

Summary of Historic American Buildings (HABS) survey done on November 14, 1966. FLA 192

This document is a 1966 Historic American Buildings Survey record for Captain Francis Watlington's home, traditionally known as the oldest house in Key West, located at 322 Duval Street and believed to have been built around 1825 and moved to its present site in 1832. It traces the chain of title from John W. Simonton's 1834 sale of Lot 1, Square 25, through Richard W. Cussans, William M. Wall, Nicholas D. Herder, and finally to Emeline Watlington in 1866, after which the property remained in the Watlington family, with Earl Johnson listed as owner and occupant in 1966.

The historian's worksheet notes that the house may have been built by the U.S. government for Commodore David Porter's anti-piracy squadron, but also cites evidence that Cussans was a carpenter and property owner on Whitehead Street in 1829, suggesting a local builder origin. It records minimal but notable alterations, including enclosure of portions of the rear porch to create Captain Watlington's office with a private entrance, addition of a second screened porch, and replacement of the original rectangular front porch balusters with simple X-shaped cross supports. The most distinctive exterior feature is identified as the three dormer windows on the street façade, each a different size and visually dominant, with later annotation noting that at least one, probably two, were enlarged according to old photographs.

The architect's worksheet describes the building as a New England-Bahamian type house, scaled to a modest human stature, in fair condition, one and one-half stories high, two bays wide, rectangular in plan (approximately 40 by 45 feet), and set on quarried lime rock and brick piers with weathered, unpainted lapped wood siding. It has a full-width front porch, no chimneys, simple paneled doors with double-leaf shutters, double-hung windows with shutters, and an A-frame roof clad interne metal shingles, with the three oversized front dormers again emphasized as the dominant element. Inside, a small central hall and stair serve rooms opening off it on the first floor and a similar half-story attic above; finishes are plain—4-inch tongue-and-groove wood flooring, painted exposed siding on walls and ceilings, simple paneled doors, minimal decorative trim, simple period hardware, and no original lighting or heating.

The site section notes that the house fronts directly on Duval Street, facing east, elevated on its piers, and is accompanied by utilitarian outbuildings providing service and servants' quarters, including a detached kitchen with a large brick fireplace and large trees at the rear of the lot. The document identifies Captain Watlington as an early Key West settler and prominent maritime pilot involved with both merchant shipping and wrecking, and it lists primary sources (county deeds, U.S. census and tax rolls) and secondary published works on Key West, along with an interview with owner Earl Johnson, as the basis for the survey.