

# The Eighteenth-Century González-Alvarez (Oldest) House, St. Augustine, Florida: U.S. Policies and Practices of Construction, Interpretation, Preservation

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On 15 April 1970, the Secretary of the Interior, Walter J. Hickel, upon the recommendation of the National Park Service's Historic Sites Survey, designated the González-Alvarez (Oldest) House—an outstanding example of a "St. Augustine Plan" Spanish colonial residence—a National Historic Landmark.<sup>1</sup> The name of this building—González-Alvarez (Oldest) House—is derived from two Spanish owners of the building, Tomás González y Hernández and Gerónimo Alvarez. González constructed the original *coquina* masonry building and lived in the residence from the 1720s to 1763, while Alvarez and his descendants occupied an enlarged building from 1790 to 1882.<sup>2</sup> The "Oldest House" was a title bestowed on this building by a later owner, Dr. Charles P. Carver, who advertised this building as the

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<sup>1</sup> National Historic Landmark (NHL) status is the highest level of cultural significance designation by the United States federal government under the authority of the 1935 Historic Sites Act. This designation was part of an NHL colonial architecture study conducted in the late 1960s by the National Park Service (NPS). As a result of this study, NPS designated over seventy Spanish, French, English, Russian, and Dutch colonial period buildings and districts throughout the United States and American Caribbean as historical landmarks.

<sup>2</sup> *Coquina* is a sedimentary rock composed almost entirely of shell fragments that accumulates in marine environments where swift currents result in the fracturing and sorting of the shells. *Coquina* deposits are found on beaches, swift tidal channels, and barrier bars. When first quarried, *coquina* is extremely soft. This makes it easy to remove from the quarry and cut into shape, though the stone at first is too soft to be used for building. The stone is left out to dry for one to three years, which causes it to harden into a usable form. Albert Manucy, *The Houses of St. Augustine, 1565-1821* (St. Augustine, Fl.: The St. Augustine Historical Society, 1962), 156.

“Oldest House” in the United States from 1884 to 1898, when it became one of the first private tourist venues in St. Augustine, Florida.<sup>3</sup> The St. Augustine Historical Society and numerous scholars undertook background research on this building to develop new information and ideas on Florida and Caribbean Spanish colonial culture presented herein for the first time.<sup>4</sup>

In the late 1950s, Albert Manucy, a National Park Service historian, received a Fulbright Research Scholarship to study historic Spanish architecture on the Iberian Peninsula and compare it with contemporary colonial buildings found in St. Augustine, Florida. As a result of his research, Manucy published one of the first books devoted to Spanish colonial residential architecture in the United States, *The Houses of St. Augustine* (1962). In a follow-up article entitled “Changing Traditions in St. Augustine Architecture” published in 1978, Manucy defined the “St. Augustine Plan” architecture style and its links with the local environment:

The houses which have survived are massive masonry buildings, cool in summer, warm in winter, sound and practical, and not to be changed in a hurry. Yet, as we have seen, radical adjustments could be made to meet new conditions, and indeed often were. It was not unusual to double the size of a small masonry home by adding a timberframe story; flat roofs gave way to shingled gable or hip roofs, often with dormers in the garret. And while the trend was unmistakably toward high-ceilinged spaciousness in the Georgian manner, even the new houses kept such niceties as loggias and street balconies, which were not only functional but pleasing to the eye and comfortable for living.<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> See Appendix A for a listing of the owners of the González-Alvarez (Oldest) House and their modifications to the house from the 1720s to the present.

<sup>4</sup> This multi-year research effort undertaken when the author worked for the National Park Service has produced research articles on other colonial properties in this community. This article is a continuation of that effort. See Mark R. Barnes, “Cathedral of St. Augustine: Taking Another Look,” *El Escribano: The St. Augustine Journal of History* 45 (2008):48-85; and Mark R. Barnes, “The Llambias House: An Example of Spanish Colonial Caribbean Housing in the Southeastern United States,” *SMRC Revista* 43:160-61 (2009):14-36.

<sup>5</sup> Albert Manucy, “Changing Traditions in St. Augustine Architecture,” in *Eighteenth-Century Florida: Impact of the American Revolution*, ed. Samuel Proctor (Gainesville: University Presses of Florida, 1978), 132.

Manucy, furthermore, discussed Spanish regulations relating to the size of the house lots allotted to citizens. The formula for granting real estate to soldiers in Spanish colonial towns was based upon the amount of land needed to sustain a foot soldier, that is, a peasant, or *peón*; the term for the quantity of land was *peonía*. After living on the land five years, the grantee gained fee simple title from the Crown.<sup>6</sup> The typical *peonía* lot was about 50 feet fronting on the street, with a depth extending back about 100 feet.<sup>7</sup> In St. Augustine, however, “inconsistencies in the dimensions of lots and blocks are traceable to such factors as the topography of the peninsular site, drastic turnovers in population with wholesale property transfers and abandonments, loss of records, collapse of fences and blurring of [house] lot lines, not to mention the inevitable encroachments upon public lands.”<sup>8</sup> The González-Alvarez (Oldest) House currently is located on a rectangular shaped lot with about 160 feet of street frontage and a lot depth of about 90 feet, which was somewhat larger than the *peonía* lot authorized by Spanish regulations but would have been appropriate for Tomás González y Hernández, an artilleryman at the Castillo.

Manucy also concluded that the *coquina* masonry “St. Augustine Plan” buildings were the logical outcome of a long Iberian tradition of residential construction that offered privacy and was transferred to the New World and modified to the environmental conditions of Florida. From the earliest wood and *tabby* houses to *coquina* masonry residences, St. Augustine’s buildings were constructed of local raw materials by Spanish artisans who were obliged to adapt traditional practice and building regulations to available raw materials. Graphic sources of the sixteenth century represent St. Augustine housing as timber frame with vertical board walling and thatch roof. There followed a progression to monolithic walls of the concrete called *tabby*.<sup>9</sup> According to Manucy, *tabby* is a “concrete composed of approximately equal parts of lime, sand, and shell aggregate.... It was used for walls, floors, roofs, walks, fences and benches, being poured into the formed space and compacted.”<sup>10</sup> As noted above, wood and *tabby* dwellings were the rule:

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<sup>6</sup> Manucy, “Changing Traditions in St. Augustine Architecture,” 99.

<sup>7</sup> James Early, *Presidio, Mission, and Pueblo: Spanish Architecture and Urbanism in the United States* (Dallas: Southern Methodist University Press, 2004), 8.

<sup>8</sup> Manucy, “Changing Traditions in St. Augustine Architecture,” 101, 103.

<sup>9</sup> Manucy, “Changing Traditions in St. Augustine Architecture,” 103.

<sup>10</sup> Manucy, *The Houses of St. Augustine*, 164.

... until the beginning of the Castillo (1672), [as] stone walling was deemed too heavy for the light sandy soil with its high water table. When the English burned the town in 1702, aid from the king's treasury along with stone from his quarries combined to usher in an era of stone housing. Walling was generally coursed, squared rubble, with lime-plastered surfaces. Both board timber frame and tabby continued, sometimes in combination with each other or with stone.<sup>11</sup>

In considering the nearly three dozen currently extant colonial masonry dwellings in St. Augustine, Manucy stated:

The Spanish foundation had remarkable solidity, comprising as it did the inflexible old town plan with its narrow shaded streets. Upon this foundation the Spanish builders erected simple utilitarian houses, which were well adapted to the environment. But neither of the great traditions, as they met at St. Augustine, was purely Spanish or purely English, for the transplantings from the homelands had flowered diversely as they grew in the American climates. What the English inherited at St. Augustine was vernacular architecture, and the features they added were in a vernacular of their own.<sup>12</sup>

In many ways, the history of the González-Alvarez (Oldest) House exemplifies the global history of St. Augustine, beginning with the founding of a town and fortress in 1565 in the area of present-day St. Augustine as part of a plan by the Spanish to create a series of defenses throughout the Caribbean to ensure the safe transit of the wealth of the New World back to Spain. The Spanish Crown produced standards for the construction of defensive forts and towns throughout the Caribbean and installed Royal Engineers to see that the standards were followed. St. Augustine was the last defensive position on this trade route and often the target of several attacks by pirates and rival colonial powers.

