

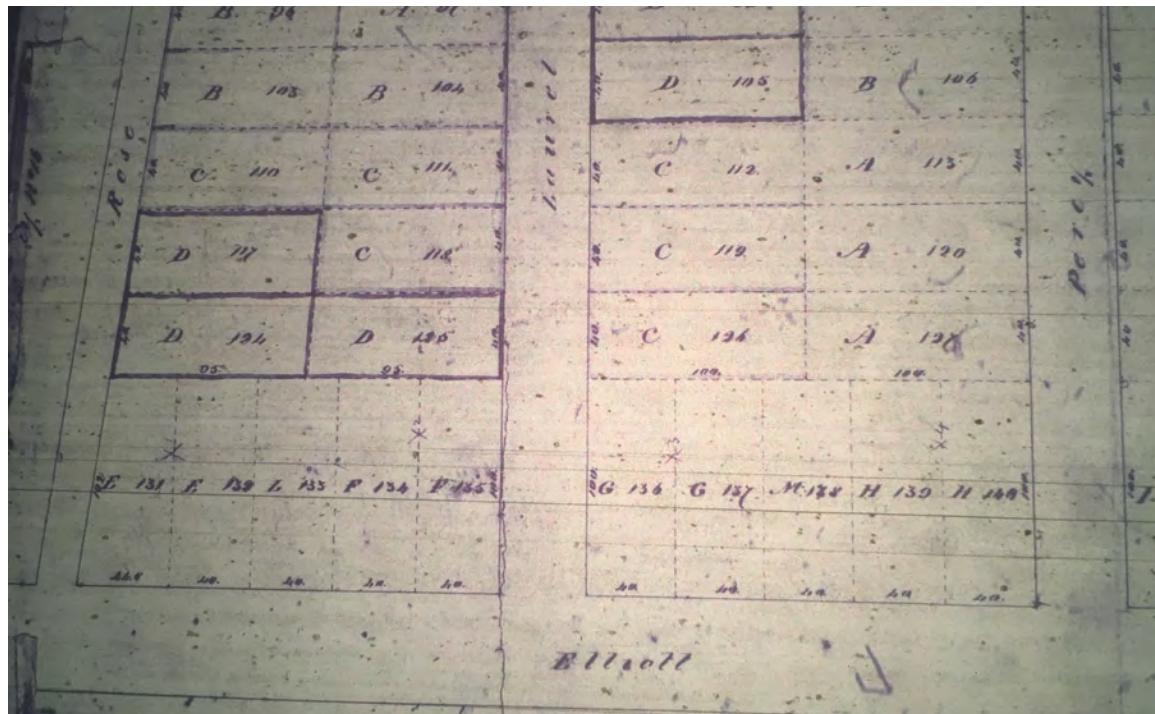
The History of 92 Spring Street, Charleston, South Carolina
Christina Butler/Butler Preservation, for JJR Development
January-February 2017

Overview:

92 Spring Street (alternatively known as 92 ½ Spring Street) is a historic property situated in the Cannonborough/Elliottborough neighborhood in the City of Charleston's historic district. A single house style residential building at the back of the lot was lost in the late twentieth century, but still extant are two single-story commercial buildings oriented on the front of the lot along Spring Street. The simple buildings belie important historical associations- they were built by Huldah J. Prioleau, one of the first female African American physicians in South Carolina, and one of the buildings served as her office from 1908 until her retirement in around 1934.¹ 92 Spring Street was also the setting for civil rights-inspired conversations between Prioleau and famous Charleston Renaissance author John Bennett during the tense race relations of the World War One era. They two commercial buildings continued in use as shops and briefly as a church for the African American community living near Spring Street.

Chain of Ownership:

92 Spring Street was originally part of a large tract owned by Rev. William Percy. Upon his death in 1848, the land was subdivided into 146 lots roughly bounded by Spring, Line, Rose, and Percy Street. It was at that time that this large parcel of land in Cannonborough-Elliottborough was first opened for development. The following year, the area was annexed into the City of Charleston, which also hastened growth on the “Charleston Neck”, the neighborhoods lying to the north of Calhoun Street.



¹ See City Directory Appendix.

This plat, surveyed by Robert K. Payne on order of the Court of Equity in May of 1848, shows the lands of Rev. William Percy, newly subdivided. Elliott Street was renamed Spring Street, and Laurel became Ashe Street. 92 Spring Street is situated on lot E 132, along Elliott Street.

N.M. Porter, a slaveholder who owned property throughout the Neck, purchased lots 131E and 132E (92 Spring Street) and sold both to Charles P. Bradley in 1851. Bradley's estate sold 92 Spring Street to Henry Horres in 1872, who sold it two years later to Frederick W. Scharfer. The 1874 deed noted that there was a building on the lot by that time.

Scharfer sold 92 Spring Street to Huldah Josephine Prioleau in April 1907 for \$1200. The deed described the property as:

"all that piece, parcel, or lot of land and the buildings thereon, situate lying and being on the north side of Spring Street, between Ashe Street and Rose Lane, and known in the present numbering as 92 Spring Street, the said lot being known on a plat of the Percy Lands made by RK Payne, 24 May 1848 (number 132 E). Butting and bounding to the north on lot 124 D on said plat, to the east on lot 133 L, to the south on Spring Street, and to the west on lot 131 E. measuring and containing on Spring 40 feet, by the same on the back line, and 100 feet in depth more or less."

During her ownership, Dr. Prioleau removed the earlier buildings and constructed an office, shop, and residential structure on the lot. She used the office and rented the other buildings. Prioleau's estate sold the property to Lillie Ruby Holloway in 1941. Holloway never lived at 92 Spring Street, but did advertise in the newspaper in 1945 that she was reopening the dwelling on site for rent.² Thelme Reese and Lillie Sheffield inherited the property from Holloway and sold their interest to James and Louise Diggs in 1973. The Diggs family transferred 92 Spring Street to JJR Development in 2016, which has plans to restore the historic commercial buildings on site.³

Construction, materials, and architectural description:

