

A Little History of a Little House

4 Chalmers Street, Charleston, SC



Tanesha J. High

HP 8090 Fall 2018

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Introduction

The night of August 31, 1886 started as typical subtropical Charleston night and ended with the city's destruction by the worse earthquake recorded in the eastern United States. The city shook for less than a minute, but when it was over sixty-seven percent of the brick buildings in the city were damaged or destroyed.¹ After nearly being destroyed by fire on five occasions city fathers encouraged masonry construction over brick. Brick is an excellent choice to slow or stop fires, but it is brittle and does not tolerate ground movement very well.⁴ Chalmers did not escape the disaster. All but two walls, (the one butting 6 Chalmers) and northeast walls of the 1 ½ story brick building standing on the property was destroyed.² John Baker was not discouraged by the tragedy and used those walls as a starting point for the house he had built there just two years later. He chose to build a two-story side hall single house. Aside from one wall of its predecessor the building is of wood frame construction. A two-story piazza runs along the east façade of the house. A room was added to the second floor of the piazza, closing in the south half. Commonly piazzas were entirely or partially filled in to add modern conveniences such as kitchens in bathrooms in houses constructed long before their everyday use or a few more square feet to small homes or homes that lacked storage. Nancie Quick grew up in the house and in a 1998 interview mentioned the piazza had been filled in for a bathroom.³ Several campaigns of additions to the house appear on maps of Charleston drawn by the Sanborn Map Company for

¹ Richard N. Cote, *City of Heroes: The Great Charleston Earthquake of 1886*, (Corinthian Books: Mt. Pleasant, SC 2007), pages xii, xii.

² “Notes from Interview with Nancie Quick,” July 1998. Historic Charleston Foundation Vertical File; Charleston County. Records of the Menes Conveyance (RMC), Charleston, SC. Deed Book K17-191.

³ “Notes from Interview with Nancie Quick.”

fire insurance purposes. Sanborns show the materials that compose a building, how many floors it is, and other information that helped insurers determine fire insurance rates.⁴

Sanborn Maps

The 1888 Sanborn shows a predominately wood frame house with the piazza on the east, a one-story frame room on the back of the house and a piazza running along the west façade of the back room. We know the house and shed are wood frame since they shaded it in yellow. Red shading indicated masonry, so the map shows the two walls from the previous building left by the earthquake. The number 2 in the southwest corner lets us know the building is two stories and the 1 in the room on the rear room indicates it is only a single story. The dotted line on the east façade indicates that is a porch or piazza and its two let insurance companies know it is two stories as well. The shed to the east of the house was replaced by a garage by Herbert Hahn and Sylvia Risher sometime between 1996 and 1998.⁵

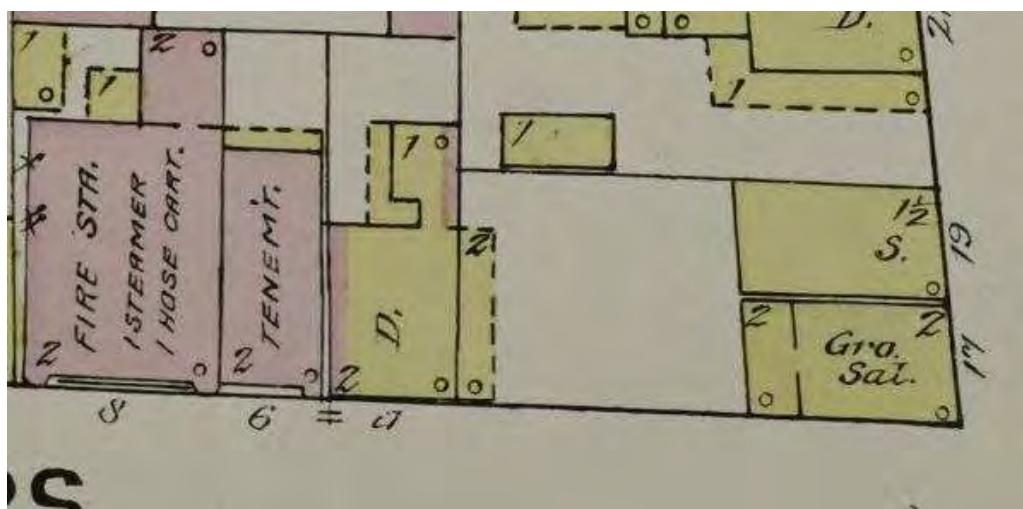


Figure 1 Detail of 1888 Sanborn Map of Charleston, SC page 11 showing 4, 6, and 8 Chalmers Street.

⁴ “1888, 1902, 1941, and 1944” Sanborn Fire Insurance Maps. *Historical Information Gatherers*. <https://fims-historicalinfo-com.ezproxy.ccpl.org/FIMSSearch.aspx>. Accessed November 28, 2018.

⁵ 1888 Sanborn Fire Insurance Map.

When the 1902 map was drawn the frame room on the back had been replaced by a larger brick room that included where its piazza had been. The original square of the main portion of the house has had a small bay addition added as well.⁶

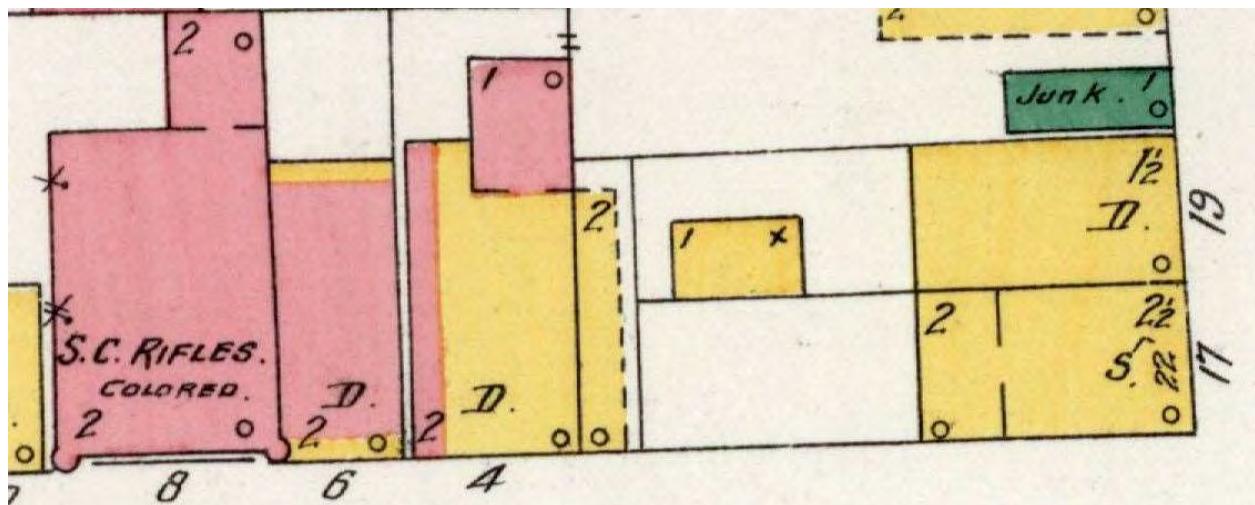


Figure 2 Detail of 1902 Sanborn Map of Charleston, SC page 60 showing 4, 6, and 8 Chalmers Street.

