



October 26, 1998

Mr. Malcolm Brennan
Malcolm Brennan Architects, Inc.
635G East Bay Street
Charleston, SC 29403

Re: Old Slave Mart

Dear Malcolm:

Thank you very much for sharing with Carter Hudgins and me a copy of your historic documentation and your plans for the rehabilitation of the Old Slave Mart at 6 Chalmers Street. Carter and I have reviewed these plans and we think that generally they are excellent, the museum exhibits are well arranged and the renovations to the building will be appropriate.

The one exception, however, is that we strongly disagree with the plan for the front arched opening of the building along Chalmers Street. We believe that the iron gate concept is overwhelming and distracts from the primary character of the building. We would prefer to see something more appropriate, perhaps in keeping with earlier treatments, particularly a scheme matching the photograph included in your material that show the building prior to the opening of the Old Slave Mart Museum in 1937. We think that the over-door wooden transom and the multiple wooden doors shown would be most appropriate and offer convenient accessibility to the museum. As we strongly agree that it would be good to have Philip Simmons execute some piece of ironwork for the building, perhaps the overthrow or transom would be an appropriate place for some sort of detailed wrought iron lunette. This would greatly add to the building and be in keeping with the building's history.

I also want to work with you at the time about the stucco facade as it has a very good weathered "old Charleston" look and we would like to see that retained. Otherwise we will look forward to working with you on the final plans.

With best regards, I am

Yours sincerely,

Jonathan H. Poston
Director of Preservation

JHP:tm

cc: Carter L. Hudgins, Executive Director
Cynthia Jenkins, Preservation Society
Charles Chase, City of Charleston

Summary of Historical Documentation
Supporting Architectural Concept for the
Old Slave Mart at
#6 Chalmers Street
October 1, 1998

Eye witness account of journalist Charles Coffin in
The Boys of 61, Or, Four Years of Fighting (Boston
1883 pp. 472-474)

140

CIVIL WAR HISTORY

appropriate design of double-edged swords and spears. Thousands of slaves had been incarcerated there for no crime whatever, except for being out after nine o'clock, or for meeting in some secret chamber to tell God their wrongs, with no white man present. . . . Amid these surroundings was the Slave-Mart,—a building with a large iron gate in front, above which, in large gilt letters, was the word MART. The outer iron gate opened into a hall about sixty feet long by twenty broad, flanked on one side by a long table running the entire length of the hall, and on the other by benches. At the farther end a door, opening through a brick wall, gave entrance to a yard. The door was locked. I tried my boot heel, but it would not yield. I called a freedman to my aid. Unitedly we took up a great stone, and gave a blow. Another, and the door of the Bastile went into splinters. Across the yard was a four-story brick building, with grated windows and iron doors,—a prison. The yard was walled by high buildings. He who entered there left all hope behind. A small room adjoining the hall was the place where women were subjected to the lascivious gaze of brutal men. There were the steps, up which thousands of men, women and children had walked to their places on the table, to be knocked off to the highest bidder. . . . In front of the mart was a gilt star. I climbed the post and wrenched it from its spike to secure it as a trophy. A freedman took down the gilt letters for me, and knocked off the great lock from the outer iron gate, and the smaller lock from the inner door. The key of the French Bastile hangs at Mount Vernon: and as relics of the American prison-house then being broken up, I secured these. . . . Entering the brokers' offices,—prisons rather,—we walked along the grated corridors, looked into the rooms where the slaves had been kept. In the cellar was the dungeon for the refractory,—bolts and staples in the floors, manacles for the hands and feet, chains to make all sure.⁴

1886 Inspectors Record of Earthquake Damages (Charleston, 1886) pp. 43

...A report by the architect and the engineer hired by the City of Charleston to survey the damage of the 1886 earthquake resulted in the following data on this property:

6/North Side Chalmers/ D. O'Neill, Store/ Brick [building] / Tin [Roof] / 35 [Feet Long] / 20 [Feet Wide] / 22 [Feet High] / [Condition of Walls] [North] Boarded/ [South] Partition Boarded/ [East] Cracked/ [West] Division/ [Condition of Chimney or Flues] Good. This was an open passageway, and was boarded in for tenement purposes.³³

An extremely significant document, it points to the next stage in the building's development; the original brick, arched facade, herein called the "Partition," remained, but its gates had been removed, replaced by wooden boards. Aside from this front wall, at some time after 1865, the property reverted essentially to its original configuration, that of a passageway to the main area of the Ryan's Mart complex. The west wall shared with the Fire House, to which some of the "Brick Trusses" (the facade and the two west pillars) were anchored, was intact; and an east wall, made of brick (having "Cracked"), had been added at the time of

³³ Cf. numerous advertisements in CDG, 1859-1863.

³⁴ W. H. Perkins and Fred S. Stewart, Inspectors, *Record of Earthquake Damages* (Charleston, 1886), p. 43.

Historian Frederick Bancroft's vision of the Slave Mart (#6 Chalmers Street) as gathered from the study of numerous advertisements of slave auctions.
Published in Slave Trading in the Old South
(Baltimore, 1931) p. 170

