32 LEGARE | A HISTORIC *Timeline*

THE SWORDGATE HOUSE

1700

Solomon Legare obtained his first land grants for town lots and land outside of Charles Towne.

1739

Solomon Legare owned at least 500 acres. It is unclear when the original house was built, but it was first shown on a map in 1739. Solomon Legare Jr. built a tannery behind the location of today's Sword Gate House around this time,

1740

Legare Sr. gave the house to his son, Solomon Legare Jr. The deed outlined that the older man would be able to live in the house until he died.

1774

Solomon Legare Jr. died. His three sons inherited the property. His eldest son, Solomon Legare III "The Younger" inherited the family home. Research has not determined whether or not he lived in the home; it could have been rented or stood vacant while he owned it. The corner property had been rented to a store or tavern keeper. The middle secrion was an appropriate inheritance for Legare's son Daniel, who was a commission merchant and planter. Thomas Legare inherited the Easternmost parcel of land, where he may have already had his residence. He also received the Tannery Building and equipment along with four slaves.

1776

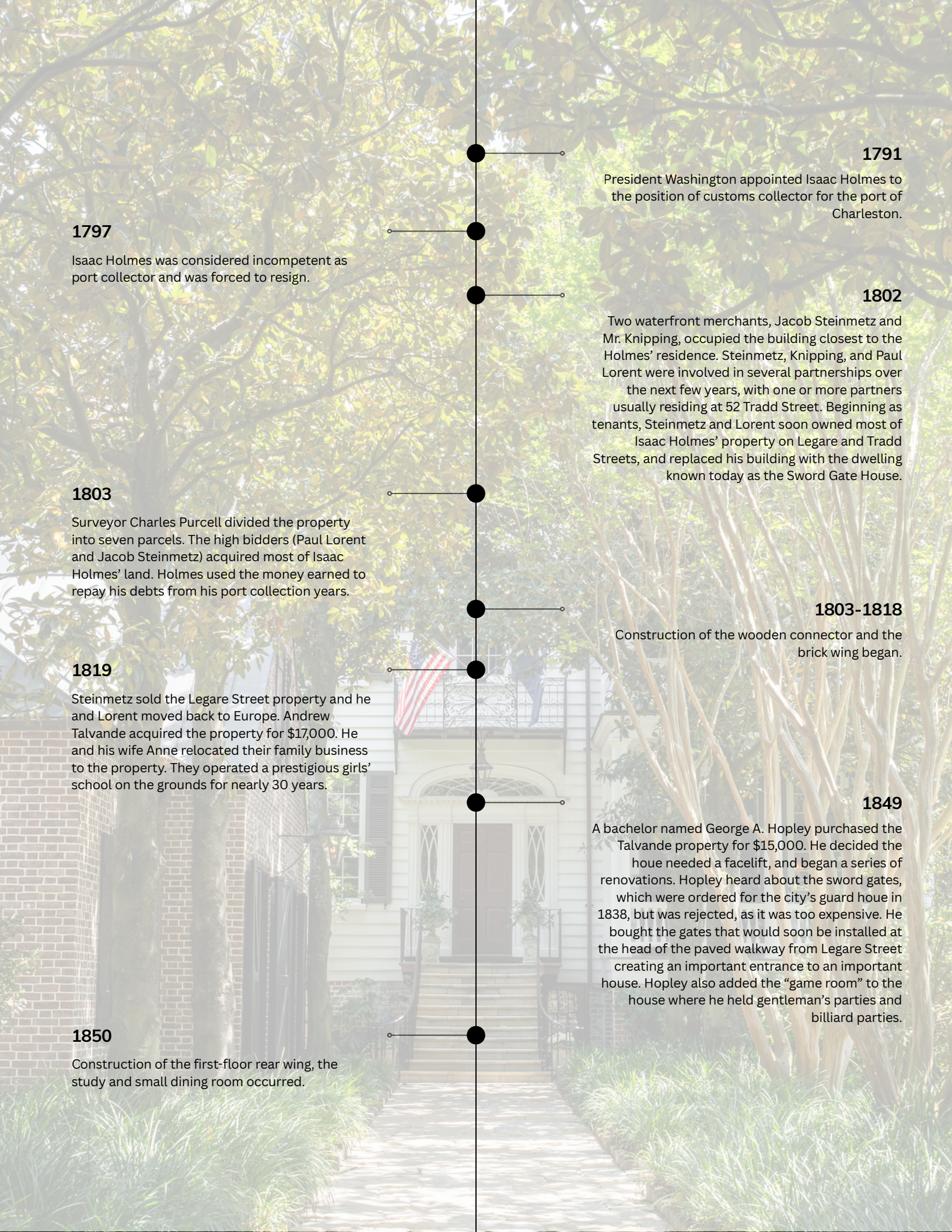
The British were repelled from Fort Moultrie. Charleston was the center of shipping and inland traffic for goods throughout the Southern and Mid-Atlantic colonies.