On the 1944 map, the back room is entirely a frame structure. The brick wall that survived the earthquake and used as part of the 1888 rear room is also not shown on this map. The bay addition now runs along the entirety of the west façade of the back room. The Sanborns do not change after this map. Missing from the Sanborns is the conversion of the north half of the second-floor piazza into a room of the house.⁷ Ms. Quick talks about how rooms were added to the northwest to accommodate extended family members that moved in during the 1920s and 1930s. Additions and demolitions mentioned by Ms. Quick in the interview and not shown on the Sanborn could be due to mistakes, or the additions went up and down between visits by the cartographers.⁸

⁶ 1902 Sanborn Fire Insurance Map.

⁷ 1941 and 1955 Sanborn Fire Insurance Maps.

⁸ "Notes from Interview with Nancie Quick."

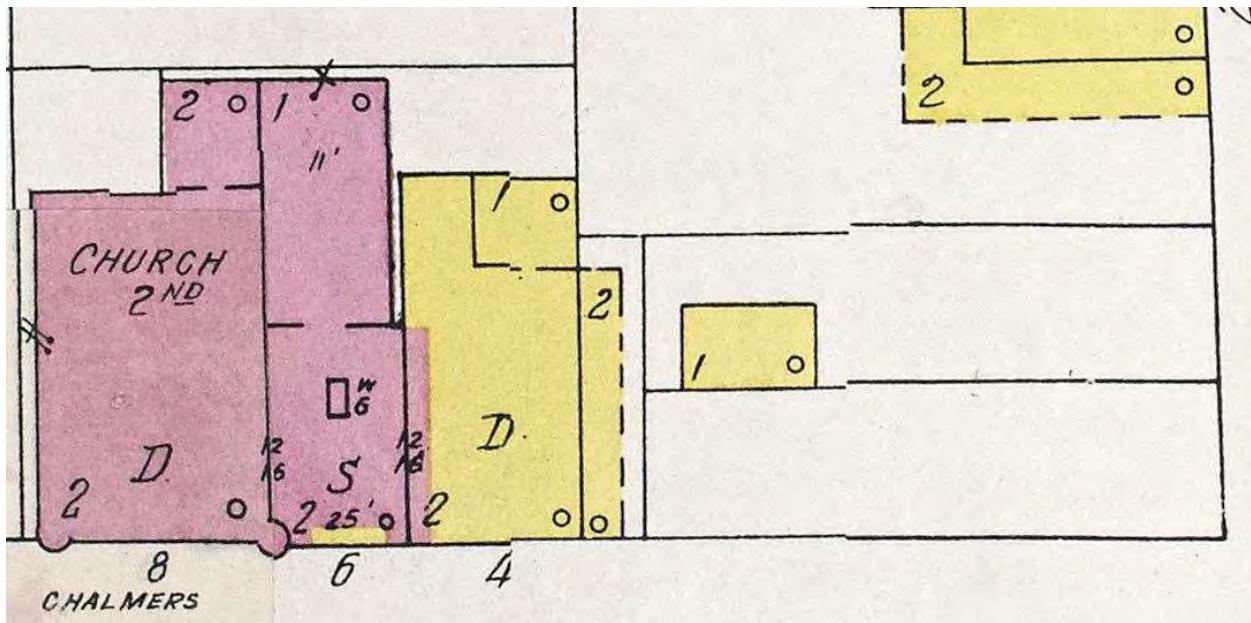


Figure 3 Detail of 1944 Sanborn Map of Charleston, SC page 60 showing 4, 6, and 8 Chalmers Street.

History

Chalmers Street

Chalmers Street is one of the oldest streets in Charleston and was part of the Walled City. To add to the city's romanticism and popularity with tourists the street continues to be paved with cobblestone. Little rock and no stone occur naturally in the Low Country. The cobbles came over as ballast on ships to keep them balanced on their ocean voyage. Once in Charleston, the cobbles were offloaded, and the cargo acted as ballast. The discarded stoned quickly found uses in the stone starved city. Streets paved with cobbles or brick were less likely to become muck and mire in a city that often experienced tidal flooding and lots of rain. The street's namesake was Dr. Lionel Chalmers, a Scottish born and educated physician and meteorologist. He combined the two when he authored *Essays on the Weather and Diseases of South Carolina*. Charleston's filth and warm moist climate caused outbreaks of illness that led to

the reputation of being a sick city and attracted doctors to its shores.⁹



Figure 4 Image of 4 Chalmers Facing Northwest.

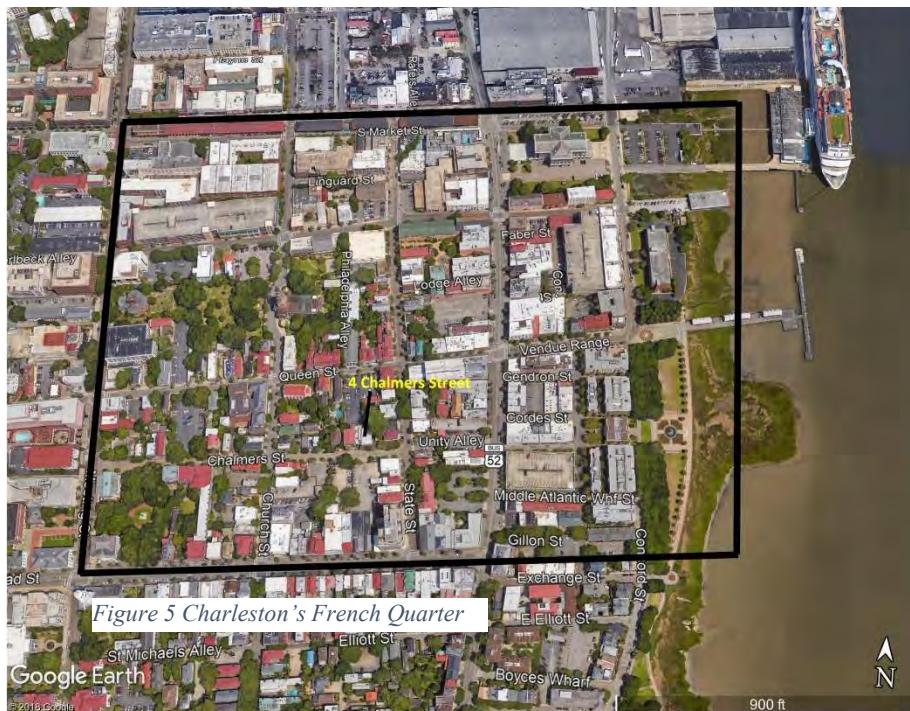
The street did not receive Dr. Chalmers' name until 1801 as the city was attempting to systematically number the streets while straightening and widening streets. Chalmers was widened as part of these improvements along with the whole street receiving one name.¹⁰ Before these improvements, the part of Chalmers from Meeting Street to Church Street was called Beresford's Alley and from Church Street to State Street was known as Dennis Alley. From the