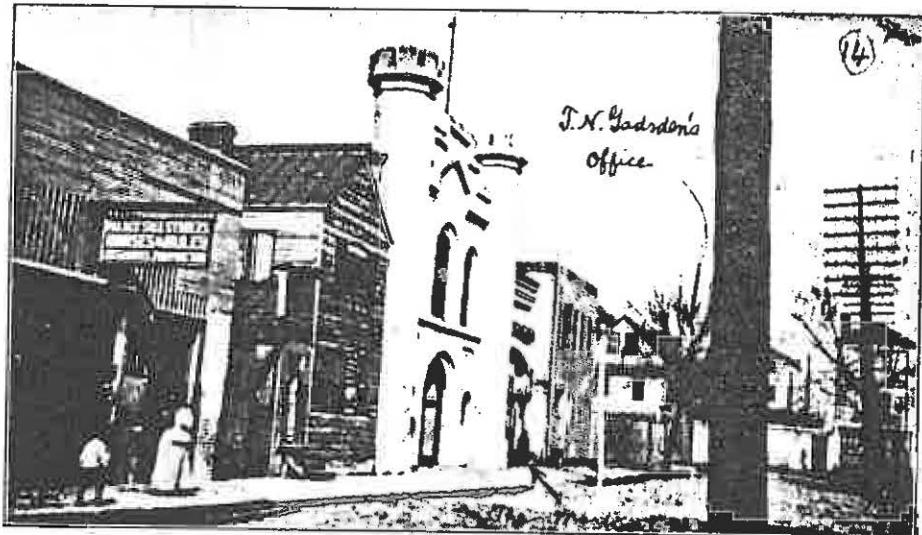
in State street. As early as July, 1856, Thomas Ryan & Son had both a salesroom—which was described as “the Auction Mart in Chalmers-street, next to [and east of] the German Engine House”—and also a “lot” or “yard”, “immediately in the rear” of it.¹⁰ They were very convenient and soon met with general favor. Before the end of the 'fifties virtually all public sales of negroes, except some by legal process, were held at what was variously called “Ryan's Mart”, “the Mart in Chalmers street” and, finally, “the Slave Mart”. Its exterior appearance and that of the immediate neighborhood changed but slightly during the next sixty years. The building was originally 44 by 20 feet, and there was 22 by 18 foot yard in the rear. The façade resembles nothing seen elsewhere. On either side is an octagonal pillar more than 20 feet high, with a graceful arch between them. The Mart, a salesroom with a 20-foot ceiling, was light and airy, for the space below the arch was open, so

¹⁰ These facts are gathered from numerous advts. of slave-auctions. According to the *Census of the City of Charleston, 1861*, it was No. 8. It and No. 6, also a brick building east of it, were owned by Ziba B. Oakes, the trader. Nos. 4 (brick) and 2 (wood, on the n. w. cor. of State and occupied by T. N. Gadsden) were owned by Theo. A. Whitney.

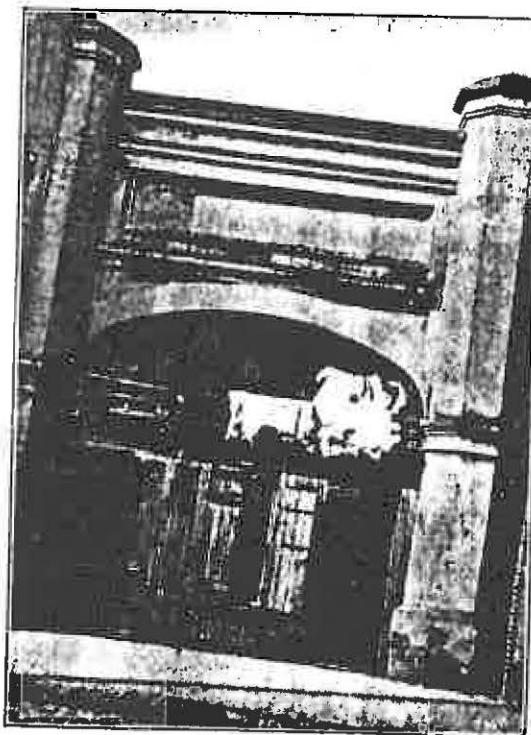
that the auction table, about 10 feet long and 3 feet high, might be placed lengthwise near it and allow ample room for the spectators to pass in and out and stand either inside of the building or in the street, according to the weather.¹¹

Just back of the Mart and the engine-house, but facing Queen street, and only a few rods east of the Huguenot church, was “Ryan's nigger-jail”. The jail proper was a detached double-house—four stories high, with barred windows, and bolts and locks on every door—in a lot 60 feet wide and 175 feet deep. Brick walls, about 20 feet high, helped to make, out of what had probably been some rich man's residence, an exceptionally large and complete slave-jail and slave-pen.¹² Between the lot of the Mart and that of the jail a heavy gate, with iron bars and a brass padlock, opened on stone steps.

Photographs of #6 Chalmers Street, published in
Frederick Bancroft's Slave Trading in the Old South
(Baltimore, 1931) p. 170

