

Stable-Carriage House-Quarters Buildings –Mary Fesak

Stable-Carriage House-Quarters buildings were once common structures in Charleston's urban landscape during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. As the horse and carriage became obsolete during the early-twentieth century, many of the buildings designed to house them disappeared from the built environment. Like kitchen-laundry-quarters buildings, stable-carriage house-quarters were located in the work yard behind the main house. The placement of the stable-carriage house-quarters on the lot varied. While no systematic study has been undertaken, many of the eighteenth-century properties on tour had a stable building located across the yard from the kitchen including the George Sommers House, the Branford-Horry House, and the George Eveleigh House. Examples of this configuration that survive to the present include the Heyward-Washington House and Aiken-Rhett House.¹ By the nineteenth century, some property owners used a linear arrangement, locating the stable-carriage house-quarters directly behind the kitchen-laundry-quarters. Nathaniel Russell used this configuration, although most of his stable building was lost in the 1886 earthquake.² Corner lots like the Branford-Horry House and Aiken-Rhett House had stable buildings located on the street, while the kitchen buildings stood opposite on the interior of the lot. Property owners likely chose this layout because it made the stables and carriage house more accessible from the street.

Surviving stable-carriage house-quarters have frequently had extensive structural modifications to convert them into garages or residences. While adaptive reuse has kept stable-carriage house-quarters buildings from being demolished, many of the buildings' features that enable architectural historians to "read" the original divisions and usages of space have been removed or covered. Stable-carriage house-quarters buildings appear to have had two or three rooms on the ground floor, as well as a hayloft and one or two rooms for enslaved people upstairs. One of the rooms on the ground floor contained stalls for horses. The stable rooms were characterized by large numbers of vents or openings in their masonry walls for ventilation. The room for carriages often had wood flooring and fewer vents. Sometimes the stables also had wood flooring with drainage for waste. Stable-carriage house-quarters could have separate tack rooms like the Miles Brewton House and the Heyward-Washington House, or tack could be stored in the room that housed carriages.³ The stable-carriage house-quarters at the Aiken-Rhett House exemplifies the two-room layout. The owners kept the carriages in the south room and the horses in the north room. A central staircase provided access to a room for slaves above the carriage house and the hayloft above the stable. The original layout of the stable-carriage house-quarters at the Branford-Horry House is more difficult to discern since it has been used as a residence since the 1860s. The southern room likely housed horses, while the northern room probably stored the carriage and possibly tack. The center room may have been a passage used for the preparation of the horses and carriage or as a tack room. An exterior staircase provided access to the south room on the second floor. The room above the stable would likely have been used as a hayloft, while

¹ The stable-carriage house at the Heyward-Washington House did not contain quarters. The Aiken-Rhett House was constructed in the nineteenth century, but it likely follows this configuration because of the corner lot.

² Surviving elements of the carriage house have been incorporated into visitor facilities.

³ Martha A. Zierden and Elizabeth J. Reitz, *Charleston through the Eighteenth Century: Archaeology at the Heyward-Washington House and Stable*, The Charleston Museum Archaeology Reports, May 2007, 100.

one or two rooms to the north were inhabited by slaves. The room or rooms would have been heated by fireplaces in the chimney. It is unclear if there was a fireplace on the ground floor in the carriage room. The carriage house at the Aiken-Rhett House did not have a fireplace, although the slave quarters above did. However, it was not unusual for there to be a heat source in carriage rooms by the mid-nineteenth century, so it is possible that there was a fireplace.

Bibliography

Zierden, Martha A. and Elizabeth J. Reitz. *Charleston through the Eighteenth Century: Archaeology at the Heyward-Washington House and Stable*. The Charleston Museum Archaeology Reports, May 2007.