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<sup>11</sup> Manucy, "Changing Traditions in St. Augustine Architecture," 103-04.

<sup>12</sup> Manucy, "Changing Traditions in St. Augustine Architecture," 132.

During the 1970s, Kathleen Deagan, of the University of Florida, Gainesville, undertook a major archeological survey of downtown St. Augustine to define the limits of the buried sixteenth century Spanish occupation. Deagan's field work was the basis for Manucy's final volume on Spanish colonial architecture, *Sixteenth-Century St. Augustine, The People and Their Homes* (1997). In this work Manucy noted:

For most of San Agustín town lots were *peonía* size: 50 by 100 Spanish feet (44 by 88 U.S. feet). This conclusion results from map and documentary studies of 1976-77 and is supported by archaeological findings. Kathleen Deagan asserts, [this type of house lot] "is found [archaeologically] at all kinds of households in all time periods of First Spanish St. Augustine" [1565-<sup>13</sup> 1763].

Manucy also conducted research to establish a linkage between the colonial masonry dwellings of St. Augustine, such as the González-Alvarez (Oldest) House, and their contemporaries in Spain:

...it is clear from the later survivors that they are related to the folk architecture of northern Spain, the home of Pedro Menéndez, the town's founder. Today in Oviedo and Santander Provinces one can see masonry houses, often with overhead balconies, fronting the streets. House lots are fenced to serve as corrals and stables. And in the town Treceño there are houses with roomy ground-floor loggias, open to the yard through an arcade of two or three arches. These same styles can be seen in St. Augustine, and they have been there a long time.<sup>14</sup>

Building on Manucy's research for St. Augustine, Florida, Pamela Gosner published her research on architecture of the Spanish Antilles (Cuba, Dominican Republic, and Puerto Rico), *Caribbean Baroque, Historic Architecture of the Spanish Antilles* (1996). In this volume, Gosner, like Manucy, believed the masonry houses on the

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<sup>13</sup> Albert C. Manucy, *Sixteenth-Century St. Augustine: The People and Their Homes* (Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 1997), 62.

<sup>14</sup> Manucy, *Sixteenth-Century St. Augustine*, 5.

former Spanish colonial Caribbean islands and those in St. Augustine, Florida, were derived from the Iberian Peninsula masonry building traditions and shared many architectural elements. According to Gosner, the Roman townhouse, or *domus*, introduced into the Iberian Peninsula in the first century AD, served as the basic model for later Spanish colonial buildings in the New World. The *domus*, in particular those residences built in towns, were built right up to the street front and could only be entered through a single opening, or *vestibulum*:

...the *vestibulum* led into an area open to the sky known as the atrium. This was surrounded by small rooms, and usually had a pool, the *impluvium*, in the center. The atrium was a semi-public area; beyond it, and more private, was a larger open area, usually surrounded by a pillared corridor, called the *peristylum*; from this opened the rooms for family living. The house was only one story in height whenever space permitted, and even when it had an upper floor all attention was concentrated on the ground floor.<sup>15</sup>

The practicality of Roman domestic architecture, based on the *domus*, meant it would continue to be a basic house form in Iberian towns even after the breakup of the Roman Empire and into the fifth and seventh centuries AD, when the Iberian Peninsula was subjugated by the Visigoths. In AD 711, Spain was invaded by an army of the Umayyad Caliphate, and they, too, adopted in large part the Iberian house forms during their long occupation of Iberia.<sup>16</sup>

Over the next seven centuries, Iberian kings retook the peninsula from the Moors, a process that ended in 1492 with the surrender of the Alhambra and which coincided with the first Spanish

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<sup>15</sup> Pamela W. Gosner, *Caribbean Baroque: Historic Architecture of the Spanish Antilles* (Pueblo, Colorado: Passegiata Press, 1996), 130.

<sup>16</sup> The Umayyad army that invaded the Iberian Peninsula was composed mainly of Moorish troops from the newly conquered and converted lands of northwest Africa. In the mid-700s, shortly after the conquest of most of the Iberian Peninsula, the capital of the Umayyad Caliphate, in Damascus, Syria, was overthrown by the Abbasid Dynasty. Surviving members of the Caliphate reestablished their capital in Cordoba, in the Andalusian area of southern Spain. Cordoba was conquered in the early 1000s by Islamic rivals. During the Middle Ages, the Umayyad Caliphate in Spain became renowned as a refuge for religious tolerance, scientific inquiry, translation of ancient writing, and the construction of architectural wonders, such as the Alhambra and the Grand Mosque of Cordoba. Gosner, *Caribbean Baroque*, 130.

voyage of exploration to the New World. The similarity of climates between Spain and the New World encouraged the transplanting of Iberian Peninsula architectural traditions to the colonies. According to Gosner, the Spanish colonists introduced a number of architectural elements reflecting both the Spanish and Moorish traditions common to the Mediterranean area, such as patios surrounded by galleries, louver and grille window coverings, and plain white washed walls.<sup>17</sup>

By the late sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries, Cuban, Dominican Republic, and Puerto Rican masonry houses had an “entrance vestibule (or *zaguan*), which was usually at one end of the front [of the building], and which communicated with the patio by means of archway,” and in the patio were “stairways to the upper floors...generally placed at one end of the gallery,” similar to the “St. Augustine Plan” as defined by Manucy.<sup>18</sup>

As noted above, the “St. Augustine Plan,” as exemplified by the González-Alvarez (Oldest) House, represented earlier Iberian traditions but also conformed to the Spanish Ordinances of 1573, which dictated the layout of a city plan, the dimensions of an individual house lot, and even the placement of the residence on that lot. According to James Early, *Presidio, Mission, and Pueblo, Spanish Architecture and Urbanism in the United States* (2004),

Manucy believed that house lots in St. Augustine generally conformed to the standard smaller lot defined in the urban Ordinances of 1573, the *peonaria*, fifty by one hundred Spanish feet, or forty-four by eighty-eight English feet. He endorsed Kathleen Deagan’s finding that a common layout was characteristic of these lots throughout whole period 1565 to 1763. ...Ordinary houses were placed directly along the street with a porch attached to one of their sides at right angles to the street. Larger houses extended from the street back into the lots. A freestanding kitchen and utility structure was often placed in a rear corner of the lot and a garden wall ran down one of its long sides.<sup>19</sup>

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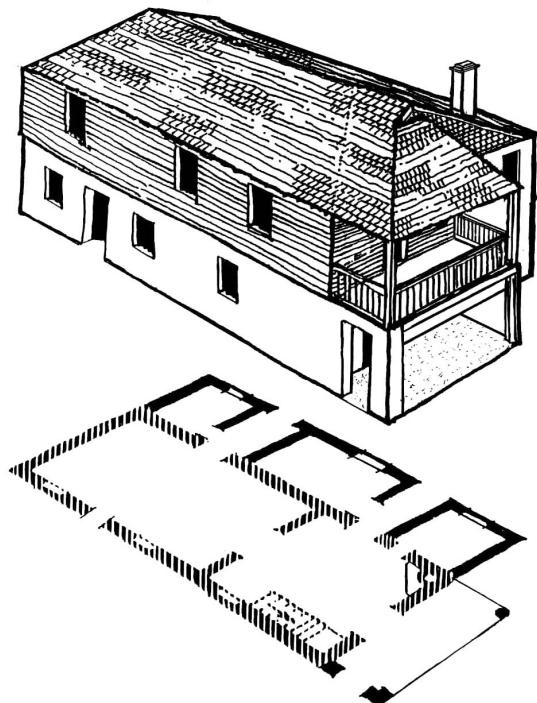
<sup>17</sup> Gosner, *Caribbean Baroque*, 131.

