

Howard Littlejohn House

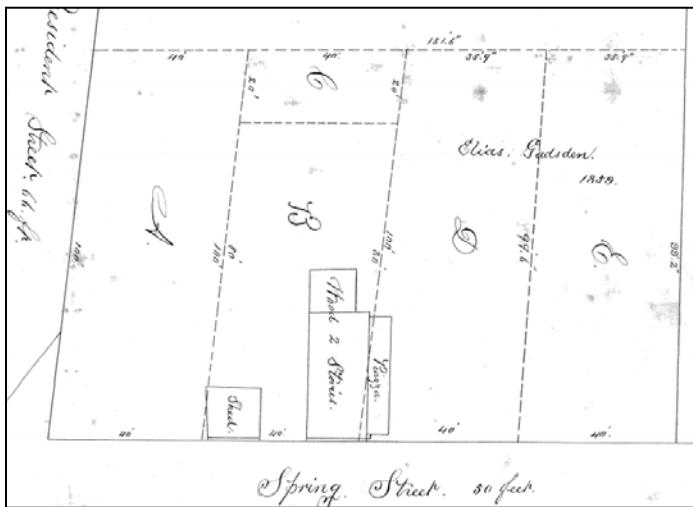
168 Spring Street
c. 1929



The 20th century house at 168 Spring Street is at least the second dwelling on the property. Although the construction of the current house can be pinpointed to 1929, the earlier history of the property begins much earlier.

The Bank of South Carolina sold property to **Frederick Stall and Robert Disher** for \$1500.¹ The sale included two lots (2 and 3) on a plat of February 22, 1843. A

plat dated March 1844 was recorded immediately before the deed. The two lots totaled 458 feet on Elliott Street, 488 feet on the north line, and 319 deep. John Ball, sr. owned land bounding it to the east. The house at 168 Spring Street was carved out of the western parcel shown in the 1844 plat which had been in use as a slaughterhouse at that time.



Just before the Civil War, the executors of Frederick Stall began selling off pieces of a large tract at the northeast corner of Spring and President Streets. His property at the northeast corner of President and Spring Streets ran 120 feet on Spring Street and about 320 feet deep. There was a slaughterhouse along President Street and a two-story building

with an eastern piazza nearly where 170 Spring Street stands today.

Mr. Stall's slaughterhouse seems to have been the source of rather contemporary-sounding disputes. Apparently, as the city expanded, newcomers to

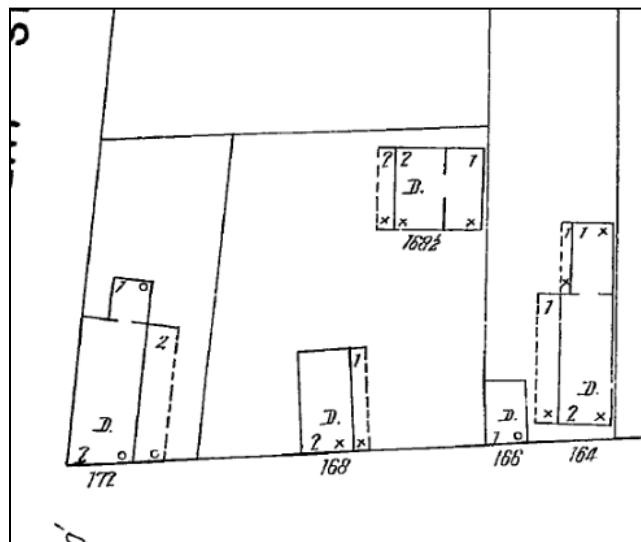
¹ Deed book Y10, page 579

Charleston—those who had “scarcely been incorporated with the City”—began buying lots in the outlying areas to take advantage of lower prices. However, once there, those same residents took up the issue of the slaughterhouse with City Council and sought to have it closed. On April 30, 1853, Mr. Stall wrote a letter to the editor accusing City Council of legislating against his rights without giving him a fair hearing. He noted that his slaughterhouse had been in place long before the newcomers bought the adjoining lots.²

Mr. Stall died in early 1858, and his executors began selling off pieces of the large Stall tract. An advertisement appearing on February 17, 1859, listed the individual lots as “vacant LOTS OF LAND.”³ The executors sold the two easternmost lots on Spring Street to **Elias Garden**, on March 3, 1859, for \$1095.⁴ The deed showing the division of Mr. Stall’s property was not recorded until 1860, but Mr. Garden’s name (misspelled as Gadsden) was already included on the plat as the owner of the two lots.