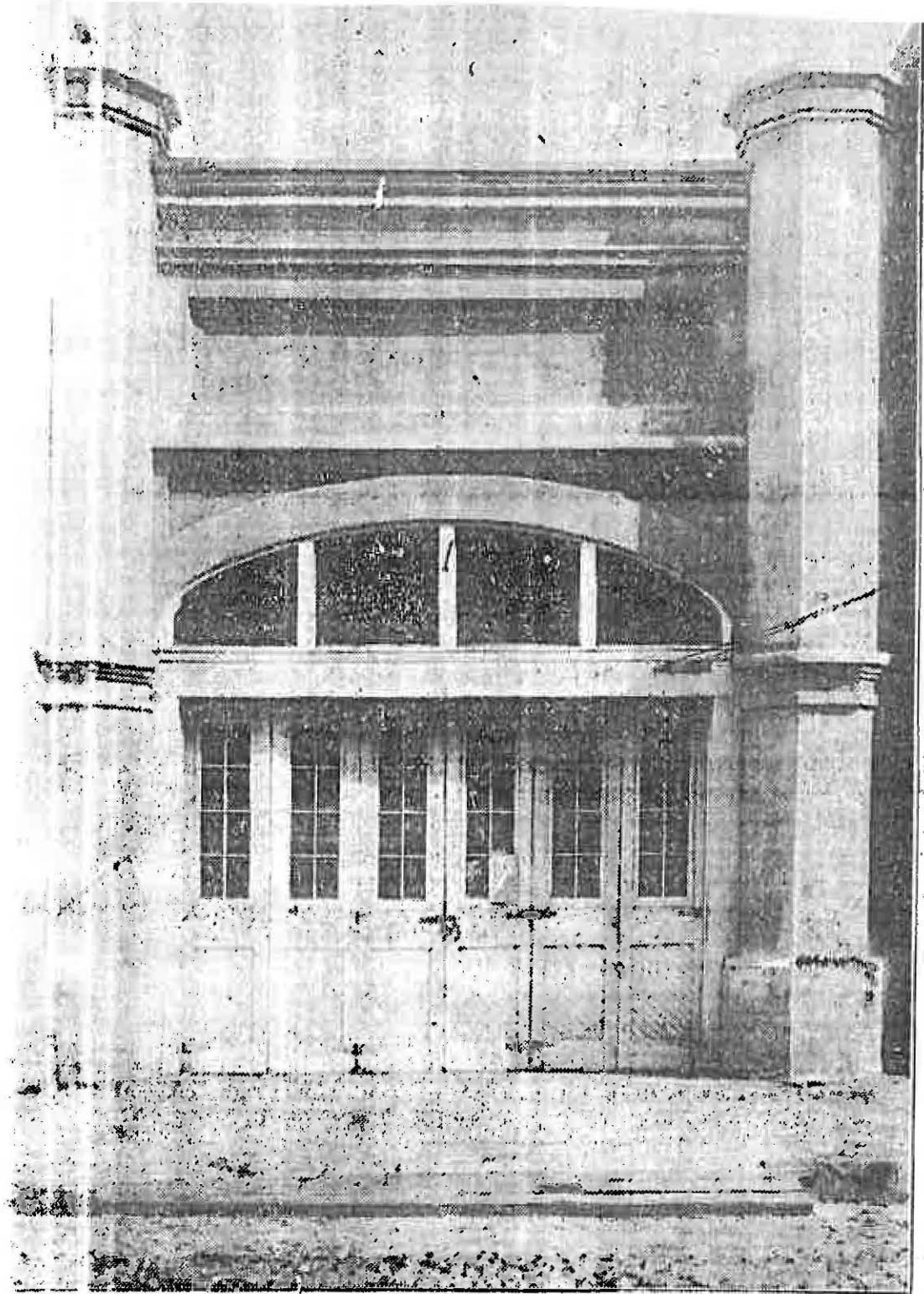


CHALMERS STREET AS IT WAS IN 1907



THE SLAVE-MART BUILDING AS IT WAS IN 1907
Negro tenements had been built inside

News paper photograph of #6 Chalmers Street prior to opening of Old Slave Mart Museum in 1937, Charleston Archives, date unknown.



In this building, called the Old Slave Market, in Chalmers street, tradition has it that slaves were sold)
suction block. There are no records, however, to sustain the tradition.

News and Courier Photo of #6 Chalmers Street,
March 22, 1988



File Photo

The Old Slave Mart Museum.

The following article contains references from the
Time Line for #6 Chalmers Street.

THE OLD SLAVE MART MUSEUM, CHARLESTON, SOUTH CAROLINA: REDISCOVERING THE PAST

Edmund Drago and Ralph Melnick

THE OLD SLAVE MART MUSEUM of Charleston, South Carolina, has stood for the past four decades as a reminder of an era and an institution sorely in need of further understanding as a means of creating a more harmonious future in this country. Not always popular in so proudly Southern a city as Charleston, Miriam Wilson, and after her, Judith Chase and Louise Graves, have made strong efforts at collecting and maintaining the past in what is considered by some to be its historical setting.

Long before Miss Wilson purchased the Mart building in 1938, some denied the historical authenticity of the site. Early guidebooks neglected even to mention slavery, and the few that did put it in a most favorable light, while referring to 6 Chalmers Street as something other than a former slave market. As a rejoinder to the traditional "prejudices" of those who wished to propagate a "partisan history," the following 1919 statement makes clear its author's position on the Mart and the question of slavery:

No. 6, Old Slave Market, so-called.
Many visitors to the city, particularly those who have imbibed the traditional prejudices against old time Southern slavery, enquire for the tourists' traditional "Slave Market." As a matter of fact no such market existed in the city. Most of the Southern owners of slaves never sold them, and the workers on the various plantations—the best cared for peasantry the world has ever seen—passed by inheritance from father to son. But this class of property was subject to the same vicissitudes as all others and sales of slaves were necessary from time to time. We refer to this as conditions existing in the nineteenth century. Such sales were made by brokers who had to lodge and feed the slaves while in their custody, and hence they required house room and often a room therein in which any auction sale took place. There were several such buildings in the neighborhood of Broad, State and Church Streets, but as has been said, no general market for this purpose. The sale of slaves was largely discontinued, and whenever possible families were not divided by such sales. Unfortunately the word "Slave" was given to the African—a word most distasteful to the ears of free men. But the condition of the Southern slave was the best of any peasantry in the world. . . . They were cared for in youth and old age. Kept healthy, fed, clothed, and their spiritual wants catered to. It was the greatest compliment to the Southern people's good influence on the race, that in about one hundred years, they had raised it from cruel barbarism to be worthy, in the view of the statesmen of 1865, to become voting citizens of

a white man's country. The same partisan history which stigmatizes the institution of slavery, designates this building as a Slave Market, which market, however, never existed.¹

Eight years prior to her purchase of the property, Miss Wilson, having researched the period, became convinced that the Mart was indeed an authentic antebellum structure that had once operated as a slave market. Her 1930 guidebook, *Street Strolls Around Charleston, S.C.*, acknowledged the disputatious nature of the building:

No. 8, The Old Slave Mart.

The location of this is often disputed, but everything the writer has been able to find regarding this building points to its having been used for the sale of trained servants and artisans, who were sold one at a time to the highest bidder. The auction block stood on the west side of the room. Originally there was a balcony over the entrance, but the present owner changed the front to turn it into a garage. . . . On the left of the above building is a building with turrets, often mistaken for the 'Slave Mart.' This building housed the old German Volunteer Fire Company. It is now used as a Negro Lodge.²

Despite her efforts, the old arguments against the Mart surfaced again only a year after the Museum's doors were opened:

MYTHICAL OLD SLAVE MARKET, 6 Chalmers Street:

Chalmers in this year is fairly famous for two things: It is Charleston's surviving "cobble-stone" street, the stones coming in ballast from European shores in the old sailing days, and on it is a building tourists are told was the old Slave Market. The myth has been exploded repeatedly, but it persists, and since there are no black slaves it probably doesn't matter. Authorities are positive in saying that nowhere in Charleston was there a constituted slave market for the public auctioning of blacks from Africa. Several houses in this vicinity were used in olden times to quarter slaves who were to be sold on the block. Authorities also agree, propagandists to the contrary notwithstanding, that the black slaves in the South were in better care than were the peasantry in any other part of the world.³

