare Street," *Preservation Progress for the Preservation Society of Charleston* 54, no. 1 (2009): 11-12, <http://www.preservationsociety.org/progress/54.1PreservationProgress-FinalLowRes.pdf>.

²⁴ "Legare Street, Hume Residence," *Lowcountry Digital Library*, accessed July 8, 2014, <http://lcdl.library.cofc.edu/lcdl/catalog/lcdl:2644#!prettyPhoto>.

²⁵ "Charleston, South Carolina, City Directory, 1884," *U.S. City Directories, 1821-1989* [database on-line], Ancestry.com, 1884.

²⁶ 1880 census

²⁷ "Charleston, South Carolina, City Directory, 1905," *U.S. City Directories, 1821-1989* [database on-line], Ancestry.com, 1905.

the house in 1910.²⁸ This is because Hume left Charleston to attend school in Philadelphia in the early 20th century. Hume received a B.S. from the University of Pennsylvania in 1911 at age 24, and the General alumni catalog listed him as residing at 17 Legare in 1922.²⁹ However, a WWI draft card from June 5, 1917 indicates that Hume was living in Saluda, NC as a farmer.³⁰ Errington Hume Jr. died on May 5, 1969 and is buried in Magnolia Cemetery.³¹

Today's garden includes a lawn, pool, and plenty of plant life, much of which was very dense along the perimeter until the garden was redesigned between 2007-8 by the landscape architects Bob and Donna Cox. In this redesign, the owners uncovered the brick wall on the south façade of the property. The remaining brickwork throughout the property, including the front and rear wall and ironwork, was added by the Dyke family after they moved in in 2007.³²

²⁸ 1900 and 1910 census

²⁹ *General Alumni Catalogue of the University of Pennsylvania, 1922*, ed. W.J. Maxwell (Philadelphia: The University of Pennsylvania, 1922), 203.

³⁰ "U.S., World War I Draft Registration Cards, 1917-1918 about Errington Burnley Hume Jr.," *U.S., World War I Draft Registration Cards, 1917-1918* [database on-line], Registration State: *North Carolina*; Registration County: *Polk*; Roll: 1765931, Ancestry.com, 1917.

³¹ "Errington Burnley Hume," findagrave.com, last edited June 9, 2009, <http://www.findagrave.com/cgi-bin/fg.cgi?page=gr&GRid=38109132&ref=acom>.

³² "Anthony Toomer House," Festival of Houses and Gardens, Annual Tour of Houses given by the Historic Charleston Foundation, ca. 2002.