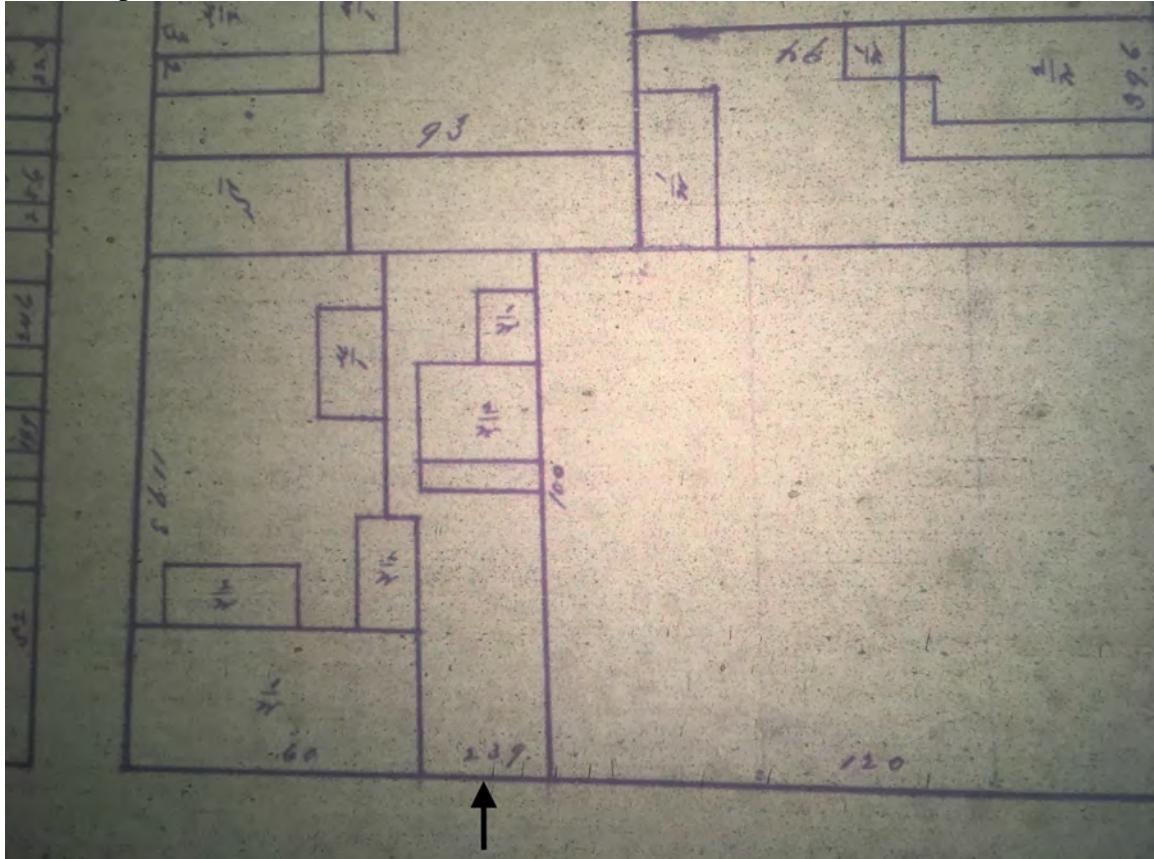
92 Spring Street boasts two examples of the one story commercial architectural form that is found in Charleston primarily in the Cannonborough-Elliborough and Eastside (Hampstead Village) neighborhoods today. A city-commissioned area character appraisal notes that, "buildings of this size and use stand out not only for their style, but materials, details, and colors as well. Several 20th century filling stations occupy valuable corner lots on Rutledge, Ashley, and Cannon. Additional single story commercial buildings are concrete block such as the bakery at 59 ½ Cannon Street, and a former millinery business at 85 ½ Spring Street, which has a stepped parapet. Two buildings, 9 and 13 Cannon, are wood frame with high parapets concealing gabled standing seam metal roofs beyond. At Sires and Spring Street is a one-story modern brick conveniences store. A one story building at 61 Cannon Street was built for a downtown branch of the YMCA in the early 1950s."⁴

² *Charleston Evening Post*, 31 January 1945.

³ See Chain of Title appendix for all deed references

⁴ Robert and Company, Area Character Appraisal, section V, pg. 51.

Before the one-story commercial buildings were constructed, a wood frame two-story single house stood at 92 Spring Street. Owner Fred Schaffer reported only \$30 in damage to the house during the Earthquake of 1886 (which measured 35 feet in depth, 22 feet tall, and 20 feet wide, with a shingle roof), but sometime after 1902, the dwelling was demolished, probably after Dr. Prioleau purchased the lot.⁵



This 1882 plat created by the City Engineer shows Frederick Scharfer's two story wooden dwelling, with a front porch and rear one story addition, located at 92 Spring Street before the current buildings arrived.

Dr. Prioleau had three buildings constructed at 92 Spring Street, her office building (92 1/2, probably completed after she purchased the property in 1907), a one story commercial building used during most of its life as a barber or beauty shop (92 Spring, completed in 1926), and a rear residential building (completed in 1913 and lost around 2014.) All can be seen on the 1929 *Sanborn Fire Insurance Map* below.

It is unclear when Dr. Prioleau removed the preexisting one story building at 92 1/2 Spring Street and constructed her office because no permit could be found, but the project likely took place shortly after she purchased the property. The Sanborn maps below show that the current building sits on the sidewalk; while the building standing in 1902 was recessed several feet back from the sidewalk. Her office first appears in the *City Directory* in 1908. That year (although the property description remained the same, listing only a two story wood house on the lot from before 1902 until the late 1920s), the tax assessor increased the value of 92 Spring Street from \$600 to \$1128. A large price fluctuation often indicates new construction or a major improvement on a property.

⁵ "Record of Earthquake damages"; 1902 and 1929 Sanborn Fire Insurance maps.

The assessor also listed Prioleau as the new owner and noted, “N/443 (\$200)”, a notation that unfortunately has no key or explanation in the tax books.⁶

The two surviving single-story wood buildings were inventoried for the South Carolina Department of Archives and History in 1985 and were described as follows:

[92 A Spring Street] “foundation- brick piers. Condition- good. Use- commercial.

Small one story frame building of rectangular form with flat roof; 2 bays at façade, paired two over two pane window, door with transom and a cornice set 2’ below roofline; weatherboard clad; six over six window on rear elevation; narrow rear addition with two over two window. Construction circa 1900.”

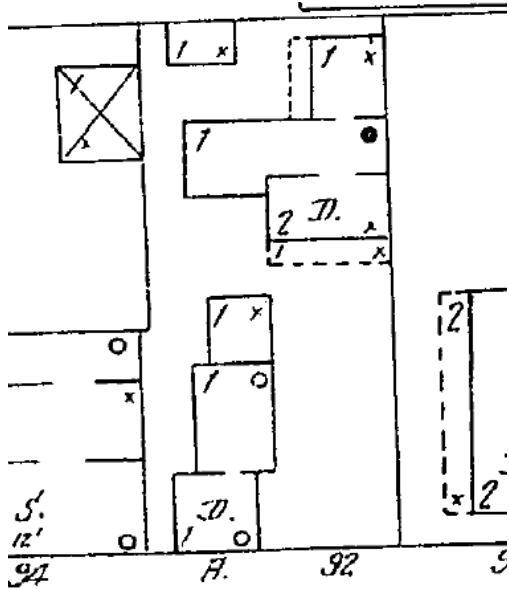


92 A Spring Street, Dr. Prioleau's historic office, as it appeared in 1985.

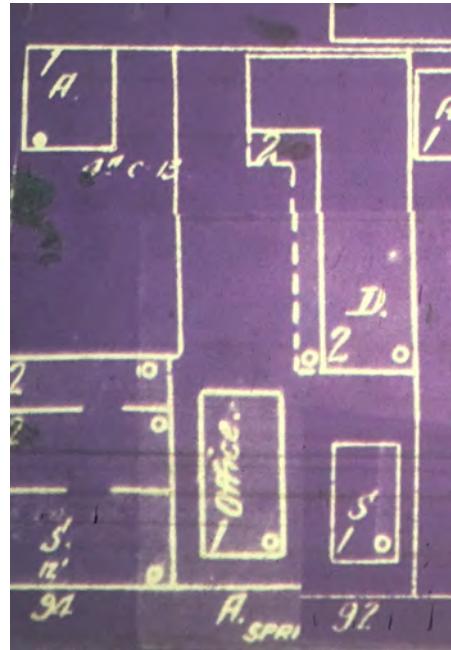
[92 Spring Street] “Small frame 1 story shed roofed building in front of house; has weatherboard siding, with brick veneered façade (1950s).”⁷

⁶ See Ward book data, appendix 3.

