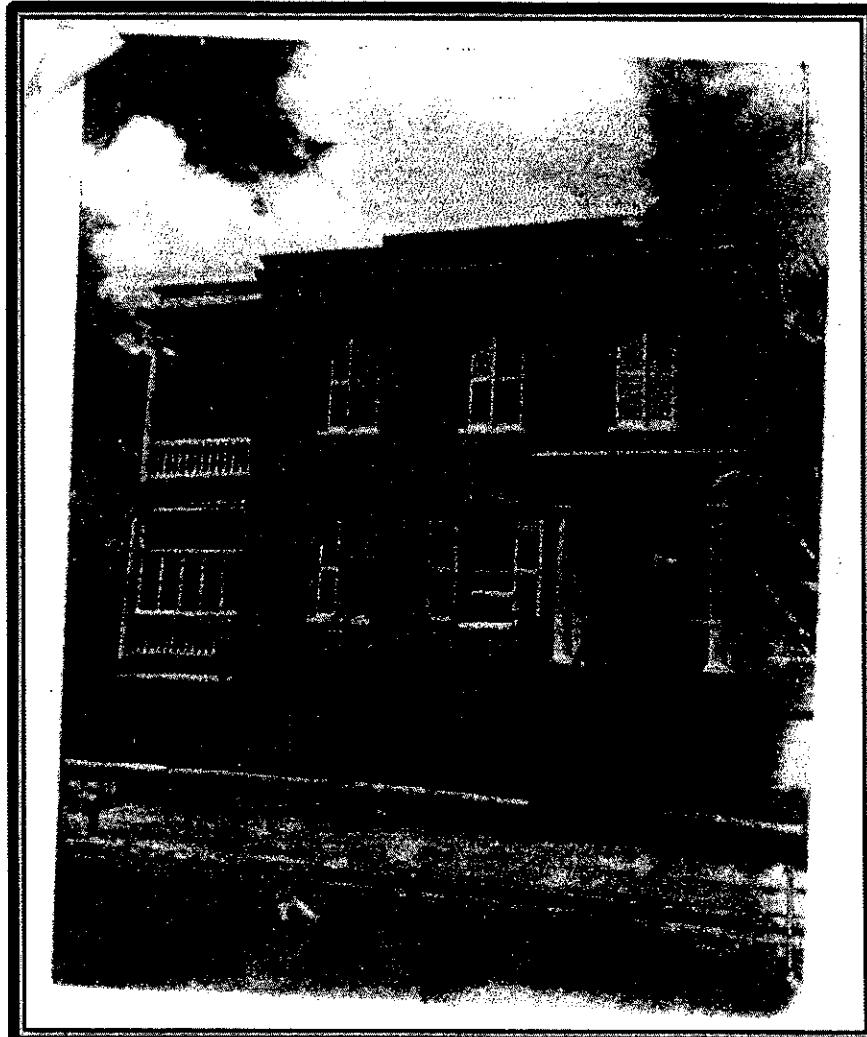


5 Pitt Street: The Pollitzer House

a property history

By Jenny. R. Brant



Note: Cover Image is the author's scan of a photocopied image found in the Vertical Files of the South Carolina Room, located in the Charleston County Public Library. Source, photographer and date unknown.

Table of Contents

Introduction	3
Architectural Description	
Summary and Setting.....	4
Structure Overview.....	5
Property History	
In the Beginning.....	7
Lanneau Row.....	7
The Civil War Era.....	8
The Pollitzer Family.....	10
Conclusion.....	12
Appendix A (Images).....	13
Appendix B (Timeline).....	16
Appendix C (Chain of Title).....	17
Bibliography.....	18

Introduction

With a history that can seem to revolve around endless narratives of the Civil War, it is easy to view Charleston, South Carolina's past through a heavily enforced paradigm of the South. A visitor to the small city can have their pick of buildings and residences built by wealthy, white, male property owners and planters who represent the uppermost echelons of their contemporary times.

Within this broad context, however, there are an infinite number of more complex, nuanced stories of the people who lived in Charleston's times past. Known as the neighborhood where Charleston's intellectuals and entrepreneurs¹ preferred to settle, Harleston Village's tight alleyways and crowded single row houses can offer intimate details of their past residents' lives to the current generation of historians and preservationists alike. Located at 5 Pitt Street in the neighborhood's southeastern corner, the Pollitzer House typifies this area's dynamic legacy. From French Catholics, to immigrant families, to Jewish Suffragettes, the Pollitzer House's residents have a history that combines to tell a story of Charleston's unique religious tolerance, heated political dialogues, and capitalistic spirit.



