

LOCAL HISTORIC LANDMARK PROGRAM

Forsyth County Historic Resources Commission

First House

Local Historic Landmark #1

446 S. Main St., Winston-Salem

(Original Salem Lot 52)

Construction Date: 1766

Reconstruction Date: 1969

Landmark Designation Date: 10/04/1976

The First House was constructed based on a sketch by Philip Christian Gottlieb Reuter, a Prussian-trained surveyor, who also served as an architect and town planner. It was actually the second dwelling built in Salem, preceded by a log cabin built in January 1766 to provide shelter for workmen who had moved from Bethabara to begin clearing ground for the new town of Salem. The ground-breaking ceremony of the First House took place on June 5, 1766, and was the first of many such occasions in early Salem.

When planning the First House, the Moravian brethren had originally hoped to build a two-story dwelling to accommodate multiple needs, including a place for worship and a meeting hall on the first floor, and housing for two families on the second. Ultimately, however, a 1½-story house was approved. Once constructed, the First House became a crowded and busy place. It was home to a gunsmith, saddler, road master, and weaver, who also based their trades out of the house. Additionally, as planned, the house contained a small “saal,” used to hold worship services.



First House in Salem, Date Unknown
Courtesy of Forsyth County Public Library
Photograph Collection



The First House is a half-timbered structure with wattle and daub, representing the earliest of the architectural styles constructed in Salem. The finished windows and doors with casings and glass came from Bethabara. In 1772, the house became available as a private residence; Dr. Jacob Bonn bought the house and lived there with his family until his death in 1781. Bonn also used the house as his office and apothecary. The house was known as the “doctor’s house” for some years after that, for it served as the residence of two other physicians. In 1812, John Christian William Fries (father of Salem industrialist Francis Fries) bought the house, where he lived until his death in 1866. During 1889-1890, when Main Street was raised for the streetcar system, the house was moved to the rear of the lot to face Salt Street. However, by 1912 the house was demolished. In the late 1960s, Old Salem, Inc. excavated the original site; in 1969 the First House was reconstructed to its 1766 appearance.

Today the First House is privately occupied.



This information is also available
at the Forsyth County
Historic Resources Commission’s web site:
<http://www.ForsythCountyHRC.org>