The Capers-Motte House

69 Church Street | Circa 1745

The Capers-Motte House at 69 Church Street is one of Charleston's earliest and most significant surviving residences. Believed to date to approximately 1745, the grand three+ story, stucco-over-brick dwelling is an exceptional example of early Charleston architecture and has been associated with prominent figures in the city's political, cultural, and artistic history for nearly three centuries.

Architecturally, the house follows a variation of the traditional Charleston double-house plan, with a central stair hall and four principal rooms. The five-bay Church Street façade is distinguished by scored stucco, nine-over-nine windows, a central entrance, and a pediment with a semicircular fanlight. A hipped slate roof, paired dormers, and substantial chimneys further define the exterior.

Inside, the ornamentation of the main dwelling is particularly elaborate with extraordinary examples of fine Georgian and Federal craftsmanship, including elaborate mantels, overmantels, wainscoting, paneling, moldings, and cornices. Among the most notable details are the Federal mantel in the second-floor drawing room, delicately carved with figures of Ariadne and Bacchus, along with the cypress paneled den/office which has been left unpainted so that the crispness of the fine carvings and natural wood can be discerned. The grand ballroom and drawing room on the second floor are spectacular, creating impressive reception spaces with incredible woodwork and moldings extending across the width of the house.

The property also retains its historic two-story kitchen house, distinguished by Gothic-inspired lancet windows and doors, linked to the main house with a hyphen, part of which is all glass. The kitchen house features a period-style kitchen, casual family room, along with two upstairs guest suites that open onto a porch, perfect for guests or staff. Original privies out near the pool are gorgeous surviving historic outbuildings.

The property can be traced to Richard Capers, who likely inherited the land from his father around 1718 and constructed the house around 1745. The earliest known documentation of the house appears in a 1761 deed referencing the "Brick House Messuage or Tenement and out Houses thereon Erected." The house was rented to Jacob Motte, Public Treasurer of the colony, who lived here from 1761 until his death in 1770. During Motte's residency, 69 Church Street also served for a time as a meeting place for the Commons House of Assembly before construction of the statehouse at the corner of Broad and Meeting Streets. In 1778, the house became the residence of James Parsons, a member of the Provincial Congress and the Secret Committee of 1775.

During the nineteenth century, the house underwent several renovations reflecting changing architectural tastes. A three-story piazza was added, the front entrance was relocated, and Greek Revival elements were introduced. After sustaining damage during the Union bombardment of

Charleston, the property was purchased in 1869 by Eliza Middleton Huger Smith and remained in the Smith family for more than a century.

The house is particularly significant for its association with Eliza's granddaughter, Alice Ravenel Huger Smith, who lived at 69 Church Street for much of her life. One of South Carolina's most important twentieth-century artists and a leading figure of the Charleston Renaissance, Smith became celebrated for her evocative watercolors of lowcountry life. Alice was also an influential preservationist whose art and writing helped document and celebrate Charleston's distinctive architecture, buildings, and cultural heritage, publishing several books on these subjects. Alice Ravenel Huger Smith was one of the most significant women in Charleston history.

In 1970, the house was purchased by Mrs. Anthony Cecil, who undertook an extensive restoration intended to return the property to its earlier appearance. The piazzas were removed, the Church Street entrance was returned to the center of the façade, and the original center hall was restored. Later owners Dan and Ellen Kiser continued this preservation work, further restoring the property while thoughtfully adapting it for modern use.

Today, nearly three centuries after its construction, the Capers-Motte House remains an extraordinary example of Charleston's architectural and cultural heritage. Its remarkable Georgian and Federal interiors, historic outbuildings, association with colonial government and prominent Charleston families, and connection to Alice Ravenel Huger Smith make 69 Church Street one of the city's most historically significant residential properties.