Figure 1 - Location of 5 Pitt Street, Charleston SC 29401
Image Source: Google Earth

¹ Poston, Jonathan H. for the Historic Charleston Foundation. "The Village of Harleston: Intellectuals and Entrepreneurs." *The Buildings of Charleston: A Guide to the City's Architecture*. Columbia, University of South Carolina, 1997. Pages 479-583.

Architectural Description



*Figure 2 - The Pollitzer House today. Note the Historic Marker 10-49 at right, dedicated to the Pollitzer sisters.
Image Source: Google Earth*

Summary & Setting

Location: $32^{\circ} 46.795' \text{ N}$, $79^{\circ} 56.312' \text{ W}$

With its primary façade facing North, the two-story Pollitzer House is situated in the middle of a residential block of Pitt Street, bounded by Wentworth and Beaufain Streets. It is a rectangular plan on a rectangular plot of land, with the narrow ends of both being the nearest to Pitt Street. The front façade is stepped back from the sidewalk, which runs parallel to the building's frontage. Separating the sidewalk from the front façade is a fence comprised of an unembellished balustrade atop a masonry footing. A garden with sparse vegetation fills the area between the building's foundations and the fence. The continuous expanse of sidewalk and the property fence are broken to the building's left to allow for a driveway. This driveway, and the abutting property's driveway on the building's right, create space between the Pollitzer House and the neighboring structures.

Structure Overview

The front façade has no visible delineating elements between the foundation, the first story, and the second story, which creates a continuous flat, unembellished surface until the cornice. The entry door is located on the façade's right, and though this creates asymmetry, the building's three bays are evenly spaced. There are two casements windows housed in the masonry foundation, sealed by wooden shutters, painted darkly. The first story also houses two windows, but they are sashed with six-over-six glazing. These two windows are flanked on both sides by shutters, painted darkly, and are capped by molded pediments. The second story has three six-over-six sashed windows, with flanking shutters matching the first story's. All the second story's windows have straight, molded cornices above them.

The entablature of the building possesses the first and only belt course of the front façade, and it nearly rests atop the second story windows' molded caps. The parapet-like cornice is perforated with three wrought-iron panels recessed into the otherwise flat frieze. The cornice is capped with flat molding that run continuously around to the side façades. This flat cornice prevents any view of the roofline from street level.

Though the window caps, color palette, and flat cornice all combine to give the building a dominant Italianate style, the side piazza and the entry door's portico contribute Greek Revival elements to the building's overall character.² Located on the building's eastern façade, the timber framed piazza spans the full height and length of the façade and rests atop brick piers. The piazza's flat roofs are supported by rounded wooden columns capped with Doric capitals, and wooden balustrades with turned balusters create railing for the area. Staggered to be lower than the main building's cornice, the piazza's cornice has a Greek Revival style entablature complete with deep eaves and dentils.

² Poston, Jonathan H. Page 479.

A portico with a float top overhangs the entry door, and its entablature repeats the same Greek revival elements seen on the piazza. The masonry stairs leading to the door's landing create the platform for the fluted Doric columns that the overhang. The point where the portico's overhang meets the front façade is emphasized with pilasters that mirror the support columns. These two pilaster elements are replicated yet again in the entry's door surround, though on a smaller scale. Sidelights and a transom light complete the door surround.

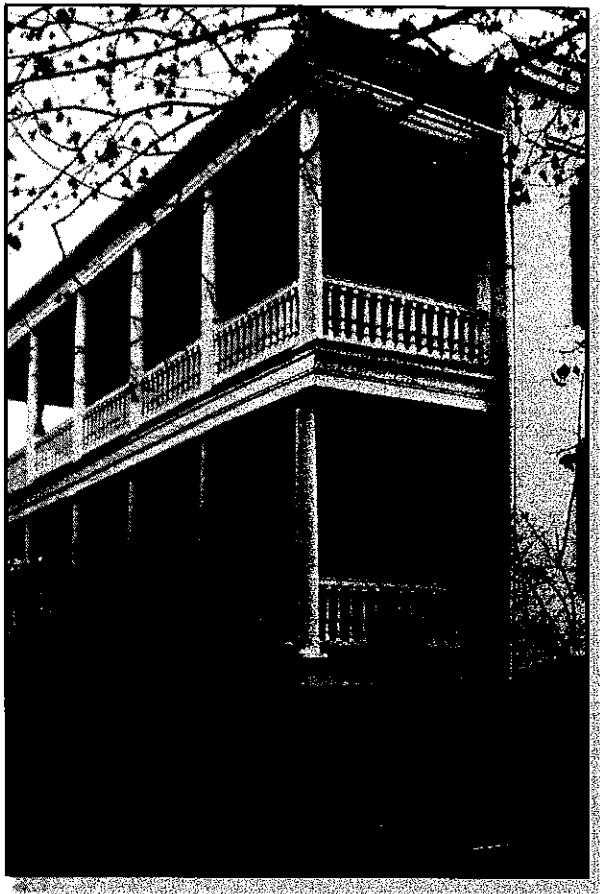


Figure 4 - Piazza on the eastern facade.
Image by Mike Stroud, Jan. 2011, for the Historic Marker Database.

