



## **50 Reid Street: Digging Up the Past**

**Pemberton**

**HP 8090**

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# Table of Contents

<b>Introduction</b>	<b>3</b>
The Neck	3
<b>Setting the Stage</b>	<b>4</b>
The Early Years	5
20 <sup>th</sup> Century Transitions	6
<b>Architectural Description</b>	<b>8</b>
<b>Conclusion</b>	<b>8</b>
 <i>Appendices</i>	
A. List of Illustrations	9
B. Annotated Chain of Title	10
C. Bibliography	15

# Introduction

A tour through downtown Charleston will take you through the old market district, the Battery at the southern tip of the peninsula, and past nearly a dozen historic, white, graveyards. On the tour your guide may mention that by the end of the 18<sup>th</sup> century Charleston's population consisted of nearly ninety percent enslaved blacks<sup>1</sup>. It is only a matter of time before one begins to wonder where did Charlestonians inter their enslaved and free blacks. It seems that over time even Charleston has forgotten. In the last century as the city expanded further north African burial grounds have been abandoned, forgotten, buried and built upon. This report of 50 Reid Street attempts to tell the story of Charleston's forgotten cemeteries through the focus of the African burial ground known as the Beershiva cemetery.

## The Neck

The Charleston Neck is defined by the land that laid north of the town of Charleston in the late 18<sup>th</sup> and early 19<sup>th</sup> century. It was developed during this time in a series of planned suburban neighborhoods in an attempt to offer wealthy merchants and planters open space further inland from the peninsula outside the



Figure 1 Charleston News and Courier, Charleston, SC. 10-20-1885  
p. 3

<sup>1</sup> Wilson, Thomas D. *The Ashley Cooper Plan: The Founding of Carolina and the Origins of Southern Political Culture*. Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2016.

hustle and bustle of the Holy City.<sup>2</sup> The Neck attracted more than the wealth, cheap land and low rent attracted blacks and immigrants. The Neck quickly became a haven for free blacks, the mulatto elite, and “live out” slaves who were allowed to live separate from their masters. German and Irish immigrants also flocked to the outlying territories.

The cheap land, along with access to railways drew more industry to the Neck and in 1849 Charleston annexed the Neck as part of the city. This part of the city strived to keep up with industrial growth as Charleston’s agrarian industry began to decline. Despite its attempts to modernize and adapt Charleston to changing industries this area ultimately deprived Charleston from becoming a major port by preventing the railroad from making the connection to deep water ports near the south end of the peninsula. Because of this cargo needed to be loaded into carts and wagons to be carried to port or transported by small craft to the wharfs located in the Neck.<sup>3</sup>

### **Setting the Stage**

Located on the Charleston Neck in the Hampstead neighborhood at the northeast corner of Reid and Hanover, sits a bungalow with an unsettling past. Hampstead was part of the suburban planning campaign of in the late 18<sup>th</sup> century to inhabit the Neck. Conceptualized in 1769, many of the streets of Hampstead were laid out across low lying land and tidal creeks. The planners relied on land fill to eventually complete the streets. The streets drew their names from surrounding families and businesses already in the area. Reid Street was named after Captain James Reid who operated a ropewalk in the area around the time of Hampstead’s development.<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> Grimes, Kimberly M. *Between the Tracks: The Heritage of Charleston's East Side Community*. Charleston, SC: Charleston Museum, 1987.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid

<sup>4</sup> Register of St. Philips Paris, Charles Town, South Carolina, 1720-1758. p. 80



Today Hampstead is commonly referred to as the Eastside and has been since the 1950's. Although there are not creeks remaining in the Eastside, some lower lying streets still flood during neap tides and following heavy rains in the South Carolina upstate as surging waters flowing from the Ashley and Cooper rivers converge with incoming tides. The African American community accounts for a large percentage of the inhabitants in the East side. The condition of buildings in the area have a wide variety of conditions some new, some restored, and some condemned. Intermingled within the East side are several Section 8 developments however most buildings are historically single family dwellings.