⁷ SCDAH Architectural Inventory card, completed 9 April 1985 by Geier Brown Renfrow Architects. BAR files. Note: the 1950s date refers to the brick veneer, not the building's construction date.



92/ 92 A Spring Street, 1902 *Sanborn Map*.
These buildings do not match the 1886
description for the house on the lot.



92 Spring Street, as shown on 1929 *Sanborn Map*, after Dr. Prioleau had constructed her office, a shop, and the 2 story residential rental property on the rear of the lot.

Dr. Prioleau petitioned the city's Committee on Brick and Wood Buildings, a governing body in charge of approving building projects, to construct a two-story, ten room apartment building. The Committee denied the project twice, and Prioleau was finally successful on her third attempt, after making modifications to the design. The grounds for the first denial in October 1912 were that the Committee "doubts the advisability of granting a permit for such a building in the locality named, and therefore begs to report unfavorably."

City Engineer James Dingle reviewed the resubmittal in December and reported:

"concerning petition of Dr. HJ Prioleau for permission to erect an apartment house at No 92 Spring Street, your committee has examined the plans submitted, and an inspection has been made of the locality. The plans contemplate a two-story structure situated at some distance from the street, containing 10 rooms, five to each floor. Your committee doubts the advisability of granted a permit for such a building in the locality named, and therefore begs to report unfavorably. Dr. HJ Prioleau has now applied for a permit to erect a "residence" similar to the building for which permit was previously refused. In consequence of the similarity

between the plans previously submitted and those at hand, I permit and would be glad it council would instruct me on the matter. Referred to Committee of Brick and Wood buildings."

hesitate to issue
Dingle.

On 14 January 1913, the Committee approved Prioleau's third submission on the grounds that the "building be used for no other purpose than a ten-room dwelling." It was at this time that the rear house, which appears on the 1929 *Sanborn Map* above, was constructed.⁸

The South Carolina State Archives Architectural Inventory card described the two-story frame house as a "rare example of Italian Renaissance Revival influence upon a single house; 1 by 6 bay core with back of porch wing- early or original. Flat roof concealed by façade parapet. Bi-planar façade has a central slightly projecting bay with paired 2/2 windows with cornice moulding. And box cornice below the parapet." They estimated the construction date (erroneously) as between 1895-1905.⁹



The rear house and 92 Spring Street as they appeared in 1985.

Prioleau paid \$100 for a building permit in August of 1926 for "construction of a barber shop", the easternmost one story building fronting on Spring Street.¹⁰ The building operated as a barber or beauty shop for most of its existence.

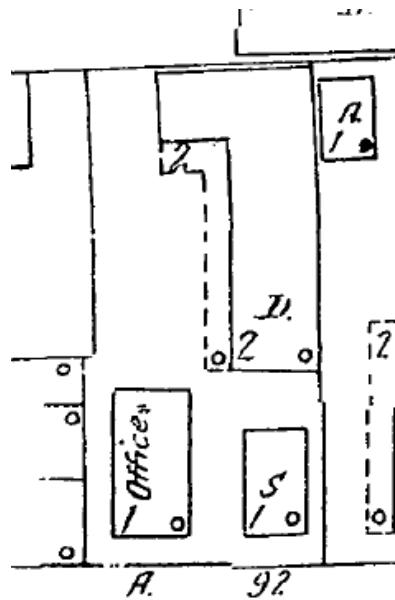
Alterations:

⁸ *City Council Proceedings*, 22 October 1912; *News and Courier*, 28 December 1912, 20 December 1912; *City Council Proceedings*, 13 January 1913.

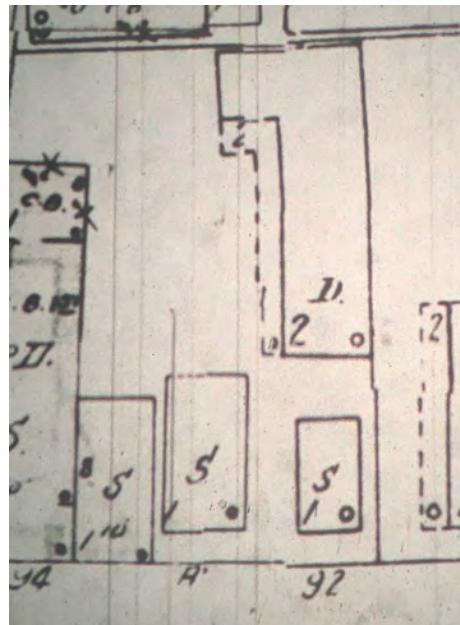
⁹ SCDAH Architectural Inventory card, completed 9 April 1985 by Geier Brown Renfrow Architects. BAR files.

¹⁰ *News and Courier* 27 August 1926.

Little change occurred to the plans of the buildings during Prioleau's ownership, although her former office and rental shop may have had interior changes as different tenants moved in and out. After Prioleau's death, the office was used as a shop space, and briefly was associated with a Pentecostal church, which used the space for worship and may have made interior alterations.



1944 Sanborn Map



1967 Sanborn Map

A 1939 advertisement for the lower five-room apartment noted that it was equipped with "hot water and other modern conveniences". Lillie Holloway requested permits in 1945 to reopen the dwelling house at 92 Spring (there were no residents listed in the Directory in the 1930s or 1940s, although newspaper ads indicate that there were residents in the rear building at least part of the time, as late as 1943.¹¹) In 1948 she paid \$100 for a permit to repair the dwelling building, and the following year she paid \$50 to repair an unspecified building at 92 Spring Street.¹²

After the Diggs family purchased 92 Spring Street in 1973, they requested a variance from the Board of Zoning Appeals for "permission to occupy building in rear of lot at 92 Spring Street as a three family dwelling having insufficient lot area and without having required off street parking facilities." They also requested a variance in 1983 to operate a retail space out of the 288 square foot unit with no off street parking.¹³

In 2007 a tenant named Timothy Jones requested permission from the Board of Architectural Review to paint the easternmost building. He supplied the photographs below, giving an indication of building condition:

¹¹ *News and Courier*, 1 March 1943. "Young colored woman wants part time afternoon work as cook and housecleaner. See Charlotte Jones, 92 Spring Street in rear."

¹² *News and Courier*, 22 June 1948, 4 November 1949.

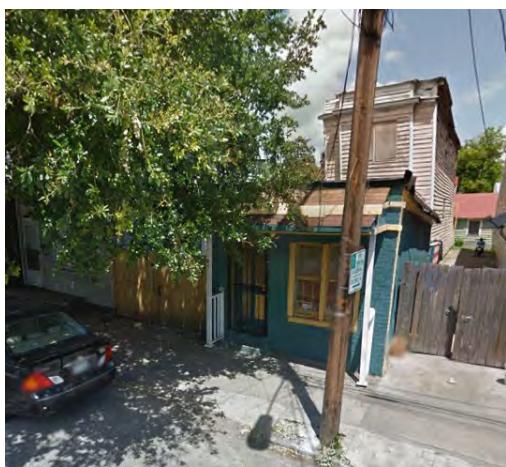
¹³ *News and Courier*, 12 April 1973, 27 January 1983.