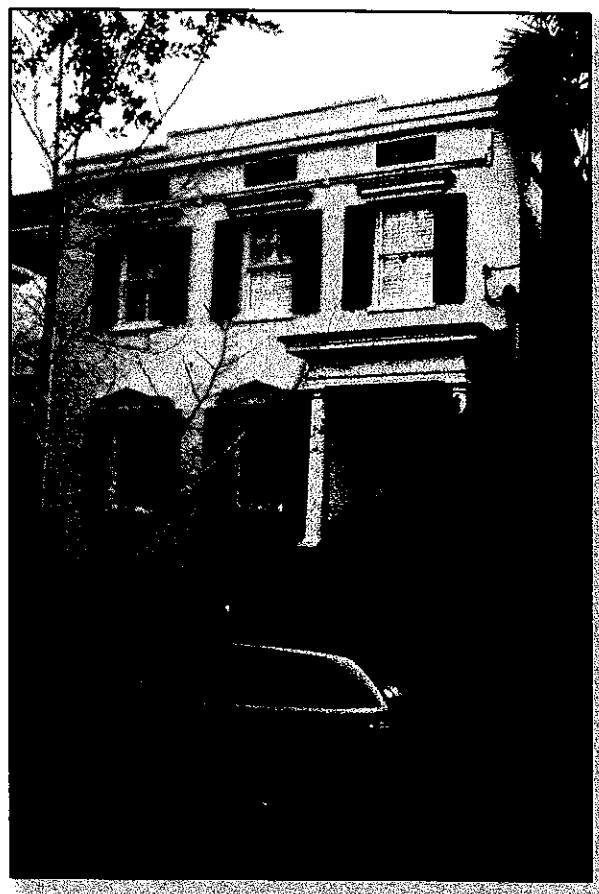


Figure 3 - The Pulitzer House's front facade.
Image by Mike Stroud, Jan. 2011, for the Historic Marker Database.

Property History

In the Beginning

Through a land grant from the Lord Proprietors, John Coming obtains land on the Charleston peninsula in 1680.³ After his death, his widow, Affra Harleston Coming, began deeded off acres of the “Coming Tract,” including seventeen acres that were given to the parish of St. Phillip to serve as a glebe for clergy.⁴ In 1770, Affra’s nephew, John Harleston, having obtained the land through inheritance, began the process of subdividing the land into lots and streets. A patriot during the time of nationalistic fervor that culminated in the American Revolution, Harleston named the area’s streets after contemporary revolutionaries. Thus Pitt Street was named after William Pitt, the “defender of American rights in the Stamp Act crisis.”⁵ In the 1790s, Harleston continued to divide his lands, a process that would continue Harleston Village’s antebellum period.

Lanneau Row

To accommodate the dominant trend of narrow, single-family dwellings, Harleston village continued to be divided into smaller and smaller lots from the early 1800s to the 1840s. This was accompanied by a building boom of houses in the neighborhood, many decorated with the Greek Revival, Gothic, Neoclassical, and Italianate elements that were in vogue at the time.⁶ It was during this time that Basile Lanneau, a French Catholic who later converted to Protestantism, acquired a run of several adjacent lots on Pitt Street, in the easternmost area of the Harleston Village.⁷ He then

³ Catherine, Armstrong. “Place and Potential: Buying and Selling Plots of Land.” In *Landscape and Identity in North America’s Southern Colonies from 1660 to 1745*, 141–66. New York, NY: Routledge, 2016.

⁴ Glebe: a piece of land serving as part of a clergyman’s benefice and providing income

⁵ Edgar, Walter. *South Carolina: A History*. Columbia, South Carolina: University of South Carolina Press, 1998.

⁶ Poston, Jonathan H. Page 542.

⁷ Poston, Jonathan H. Page 541.

divvied out these lots to his sons and several other members.⁸ The Lanneau family would go on to nearly fill a block of Pitt Street with their residences, spanning on the western side of the street from lots 1-9. This line of similar buildings earned the nickname “Lanneau Row” by Harleston residents.

Third in Lanneau Row⁹ is the house at 5 Pitt Street that Basil Lanneau constructed on a 60' x 212' lot, sometime between 1830 and 1835. However, by August 1847 the property was no longer in the Lanneau family, as it was owned by a man named Robert Brodie.