Is the Chalmers Street Slave Market only "so called" and "mythical," or is it an important piece of America's heritage, to be bequeathed to future generations? An eye-witness account, that of journalist Charles Coffin, records the following description of Charleston's slave trading district in February of 1865:

Charleston was one of the great slave-marts of the South. She was the boldest advocate for the reopening of the slave-trade. Her statesmen legislated for it; her ministers of the Gospel upheld it as the best means for Christianizing Africa and for the ultimate benefit of the whole human race. Being thus sustained, the slave-traders set up their auction-block in no out-of-the-way-place. A score of them opened offices and dealt in the bodies and souls of men. Among them were T. Ryan & Son, M. M. McBride, J. E. Bowers, Z. B. Oaks, J. B. Baker, Wilbur & Son, on State and Chalmers Streets. Twenty paces distant from Baker's was a building bearing the sign, "Theological Library, Protestant Episcopal Church." Standing by Baker's door, and looking up Chalmers Street to King Street, I read another sign, "Sunday-School Depository." Also, "Hibernian Hall," the building in which the ordinance of Secession was signed. In another building on the opposite corner was the Registry of Deeds. Near by was the guard-house with its grated windows, its iron bars being an

¹ C. Irvine Walker, *Guide to Charleston, S.C. with Brief History of the City and a Map Thereof* (Charleston, 1919), pp. 70-71.

² Miriam B. Wilson, *Street Strolls Around Charleston, S.C.* (n.p., 1930), p. 42.

³ Thomas Petigru Lesesne, *Landmarks of Charleston Including Description of an Incomparable Stroll* (Richmond, 1939), pp. 63-64.

appropriate design of double-edged swords and spears. Thousands of slaves had been incarcerated there for no crime whatever, except for being out after nine o'clock, or for meeting in some secret chamber to tell God their wrongs, with no white man present. . . . Amid these surroundings was the Slave-Mart,—a building with a large iron gate in front, above which, in large gilt letters, was the word MART. The outer iron gate opened into a hall about sixty feet long by twenty broad, flanked on one side by a long table running the entire length of the hall, and on the other by benches. At the farther end a door, opening through a brick wall, gave entrance to a yard. The door was locked. I tried my boot heel, but it would not yield. I called a freedman to my aid. Unitedly we took up a great stone, and gave a blow. Another, and the door of the Bastile went into splinters. Across the yard was a four-story brick building, with grated windows and iron doors,—a prison. The yard was walled by high buildings. He who entered there left all hope behind. A small room adjoining the hall was the place where women were subjected to the lascivious gaze of brutal men. There were the steps, up which thousands of men, women and children had walked to their places on the table, to be knocked off to the highest bidder. . . . In front of the mart was a gilt star. I climbed the post and wrenched it from its spike to secure it as a trophy. A freedman took down the gilt letters for me, and knocked off the great lock from the outer iron gate, and the smaller lock from the inner door. The key of the French Bastile hangs at Mount Vernon: and as relics of the American prison-house then being broken up, I secured these. . . . Entering the brokers' offices,—prisons rather,—we walked along the grated corridors, looked into the rooms where the slaves had been kept. In the cellar was the dungeon for the refractory,—bolts and staples in the floors, manacles for the hands and feet, chains to make all sure.⁴

The careful reader may have noted Miss Wilson's reference to the Mart at No. 8 Chalmers, while all other mention speaks of it at No. 6. This discrepancy, dating long before Miss Wilson's work, is only a small part of the reason for the dismissal of the building as historically spurious. At a time when over \$100 million of federal and state matching funds are being spent annually on the unquestionably worthy project of preserving our national heritage, it is important that this work and its underlying principle be protected from would-be detractors, that every

effort be made to eliminate all doubt surrounding National Historic Registry designates.⁵ It was with this in mind that the authors approached the question of a slave market and the "Slave Mart" in Charleston. How had the history of the slave trade related to this particular structure? What were its beginnings and what changes had it undergone? To what history had the present building at 6 Chalmers Street been a witness?

Slave sales had taken place early in the history of colonial Charleston, with Sullivan's Island acting as the port of entry, a virtual Ellis Island for African "immigrants." Attempts to regulate, at least the place of sale were made at numerous times. The November 20, 1839, ratification by the Charleston City Council of "An Ordinance to Reorganize the Work House Department, to Establish a Mart for the Public Sale of Slaves begins the story.

⁴ Charles Carleton Coffin, *The Boys of '61; Or, Four Years of Fighting* (Boston, 1883), pp. 472-74.

⁵ This information was obtained from the South Carolina Department of Archives & History historic preservation specialist, who also pointed out that South Carolina's portion will be \$1,472,000.

V
2
7
/
2
J
E
8
1
UMI

A building of such description, plan and arrangements, as Council may determine, shall be constructed within the enclosure of the lot attached to the Work House, which shall be established as a Mart or exclusive place within the city, for the sale, at public auction, or outcry, of all slaves other than at Sheriff's sale, and upon the completion of the said building, it shall be publicly notified by advertisement, three times published in the city newspapers, that from and after a certain day to be specified in such advertisement, the said Mart shall be opened for the reception of all slaves, to be offered or exposed for sale at public auction; and from and after the day specified in the said advertisement, if any Broker, Auctioneer, or other person or persons whatsoever, shall expose or offer for sale, or sell any slave or slaves in any of the streets, lanes, alleys, or open courts in the city, or on any lot, enclosure, open space, house or building, or in any place within the limits of the city, other than at the said Mart, so established as aforesaid, such Auctioneer, Broker, or other person or persons herein offending, shall forfeit and pay for each slave so exposed for sale, or sold contrary to the provisions of this ordinance, the sum of five hundred dollars, provided that nothing contained in this section shall extend to sheriff's sales, or sales made by the Master or Commissioners in Equity.⁶

On June 1, 1840, the mayor reported to the council that work on the slave market had been completed, and it was ready to begin operation following the drafting of rules and regulations for its management.⁷ Thrice read before the council as required by law, these rules and regulations were adopted and elevated to the level of an ordinance and ordered published as such on August 3, 1840.⁸ With pride, the *Charleston Daily Courier* noted that among recent civic improvements was "a mart for the sale of negroes."⁹ During the first month, only four slaves were sold,¹⁰ but business soon improved, with April's sales totalling eighty-five individuals.¹¹ So successful had this proven for the city that a year after its inception, the Work House reported "the largest amount ever received by the city from that institution. Among the causes which have produced this result, are . . . the establishment of the Slave Mart."¹²

