

## JOHN FULLERTON HOUSE

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**Constructed 1772-1773**

**15 Legare Street**

**Builder: John Fullerton**

The house at 15 Legare Street, believed to have been built in 1772-1773, is commonly known as the John Fullerton House. It is important because of its age, its historical associations and its architecture. Early maps indicate there were few major structures along the sandy street, then known as Johnston Street, when in 1772 John Fullerton and his wife Elizabeth acquired eighty feet of frontage from William Gibbes. Legal records indicate that during the next few years the Fullerton sold parcels of this land: the first was sold to the contractor John Bennett in November, 1776, *and* another, presumably with the recently completed residence, for a much larger sum to the merchant George Cook in May, 1777. The frequency of these transactions and the undeveloped nature of the area *at that time* have led to the common assumption among historians that this house was built primarily as a speculative venture. Regardless of the motive, the house clearly was a significant addition to the community.

The house remains as one of fewer than 75 pre-revolutionary War buildings in Charleston. Therefore, its age alone denotes special importance. The house is also noteworthy to the history of the community by virtue of association with both important persons and events. The earliest important historical association is with the building's first owner and builder, John Fullerton. An accomplished carpenter from Scotland, Fullerton (1734?-1779) is credited with having built a number of fine houses in Charleston. In addition to his own house at 15 Legare Street, he is known to have worked extensively at the Independent Congregational Church in 1774 and 1776, having been *paid for* framing and flooring, interior and exterior cornices, and other finish work. The vestry books at Saint Michael's Church record that his firm of Miller and Fullerton also had contracted to build the rectory at 39 Meeting Street in 1766-1767. According to an 1822 account by Miller's grandson, William Simmons, Fullerton also constructed the John Ashe House at 32 South Battery, the Edward Rutledge House at 117 Broad Street, and the David Ramsay House at 92 Broad.

This prolific builder also found time to serve in the Second and Third General Assemblies of *the* new state from 1776 to 1779. Earlier, he had been active as one of the "Sons of Liberty" who met in Mazyck's pasture in 1766 to celebrate the repeal of the Stamp Act.

Local tradition holds that during the British occupation of the city, the Fullerton House was commandeered for officer's quarters. The commanding officers were in residences across the street immediately to the east at 27 King Street, the Miles Brewton house. (The houses now on the east side of Legare Street were built in the 1850s from parcels of the original Brewton property.)

The house at 15 Legare is also important because of its architecture. It is a fine example of the early Charleston "single house," that distinctive residential type that orients the main facade of the structure towards a side garden with the end towards the street. Though added to and modified over its two centuries, the Fullerton House retains much of its original character.

The imposing main house consists of a frame, three-story single house set at the east property line which abuts the city street now known as Legare Street. The house is raised atop a brick perimeter wall which also creates a ground floor service area. The main entrance to the house is from the south. The floor plan is one room deep with two major rooms per floor served by a central stair hall. A bell cast gable roof tops the structure. Tabernacle frames, a frequent decorative motif of pre-Revolutionary Charleston houses, adorn the first- and second-floor windows of the street elevation, while simple consoles support the window sills of the third-floor and the single attic-level gable window.

Of the interior, the most outstanding element is the chimney piece of the second floor parlor. The sawn fretwork of the mantel and overmantel is the same as that of the craftsman Thomas Elfe. (The business journal of Thomas Elfe records the sale of fretwork to John Fullerton in 1774.) The style of the handsome consoles and miniature trusses of this chimney piece indicates a link to the as-yet-unidentified master carver known now only as "the Sommers carver" because of his known work at several Charleston houses including the Humphrey Sommers House. However, the lack of sophistication in the chisel marks suggests the mantel at 15

Legare was surely carved by one of his journeymen/apprentices.

Dating from about the same initial construction period as the main house is the kitchen building, actually a combined kitchen/servants' quarters. Initially detached, it is a two-story structure with cooking and food preparation areas on the first floor and living quarters on the second.

