



17 Nassau Street

An Archival Investigation

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For Katherine Pemberton
HP 8090/HPSV 809
Historical Research Methods
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Introduction

Upon initial inspection, the house that stands at 17 Nassau Street is not unique. Because of its appearance as a Charleston single-house, the 17 Nassau could be placed almost anywhere within the city and blend in seamlessly to the surrounding neighborhood. However, a rich history of the house emerges upon a closer inspection of archival resources. Though indicative of numerous other single houses in the city, the house at 17 Nassau Street nevertheless has a unique and relevant story to tell.

This investigation was undertaken as part of a graduate-level course in the Masters of Science in Historic Preservation program, a joint venture between the College of Charleston and Clemson University. The course, entitled Historical Research Methods (HP 8090/HPSV 809), was taught by Katherine Pemberton. For this investigation, only archival and print resources were consulted. A physical investigation, when combined with archival research, would yield a far more complete history of 17 Nassau. However, because of time and access constraints, this investigation is concerned only with information gathered from archival and print resources. Additionally, because this is a history of the house currently standing at 17 Nassau Street, much of the research is focused on the years around the house's construction. Greater research focusing on the lot prior to the construction of 17 Nassau is not directly relevant to the purpose of this investigation.

Location

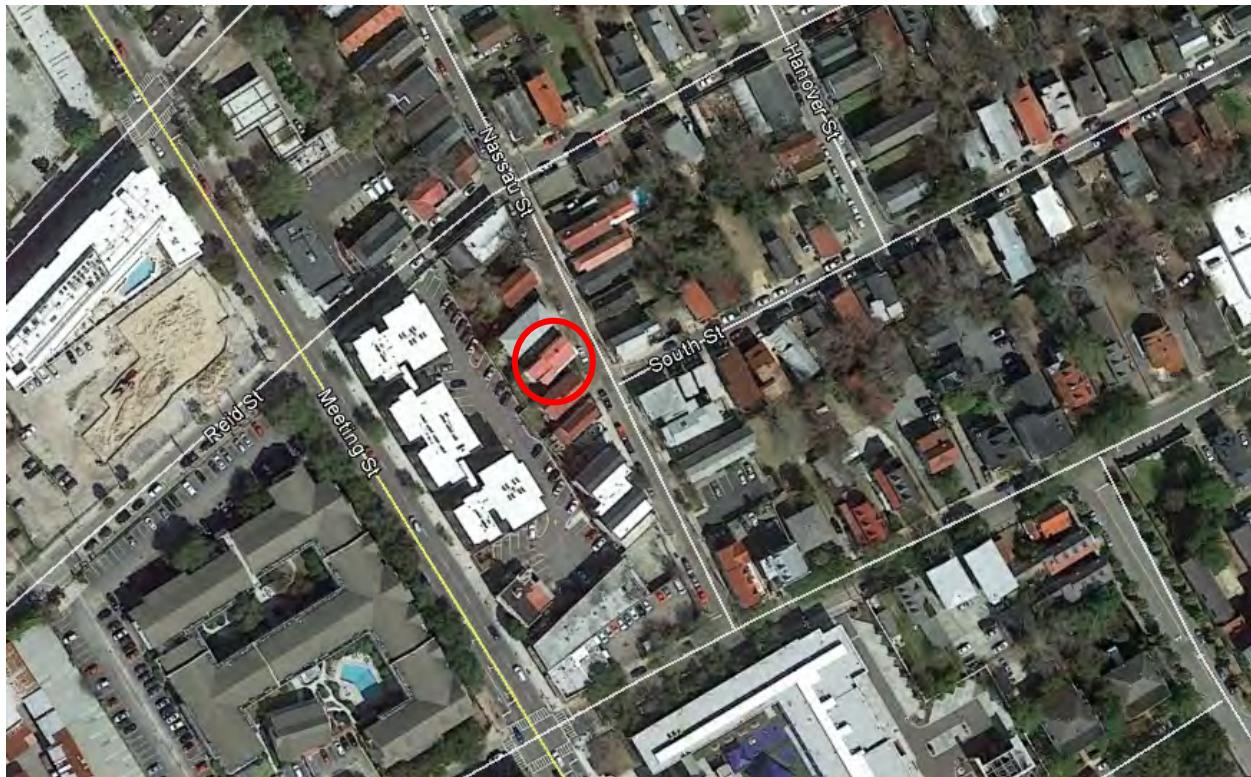


Figure 1: Location of 17 Nassau Street. Map: Google Earth.

