

Joseph and Mary Whilden House

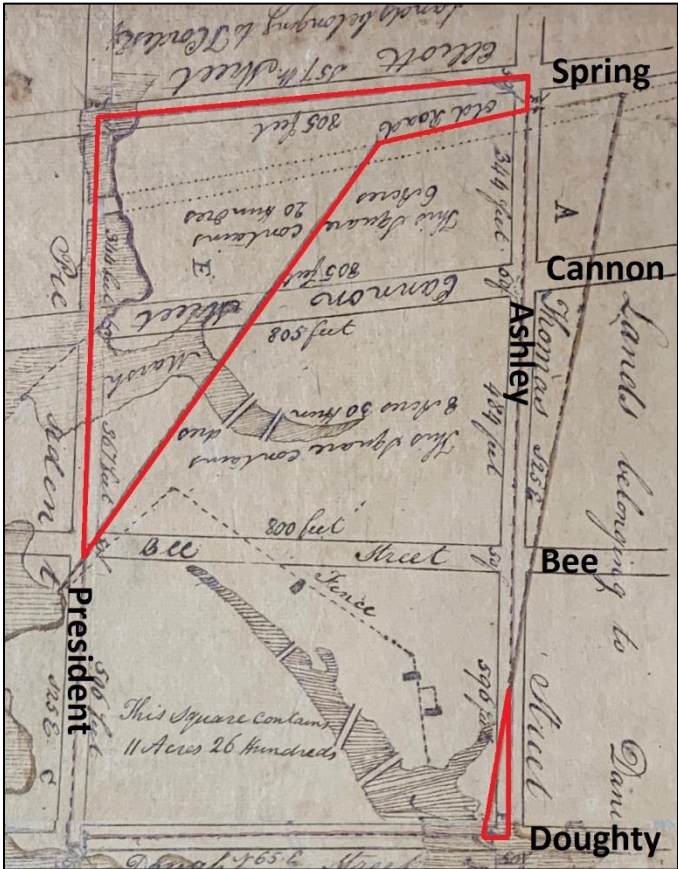
133 Spring Street

c. 1859

The house at 133 Spring Street with its detached dependency were likely built in 1859 by Joseph Whilden on a repeatedly subdivided property at the outer edge of the city. The house was built as an owner-occupied dwelling but has also served as a social hall and a rental property.

Creation of the Lot

The land itself for 133 Spring Street in the 18th century was well outside the bustling city in the Village of Washington. In November 1796, **Daniel Cannon** and **Philip Gadsden**, both of whom owned very large tracts north of the city limits, swapped property. Mr. Gadsden already owned most of the land bounded by Elliott (Spring) Street, Thomas Street (Ashley Avenue), Doughty Street, and President Street. To fill out the rest of the three-block rectangle, he gave 10.25 acres to Mr. Cannon, and Mr. Cannon swapped him 6.3 acres of his own land (bordered in red, right) to fill out those three blocks.¹ The current parcel for 133 Spring Street picked up a few feet separating it from what would become Elliott (Spring) Street in the trade.



Mr. Gadsden platted this land into regular lots of 100' wide along Spring Street, with Lots 1 and 2 at the extreme northeast corner. The houses at 133 and 137 Spring Street were eventually built on Lot 2, but the double lot was originally sold together. In March 1800, Mr. Gadsden sold Lots 1 and 2 to vendue master **Tobias Cambridge** for 120 pounds.² The combined property was 200' on Elliott (Spring Street) Street and 172' on Thomas Street (Ashley Avenue). In January 1802, Mr. Cambridge sold Lots 1 and 2 for \$1200 to bricklayer (later a planter) **Benjamin Harvey**.³ Whether a house stood on the double lot in 1802 is unclear, but Mr. and Mrs. Harvey occupied a house on Lot 1 the early 1800s.