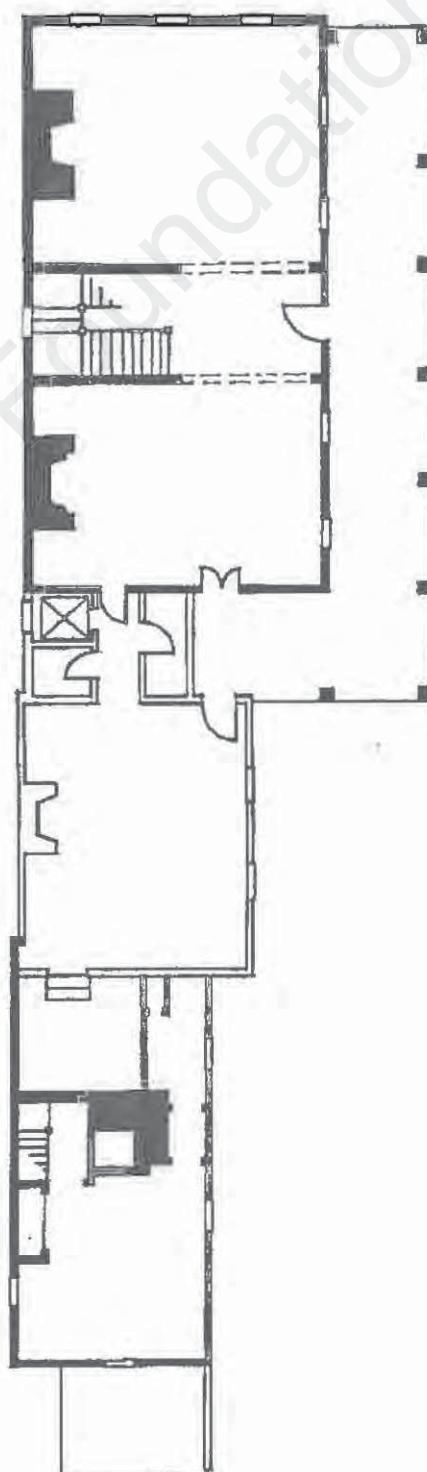
The first major change to the complex appears to date from the early nineteenth century. The style of the architectural elements and paint analysis conducted during the 1990 restoration place the addition of the piazza between c. 1800 and c. 1810. A two-story neoclassical piazza was added to the west and south elevations of the main house while an entry doorway to the street. Recent investigations indicate that the central window on the second level of the south facade was converted to a doorway at this time; its door matches the replacement Federal Period door immediately below. The bricks and mortar of the piazza piers are different from those of the perimeter brick wall supporting the original house. It appears that the exterior face of the piers and the east face of the perimeter wall were stuccoed and struck in a pattern to resemble an ashlar stone when the piazza was added.

Perhaps occurring at the same time or soon thereafter was the installation of the dormers on the north and south roof slopes of the original house. At attic or third-floor window was added to the rear or west gable end as well. Again, the stylistic elements and paint analysis of these sashes and interior trim suggest a probable construction period of c. 1810-1820.

A later remodeling replaced the two single-leaf interior doorways off the second-floor hall with large folding doors, effectively converting the upper level of the house into one large room. The doors and trim of the enlarged doorways are Greek Revival in style, dating to the 1840s.

The original Georgian window sashes of the main house were replaced sometime in the middle to late nineteenth century. Fortunately, one pair of these Georgian sashes survives. These sashes originated in the west elevation of the second-floor west room and were moved when the piazza was later enclosed. These sashes were the models for the reconstructed sashes installed during the 1990 restoration.

Very late in the nineteenth century, a two-story addition was built between the house and the old kitchen building. This configuration is essentially what is present today. In 1985 the grounds were extensively landscaped and a swimming pool added. In 1990 when the Georgian sashes were reconstructed, their original paneled shutters were found in a garden room beneath the piazza (where they were used to create walls) and reinstalled on the first level of the main house. The fixed shutters of the second level date to the early nineteenth century; these shutters were in place and were retained. The exterior color scheme of the kitchen building and addition are of the period of the kitchen modifications; the colors of the main house exterior are the original.



*John Fullerton House, first floorplan.* Measured and drawn by Phillips and Oppermann, architects