17 Nassau Street sits on the west side of Nassau Street in the block bordered on the north and south by Reid and Mary Streets, respectively. The house's location was never within the bounds of an officially named neighborhood. Though now associated with the larger "Eastside" neighborhood, early plans of the neighborhood, then known as Hampstead, exclude the property. Hampstead, laid out in 1769 (Figure 2), was not the only neighborhood to exclude 17 Nassau.¹

¹ Dale Rosengarten, Martha Zierden, Kimberly Grimes, Ziyadah Owusu, Elizabeth Alston, and Will Williams III. *Between the Tracks: Charleston's East Side During the Nineteenth Century* (Charleston: The Charleston Museum and Avery Research Center, 1987), 10.

The later neighborhood of Wraggborough also excluded the property, as did the adjacent Mazyckborough. 17 Nassau now lies within the larger “Eastside” neighborhood, a broad designation for the area generally bounded on the north by Cooper Street, the east by East Bay Street, the south by Mary Street, and the west by Meeting Street.

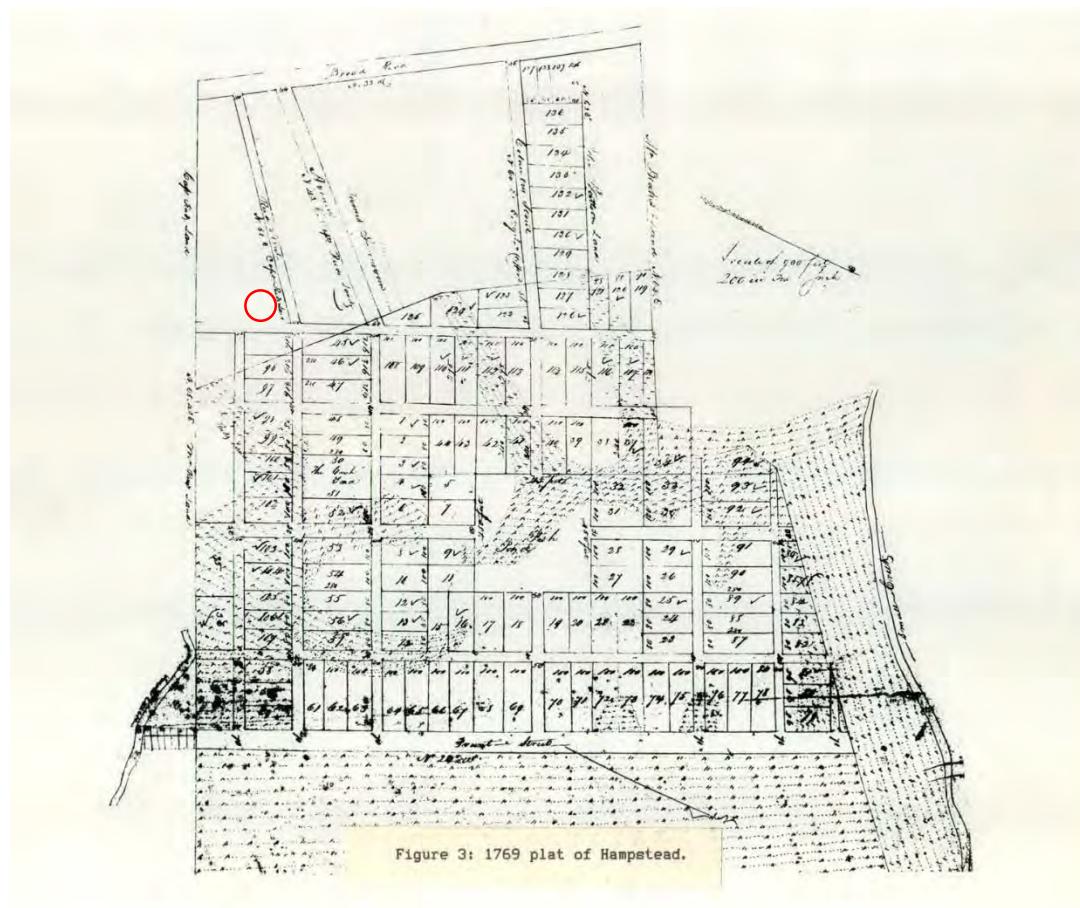


Figure 2: 1769 Plan of Hampstead. 17 Nassau site circled in red.²

Early History

In the early 1820s, a man named Archibald McVicar died, leaving a large swath of land available for sale. This tract, bounded by Meeting Street (then Meeting Street Road) on the west,

² Dale Rosengarten, Martha Zierden, Kimberly Grimes, Ziyadah Owusu, Elizabeth Alston, and Will Williams III. *Between the Tracks: Charleston's East Side During the Nineteenth Century* (Charleston: The Charleston Museum and Avery Research Center, 1987), 13.

