

Original email (first version of spreadsheet):

From: Kevin R. Eberle [mailto:keberle@charlestonlaw.edu]
Sent: Tuesday, June 05, 2012 3:30 PM
To: Perry, Valerie; Sarah Fick; Robert Gurley; Emmons, Karen; Evan R. Thompson
Subject: Resource

As you know, I have spent the past year tediously (lovingly?) poring over the old, unindexed copies of the local paper in a hunt for information about Hampton Park. What a chore!

One worthwhile side benefit was the discovery of a column which used to report the building permits from the city. As you might know, the city did not start retaining copies of building permits until 1936, so permits before that are apparently lost. But, for a period, the paper used to include a list of all of the permits that were issue just like it listed real estate transfers.

Real estate transfers have apparently been consistently listed for more than 100 years in the paper, but permit were a lot more spotty. As best I can find, the paper started listing them in late 1910 and did so for a few months before dropping that coverage. It also included that coverage for two months in early 1912 before stopping again. Then, in February 1913, the paper suddenly started regularly including the permits. Regular coverage continued until early 1917 when the listings suddenly disappeared again.

Coverage picked up again in the mid 1920s, but I have not figured out any sort of pattern in the coverage.

Still, the inclusion of the permits from 1913-1917 is great because that coincides with the major build-out of Hampton Park Terrace, so I have been able to pretty conclusively establish some of the contractors who built my neighborhood's houses and the dates of construction too. That limited window also includes some of Wilson's Farm.

As I scrolled through the newspapers, I kept a running list of all of the permits which I have put into a spreadsheet. I thought you each might see some value in this as a resource for further research and might find a place to stash it in case someone wanted to check it.

A few caveats: First, even during the more consistent coverage, there were some inexplicable gaps. I am pretty confident that I have located at least 95% of the entries, but there might be some more out there somewhere. Second, especially during the 1916-1917 window, the quality of the images was really poor, so there are several entries on the spreadsheet that have blanks or question marks where the original image was simply not legible. If there is a source for looking at the original newsprints, a lot of those gaps might be filled in (Note: Summer intern project?).

As far as using this, anyone should be warned that some of the images were fuzzy, so I made a pretty good guess at the details. Anyone using this should go back and double check the image of the paper himself or herself. Also, the paper was VERY inconsistent in describing the location of the permits. Sometimes, the paper would specifically say something like "Plat No. 4," but other times, it would just say "No. 4.," leaving the impression that that was the street

number when it might not have been. For example, as Hampton Park Terrace was being built out, the permit list would often say something like "52 Huger St." when, in fact, that was a reference to Lot No. 52 of the original plat (which can be confirmed because the permit puller and the owner of the corresponding lot matched up). Where I was able to determine the actual address, I have keyed that into the spreadsheet. Lastly, many streets in Charleston were renumbered about 1922, so a lot of these addresses might be off because they reflect the then-current street numbers. For some of those, I have been able to list the existing street address (for example, in Hampton Park Terrace), but for some, the information is wrong. So, the point is, anyone using this for research should definitely use it as a confirming source or a starting point, but should really try to double check the information.

The spreadsheet lists all of the permits, both for new construction and for alterations. I also included the notes from the newspaper (contractor, owner, value of permit, etc.). A LOT of the permits were for repairs, but I thought that could be useful to someone, so the O.C.D. side of my took over and forced me to include those too. For example, a few years ago, the owners of 29 Legare St. wanted to replace their iron fence, and Robert Gurley had to say NO because of our easement. This spreadsheet shows the permit for the installation of the iron fence in 1917 (later that we thought, but still historic). Most of the repair permits did not include any sort of detail beyond whether the building as a dwelling or storefront. A few did though.

Any who, with all of that having been said, I'm attaching the spreadsheet. I also noticed at one point that the Evening Post ran a similar feature. Its listings sometimes appeared in gaps of the News & Courier, so I hope that those lists of permits don't just repeat what is otherwise listed on this spreadsheet. But, frankly, I just got totally burned out putting this list together, so I have not gone back and added the info from the Evening Post yet (Note: Summer intern project?).

Kevin Eberle

Second email with database revisions:

From: Kevin R. Eberle [mailto:keberle@charlestonlaw.edu]
Sent: Wednesday, September 05, 2012 2:22 PM
To: Emmons, Karen; WelschS@Charleston-SC.gov; Robert Gurley; Perry, Valerie; Sarah Fick
Subject: Building Permits - More Complete Listing

As you will recall, as part of my tedious review of old newspapers for the book about Hampton Park, I discovered that the newspapers used to report building permits. The extracted information listed the owner (or contractor), the address, the value of the work, and whether it was repair, new construction, demo, additions, or something else. A few entries had special detail, but not many.