It is unclear which of the two lots Mr. Garden developed, but by 1869, the family of Jacob Mills was occupying a house identified as “78 Spring Street” in the old numbering system. When Mr. Garden died, his heirs sold his two lots. **Jacob Mills**, who had already been living in a house on one of the two parcels, bought both Lot D (the site of 168 Spring Street) and E (the site of 164 Spring Street) for only \$272.45 on July 20, 1880.⁵

It is likely—but not certain—that Mr. Mills had been living in a house that Mr. Garden had erected on the site of present day 168 Spring Street, not at 164 Spring Street. When Mr. Mills acquired both lots, he immediately trimmed his holdings and sold off the eastern parcel (164 Spring Street now) on the same day to Robert A. Barton. It seems highly unlikely that Mr. Mills would have



² “To the City Council,” Charleston Courier, Apr. 30, 1853, at 2

³ Charleston Mercury, Feb. 17, 1859, at 3

⁴ Deed book F14, page 215

⁵ Deed book H18, page 33

immediately sold off the half of his property with a house that Mr. Mills had been occupying for more than a decade before having a chance to build a new home next door. Rather, it seems more likely that Mr. Mills occupied a house located at present-day 168 Spring Street and sold off the still-vacant neighboring lot that would become 164 Spring Street.

There are no known images of Mr. Mills' house. In 1902, the Sanborn insurance map showed a two-story Charleston single house with double piazzas at the rear of the lot that was likely used as the Mills' residence. (The numbering of the 1902 map is confusing. Although it labels the set-back house as 168 1/2 Spring Street with the neighboring house to the west as 168 Spring Street, no city directory reflects that numbering.

The Mills family occupied the old house for several more years. Then, janitor **Richard Mills** acquired the house after a probate court action for \$1285 on February 7, 1911. The action had been brought to settle the debts of Charles Mills (who was dead), and there was an auction on February 2, 1911.⁶ The newspaper notice described the auction as being for a "lot of land" but made no reference to any structures. However, Richard and Lottie Mills occupied the property until the late 1920s.

On January 31, 1928, the house burned. Rachel Mills, 40, was trapped on the second floor and died in the blaze. Her body was found in the house in a back room. Her brother had jumped to safety after throwing an 11 year old relative to the ground. The house was "practically demolished" by the blaze. The two had jumped from a window, but "[i]t is said that the Mills woman's large size made it impossible for her to jump from the window herself, and bystanders said they saw her pass to and fro behind the



⁶ Deed book S18, page 46

window, apparently terror stricken." Her body was later found in a rear room "burned to a cinder."⁷ At an inquest, it was revealed that Ms. Mills had saved the lives of her little sister, a niece, and a nephew by hoisting them through a window to safety. Either because of exhaustion or her size, she was unable to escape through the window herself.⁸

Richard Mills died on September 13, 1928, and members of his family brought a suit to resolve the property issues in July 1929, and the 45 by 100 foot lot was sold on September 6, 1929 to **Howard F. Littlejohn**⁹ for \$188.88.¹⁰ A permit for \$1500 new house was pulled by Mr. Littlejohn, an orderly, in September 1929,¹¹ and he lived in the house in time to be counted in the census in April 1930 with his wife, Jessie Mae.¹² Although configured as a single family house, the dwelling was used as a rental property in part at least at times.



Mr. Littlejohn died on December 3, 1989, and the house was sold for \$40,000 to the owner of Ariel's Beauty Salon, Marilyn Ross McCants,¹³ on June 11, 1990.¹⁴

She sold it to John and Yolanda Weidner for \$365,000 on June 20, 2005.¹⁵

John Weidner and Yolanda Weidner sold it on April 1, 2016, to Jonathan Holt for \$630,000.¹⁶

⁷ "Burned to Death in Blazing Home," Charleston News & Courier, Feb. 1, 1928, at 2

⁸ "Rachel Mills Met Death Heroically," Charleston News & Courier, Feb. 2, 1928, at 10
⁹ (b. 1895)

¹⁰ Deed book H34, page 85

¹¹ Charleston Evening Post, Sep. 30, 1929, at 10A

¹² (d. Apr. 1, 1945)

¹³ (b. Oct. 5, 1959; d. Sept. 19, 2009)

¹⁴ Deed book Y193, page 794

¹⁵ Deed book R541, page 539

¹⁶ Deed book 0544, page 684