Reid Street on the north, Nassau Street on the east, and Mary Street on the south, was divided into numbered lots and sold. A plat from 1823 shows a variety of buildings already on the tract, including a stable, a tenement, and a kitchen, among others. The lot containing present-day 17 Nassau Street is Lot #5 (Figure 3). The lot shows a “building of wood” already on the property, although it is not the building currently on the site.³

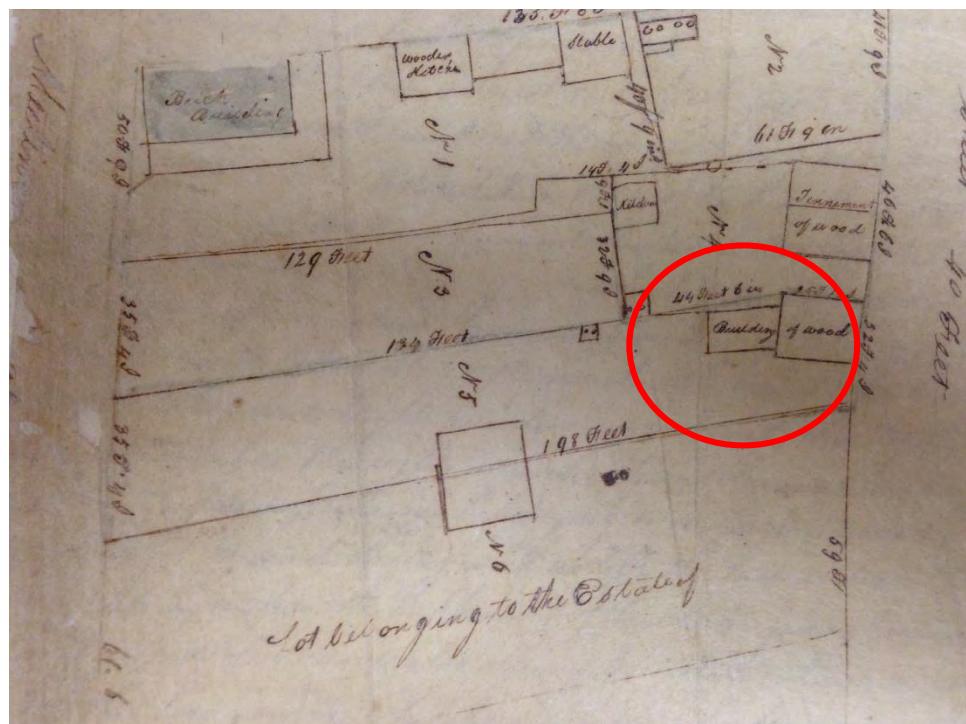


Figure 3: Plat of the lands of the Estate of Archibald McVicar, December 31, 1823, Deed book N7, page 178. Current location of 17 Nassau Street is circled in red.

Following Archibald McVicar’s death, Lot #5 was purchased by Neil McVicar. Though the relation is unclear, Neil bought multiple lots from the estate of Archibald, which could suggest a familial relationship. The transaction occurred in January of 1825 for a fee of \$600.⁴ Just eight months later, the property again changed hands. Along with another tract Neil McVicar had previously purchased in Cannonborough, Gozen McLane purchased the two lots

³ Charleston County. Records of the Register Mesne Conveyance (RMC), Charleston, S.C. Deed Book N7, p. 178.

⁴ RMC, Charleston, S.C. Deed Book N9, p. 446.

for a fee of \$3,000.⁵ Just a year on, Lot #5 had another new owner, passing from McLane to John Wilson for a fee of \$625, suggesting few changes were made to the property during that time.⁶

John Wilson held the entirety of Lot #5 until 1840, when he conveyed the portion containing 17 Nassau Street to W.B.T. Shroud, in trust for Eliza Shroud. After W.B.T. Shroud died, the property passed to Eliza Shroud, her new husband, George Mansfield, Esq., and Eliza Shroud (Eliza Mansfield's mother). A complicated and unclear situation, made all the more confusing by mother and daughter's identical names, a deed of release was eventually deemed necessary. On October 6th, 1853, a deed of release was entered into the Charleston Register of Mesne Conveyance, outlining the situation.⁷ Just a month prior, George & Eliza Mansfield and Eliza Shroud had sold the property to James E. Walker.⁸ Likely, the deed of release was undertaken as a precaution against any complications from the complex situation.