⁹ Walter J. Fraser, Jr., *Charleston! Charleston! The History of a Southern City*, (Columbia: South Carolina University Press), 131-132; “The story behind Charleston's cobblestone streets,” *Moultrie News*, November 30, 2016. https://www.moultrie-news.com/opinion/the-story-behind-charleston-s-cobblestone-streets/article_dabde060-b187-11e6-ac98-b30931b65fa9.html.

¹⁰ “The story behind Charleston's cobblestone streets,”

1849 conveyance between Edward Thwing and the Estate of Frederick Schaffner back, refer to the street as Chalmers Alley in the deed books and indexes.¹¹

Chalmers Street is part of the French Quarter Historic District listed September 19, 1973. The area earned the name from the many French settlers choosing to establish businesses and live in that area, but other European groups settled in that part of Charleston as well. The Irish social hall, Hibernian Hall, is opposite Chalmers on Meeting Street.¹² The current boundaries of the neighborhood are Meeting Street on the west, the Cooper River on the east, North Market on the north, and Broad Street on the south. The north side of the street, where 4 Chalmers is located, maintains much of its historic integrity, but the south side of the street between Church and State streets is mostly parking lots. The lot also backs up to a large parking lot to the north accessed from Queen Street. The lot allowed access to photograph the rear of the house and the brick wall that encloses the yard.



¹¹ Charleston County. Records of the Menes Conveyance (RMC), Charleston, SC. Deed Book D12-449.

¹² "Charleston's French Quarter District, Charleston County (Charleston)" *South Carolina Department of Archives and History*. Accessed November 29, 2018.

Auctions

The common theme in the history of the property from 1812 – 1877 is public auctions. In 1876 or 1877 Michael McBride sued many members of his family and business associates. He needed to sell his properties, but it appears personal, and business relationship did not make selling his properties a smooth or straightforward process. During the court proceedings, he died, and the judge ordered the properties sold at auction. Baker was the highest bidder for this property and one other. A notice ran in the October 17, 1877, News and Courier detailing the lots sold and the highest bidder at \$720.¹³

On March 14, 1812, Federal Marshall Robert Cochran was auctioning off property belonging to Thomas Pearce (spelled Pierce in some sources). Tax collector Hugh Swenton seized the property and Cochran auctioned Pearce's property based on the authority given them by Congress by “an act further to amend an act entitled an act to lay and collect a direct tax within the United States” passed during the first session of the Eighth Congress March 3, 1804.¹⁴ The act outlines the procedures tax collectors, federal marshals and their supervisors are to follow to seize and sell land for the payment of taxes. Despite his property being sold, there was still hope for Pearce. The act allowed a two-year grace period where the delinquent taxpayer could buy back the land. In the event the property sold for more than what he owed in taxes, the fees, and court cost he would receive the difference. This, and several other properties Swenton and Cochran were selling that day, were purchased by Stephen Moore. What Moore paid for the

¹³ Deed Book K17-191; “Real Estate Sales,” *The News and Courier*, (October 17, 1877), page 4. Accessed November 29, 2018.

¹⁴ Charleston County. Records of the Menes Conveyance (RMC), Charleston, SC. Deed Book E8-283.

property is not listed in the deed. Marshals and tax collectors had to prepare transcripts that detailed how much the land sold for and the amount of the tax debt. Locating the transcripts will add to the story of 4 Chalmers.¹⁵

An Infamous Neighbor

The last two buildings at 4 Chalmers were built touching a slave market and may have once shared the same owner slave trader, Ziba Oakes, at one time.¹⁶ In 1856 a city ordinance was passed that prohibited outdoor slave auctions so Thomas Ryan, the builder of the slave market at 6 Chalmers, and others opened auction houses like Ryan's Slave Mart. The 1852 ward book shows that a blacksmith occupied part of the lot at 4 Chalmers.¹⁷ Further research is needed to determine who the smith was and if he was an independent, or an employee or slave of the mart. If he was the owner of his own business setting up his forge next to a business that had constant need of worked iron for chains, handcuffs, and leg irons was a shrewd business move on his part.

Changing Lot Lines

The difficulty in determining if Oakes owned the subject property, and other challenges in the research, are the result of lot lines shifting and 2 Chalmers becoming part of 4 Chalmers. All nineteenth-century maps, plats, and descriptions from the 1852 Ward Book until the 1886 Ward Book include 2 Chalmers and the lot occupied by the blacksmith. The 1886 Ward Book does not number the lot location of the blacksmith's shed. The lot sizes listed in the Ward Books

¹⁵ *The Public Statutes at Large of the United States of America, Volume 2*, ed. Richard Peters, Esq. (Boston: Charles C. Little and James Brown 1850), pages 262-264.

https://books.google.com/books?id=SEMFAAAAYAAJ&printsec=frontcover&dq=editions:rUOz8p4X2YkC&hl=en&sa=X&ved=0ahUKEwjc_MrgpvjeAhWGvFMKHbTNCjcQ6AEILTAB#v=onepage&q&f=false. Accessed November 29, 2018.

¹⁶ Charleston County. Records of the Menes Conveyance (RMC), Charleston, SC. Deed Book L14-318.

¹⁷ Charleston County 1852 Ward Book. *South Carolina Room Charleston County Public Library*, page 7.

do not change, so it is unknown which lot the blacksmith's property was merged with.

