

"Ownership of this property by the Colonial Dames has insured that survival of the house.... Private projects of this sort have been the leaders in the American historic preservation movement."

Charles E. Peterson, FAIA, Philadelphia, 1972

Rescue and Restoration



After Louisa Fatio's death in 1875 the boarding house stood stalwart, waiting for the next chapter in its intriguing life. By 1920 windows and doors downstairs were boarded, and most of the house was empty. Artists and craftspeople used a few rooms. The north and west yards were sold. The washhouse had collapsed. In 1929, the nation suffered the Great Depression and tourism ended.

Federal "New Deal" programs and private efforts attempted to revive the economy. The St. Augustine Historical Program created by the Carnegie Institution of Washington focused on the city's Spanish colonial buildings. The "nation's oldest city" became part of America's infant historic preservation movement.

In 1939 The National Society of the Colonial Dames of America in The State of Florida purchased the Fatio House from Judge David Ross Dunham, Louisa Fatio's great-nephew.

"Considering when the restoration was begun, 1939, the present condition of the house is a tribute to those women who presided over it. They were preservationists as opposed to restorationists; everybody else is just now coming around to their thinking."

William Seale, Architectural Historian, Alexandria, Virginia, 1974



Experts studied the building's construction, investigated the property archaeologically, and recommended furnishings for its use as a house museum.



The house would remain as altered in the mid-19th century. Whitewashed plaster covered coquina walls; floors were tabby or hardwood; woodwork and doors were painted; early warbled glass would remain in the sash windows. Exterior shutters were returned to the windows. Mechanical systems and conveniences would remain absent from museum rooms. The detached kitchen building would be studied and restored to its mid-19th century appearance.

"Remember, a museum house is a three dimensional historical document and is worth saving on the criteria of architecture, or association with a historical person, or both."

William Murtaugh, National Trust for Historic Preservation, 1963

"It is remarkable that the remodeling of the 1830-1848 has been the only major change made since original construction. . . . This excellent state of preservation further enhances the historic significance of this important structure."

Herschel E. Shepard, AIA, 1974

"I must say there are few houses I have liked as much—that subtle combination of the vernacular and 'style' presents exciting possibilities. . . . the generation before has bequeathed the present a noble and un-tampered piece of history."

William Seale, 1975

"Rather, the National Society of the Colonial Dames of America in the State of Florida, the owner and guardian of this site, has wisely chosen a point in the life of these extant structures well after they were built. The buildings and site are interpreted at the flower of their vitality, at a point where the buildings and landscape had matured, grown accustomed to their usage, but had not yet started down the path of neglect and decay."

Charles Phillips, AIA, Charleston, 1979

World War II Rationing

Beginning in May 1942, the United States rationed gasoline as a wartime measure. Civilians carpooled or rode in buses. Gasoline was available for only essential trips. Traffic on roads was heavy—with military vehicles.

Rationing affected, but did not deter, the Florida Dames from their goal of preserving the Ximenez-Fatio House. With their acquisition of this historic property only a mere three years old and a mortgage to satisfy, they came almost daily from Jacksonville to St. Augustine. This bumpy, dirty, un-air conditioned ride consumed nearly two-hours at either end of their volunteer work day. Their dedication resulted, not only in ownership of the property, but opening of the Ximenez-Fatio House as a museum in 1946.