Photographs from City of Charleston, Board of Architectural Review files, 92 and 92 ½ Spring Street.

The rear two-story single house was lost recently, between 2013 and 2014, according to Google Street view images of the block. There are no permits or requests for demolition of the structure on file with the City of Charleston's BAR or Zoning offices.¹⁴

¹⁴ At the request of Butler Preservation LC, the city staff pulled all available files for the address and checked their database back to 2007, on 2 February 2017.



Google Street views from May 2013 (left) and December 2014 (right) show the loss of the rear house.

Neighborhood and Context:

Cannonborough-Elliottborough was developed as two separate neighborhoods in the late eighteenth century. The heirs of planter, Revolutionary War hero, and member of the South Carolina Provincial Congress Bernard Elliott laid out Elliottborough in 1785. Daniel Cannon, a carpenter, mechanic, and successful lumber mill owner, is the other namesake. The area became developed in the early nineteenth century, when it lay outside of the City of Charleston, the boundary of which was Calhoun Street until 1849. Cannonborough-Elliottborough had an interesting mixture of mills, butcher pens, and industrial enterprises interspersed with elite urban plantation estates and simple residential properties. The neighborhood was marked by tidal creeks, marshes, and millponds that were gradually filled to allow for more development. Toward the northern edge of the Cannonborough Elliottborough is Line Street, so named because it was the site of an earthen military “line” or fortification during the War of 1812.¹⁵

In the later nineteenth century, Cannon and Spring Streets developed as commercial corridors. Cannonborough-Elliottborough “became home of ‘the common Charlestonian’- a diverse mix of immigrants, freed slaves, and lower class workers of the time.”¹⁶ Much of the residential architecture, comprised of two story wood frame single houses and one story freedman’s cottages, were home to blue collar workers. The neighborhood suffered a period of decline following the construction of Septima Clark Expressway in 1967, which essentially severed the northern part of the neighborhood as the modern highway cut across the residential areas.¹⁷ The neighborhood today is experiencing a revival and continues to exhibit a variety of small local businesses, vernacular architecture, African American businesses congregated along Morris and Spring Street, and a rich and diverse local culture.

In 1997 the City of Charleston completed a study investigating the viability of converting Spring and Cannon Streets into two way roads, in an effort to slow traffic, improve walkability, and

¹⁵ Cannonborough-Elliottborough Character Appraisal, 1-12.

¹⁶ Ibid, 10

¹⁷ Ibid, 10

bring interest and revitalization to the mixed commercial/residential corridors. Residents at the time feared more Section 8 and student housing and corresponding loss of owner occupied housing, while the Urban Development Department confirmed that the area was already majority rental. Residents were also concerned over disappearing retail, a national trend of businesses out of city centers in the 1960s and into the 1990s; “consequently, many of the services that used to support community life are no longer found in the neighborhoods, and sometimes not even located nearby.” The area was also experiencing another demographic shift of white residents into Cannonborough-Elliottborough. The neighborhood was 97% black in 1980, and had dropped to 66% black by 1990.¹⁸

Since the study was completed, the area has continued to see an influx of new residents and businesses, revitalization of historic architecture, new construction, and the rising prices that often accompany improvement. The city has begun the proposed street improvement project to convert Spring and Cannon to two way streets, repave the sidewalks, and add landscaping along the roadsides, which was underway as of January 2017. As the area experiences growth, there is no more fitting way to pay tribute to the African American history of the area’s past than to restore and document Dr. Prioleau’s landmark office building at 92 Spring.

Landmarks include the oldest Jewish Cemetery in Charleston, consecrated in 1764, located on Coming Street, and the Karpeles Manuscript Museum, housed in a circa 1856 Greek Revival style, temple front building that formerly served as a Methodist Church.¹⁹



¹⁸ City of Charleston, Spring and Cannon Corridor Plan, 18-19.

¹⁹ Karpeles Museum website, <https://www.rain.org/~karpeles/chasfrm.html>, accessed February 2017.

Cannonborough-Elliottborough as shown on the 1949 Halsey Map of Charleston. The red jagged line on the top of the map above Spring Street indicates the War of 1812 fortifications near Line Street.

Owners and Occupants:

Frederick W. Scharfer owned 92 Spring Street from 1881 until 1907, when he sold it to Dr. Prioleau. He owned other buildings on Spring Street, presumably using them as rental properties.²⁰ Frederick was born in Hanover, Germany in 1840 and immigrated to Charleston in 1857. Scharfer worked as a grocery salesman and lived on Rose Lane, near the corner of Rose and Spring Streets, with his wife Annie and daughter, Annie M. Dodd. He died as a widower in September 1912 and was interred at Bethany German Cemetery.²¹

Dr. Huldah J. Prioleau

The most significant owner and occupant of 92 Spring Street was Dr. Huldah J. Prioleau, one of Charleston's only female black physicians in the early twentieth century, and a woman highly dedicated to the service of the black community in the city. She was one of the first black women in South Carolina to get a medical degree, following Matilda Evans, who earned her degree in 1897, and Lucy Hughes Brown, who finished here studies around the same time. Brown retired in 1904 and Evans was based in Columbia, leaving Prioleau as one of the only black doctors in Charleston.²²

Dr. Prioleau operated her general practice out of 92 ½ Spring (also sometimes referred to as 92 A), the westernmost one story commercial building on the lot. A mulatto, Prioleau was born in Charleston on July 4th 1870.²³ Her mother, whose name is not known, was born in Virginia, and her father was Louis Prioleau, of Charleston. She attended Claflin University in Orangeburg, SC and Allen University in Columbia SC. Prioleau was appointed Commissioner of Colored People's Exhibit, Lades' Department, Southern Institute Exposition in August of 1891 while in college.

She later attended Howard University Medical College, session 32, 1899-1900, where she received her Medical Degree in May 1900, and then returned to Charleston to practice.²⁴ In 1913 she served as treasurer of the Charleston County Medical Association.²⁵ Dr. Prioleau never married, devoting her time to her work as a general practice physician and to various civic groups. She briefly lived at 92 Spring Street, according to the 1910 census. She maintained her

²⁰ Deed B19-172 describes Sharfer purchasing "a two story wooden building and small office" near 92 Spring Street, 1881.

²¹ South Carolina Naturalization record, 21 July 1871; 1910 Census; City of Charleston death certificate, #216.

²² Biography of Matilda Arabelle Evans, https://cfmedicine.nlm.nih.gov/physicians/biography_107.html; biography of Lucy Hughes Brown, <http://waring.library.musc.edu/exhibits/mcclellanbanks/Brown.php>.