Documentation giving a reason for the changes has yet to be located.¹⁸ Sometime between 1886 and 1888 2 Chalmers becomes an empty lot and is later added to 4 Chalmers.¹⁹

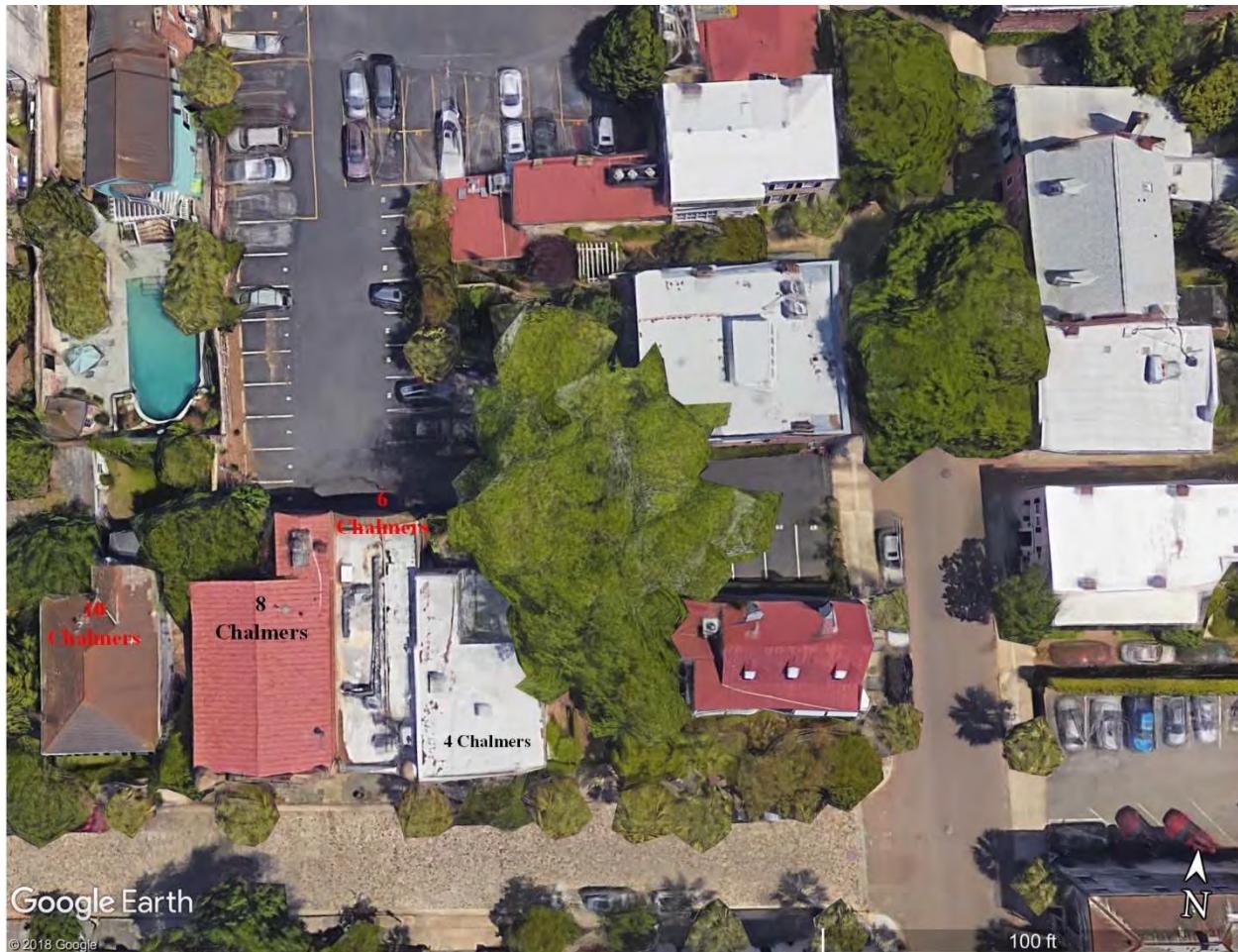
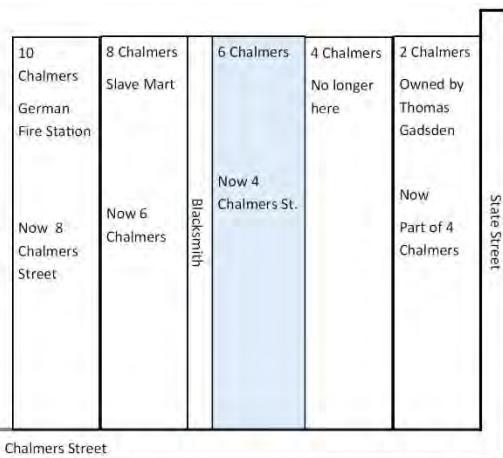


Figure 6 4, 6, 8, and 10 Chalmers as they appear in November 2018.

¹⁸ Frederick A. Ford, *Census of the City of Charleston, South Carolina, For the Year 1861. Illustrated by Statistical Tables. Prepared under the Authority of the City Council*, (Charleston: Evans & Cogswell, 1861), 57.

¹⁹ 1888 Sanborn.

1852 WARD BOOK



1861 CENSUS

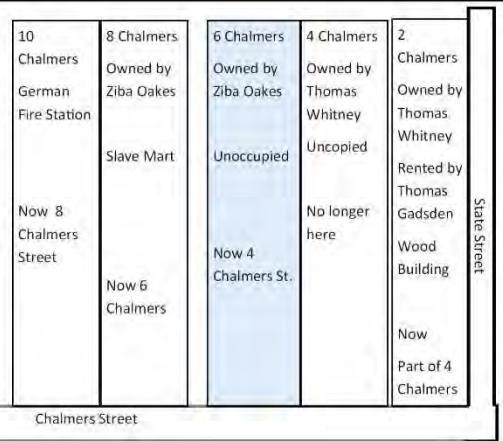


Figure 7 Diagrams of 2-10 Chalmers Street. Created by TJH.