### The Early Years

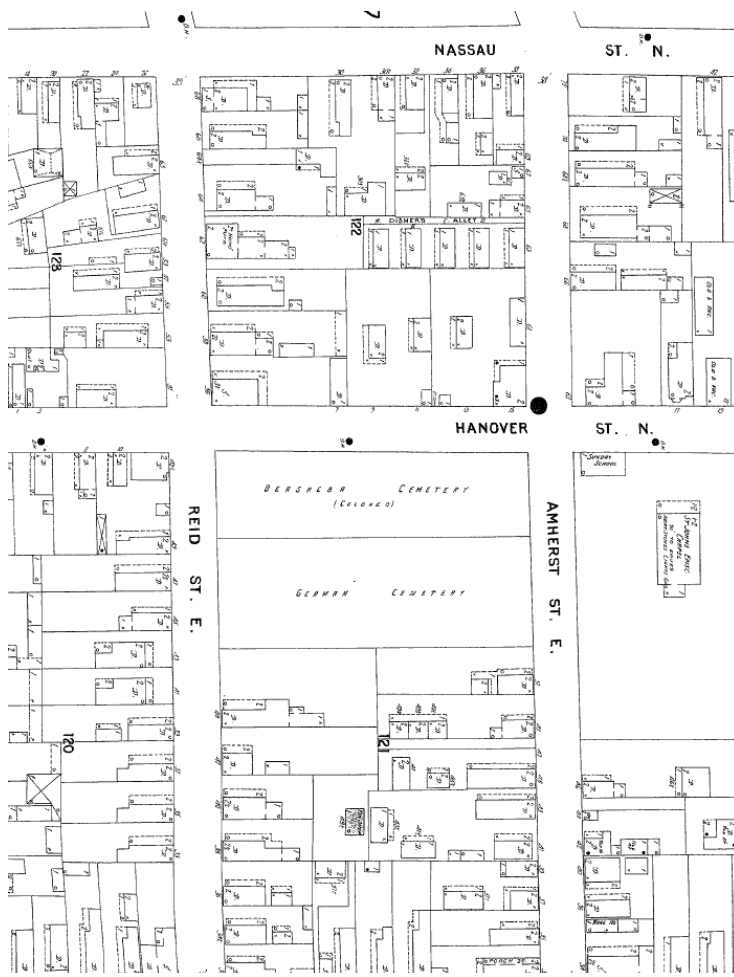


Figure 2 1902 Sanborn Map. University of South Carolina. 1902 Sanborn Fire Insurance Maps, Charleston S.C.

The research of this report shows the first record of sale being from John and Rebecca Fereven in 1818 to one John Geyer and after several more conveyances being transferred to the Presbyterian Church of Charleston. However, Research from a report performed by Chicora on the cemetery revealed a discrepancy in the chain of title. According to the research The property was sold to the Africa Society by Susannah Cart in 1818. The research of this report verified that the conveyance was valid however no future conveyance could be located following the 1818 transaction. Regardless of

ownership, the property began being used for the interment of black Charlestonians.

The Charleston City Directory of 1856 identifies the property as the First Presbyterian Cemetery for Colored Members, but remained unidentified on maps such as the 1872 *Bird's Eye View of the City of*



Figure 3 1872 Birdseye View of Charleston

*Charleston* as seen in Figure 1.<sup>5</sup> The 1888 Sanborn Fire Insurance Map was the first time the cemetery appeared on a map. By the time the 1902 Sanborn Map was made it appears that the cemetery has absorbed the DaCosta cemetery above. According to the records of ownership this is not the case. The properties were still owned by different entities but perhaps there was no barrier between the two, and it was assumed that the entire stretch of the block facing Hanover Street was, as titled in the 1902 Sanborn Map, the Beershiba Cemetery (see Figure 2).

### 20<sup>th</sup> Century Transitions

In 1918 the property was conveyed to the Olivet Presbyterian Church by the Presbyterian Church of Charleston for \$5.00.<sup>6</sup> In a court proceeding in 1921, that will be addressed later in this report, Olivet Presbyterian claimed to be in possession of the burial ground for nearly 40 years.<sup>7</sup>

<sup>5</sup> Michael Trinkley, Debi Hacker, Nicole Southerland, *The Silence of the Dead: Giving Charleston Cemeteries a Voice*. Columbia, SC: Chicora Foundation, 2010.

<sup>6</sup> Charleston County. Records of the Register Mesne Conveyances (RMC), Charleston, S.C. Deed Book W28, p. 2

<sup>7</sup> Charleston County Court of Common. Plea Box 330, File 12.

Olivet Presbyterian later sold the lower portion of the property to Martin P. Rowland in 1919 who began construction of a home on the property.<sup>89</sup> In October 1921 Mrs.

