

## The Inventory of John Faucheraud Grimke & Furnishings Plan of 321 East Bay Street



*Blake-Grimke House circa 1941*

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## **Life and Family of John F. Grimke**

John Faucheraud Grimke was born in Charleston, South Carolina on December 16, 1752.

He was the son of the merchant/jeweler John Paul Grimke and Mary Faucheraud.<sup>1</sup> He was educated in Cambridge at Trinity College receiving a Bachelor of Arts degree. Following his time at Cambridge, Grimke returned to Charleston in 1774 and married Mary Smith. From this marriage came fourteen children, two of which were Sarah and Angelina who would later become famed abolitionists.<sup>2</sup>

During the Revolutionary War John F. Grimke entered the Regiment of Artillery as a Lieutenant. He was present at the Battle of Stono, the siege of Savannah, and the fall of Charleston. Following his imprisonment in March of 1781, Grimke joined Nathanael Greene's Continental Line for the duration of the War.<sup>3</sup>

Later in his life Grimke was elected to the Fourth and Fifth General Assemblies. Subsequent to his service in the General Assembly, he was made Associate Justice of the Court of Common Pleas and General Sessions in March of 1783. He was then elected to the Sixth, Seventh, and Eighth General Assemblies where he served as Speaker of the House in the Sixth.<sup>4</sup>

He voted at the state convention for ratification of the federal constitution in 1788. Grimke was made Senior Associate Judge in 1799 serving in this position until his death. Several sources claim Grimke was not easy to get along with and was not popular in his circuit in addition to being the subject of an unsuccessful impeachment attempt in 1811.<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Edgar, Walter, ed. The South Carolina Encyclopedia. Columbia: University of South Carolina Press, 2006. p. 408.

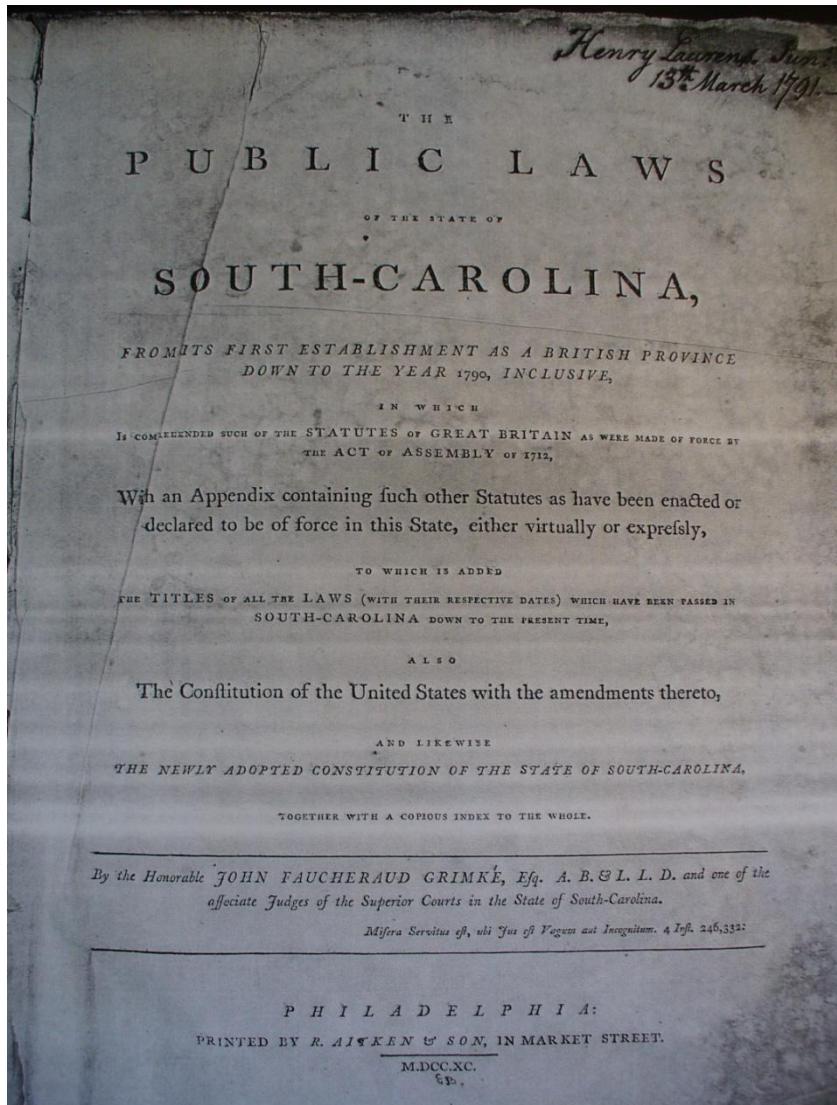
<sup>2</sup> Ibid.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid.