The success of this operation did not go unnoticed for very long. Less than six months after the first sale, the process to repeal the ordinance establishing the Work House Slave Mart as the sole permitted place of sale (as defined above) was put in motion. At first it was sought to make "lawful to and for any Broker, Auctioneer or Trader in vending Negroes . . . to sell by private sale at any lot, enclosure, house or building within the limits of the City, being his own premises, any slave or slaves

⁶ Charleston, S.C., City Council, *Ordinances of the City of Charleston, from the 24th May 1827, to the 18th March, 1840 . . .* (Charleston, 1840), pp. 188ff., particularly pp. 205-8; Peter H. Wood, *Black Majority: Negroes in Colonial South Carolina from 1670 Through the Stono Rebellion* (New York, 1974), p. xiv.

⁷ Charleston, S.C., City Council, *Proceedings*, June 1, 1840 (reported in *Charleston Daily Courier*, June 4, 1840).

⁸ *Proceedings*, July 21, 1840 (CDC, July 23, 1840) and Aug. 3, 1840 (CDC, Aug. 6, 1840).

⁹ CDC, Sept. 15, 1840.

¹⁰ "Report of the Commissioners of the Work House for the Month of April 1840," in *Proceedings*, Sept. 15, 1840 (CDC, Sept. 18, 1840).

¹¹ "Report of the Commissioners of the Work House for the Month of April 1841," *Proceedings*, May 17, 1841 (*Southern Patriot*, May 19, 1841).

¹² *Proceedings*, Aug. 30, 1841 (SP, Sept. 2, 1841).

whatsoever . . . provided, that nothing herein contained shall permit or allow any Slave or Slaves to be exhibited, displayed or exposed in any house, store, office, or other place within the city."¹³ By the following January, total repeal of the 1839 ordinance had been approved by the City Council, though "the sales of Slaves at Public Auction in any street, lane, or unenclosed lot" was still illegal.¹⁴ It was not until November 1848, that argument to remove this final prohibition was introduced, "as it has a very injurious effect on the value of slave property . . . as it appears . . . to be a great concession to those who are opposed to our peculiar institution. . . ." Ratification came with the new year.¹⁵

Despite the ordinances prohibiting street auctions, the practice had not been eliminated, nor had its practitioners been punished or made to desist. It was clearly a case of the law following the fact with the repeal of an unenforceable statute. Nevertheless, brokers welcomed repeal, a sign of the official approval of a vital part of Charleston's business enterprise.

However, slave sales and those who dealt in such transactions continued to offend some people in positions of authority and influence; still others sought public control for humanitarian reasons, fearing ill-treatment of slaves by some private brokers. And, as time passed, a number of the more influential brokers acquired sales offices which were used with increasing frequency, either by themselves or by others, as rental space for their own business transactions. These several factors appear to have played an influential part in the developments of 1856. In April, passage of an ordinance "to prevent sales at auctions, in the streets and places surrounding the Custom House" was accomplished, removing auctions from public view once again.¹⁶ The mayor opposed this, attempting to place private auctioning carried on in public under public control. Having been defeated earlier in the year, he proposed an alternative in December:

You will recollect that some months ago I suggested the propriety of surrounding the space north of the Custom House with an iron railing and placing proper desks and tables within it for the accom[m]modation of the brokers, for the use of which they might be charged an annual rent. My suggestion was referred to the Committee on City Lands, who not only reported unfavorably upon it, but introduced a bill prohibiting all sales north of the Custom House after the first of July last. I opposed the passage of the Ordinance, because I thought it uncalled for and impolitic. Sales of slaves should be conducted in the most open and public manner. They are thus always subjected to the scrutiny and judgment of public opinion, which must have a tendency to restrain abuses which cupidity and inhumanity might venture upon if such matters were transacted out of sight—in a corner—but which they dare not practice in the full view of a high minded community. If there be objections

¹³ *Proceedings*, Mar. 2, 1841 (*SP*, Mar. 4, 1841).

¹⁴ *Proceedings*, Jan. 31, 1842 (*SP*, Feb. 2, 1842).

¹⁵ *Proceedings*, Nov. 28, 1848 (*CDC*, Nov. 30, 1848); Dec. 29, 1848 (*CDC*, Jan. 1, 1849); and Jan. 2, 1849 (*CDC*, Jan. 3, 1849).

¹⁶ *Proceedings*, Feb. 5, 1856 (*CDC*, Feb. 7, 1856) and Apr. 15, 1856 (*CDC*, Apr. 24, 1856).

V
2
7
—
2

J
E

8

1

UMI

to the blocking up or obstructing of East-Bay Street, as is alleged, in consequence of these auction sales . . . then let us show in a manner not to be mistaken, that Council in this whole matter, has been actuated, not as has been industriously circulated, but without, I am sure, the least foundation, by an mawkish and false sentiment as to the publicity of slave sales. I recommend, therefore, that the City Square be allowed the Brokers for the sale of negroes and all other property which they have hitherto been in the habit of selling North of the Custom House.¹⁷

The mayor was defeated again, for in the intervening period a new and steadily more utilized facility had come into existence.

Among the brokers petitioning for these several changes was Thomas Ryan, who as one of the commissioners of the Work House, was able to observe its rising success as a slave market. In fact, just before this operation began, Ryan had petitioned and been granted an auctioneer's commission, a license to act as a broker in the sale of all types of property, including slaves.¹⁸ Small wonder that his name appears on the petitions of 1842 and 1848. The ordinance of April 15, 1856, prohibiting sales at the northwest corner of the Custom House beginning that July 1, gave impetus to Ryan to open his mart on that date.