Once again, the property was held for only a short time (this time only two months) before Walker conveyed the property (along with adjacent Lot #4) to Adele Delettre for \$2,500.⁹ Very little is known about Adele Delettre. Though she appears in the 1850 Census living elsewhere in Charleston, she does not appear in any other Census listing. In 1850, she is noted as being a 35-year-old female mulatto who appears to be a single mother of five. Other than that Census entry and entries in the city Ward Books, no other information exists on Adele Delettre, including deeds. She purchases the property in November of 1853, and according to city Ward Books, owns 17 Nassau Street until at least 1898. Though no deed exists showing Delettre

⁵ RMC, Charleston, S.C. Deed Book O9, p. 459.

⁶ RMC, Charleston, S.C. Deed Book T9, p. 183.

⁷ RMC, Charleston, S.C. Deed Book E13, p. 95.

⁸ RMC, Charleston, S.C. Deed Book A13, p. 357.

⁹ RMC, Charleston, S.C. Deed Book A13, p. 437.

selling the property, the next discernable deed in 1899 could perhaps shed some light on the situation.

In 1899, the property is sold by Matilda Lamkin, Cecile Lamkin, Caroline Suren, Matilda Bopp, Louis L. Lamkin, Louisa A. Hutman, and Marie Smith to Ella Ferira. A large number of grantors such as this would normally suggest a sale by heirs, though no note is made in the deed. The property conveyed is the same as Adele Delettre purchased in 1853, noted as being a part of Lot #5, measuring 33'-2" on Nassau Street, 52'-10" on the north line, and 38'-8" on the west line. These measurements are identical to today's lot measurements, meaning the lot size has not changed since 1853.¹⁰

Perhaps Adele Delettre was somehow related to the Lamkin family, naming them as her heirs upon her death. A newspaper notice in 1901 may shed light on the situation. It lists the Estate of Adele Delettre as owning property at 17 Nassau Street. Though this further complicates the chain of owners (Ella Ferira had purchased in the property in 1899), it does suggest that Lamkin et al were Delettre's heirs and/or executors.

Prior to 1886, the address of the property was 11 Nassau Street. On the 1861 Charleston Census, Adele Delettre was noted as owning and occupying 11 Nassau Street.¹¹ Though the Charleston Ward Books list Adele as the owner of 17 Nassau from 1871 on, city directories list various members of the Lamkin family as residents of 11 Nassau during the 1870s and 1880s.

¹⁰ RMC, Charleston, S.C. Deed Book O23, p. 12.

¹¹ Charleston (SC) City Council. *Census of the City of Charleston, South Carolina, For the Year 1861. Illustrated by Statistical Tables*. Charleston: Evans & Cogswell, 1861.

Names that appear on the 1899 deed to Ella Ferira also appear on the city directories, including Matilda Lamkin and Louis Lamkin.

**De Lettre, est Adella 17 Nassau, 1 b.
11.**

Figure 4: Newspaper clipping, noting the sheriff's sale of property from the Estate of Adele Delettre's¹²

Construction of 17 Nassau

By 1899, Ella Ferira was the owner of the lot containing what is now 17 Nassau, but all records indicate the current house was not on the property. An 1888 Sanborn Map (Figure 5) showed that there were no buildings on the lot. However, by 1902, a building appears, likely the house standing today (Figure 6). A jump of \$150 in the property's assessed value between 1902 and 1903 furthers this assertion.¹³

One-story tall and only valued at \$150, the building constructed under Ella's ownership appears to have been modest in scale. Perhaps the building was built as what has come to be known as a "Freedman's Cottage." Freedman Cottages are similar to Single Houses in that they are usually one-room wide with a piazza running the length of the building. Both building types have gable roofs whose gable ends are oriented toward the street. The primary and most noticeable difference between Freedman Cottages and Single Houses is the number of stories; the Charleston Single House is two or more stories, while the Freedman's Cottage is only one story. Though "Freedman's Cottage" is derived from the legacy of free blacks constructing and occupying the building type, many were often built and occupied by white residents.

¹² "Sheriff's Sale." *The Post* (Charleston, SC), May 27, 1901.

¹³ Charleston County. Records of the Register of Mesne Conveyance. Ward Books, 1902, 1903.