Martin P. Rowland passes away at 51

Reid Street (Figure 4). Two month later Martin finds himself facing a legal injunction over his new home. According to the injunction the Olivet Church never owned the burial ground and

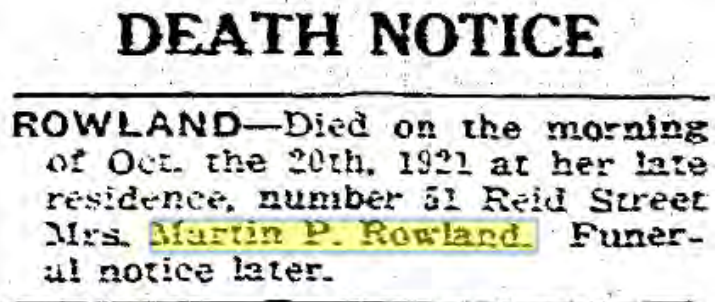


Figure 4 Charleston Evening Post (Charleston SC) 10-20-1921 p.11

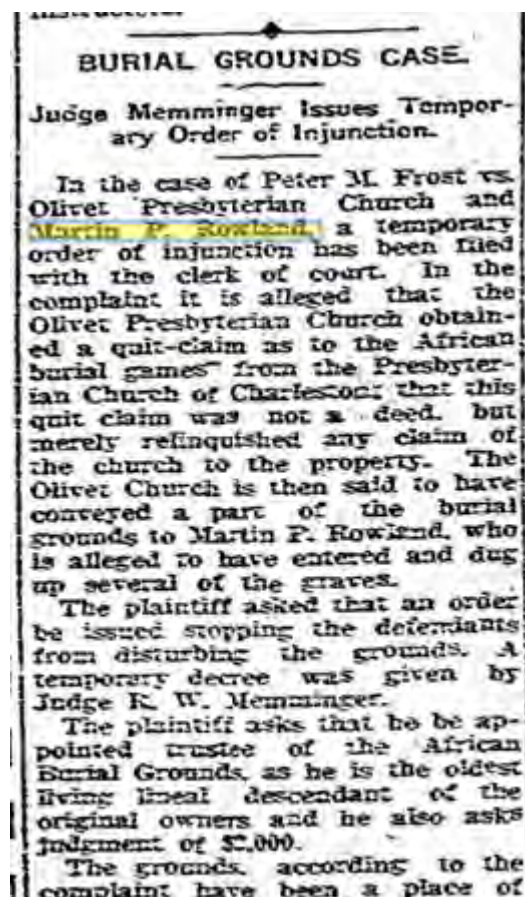


Figure 5 Charleston Evening Post (Charleston, SC) 12-02-1921 p. 16

therefore never had the right to convey the property to Martin Rowland. The plaintiff, Peter M. Frost, claimed that Rowland disinterred the graves and “threw their contents into the street, and otherwise mutilated and trespassed.”<sup>10</sup> The case never went to trial and Rowland retained the deed to the property.

In 1929, on the cusp of the Great Depression Rowland sold the property to an investment company for \$200.<sup>11</sup> According to the Federal Census of 1920 Rowland was a grocer by trade and he may have been experiencing hard economic times earlier than other industries. The investment company quickly sold 50 Reid Street to a Louis E. Cole for \$3000. Louis held

<sup>8</sup> RMC, Charleston, S.C. Deed Book W28, p. 450

<sup>9</sup> Trinkley, Hacker, and Southerland, *The Silence of the Dead* p.72

<sup>10</sup> Ibid

<sup>11</sup> RMC, Charleston, S.C. Deed Book H34, p. 92

the property for two years before it was seized by the Charleston County Sheriff for the unpaid property taxes of Mr. Rowland in 1932.<sup>12</sup> Rowland's defaulted payments totaled at \$49.84.<sup>13</sup> 50 Reid Street conveyed several more times in the 20<sup>th</sup> Century and eventual came under the ownership of Christina Butler, professor of Art and Architectural History at the College of Charleston. Christina said that every once in a while, "after a hard rain, teeth still come up in the yard."

### **Architectural Description**

The building located at 50 Reid street is a stud frame, bungalow siting on a raised foundation of stucco masonry. The house faces south overlooking Reid Street. The building is square in shape with one 10'x10' protrusion on the east side of the north façade. On the south façade is a piazza covered by the cross-gabled roof. There is a center door with two 2/2 windows to the left of the door and two to the right, all evenly spaced. The east and west facades are identical with 4 2/2 windows spaced evenly across. The home features Italianate brackets in the eaves of the roof on the gables.

### **Conclusion**

As this report has shown, the African burial ground located at the northeast corner of Reid and Hanover quickly disappeared in the urban expansion of the early 20<sup>th</sup> century, but this cemetery was not alone. Hampstead was home to ten other cemeteries prior to the 1900s, only one of which survives today.<sup>14</sup> As gravesites such as this disappear we lose valuable evidence pertaining to the lifestyles of the people buried there. There is much more to be learned about these cemeteries through newspaper clippings, archival research, and perhaps even excavation.