¹ Deed book B7, page 232 (Gadsden to Cannon, sections A-D) (recorded July 22, 1800); deed book B7, page 233 (Cannon to Gadsden, sections E-F) (recorded July 22, 1800)

² Deed book B7, page 28 (recorded May 28, 1800)

³ Deed book Z7, page 228 (recorded Jan. 21, 1802)

When Mr. Harvey died in 1814,⁴ his wife, Susannah, was given the choice of his several houses for the rest of her life, and she picked the house on the double, likely the couple's existing home. Mrs. Harvey was there at least until 1819, but she eventually found it "incon[v]enient to reside therein" because the buildings were "much out of repair" and were wood and subject to burning. Because her children would have received the property upon her death (according to Mr. Harvey's will), Mrs. Harvey needed the court's permission to sell the house, and a court auction was held on March 20, 1823.

Charles K. Lesesne bought the 200' by 172' property for the highest bid of \$3150 for his children⁵ in trust.⁶ He occupied the Harveys' house on the corner, but he eventually wanted to invest differently for his children and contracted to sell the double lot to **Dr. James Doughty**. Dr. Doughty would not close on the sale until the court had signed off on it since the beneficiaries were minors. The \$3300 sale was finally approved and recorded in February 1827.⁷

The Doughtys seem to have had recurring problems staying current on their debts. Dr. Doughty mortgaged Lots 1 and 2, and when he defaulted, the Harveys' house was sold at a public auction on September 15, 1830. The Doughtys were not ousted, though. A trustee for the Doughtys paid \$2500⁸ for the two lots at the 1830 auction⁹ and then turned around and sold the double lot with the house in June 1832 to **Sarah B. Doughty**¹⁰ for \$2000.¹¹ She took out a mortgage in connection with her purchase,¹² and when she fell behind, the double lots were again foreclosed upon and sold at a public auction on November 29, 1849.¹³

James H. White was the highest bidder at \$3000 for "all that house and the two lots of land upon which it is standing." The specific reference to the lone house on the double lot strongly suggests that there were no improvements to Lot 2 at the time of the sale in late 1849 and that the only house was the Harveys' house on Lot 1 closer to the corner.

Mr. White held the two lots for only a few years before selling them off. He began by splitting Lot 2 into smaller parcels. First, the current lot¹⁴ for 133 Spring Street was created when he sold 55' of Lot 2 with no improvements noted to **M.W. St. Amand** for \$1500 on June 10, 1854.¹⁵ The new lot first

⁴ Charleston Courier, June 1, 1814, at 3 (reciting death on May 12, 1814)

⁵ The beneficiaries were Charles, William, Eliza Ann, and John George and any others he would have with Ann Eliza Lesesne.

⁶ Deed book M9, page 139 (recorded Apr. 29, 1823)

⁷ Deed book S9, page 399 (recorded Feb. 8, 1827)

⁸ The deed refers to \$2000 in one place and \$2500 in another. Sextus Gaillard was the trustee.

⁹ Deed book D10, page 380 (recorded June 1, 1832)

¹⁰ The connection between Sarah Doughty and Dr. James Doughty is unknown. Dr. James Doughty died in 1831, and Sarah Doughty was noted as a widow in the 1832 deed, but the name of his wife was not recorded in earlier deeds concerning 133 Spring Street.

¹¹ Deed book D10, page 382 (recorded June 1, 1832)

¹² Deed book D10, page 378 (recorded May 31, 1832)

¹³ Deed book C12, page 510 (recorded Feb. 15, 1850)

¹⁴ Technically, the property line was tweaked a tiny bit in the 1960s to accommodate a garage's encroachment on a neighboring lot, but the basic lot was formed in 1854.

