

Miles Brewton Kitchen/ Quarter/ Stable, 27 King Street, Charleston, SC

A First Look

Today I spent part of the morning looking at the 18th -century kitchen/quarter/stable at the Miles Brewton House. It is a complex and very informative building, little modernized, and it deserves a much closer look. What follows is a sketch of what I saw on this first visit.

The building is a large and early version of what became a conventional approach to housing for domestic work and slaves on elite city lots in Charleston, with work buildings and perhaps quarters on the first floor and all quarters on the shorter floor above. Here it is pulled up to the street frontage, a position that allowed for the east (front) space to be used as a carriage house, after remodeling of the facade in the first half of the 19th century. The apparent presence of a cellar that once extended under the east end indicates that originally the first floor there was even with those of its neighbors to the west (rear), so the carriage house space originally had a different function.

The long (roughly 65') south front, facing the side of the main house and of the entrance courtyard, has eight first-floor openings that give a visitor the first indications of what is inside. There is now a representative arrangement of alternating windows and doors, but originally there were only three doors and five windows, the former providing direct entrance into three first-floor rooms and indirectly into the fourth, at the east end. The westernmost (left end) door leads to a cook room lighted by two

windows, one in the west end wall. A 6'4" by 3'1" segmental headed work fireplace with an early wrought-iron crane and trammel bar is located in the north wall, with what looks like a 19th-century oven to the east and the vaulted niche below what was probably an original oven to the west. The latter oven now opens into an elevated and covered way outside, to the west, but the brickwork around the mouth and above the niche were rebuilt, perhaps late in the 19th century, so I assume the oven was originally operated from the less public cook room. The three brick walls and ceiling frames of the cook room are now exposed but there are traces of plaster on both. What looks from a distance like rose-head-nails remain from lath overhead, and window and door lintels are distressed to hold plaster, so I assume the room was originally plastered.

A planed and beaded vertical-board wall now separates the cook room from what has long been called the laundry, to east (right), but this has been reset and it is not clear where and even if the two spaces were originally partitioned. Certainly the spaces would have been separate if the 6'5½" by 3'1" "laundry" fireplace --with another crane, several inches shorter-- was planned for washing. But, I wonder if both fireplaces were not intended for cooking, especially in light of what appears to be an early, perhaps original, oven flue visible inside the fireplace, piercing the east (right) side of the main flu. If indeed both fireplaces were planned for cooking on a grand scale, the space could have been left open from the west end wall to the brick partition, and lighted by a row of three south windows as well as one on the west. The two original doorways into the space argue for a partition, but an original trimmer (modern term is header) for the stairway

encloses a full 7' width between the two fireplaces, suggesting a single stair to the quarters at the west end of the building, rising from the work space.

The present western doorway into the laundry was cut down from a window when a narrow (3'2") north-south passage was created to provide independent access to the second-floor quarters in the first half of the 19th century, perhaps about 1820-40.

Much of the old plaster remains in the laundry room, and here there clearly are rose-head lath nails in the unplanned joists overhead. Early plaster on the brick partition outline three rows of shelves (tops 5'1", 6', and 6' 10³/₄" from the floor, stanchions, and a dresser (top 3'), all reminiscent of the shelves and dresser indicated by ghosts on the walls of the Heyward kitchen/ laundry/ quarters at 87 Church Street.

The easternmost doorway leads into a room with a corner heating fireplace that probably suggests use for quarters or a servants' wall. Interestingly, there is a small original window opening beside the fireplace in the north wall, otherwise unpierced. There is also an old door frame lapped into a joist 13'4" east of the brick partition, where the floor drops to street level for the two carriage bays. I suspect that the door was part of a partition installed when the carriage space was created, perhaps at the same time as the work space and the quarter access was rearranged in the first half of the 19th century.

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The ghost of a stair rising near the south end of the brick partition shows how occupants reached the upper floor, probably after the remodeling.

Albert Simons' plan of the Miles Brewton complex published in Simons and Lapham, Charleston (1927) shows a partition with two doorways just west of the easternmost doorway, creating a second passage from the room with the corner fireplace. I left before seeing evidence for this but assume it was a late addition, given what it does to the space. This as well as the very important upper floor will wait for another visit.

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June 29, 1997

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Notes for Future Visit:

- Add a brief section on the exterior, including nature of the widows.
- Review evidence for original first-floor plan, especially the original east (front) stair location.
- Look at the upper floor.
- Photograph interior, including room of Sam McClary, who moved to elsewhere on King St. [check] about 1995 [check], preferably large-format, given the unremodeled character of the building.
- Look at the cellar.
- Consider drawing plans of the 1st and 2nd floors.