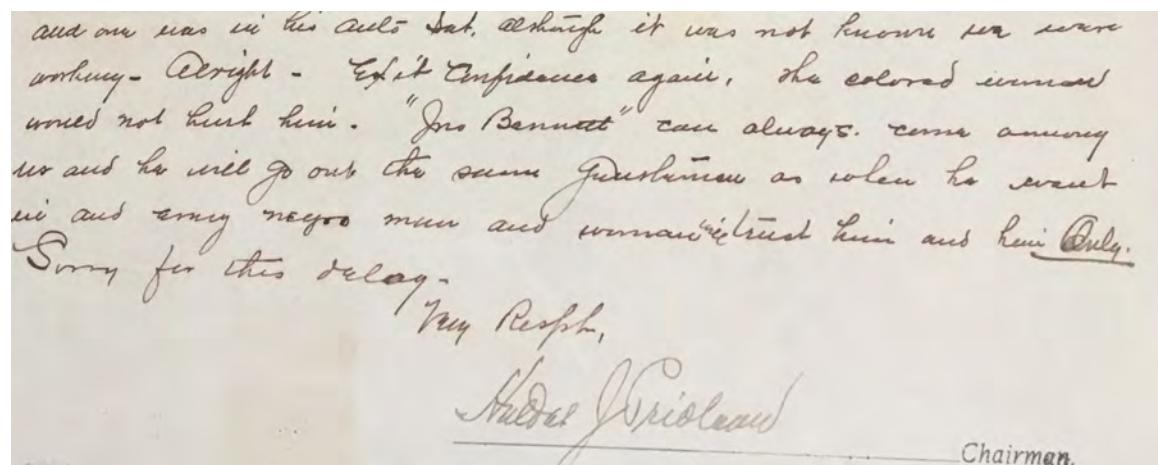
²³ There are discrepancies about Prioleau's birth date; some sources state 1866, others 1870, and others, 1874.

²⁴ Lamb, *A Historical, Biographical, and Statistical Souvenir*, pg. 258; *International Record of Medicine and General Practice Clinics*, Vol. 79, pg 1203.

²⁵ *Journal of the National Medical Association*, Vol. 5 and 6. 1913

office on Spring Street but her residence for most of her career was 242 Rutledge Street, which she purchased in 1906.²⁶ Beulah Crawford, an African American registered nurse, lived with her at the Rutledge Street house from 1912 until Dr. Prioleau's death.²⁷ Both women worked with the City of Charleston to ensure that African American children had access to medical care, playgrounds, and recreational. Prioleau chaired a commission to create Negro playgrounds, while Crawford was employed as the City Playground Department nurse and director of Harmon Field playground on the city's West Side.²⁸

Dr. Prioleau was dedicated to improving the lives and health of the African American community in Charleston and served in the black branches of various civic organizations. She was on the executive board the Negro branch of the Red Cross, which was instrumental in blood and supply drives during World War One.²⁹ She also chaired the Committee on Entertainment for Colored Soldiers and Sailors.³⁰ Tensions rose between the black and white branches of the Red Cross over whether their programs should include entertainment for African American personnel. Famous Charleston Renaissance author John Bennett (a white man born in Ohio) was caught in the middle, writing to his wife of his frustration that his white female acquaintances did not know how to handle "intelligent negroes." Bennett had connections to Dr. Prioleau and corresponded with her to try to quell the tensions between black and white volunteers. Prioleau wrote to Bennett expressing her friendship and trust in him: "John Bennett can always come among us, and go out the same fashion as when he went in and every negro man and woman will trust him and him Only."³¹



and we was in his auto Sat. although it was not known for some
anything - Alright - Let's confidences again, the colored masses
would not hurt him. "Jno Bennett" can always come among
us and he will go out the same fashion as when he went
in and every negro man and woman will trust him and him Only.
Sorry for this delay.
Very Resph,
Hedie Prioleau
Chairman.

Dr. Prioleau expressing her trust of John Bennett in an undated 1918 letter. John Bennett papers, SCHS.

²⁶ 1910 US Census; 1920 US Census; City Directories. Deed book D22-65, Gevert Semken conveyed 242 Rutledge Street to Prioleau, April 1906.

²⁷ City Directory data.

²⁸ Charleston News and Courier, 24 September 1923, 24 September 1937; 1938, 1940, 1948 City Directories.

²⁹ News and Courier, 31 October 1917, 2 June 1918, 27 October 1919.

³⁰ Charleston News and Courier, 30 June 1918.

³¹ Greene, *Mr. Skylark*, 141-142, 310; Bennett Papers, letters dated 4 April 1918 and 17 April 1918, SCHS.

Prioleau and her volunteers were angry over what they perceived and discriminatory and belittling treatment from white Red Cross members, including a Mr. Styles and James Coleman. She expressed her frustration to Bennett:

“I want to give a lesson of expression to a group of neglected people who know no white friends save the collector and the magistrate. Mr. Styles will talk to my people but I fear the talk may be like the “movies”. Mr. James Coleman gave the colored chapter such as a notice at 11:30 am Sunday to see a picture at the Garden Theater 6 pm that same afternoon, I thank him and told him we would not see it. Fearing such a bad brake [sic] might come like that I am begging Mr. Bennett to please accompany Mr. Styles Friday Eve 8:30 and be ready to made immediately because it is sure to come. Mrs. Mordecai was to be in your part but she is very very indisposed therefore I am again anxious. You are better able to reach my people than the other mentioned. I truly hope you will try and come out. If you can make your subject direct on the service the Negro can give to the country and what this service will have in the morale of the country at home and abroad during and after the war. These are children in a way that you will speak with to please Sir and monosyllables will be all right. Wishing you a pleasant and comfortable day and no disturbance from no one else.

I am, most respectfully,

Huldah Prioleau.

Bennett replied in a letter dated 7 April that he apologized that he had been out of attendance in some of the meetings due to illness.

“at least I can say, since I am talking to a physician, that it was a sever chill of some sort, followed by a sharp fever . . . this is one reason you have not seen me. I have meant to see you, having some valuable and interesting facts to talk over with you, which I can hardly write here, lacking time and space and strength. We can then discuss a number of things, carefully, thoughtfully, and considerately, for the good of all men of our state and community, as well as for the great work of the Red Cross and the loyal service of the recreation club.

Yet, meantime, I would ask you to judge nobody hastily, especially a lonely stranger among strange people, hurried, busy, and hectored about by many impatient people. Let us give every man a real chance to show his intentions, not judge him too quickly by some unprepossessing style of manner . . It is true for myself that I always find genuine pleasure in meeting honest friends and feeling that they know me friendly; and it is, and ever will be, pleasure to me to meet with those engaged in loyal and inspiring work such as that you all have undertaken, and who so faithfully persevere through difficulty.

I thank you for your words of confidence. In whatever I may say to you and all my friends, I am sincerely your friend and fellow worker, for the good of all our people, in the service of the nation, and in the work of the Red Cross, for men stricken in battle for the freedom of this world, for right and true liberty.”

Bennett confided in his wife about his frustrations with the racial tensions and spoke candidly of his friendship with Dr. Prioleau. Excerpts are included below:

“Colored branch sent in request for purchase of goods of various sorts. All the supply committee and purchasing committee fell down promptly . . . nor did the requisition state how much of anything was wanted, only named the goods. Dr. Prioleau rang me up later; says she had told the workers you were out of town; was disconcerted that no one seemed ready to supply them for immediate work. I told her to let me have the exact amount of stuffs wanted and that I would wire you for orders to buy as well as I could, or get Mrs. Dwight to buy them. Dr. Prioleau wanted to know if they could not go buy for themselves. I shall ask Mrs. Halsey about this. If they can, submitting to you the invoices I shall tell them to go ahead and heaven bless them. I am trying to get Coleman to arrange some pictures for them: they are very restless: the last handing of 13 Negro soldiers caused great dissatisfaction among all the colored peoples here.”³²

“very imperative message from Jimmy Coleman. Found him at his office, and had a long talk with him. Find he is the one put Christensen up to asking me for information on Charleston Negro situation. Find to my dismay that Coleman had gone immediately to see Dr. Prioleau on my suggestions that something be done in the war picture way for the Negro Red Cross . . . since they are already restive over criticisms by Mrs. Sams and Dwight, and have some reason to be. Coleman is last man on earth to meet the situation, Dr. Prioleau being indignant and angry already . . . further gumming of a difficult game resulted, I may see Dr. P tomorrow, both to try to straighten out one of two matters and to hear what she will say to me, who am supposed to be the friend of the Negro.