¹⁵ Deed book I13, page 189

appeared as its own parcel in the tax records in 1854, but no improvements were identified. Second, Mr. White sold about 34' of Lot 2 to W.L. Smith for \$2500 on November 9, 1854.¹⁶ The 66% *higher* price for the 40% *smaller* portion of Lot 2 suggests that Mr. White had added a house to the western half of Lot 2 (a forerunner of 137 Spring Street) between 1849 and 1854. Indeed, in the 1852 Bridgens & Allen Map, there was a small building at the northwest corner of Lot 2. Finally, having sold off Lot 2, on March 16, 1858, Mr. White sold the 100' wide Lot 1 with its house to jeweler William G. Whilden for \$5000.¹⁷



Although the parcel for 133 Spring Street was created in 1854, it seems that the house was not added until the end of the 1850s. On June 20, 1856, Mr. St. Amand sold his subdivided 55' portion of Lot 2 to **Francis M. Sires** for \$1300.¹⁸ After another two years, Mr. Sires sold the 55' subdivision to insurance agent **Joseph Whilden**¹⁹ in March 1858.²⁰

Addition of the House

Although no evidence pegs the construction of 133 Spring Street, a very compelling circumstantial case can be made that the house was added by Joseph and Mary Whilden in 1859. Although the deed to Joseph Whilden did not specify a price—the deed actually left the price line blank and did not even specify a nominal payment—Mr. Whilden had taken out a \$1500 mortgage from the Charleston Savings Institute, a price that would have been consistent with an unimproved lot.²¹ In 1859, Joseph Whilden was recorded in the city directory at the corner (the house of his brother, William G. Whilden), but by the 1860 federal census, Joseph was the head of his own household next door to his brother.

Joseph Whilden's time at the house seems to have been almost an overlap of the Civil War. In the 1860s, Mr. Whilden was at 59 Spring, the number of the house from 1861 until 1886's renumbering. Not too long after the War, in 1866, Mr. Whilden sold the improved lot and seems to have joined his brother William G. Whilden again next door at the corner house.

¹⁶ Deed book I13, page 277

¹⁷ Deed book T13, page 227 (recorded Mar. 16, 1858)

¹⁸ Deed book T13, page 76

¹⁹ (b. Nov. 20, 1820; m. Mary Rebecca Richards, 1851; d. Dec. 25, 1909)

²⁰ Deed book F14, page 30 (recorded Mar. 29, 1858)

²¹ Deed book G14, page 340 (recorded March 22, 1858)

William G. Jeffords²² paid Joseph Whilden \$3000 for the property in September 1866 and seems to have moved right in.²³ Mr. Jeffords was, for most of his time at the house, the superintendent of Adger's Wharf and living with his wife, Elizabeth.²⁴

In 1872, the house with its odd L-shape was visible in the Bird's Eye View map. The house was set back slightly from the street and had a much smaller building behind it that would seem to be the current rear structure. (Another building further back would seem to be associated with a Cannon Street house.) That the house had its L-shape within only 13 years of its construction suggests the house was either originally built that way or a front addition was made by the Jeffords in the late 1860s. Other examples of additions to the fronts of traditional Charleston single houses that masked the piazzas include 6 Bogard Street and the 1872 addition to the front of 15 Cannon Street.



William and Elizabeth M. Jeffords sold the improved property to **Celia Campbell** for \$3450 in March 1883.²⁵ The house fared well in the 1886 Earthquake with no damage reported to the frame house with shake roof. Ms. Campbell died February 28, 1887, leaving her sister **Mary B. Campbell** as her heir. Mary conveyed the property in June 1888 to the **House of Rest Charity**²⁶ on the condition that the charity to satisfy the \$2500 mortgage taken by her sister.²⁷ When the charity was unable to pay off the debt, the property was conveyed to the lender, **Charleston Savings Institution**, in return for the cancellation of any debts in February 1890.²⁸

²² (b. 1825; d. Jan. 24, 1903)

²³ Deed book A15, page 43 (recorded Sep. 3, 1866)

²⁴ (b. 1836; d. 1920)

²⁵ Deed book Y18, page 256 (recorded Mar. 18, 1883)