1886 Ward Book

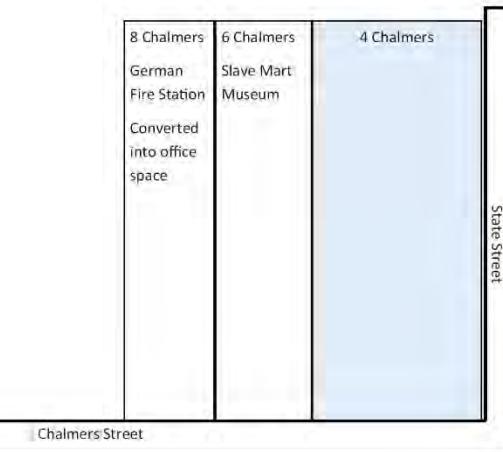


Figure 8 Diagram of 4-8 Chalmers based on 1886 Ward Book Page 6

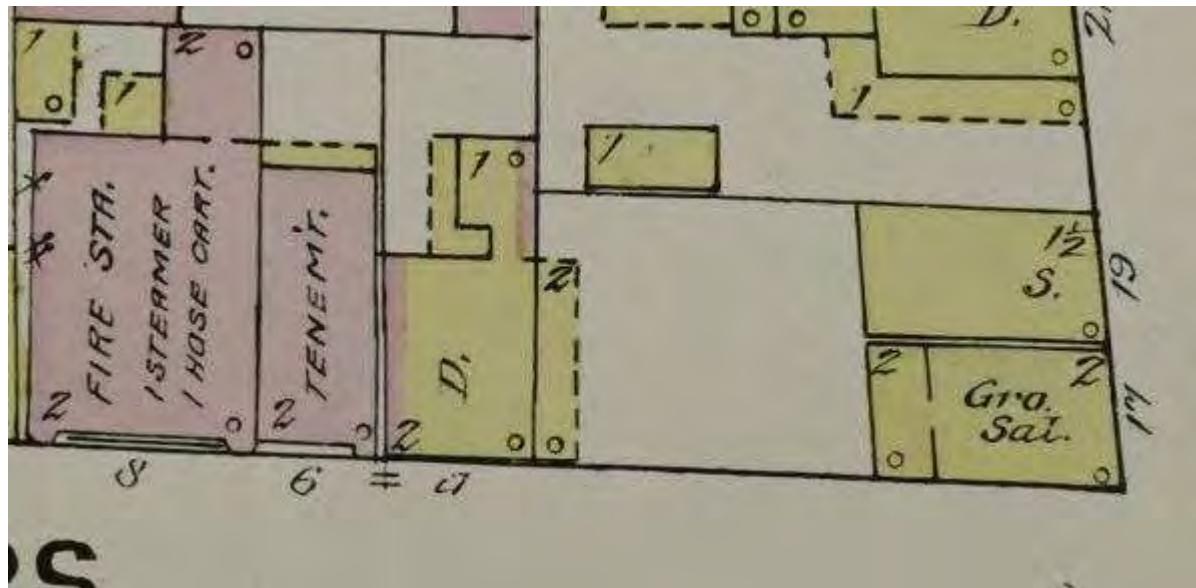


Figure 9 Detail of 1988 Sanborn Map of Charleston, SC page 11 showing 4, 6, and 8 Chalmers Street and 2 Chalmers as an empty lot.

Conclusion

On its own 4, Chalmers is not significant. It is one of many single houses in Charleston, SC. Plus, the modern siding, shutters, and brackets affect the building's integrity even though it is not listed as a contributor to the French Quarter Historic District the presence of this simple house helps Chalmers maintain its historic integrity and the feeling of a downtown Charleston residential neighborhood as the lots across the street and directly behind became parking lots.²⁰ This report covers a small portion of the history and context of 4 Chalmers. The first deed in the Chain of Title is from 1812. Chalmers was part of the Grand Model laid out by the Lords Proprietors at the establishment of the city in 1680. Meaning the history of the lot at 4 Chalmers starts long before 1812. Moving the chain of title is not the only area of further research. Who

²⁰ "Charleston's French Quarter District, Charleston County (Charleston)"

was the blacksmith that operated on a portion of the property at one point? Was he independent or part of the auction house next door? Was he black or white? Free or enslaved? Chalmers was one of the desegregated residential streets in antebellum Charleston, so it is not a far stretch for the blacksmith to have been a free man of color. On its own it may not contribute to the historic district or Charleston as a whole, but the story of 4 Chalmers needs to be researched and told. All histories are important and contribute to the narrative of the American Experience.

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Charleston County 1876 Ward Book. *South Carolina Room, Charleston County Public Library*.

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Appendix A: Annotated Chain of Title

Date: March 14, 1812

Grantor: Robert Cochran, Federal Marshall
 Grantee: Stephen Moore
 Book & Page: E8-283
 Type: Conveyance
 Lot: 14'x90'

Thomas Pierce (or Pearce) was delinquent in paying his taxes, so his property was seized by the federal marshal and sold at public auction. Reason sited is "an act further to amend an act entitled an act to lay and collect a direct tax within the United States."

Date: February 3, 1814

Grantor: James Thwing
 Grantee: Stephen W. Moore
 Book & Page: H8-204
 Type: Conveyance
 Lot: 14'x90'

Edward Thwing sold the property to Stephen Moore for \$30.

Date: October 29, 1838

Grantor: James Thwing
 Grantee: Edward Thwing
 Book & Page: U10-590
 Type: Conveyance
 Lot: 20'x90'

One of several lots exchanged at the same time. It was noted that the price paid is in one of the other deeds, but the recorder does not indicate which deed.

Date: September 20, 1849

Grantor: Edward Thwing
 Grantee: Estate of Frederick Schaffner
 Book & Page: D12-449
 Type: Conveyance
 Lot: Not listed

Both men were living in Jackson Parish, LA so deed was executed there. "One half of a certain lot of land with a blacksmith shop thereon..." was conveyed for \$500. The 1852 Ward Book notes that a blacksmith's "shed" occupies part of the lot.

Date: January 24, 1860

Grantor: Z. B. Oakes
 Grantee: Thomas A. Whitney
 Book & Page: L14-318

Type: Conveyance

Sold for \$1,000. The deed also reads the property is to be paid for in "three equal annual payments." There is a two-story brick building on the property at this time, so this deed may be for the Slave Mart.

Date: April 1, 1872

Grantor: Robert Wallace, U.S. Marshal

Grantee: Charles Lewis Carrington

Book & Page: B16-532

Type: Conveyance

Theodore Whitney owed \$1,242 in taxes resulting in the property's sale at public auction for \$440.

Date: October 16, 1877

Grantor: C.C. Bowen Sheriff of Charleston County

Grantee: John Baker

Book & Page: K17-191

Type: Conveyance

Sheriff's sale resulting from a lawsuit between Michael McBride, members of his family, Charles Carrington, and others after a foreclosure. Michael McBride passed during the trial, and the judge ruled the property sold at public auction. John Baker bought it for \$720.

Date: June 15, 1927

Grantor: Thomas F. Baker

Grantee: Agnes Baker Dean

Book & Page: Z31-262

Type: Conveyance

In a will dated August 11, 1903, John Baker left the property to his wife, Bessie Baker. At her death, the property was to be divided equally among his children and grandchildren. Thomas F. Baker sold his interest in the property to his sister Agnes Baker Dean for \$1, love, and appreciation.