A bad mess has been made of matter . . . though he was entirely innocent of intent and walked in upon a hard situation to handle. The refusal immediately to buy material for the branch was another trouble. . . . I’ve to see Huldah first. I’m afraid the fat is on fire. Coleman reported Huldah to Christensen as dangerously disloyal in her utterances Jimmy has seen a copy of DuBois’ paper “the crisis” and is all het [sic] up! He has never so much as looked at a negro paper before . . . and know little Negros, except the famous old southern way of knowing all about the Negro which is three quarters fudge when it comes to handlings the situation today with the yellow men and women.”³³

Dr. Prioleau was assertive and acted as a champion of her community in a time when it was dangerous for African Americans to do so, and indeed Mr. Coleman, who she had clashed with at the Red Cross, reported her to ensign and former S.C. Representative Christensen. Fortunately, Bennett was able to diffuse tensions. Bennett confided in his wife, “I think I got Jimmy Coleman out of the hole; but Dr. Prioleau and James are not two to get on together. Jimmy hasn’t the method, he has no feeling, and no tact, and is imminently had of understanding, though honest, straight, and thorough- he’s spitefully dull of comprehension. Dummed [sic] if he hasn’t reported Dr. Prioleau to certain persons as a dangerous and threatening woman. Dangerous she could be;

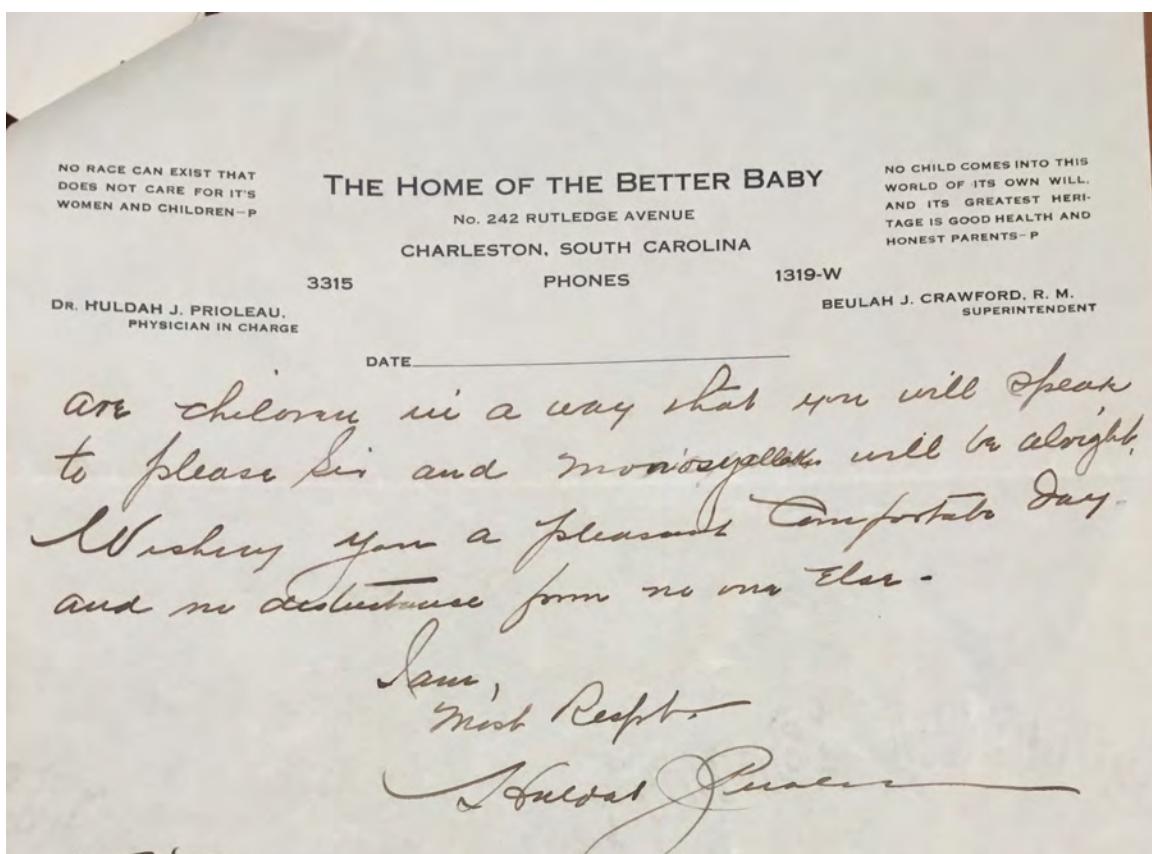
³² Bennett papers, 1176.00, box 21-139, folder 11. Letter to wife dated 1 April 1918.

³³ Bennett papers, 1176.00, box 21-139, folder 11. Letter to wife dated 3 April 1918.

if not handled with any consideration whatever. It's the yellow men; I mean to get at tails of some several such . . . nuff said.”³⁴

On April 7, Bennett met Dr. Prioleau at her Spring Street office to discuss the Red Cross work. He wrote that, "at Dr. Huldah Prioleau's small office we met and talked for an hour and a half, frankly and confidently, each in his own way, to a dozen faithful colored women, of all colors from deep brown to almost white, who have persevered in good work through great discouragement . . . it puts me in a peculiar situation," Bennett realized as he was, "not member of either YMCA or Chamber of Commerce but used by both in pinches."³⁵

Prioleau chaired a 1918 program for African American child welfare, lecturing about the importance of cleanliness and infant care. In her role with the child health education for the black nurses training school on Cannon Street, the local papers reported, "Dr. Huldah Prioleau, Chairman of the committee, is very anxious to have a large number of babies brought to be weighed and measured and it hoping for good weather to make it the success it should be."³⁶



Dr. Prioleau's signature on a 1918 letter to author John Bennett, with home of the Better Baby letterhead.

³⁴ Bennett papers, 1176.00, box 21-139, folder 11. Letter to wife dated 4 April 1918.

³⁵ Greene, *Mr. Skylark*, 141.

³⁶ *Charleston News and Courier*, 1 December 1918.

Dr. Prioleau retired in the early 1930s. She died at her home on 242 Rutledge Street on 11 December 1940 of endocarditis. She was interred at Unity and Friendship Cemetery in Charleston. The informant was nurse and longtime companion, Beulah Crawford.³⁷ Her obituary in the *Charleston Evening Post* read as follows:

“Dr. Huldah Prioleau. Negro Woman physician passes away in 61st year.

