

News + Courier  
11.29.82

36 George Street

## Williams Clan Gathers For Reunion

By JANE E. ALLEN  
Post-Courier Reporter

When descendants of Jacob Williams' family gathered at 36 George St. this week, they marked the presence of the Williams clan in Charleston since Civil War times.

The first floor of the three-story family homestead now houses the offices of Elza's, a woman's clothing store on King Street. The upper floors have been converted into apartments.

According to a family history compiled by Charleston resident Anita Williams Steinberg, her grandmother, Paulina Gonzalonziz, left her native home in Samter, in the Prussian province of Posen, for the United States around 1859 or 1860. Her childhood sweetheart, Jacob Moses Victorius, gave up his career as a soldier, after being wounded, and followed Miss Gonzalonziz to America.

At the suggestion of his captain he changed his name — to the captain's — and became Jacob Moses Williams. Many of his descendants have incorporated Victorius or Victor into their names in honor of the original family name.

Williams and Miss Gonzalonziz married in Charleston, settling on John Street. At the outbreak of the Civil War, the couple moved to Griffin, Ga., and later to Camden, S.C., where Williams maintained a general merchandise store and acted as a spiritual and religious leader for other countrymen. After his death, the family returned to Charleston. In 1890, Mrs. Pauline Williams purchased the George Street lot and raised her nine children there.

Mrs. Williams was a stern disciplinarian and a devout Jew. When her husband Jacob died in Camden, the family wanted to bury him in

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Charleston. When the Orthodox synagogue would not allow the body to be moved from Camden to Charleston, his family joined the reform congregation, Kadosh Beth Elohim, to which many other German Jews belonged.

According to property records, Pauline Williams bought the 46 foot by 159 foot lot and house in November 1890 from Flora O. Moses for \$4,500. Since that time, the house has stayed in Williams family hands, most recently those of distant cousins Elza and David Alterman, who bought the lot in 1959.

Tracing back, the antebellum house must have been built between 1801 and 1834. Lawrence Benson purchased the property with the house in June 1834 from Amella Lois Lequeux and Sarah H. Lequeux. They had inherited it from Edward Darrell, a Charleston attorney, who bought it July 21, 1801, from a local merchant, Thomas Tunno. Property at that time was turned over in a two-part process, consisting of a lease and a release.

Darrell first leased the property from Tunno, paying a rent of "one grain of Indian corn," before it was released to him a year later for a purchase price of 759 pounds, one shilling and four pence. The transfer gave Darrell "all and singular the gardens, orchards, fences, ways, wells, water courses and easements." There was no mention of a house on the property.

The three-story brick house, built in the

Charleston single tradition of one-room width on the street side, has a white painted doorway surrounded by white Ionic columns. It connects to a renovated kitchen wing with original brick fireplaces and beams and a carriage house in back. The house originally had a two-story piazza, which the Altermans removed.