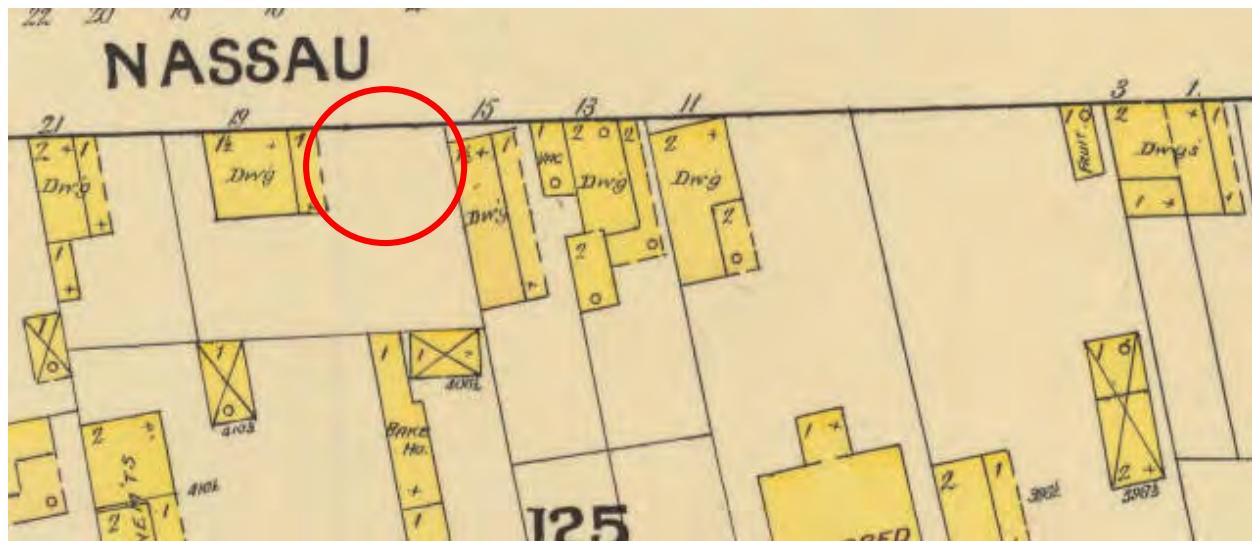


Figure 5: 1888 Sanborn Fire Insurance map. Site of 17 Nassau circled in red.

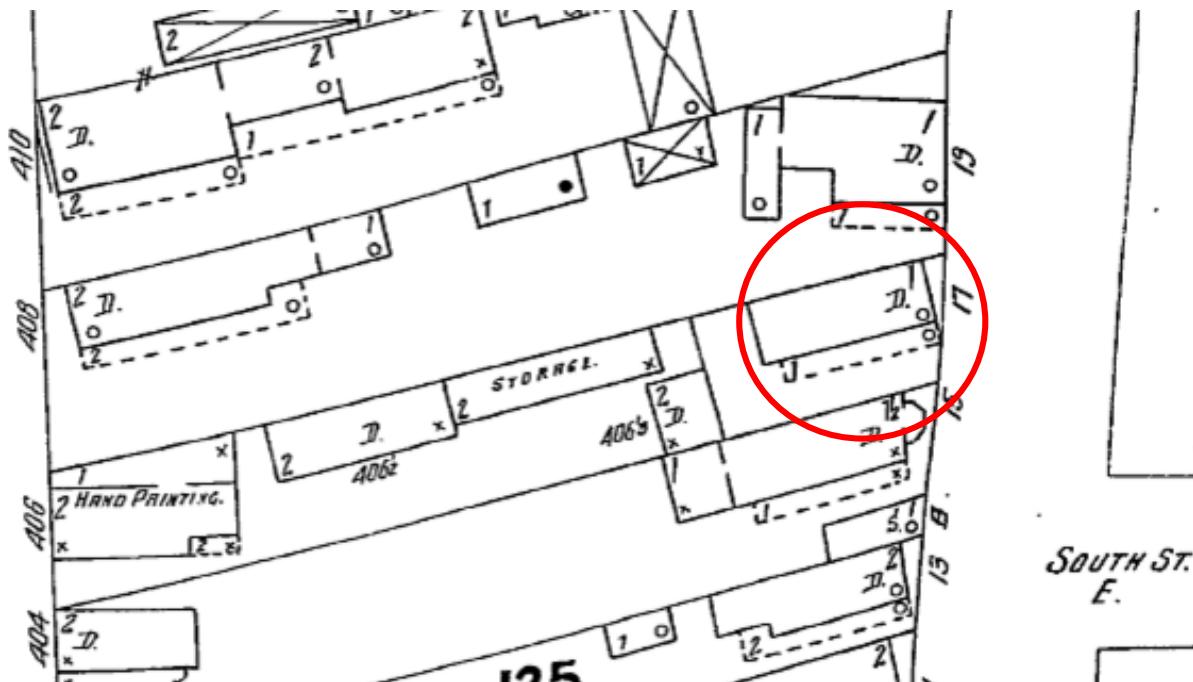


Figure 6: 1902 Sanborn Fire Insurance map. 17 Nassau circled in red.

Growing Family, Expanded Building

In 1916, a notice in the Charleston Evening Post showed that Ella Ferira applied for a building permit to construct on the premises of 17 Nassau Street, with the work valued at \$200.¹⁴

¹⁴ "Building Permits," *The Charleston Evening Post* (Charleston, SC), April 25, 1916.

