

73 Cannon Street

Francis P. Seignious House

c. 1856



The large two-and-one-half story Charleston single house set on a high basement at 73 Cannon Street has become a landmark in part because of the unfamiliar purpose it serves and its unchanging appearance in a rapidly changing neighborhood. The building was built as a spec house in 1856, but for most of its history has been used as the headquarters to an African-American social organization.

When development of Cannonborough began picking up steam, an advertisement for a large tract appeared in 1819.¹ The listing

included no reference to any existing buildings on the lot which was 120 feet wide on Cannon Street and stretched back 185 feet. (Mr. Gates' property was 487 feet deep in the ward books of the 1850s.) A second ad that appeared in September 1820 listed the same parcel and described it as being between the property of Sparrow (to the east) and Happoldt (to the west).²

In 1854, **William Lloyd and Alonzo S. White** purchased a plot of land on the south side of Cannon Street for \$4,000.³ Eight days later, the two business partners transferred the deed to **Stephen Lloyd**, presumably a relative of William Lloyd, for development.⁴ Stephen Lloyd built a three and half story, wood framed Charleston single house. According to the county tax records, the first value for the

¹ City Gazette, Dec. 18, 1819, at 3

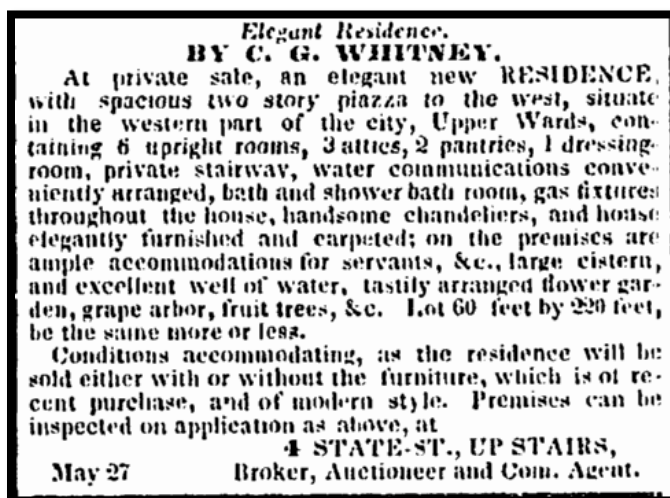
² Southern Patriot, Sept. 11, 1820, at 2

³ Deed book F13, page 169

⁴ Deed book J13, page 151

lot appeared in 1856 when the property suddenly had a three-story wooden house with a value of \$6500.

Mr. Lloyd seems to have built the house as spec housing, and he immediately began marketing it for sale. An advertisement in mid-1856 for the house described an “elegant new RESIDENCE” with two-story piazzas.⁵ The house included a furnished house with handsome chandeliers, gas fixtures, servants’ quarters, a cistern, full bathrooms, and a garden with fruit trees. At that time, the lot was 60 by 220 feet.



The house quickly sold; on October 29, 1856, Lloyd sold the property and new house for \$6,800 to **Francis P. Seignious**.⁶ Mr. Seignious was born on October 12, 1817. In the 1859 city directory, he was listed as living on Cannon Street near Smith Street. In the 1860 census, he lived at the house with Martha (b. abt. 1822) and five children. In the 1866 edition, he was identified as a resident of 43 Cannon Street. He operated a coal yard on East Bay Street near Hasell Street in the 1880 census. In the 1880 census, one of his daughters and her family shared the house. For most of the next many years, the house was numbered as 45 Cannon Street, with Mr. Seignious still there in 1883.

Mr. Seignious died on July 4, 1883, and his estate disposed of the house. On July 6, 1886, “by said will [of Francis Seignious] and four thousand dollars,” the property was conveyed to George Petit.⁷ After twenty years of ownership, George Petit, a furniture salesman, sold the property to J.B. Campbell, a music teacher.⁸

⁵ Charleston Courier, June 4, 1856, at 3

⁶ Deed book T13, page 105

⁷ Deed book C20, page 399

⁸ Deed book D22, page 327



Two years later in 1908, J.B. Campbell sold the property to James Fraser, an African American carpenter.⁹

James W. Fraser, the owner of 73 Cannon between 1908 and 1933, ran Fraser Auto Repair from the rear of the lot. The ownership of the property was disputed after Fraser's death. In the Court of Common Pleas on October 22, 1934, William Morrison, "the Master in and for the County," conveyed the property to Fraser's wife, Catherine.¹⁰ Catherine Fraser lived in the house, and Fraser Auto Repair

continued to operate from the rear of the property. Catherine was an African American nurse.

Order of the Tents bought it in November 1956.¹¹ The United Order of Tents is a secret society comprised and operated solely by African-American women. The Order traces its roots back to the operations of the Underground Railroad in Norfolk, Virginia. Its founders saw a need for African-American women to join together for strength and security in the new free world and created the organization. The founding members viewed the Order as a "tent of salvation" amidst the turmoil of Reconstruction and intended to uplift the African-American community through mutual-aid and personal betterment.

The Charleston branch was created in 1913. After buying the large single house in 1956, the group used the building as its headquarters for more than fifty years. The property was used as a meetinghouse, a stage for the members' sacred rituals, an office, a fundraising events venue, and an income-producing property.

The Order made some changes to the house, including enclosing the piazzas in 1963. Unfortunately, a two-story dependency was demolished in the back of the property in 1973. In the summer of 2012, the City began proceedings against the house because of "demolition by neglect." The house is vacant today with no plans for its future.

⁹ Deed book D25, page 252

¹⁰ Deed book Y36, page 159

¹¹ Deed book A64, page 465