Date: June 15, 1927

Grantor: Agnes Baker Dean

Grantee: John Dean ETAL

Book & Page: Z31-261

Type: Conveyance

The note for Line #4 on back of Property Record Card states, "ETAL are: Eleanor Shiver, Mary Niggel, Elizabeth D. Sauls, Agnes D. Farmer, and David Dean, surviving devisees of Agnes Dean. Will file 78-722 is from Sidney F. Dean leaving his int to the sole surviving heirs of Agnes Dean who died in 1957. 8/14/1979 ds"

Date: August 31, 1983

Grantor: Agnes Dean Farmer, Eleanor Dean Shiver, Mary Dean Niggel, and David L. Dean

Grantee: Elmer and Charlotte Quick

Book & Page: V132-173

Type: Conveyance

From the note for Line 5 on back of Property Record Card. Not listed on the front of the card. One of three deeds where descendants of Agnes Dean are selling their interest in the property to Elmer and Charlotte Quick for "\$5.00 dollars and other valuable consideration."

Date: August 31, 1983

Grantor: John Dean ETAL

Grantee: Elmer and Charlotte Quick

Book & Page: V132-146

Type: Conveyance

From the note for Line #5 on back of Property Record Card, "Consideration in deed V132-146 was \$5.00 dollars and other valuable consideration. By recital in deed V132-146 John J. Dean, Jr. also died intestate 2/11/82, leave a Will dated 5/28/73 leaving his int. in said property to his sister Eleanor D. Shiver."

Date: August 16, 1983

Grantor: Elizabeth Dean Sauls

Grantee: Elmer and Charlotte Quick

Book & Page: V132-173

From the note for Line #5 on back of Property Record Card and not listed on the front. First of three deeds where descendants of Agnes Dean are selling their interest in the property to Elmer and Charlotte Quick for "\$5.00 dollars and other valuable consideration."

Date:

Grantor: Elizabeth Dean Sauls

Grantee: Elmer and Charlotte Quick

Book & Page: V132-176

Type: Conveyance

Lot:

From the note for Line #5 on back of Property Record Card. Actually. The page number is an error. It should be V132-146. V132-176 is a company in Illinois selling their interest in a separate property.

Date: December 19, 1996

Grantor: Elmer A. and Charlotte C. Quick

Grantee: Charlotte C. Quick

Book & Page: X277-472

Type: Deed of Distribution

Date: December 19, 1996

Grantor: Charlotte Quick

Grantee: Herbert Hahn and Sylvia Risher

Book & Page: U337-176

Type: Quick Conveyance

Deed book and page number not listed on front of Property Record. Found in the note for Line 7 on back of the Card.

Date: November 11, 1999

Grantor: Herbert Hanh and Sylvia Risher

Grantee: John Carr and Katherine Burgund

Book & Page: Z337-698

Type: Conveyance

Date: October 31, 2001

Grantor: John Carr and Katherine Burgund

Grantee: L386-328

Type: Conveyance

Appendix B: Sanborn Maps

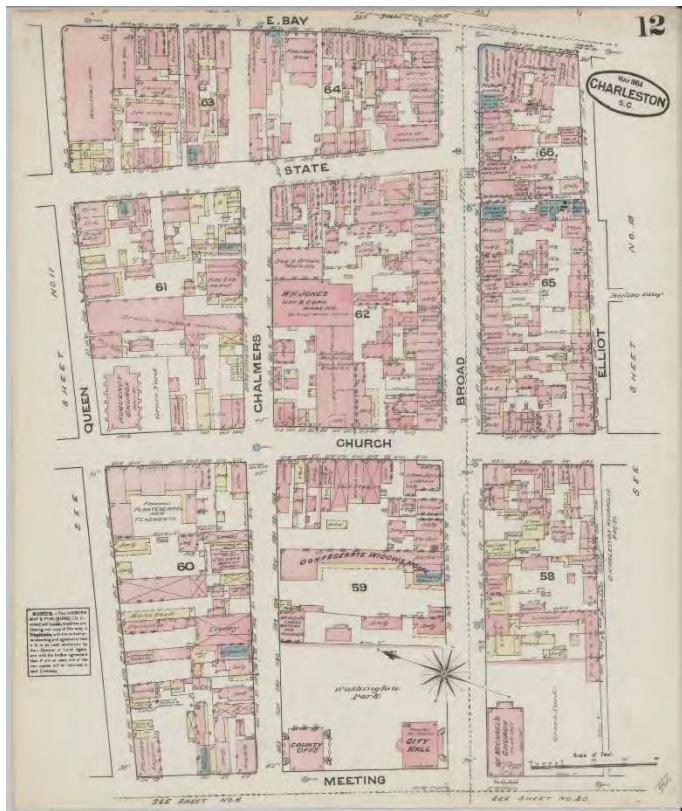


Figure 12 1884 Sanborn map of Charleston, SC page 12. Subject area is highlighted.

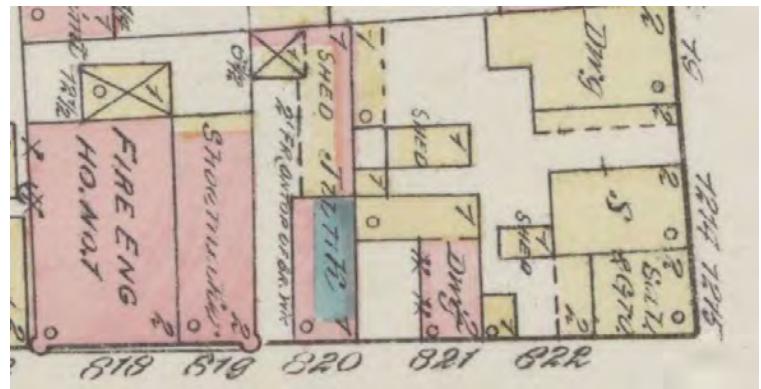


Figure 13 1884 Sanborn Map of Charleston, SC page 12. Detail of subject area.