The Civil War Era

In February 1847, Robert Brodie lost ownership of 5 Pitt Street, due to foreclosure. He had mortgaged the property in 1845 with the Planters and Mechanics Bank of South Carolina for \$1800. Yet he had missed his first payment of \$900 “with lawful interest,”¹⁰ and had then refused to go to settlement court. As consequence:

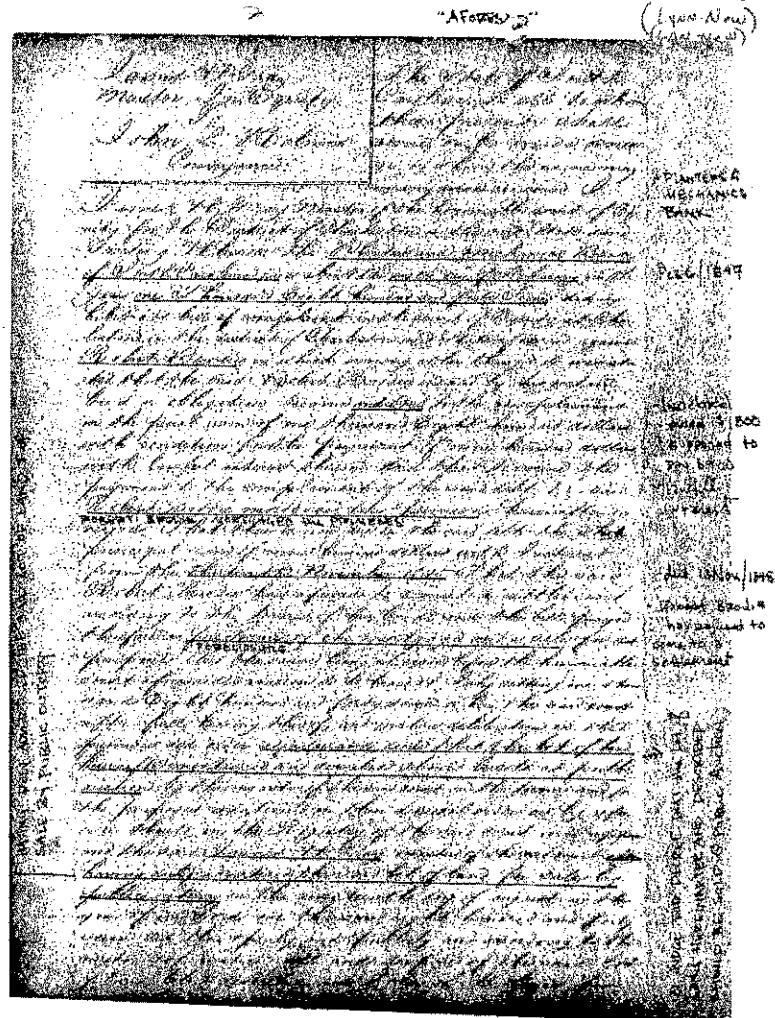


Figure 5 - The deed to 5 Pitt Street, as conveyed to John L. Holmes in August 1847.
Source: Author's scan of Microfilm from RMC Office, Charleston SC

⁸ Charleston County. Records of the Register Mesne Conveyance (RMC), Charleston, S.C. Deed Book, A11-317 pg. 54.

⁹ “From: Scrapbooks of Charleston, SC Architectural Inventory 1973.” From Vertical Files located at South Carolina Room of the Charleston County Public Library.

¹⁰ Charleston County. Records of the Register Mesne Conveyance (RMC), Charleston, S.C. Deed Book I11, pages 506-508.

“...a judge did decree that the lot of land hereinafter
and described should be sold at public auction, having
duly advertised the said lot of land for sale by public
outcty...”¹¹

At the auction, held in August 1847, John L. Holmes and his wife Rebecca purchased the property for \$1600. Unfortunately, John died shortly thereafter and pursuant to his will the property passes to Rebecca.¹² She continued to live at 5 Pitt Street during the escalating tension Charleston experienced before the Civil War. In 1861, the same year the first shot of the war was fired, the Census of the City of Charleston¹³ shows Rebecca still living there.

As odd as it may seem to us now, everyday life continued for Charlestonians even while the Civil War was raging in the South. People lived, people died, and people bought and sold property, just as they would in times of peace. Still, living in Charleston during the Civil War was a difficult endeavor, and Rebecca Holmes' death in 1862 may serve as a testament to that fact. A few months later, the executor of her estate sold 5 Pitt Street to Louis Coxeter¹⁴ for \$2350.

¹¹ Charleston County. Records of the Register Mesne Conveyance (RMC), Charleston, S.C. Deed Book I11, pages 506-508.