This brings us back to the question of 6 Chalmers Street. Those connected with the Old Slave Mart Museum have long maintained that it is Ryan's Mart, as did Frederic Bancroft in his *Slave Trading in the Old South*:

As early as July, 1856, Thomas Ryan & Son had both a salesroom which was described as "The Auction Mart in Chalmers-street, next to the German Engine House"—also a "lot" or "yard," immediately in the rear of it. They were convenient and soon met with the general favor. Before the end of the "fifties" virtually all public sales of negroes, except some by legal process, were held at what was variously called "Ryan's Mart," "the Mart in Chalmers street," and finally "The Slave Mart."¹⁹

Using Bancroft as an authoritative source, and with reliance upon Ryan's 1853 deed to the property, the present owners of the Museum offered the following description of the building and its surroundings in their application to the United States Department of Interior for National Register status:

EXTERIOR: Built by Thomas Ryan and his partner, James Marsh, the Slave Mart has a stuccoed facade with octagonal pillars at either end. In *Slave Trading in the Old South*, Frederic Bancroft describes the building as "44 by 20 feet (with a) 22 by 18 foot yard in the rear. The facade resembles nothing seen elsewhere. On either side is an octagonal pillar more than twenty feet high, with a graceful arch between them. The Mart, a salesroom with a 20 foot ceiling, was light and airy, for the space below the arch was open, so that the auction table, about ten feet long and three feet high, might be placed lengthwise near it and allow room for the spectators to pass in and out and stand either inside of the building or in the street, according to the weather." The stuccoed facade of the Slave Mart is unchanged. Alterations include extension of the rear of the building about 22 feet in 1922. In 1937 a wooden facade was inserted within the arch, a second floor added below the original roof, and the tile roof replaced with a tin roof. . . . Following the War Between the

¹⁷ *Proceedings*, Dec. 23, 1856 (CDC, Dec. 27, 1856).

¹⁸ *Proceedings*, Feb. 2, 1840 (CDC, Mar. 3, 1840).

¹⁹ Frederic Bancroft, *Slave Trading in the Old South* (Baltimore, 1931), p. 170.

States, the building was used as a tenement house and about 1922 was converted into an automobile salesroom. Old Slave Mart Museum was established in 1937.

SURROUNDING: The Old Slave Mart, 8 Chalmers Street, is located within Charleston's Historic District. Chalmers Street is paved with cobblestones and has blue flagstone sidewalks. To the west of the Slave Mart is the German Fire Engine Company building, constructed in 1851. Brokers' offices once occupied the surrounding buildings. . . . Mart originally included two additional lots and three additional buildings, a jail or "Barracoon" to house slaves prior to sale, a kitchen, and a morgue. The back two lots were cut off in 1875 and the jail, kitchen, and morgue were demolished in the 20th century. A parking lot is now located to the rear of the museum.²⁰

Despite the application's acceptance by local, state, and federal officials, a thorough investigation of the evidence has revealed a number of significant discrepancies and the interesting history of a building's passage through time. Antebellum Charleston newspapers included numerous place names on Chalmers Street connected with Ryan's Mart—"opposite Ryan's Mart," "at the Auction Mart; in Chalmers-Street," "in T. Ryan & Son's yard, Chalmers Street," "at Ryan's yard, Chalmers-st."²¹ In fact, not until early 1859, when the name of Ryan disappears from the advertisements, is a single locale—"at the Mart, in Chalmers Street"²² used.

Clearly something more (or possibly less!) than a building was situated at 6 Chalmers in the first years after the April 1856 ordinance. A check of the 1853 Ryan deed, surprisingly enough, revealed no mention of a building on the property. This touched off an extensive search through Charleston County deeds and tax records, city directories and guidebooks, and in the newspapers of the period. All that was certain was that something had taken place at the address, that it may have been connected with slave trading, and that the possible error of a noted scholar may have misled those who followed his lead. What was the origin of the museum building? Was it Ryan's Mart, of a mart of a different origin, or a building constructed for an entirely different purpose? And for how long was Ryan a part of the scene?

The earliest deed found for the property dates to March 10, 1814, recording the sale by the heirs of Jeremiah Clark to Elizabeth Sweeney, for \$500, of "all that lot piece and parcel of Land in Chalmers alley containing in Front on said alley Nineteen feet and in depth Ninety seven feet and is butting and bounding to the East on Land Rasdale to the South on said alley to the west on land of Edw. Trescot and North on lands of Abraham Sasportas."²³ Chalmers Street was, at this time, little

²⁰ Application submitted May 2, 1975.

²¹ *CDC*, June 29, 1856; Aug. 23, 1856; Sept. 30, 1856; Oct. 22, 1856; Oct. 23, 1856; Oct. 23, 1856.

²² *CDC*, Feb. 21, 1859.

²³ Charleston County, Register Mesne Conveyance, Deed Book (hereafter referred to as RMC) 1-8, pp. 195-96. We can be certain of the applicability of this and all subsequent deeds because of the plot dimensions (the approximate measurement of 19 feet fronting on Chalmers Street has not varied substantially up to the present) and the property owner-

V
2
7
/
2
J
E
8
1
UMI

more than an alley, known both as Beresford Alley, and, in a less favorable way, as "Mulatto alley," the site of "many squalid hovels" removed by the city in 1818.²⁴ Once cleared, the property became a bit more desirable, and a small but quick profit was made by Elizabeth Sweeney in her sale to John T. Vause on September 8, 1818, of "all that Lot, piece or parcell of Land in Chalmers Alley containing in the Front on said alley Nineteen feet Six Inches or thereabouts and in Depth Ninety Seven feet and is Butting and Bounding to the East on Land of to the South on said Alley to the West on Land of Edward Trescott and to the North on Lands of Abraham Sasportas."²⁵

We can only guess at the motivation, perhaps to protect his wife, or less chivalrously, some of his property, should the possibility arise of having it attached for debts, but on April 28, 1825, John Vause conveyed the property to Thomas Duggan in trust for his wife Margaret:

all that lot piece or parcel of land Situate lying and Being in Chalmers Alley in that now Number No. 8 Containing in Front in said Alley in Street Nineteen feet Six inches 19ft 6in or thereabouts and in depth ninety seven feet (97) Butting and Bounding to the east on land of to the South on Said alley in Street to the West on land of Edward Trescott & to the North on lands of Abraham Sasportas.²⁶

This is the first mention of a plot number and it should be noted that only a "lot" and not a "lot and buildings" (the legal terminology for a structure or structures) is referred to in these and in the several deeds that will follow.