Though this would suggest the addition of the second floor, giving the house its Single House appearance, the funds were likely used for additions to the rear of the building. Throughout this time, the Ward Books indicate that the building that Ella Ferira owned on the property was one-story tall. In 1930, the house on the property is noted as being two stories for the first time. The very next year, the valuation of the lot jumps \$75. Unfortunately, this valuation changes coincides with a documented reassessment of property values. The doubling of the size of the house would likely yield a change in valuation of more than \$75, which creates a conundrum.

Ella Ferira's intent to build on the premises is logical, as her family was quickly growing during the second decade of the 20th century. In 1902, city directories note only three people residing at 17 Nassau Street: George E. Ferira and Ella Ferira (husband and wife), and Joseph Ferira. By 1914, the family had swelled to seven: George and Ella, Florrie, Joseph, Julia, Mabel, and Marguerite Ferira. This increased occupancy likely necessitated an addition to the house. By 1944, the house was noted as two-story, giving it an appearance similar to today.¹⁵

¹⁵ Sanborn Map Company. University of South Carolina: 1944. "Sanborn Fire Insurance Maps" <http://library.sc.edu/digital/collections/sanborn.html>.

Southern Railway Freight Workers—3 Decades Ago



Workmen in the Southern railway freight depot on Ann street are shown in this picture which was taken about 30 years ago.

Kneeling, left to right: Edgar Dauer, George Dodds, James Meynardie and George Dodds, Jr. Standing, left to right: Jim Heins, Jim Eveington, unidentified, Fred Almers, George Ferira, unidentified, Henry Mitchum.

The photograph reproduced above belongs to Mrs. Ella Ferira, 17 Nassau street, and is one of a series being published by The Evening Post, showing scenes of former years. Those having suitable photographs they are willing to lend are invited to submit them.

Figure 7: Newspaper clipping showing George Ferira.¹⁶

From their first appearance in 1902 in the Charleston city directory, it is clear that the Ferira family was working class. George Ferira, the son of a Portuguese immigrant, was employed as a watchman from at least 1902 to 1922, first for the Southern Railway, then for the Atlantic Coast Line Railroad. During the same time, Ella Ferira worked at the nearby Cigar Factory, located on East Bay Street. A 1943 News and Courier article highlighted Joseph Edward Ferira, son of Ella and George. In the article (Figure 8), Joseph is noted as having been the longest-serving employee of the sheetmetal shop at the Charleston Navy Yard. Other daughters of Ella and George hold various jobs around town, the most common of which is at the Cigar Factory, just like their mother.

¹⁶ "Southern Railway Freight Workers – 3 Decades Ago." *The Charleston Evening Post* (Charleston, SC), August 25, 1939.



HE'S THE FIRST SHEETMETAL WORKER AT CHARLESTON NAVY YARD—On December 7, 1906, Joseph Edward Ferira was employed as a tinner in the Charleston navy yard. He has been working there ever since and is now the oldest employee in point of service in the sheetmetal shop. He lives at 17 Nassau street. Recently members of his union gave him a gold ring "in appreciation and in recognition of years of loyal service at the Charleston navy yard". (Official U. S. Navy Photo)

Figure 8: July 23, 1943 News and Courier article showcasing Joseph Ferira.¹⁷

Later Years

Ella Ferira held the property until 1939, when she transferred the property to her daughter, Julia Ferira.¹⁸ At that time, Ella was eighty years old. Though she lived for another fourteen years, her advanced age likely necessitated a transfer of the property, especially as she had been a widow since 1931. Perhaps the addition of a second story to the house occurred around the time the house transferred between Ella and Julia. Even before Julia purchased the property, it appears that other members of the family resided in the house as well. The 1930 Census shows that in addition to George and Ella Ferira, daughter Julia also resided at 17

¹⁷ "He's The First Sheetmetal Worker at Charleston Navy Yard." *The News and Courier* (Charleston, SC), July 23, 1943.

¹⁸ RMC, Charleston, S.C. Deed Book X40, p. 209.

Nassau, as did daughter Ella and her husband Blancit Griffin. Also residing at 17 Nassau Street was Mabel Smith, daughter of George and Ella Ferira, who rented with her husband, John, and her two sons, Kenneth and Robert.¹⁹ The Smiths continued to reside at 17 Nassau through the 1930s, but tragedy struck in 1936. John Smith was injured fatally on August 21, 1936 when a motorcycle he was riding on collided with a truck.²⁰ Like both of his in-laws, he was buried at Bethany Cemetery.