¹² “Will of John Holmes,” Wills of Charleston County, 1857-1860, Book E, pg. 516. [microfilm] South Carolina Room, Charleston County Public Library.

¹³ Charleston City Council. Census of the City of Charleston, South Carolina. For the Year 1861, page 19 and page 165. Illustrated by Statistical Tables. Charleston: Evans & Cogswell, 1861. University of North Carolina. <https://docsouth.unc.edu/imls/census/census.html> {Accessed October 24th, 2019}. It should be noted that the 1861 census the “Holy City” took of itself can offer a glimpse of Harleston Village’s demographics just before the war. In 1861, Pitt Street had 225 white persons, 302 slaves, and 49 “free colored”, totaling 576 persons residing there.

¹⁴ Charleston County. Records of the Register Mesne Conveyance (RMC), Charleston, S.C. Deed Book R14, pg. 62. [microfilm]. It should be noted that in several instances of documentation, his surname is spelled “Coffeter” as well.

The Pollitzer Family

On July 1st, 1897, Gustave M. Pollitzer bought 5 Pitt Street from the executor of Louis Coxeter's estate. Mr. Pollitzer was no newcomer to Charleston, however.

Though he and his wife, Clara, had been married in New York City in 1880, the couple had been living in Charleston since at least 1881. That was the year that they had their first child, a baby girl named Carrie Teller Pollitzer, and they were living at 3 Rutledge Avenue at the time. They would continue building their family while moving around Charleston during the Reconstruction era. Richard Morris Pollitzer was born in 1883 and Mabel Louise Pollitzer in 1885, both at 17 Legare Street. Finally, almost a full decade after Mabel, Anita Lily Pollitzer was born in 1894 while the family was living on New Street.¹⁵

After years of moving their ever-growing family, the Pollitzer's purchase of 5 Pitt Street would give them a place to raise their children. Indeed, the Pollitzer House is called such not because the children were born at the address, but because of their childhood, adolescence, and young adult years spent in the house.

Every member of the family would pursue their own course of education. This was particularly poignant for the three Pollitzer sisters. Being women, they were born into a time where education for women was limited, particularly in the south. Yet that was no issue for Carrie. She led a successful campaign to get College of Charleston to admit women, and she herself was one of the first to attend



Figure 6a & 6b – Gustave and Clara Pollitzer, around 1880 Gustave would have been around 25.

¹⁵ See Appendix A1 for image: "Gustave Pollitzer and Clara Guinzburg marriage certificates and children's births".

classes at the historic school. Mabel pursued her education all the way to Columbia University, where she created a substantial body of academic papers before returning to Charleston.¹⁶ She would spend the rest of her life as a teacher, then principle of Memminger High School.¹⁷ Perhaps it was Gustave who encouraged his daughters to educate themselves; in 1903 he ran for and was elected to be the School Commissioner for District #2.¹⁸

Though she came from an affluent, intellectual family, it was Anita Pollitzer that would evolve to become the best known of the clan. She would play a local and national role in the National Women's Party, a suffragette organization that was influential in the passing of the 19th Amendment.¹⁹ While attending Columbia University, Anita not only befriended Georgia O'Keeffe, she was the person who introduced O'Keeffe to her future husband.²⁰ Anita and Georgia would remain lifelong friends.²¹

The accomplishments of the Pollitzer sisters resulted in a Historical Marker being placed in front of their childhood home at 5 Pitt Street, the resident that fostered such ambitious young women. Having received 5 Pitt Street when Gustave died in 1909,²² Clara Pollitzer went on to convey the property in 1924 to Carrie, Mabel, and Anita for "...\$5.00, with love and affection for my daughters."²³ The sisters would keep the property until their deaths. They all died within 5 years of each other.

¹⁶ Pollitzer, Mabel L. "The Mabel L. Pollitzer Papers, 1904-1974." Marlene & Nathaniel Addlestone Library at College of Charleston, Special Collections, Collection #0037, Boxes 1 and 2.

¹⁷ Pollitzer, Mabel L. Interview by Constance Ashton Myers. Tape and transcript, September 5, 1973. Constance Ashton Myers Collection, South Caroliniana Library, University of South Carolina, Columbia.

¹⁸ See Appendix A2 for image: "Gustave Pollitzer and Clara Guinzburg marriage certificates and children's births".

¹⁹ McCandless, Amy Thompson. "Anita Pollitzer: South Carolina Advocate for Equal Rights." *Proceedings of the South Carolina Historical Association* (2000): 1-10.

²⁰ Giboire, Clive, ed. *Lovingly, Georgia: The Complete Correspondence of Georgia O'Keeffe & Anita Pollitzer*. New York: Simon & Schuster, 1990.