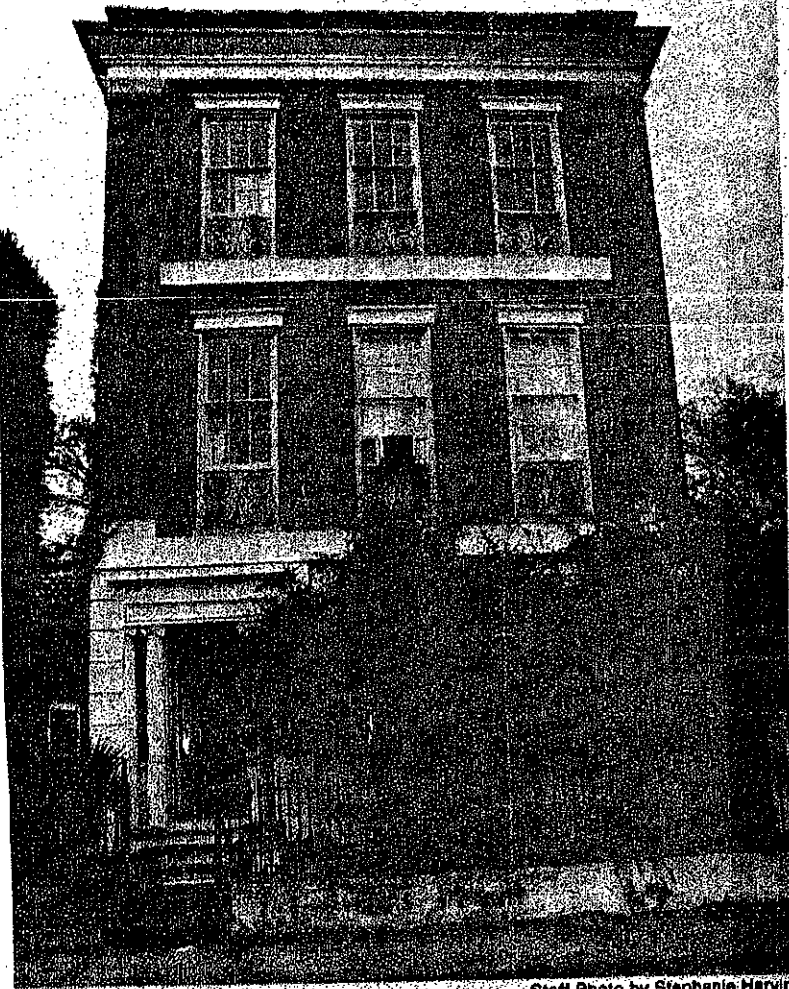
A tin garage at the rear of the property and another dilapidated brick building with a small tin supporting building were included in the 1959 purchase.

The two-room schoolhouse known as "Miss Mary Williams School," run by the oldest of the Williams children, was in the old brick building. There, she and her sister Hannah taught and prepared pupils to transfer to grammar school in the fourth grade. Mary and Hannah taught not only full-time students but also made themselves available each afternoon to foreigners of any ethnic background for free English lessons.

Their brothers, Henry Jacob Williams and Charles Samuel Williams, Mrs. Steinberg said, established the first retail shoe store in South Carolina — Williams Brothers on King Street. Another brother, Solomon Cohen Williams, a druggist with a store at King and George streets, introduced Coca-Cola into Charleston at his soda fountain.

Arthur Victorius Williams was secretary to Charleston Mayor T.T. Hyde and headed the Anti-Defamation League that defended the image of Jewish people from pointed jokes and comments in vaudeville and picture shows.

According to Mrs. Steinberg, the home was a family house. "As each member of the family got married, they stayed there (on the third floor) until they were married and had gotten a foothold," she said.



Staff Photo by Stephanie Harvin

Williams homestead now houses offices.

It was built for Elizabeth Robinson, who purchased the site in 1796. From c. 1801 it was the home of Peter Freneau, a prominent journalist, merchant and shipowner, and Jeffersonian politician. A New Jersey native of Huguenot descent, he was a brother of Philip Freneau, the "Poet of the Revolution." He came to Charleston in 1782 and became co-editor of the City Gazette and Daily Advertiser. He was Secretary of State of South Carolina and a state legislator, and in 1800 managed Jefferson's Presidential campaign in the state. Elizabeth Robinson died in 1812, bequeathing the property to Freneau, with the condition that he pay her niece the value of the real estate. He was unable to pay and the property was sold at auction. He continued to live here until his death, near bankruptcy, in 1813.

(Stockton, unpub. notes.)

36 George St. -- This three story red brick house was built sometime before 1834 by Edward Darrell or his heirs, Amelia Lois Lequeux and Sarah H. Lequeux. The facade has a rusticated first level with an Ionic columned entrance, and giant order pilasters at the corners, supporting a heavy molded cornice. (Allen, DYKYC, Nov. 29, 1982. Stoney, This is Charleston, 52.)

58 George St. -- This Adamesque period house, with two and one half stories of wood on a brick basement, was built c. 1803 by Barnard Elliott, a wealthy planter. It has a Regency front doorway and interior woodwork from the George Walker House, which stood at 26 George until 1912. The property is now part of the College of Charleston campus.

(Stockton, DYKYC, Nov. 14, 1977.)