1780

Isaac Holmes, married to the daughter of Solomon Legare III, bought a 76-foot-wide lot on Tradd Street, part of the old Tannery property. Nearly a decade later, he divided the parcel into two and built rental houses. The British army occupied Charleston and identified Isaac Holmes as an enemy. He and his family were expelled to Philadelphia and were not allowed to return until 1783.

1790

The Holmes' moved to Legare and Tradd Streets in a house that has been lost, but the layout of the property remains. The Holmes property had access from two streets. The kitchen house and stable was on Tradd, at a right angle to the back of the house. The main house faced Legare across a deep front graden. The three-story, one-room southwest wing, with the drawing rooom, primary bedroom, and family room was erected.



1791

President Washington appointed Isaac Holmes to the position of customs collector for the port of Charleston.

1797

Isaac Holmes was considered incompetent as port collector and was forced to resign.

1802

Two waterfront merchants, Jacob Steinmetz and Mr. Knipping, occupied the building closest to the Holmes' residence. Steinmetz, Knipping, and Paul Lorent were involved in several partnerships over the next few years, with one or more partners usually residing at 52 Tradd Street. Beginning as tenants, Steinmetz and Lorent soon owned most of Isaac Holmes' property on Legare and Tradd Streets, and replaced his building with the dwelling known today as the Sword Gate House.

1803

Surveyor Charles Purcell divided the property into seven parcels. The high bidders (Paul Lorent and Jacob Steinmetz) acquired most of Isaac Holmes' land. Holmes used the money earned to repay his debts from his port collection years.

1803-1818

Construction of the wooden connector and the brick wing began.

1819

Steinmetz sold the Legare Street property and he and Lorent moved back to Europe. Andrew Talvande acquired the property for $17,000. He and his wife Anne relocated their family business to the property. They operated a prestigious girls' school on the grounds for nearly 30 years.

1849

A bachelor named George A. Hopley purchased the Talvande property for $15,000. He decided the houe needed a facelift, and began a series of renovations. Hopley heard about the sword gates, which were ordered for the city's guard houe in 1838, but was rejected, as it was too expensive. He bought the gates that would soon be installed at the head of the paved walkway from Legare Street creating an important entrance to an important house. Hopley also added the "game room" to the house where he held gentleman's parties and billiard parties.

1850

Construction of the first-floor rear wing, the study and small dining room occurred.

1853

William Adger bought the Sword Gate House for $25,000 (plus $800 for the furniture) after Hopley moved to Paris and was married. He was 1 of 4 sons of a wealthy businessman. After he purchased the property, he made improvements to the grounds, adding a 210-foot-deep lot facing Tradd Street, part of the original Legare tract. He lived in the house with his wife Margaret, and six children. William Adger died of smallpox leaving Margaret and her children with the Sword Gate property.

1856

Margaret Adger's brother-in-law purchaed the Sword Gate property from Margaret for $31,000.

1870

After the Civil War had ended, Robert guided his nephews (sons of William and Margaret Adger) through the purchase of the Pineapple Gate House, just a few houses down from the Sword Gate, for which they paid $15,000. Margaret came to live there with her sons.

1875

Robert Adger invested in another expansion of the Sword Gate property, paying $3,975 for two lots on Tradd Street west of the kitchen house. On the land was a two-story tenement house and three other multi-use brick buildings.

1881

As part of settling the finances of James Adger & Co., Robert Adger sold his home and moved to Meeting Street where he lived with his daughter until his death. He had continuted William's modernizations, and by 1881 the Sword Gate House boasted hot and cold running water, bathrooms, dressing rooms, a furnace, and hot air pipes. The grounds and conservatory were said to have been left in "fine condition." The property sold for only $11,000.

Charles H. Simonton, Adger's 51-year-old cousin and one of Charleston's respected attorneys purchased the property. He was a well-respected man serving in the state House of Representatives.

1886

One of the worst earthquakes to ever strike an American city shattered Charleston. The Sword Gate House's solidarity was tested, but it was not significantly damaged.

1893

Judge Simonton became the circuit judge for the Fourth United State Judicial Court.

1900

Judge Simonton sold the brick rental house on Tradd Street which established the boundaries of today's 34 Legare Street. The buyer, Richard S. Whaley, replaced all of the buildings with a new residence.

1904

After hearing a case in Raleigh, Simonton took the train to see a Philadelphia physician, who briefly hospitalized him, but Simonton died unexpectedly. After his wife passed just 11 months later, their daughter, Caroline Simonton Alston, inherited the Sword Gate House. She and her husband spent the next quarter century there.

1929

Faneuil Alston died and in July of that year, his widow Caroline sold the Sword Gate House to Mary Parsons.

1930

Less than a year later, Mary Parsons and her husband Edwin resold the Sword Gate House to Mrs. Jessie Lincoln Randolph, a granddaughter of President Abraham Lincoln, who lived in Washington and planned to use the property as a seasonal residence.