Burial rites for Dr. Huldah Josephine Prioleau, 60, Charleston’s only Negro woman physician, who died Saturday at her residences at 242 Rutledge avenue, were conducted yesterday afternoon in Unity and Friendship Cemetery. A graduate of Howard University’s school of medicine in Washington, Dr. Prioleau began practice in Charleston in 1904 when she became connected with the colored hospital and training school until she retired about ten years ago. Dr. Prioleau, who was very fond of children, was one of the sponsors of Harmon playground and was chairman of the playground committee until the city system was formed. She was a member of many organizations.”³⁸

Prioleau was survived by two sisters (Lucy Parker Keitt, Estelle C. Caldwell) and several nieces living in California and Washington, D.C. Her estate included her home at 242 Rutledge, office and buildings at 92 Spring Street, a watch and locket, various insurance policies, and household goods. The Spring Street property was sold and the proceeds distributed among her heirs. Beulah Crawford received proceeds from the sale of some of the household goods, and purchased a bedroom suite and sewing machine from the estate. Dr. Prioleau’s estate papers show her success as a property owner and landlord; she had steady income collected on her behalf by two management agents for her Spring Street properties.³⁹ Beulah remained at the Rutledge Street house until her death in 1956.⁴⁰

Dr. Joseph Hoffman (African American physician working on John’s Island, 1898-1988) remembered Dr. Prioleau as the only black female doctor in Charleston, during a 1980 oral history interview:

Eugene Hunt (interviewer): “were there any women doctors?”

Hoffman: “yes. There was a Dr. Prioleau, who was a doctor on Spring Street who was one of the three colored people on our block [he lived at 248 Rutledge, two doors down from Prioleau.]

Hunt: “Was she a native Charlestonian?”

Hoffman: “No, I don’t think so.”

Hunt: “Don’t remember, where she came from?”

³⁷ South Carolina State death certificate.

³⁸ *Charleston Evening Post*, 17 December 1940

³⁹ Charleston County Estate record, case 814-0026.

⁴⁰ Charleston County Estate record, case 861-182.

Hoffman: “No, I don’t. She was a peer of Dr. Johnson. I mean at just about that same vintage.”⁴¹

Businesses at 92 Spring Street.

Bon Ton Barber shop, operated by black business owner Robert Taylor, operated in 92 Spring (the easternmost one story building fronting on Spring Street) from 1928 until the late 1940s. After short-lived Welcome Barbershop (operated by James Davis, who lived in Union Heights in North Charleston), Esquire Barbershop took over the space from 1955 until 1972. The shop catered to African Americans and was operated by Wardell Payne. Casa Bella Beauty assumed the space in 1979. The business was robbed of \$600 worth of beauty supplies in 1983, and Ivan Washington of Rose Lane was arrested for this and a series of other burglaries shortly thereafter.⁴² The business rebounded and as of 2016, Casa Bella was still in operation.

Mt. Zion First Pentecostal Church of America occupied Dr. Prioleau’s former office from 1968 until 1972, being replaced by Calvary Pentecostal from 1972 until 1977. Both churches used the office as their worship space.⁴³

Renters at 92 Spring Street.

“Available: Reliable woman wants a place to cook or do chamber work. City references. Call or address 92 Spring Street.” *News and Courier*, 19 March 1906.

Several blurbs from historic newspapers give an idea of life at 92 Spring Street over the years and provide resident names that were omitted from the *City Directories*. In 1932, resident Estelle Jenkins was stabbed four times in a domestic altercation in her unit with a Palmer Fishburne, but fortunately survived the assault as was released from the hospital the next day. Later that year, a fire broke out at 92 Spring and caused nominal damage. Happier events occurred in December 1912 when Robert Lawrence of 92 Spring married neighbor Hattie Rivers of 72 Spring Street.⁴⁴ In 1942 the police carried out a “Negro dice raid” at 92 Spring.⁴⁵

Various short term renters resided at 92 Spring Street in the rear house that was lost in the late twentieth century. They were mostly African American working class residents, in keeping with the demographics of Spring Street in the early to mid-twentieth century. Residents were employed as drivers, laborers in the phosphate industry, coopers, gardeners, barbers, and dry cleaning technicians. Robert Taylor and wife Lorraine were the longest tenants, from 1938 into the 1950s. Jenkins C. Johnson lived there from 1901 until 1913. Jenkins died at 92 Spring Street

⁴¹ Avery Research Center. “Oral History Interview with Joseph Hoffman.” *Avery Oral History Collection*. 25 September and 9 October 1980. Interviewers: Eugene C. Hunt and Edmund L. Drago. Dr. William Johnson was a Charleston African American physician and friend of Hoffman.

⁴² *News and Courier*, 3 February 1983.

⁴³ City Directory data.

⁴⁴ *News and Courier*, 29 February 1932, 29 November 1932, 15 December 1915.

⁴⁵ *News and Courier*, 31 August 1942.

on October 7, 1913 of acute nephritis. The 66 year old had been employed as a gardener. He was interred at Morris Street Baptist Cemetery.⁴⁶ The residential building had periods of vacancy throughout the mid twentieth century. From the 1970s until 2000, residential occupants were listed.

Significance statement and conclusion:

The commercial buildings at 92 Spring Street are an increasingly rare example of an affordable architectural form in Charleston that was favored in working class, predominantly African American communities. As the neighborhoods in which they are located experience rising prices, it is all the more important to preserve the buildings, as is being undertaken at 92 Spring Street. Beyond their architectural merits, the 92 Spring Street buildings are significant for their association with Dr. Huldah J. Prioleau, one of the first African American female doctors in Charleston. Prioleau operated her general practice business out of 92 Spring Street for almost thirty years. She was unique for her time as a formally educated black female business and property owner. She was also active in civil rights and social services for the black community of Charleston, serving on the Board of the Red Cross's Negro branch during World War One and advocating to the city leaders to provide recreational amenities to black children. After her death, the buildings at 92 Spring Street continued to serve the community as part of the city's black business district. Today they stand as important reminders of the city's African American history.

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Appendix 1: City Directories

Year	Name	notes	
2015	Casa Balla		
2010	Casa Bella		
2005	Casa Bella Beauty Salon		
2000	A. Casa Bella B. Vacant C. Joseph Frazier Williet Watson		
1996	D. Casa Bella E. Vacant F. Joseph Frazier G. Williet Watson		
1990	A. Casa Bella B. One Day Sewing, Tailor C. Eloise Fields D. Benjamin Gibson	Manager of salon: Lillie Washington	
1985	A- Casa Bella B- One Day Sewing, Tailor		
1979-80	Cass Bella Beauty		
1977	Calvary Pentecostal Holiness Church - Ballard Geritue		
1976	Calvary Pentecostal Holiness Church - Eloise Fields	Fields, retired. Widow of Robert Fields	
1974	Calvary Pentecostal Holiness Church - vacant		

1972	Mount Zion First Pentecostal Church - Payne's Barber Shop	Shop operated by Waddell Payne	
1971	Not listed		
1970	Mt. Zion First Pentecostal Church of America - Esquire Barber	Shop operated by Wardell Payne	
1969	Mt. Zion First Pentecostal Church of America - Esquire Barber - Nowlin Ellison		
1968	Mt. Zion First Pentecostal Church of America - Esquire Barber - Nowlin Ellison		
1961	Esquire Barber, colored - James Pope, c - Robert B. Taylor, c	- Pope, 1 dependent and wife Lillian C. - Taylor and wife, Lorraine. Works at Dry Cleaners United	
1958	Same at 1961		
1955	Esquire Barber Shop		
1951	Robert Taylor (Palmetto Cleaners) - Welcome Barber Shop, c	Shop operated by James Davis, c, resides in Union Heights with wife Bernice	
1944	Bon Ton barber, Apex Beauty Shop	(both colored)	
1942	Bon Ton Barber shop, c - Thomas Rodger, operates Bon Ton		
1940	Bon Ton Barber Shop - Robert Taylor	Rodger, manager, lives at 89 Spring - Taylor is a presser for Caro Dry Cleaning	
1938	Bon Ton Barber Shop - Robert Taylor		

