

Tift-Hemingway House
907 Whitehead Street
Key West
Monroe County
Florida

HABS No. FL-179

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PHOTOGRAPHS

HISTORICAL AND DESCRIPTIVE DATA

Historic American Buildings Survey
Heritage Conservation and Recreation Service
Department of the Interior
Washington, D.C. 20243

HISTORIC AMERICAN BUILDINGS SURVEY

HABS No. FL-179

TIFT-HEMINGWAY HOUSE

Location: 907 Whitehead Street, Key West, Monroe County, Florida.
 USGS Key West Quadrangle, Universal Transverse
 Mercator Coordinates: 17.418900.2715280.

Present Owner: Mr. and Mrs. Jack Daniels
 907 Whitehead Street, Key West, Florida.

Present Occupant: Owner resides in pool house, main house is open to public.

Present Use: Ernest Hemingway Museum.

Significance: The house possesses both architectural and historic interest. Built by Asa F. Tift, a prominent early settler who was active in the Confederate cause during the Civil War, the house is best known as the Key West residence of author Ernest Hemingway. The house is constructed of native limestone and has a distinctive architectural character.

PART I. HISTORICAL INFORMATION

A. Physical History:

1. Date of erection: The first mention of any building existing on the property was found in Monroe County, Florida, Tax Rolls of 1876. Popular tradition dates the building as being pre-Civil War; however, a local historian, writer and neighbor says, "The home of Asa Tift is of native stone and was built after the Civil War." (Cappick, Coral Tribune, December 6, 1951).
2. Architect: No record has been found. There is, however, a strong possibility that William Kerr may have designed and built the main house as well as the original outbuildings. He is credited with building several structures of native stone. As an architect and builder he showed more versatility and originality than other builders of that period. (A Guide to Key West; pp. 69, 70, 71).
3. Original and subsequent owners: The property was purchased by Asa F. Tift in 1850 (Monroe County Deed Book E, p. 285). As part of Asa F. Tift's estate, it was sold at Public Auction to Adolph M. Ferguson in 1903 (Monroe County Commissioner's Deed Book U, p. 375). Ferguson deeded the property to Arleen B. Shephard 1925 (Monroe County Deed Book B-5, p. 128). Arleen B. and Arthur H. Shephard deeded it to Paul Lumley in 1929 (Monroe County Deed Book G-2, p. 453). Paul and Zoila Lumley sold the property in 1931 to Jerry J. Trevor (Monroe County Deed Book D-3, p. 152). Trevor deeded the property to Ernest

Hemingway April 29, 1931 (Monroe County Deed Book D-3, p. 153). Mary Hemingway, widow, and Patrick and Gregory Hemingway, sons of Ernest Hemingway, sold the property to Jack and Bernice Daniels, Lot 2, Sq. 9, in Tract 4, on March 28, 1963 (Monroe County Deed Book 275, p. 560-565).

4. Builder, contractor, suppliers: Builder is believed to be William Kerr, who may also have been supplier of basic building materials. Mr. Tift may have brought the iron work from New Orleans or Cuba in his own ships.
5. Original plan and construction: A two-story masonry building with a two-story gallery.
6. Alterations and additions: An early photograph, circa 1890, shows two outbuildings in the rear of the main house. Both buildings had mansard roofs. At some point one of the buildings was removed or destroyed.

At the time the property was purchased by the Hemingways in 1931, the buildings were in poor condition. The Hemingways did extensive repairs and remodeling. A partition wall on the southeast side of the house was removed creating a large living room. The windows leading onto the porch at the rear were sealed over. A similar partition on the second floor above was removed to make a larger master bedroom. A private bath was built at the southwestern end of the room. The Hemingways also added the double porches on the northeast side of the house.

At the time the Hemingways purchased the property a long wooden hallway connected the main house and the building at the rear. The Hemingways built a wrought iron catwalk on top of this wooden structure which leads from the upstairs porch of the main house to the mansard room in the outbuilding which the author used for his studio. A spiral stairway leads from the studio to the patio below.

About 1936 a wall was built around three sides of the property, utilizing old paving brick from the city streets. The swimming pool was built about 1938, and was the first pool on the island. A dressing room and showers were installed in the downstairs of the outbuilding, which became known as the pool house. In the 1940s, Mrs. Hemingway enlarged and remodeled this building, adding a living room with a fireplace, a kitchen and back porch. She then made the pool house her residence and rented the main house.

Sometime in the 1940s Mrs. Hemingway removed the wood gallery on the main house. The Daniels have rebuilt the gallery with concrete block and handmade concrete tiles. (Bruce Interview, August 1, 1965)

B. Historical Events and Persons Connected with this Structure:

Asa F. Tift, the son of Amos Tift, was born in Groton, Connecticut, in 1812. He came to Key West with his father, a sea captain and merchant, who established a business here as early as 1826. The Tifts became owners of one of the major wharf areas on the island. At the outbreak of the Civil War he left the island and went to Georgia, where other members of his family were prominent citizens. Tift County and Tifton, Georgia were named for this family.