<sup>18</sup> Gosner, *Caribbean Baroque*, 136.

<sup>19</sup> Early, *Presidio, Mission, and Pueblo*, 18.

The González-Alvarez (Oldest) House—as restored in 1959–1960—is sited in the southern third of St. Augustine, Florida, on the north side of St. Francis Street between Charlotte and Marine Streets (see Figure 1). Adjacent to this property, at the corner of St. Francis and Charlotte Streets, is the Tovar (Cannonball) House, and further

Figure 1



Drawing of the González-Alvarez House showing the front (south) and side (east) elevations of the building as it presently exists following the 1959-1960 restoration. Below this drawing is the floor plan showing the two room *coquina* dwelling and loggia entrance on the east side built by Tomás González y Hernández in the 1720s (cross-hatched line) and the three room addition built on the north side by Sergeant Major Joseph Peavett c. 1775 (solid line). Courtesy of St. Augustine Historical Society Archives.

west along St. Francis Street is the Llambias House. All three Spanish colonial *coquina* masonry buildings are managed by the City of St. Augustine and the St. Augustine Historical Society. Across St. Francis Street from the González-Alvarez (Oldest) House is the colonial period St. Francis Barracks, currently the headquarters of the Florida National Guard, and nearby is the *coquina* masonry King's Bakery, one of the few British period (1763-1783) buildings in the city.<sup>20</sup>

Prior to the construction of *coquina* masonry buildings in St. Augustine, such as those noted above, historians and archaeologists have determined that the earliest colonial buildings of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries were constructed of wood, the most readily available building material of coastal northeastern Florida. When the English, under the command of Sir Francis Drake, attacked and burned St. Augustine in 1586, they described it as a "little town or village without [fortification] walls, built of wooden houses." After St. Augustine was rebuilt, Fr. Andres de San Miguel noted that "all the house walls are built of wood [*madera*] and the roofs of palm [*palma*], with some of the main ones of [*sawn*] board [*tabla*]...the Spaniards make the walls of their houses out of cypress [*savino*] because it does not rot when in the ground."<sup>21</sup>

A map of St. Augustine dated 1593 shows details of some of the town's now-lost wooden dwellings, which excavations have confirmed were constructed of "vertical [*sawn*] board walls and thatched roofs" for the town's inhabitants.<sup>22</sup> The use of wood as the primary material for residential construction in St. Augustine would continue well into the next century. In 1675, Bishop Gabriel Díaz Vara Calderón noted that "most of the houses they build are flimsy and without much room, since they are merely boards with palm-thatched roofs."<sup>23</sup>

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<sup>20</sup> Mark R. Barnes, "González-Alvarez (Oldest) House, Additional Documentation National Historic Landmark Study" (manuscript copy on file with the Southeast Region of the National Park Service, Atlanta, Georgia, 2007), 9.

<sup>21</sup> Manucy, *The Houses of St. Augustine*, 15-16.

<sup>22</sup> Manucy, *The Houses of St. Augustine*, 16, 20; and Kathleen A. Deagan, John Bostwick, and Dale Benton, "A Sub-Surface Survey of the St. Augustine City Environs" (manuscript on file with Florida State University, Tallahassee, Florida, 1976).

<sup>23</sup> Manucy, *The Houses of St. Augustine*, 20. Only one wooden Spanish colonial building remains in St. Augustine, the Juan Genopoly House (Oldest School House) (8SJ2519), at 14 St. George Street. It is a vernacular, wood-framed structure that was built between 1800 and 1810. Mark R. Barnes, "St. Augustine Town Plan Historic

During this same period, the Spanish also used *ostiones* (oyster shells) collected from local shell middens as the basic ingredient for *tabby*, the second type of building material. To construct the walls of a *tabby* building, the lime, sand, and shell mixture was combined with water and allowed to harden in prepared wooden forms and, when dry, the process was repeated until the desired height of the building was attained.<sup>24</sup> In the case of the González-Alvarez (Oldest) House, *tabby* was only used to make the ground floor, which was periodically renewed.

As early as 1580, Florida's Spanish Governor Pedro Menéndez Marques reported the discovery of shell stone or *coquina*, a third type of building material, on Anastasia Island, to the east of the town of St. Augustine. However, in 1596, Governor Gonzalo Méndez Canzo believed *coquina* masonry construction in St. Augustine was impractical due to the locally unstable geological conditions: "in digging one cubit [about 18 inches] beneath the surface one finds sand and water."<sup>25</sup> Changes in the raw material used in residences of St. Augustine may be traced to the sacking and partial burning of the town by the English pirate Robert Searles in 1668 and the 1670 establishment of the British colony of Carolina to the north. To protect St. Augustine from future pirate attacks and threats from British colonies to the north, the Spanish Crown authorized funds and personnel to open the *coquina* quarries on Anastasia Island in 1671. The cornerstone for the masonry fort, the Castillo de San Marcos, would be laid in 1672 and completed in 1697.<sup>26</sup>

At the beginning of the War of Spanish Succession (1702-1713), when the English Carolina militia unsuccessfully besieged the fort in 1702, the Castillo de San Marcos proved paramount to the successful defense of St. Augustine.<sup>27</sup> At the time that the English

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District, Additional Documentation Study" (manuscript on file with the Southeast Region of the National Park Service, Atlanta, Georgia, 2007), 71.

<sup>24</sup> Manucy, *The Houses of St. Augustine*, 32.

<sup>25</sup> Manucy, *The Houses of St. Augustine*, 17. The Spanish eventually became very adept at constructing *coquina* masonry structures on St. Augustine's sandy terrain. In 1789, the Royal Spanish engineer Mariano de la Rocque designed a nearly four-story tall masonry façade for the St. Augustine Cathedral "that is singular among all the religious structures extant from the Spanish colonial period in the United States." Barnes, "Cathedral of St. Augustine," 84.

<sup>26</sup> Manucy, *The Houses of St. Augustine*, 19-20.

<sup>27</sup> The War of Spanish Succession (1701-1713), known as Queen Anne's War in the New World English colonies, was initiated by Louis XIV in an effort to place his grandson, Philip, Duke of Anjou, on the Spanish throne after the death of Carlos II

forces withdrew, they burned all of the wooden and *tabby* residences in the city. Manucy believed that none of the approximately three dozen currently extant colonial residential buildings in St. Augustine can be dated from before the 1702 attack. It is generally assumed the extant colonial residential buildings in St. Augustine date from after this event.<sup>28</sup>

Although it took time for the Spanish to recover from the 1702 attack, by 1713 Governor Don Francisco de Coroles had constructed, for himself, a new *coquina* masonry known as the Governor's House.<sup>29</sup> Fifty years later, in 1763, the Spanish departed St. Augustine under the terms of the Treaty of Paris, which ended the French and Indian War. The Spanish inventory of the 342 private dwellings in the town revealed that 124 (36 percent) were built with *coquina* masonry, 140 (41 percent) with *tabby*, and 78 (23 percent) with wood.<sup>30</sup> Originally a wooden town, St. Augustine was now three-quarters *coquina* masonry or *tabby* construction. In the period following the British attack of 1702, and up until 1763 when Spain lost Florida, Manucy noted within St. Augustine an "improvement in the economy, and new defenses that promised security the city had never had before. The nature of the materials, the national traditions of the people, and the workman's skill were fundamental influences on the buildings."<sup>31</sup>

As a result of the improving economy of St. Augustine during the period of 1702-1763, many families had been able to afford

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(1665-1700), the last of the Hapsburg line. England and Holland opposed the union of the French and Spanish dominions that would have made France the leading European power and diverted Spanish New World trade from England and Holland to France. In 1702, Queen Anne's War, the second of four colonial wars to occur on the North American continent, saw the South Carolina militia seize, pillage, and burn the town of St. Augustine but fail to take the Castillo de San Marcos. The war ended with the signing of the Treaty of Utrecht (11 April 1713) but was followed by further wars between England, France, and Spain in North America. This rivalry ended with the French and Indian War (1754-1763), at which time the British occupied Florida and established St. Augustine as the capital of British East Florida. Barnes, "González-Alvarez (Oldest) House," 17.