<sup>4</sup> Ibid.

<sup>5</sup> Ibid.

Grimke was given an honorary Doctor of Laws in 1789 by the College of New Jersey, now known as Princeton. Several treatises he wrote include *Revised Edition of the Laws of South Carolina*, *Duty of the Justice of the Peace*, *Public Laws of South Carolina*, and *Duty of Executors and Administrators*.<sup>6</sup>



**Title page of Judge John F. Grimke's *The Public Laws of the State of South Carolina* signed in the upper right-hand corner by Henry Laurens 1791  
Courtesy of the Charleston Library Society**

<sup>6</sup> Ibid.

John F. Grimke was also a member of the Charleston Library Society, the South Carolina Society, the Society of the Cincinnati, Vestry of St. Philip's Church, President of the Catawba Canal Company, and Commissioner for the rebuilding of the Charleston Courthouse.<sup>7</sup>

Along with his dwelling located at 321 East Bay Street, Grimke also had plantations on the Tyger River and Belmont plantation in the Union District of South Carolina. Grimke died on August 9, 1819 from complications arising from an illness he was stricken with for over a year.<sup>8</sup>

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<sup>7</sup> Ibid.

<sup>8</sup> Ibid.

## History of 321 East Bay Street

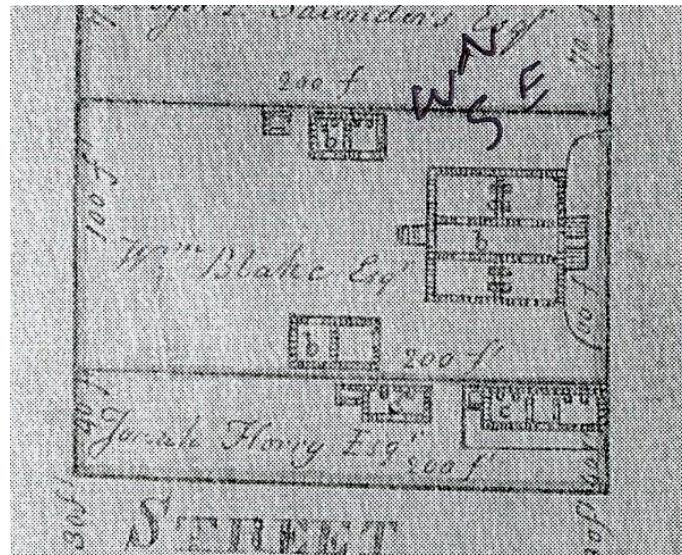
The house located at 321 East Bay Street, otherwise known as the Blake-Grimke House, has been through several notable changes in its history. This house was constructed prior to 1789 by one of the wealthiest slave owners in South Carolina, William Blake. Blake came to acquire extensive holdings in the low country later in his life. The following chain of title illustrates the various individuals that have occupied the house since its construction:

- William Blake – pre-1789 – date unknown
- John F. Grimke (given to son Henry upon his death) – date unknown – 1839
- Henry Grimke – 1819 – 1839
- Mary A. Faber – 1839 – 1850
- John E. Bonneau – 1850 – 1862
- Charles O. Witte – 1862 – 1877
- George O. Witte & John B. Reeves – 1877 – 1908
- Belle White Mitchell – 1908 – 1941
- Louis E. Storen – 1941 – 1942
- Ruth V. Orvin – 1942 – 1954
- W. Y. Scarborough – 1954 – 1955
- Atlantic Coast Life Insurance 1955 – 1965
- Historic Charleston Foundation 1965 – 1970s
- Citizens and Southern National Bank 1970s - 1990s
- Pierce, Herns, Sloane, and Mcleod Lawfirm- present<sup>9</sup>

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<sup>9</sup> Some of the information gathered for the chain of title was previously recorded at the Historic Charleston Foundation while other portions of the chain of title were collected from the Register Mesne Conveyance Office in Charleston, South Carolina. Several dates could not be determined due to a lack of evidence in the records for the house.

In a 1795 plat of Gadsden's Middlesex, the house is illustrated as being a symmetrical double house with three outbuildings which are located on the northwestern and southwestern portions of the property.