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<sup>12</sup> RMC, Charleston, S.C. Deed Book G23 p.141

<sup>13</sup> Ibid

<sup>14</sup> Trinkley, Hacker, and Southerland, *The Silence of the Dead* p.72



## A. Picture Index

Figure 1 Charleston News and Courier, Charleston, SC. 10-20-1885 p. 3.....	2
Figure 2 1872 Birdseye View of Charleston .....	2
Figure 3 1902 Sanborn Map. University of South Carolina. 1902 Sanborn Fire Insurance Maps, Charleston S.C. ....	2
Figure 4 Charleston Evening Post (Charleston SC) 10-20-1921 p.11 .....	2
Figure 5 Charleston Evening Post (Charleston, SC) 12-02-1921 p. 16 .....	2

## **B. Chain of Title**

**October 19, 1818**

Grantor	Rebecca and John Fereven
Grantee	John Geyer
Book and Page	C9-15
Type	Conveyance
Lot dimensions	80ftx200ft

\$100

**February 2, 1820**

Grantor	John Geyer
Grantee	Robert Wall
Book and Page	E9 208
Type	Conveyance
Lot dimensions	80ftx200ft

\$280

**August 30, 1825**

Grantor	Robert Wall
Grantee	William Cruickshanks
Book and Page	Q9 189
Type	Conveyance
Lot dimensions	80ftx200ft

\$450

**June 21, 1834**

Grantor	William Cruickshanks
Grantee	Presbyterian Church of Charleston
Book and Page	G10 252
Type	Morgage
Lot dimensions	80ftx200ft

\$200

**February 14, 1918**

Grantor	Presbyterian Church of Charleston
Grantee	Olivet Presbyterian Church

Book and Page	W28 2
Type	Conveyance
Lot dimensions	80ftx200ft

Lot purchased for \$5.00, included the entire northeast block of Hanover and Reid.

**September 24, 1919**

Grantor	Olivet Presbyterian Church
Grantee	M.P. Rowland
Book and Page	W28 450
Type	Conveyance
Lot dimensions	81x50

\$600, butted south by Reid and west by Hanover

**December 12, 1929**

Grantor	M. P. Rowland
Grantee	Whitrow Investment Company
Book and Page	H-34 92
Type	Conveyance
Lot dimensions	81x50

\$200

**April 29, 1930**

Grantor	Witrow Investment Company
Grantee	Louis E. Cole
Book and Page	J-34, 230
Type	Conveyance
Lot dimensions	39.3x50

\$3000

**October 18, 1932**

Grantor	M. P. Rowland
Grantee	Charleston City Council
Book and Page	G23 141
Type	Conveyance by City Sherriff

Lot dimensions	39.3x50
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M.P. Rowland defaulted on his taxes (\$49.84) in 1929

**December 3, 1932**

Grantor	Charleston City Council
Grantee	Hyman Pearlstine
Book and Page	Z36, 634
Type	Conveyance
Lot dimensions	39.3x50

Hyman assumes payment of taxes and is granted deed.

**January 20, 1934**

Grantor	Hyman Pearlstine
Grantee	A. I. Orlansky
Book and Page	P37, 537
Type	Conveyance
Lot dimensions	39.3x50

\$1

**January 20, 1934**

Grantor	Marrington Realty Company
Grantee	A. I. Orlansky
Book and Page	X36, 121
Type	Conveyance
Lot dimensions	39.3x50

\$10.50

**January 22, 1936**

Grantor	A. I. Orlansky
Grantee	Orlansky Property Inc.
Book and Page	C38, 585
Type	Conveyance
Lot dimensions	Same

Orlansky Property is Florida company, purchases property for \$10

**February 2, 1945**

Grantor	Orlansky Properties Inc.
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Grantee	Loretta Lucas
Book and Page	H45, 263
Type	Conveyance
Lot dimensions	Same

\$1200

### **July 1955**

Grantor	Loretta Lucas
Grantee	Janie Williams
Book and Page	K60, 297
Type	Conveyance
Lot dimensions	Same

\$5250

### **March 17, 1997**

Grantor	Janie Williams
Grantee	Thomasina Clark
Book and Page	H281, 805
Type	Will
Lot dimensions	Same

### **October 3, 2000**

Grantor	Thomasina Clark
Grantee	Thomas Loeber
Book and Page	A356, 628
Type	Conveyance
Lot dimensions	39.3x50

\$55,000

### **September 21, 2001**

Grantor	Thomas Loeber
Grantee	Nathan Weber
Book and Page	V382, 645
Type	Conveyance

Lot dimensions	39.3x50
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\$82,000

**December 28, 2011**

Grantor	Nathan Weber
Grantee	Christina Shedlock
Book and Page	O226, 861
Type	Conveyance
Lot dimensions	39.3x50

\$142,000

**April 24, 2014**

Grantor	Christina Shedlock
Grantee	Christina Shedlock
Book and Page	O402, 046
Type	Conveyance
Lot dimensions	39.3x50

\$175,000

#### D. Bibliography

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