Margaret Vause, on April 11, 1828, mortgaged her property to Colonel William Rouse.²⁷ How it finally left her hands is unknown, though we can speculate that she possibly failed to satisfy the mortgage and lost it at public auction, perhaps to John P. Bizen, for we learn that on November 14, 1833, Bizen assigned all his property to John H. Peters, the next title holder of 6 Chalmers.²⁸ Mr. Peters held this property until May 15, 1837, when for \$1420 Thomas Malone (a witness to the 1833 agreement) purchased "that Certain Lot of Land situate lying & Being in Chalmers Street in the said City of Charleston & State aforesaid Containing in front on Said Street 19 feet 6 inches & in depth from South to North 97 feet Butting and Bounding as followg to the South on Chalmers Street aforesaid to the West on lands of Henry Trescott to the North on

ships of those plots bounding to the north, west, and east. This necessitates complete quotation of the relevant portion of each deed as will be demonstrated throughout the narrative.

²⁴ Charles Fraser, *Reminiscences of Charleston* (Charleston, 1854), p. 116.

²⁵ RMC, A-9, pp. 411-12.

²⁶ RMC, Q-9, pp. 59-62.

²⁷ RMC, U-9, pp. 322-23.

²⁸ RMC, II-10, pp. 403-4. This brief gap in the record, as well as one we will confront shortly, further necessitates the use of the descriptive passage from each deed, if continuity is to be demonstrated.

Lands of A. Sasportas to the East on lands of E. Thwing."²⁹ In 1853, Thomas Malone sold 6 Chalmers Street to James Marsh and Thomas Ryan for an inexplicable loss, netting only \$200. Thus, on May 10, 1853, Ryan and Marsh took title to all that Lot of Land situate lying and being in Chalmers Street in the said City of Charleston and state aforesaid, containing in front on said street nineteen feet six inches and in depth from South to North Ninety seven feet. Butting and Bounding to the South on Chalmers Street aforesaid, to the West on Lands of Henry Trescot, to the North on lands of A. Sasportas and to the East on lands now or formerly of E. Thwing."³⁰

One day prior to this purchase, Ryan and Marsh acquired the adjoining property to the north, putting together a single holding, L-shaped, running from Chalmers Street through to Queen Street with the joining of the two as a single unit. The land to the north of 6 Chalmers, held by Abraham Sasportas, and conveyed by his trustee, Jacob de la Motta, consisted of "all that lot of land with a large double brick tenement and other buildings thereon, composed of two lots now or formerly known by the Nos. 13 and 15 [this numbering changed after the 1886 earthquake] on the South side of Queen Street in the City of Charleston, measuring 29 feet 8 inches on Queen Street and 172 feet in depth more or less."³¹ The building acquired from Sasportas has been identified by Bancroft and others as the jail or "Barracoon" (Portuguese for the slaves' holding area on the west coast of Africa), the place where slaves were kept prior to their sale in Ryan's Mart at 6 Chalmers Street.

As we have indicated above, slave sales appear to have taken place in at least two locations on the combined property, the "yard" or "lot" and the "Sales Rooms." In fact, auctions were held at the same time at both Ryan's "Lot" and in the "Sales Rooms." Even harder to explain, at first, was the earliest advertisement of an auction "opposite Ryan's Mart" on June 29, 1856.³² While no standard term was used before February 1859, the work "mart" does appear to have been used more frequently than any other by the end of the first year of operation. Ryan himself seems to have adopted it by January 1857, referring to an auction he was to hold "at our mart, in Chalmers Street."³³ What meaning can we ascribe to this term "mart"? Was it a building or the name applied to an entire auction complex consisting of buildings and lots? Was it several places where numerous sales could take place simultaneously? In sum, what was Ryan's Mart?

The deeds examined thus far show no building at 6 Chalmers Street as of 1853. "An Original Map of the City of Charleston," drawn 1852, also

²⁹ RMC, T-10, pp. 402-3.

³⁰ RMC, A-13, p. 89.

³¹ RMC, Y-12, pp. 558-60.

³² CDC, June 29, 1856.

³³ CDC, Jan. 14, 1857.

V
2
7
—
2

J
E

8
1
UMI

indicates a vacant lot.³⁴ The Tax Auditors' Ward Book for 1859 lists "L," or lot, to Queen Street for Ryan's property on Chalmers Street.³⁵ And finally, Ryan and Marsh's deed of sale to Z. B. Oakes on February 1, 1859, gives a confirming physical description of the property. For the sum of \$14,000, Oakes purchased

all these Two Lots' pieces or parcels of Land hereinafter described to Wit, all that Lot of Land with a large double Brick tenement and Brick Kitchen House, composed of Two Lots now or formerly known by the Numbers Thirteen and Fifteen on the South side of Queen Street in said City of Charleston, Measuring each Twenty Nine Feet Eight Inches on Queen Street, and One Hundred and Seventy Four Feet in depth from North to South, and Butting and Bounding together, to the North on Queen Street, to the South on Lands now or formerly of the German Fire Company, E. Thwing and a lot of Land hereinafter described, to the West on Land now or formerly of Estates Blum, and Henry Cobias, and to the East by Lands also all that other Lot of Land adjoining the above described Lot to the South and Fronting on Chalmers Street in said City of Charleston, measuring on Chalmers Street, Nineteen Feet, Six Inches, and in depth from North to South, Sixty Nine Feet Six Inches more or less, Butting and Bounding to the North on the lot above mentioned, to the East on Land now or formerly of E. Thwing, and to the West on land now of the German Fire Company.³⁶

All evidence pointed to only a surmisable solution when the January 25, 1859, advertisement announcing Ryan's desire to sell his property was found to read as follows:

Large Brick Building and Lot
BY THOMAS RYAN & SON,
Will be sold on Thursday next, 27th inst., at the
North side of the Exchange, at 11 o'clock,
That LARGE FOUR STORY BRICK BUILDING and LOT situated on the
South side of Queen-st, opposite Philadelphia Street, and known
as Ryan's Mart. The Lot has a large front on Queen-street, and
extends to Chalmers-street. There is also on the Lot a large
Two Story Brick Kitchen.³⁷

Ryan's Mart was not a building at 6 Chalmers, for no such building existed at this date; rather, it was the building which also contained the jail, the four-story "prison" so vividly described by Coffin. As a double four-story tenement, there was ample room to house, display, and sell slaves, that is, to incorporate both the Barracoon (Coffin's "prison") and sales-rooms (Coffin's "brokers' offices") within the same structure. Auctions advertised at the "yard" and "lot" undoubtedly took place either in the courtyard of the "Sasportas" property (containing the kitchen building and the "small room adjoining the hall," Coffin's description, probably identical with the building later identified as a mortuary) to the rear of

³⁴ Map to be found at the South Carolina Historical Society under this title.