I started collecting all of those, and when the book writing process ended, I decided I'd keep working on the building permits since it could really be a valuable resource for researchers in the future. Unfortunately, the City did not keep its building permit files before 1932. The newspaper coverage was very regular for a few years, but it was mainly pretty spotty. I think the feature must have been a gap filler on slow news days. The result was that there is no way to just scan through papers (like every Monday) to find these things. For many years, they did not even consistently appear on the same page every time or even in the same section. Ugh. The only way to find these things is to mindlessly scroll through pages and pages and pages of this tiny font.

Thankfully, "mindless tedium" is what I'm really good at! I'm attaching a copy of the spreadsheet that I built. Let me offer a few notes for future use of this.

1. When the newspapers were microfilmed, the quality was very, very poor, and these listings used small print to start with. As a result, the information was very hard to read. There were a few years when entire pages of the newspapers were simply illegible. I have recorded as much information as possible. For example, you might see where a property was Meeting Street had a permit pulled, but the type of work, owner, and street number just couldn't be read. With a lot of effort, some more information might be able to be gleaned. For instance, if the person's name was legible, you could hopefully figure out the subject property from deed records and then check the property and get a pretty good idea if it might have been built or had major work done at the same time.
2. I have made the best guess possible about spellings. If a character could not be read clearly, I used a question mark. So, "5?3" might have been 513 or 543. If you see something like "4?" in the house number section, it means that the house number was clearly a two-digit number, but the second one could not be read. If multiple characters could not be read, I tried to use underlining. For example "And____" might have been Andrews or Anderson or some other last name.
3. I have recorded the information as it appeared in the newspapers. There were a few times when the address information was no longer right. For example, addresses in the upper peninsula were renumbered in the 1920s. When I definitely knew that the listed address was no

longer right, I substituted the current address but left the original reference in the Notes column along with the owner and value of the work.

4. If someone were to research a specific property, he or she should reorder the list by street instead of by date and check for that building number within the entries for that street, but also make sure to scroll throughout the entire listing of projects on that street in search for a recognizable property owner's name.

5. There were a very few instances when the exact same information would be listed in consecutive listings of build permits. In those cases, I recorded only the first entry and chalked the second one up to a reporter's mistake.

6. The two newspapers ran coverage of the permits at different times. The News & Courier was very consistent about running the information every week, once a week, in the same section of the paper for a few years in the late 1910s. During that period, I did not go back and search the Evening Post. At other times, I found that the Evening Post ran the listings even when the News & Courier did not. At still other times, the News & Courier's coverage was spotty, and the Evening Post was also spotty, so I checked both. That produced a few hits that would have otherwise gone undetected but also generated a few double listings (one from each paper).

7. The City apparently started requiring demo permits only in the 1920s or 1930s. I did not find those listed in the earliest records, but they regularly popped up in the later ones. I once read an article that mentioned that, at least for a while, painting also did not require a permit. So, yet another reason that there are gaps might be that the work just did not need a permit. And, I suspect that, like today, some work gets done under cover of darkness and is never permitted at all.

8. I had already plowed through the old newspapers through January 1936 before learning that the City's extant records start in 1932. So, the last four years of this can probably be found more officially and with greater details in the City archives, but at least this has the benefit of helping researchers pinpoint a specific date before heading over there.

The point of all of this is that this is a good starting point for research, but definitely not conclusive. If I ever randomly come across another mention of building permits in the old Evening Post (which is not on-line and take more effort to search), I'll add them to this. Likewise, if you ever have reason to find some reference, please let me know.

Kevin Eberle

Third email (final version):

From: Kevin R. Eberle [mailto:keberle@charlestonlaw.edu]

Sent: Monday, April 22, 2013 2:38 PM

To: Sarah Fick; Perry, Valerie; bob stockton; Emmons, Karen; WelschS@Charleston-SC.gov; Robert Gurley

Subject: Building Permit spreadsheet

Folks –

At long, long last, I have finished my best effort at collecting all of the City's building permit information!

The attached spreadsheet collects all of the available information from before the City's archived records begin (and a few from later on) from four basic sources that are explained at the top of the spreadsheet. There are about 6,000 entries dating before the City's index starts.

There is a ridiculous shortcoming of Excel spreadsheets which is sort of the opposite of the Y-2-K bug. Insanely, Microsoft Excel cannot recognize dates before 1900! So, I had to break the dates of the sources into three columns so that they can be sorted by exact date. Insane.

Hope this helps someone with some research at some point!

Kevin

Fourth email - Sept. 2014 Update

From: [Kevin R. Eberle](#)
To: [Emmons, Karen](#)
Subject: Update on building permit database
Date: Sunday, September 28, 2014 7:12:57 PM
Attachments: [Repair Database - Sept 2014.xlsx](#)

Karen –

A friend shared a connection to a searchable database of early Charleston newspapers recently, and I was able to use it to find a few more entries of building permits that I had missed when combing through the old newspapers manually.

Here is an updated version of my database with entries for all of the mentions of building permits from the old newspapers.

Kevin

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