

Text of Part One Application, 223 Bennett Street

The Eliza Hibben Leland House at 223 Bennett Street is a ca. 1809 two-story frame residence with a two-tier front porch across the wide front façade, a low hipped roof, and two brick exterior chimneys centered on the front rooms of the four-room plan. The main entry and fanlight are set in a narrow round-arched surround, the second-floor entry has a simple surround, and the symmetrically placed single windows have double-hung 9/9 sash. The exterior is clad in weatherboard, roofing is standing-seam terne metal, and the shallow excavated foundation is brick (brick piers under the porch).

Exterior alterations in the late-1940s/early 1950s (completed by 1954) were replacement porch posts and rails, enclosing the foundation beneath the porch, brick front steps to replace the earlier entry steps at the east end of the porch, and replacement of an early rear structure. The structure that was removed in the 1950s was first used as a house for domestic slaves, then used as the cooking kitchen attached to the main house with an enclosed breezeway. A narrow connector was retained when a three-room apartment cottage replaced the early cabin. In 1992, the connector between house and rear addition was widened and a side porch added along the east.

The four-room interior has two south-facing rooms divided by the entry/stairhall, and shallower rear rooms. The principal first-floor rooms retain chair rails, deep baseboards, wood cornices, and wood mantels and shelves. Alterations generally date to 1992: a large cased opening between the west rooms (living and den), passage from entry hall to 1950s blocked as closet and pantry, and modern den in the reworked rear connector. The rear apartment – den, kitchen, bedrooms – retains midcentury finishes.

Significance

The Eliza Hibben Leland House, 223 Bennett Street, is a fine example of an early 19th-century residence in the waterfront village of Mount Pleasant. It retains integrity of location, design, setting, materials, workmanship, feeling, and association, and contributes to the significance of the Mount Pleasant Historic District.

Historical background

In 1803, James Hibben bought Mount Pleasant Plantation from the Estate of Jacob Motte and laid out streets and 35 building lots. 223 Bennett Street stands on Hibben's Lot #2, a square of land fronting 255' on Bennett Street and extending more than 400' to the Charleston Harbor waterfront. Hibben had the house built in 1809 as a residence for his eldest daughter Eliza upon her marriage to Aaron Leland (1787-1871), a schoolteacher who became a Presbyterian minister. The couple kept the property while Leland pastored First Scots Church (Charleston), then James Island Presbyterian Church. In 1833, Leland was appointed to the faculty of Columbia Theological Seminary, and the family moved to Columbia. In 1840, Elizabeth Hamlin (d. 1857) and Susan Hamlin (d. 1875), unmarried daughters of Thomas Hamlin, bought the house and Lot 2. A few years later, the sisters gave their nephews J. T. H. White and George

White a section of the lot along Bennett Street and the present lane leading to 223 Bennett Street. The ca. 1850 masonry house on the White's lot is 217 Bennett Street today.

In 1877, John L. Girardeau (1825-1898) bought the Hamlin property from the estates of the Hamlin sisters. Girardeau was married to Sarah Hamlin, a niece of the previous owners. Another Presbyterian minister, Girardeau was then on the faculty of Columbia Theological Seminary, so it is not known whether the family rented out their Mount Pleasant house or kept it as a part-time residence; Girardeau sold it in 1887. Another subdivision of the lot in 1898 allowed construction of today's 225 Bennett Street under separate ownership, leaving the Leland House to occupy the large waterfront lot accessed by a 10' lane from Bennett Street.

From 1912 until 1934, Charlestonian James P. Allen owned 223 Bennett Street, using it as a rental house. When Col. Aiken Simons and his wife, Eliza Dunkin Simons, bought the property in 1935, it was described as a 9-room dwelling with servants' quarters and garage on a two-acre parcel. The buyers announced plans to renovate it for occupancy as a summer residence. Already in poor health, Aiken Simons died only a few years later, in 1939.

After her 1942 remarriage, in 1945 Eliza Dunkin Simons Kammerer conveyed 223 Bennett Street for \$5 to T. Grange Simons (1882-1975), her late husband's brother. He and his wife, Helen Holmes Simons, soon occupied it as their full-time residence. In the early 1950s, the former slave cabin was replaced by a cottage built for Mrs. Simons's sister, Mildred Holmes (d. 1977). In 1978, F. H. Simons, a son of Helen and T. Grange Simons, conveyed his half-interest in the property to his brother, also T. Grange Simons, who lives there now.