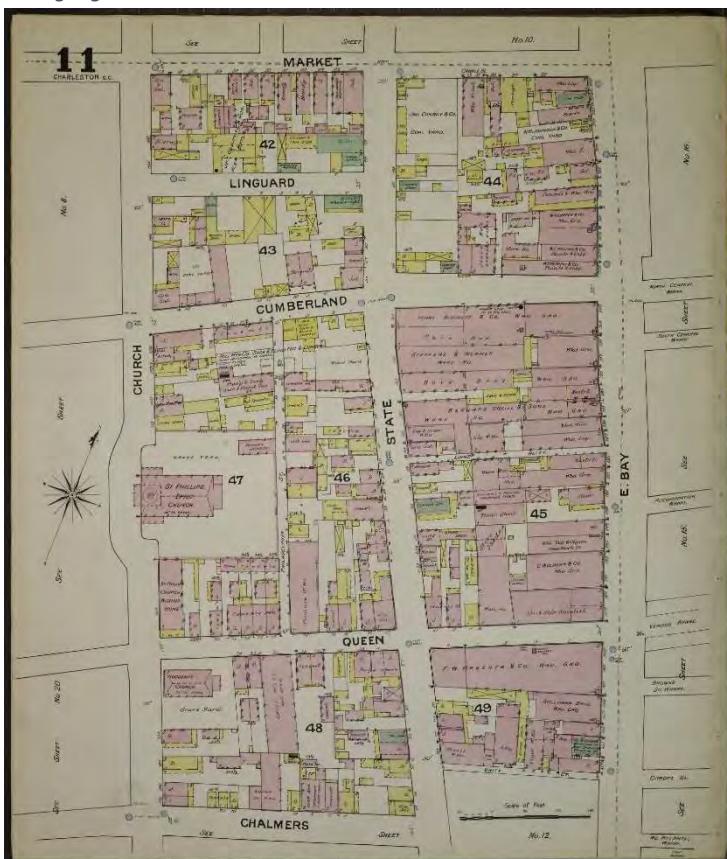


Figure 11 1888 Sanborn map of Charleston, SC. Page 11. Subject area is highlighted.

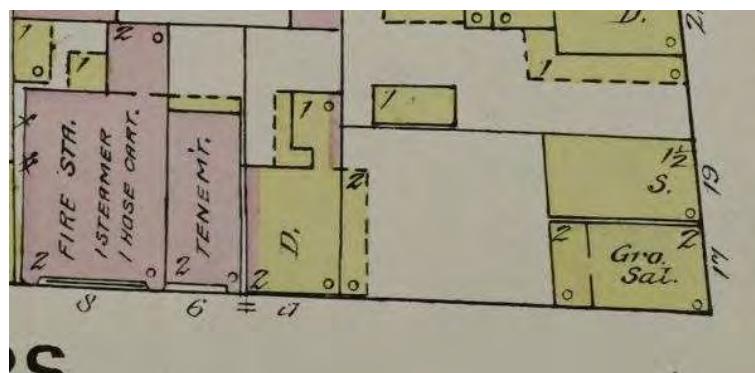


Figure 10 1888 Sanborn map of Charleston, SC. page 12. Detail of subject area.

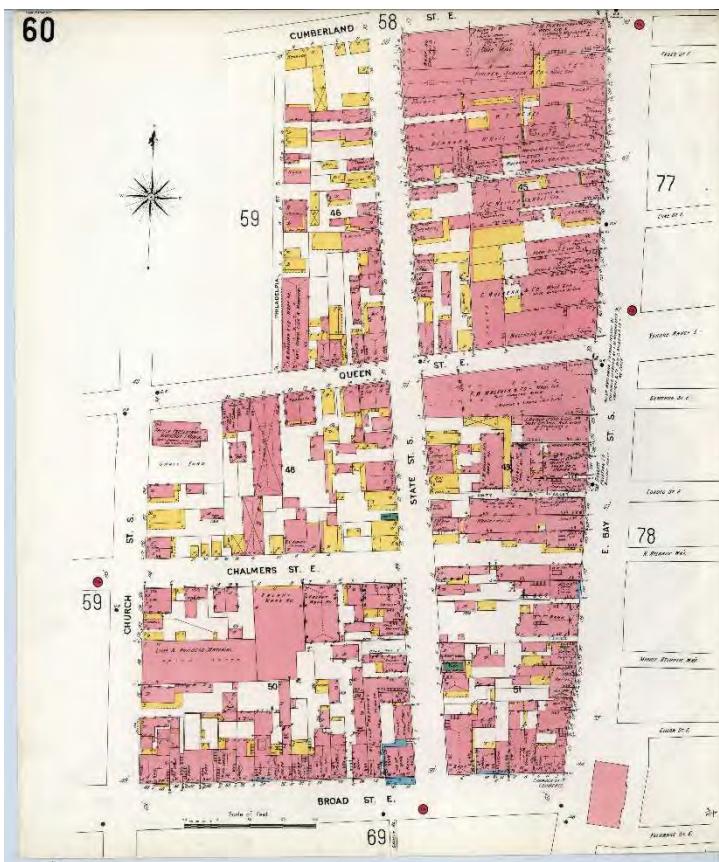


Figure 15 1902 Sanborn map of Charleston, SC. Page 11. Subject area is highlighted.

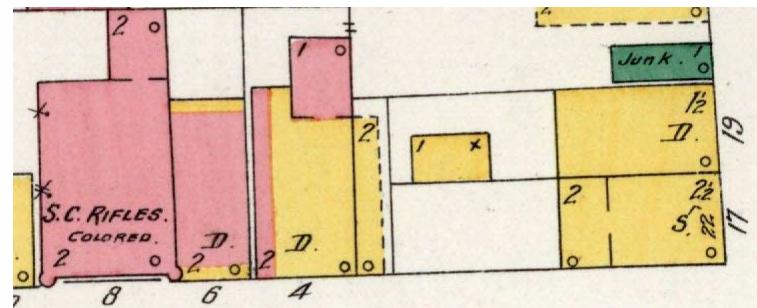


Figure 17 1902 Sanborn map of Charleston, SC. page 60. Detail of subject area.



Figure 14 1951 Sanborn map of Charleston, SC. Page 60. Subject area is highlighted.

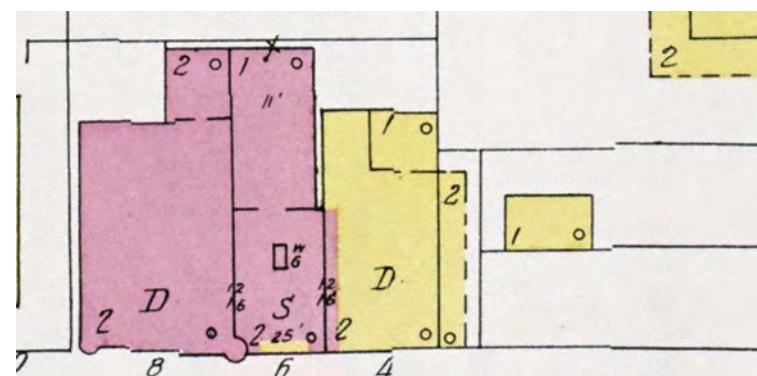


Figure 16 1951 Sanborn map of Charleston, SC. page 60. Detail of subject area.