²¹ See Appendix A3 for image: "Letter from Georgia O'Keeffe to Anita Pollitzer" Lowcountry Digital Library, South Carolina Historical Society. <https://lcdl.library.cofc.edu/lcdl/catalog/lcdl:23060?tify=%22view%22%22info%22>

²² "Will of G. M. Pollitzer," Wills of Charleston County, Will Book 74, pg. 768. South Carolina Room, Charleston County Public Library. [microfilm]

²³ "Will of Clara Pollitzer," Wills of Charleston County, Will Book 79, pg. 368. South Carolina Room, Charleston County Public Library. [microfilm]

Conclusion

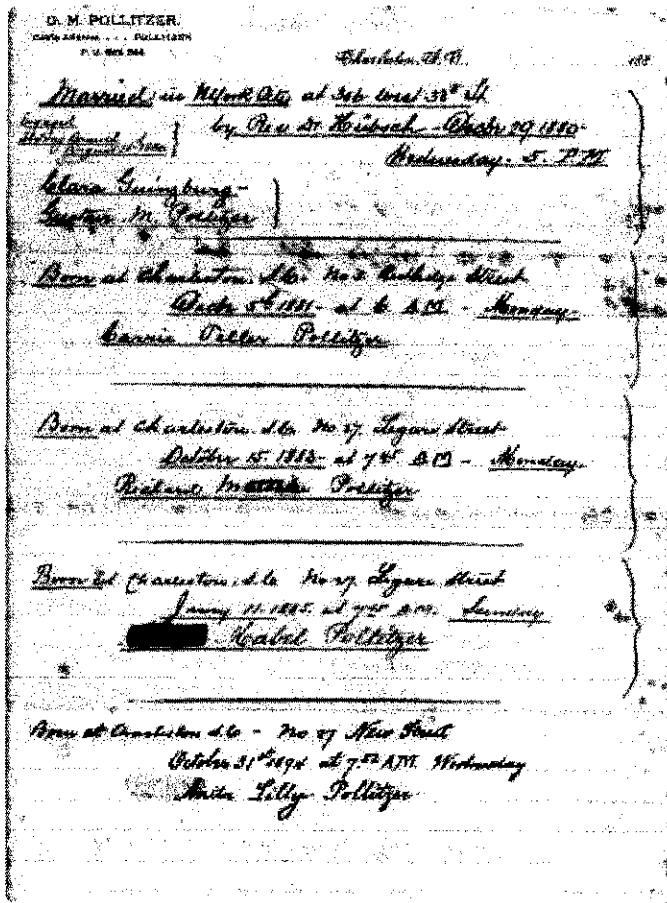
In January 1980, Citizens & Southern National Bank of South Carolina, as the trustee of the Pollitzer sisters' estate, sold the property at 5 Pitt Street for \$105,000, to Mr. John Jenks and his wife, Elizabeth Jenks.²⁴ They did not keep the property for long however, and they sold it to W. Vaughn Davidson in 1981.²⁵ The Pollitzer House passed through several sets of hands in the 1980s and 1990s before 2004, when it was purchased by its current owner, Alan Tanenbaum.

²⁴ Charleston County. Records of the Register Mesne Conveyance (RMC), Charleston, S.C. Deed Book B123, pg. 166. [microfilm]

²⁵ Charleston County. Records of the Register Mesne Conveyance (RMC), Charleston, S.C. Deed Book C127, pg. 164. [microfilm]

- Appendix A -

images



Appendix A1 – “Gustave Pollitzer and Clara Guinzburg marriage certificates and children’s births” Lowcountry Digital Library, South Carolina Historical Society, 1890-1900. <https://lcld.library.cofc.edu/lcdl/catalog/lcdl:32843?tfify=%22view%22%22info%22>

Description: A page of G.M. Pollitzer's listing and detailing important dates: his engagement and marriage to Clara Guinzburg, the birth of Carrie Teller Pollitzer, Richard M. Pollitzer, Mabel Pollitzer, and Anita Lilly Pollitzer.