Just like their father, who fought in World War I, Robert and Kenneth Smith fought for their country.²¹ A newspaper clipping from 1943 shows both Robert and Kenneth Smith in their military attire, noting their deployment locations. Robert, enlisted in the Navy, was stationed in Seattle, while Kenneth was stationed at Camp Sibert, Alaska.²² Two years later, another newspaper clipping reported the two brothers' reunion on a Navy ship in the Pacific Ocean, having not seen each other for two years.²³ By 1951, Kenneth Smith was in action again, this time fighting in the Korean War.²⁴

Julia Ferira died on January 13, 1967, leaving 17 Nassau in her will to her sister, Mabel Smith. Ten years later, Mabel died without a will, but because of a provision in Julia's earlier will, the property was transferred to Mabel's two sons, Kenneth and Robert Smith. Only holding the property for five years, the brothers sold 17 Nassau to Daniel and Octavia Wright in 1984.²⁵ After Octavia died four years later, the property was transferred solely to Daniel.²⁶ Finally, in

¹⁹ South Carolina. Charleston. 1930 U.S. Census, population schedule. Digital images. Ancestry.com.

²⁰ "No Blame is Fixed in J.K. Smith Case." *The News and Courier* (Charleston, SC), August 21, 1936.

²¹ South Carolina. Charleston. 1930 U.S. Census, population schedule. Digital images. Ancestry.com.

²² "Brothers in Service." *The News and Courier* (Charleston, SC), November 28, 1943.

²³ "Meet After Two Years." *The Charleston Evening Post* (Charleston, SC), July 18, 1945.

²⁴ "Home on Furlough." *The Charleston Evening Post* (Charleston, SC), September 4, 1951.

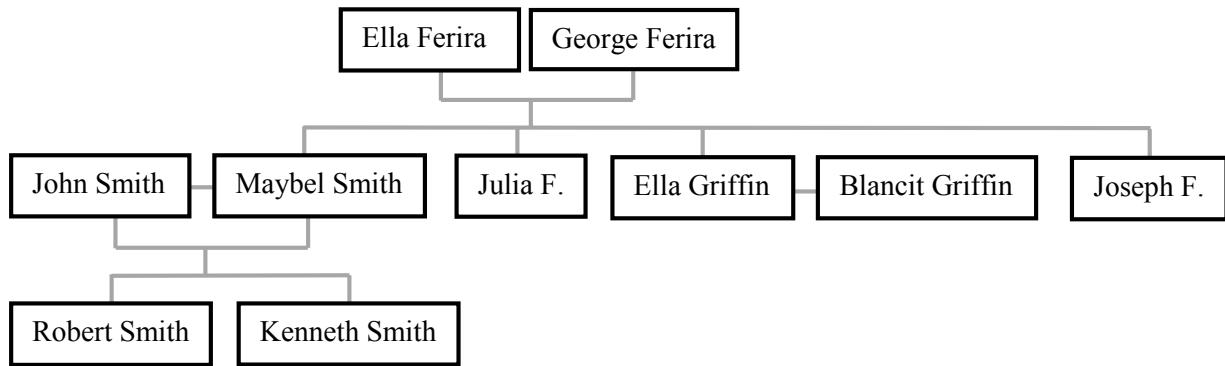
²⁵ RMC, Charleston, S.C. Deed Book D142, p. 306.

²⁶ RMC, Charleston, S.C. Deed Book W257, p. 25.

2002, Daniel conveyed 17 Nassau to his daughter, Orabell Wright-Price, who still holds the property.²⁷

Appendices

Appendix A: Abbreviated Ferira Family Tree*



* This family tree is not of the complete Ferira family and is meant only as a supplement for this investigation. Multiple members of the family have been omitted from this tree, in an effort to better explain the complex twentieth century ownership of 17 Nassau Street.

²⁷ RMC, Charleston, S.C. Deed Book H410, p. 555.

Appendix B: Annotated Chain of Title

1825, January 18

N9/446

Grantor: Robert Walker and Campbell Douglas (Executors to the estate of Archibald McVicar)

Grantee: Neil McVicar

Type: Sale

Sale Price: \$600

Lot Size: 35'-4" x 198' x 32'-4" x 134' x 44'-6" x 25'-10" (Lot #5)

Neil McVicar purchased Lot #5 in plan of lands of Archibald McVicar, deceased. Neil McVicar took out a mortgage at a cost of \$3,133.34 (Deed Book N9, page 449) for the above property, as well as another lot in Cannonborough.