1795 plat showing 321 East Bay<sup>10</sup>

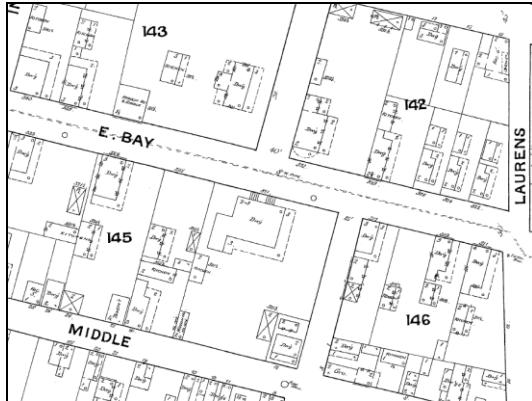


HOUSE SHOWN AFTER EXTERIOR RESTORATION  
Residence was constructed before 1789 (Staff Photo by Burbage)

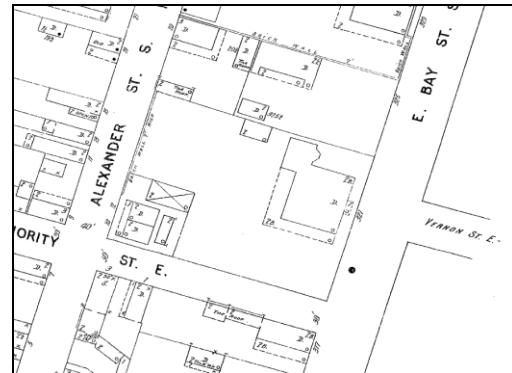
Blake-Grimke House following restoration in 1969  
Photo courtesy of the *Post and Courier*

<sup>10</sup> Poston, Jonathan H. The Buildings of Charleston. Columbia: University of South Carolina Press, 1997. p. 433.

The house had an addition to its southern side circa 1850 and was renovated in the late 1960's.<sup>11</sup> Sanborn Maps from 1888-1951 highlight the extension of the lot lines southward, newly constructed dependencies in the southwestern corner of the properties, along with several additions to the house's exterior.



1888 Sanborn



1902 Sanborn



1902-1944 Sanborn



1955 Sanborn

The 1795 plat illustrates front and rear staircases that are still extant outside of the house. The outbuildings in the Sanborn Maps have been taken down or destroyed, while the majority of

<sup>11</sup> Ibid. pp. 433-434.

the original house is still in fair condition. The house's interiors have been divided over the years to accommodate renters as well as new offices for various businesses. The following photographs provide evidence of the way the house has appeared from 1941 to the present.



The DILAPIDATED OLD HOME now is being repaired for use as apartments. It once was the home of Judge Faucherard Grimke, in a neighborhood then known as Gadsden's Green, not to be confused with the other Gadsden's Green on the west side of town where a government housing project is being erected.

**Blake-Grimke House 1941**

*Post and Courier*



DWELLING HAS HAD DISTINGUISHED TENANTS AND OWNERS

**Blake-Grimke House 1968**  
*Post and Courier*



**BLAKE HOUSE PORCHES REMOVED IN RESTORATION**  
Dwelling is shown when cut into slum apartments. (Staff Photo by Evans)

**Blake-Grimke House 1969 prior to restoration**  
*Post and Courier*

For the purpose of the John F. Grimke house museum it would not be appropriate to add the earlier additions back on to the house in an attempt to show the past modifications. This would not be the case had the additions been left on the house. In order to reflect the house's Federal period interiors, any modern additions will be removed in order to highlight the details of its historic interiors. During the latter part of the 18<sup>th</sup> century there were no bathrooms, large closets, or kitchens inside the house. In order to portray a truly Federal period interior furnishings plan these new amenities will be removed along with those previously mentioned.

## Architecture and Furnishings of the late 18<sup>th</sup> Century

The Federal style of architecture (1780-1850) was the first stage of what is known as the Neoclassical period in America. Neoclassicism was a reinterpretation of classical architecture. Palladian elements from the earlier Georgian style were abandoned for elements originating in classical Roman domestic buildings. These buildings had been unearthed by archaeologists of the mid to late 18<sup>th</sup> century which helped spawn this classical revival in America.<sup>12</sup>

This style was well known by the late 1780's. It is renowned for its "attenuated forms, curved or elliptical features and sophistication of details: polygonal or curvilinear bays, concealed hipped roofs behind balustrades, elongated windows with large panes and thin glazing bars, decorated cornices, and entry porches with thin, tapered columns."<sup>13</sup>