Appendix A2 – “Gustave M. Pollitzer School Commissioner Certification” Lowcountry Digital Library, South Carolina Historical Society. <https://lcld.library.cofc.edu/lcdl/catalog/lcdl:32834?tfify=%22view%22%22info%22>

Dear Anita:

It is nice to hear from you and I
would like to see you but I think I can not ~
See much excitement for my first winter ~
I have been alone for two weeks ~ and it has
been so good it amuses I mean want to go where
any one will talk to me again ~ Steiglitz is
coming to-night for his work and ~

I have certainly been good for nothing
this year ~ and it is a year since I've been
doing nothing ~ as painting at all and it
seems I can't start ~ the ~~the~~ autumn ~~and~~
is here ~ I look unusually well ~ and I
suppose I feel as well as many folks even do if I
am very careful of my good for nothing self ~
um but for one to really know I have to feel

Appendix A3 – “Letter from Georgia O’Keeffe to Anita Pollitzer” Lowcountry Digital Library, South Carolina Historical Society, <https://lcld.library.cofc.edu/lcdl/catalog/lcdl:23060?tify=%22view%22%22info%22>

Description: Georgia O’Keeffe’s response to Anita Pollitzer’s request for a visit with the South Carolina Historical Society.



Appendix A4 - “Carrie Pollitzer” Lowcountry Digital Library, South Carolina Historical Society, 1905. <https://lcdl.library.cofc.edu/lcdl/catalog/lcdl:32865>

Description: A young Carrie Pollitzer at the age of 24/



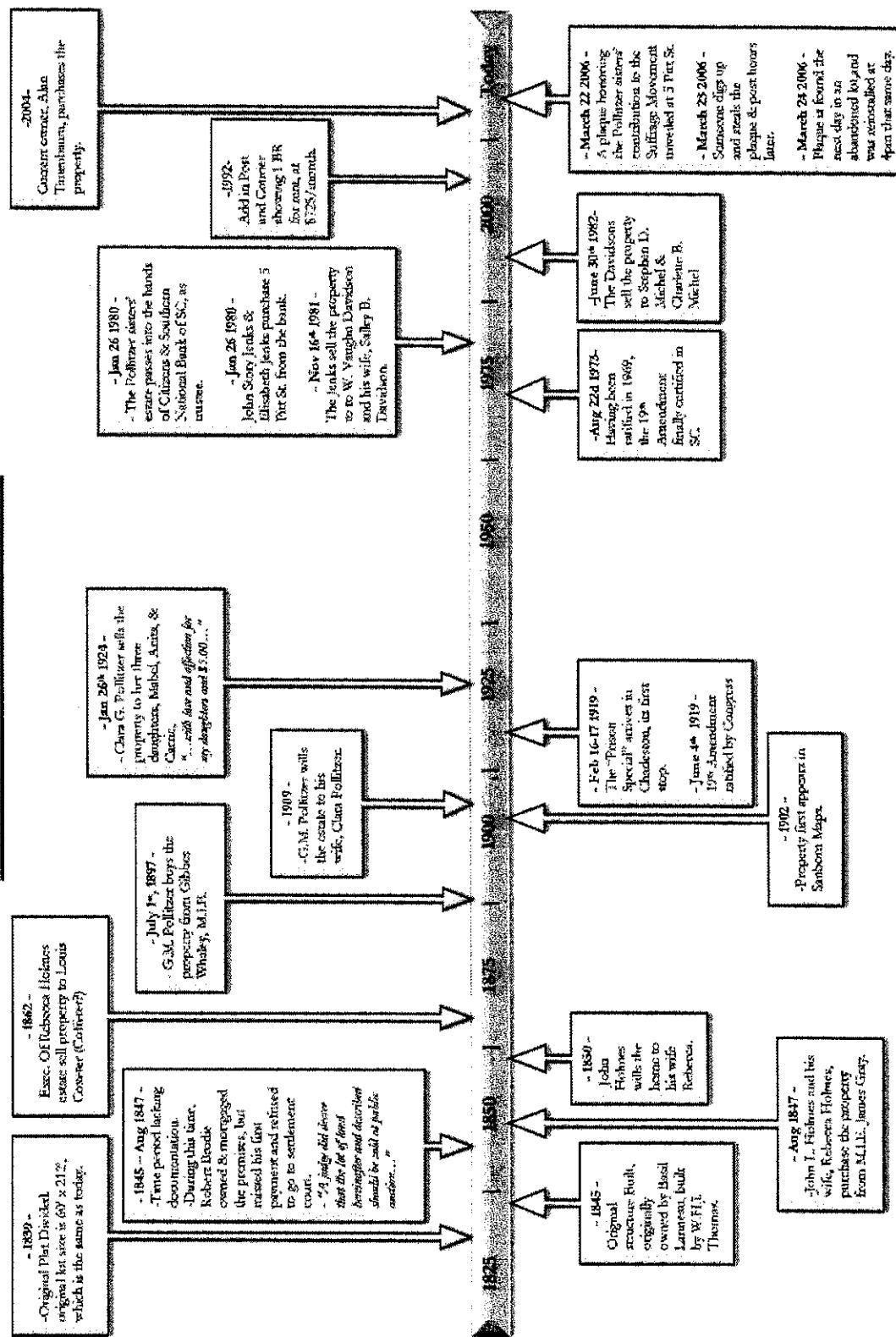
Appendix A5 – “Mabel Pollitzer” Lowcountry Digital Library, South Carolina Historical Society, 1904-1906. <https://lcdl.library.cofc.edu/lcdl/catalog/lcdl:32868?tify=%22view%22;%22info%22>

Description: A young Mabel Pollitzer at the age of 17.