<sup>28</sup> Manucy, *The Houses of St. Augustine*, 8, 11. Research at the Father Miquel (Michael) O'Reilly House, at 32 Aviles Street in St. Augustine, demonstrates that at least part of this First Spanish Period building may have been constructed as early as c. 1691. See [www.oreillyhouse.org](http://www.oreillyhouse.org) (accessed 5 March 2015).

<sup>29</sup> The Governor's House, or Government House (8SJ1027), was constructed c. 1713 and underwent several renovations from the eighteenth through the twentieth centuries. Barnes, "St. Augustine Town Plan Historic District," 37-41.

<sup>30</sup> Manucy, *The Houses of St. Augustine*, 33.

<sup>31</sup> Manucy, *The Houses of St. Augustine*, 9.

constructing masonry and/or *tabby* residences.<sup>32</sup> Although more expensive, these structures were more durable and resistant to rot and fire than wood buildings built by previous residents of the town. The head of one of these families, Tomás González y Hernández, constructed a two-room *coquina* dwelling on St. Francis Street in the late 1720s. His family would reside there until the end of the French and Indian War in 1763 (see Figure 2).

In 1763, the beginning of the British tenancy, Dr. William Stork described the *coquina* masonry houses of the first half of the eighteenth century as “built of free-stone, commonly two stories high, two rooms upon a floor, with large windows and balconies; before the entry of most of the houses [at the rear] runs a portico of stone arches; the roofs are commonly flat.”<sup>33</sup> William Gerard de Brahm supplied an additional description of the Spanish colonial houses in St. Augustine:

All houses are built of [*coquina*] Masonry; their entrances [at the rear] are shaded by Piazzas [porches] supported by Tuskan Pillars or Pillasters against the South Sun. The houses have to the East windows projecting 16 or 18 inches into the street, very wide and proportionately high. On the West side their Windows are commonly very small, and no Opening of any kind to the North, on which side they have double walls 6 or 8 feet asunder, forming a kind of Gallery [loggia], which answers for Cellars and Pantries ...No house had any Chimney for a Fire-place.<sup>34</sup>

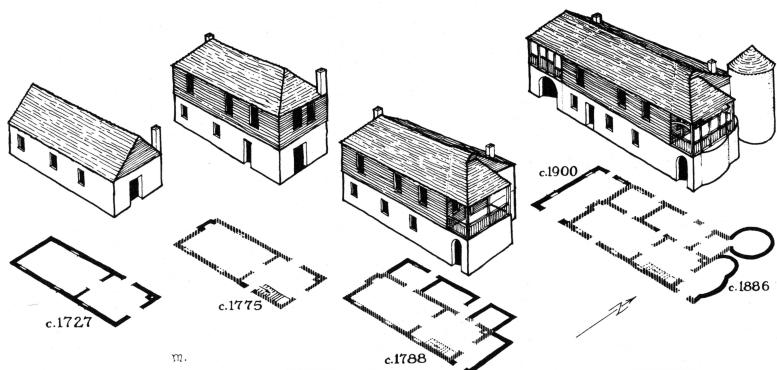
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<sup>32</sup> Susan Parker used probate inventories from ten private *coquina* masonry buildings dating from the first half of the eighteenth century to show that well-to-do Spanish colonists residing close to the plaza had residences with roofs made of “wooden shingles” (90), “windows with glass panes” (93), masonry “chimneys,” and where a first floor contained a shop, there would have been direct access to “the shop from the street” (94). Parker further proposes that the settlers who came in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries from Asturias, in northern Spain, were culturally predisposed to wooden dwellings, where a “tradition of building with timber” existed (83), and that southern Iberian masonry traditions began to enter St. Augustine with the craftsmen who built the Castillo (84-85), starting in the 1670s. Lastly, by 1680, Parker notes that “a substantial number of arrivals from Iberian regions (Castile and Andalucia) where masonry construction prevailed prompted a preference for masonry instead of wood” dwellings in St. Augustine during the first half of the eighteenth century (86). Susan R. Parker, “The Second Century of Settlement in Spanish St. Augustine, 1670-1763” (Ph.D. diss., University of Florida, 1999).

<sup>33</sup> Manucy, *The Houses of St. Augustine*, 28.

<sup>34</sup> Manucy, *The Houses of St. Augustine*, 29.

Figure 2



Drawing showing the evolution of the González-Alvarez House, from its initial construction in the 1720s by Tomás González y Hernández, to two enlargements by Sergeant Major Joseph Peavett (c. 1775 and 1788), and the final enlargement by Dr. Carver and Mr. Henderson from c. 1886 to c. 1900. Courtesy of St. Augustine Historical Society Archives.

During the first years of the English occupation of St. Augustine (1763-1783), British soldiers were quartered in numerous vacant wood and *tabby* houses before barracks could be completed at the renovated St. Francis Convent, across St. Francis Street from the González-Alvarez (Oldest) House. The Philadelphia botanist John Bartram observed King George's soldier's ill-treatment of their temporary quarters: "soldiers pulled down 'about half the town' to make firewood, which was scarce."<sup>35</sup> As this loss of *tabby* and wood dwellings was occurring, however, *coquina* masonry Spanish colonial houses were being purchased and enlarged by the more affluent British colonists, who "remodeled many of the better (*coquina*) ones, and built scores of small timber-frame houses for a flood of refugees from the [American] Revolution to the north."<sup>36</sup>

Renovations of the masonry buildings may have included adding a masonry or wooden second floor, usually with a street-side balcony, building a chimney on the side of the building, and replacing wood shuttered windows with glass panes. The British often found it convenient to retain the Spanish-inspired side entrances to the courtyard and rear porch or side loggia entrances to the house, both of which provided shade and protection from the summer heat (see Figures 2 and 3 and Photo 1).<sup>37</sup>

At the end of the American Revolution in 1783, St. Augustine was returned to the Spanish, and in 1788, the Spanish Royal Engineer Mariano de la Rocque resurveyed the town, finding a total of 266 residential buildings:

133 houses of wood (*madera*), 114 stone (*coquina*), and only 19 *tabby*. Probably the latter were survivors of the *tabby* houses so numerous before 1763. Most of the wooden buildings were recent make shifts from hectic Tory times.<sup>38</sup>

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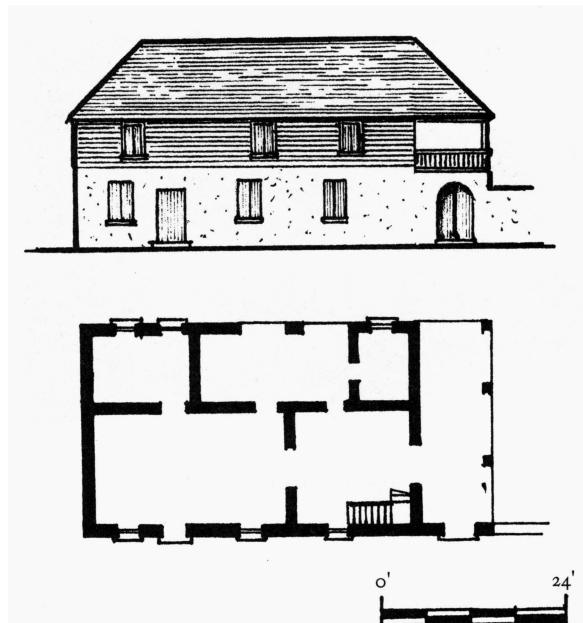
<sup>35</sup> Manucy, *The Houses of St. Augustine*, 34. The infamous reputation of British troops quartered in private lodgings was so widespread that when Congress wrote the Constitution they included the Third Amendment, placing restrictions on the quartering of soldiers in private homes without the owner's consent and forbidding the practice in peacetime. This amendment was a response to Quartering Acts passed by the British parliament during the American Revolutionary War, which had allowed the British Army to lodge soldiers in private residences.