To aid in meeting the Confederate need for ships, Asa and his brother Nelson devised a design for ships that could be built by ordinary house carpenters. The Tifts, who were old Key West friends of Stephen R. Mallory, Secretary of the Confederate Navy, placed their plans before the Naval Board and offered their services to superintend the construction without compensation. The plans were accepted and construction began on the first of two ironclads at New Orleans. The fall of New Orleans forced the destruction of the almost completed ship. After the war, Asa Tift returned to Key West and lived there until his death in 1889. (Rerick, n.p; Browne, p. 219; Durkin, n.p.)

Before purchasing this house Ernest and Pauline Pfeiffer Hemingway had lived in rented quarters in Key West. This was the first house the writer had ever purchased, and he retained his ownership until his death. It was in this house that Hemingway wrote many of his best selling novels and a number of his short stories. Writers, painters, publishers and sportsmen from all over the world came to fish and visit with the Hemingways during the years they resided here.

Although the writer moved to Cuba in about 1940, he returned periodically through the years, and after Pauline Hemingway's death took full responsibility for maintaining the house. He refused all offers to sell the house during his lifetime. (Thompson Interview, n.d; Bruce Interview, August, 1965)

The building was opened as a Hemingway Museum February 8, 1964 by Mr. and Mrs. Jack Daniels. (Key West Citizen, February 1, 1964).

C. Sources of Information:

1. Old views:

Crane, Horatio, Key West, Florida, Photogravure, The Albertype Co., New York, 1896. Bird's eye view taken from Key West Light House shows three original buildings.

Old Island Restoration Foundation, Inc. Collection, Monroe County Public Library, Key West, Florida. Bird's eye view of studio and walkway from main house.

2. Bibliography:

a. Primary and unpublished sources:

Monroe County Courthouse Records and Deedbooks, County Clerk's Records, Key West, Florida.

Monroe County Tax Rolls, 1845-1860, 1866-1879, Microfilm, Genealogy Society, Salt Lake City, Utah. Also Monroe County, Public Library, Key West, Florida.

Sanborn Map of Key West, Florida, 1886, 1892, 1899, 1912, 1926, Sanborn Map Co., New York.

b. Secondary and published sources:

American Guide Series, A Guide to Key West, Revised Second Edition, Hastings House, New York 1949. pp. 69-71.

Browne, Jefferson B., Key West: The Old and New, St. Augustine, Florida, 1912, p. 219.

Cappick, Marie, "The Key West Story," Chapter 4, Coral Tribune, December 6, 1951. Key West, Florida.

Durkin, Joseph T., S.J., Stephen Mallory, Confederate Navy Chief, University of North Carolina Press, Chapel Hill, North Carolina, 1954.

Rerick, Rowland, Memories of Florida, Southern Historical Association, Vol. 235, Atlanta, Georgia, 1902.

c. Interviews:

Bruce, T.O., 611 Simonton Street, Key West, Florida, August 1, 1965.

Thompson, Mr. and Mrs. Charles, 1314 Seminary Street, Key West, Florida, n.d.

Prepared by: Betty M. Bruce
Old Island Restoration
Foundation, Inc.
Project Historian
HABS Key West Project
September 1966

PART II. ARCHITECTURAL INFORMATION

A. General Statement:

1. Architectural character: The house has a two-story gallery, a feature which distinguishes many Key West houses. The cast iron columns and railing of the gallery, the limestone walls, flat roof, and arched windows and doors, however, are not features commonly seen in Key West architecture and make the building distinctive.

B. Description of Exterior:

1. Overall dimensions: A two-story block with an ell, 52'-7" x 52'-8".
2. Foundations: Limestone foundation walls and 5" x 7" wood columns.
3. Wall construction: Limestone rubble, stucco finish scored to resemble coursed dressed ashlar, simulated quoins at exterior corners; stucco finish at opening scored to express arch and projecting keystone, 10 1/2" board nailing strip at underside of gallery roof at all elevations, projecting base.
4. Structural system: Masonry bearing wall, post and lintel; wood framing for floor consisting of 8" x 9" beams, 2 1/4" x 12" joists, and 2 1/2" x 3 1/2" nailing strips notched through joists; all structural members radial sawed.

5. Porches:

Two-story gallery on the southwest, southeast, northwest and part of the northeast elevations.

First floor: Cement tile floor, tiles of various sizes and hues in random pattern; concrete and/or limestone bases for columns; cast iron columns and base, fluted columns with acanthus pattern at capitals; iron flanged beam between columns with rosette decorations on exterior of web; plinth blocks with rosette decoration serve as bases for second floor columns; wood beams and flooring of second floor porch exposed, chamfered edges on beams, joists are squared.

Second floor: Wood boards 3 1/4" wide painted green, floor slopes to the exterior; wrought iron balustrade in heart pattern; columns are similar to those on the first story, but smaller in diameter; iron flanged peripheral beam, corrugated sheet metal roof curves downwards and out from below the parapet to the line of columns and peripheral beam.

6. Stairways: Modern concrete steps from porch to grade; modern concrete stairway from first floor porch down to basement entrance east side of house at ell.

