

LESESNE HOUSE
415 Atlantic Avenue
Fernandina Beach
Nassau County
Florida

HABS No. FL-357

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WRITTEN HISTORICAL DOCUMENTATION

Historic American Buildings Survey
National Park Service
Department of the Interior
Washington, D.C.

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HISTORIC AMERICAN BUILDINGS SURVEY

LESESNE HOUSE

HABS No. FL-357

Location: 415 Atlantic Avenue (NW corner of Atlantic Avenue and Fifth Street), Fernandina Beach, Nassau County, Florida.

Present Owner: Angel Starke Davis.

Present Occupant: Mrs. Davis.

Present Use: Dwelling.

Significance: The Lesesne House is a typical example of the ante-bellum dwelling of coastal Florida and Georgia. It is considered to be one of the oldest inhabited houses on Amelia Island.

PART I. HISTORICAL INFORMATION

A. Physical History:

1. Date of erection: ca. 1860. Family tradition has it that the house was built by Dr. John F. Lesesne before the Civil War. If this information can be accepted as correct the structure had to be built at this date since Lesesne did not purchase the site until August 1860. (Interview with Davis; see "Original and subsequent owners" below)
2. Architect: Unknown.
3. Original and subsequent owners: The Lesesne house was built on lots 13, 14, and 15 of Block 23 of the official plat of the City of Fernandina which was lithographed and issued by the Florida Railroad in 1857 and enlarged, revised, and reissued by the Florida Town Improvement Company in 1887 and 1901. The chain of title is drawn from the Deed Books and Mortgage Records of Nassau County, Florida:

1860 Deed, August 19, 1860, recorded June 27, 1861 in Book G, page 433. Lots 11 through 15 of Block 23 were sold for \$1,000 by Florida Railraod Company
to
John F. Lesesne.

1868 Probate Deed, recorded May 2, 1868 in Book I, page 496. Lots 11 through 15 of Block 23 were sold for \$3,600 by
Anthony T. Porter, guardian for Josephine Lesesne (heir of John F. Lesesne).
to
Mrs. John Friend.

- 1869 Quit Claim Deed, recorded March 22, 1869 in Book L, page 191. All claims to lots 11 through 15 of Block 23 were relinquished for \$1.00 by Edward N. Dickerson to Maria Friend.
- 1895 Deed, recorded August 24, 1895 in Book Y, page 561. Lots 13 through 15 of Block 23 were sold for \$4,500 by Maria Friend to Bertha F. Angel.
- 1907 Deed, recorded April 24, 1907 in Book B-9, page 70. The west 20' of lot 13 and the west 20' of lot 15 of Block were sold by Bertha F. Angel to The United States of America.
- 1927 Deed, November 7, 1927, recorded November 8, 1927 in Book 68, page 239. The east 80' of lot 13, lot 14, and the east 30' of lot 15 of Block 23 were sold by Bertha F. Angel to Angel Starke Davis.

4. Original plans and construction: None known. The original plan of the house seem to have been typical of ante-bellum houses of Florida and Georgia. It was a two story frame structure with a central hall and four room plan. There was a porch around the south and west sides of the house. It is difficult to establish whether this porch was one or two stories originally. Certain inconsistencies in materials and construction could suggest that the second story was a later addition. The walls of the first story porch are of flush siding while the second story ones are of clapboard indicating a possible exposed wall at one time. The ceiling material and flooring material of the second story. The second story ceiling appears to have been attached to a former eave which is visible in the building today. This is only a suggestion as to the addition; it cannot be documented. There is no evidence that a porch existed on the north side of the building when it was first built. (Interview with Davis; examination of structure)
5. Alterations and additions: It is apparent from differences in construction materials and techniques that a two-story addition to the house was constructed before 1891. (Sanborn map, February 1891) Family tradition has it that John Friend built this addition as an office for his law practice. (Interview with Davis) If this information is correct, the date of this

addition was probably between 1868 and 1878 since Friend bought the house in 1868 and died in 1878. (See "Original and subsequent owners" above; Florida Mirror, November 30, 1878) The materials and construction techniques also imply that if the second story porch was added to the house it was before the office addition.

The 1891 Sanborn map also shows a single story structure extending west from the office addition. There is no evidence which suggests the date of this addition except that it was probable after the office.

The same Sanborn map shows a northern addition to the house. This was a single story structure at the extreme west end of the north side. It measured approximately 12-1/2' x 18'. Tradition has it that this was the kitchen and was added sometime in the 1880s.

In 1897 this northern addition appears to have been raised to a second story. This alteration is also suggested in the novelty siding on the second story and clapboard on the first. It was noted that a slate or tin roof had replaced the original shingle one on this addition (Sanborn map, June 1897)

The Sanborn map of 1903 showed the northern addition with considerable changes. (The drawing of the house on this particular map seems to be incorrect, but the shapes and proportions seem consistent. In any event the dimensions of the changes can be drawn from the 1909 and 1926 Sanborn maps.) The old northern addition was extended from 18' to 30' toward the east. A small one-story porch, measuring 5' x 25' was added to the north side of the addition. The 1926 Sanborn map indicates that this porch was open, however, at present the ends of the porch have been enclosed forming two rooms.

To the east of the northern addition is a second addition to the north side of the building. This structure consists of a small lavatory, a first story porch, and an enclosed room on the second story. According to Mrs. Davis this addition was constructed during the late 1920s. It does not appear on the 1926 Sanborn map.

- B. Historical Events and Persons Connected with the Structure: Very little is known about the original owner of the house other than the fact that he was a doctor.