<sup>36</sup> Manucy, *The Houses of St. Augustine*, 8.

<sup>37</sup> Barnes, "González-Alvarez (Oldest) House," 19.

<sup>38</sup> Manucy, *The Houses of St. Augustine*, 46.

Figure 3



Drawing showing the González-Alvarez House front (south) elevation and floor plan as it presently exists following the 1959-1960 restoration. The front elevation shows the original dwelling entrance (1720s) on the right—through the garden wall and thence into the dwelling via a side loggia—indicative of the St. Augustine Plan and the direct access entrance to the dwelling from the street established by Sergeant Major Peavett (c. 1775) when he turned the first floor of this house into a tavern. Courtesy of St. Augustine Historical Society Archives.

Photo 1

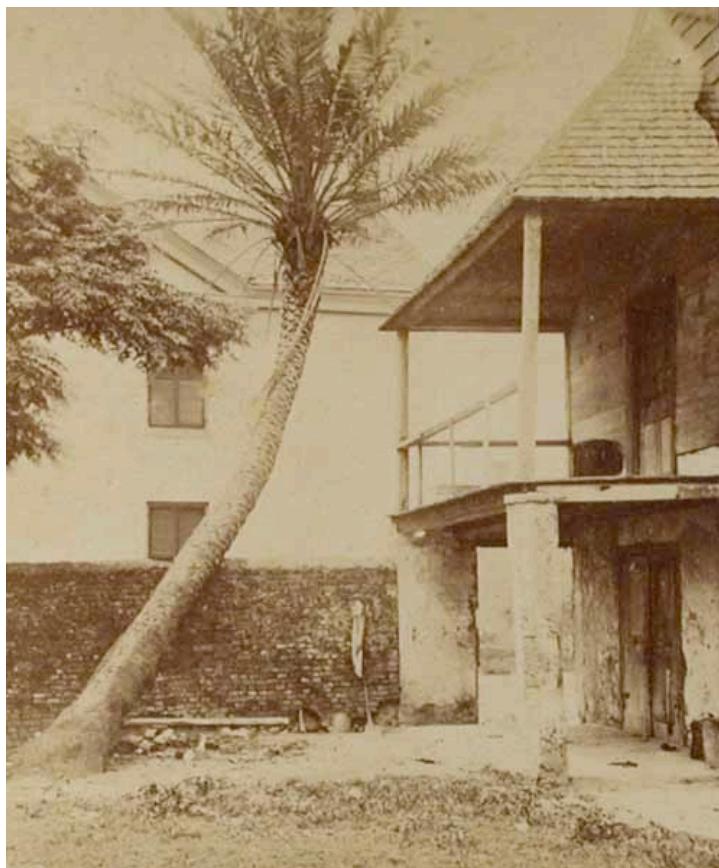


Image from an unattributed stereoview of the 1870s taken from inside the enclosed garden looking south and shows the east end of first and second floors of the dwelling on the right side of the image. The first floor *coquina* walls and side loggia entrance shown were constructed in the 1720s by Tomás González y Hernández. The wooden second floor and covered entrance to the first floor was constructed by Sergeant Major Joseph Peavett c. 1775. On the left side of the image is the masonry garden wall, probably also constructed by Peavett, and the garden entrance which admit people to the garden and dwelling via a side loggia—a singular feature of the St. Augustine Plan as developed by Albert Manucy. Image is from the author's private collection.

When St. Augustine became part of the United States in 1821, by dint of the ratification of the Adams-Onis Treaty of 1819, the number of buildings had increased to approximately 300, of which several were *coquina* masonry, built in the Second Spanish Period between 1783 and 1821. By 1962, when Albert Manucy published his study on Spanish colonial buildings and structures in St. Augustine, only 31 colonial *coquina* masonry residences and structures, 1 wooden building, and a *tabby* fragment of a garden wall remained of the 300 colonial residential buildings noted in 1821.<sup>39</sup> In short, only about 1 in 10 colonial buildings had survived after 141 years. Manucy observed that the surviving masonry buildings, such as the González-Alvarez (Oldest) House, constituted “the better houses, not representative of the total architecture” which once made up St. Augustine.<sup>40</sup> Nearly all of these masonry residences have undergone rebuilding and alteration since construction. Manucy explained that these houses, “which survived catastrophes[,] underwent a sort of continuous development, in which countless structural additions were made and few taken away.”<sup>41</sup>

The survival of the *coquina* masonry buildings in St. Augustine is credited to the use of the most durable local raw material for their construction. Toward the end of the nineteenth century, however, their economic value to the owners as tourist venues became another important factor in the preservation of some of these colonial buildings. In 1882, the heirs of Gerónimo Alvarez, who had resided in the “Oldest House” since 1790, sold the property to William B. Duke for \$2000.00. At that time, the structure was described as “an old dilapidated *coquina* house.”<sup>42</sup> Duke purchased the building as an investment and, in 1884, sold the house for \$3,000.00 to Mary Carver, wife of Dr. Charles P.

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<sup>39</sup> During the production of this article the author learned that the Pedro Fornells House collapsed during renovation and was torn down. The Pedro Fornells House (8SJ2239) was located at 62 Spanish Street, at the corner of Spanish and Hypolita Streets. The dwelling was a two-story *coquina* masonry building constructed in the Second Spanish Period (1783-1821), sometime between 1801 and 1807. So there are now only 30 colonial *coquina* masonry residences and structures in St. Augustine, Florida. John Ayer, personal communication with author, 24 September 2014.

<sup>40</sup> Manucy, *The Houses of St. Augustine*, 10.

<sup>41</sup> Manucy, *The Houses of St. Augustine*, 9.

<sup>42</sup> Jean P. Waterbury, “The Oldest House: Its Site and Its Occupants 1650(?)–1984,” *El Escribano* 21:9 (1984):1-35; and Barnes, “The González-Alvarez (Oldest) House,” 19.

Carver, a dentist and real estate developer.<sup>43</sup> The Carvers are believed to be the first owners to promote the building as “The Oldest House.” Legend has it that so many tourists knocked on the door wanting to see the house that Carver was unable to continue his dental practice and instead started charging admission.<sup>44</sup> Carver undertook renovations to the house to make it more livable for his family and more interesting to tourists (see Figure 2 and Photo 2).<sup>45</sup>

Carver retained ownership of the property until 1898, at which time he sold it to James W. Henderson for \$10,000. The Henderson family lived there for thirteen years before selling it in 1911 to the South Beach Alligator Farm and Museum of Marine Curiosities, which added the “Oldest House” to its list of tourist attractions.<sup>46</sup> During their tenure the Henderson family added a “two-story addition on the west end of the house [that] provided ground-floor space for the family automobile, dramatically named the Red Devil, and an upstairs apartment for the family” (see Figure 2 and Photo 3).<sup>47</sup>

The “Oldest House” in America became so popular with tourists that there were soon a number of *coquina* houses advertised as the “Oldest House” in St. Augustine. Ring Lardner in *Gullible’s Travels* provides a tongue-in-cheek description of a visit to St. Augustine in the early twentieth century:

First, we went to St. George Street and visited the oldest house in the United States. Then we went to Hospital Street and seen the oldest house in the United States. Then we turned the corner and went down St. Francis Street and inspected the oldest house in the United

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<sup>43</sup> Jean P. Waterbury, *The Gonzalez-Alvarez Oldest House, the Place and Its People* (St. Augustine: The St. Augustine Historical Society, 2000), 30-31.

<sup>44</sup> Waterbury, *The Gonzalez-Alvarez Oldest House*, 29-30.