Grander rooms in Federal period houses tended to incorporate open plans containing a subbase attenuated with sticking or paneling, as well as extremely ornate plastering found around cornices, ceiling medallions, and fireplace mantels. Several well known architects of this Period with houses in America include Robert and James Adam, William Pain, Charles Bulfinch, and Gabriel Manigault who was a resident of Charleston.<sup>14</sup>

Typically Federal houses incorporated several different building materials. Some architects chose to use stone or brick, others incorporated wood into their designs and more often than not all three materials would be incorporated into some facet of a house. This type of architecture uses these materials to offer somewhat of a refined and ornate style that the owner could show off to visitors.<sup>15</sup>

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<sup>12</sup> Calloway, Stephen, and Elizabeth Cromley, eds. The Elements of Style: A Practical Encyclopedia of Interior Architectural Details From 1484 to the Present. New York: Simon and Schuster, 1991. p. 204.

<sup>13</sup> Ibid.

<sup>14</sup> Ibid. p.205.

<sup>15</sup> Foster, Gerald. American Houses: A Field Guide to the Architecture of the Home. New York, Houghton Mifflin Company, 2004. p. 224.

The form of most Federal period houses follows a 5-bay symmetrical pattern which might include 2 or 3 stories on a raised basement. The roof is mainly low pitched and hipped which may appear to be flat from the ground. There are some cases where a Federal period house may have a steeply pitched roof with dormers. Chimneys on these houses are commonly at either end, but are not always symmetrically oriented with the plan. Most houses contain high ceilings, with the exception of those on the third floor which may be lower.<sup>16</sup>

Federal period house's interiors and stylistic forms follow those of the previously mentioned architects, especially Robert Adam. Most often Federal houses offer simple flat walls with evenly spaced double hung window sash incorporating thin muntins between larger panes of glass. Inset panels are often found under these windows with sticking or other applied decoration. In addition, this period of architecture includes elegant and refined composition that may be applied to mantels and cornices.<sup>17</sup>

Various interior decorative elements of this period might include whale oil burning Argand lamps, candles with chandeliers, in addition to ornate busts and statues that add to the other neoclassical forms found throughout this kind of architectural style. Floors were often left uncovered, with the exception of painted floor cloths, and carpets imported from other countries. Federal period mantels are some of the most ornate in America. They are often decorated with compositional ornament depicting Greek gods and goddesses or images that are popular within a certain region of America.<sup>18</sup>

Furniture of this period is on the same scale as the decorative elements found on the interiors of Federal style houses. Classical ornament originating from the designs of European

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<sup>16</sup> Ibid. p. 222.

<sup>17</sup> Ibid.

<sup>18</sup> Calloway, Stephen, and Elizabeth Cromley, eds. The Elements of Style: A Practical Encyclopedia of Interior Architectural Details From 1484 to the Present. New York: Simon and Schuster, 1991. p. 204.

designers of the time can be found on the furniture. Notable European furniture designers include Hepplewhite, Adam, as well as Sheraton. Pattern books of this period offered stylistic elements which led to more of the same furniture construction patterns and designs coming from a variety of furniture designers.<sup>19</sup>

Furniture in Charleston during the Federal period was similar to that which was being constructed in England during the same time. Several Charleston furniture makers were able to compete with English makers. By the end of the 1780's there was a shift in ideals individuals had in furniture. Before this period the notion of furniture being useful was embraced, while the beginning of the Federal period in Charleston brought about a shift from use to ornament with regards to furniture. During this time individuals were beginning to collect antiques which had become popular following the excavations at Herculaneum and Pompeii.<sup>20</sup>

The idea of antiques being introduced into Charleston during this time would fit perfectly into the furnishings plan for the John F. Grimke House Museum along with several notable pieces that were current during the Federal period in Charleston. This furnishings plan will illustrate how the hierarchy of rooms parallels the hierarchy of furniture used throughout the house.

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<sup>19</sup> Carl, M. Allison, *An Assessment of English Interior Furniture Imports Into Charleston, South Carolina, 1760-1800*, Journal of Early Southern Decorative Arts, November 1985, Vol. XI, No. 2, MESDA. P. 1-2.

<sup>20</sup> Rogers, George C., Jr. *Changes in Taste in the eighteenth Century: A Shift from the Useful to the Ornamental*. Journal of Early Southern Decorative Arts, May 1982, Vol. VIII, No. 1, MESDA. P. 11-12.