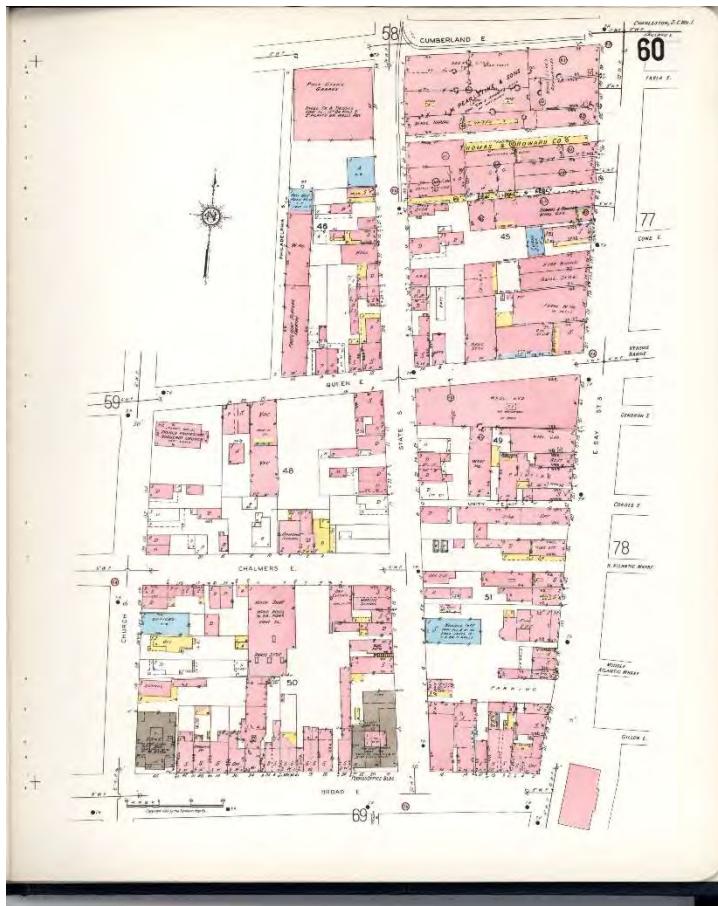


Figure 19 1955 Sanborn map of Charleston, SC. Page 60. Subject area is highlighted.

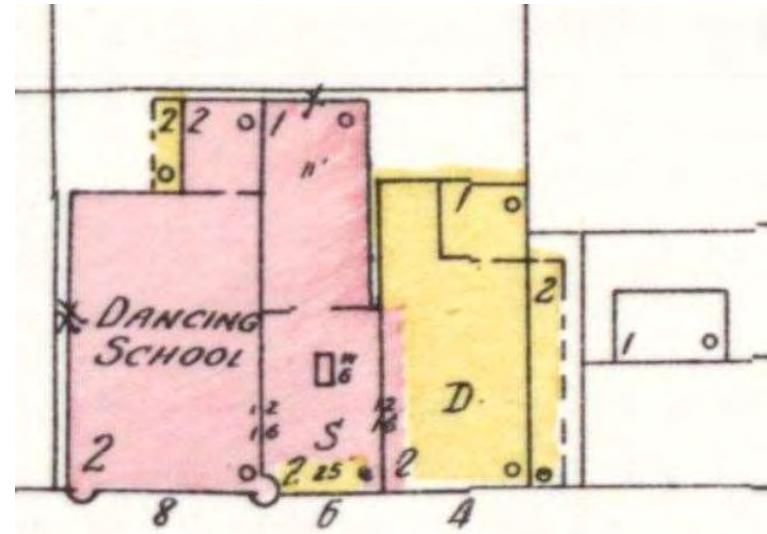


Figure 18 1955 Sanborn map of Charleston, SC. page 60. Detail of subject area.

Appendix C: Images of the House



Figure 20 Front elevation facing north.



Figure 22 East elevation. Second floor piazza.

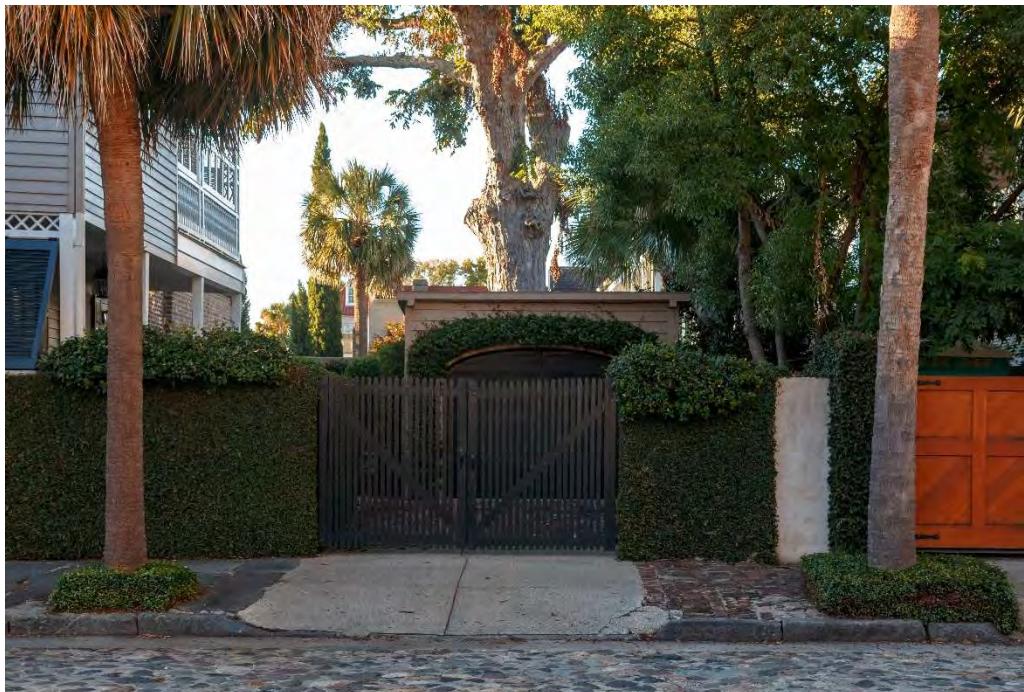


Figure 21 Garage that replaced the shed facing north.



Figure 23 Rear of house showing original piazza, small rear room and the two-story addition to accommodate extended family that moved in the 1920s or 1930s.



Figure 24 Garage and house facing north.



Figure 26 Rear of house facing southwest. Slave Mart Museum is brick building on left.



Figure 25 Rear of house facing southwest.



Figure 28 Rear of house facing southwest.



Figure 27 Rear of piazza facing south.