1934	Bon Ton Barber Shop, c 92 ½ Huldah Prioleau, physician		
1932	Thomas P Rodgers, c barber Huldah J Prioleau, c physician	Huldah resides 242 Rutledge	
1931	Bon Ton Barber, c 92 ½ Huldah Prioleau, physician		
1930	Bon Ton Barber, c 92 ½ Huldah Prioleau, physician		
1929	HJ Prioleau, physician c TB Rodgers, c barber	Huldah residence 242 Rutledge Rodgers, wife Rosa. Lives at 86 Spring	
1928	Huldah Prioleau, physician Bon Ton Barber, c		
1927	Hilda Prioleau, c phys		
1925/6	James Wright c 92 ½ HJ Prioleau, phys	Wife Mary, driver Battery Dairy. H 92 Spring	
1924	R James, c	Rebecca, h 92 Spring * Huldah, phys 242 Rutledge, h same	
1923	George Blue 92 ½ Dr HJ Prioleau, c		
1922	Mary Ladson c 92 ½ Dr HJ Prioleau, c		
1921			
1920	Mary Ladson c 92 ½ Dr HJ Prioleau, c		
1918-1919	Mary Ladson c 92 ½ Dr HJ Prioleau, c		
1917	Elizabeth Edwards, c 92 ½ Hulda J. Prioleau		

1916	Elizabeth Edwards, c 92 ½ Hulda J. Prioleau		
1915	Elizabeth Edwards, c 92 ½ Hulda J. Prioleau		
1914	Johnson Jenkins C 92 ½ Hulda J. Prioleau	Jenkins, gardener	
1913	Johnson Jenkins C 92 ½ Hulda J. Prioleau		
1912	Johnson Jenkins C 92 ½ Hulda J. Prioleau		
1911	Johnson Jenkins C 92 ½ Hulda J. Prioleau		
1910	Johnson Jenkins C 92 ½ Hulda J. Prioleau		
1908	Johnson Jenkins C 92 ½ Dr. Hulda J. Prioleau		
1907	Johnson Jenkins C	H Josephine Prioleau, 95 Spring Street. Home 242 Rutledge Jenkins, gardener. Wife, Fannie	
1906	92- J Johnson, c, res 92 ½- Sarah Gates, c		
1905	92- J Johnson, c, res 92 ½- TA Fraser, c, res		
1904	92- J Johnson, c, res 92 ½- TA Fraser, c, res	Fraser, cooper. Wife, Charlotte	
1903	92- J Johnson, c, res 92 ½- Charles Lambright, c, res		
1902	92- J Johnson, c, res 92 ½- Charles Lambright, c, res	Lambright, laborer. Wife, Rachel	
1901	92- J Johnson, c, res 92 ½- Shiloh Lambright, c, res		

1900	Henry Fletcher, c, res 92 ½- Shiloh Lambright, c, res	Fletcher, laborer Shiloh, phosphate laborer	
1899	Arthur Green, c, res	stonecutter	
1898	Robert Johnson, c, res		
1897	Catherine Kinloch, c 92 ½, John Thee, c		
1896	Calvary Bamburg 92 ½ vacant	Listed in cross as Calvin, laborer	
1895	92 Henry Edwards 92 ½, John Thee		
1894	92 -----		
1893	Rachel Howell, c		
1892	L Bellinger, c	Lawrence Bellinger, collector	
1891	James Bell, c WH Bellinger, c	Bell, driver for J Conroy and Co Bellinger, collector	
1890	92 not listed		

Appendix 2: Chain of Title

K102-62

James and Louise P Diggs

14 March 1973

\$2500.00

“per deed, Thelme Reese sell her ½ interest to James P and Louise Diggs, and by deed K101-63 Lillie M Sheffield sells.

Deed book 71-326.

Thelme Reese and Lillie M. Sheffield

Transferred “by will” from Lillie Holloway

K42-425.

6 May 1941

Morrison (Master in Equity) to

Lillie Ruby Holloway

Common Pleas decree dated 2 May 1941, Katura B. Taylor, as administratrix of the Estate of Huldah J, Prioleau, plaintiff, vs. Estella C Caldwell, Lucy Parker Keitt, Mary Proileau King,

Ethel Susanna Prioleau Bowden, George Prioleau, and Lois Amelia Prioleau, defendants. Lillie receives the property fee simple for \$2500.00

“All that piece, parcel, or lot of land and the buildings thereon, situate lying and being on the north side of Spring Street, between Ashe Street and Rose Lane, and known in the present numbering as 92 Spring Street, the said lot being known on a plat of the Percy Lands made by RK Payne, 24 May 1848 (number 132 E). Butting and bounding to the north on lot 124 D on said plat, to the east on lot 133 L, to the south on Spring Street, and to the west on lot 131 E. measuring and containing on Spring 40 feet, by the same on the back line, and 100 feet in depth more or less.”

T24-281

21 April 1907

F.W. Scharfer, widower, to

H. Josephine Prioleau

\$1200.00

[description same at K42]

“which said lot of land is the same conveyed by Henry Horres to me the said F.W. Scharfer by deed dated 23 September 1872 and recorded in R16-45.

R16-45

Henry Horres to

F W Scharfer

23 September 1874

“all that piece parcel or lot of land and the buildings thereon situate lying and being on Spring Street formerly Elliott Street . . . which said lot was conveyed to the late Charles P Bradley by N. M. Porter deed recorded 9 September 1854, book X12-504.

B16-573

Lewis Zachry Anny Zachry his wife, Gailford Bradley and Mary Bradley to

Henry Horres

10 April 1872

“whereas Charles Bradley died intestate . . . leaving heirs . . .

[description the same as X12, below.]

X12-503

NM Porter to

C P Bradley

25 July 1851

“all those two pieces or parcels or tracts of land situate lying and being upon what is commonly known as the Percy Tract in the upper wards of the City of Charleston and designate by the number 131 and 132 E in a plat by Robert K. Payne the 24 May 1848 for heirs of Revd. William Percy butting and bounding to the north on lot 124 . . . and to the west on Rose Lane.”

Appendix 3: Charleston County Ward Book Tax Assessor's records (held by Charleston County Library and Charleston County RMC Office.)

92 Spring Street (including 92 A or 92 ½), Ward 11, City of Charleston.

<u>Year:</u>	<u>Description:</u>	<u>Value:</u>
1902-1906.	44 by 100 feet. 2 story wood.	\$600

1907-1910. description the same, but Prioleau is listed as new owner. Value jumped to \$1128. Assessor note reads N/443 (\$200)

1910-1914. description the same. \$700

1914-1918. description remains the same but property value jumps to \$1000

1918-1922. same same

1922-1925. same same