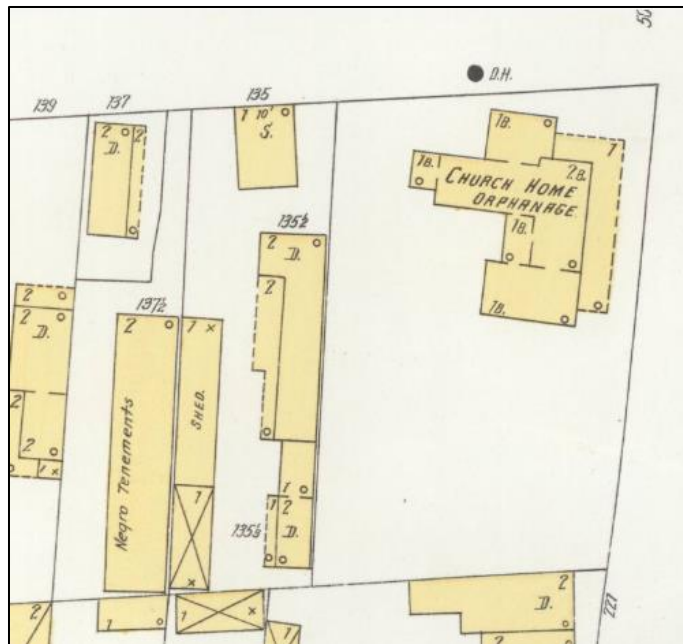
²⁶ Deed book X20, page 123 (recorded June 30, 1888)

²⁷ Deed book X19, page 33

²⁸ Deed book L21, page 661 (recorded Feb. 27, 1890)

The Charleston Savings Institution flipped the house to Black butcher **James Kennedy** for \$2200 on August 1, 1890.²⁹ Mr. Kennedy was at the house from at least 1891 to 1906, sometimes with a few boarders in addition to his large family.

Not only did Mr. Kennedy work as a butcher himself, he perhaps was responsible for adding a small butcher shop at the front of the lot. In the 1902 Sanborn maps (the first to include the property) the house was listed as 135 Spring Street with a one-story wooden store on the sidewalk. The commercial building was used as a small butcher and grocery operated by James Newton, a butcher who lived across the street.



When Mr. Kennedy died about 1909, his widow, **Eliza Kennedy**, got the house at a public sale on February 9, 1915, following a lawsuit to settle the estate of her husband.³⁰ She quickly resold property to **Sarah Alma Burn** for \$2550 in November 1916.³¹

From 1917 until her death in 1935, Miss Burn's mother, Harriett Burn,³² was at the house with some of her children. Miss Sarah Alma Burn remained at the house after her mother's death along with some other her siblings. At some point by 1940, Miss Burn had begun renting out parts of the house; in that year, the census recorded her at the house, two brothers, a niece, and three families who rented part of the house.

The 1944 Sanborn update showed the house with a two-story front porch. The one-story commercial building on the sidewalk was gone, and the large sheds were replaced with a small, wooden garage in the rear corner. The dependency was no longer attached to the main house.

Miss Burn died on May 31, 1961, still living at the house and still renting out portions both of the main house as well as the rear building. She left one