<sup>45</sup> Under Carter’s ownership, the interior *coquina* walls were paneled with wood salvaged from the First Presbyterian Church. Hip and gable hoods with novelty shingles were put over the windows and doors, and an eyebrow dormer was added to the roof. Most notably, a two-story circular tower was added to the northeast corner. The first floor was of poured concrete and the second floor was rusticated exposed *coquina*, with a cornice of conch shells. The roof was red clay tile. In the 1890s, additions were made at the east and west ends. The results were a striking piece of Victorian era Queen Anne style architecture, the tower being one of the outstanding examples of the use of local materials in design during that era. Waterbury, *The Gonzalez-Alvarez Oldest House*, 30-31.

<sup>46</sup> Waterbury, *The Gonzalez-Alvarez Oldest House*, 31.

<sup>47</sup> Waterbury, *The Gonzalez-Alvarez Oldest House*, 32.

Photo 2

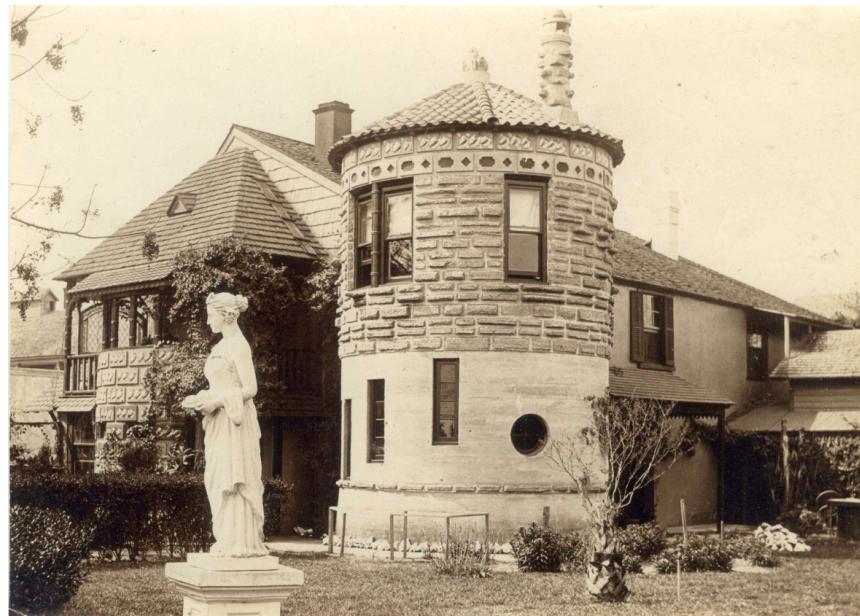


Image from an unattributed source of the 1890s. Image was taken from inside the enclosed garden looking southwest and shows the east end and back side (north side) of the dwelling. Image shows the extensive Victorian additions made by Dr. Charles P. Carver in the 1890s, when it was first advertised as the "Oldest House" in the United States. Carver's round two story concrete tower and elements of the 1890s on the east end were removed in the 1959-1960 restoration to replicate what the dwelling would have looked like in the last quarter of the eighteenth century. Image is from the author's private collection.

Photo 3



Image is from a Keystone stereoview of the first decade of the twentieth century. Image was taken from across St. Francis Street looking northwest to show the entire front of the González-Alvarez House. Image shows the building during the period of 1898-1911 when it was owned by Mr. James W. Henderson. Henderson built a wooden garage and apartment addition on the west side of the house and Victorian inspired window and door coverings and decorative roof dormers. Image is from the author's private collection.

States. Then we dropped into a soda fountain and I had an egg phosphate, made from the oldest egg in the Western Hemisphere. We passed up lunch and got into a carriage drawn by the oldest horse in Florida, and we rode through the country all afternoon and the driver told us some of the oldest jokes in the book.<sup>48</sup>

In 1917, the St. Augustine Historical Society was called upon to adjudicate the conflicting claims of historical antiquity made by the various colonial *coquina* house museum owners. A committee resolved that it “cannot positively determine which is the oldest house in St. Augustine, but it is of the opinion, based upon the findings of this committee, that the house known as the Gerónimo Alvarez house on St. Francis Street, is such.”<sup>49</sup> In 1918, the Society purchased the “Oldest House” for \$15,000, along with the Tovar House, a Second Period Spanish Period dwelling on the northwest corner of the intersection of Charlotte and St. Francis Streets. In later years, the Society would also buy the competing Don Toledo House, on St. George Street, and lease the one on Aviles (Hospital). Henceforth there would be only one “Oldest House” in St. Augustine.<sup>50</sup>

In 1925, concerned about the historical integrity of the “Oldest House,” the Society removed Dr. Carver’s paneling from part of the interior to reveal the original wooden beams and *coquina* walls. An article in the *St. Augustine Record* noted:

“This paneling was most attractive, but not at all typical of the olden time the structure really represents,” reported the press. “The effect is not as pretty, but far more interesting to the seeker after the old, the ancient and the unusual. The Historical Society is being congratulated on the work it is doing.”<sup>51</sup>

By the mid-twentieth century, Hugh Morrison compiled the first nation-wide study of colonial architecture in the continental United States. Morrison derived his descriptions of domestic Spanish colonial

<sup>48</sup> Ring Lardner, *The Ring Lardner Reader*, ed. Maxwell Geismar (New York: Charles Scribner, 1963), 51.

<sup>49</sup> Thomas Graham, “St. Augustine Historical Society, 1883-1983,” *Florida Historical Quarterly* 64:1 (1985):8-9.

<sup>50</sup> Graham, “St. Augustine Historical Society,” 8-9.

<sup>51</sup> Waterbury, *The Gonzalez-Alvarez Oldest House*, 34.

architecture in St. Augustine from the González-Alvarez “Oldest House,” and he noted certain misconceptions associated with the property:

The “Oldest House” in St. Augustine is probably typical of the Spanish domestic architecture of the eighteenth century. Sometimes alleged to have been built in 1564, it was more probably built in 1763; at least there is an unbroken chain of titles since that date. It is a simple two-story structure, the thick lower wall built of coquina limestone, the second story of [wood] frame construction with clapboard siding. A hipped roof covers second-story porches [loggias] at each end. Interiors have low ceilings, hand-hewn cedar beams, and large fireplaces.<sup>52</sup>

Considering the state of historic preservation in the mid-twentieth century, the Society was at times unfairly criticized for exaggerating the age of the “Oldest House,” but it had the salutary effect of prompting historical research to accurately determine the age of the building and develop a program for restoration.<sup>53</sup> This research was augmented by the archaeological work of John Griffin in 1954 and that of Hale Smith in 1958, which were among the first such historical archaeological investigations conducted in St. Augustine. Their findings indicated that:

...the site has had continuous human habitation since about 1650. A wooden structure here was burned in 1702. The basic [*coquina* masonry] element of the present house was built soon afterward, then was enlarged in well-defined stages which accurately reflect the changing times in the old city.<sup>54</sup>

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<sup>52</sup> Hugh Morrison, *Early American Architecture: From the First Colonial Settlements to the National Period* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1952), 183. Subsequent archeological research has demonstrated that a series of wooden buildings stood on this site from c. 1650-1702. In addition, later historical documentation indicates that a masonry dwelling constituting the two rooms fronting on St. Francis Street, dating from the 1720s, is the earliest of extant building elements on this property.

<sup>53</sup> Graham, “St. Augustine Historical Society,” 12-13, 22.

<sup>54</sup> Frederick C. Gjessing, et al., *Evolution of the Oldest House: Written for the St. Augustine Historical Society* (Tallahassee: Department of Anthropology, Florida State University, 1962), 13.

