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PAWLEY HOUSE REVISITED

by

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INTRODUCTION

The Pawley House, as described in the report by Stanley South, exhibits many 18th century features, and through the kindness of Mr. Calhoun we had an additional opportunity to examine the structure on the weekend of April 27-30. Our objectives, in addition to a very enjoyable weekend at the beach, were to excavate an additional test pit near the house and to make a series of drawings showing the original timber frame and construction details which were not possible on the first trip. The test pit was excavated in order to determine the original ground surface and to recover an artifact sample to help substantiate the architectural construction date. A floor level plan and a plan of the interior north wall were nearly completed during the weekend but several minor omissions not noticed at the time, such as the spacing of the original porch support posts, have caused some difficulty. A plan was begun of the west wall timber pattern and completed up to the second floor level where the interior tongue and groove sheathing prevented further close investigation.

Several of the features noted by South warrant additional comment although the most pertinent characteristics have already been described.

THE CHIMNEY

The foundation of the chimney at present ground level measures 5.8 feet square and the arms of the "H" are 1.2 feet thick. The mortar appears to be harder as well as whiter than that used for the footings but this may be due entirely to the more protected environment under the center of the structure. The bricks used in the Roman arches supporting the first floor hearths are identical to those used in the rest of the chimney

and footings. One of the few areas in the structure where preservation might become a problem was noted on each side of the chimney foundation where the 9" x 9" central partition wall sill extends through the brick work. A combination of factors appear to have produced this problem, foremost of them being the seepage down the chimney walls and the naturally damp masonry in contact with the timber. Similar damage was noted at the southwest corner where the constant runoff from the roof has combined with the moist masonry to produce a bad environment for the sills.

THE FOOTINGS

The brick footings, as described by South, average 1.5 feet by 3.0 feet and are put up in common bond. The outer two footings on both the east and west ends of the original structure are of "L" form, indicating that the north and south porches are original and the east porch is not. Test Pit One, located on the south side of the center south brick footing provided information on the original ground surface at the time the structure was built. The original ground surface was located at 1.0 feet below the present surface at this point and scattered oyster shells were associated with it. The builders trench for the brick footing extended to a depth of at least 2.6 feet below the present surface, where an extended basal or water table course was encountered. Further excavation was prevented by the rapid accumulation of water within the excavation and the tendency for the walls of the test pit to collapse due to seepage.

THE TIMBERING

The timbering of the Pawley House is heavy, with well executed joining.

The main sills, plates, and uprights are made of 9" x 9" straight sawn cypress. The south main sill is a single timber 40.2 feet long and although the north main sill is made up of two members, the 3 foot lap joint secured with multiple 1 1/2" dowels suggests a deliberate strengthening of the structure, perhaps to withstand the yearly threat of the hurricane. The braces and 4" x 4" studding spaced about 2 feet apart have never been covered on the interior as evidenced by the lack of nail-holes and straight saw marks are readily apparent on these as well as on the remaining original 1" plank clapboard present on the exterior. The floor joists, made up of 4" x 9" sawn timbers, joined flush with the upper surface of the sills, run from the north sill to the south sill without a summer beam present in either floor. As noted by Stanley South the lower portion of the stair, originally located on the back porch but now enclosed, was altered in both form and position during the roof raising alteration on the north side of the structure.

The illustrated timber plans exhibit the original form of the structure unless otherwise noted. Alterations were determined by the presence of cut nails, circular saw marks, and lack of joining in the more recent members. The windows and doors warrant a closer examination to determine construction details and proportions, even though the doors have been rehung a number of times and probably were not made for this structure.

CONCLUSION

The data recorded for this structure provide more structural information than many excavated ruins could produce, and in the event we excavate a structure with a similar foundation plan we will have a much better idea of the possible appearance of the perishable superstructure

of the building. The information gained from this house is an important contribution to our knowledge of 18th century houses and its apparently unique status as a beach house may lead to the discovery of other similar examples on the South Carolina coast worthy of study.