7. Chimney: Limestone masonry foundation, brick chimney (2 flues), header course in diagonal cornice pattern.
8. Openings: Openings are segmentally arched with projecting keystones.

- a. Doorways and doors: Wood surround and frame, two two-panel screen doors out swinging, fixed screen fan; two three-panel doors fit into arched opening, top panel glazed, heavy molding, inswinging; wood threshold; fragments indicate exterior shutters out swinging have been removed.

French doors: Two three-panel screen doors, outswinging, fixed screen panel above doors; two three-panel inswinging doors per opening, glazed panels. Two three-panel louvered (operating) shutters per opening, outswinging.

Doorway at rear of stair hall to porch: Two two-panel screen doors outswinging, four-panel inswinging to fit around head. Exterior shutters removed, pintles remain.

Doorway to second floor porch: Six-panel inswinging door, top four panels glazed; two three-panel screen doors outswinging, two three-panel outswinging louvered wood shutters.

- b. Windows and shutters:

First floor windows: Two inswinging casement sashes, three lights each, glazed rounded top panel, fragments indicate original windows were single sash; outswinging, wood louvered shutters.

Second floor windows: Fixed screen panel over lower half of window only; two-over-two-light double hung sash; outswinging, wood, louvered shutters.

9. Roof:

- a. Shape, covering: Flat roof over house and ell, parapet wall, built-up roof; area over ell slightly raised to accommodate cistern between roof and ceiling below; porch roof of corrugated sheet metal. Hatch provides access to cistern; stair housing wood frame, horizontal lapped siding painted green, gable roof.

- b. Eaves: Wide overhanging eaves are supported by metal rods.

C. Description of Interior:

1. Floor plans:

- a. Basement: One open space.

- b. First floor: Central stair hall between living and dining rooms (portion of dining room cut off to serve as serving pantry), kitchen in ell; stairway to second floor.

c. Second floor: Central stair hall, bedrooms and bathrooms to each side, stairway to roof.

2. Stairway:

- a. Stairway between first and second floor: Steep wood, open-string stairs, molded hand rail, turned and fluted balusters, paneled eight-sided and tapered newel post, disc finial.
- b. Stairway between second floor and roof: Straight, steep run, wood treads and risers.

3. Flooring: Pine boards 3 1/2" x 5" wide, varnished; Cuban and French glazed tiles in bathrooms, composition tile in kitchen and pantry. Basement floor is earth and limestone.

4. Wall finish: Plaster; wood base boards; plaster cornices in principal rooms. Glazed tile wainscot in kitchen and bathroom.

Basement: Wall finish is rough rubble ashlar above grade level and exposed limestone from grade to basement floor level. Ceiling is unfinished.

5. Ceiling finish: Plaster; plaster center piece in stair hall first floor at entrance, living room, dining room and bedroom.

6. Doorways and doors: Four-panel wood doors, three lights in transoms; wood saddles; molded trim surrounds.

7. Notable hardware: Porcelain door knobs (white), pivoted key hole covers.

8. Lighting: Electric; chandeliers of brass and crystal, Venetian crystal, and Spanish metal and brass lantern.

9. Fireplaces:

Dining room fireplace: Marble with deeply incised pattern, cast iron grilled front in rectangular opening, cement hearth.

Bedroom fireplace: Marble with incised and gilded pattern, cast iron grille front in rectangular opening, cement hearth.

D. Site:

1. General setting and orientation: The building faces southwest. It is situated on the southeast corner of Whitehead and Olivia Streets, enclosed by a chain link fence faced to the exterior by a masonry wall of paving bricks, wrought iron gates; lush tropical trees, plants and shrubs surround the house; concrete and cement tile walks provide access from gateways on each street; a fountain-planter in a shape resembling a Civil War monitor is near the front entrance; cement and stone pool at the northeast porch.

2. Outbuildings: The wood slat fence separates the house from a concrete slab over a cistern, a terrace paved with Cuban tile, a carriage house (not included in this survey) and a concrete swimming pool to the east and southeast. A guest house is at the northeast corner of the site.

Prepared by: F. Blair Reeves AIA
Supervisory Architect
HABS Key West Project
July 1967

PART III. PROJECT INFORMATION

These records were prepared in 1967 during a summer project jointly sponsored by the Old Island Restoration Foundation, Inc. of Key West, and the Historic American Buildings Survey. Twenty-two structures were recorded, ranging from commercial structures, residences and hospitals to a convent, a lighthouse, and the Memorial to the Victims of the Disaster of the U.S. Battleship Maine.

The project was under the direction of F. Blair Reeves, AIA, Associate Professor, Department of Architecture, University of Florida. Measured drawings were prepared by student architects John D. Davenport and John F. Grimm of Texas A. and M. University, and John O. Crosby of the University of Florida. Mrs. Betty M. Bruce of the Old Island Restoration Foundation, Inc., and Professor Reeves were responsible for the historical and architectural data. They were assisted by members of the Foundation. J. Frank Brooks, Photographer, of Key West, supplied the photographs.