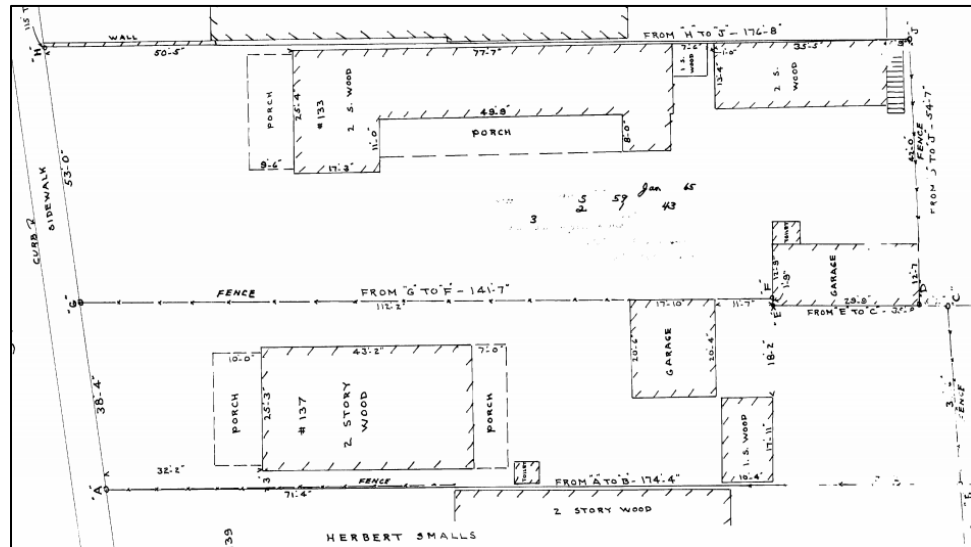
²⁹ Deed book E21, page 262

³⁰ Deed book S24, page 304

³¹ Deed book E28, page 241 (recorded Nov. 4, 1916)

³² Harriett Mervin McKinley Burn was born on January 31, 1850 in Florida; married Charles H. Burn; and died November 6, 1935.

brother, James Gordon Burn, a legacy of \$10,000 and the balance of her estate to a niece, Alma Louise Burn. Because of ambiguous phrasing in her will, a question arose whether Ms. Burn had intended to leave her real estate to her niece or not. Because of the ambiguity, all her



nieces and nephews³³ joined in selling 133 Spring Street in January 1965 to the **St. John Grand Lodge**³⁴ for \$11,000.³⁵ A plat³⁶ showed the two properties: 133 Spring Street and 137 Spring Street. The property had the two-story wooden house with a front porch and a side porch surrounded on three sides, a two-story wooden rear building, and a garage (that slightly encroached the neighboring property). The masons used the property as their facility for many years, but starting in 1987, the property was listed as vacant in directories.

On February 7, 1997, **Helen W. Fields** paid \$75,000 for the house.³⁷ Ms. Fields began using the property as a rental property with several apartments in the house, a use that continues in 2021.

The building certainly has had unsympathetic alterations to the c. 1859 house. An aerial view reveals that the gable roof of a Charleston single house remains, but the side piazzas have been entirely enclosed. The front portion of the house—which might have been original or perhaps in the 1860s—screens the narrower piazzaed portion of the house. Its historic features have been masked by replacement siding, but historic material possibly remains. The front segment of the house, whether original or not, was likely similar to the masking addition made in 1872 to 15 Cannon Street. The front portion had a two-story front porch added to it, and that porch has itself been enclosed with a stoop

³³ Ms. Burn's extended family included the three children of brother Charles Edward Burn (Charles H. Burn, Dr. Edward Morse Burn, and Nina Elizabeth Burn-Boykin), the wife and four children of brother James Gordon Burn (Mrs. Hattie Stall Burn, Ernest G. Burn, Charles G. Burn, Hazel Burn-Bowers, and Mervin Burn Zeigler), the two children of brother Henry Cameron Burn (John Webster Burn and Henry Cameron Burn, Jr.), the five children of brother Elmo McKinley Burn (Alma Louise Burn; Elmo McKinley Burn, Jr.; John H. Burn; Edwin I. Burn; and Ethel Elizabeth Burn-Fennell).

³⁴ The full name of the mason was the St. John Grand Lodge, Modern Free and Accepted Masons of the World, Ancient and Accepted Scottish Rite Free Masons.

³⁵ Deed book A82, page 420 (recorded Jan. 22, 1965)

³⁶ Plat S, page 59

³⁷ Deed book V279, page 206

added. An examination of the layout of the interior and, especially, structural elements in the attic and under the house could be extremely revealing about the evolution of the building.

Behind the house is a wooden, two-story building. It's relationship to the main house and location on the lot indicates that it is almost certainly an original part of the house. A separate dependency appears in the Sanborn books, and in the 20th century the rear building is mentioned as the dwelling of a renter. No specific references have been found about the dependency in the 19th century, but it seems to appear in the 1872 Bird's Eye View. Wooden dependencies were very common in the neighborhood in the 19th century where they were used as kitchens with possible living quarters for slaves; Joseph Whilden owned at least one 19-year old slave in 1860 when he occupied the house.