1934

Mrs. Randolph conveyed the Sword Gate to her daughter, Mary Lincoln Beckwith, who lived in Vermont. During her ownership, Margaret Barnwell acted as her caretaker.

1941

Mrs. Barnwell and several neighbors convinced Mary Beckwith to open the house to the paying public in support of the British war relief.

1949

In April, Charletonians, Henry T. and Frances Grimball Gaud purchased the property and intended the Sword Gate House to support itself as a venue for guided tours and semi-public balls. Essential repairs were made and by August the house was fit to occupy. In September, 1949 during the Braham Cattleman's Continental Convention, the Sword Gate House opened as a "show place for tourists."

1950

Henry Gaud confided to the News & Courier that the property was haunted by a man in street clothes. Hearing the creepy stories became part of the experience of touring the home.

1951

The Gaud's turned their attention to the former kitchen house/stable. Architect Douglas Ellington reconfigured the building as four one-bedroom apartments adding two outside stairways.

1952

The Gaud's remodeled the ground floor of the brick wing to provide four bedrooms and bath, with on-site parking. This "motor-court" was later expanded into the first floor and operated for 40 more years.

1959

The Gaud's decided to divide off and sell three lots, one behind the house, with a 20-foot driveway to Tradd and two lots in the front garden. Historic Charleton Foundation decried the proposal as they resolved that the change would "detract from the aesthetic and historic values of the property, neighborhood and city." Despite the objections of the preservationists and neighbors, the City of Charleston approved the Gaud's floor plan for creating a building lot behind the house.

The Gaud's eventually developed a new plan, after suggesting others. Not only would two lots be made in the front garden, but the house itself would be divided with a new interior wall between the wooden and brick sections. The Sword Gate property would become five separate parcels. The Gaud family moved into the brick wing, operated the inn, and kept the kitchen house with its four apartments. Gaud also moved the Sword Gate itself from Legare Street to install it on his own Tradd Street frontage.

1960

In June 1960, Mary S. Wilson bought one of the new lots. In August 1960, Dorothy Shakelford, whose husband Harry was a Charleston Realtor, bought the other garden lot and the wooden portion of the house. The Shakelford made several architectural changes, but most importantly forestalled construction of two houses in the garden and the removal of the gate from Legare Street. They bought Mrs. Wilson's lot and obtained Gaud's interest in the gate and lantern.

1963

Mrs. Shakelford sold her half of the house in November. The deed specified that the garden lots were to be recombined into the parcel containing the wooden part of the house and the gate and lantern were part of that property.

1966

In January, the Graham Reeves family of Summit, New Jersey, and Annandale Plantation in Georgetwon County, bought the Shakelfields half of the building with its large garden. They held the property for about 18 months, but in that time dramatically reconfigured the grounds. The patterned garden, kept up for decades by Charleston housewives, was replaced by an open lawn. As the Gauds had planned, despite the shared interior wall, the brick wing (111 Tradd Street) became a distinctly separate property. The front hald of the house (32 Legare Street) was generally known as the Sword Gate House, while the brick wing was referenced as the 'Sword Gate Inn.'

1967

Graham Reeves bought the rear lot from the Gaud's, then disposed of the Sword Gate House and built a new house at 109 Tradd Street. The Gaud's sold the Sword Gate Inn and without removing any of the kitchens nor bathrooms, moved into the apartment building. Mrs. Gaud lived in the kitchen house until 2000, while more than a dozen people shuffled ownership of the other Sword Gate properties.

1998

In two conveyances, Chauvet LTD., a Bahamas-based company, bough the Sword Gate Inn and the Sword Gate House, combining them once more into a single parcel. The head of Chauvet LTD. was Peter DeSavary, a British inn developer married to a South Carolina native. The Sword Gate property was part of DeSavary's plan for developing an exclusive, members only resort at Cherokee Plantation, a former Ashepoo River rice plantation turned into a hunting retreat. For plantation guests who were tired of the outdoor, DeSavary offered the Sword Gate Houe as an urban "outpost" from which to visit Charleston.

1999

Michael + Betsy Dingman bought the Sword Gate House in December 1999, and determined to give the property its most comprehensive reworking in a century and a half.

2000

While beginning their plans of the rehabilitation of the house and ground, in May of 2000, the current owners purchased the carriage house from Mrs. Gaud. With this transaction, the Sword Gate property was essentially restored within its historic walls.

2020

In June 2020, the current owners purchased the property and undertook another massive renovation of the entire property. Every inch of the interior and exterior of both the main house and the carriage house was touched with new, designer details installed.

Walls were taken down and a brand new kitchen and casual dining area was added to the main living level, making a much more functional floor plan. Every bedroom has an en suite bathroom, a rarity in a historic home.

The gardens and landscaping were enhances, and a large pool was added. A new hardscape courtyard and wood-burning, brick fireplace were added to the north side. The elevated design is spectacular.

This is one of the most spectacular properties in America.

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