Of greater importance was John Friend who came from Germany to America in 1846. Settling in Cleveland, Friend studied law and began his practice in 1855. In 1865 he was appointed tax commissioner for Florida and moved to the state bringing his family and settling in

Fernandina where the Lesesne House was bought. In Fernandina, Friend became county judge and was elected state senator in 1876. He never assumed his post because he died on November 29, 1878. (Florida Mirror, November 30, 1878)

C. Sources of Information:

1. Old views: Photograph of the south side of the house with no date. In possession of the owner, Mrs. Davis, 415 Atlantic Avenue, Fernandina Beach, Florida. n.d.

2. Primary and Unpublished Sources:

Davis, Angel Starke. Fernandina Beach, Florida. Interview, August 5, 1974.

Florida Abstract and Title Insurance Company. "Tract Book." Fernandina Beach, Florida.

Massau County. Deed Books. Nassau County Courthouse, Fernandina Beach, Florida.

3. Secondary Sources:

Bird's Eye View of Fernandina, Florida, 1884. Madison, Wisconsin: J. J. Stoner, 1884.

Fernandina, Florida Mirror, November 30, 1878.

Sanborn Map and Publishing Company. Fernandina, Florida, February 1891. New York: Sanborn Map and Publishing Company, 1891. In Gainesville, Florida: University of Florida, Library East, Map Room.

_____. Fernandina, Florida, June 1897. New York: Sanborn Map and Publishing Company, 1897. In Gainesville, Florida: University of Florida, Library East, Map Room.

_____. Fernandina, Florida, April 1903. New York: Sanborn Map and Publishing Company, 1903. In Gainesville, Florida: University of Florida, Library East, Map Room.

_____. Fernandina, Florida, February 1909. New York: Sanborn Map and Publishing Company, 1909. In Gainesville, Florida: University of Florida, Library East, Map Room.

. Fernandina, Florida, February 1926. New York:
Sanborn Map and Publishing Company, 1926. In Gainesville,
Florida: University of Florida, Library East, Map Room.

Prepared by: Phillip A. Werndli
Historian
HABS-Fernandina Beach, Florida
August 23, 1974

PART II. ARCHITECTURAL INFORMATION

A. General Statement:

1. Architectural character: This house is an early structure built on the second site of Fernandina in ca. 1860.
2. Condition of fabric: Good.

B. Description of Exterior:

1. Overall dimensions: This structure is a two story rectangular house measuring ' (three bay front) by ' (two bay side) with later additions to the north side.
2. Foundations: Brick piers supporting wood floor beams.
3. Wall construction, finish, and color: Built of wood frame construction, it is covered with clapboarding painted white.
4. Structural system: Load bearing wood frame construction.
5. Chimneys: There are three chimneys: two in the main rooms and one in the north kitchen wall.
6. Porches: The south entry has a porch on both the first and second levels. The second story porch appears to be an addition after construction. Later additions to the north elevation have incorporated an entry porch to the stair hall and balcony with no access above.
7. Openings:
 - a. Doors and doorways: The main entrance is from the south and is of wood. It has a simple entablature and flanking sidelights of three panes of various colored glass each.

The south dining room door is a wooden paneled door.

The north rear door is of wood with glass panes.

- b. Windows and shutters: The windows are shuttered with black louvered panels.

8. Roof:

- a. Shape and covering: Gable roof with kick at the eave covered with asphalt shingles. Additions are shed roofs covered with asphalt roll roofing.

C. Description of Interior:

1. Floor Plans:

- a. First floor: The entrance and stair hall is flanked on both sides by parlors. The east parlor is not used and is identical to the west parlor on the left. Two doors lead to the dining room to the left which was formerly the west porch enclosed as office space. The remodeled kitchen addition is to the right through the north wall.

Additions of pantry to the right and modern bath facilities with rear entry into the main stair hall are adjacent.

- b. Second floor: Similar to the first floor plan, the two main bedrooms flank the stair hall with a third bedroom above the kitchen addition. A modern bathroom and trunk room are above the dining room and have replaced the second story porch on the west side.
- 2. Stairways: The stairhall contains the singular means to the second floor. The hand rails and newels are original and the top surfaces are simple rounded wooden members.
 - 3. Flooring: Hardwood floors predominate the structure. Their width varies and is not consistent throughout.
 - 4. Wall and ceiling finish: The walls are papered in the main rooms downstairs and bedrooms above. The kitchen, pantry, and laundry room additions are painted. All ceilings are plastered and painted white. Baseboards painted are evident throughout.
 - 5. Doors and doorways: All doors are wood panel doors painted white.

6. Special decorative features, trim, and cabinet work: Fireplace mantels are of wood painted white. Severe in their lack of detail, the four fireplaces reflect the simple detailing throughout the house.

The dining room is divided by a flattened arch at its midpoint in length indicating two rooms formerly.

7. Lighting: Modern incandescent light is found throughout. The stair hall lamp: single bulb, pendant globe is notable and possibly survives the first installation of electricity.
8. Heating: Modern gas heating is vented through the fireplace opening in the parlor fireplace. Air conditioning is accomplished through portable window units.

D. Site:

1. General setting and orientation: The house faces south with its entrance from Atlantic Avenue.
2. Outbuildings:
 - a. Garage: A small one car garage is located on the property to the north with its entrance from Fifth Street.
 - b. Walks, enclosures: The entrance walk is of brick in a running pattern. The property is bounded on all four sides by a white picket fence.

Prepared by: Charles Edwin Chase
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Fernandina Beach, Florida
August 1974

ADDENDUM TO:
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PHOTOGRAPHS

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National Park Service
U.S. Department of the Interior
1849 C Street NW
Washington, DC 20240-0001