During the 1959-1960 restoration, Carver's concrete and *coquina* tower (1884-1898) was removed and the area rebuilt as it existed in the 1780s.<sup>55</sup> In addition, the Henderson's west end garage and upstairs apartment (1898-1911) were removed. Only the enclosed balcony and loggia entrance on the east end dating from the Carver's ownership were left intact (see Figure 3 and Photo 4). The rooms of the first floor are interpreted as they would have looked from the 1720s to 1763, when the Tomás González family occupied the building, while the rooms of the second floor are interpreted from the British through the early American Territorial periods (1763-1840s), which included the tenure of Sergeant Major Joseph Peavett and the Alvarez family. In his seminal work, Manucy defined "St. Augustine Plan" residential buildings, such as the González-Alvarez House, as rectangular in floor plan, one- or two-story masonry, or two-story masonry and wood dwellings, with their long sides built flush to the street line, and with attached courtyard walls—also built flush to the street line—extending from the facade of the building to the edges of the property, to enclose an interior courtyard for both privacy and defense.<sup>56</sup>

Manucy and other researchers later concluded that the "St. Augustine Plan" had its roots in much older Roman, Gothic, Moorish, and Medieval residential buildings in Spain, which separate the public areas of the street from the private areas of the courtyard and living areas within the dwelling.<sup>57</sup> These building traditions, transported to the New World, were further influenced by locally available raw materials and climate, colonial Spanish and British building practices, and the 1573 Royal Spanish Ordinances governing the establishment of new towns in the Spanish Caribbean:

All town houses are to be so planned that they can serve as a defense or fortress against those who might attempt to create disturbances or occupy the town. Each house is to be so constructed that horses and household animals can be kept therein, the courtyards and stockyards being as large as possible to insure health and cleanliness.<sup>58</sup>

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<sup>55</sup> The 1959-1960 restoration was undertaken by the St. Augustine Restoration and Preservation Association, in cooperation with the St. Augustine Historical Society.

<sup>56</sup> Manucy, *The Houses of St. Augustine*, 55, 58, 60-61.

<sup>57</sup> Gosner, *Caribbean Baroque*; Manucy, "Changing Traditions in St. Augustine Architecture;" and Manucy, *Sixteenth-Century St. Augustine*.

<sup>58</sup> Barnes, "González-Alvarez (Oldest) House," 4.

Photo 4



Image shows the front of the González-Alvarez (Oldest) House. Image was taken from across St. Francis Street looking north. Image shows the building following the restoration of 1959-1960 when most of the additions of Dr. Carver and Mr. Henderson were removed. Image was taken by the author on a visit to St. Augustine in 2000 and is from the author's private collection.

Manucy also noted a singular feature of “St. Augustine Plan” residential buildings—the lack of direct access to the interior of the building from the street. Instead, access was provided through a gate in the courtyard wall adjacent to the building which permitted access to the courtyard and then into the residence. Manucy observed two variations of the “St. Augustine Plan” based on the manner of access from the courtyard to the interior of the dwelling. Once through the courtyard wall gate, access into the dwelling was either through a covered loggia on the side of the building or via a porch on the rear of the building.<sup>59</sup> Thus, the González-Alvarez (Oldest) House is a variant of the “St. Augustine Plan” with access to the building through a covered loggia on the east side of the dwelling (see Figure 1 and Photo 1). Evident through the late nineteenth century (see Photo 1), this type of restricted access first appears in the 1720s, when the González-Alvarez (Oldest) House was constructed as a one-story two room *coquina* masonry dwelling.<sup>60</sup>

During the British occupation of St. Augustine, following his acquisition of the property in 1778, Sergeant Major Joseph Peavett enlarged the González-Alvarez (Oldest) House by adding a wooden frame and masonry second story above the original 1720s *coquina* masonry building. The second floor, which had the same dimensions as the first floor (40 feet by 20 feet), assumed the function of the family residential area, with its own access along the east side of the house, through the side entrance loggia. The first floor became a tavern that required cutting a doorway to permit direct street access for customers, probably for the British soldiers from the St. Francis Barracks across the street. This enlargement included the addition of wooden hipped roof with wooden shingles, which extended about nine feet to the east to cover an open porch, above the side entrance to the courtyard (figs. 1 and 2 & photo 1). The Peavetts also added a *coquina* masonry chimney on the north side of the dwelling.

Joseph and Mary Peavett elected to stay in St. Augustine after the end of the American Revolution in 1784. In the late 1780s, there

<sup>59</sup> Barnes, “The Llambias House,” 20. The Llambias House, down the street from the González-Alvarez (Oldest) House, has an entrance to the dwelling from a gate in the courtyard wall and then through the porch to the interior.

<sup>60</sup> According to the former executive director of the St. Augustine Historical Society, information collected during the recent restoration of the front (south) facade of the González-Alvarez (Oldest) House reveals that the building may have had a flat roof when it was constructed in the 1720s. Ms. Dannie Helm, telephone communication with author, May 2007.

was a second expansion that included a two-story *coquina* masonry arcaded porch and gallery attached to the rear of the residence, from which access to both floors of the dwelling was provided, and the construction of a wooden balcony over the masonry loggia on the east side (see Figure 2 and Photo 1).<sup>61</sup> This second expansion was probably undertaken by Joseph Peavett's widow, Mary Evans Peavett, prior to the sale of the building in 1790 to Gerónimo Alvarez. For ninety-two years (1790-1882), Alvarez and his descendants would reside in the building, leaving it unchanged from the two Peavett expansions.

As shown herein, the archaeological work conducted prior to the 1959-1960 restoration determined that the area of the González-Alvarez House was occupied by at least two wooden buildings starting c. 1650.<sup>62</sup> When Tomás González constructed the oldest part of the present dwelling in the 1720s, it consisted of a one-story, two room *coquina* masonry building, approximately 40 feet by 20 feet in size. This building stood about 9 feet in height, with walls measuring about 18 inches in thickness and plastered inside and out to protect the *coquina* stone; the interior had a *tabby* floor.<sup>63</sup> It is not certain if it had a flat *tabby* roof, supported with wooden roof beams or a wooden frame and palm thatched gable roof (see Figure 2). In accordance with Spanish regulations for the founding of military towns and the placement of residences within the town, the González House was built with its long side (south elevation) right on the edge of the street line. In the 1670s, the opening of the *coquina* quarries for the construction of the Castillo de San Marcos made it possible for citizens of the town to construct durable masonry dwellings that reflected Spanish architectural styles previously made of wood and *tabby*.

After its 1918 acquisition of the González-Alvarez House, the St. Augustine Historical Society undertook a restoration process that included the removal of Victorian additions and returned the residence to the 1788 configuration as documented in the earliest known drawings and photographs. For almost a century the Society has presented the public with an enhanced interpretation of the house and its inhabitants as new research has become available (see Figure 3 and Photo 4).

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<sup>61</sup> Stereoview dating from the 1870s (Photo 1) shows the entrance described above. Stereoview is from the author's personal collection.

<sup>62</sup> Gjessing et al., *Evolution of the Oldest House*, 102; and Waterbury, "The Oldest House," 5-7.

<sup>63</sup> Manucy, *The Houses of St. Augustine*, 164.

The preservation of the González-Alvarez House as a privately owned and well-frequented tourist venue was aided by the federal government's preservation of St. Augustine's *coquina* masonry forts (Castillo de San Marcos and Fort Matanzas), which were designated as National Monuments on 15 October 1924 and transferred to the National Park Service on 10 August 1933.<sup>64</sup> Similarly, the 1797 parish church (Cathedral of St. Augustine) was preserved at this time and later designated a National Historic Landmark in 1970 for being the most intact Spanish colonial religious structure in the southeast.

The "Oldest House" at 14 St. Francis Street has a dual significance. First, it is one of the finest examples of a Spanish colonial "St. Augustine Plan" residence, represented by a small number of surviving colonial buildings, or portions of buildings from the First Spanish colonial period in St. Augustine (pre-1763). Second, as a popular tourist attraction touted as the "Oldest House" in St. Augustine for well over one hundred years, it may be considered a forerunner of modern Florida's biggest industry. Driven by the heritage tourism economy of St. Augustine, the historical, archaeological, and architectural research undertaken at the González-Alvarez (Oldest) House demonstrates that the "Oldest House" has a wider affiliation than just St. Augustine, Florida. Indeed, colonial buildings similar to the González-Alvarez (Oldest) House with its "St. Augustine Plan" architecture are being identified throughout the former Spanish possessions in the Caribbean.