1825, September 7

O9/459

Grantor: Neil McVicar

Grantee: Gozen S. McLane

Type: Sale

Sale Price: \$3,000

Lot Size: 35'-4" x 198' x 32'-4" x 134' x 44'-6" x 25'-10" (Lot #5)

In this conveyance, Neil McVicar sold two lots to Gozen McLane: one in Cannonborough (at the corner of Cannon and Smith Streets) and the other on the east side of Meeting Street Road (the lot containing present-day 17 Nassau Street). The inclusion of the lot in Cannonborough likely accounts for the inflated sale price.

1826, September 7

T9/183

Grantor: Gozen S. McLane

Grantee: John Wilson

Type: Sale

Sale Price: \$625

Lot Size: 35'-4" x 198' x 32'-4" x 134' x 44'-6" x 25'-10" (Lot #5)

The sale cost, when compared to the 1825 transaction between Archibald McVicar's executors and Neil McVicar, suggests the property experienced few changes.

1853, October 6

E13/95

Grantor: John Wilson

Grantees: George Mansfield, Eliza Mansfield, and Eliza Shroud

Type: Release

Sale Price: n/a

Lot Size: 33'-2" x 28'-8" (portion of Lot #5)

This release was in reference to a deed from 1840, transferring two lots (including the lot in question) from Wilson to W.B.T. Shroud in trust for Eliza Shroud and her daughter, Eliza

Sarah Shroud. W.B.T Shroud died and Eliza Sarah Shroud remarried George Mansfield, Esq. This deed happens after the following deed, in which Mansfield et al convey the property to James E. Walker. Perhaps the legitimacy of that transaction was questioned, necessitating this release. For the first time, the lot is noted as having buildings.

1853, September 21

A13/357

Grantor: George Mansfield & Eliza S. Mansfield (husband and wife) and Eliza Shroud

Grantee: James E. Walker

Type: Sale

Sale Price: \$2,000

Lot Size: 33'-2" x 28'-8" x 52'-10" (portion of Lot #5)

This sale included Lot #4, which was located to the north of Lot #5. This may account for the inflated sale price.

1853, November 23

A13/437

Grantor: James E. Walker

Grantee: Adele Delettre

Type: Sale

Sale Price: \$2,500

Lot Size: 33'-2" x 28'-8" x 52'-10" (portion of Lot #5)

Just two months after buying, James Walker sold the two lots to Adele Delettre. The jump of \$500 in just two months could suggest the construction of a building on either Lot #4 or the portion of Lot #5. However, because both lots are included in the sale, it is impossible to know which was built on during Walker's brief ownership. Additionally, Adele Delettre takes out a mortgage worth \$1,500 (Deed Book G13, Page 91).

1899, October 2

O23/12

Grantors: Matilda Lamkin, Cecile Lamkin, Caroline Suren, Matilda Bopp, Louis L. Lamkin, Louisa A. Hutman, and Marie Smith

Grantee: Ella Ferira

Type: Sale

Sale Price: \$300

Lot Size: 33'-2" x 28'-8" x 52'-10" (portion of Lot #5)

Records of a transaction between Adele Delettre and Lamkin et al do not exist, thus creating a gap in this chain of title. For a more complete explanation, refer to the body of the narrative.

1939, January 27

X40/209

Grantor: Ella Ferira

Grantee: Julia C. Ferira

Type: Sale

Sale Price: \$10 and love and affection

Lot Size: 33'-2" x 28'-8" x 52'-10"

This transaction occurs between mother and daughter, as Ella Ferira was likely in declining health.

1984, December 21

D142/306

Grantors: Kenneth Edward Smith and Robert Birdsell Smith

Grantees: Daniel Wright & Octavia M. Wright

Type: Sale

Sale Price: \$15,000

Lot Size: 33'-2" x 28'-8" x 52'-10"

Julia C. Ferira died testate on January 13, 1967. In her will, she left the property to her sister, Mabel F. Smith, with the remainder to her two nephews, Kenneth Edward Smith and Robert Birdsell Smith. When Mabel F. Smith died intestate on October 7, 1979, the property fell under the ownership of Kenneth and Robert.

1995, July 26

W257/25

Grantor: Estate of Octavia Wright

Grantee: Daniel Wright

Type: Deed of Distribution

Sale Price: n/a

Lot Size: 33'-2" x 28'-8" x 52'-10"

Octavia Wright died on January 13, 1989, the property going to Daniel Wright.

2002, June 26

H410/555

Grantor: Daniel Wright

Grantee: Orabell Wright-Price

Type: Sale

Sale Price: \$5 in hand

Lot Size: 33'-2" x 28'-8" x 52'-10"

In this conveyance, Daniel Wright sells the property to his daughter, Orabell Wright-Price, with the understanding that Daniel D. Wright, Jr. will live on the property until his death.

Appendix C: Bibliography

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