Appendix A6 – “Anita Pollitzer” Lowcountry Digital Library, South Carolina Historical Society. <https://lcdl.library.cofc.edu/lcdl/catalog/lcdl:32861?tify=%22view%22;%22info%22>

- TIMELINE -



- Appendix A -

Chain of Title

August, 1847

Grantor (seller): James Gray, Master in Equity

Grantee (buyer): John L. Holmes

Book & Page: I11, pgs. 506-508

Type:

Lot: 60'W x 212'D

Notes: Robert Brodie mortgaged the premises for \$1800, via Planters and Mechanics Bank of South Carolina. Missed his first payment of \$900. After Robert Brodie refused to come to settlement court, foreclosure. "A judge did decree that the lot of land hereinafter and described should be sold at public auction

1850

Grantor (seller): John L. Holmes

Grantee (buyer): Rebecca Holmes

Book & Page: Will E (1857-1860), pg. 516

Type: Will

Lot: 60'W x 212'D

Notes:

1862

Grantor (seller): B. C. Gadsden, Exec. of Rebecca Holmes

Grantee (buyer): Louis Coxeter (Coffeter)

Book & Page: R14, pg. 62

Type: Conveyance

Lot: 60'W x 212'D

Notes: sold for \$2350

July 1st, 1897

Grantor (seller): Gibbes Whaley, Master in Equity

Grantee (buyer): G. M. Pollitzer

Book & Page: F23, pg. 45

Type: Conveyance

Lot: 60'W x 212'D

Notes:

1909

Grantor (seller): G. M. Pollitzer

Grantee (buyer): Clara G. Pollitzer

Book & Page: Will 74, pg. 768

Type: Will

Lot: 60'W x 212'D

Notes:

January 26th, 1924

-Grantor (seller): Clara G. Pollitzer
-Grantee (buyer): Mabel Pollitzer, Anita Pollitzer, & Carrie Pollitzer
-Book & Page: Will 79, pg. 368
-Type: Will
-Lot: 60'W x 212'D
-Notes: brick building and outbuildings

January 26th, 1980

-Grantor (seller): Estate of Mabel Pollitzer, Anita Pollitzer, & Carrie Pollitzer
-Grantee (buyer): Citizens & Southern National Bank of SC (as Trustee)
-Book & Page: E33, pg.10
-Type: Conveyance
-Lot: 60'W x 212'D
-Notes:

August 29th, 1980

-Grantor (seller): Citizens & Southern National Bank of SC (as Trustee)
-Grantee (buyer): John Story Jenks & Elizabeth Chardon Harrington Jenks
-Book & Page: B123, pg. 166
-Type: Conveyance
-Lot: 60'W x 212'D
-Notes: sold for \$105,000

November 16, 1981

-Grantor (seller): John Story Jenks & Elizabeth Chardon Harrington Jenks
-Grantee (buyer): W. Vaugh Davidson & Salley B. Davidson
-Book & Page: C127, pg. 164
-Type: Conveyance
-Lot: 60'W x 212'D
-Notes: sold for \$130,000

June 30, 1982

-Grantor (seller): W. Vaugh Davidson & Salley B. Davidson
-Grantee (buyer): Stephen D. Michel & Charlene B. Michel
-Book & Page: V128, pg. 164
-Type: Conveyance
-Lot: 60'W x 212'D
-Notes: sold for \$143,000

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"Clara Guinzburg Pollitzer" Lowcountry Digital Library, South Carolina Historical Society, 1865. <https://lcdl.library.cofc.edu/lcdl/catalog/lcdl:32860?tify=%22view%22.%22info%22> {Accessed November 2019}.

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“Gustave M. Pollitzer, about 25 years old” in Anita Pollitzer Family Papers Collection of Lowcountry Digital Library, South Carolina Historical Society, 1880. <https://lcld.library.cofc.edu/lcdl/catalog/lcdl:32858> {Accessed November 2019}.

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“Will of G. M. Pollitzer,” Wills of Charleston County, Will Book 74, pg. 768. South Carolina Room, Charleston County Public Library. [microfilm]

“Will of John Holmes,” Wills of Charleston County, 1857-1860, Book E, pg. 516. South Carolina Room, Charleston County Public Library. [microfilm]

- TIMELINE -