In 2006, the World Heritage Site programs published a study which identified over two dozen colonial forts and associated towns in the Greater Caribbean area as potential World Heritage Sites, including the Spanish colonial fort and town of St. Augustine, Florida.<sup>65</sup> There is now a clear understanding that the research conducted on individual buildings such as the González-Alvarez (Oldest) House transcends to international significance.

The information on the historical research conducted at the "Oldest House" presented herein is derived from a detailed multi-year survey of the colonial buildings and town of St. Augustine. This work

<sup>64</sup> National Park Service, *The National Parks: Index 1995* (Washington, D.C.: U.S. Department of the Interior, 1995), 37-38.

<sup>65</sup> Nuria Sanz, "Fortifications in Latin America and the Caribbean and the UNESCO World Heritage List," in *American Fortifications and the World Heritage Convention*, ed. Nuria Sanz, vol. 19 (Paris: UNESCO World Heritage Centre, 2006). Available on line at [http://whc.unesco.org/documents/publi\\_wh\\_papers\\_19.pdf](http://whc.unesco.org/documents/publi_wh_papers_19.pdf) (accessed 5 March 2015).

reinforced the idea that the González-Alvarez (Oldest) House is an outstanding and rare surviving example of the “St. Augustine Plan” in the continental United States, for which it was designated a National Historic Landmark in 1970. However, the focus on the architecture of individual buildings and historic districts detracts from the historical evolution of the architectural styles and construction methods that derived from earlier traditions developed in Europe and the Middle East. Only recently have researchers understood that the “St. Augustine Plan” was derived from traditional masonry residential buildings in Spain, reflecting earlier architectural aspects dating from the Roman, Gothic, Moorish, and Late Medieval periods. Nor was it understood how, starting in the sixteenth century, Spanish colonists transmitted this residential building tradition to the Spanish Caribbean islands, such as Puerto Rico, and from there to St. Augustine, the principal town of Spanish Florida.<sup>66</sup>

The narrative presented herein chronicles a century of professional work at just one building. Expanding this research across a wider geographical and historical perspective reveals that the “Oldest House” is one of hundreds of similar colonial buildings throughout the Caribbean in dozens of historic towns, purposely created by the Spanish Crown to protect their holdings in the Antilles and the mainland of the Spanish Empire from the intrusions of other European powers. Understanding how historic buildings in the remote *presidio* town of St. Augustine are related to Spanish towns in the Caribbean and the Iberian Peninsula is only the beginning. On-going research on the Spanish colonial remains of structures in Florida will continue, as researchers explore the possibility of a thematic World Heritage Site

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<sup>66</sup> Santiago Javier Gala Aguilera, staff architectural historian of the Puerto Rico State Historic Preservation Office, brought the Machín-Ramos House (c. 1800), located in San Lorenzo, Puerto Rico, to the attention of the author as one example of a rubble masonry (*mampostería*) Spanish colonial house in the Caribbean that shares many architectural aspects with “St. Augustine Plan” residential buildings in St. Augustine, Florida. The Machín-Ramos House was listed in the National Register of Historic Places on 5 May 1989. Recently, Dr. Arleen Pabón-Chaneco’s Old San Juan (*Viejo San Juan*), Puerto Rico nomination, incorporating all the fortification walls and pre-1898 Spanish colonial buildings enclosed by the walls, was designated a National Historic Landmark on 27 February 2013. Included in this study were hundreds of Spanish colonial residential properties which had similar plans and elements to the “Oldest House” in St. Augustine. Indeed, both towns contained similar arrangements of the buildings, roads, plazas, and protecting fortifications due to construction over hundreds of years in accordance to the Laws of Indies as enforced by on-site Royal Spanish Engineers.

nomination for colonial historic towns and their associated fortifications, using in part the research garnered over the last century on the “Oldest House” and its community.

Throughout the 250 years of Spanish occupation and the intrusion of a brief British ownership of St. Augustine, the vernacular Spanish-inspired private residences changed from wooden dwellings to *tabby* and finally to masonry. The González-Alvarez (Oldest) House as it appears today serves as a testament to that architectural history (see Photo 4). However, these modifications cannot be viewed solely as local history, but must be considered within the context of the raw materials available in the area of St. Augustine on the northwest coast of Florida, architectural styles reaching back hundreds of years to the Iberian Peninsula, and global events between competing colonial powers. In 2015, the community of St. Augustine will celebrate the 450<sup>th</sup> anniversary of its founding, and the almost 300-year-old González-Alvarez House should be viewed not as it was once advertised in the Gilded Age as the “Oldest House in America,” but as a cultural artifact that touches on several aspects of history and architecture on a scale of national and international significance.

## Appendix A

### Sequence of Occupation and Construction at the González-Alvarez (Oldest) House

1. Archeological investigations conducted in 1959 as part of the documentation to restore the González-Alvarez (Oldest) House uncovered a c. 1650 small, one-room residential wooden building located on this town lot. Evidence determined that fire, sometime in the late seventeenth century, destroyed the building. A second wooden building was built on the same site, only to again be burned down, possibly as a result of the 1702 British attack on St. Augustine. There is currently no information on ownership for this property in the seventeenth century.
2. Sometime between the 1702 attack and the 1720s, a one-story, two-room *coquina* masonry building was constructed on the site. The entrance to the residence was on the east side of the building. Parish records from 1727 indicate that Tomás González y Hernández and his wife were living in this building on his *peonía*.
3. In late 1763, with the start of the British occupation, the González family vacated their home. Royal Spanish Engineer de la Puente recorded their *coquina* masonry residence on Lot No. 223, on Block K in a map he made of St. Augustine. When de la Puente left in early 1764, he turned control of the González house and several others over to Jesse Fish to sell and send the proceeds to the González family, now residing in Cuba.
4. Fish was not able to sell the old masonry González house until 1778, when Sergeant Major Joseph Peavett and his wife Mary acquired the property. The Peavetts soon enlarged the original *coquina* masonry dwelling, with a wood frame and masonry second floor covered with clap board siding. The whole building was covered with a wooden hipped roof with wood shingles, and a masonry chimney was built at the northeast corner of the building.
5. As paymaster for the British army, Peavett used the first floor as a tavern to serve the troops stationed across the street at St. Francis Barracks. A direct access door from the street to his tavern for

customers was constructed about that time. Unlike many of the British residents of St. Augustine, the Peavetts elected to stay on after the return of St. Augustine to the Spanish in 1783, probably due to their extensive land holdings outside the town.

6. At some point prior to 1788, Joseph Peavett died but his wife Mary added a two-story *coquina* masonry addition along the north (rear) side of the building, adding three small rooms to each floor. The loggia entrance on the east side of the building was enclosed with one-story masonry addition, with a wooden balcony above it. These additions are shown in outline on the Spanish Royal Engineer Mariano de la Rocque's 1788 town map.

7. Mary Peavett married John Hudson shortly after Joseph Peavett's passing. Hudson's debts forced them to sell the house in 1790 at public auction to Gerónimo Alvarez. Two generations of the Alvarez family lived in the house until 1882, without making any changes to the building, at which time it was sold to William Duke.

8. Duke owned the house for two years before selling it, in 1884, to Dr. and Mrs. Mary E. and Charles P. Carver. Over the next 14 years, Carver began to advertise the house as the "Oldest House" in the United States, charging a fee for visitation. Carver built the round two-story tower on the northeast corner of the house.

9. In 1898, the "Oldest House" was sold by Carver to Judge and Mrs. James W. Henderson and the public exhibition of the house continued. The Henderson's built a wooden garage and apartment addition on the west side of the house. In 1911, George Reddington purchased the house. Reddington also owned the South Beach Alligator Farm and Museum of Curios, which catered to the tourist trade.

10. In 1918, the St. Augustine Historical Society purchased the house. In 1959-1960, following extensive research, the Society restored it to its appearance in the late eighteenth century (c. 1788). The Society removed Henderson's garage and apartment addition on the west end of the building, as well as Dr. Carter's round two-story tower on the northeast corner.

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