³⁵ Charleston County, Tax Auditor, Ward Book I, 1859.

³⁶ RMC, T-13, pp. 297-98. These are the current dimensions of the Chalmers Street property, viewed at this point as a separate smaller parcel of land than it had been in 1853 and prior to that date.

³⁷ CDC, Jan. 25, 1859. This is corroborated by auction announcements using the name "Ryan's Mart" through January 1859, but only the name "the Mart in Chalmers Street" after this date (from the papers of Hutson Lee, South Carolina Historical Society).

the Queen Street building, or possibly at times in the narrow passageway at 6 Chalmers Street. It would appear less likely that this smaller area would have been used for some of the larger auctions, having been but nineteen and one-half feet in width. Rather, it probably served more as a corridor to the rear entrance of the mart building and to the adjacent courtyard. Chalmers Street was only a few steps away from Ryan's main office at 12 State Street³⁸ (where a number of other slave transactions occurred) and, thus, a logical entranceway to the sales complex (where other types of property were sold as well).

At what point, then, do we find a slave mart located at 6 Chalmers Street? At some time before 1867, Oakes' property was transferred to John Fraser & Co., the Liverpool-based shipping and trading concern, with T. D. Wagner as its local agent, and to Fraser, Trenholm & Co., with W. L. Trenholm as its resident partner. In 1867, the United States government presented a Bill of Complaint against John Fraser, et al., in the U.S. Circuit Court for the District of South Carolina, for reasons unknown, though probably connected with wartime commerce and related losses by Northern interests. A decision handed down on February 29, 1868, assigned all property held by both companies to James Robb of New York and Charles Lowndes of Charleston, as trustees of the court. It then was agreed "that all suits now pending . . . shall be stayed" until such time as the court designated. In pursuance of this action, a detailed description of all property was made. Recorded in this listing were

all those two Lots of land with the Buildings thereon Situate lying and being on the South Side of Queen Street—Measuring on Queen Street twenty nine feet eight inches (29 ft 8 in) each and from North to South in depth one hundred and Seventy four feet (174 ft) Bounded North on Queen Street South on lands of the German Fire Company, E. Thwing and Lot hereinafter described West on land now or formerly of Estate of Blum and Henry Cobia and East on land ————— also lot adjoining above to the South fronting on Chalmers Street on said Street nineteen feet six inches (19 ft 6 in) depth North to South Sixty nine feet six inches (69 ft 6 in) Bounding North on above Lot East on land now or late E. Thwing West on Land of German Fire Company
Valued as per Schedule. P \$15,000.³⁹

Finally, in 1873, the court ruled that the property was to be sold at auction; bids to be received by the Referee under seal until the first day of June, 1873.⁴⁰ So much property was being placed on the block that the government published a several dozen page booklet describing the "Sale of Valuable Real Estate." The court's description of the property, as given above, was repeated.⁴¹

It was at this point that the two previously separate properties were

³⁸ Means and Trumbull, *Charleston Directory . . . 1859* (Charleston, 1859), p. 183. The building is extant, as are a handful of others where it can be demonstrated that slaves were sold on an occasional basis.

³⁹ RMC, K-15, pp. 1, 10.

⁴⁰ *The United States vs. John Fraser & Co./Sale of Valuable Real Estate/List and Description of Property* (Charleston, 1873), pp. 1, 6, 19.

V
2
7
—
2
J
E
8
1
UMI

again separated, as Charles L. Carrington's purchase of 6 Chalmers became final on February 1, 1875. For \$400, he acquired

All the Lot piece or parcel of Land situate, lying and being on the north side of Chalmers Street in the City of Charleston and State aforesaid measuring and containing in front on said Street nineteen feet six inches (19 ft 6 in) and in depth Sixty nine feet six inches (69 ft 6 in) by the said dimensions more or less—Butting and Bounding to the North on land formerly of the said Estate of John Fraser & Co but lately sold to ^{South in} Chalmers Street aforesaid East on land now or late of E. Thwing, and West on land of the German Fire Engine Company.⁴¹

Dennis O'Neill similarly acquired the remainder of the complex for \$3,285:

All those two lots of land with buildings thereon (four story brick house) situate and lying and being on the South side of Queen Street measuring on Queen Street fifty nine feet four inches and from North to South in depth one hundred and seventy four feet Bounding North on Queen Street, South on lands of the German Fire Company, E. Thwing, and Charles L. Carrington, West on lands now or formerly of the Estates of Blum and Henry Cobia and East on land of. . . .⁴²

In a multiparty suit involving Carrington in 1877, Dennis O'Neill purchased the Chalmers Street property ordered sold by the Charleston County Court of Common Pleas, thereby reuniting the complex for the last time. Significantly, something new was added to the deed not formerly contained in any relating to this property. For \$600, Dennis O'Neill bought "all that Lot of Land with the Buildings thereon on the north side of Chalmers Street, Measuring Nineteen (19) feet six (6) inches in front by Sixty nine (69) feet six (6) inches in depth; bounding North on lands of John Fraser and Company South on Chalmers Street, East on lands of E. Thwing and West on land of the German Fire Engine Company."⁴³

Can we then date the Old Slave Mart building to the period between 1875 and 1877? The 1861 census of Charleston lists Z. B. Oakes as the owner of a brick "Slave Mart" at number 8 Chalmers. Several printer's errors appear throughout this volume—apparently accounting for the misuse of 8 rather than 6 (probable source of Miss Wilson's error)—which lists Oakes as the owner of an unoccupied brick structure at the latter address.⁴⁴ How are we to explain this contradictory evidence? Tax records appear to corroborate the existence of a structure of some kind during the Fraser-Carrington periods of ownership, the value of which fluctuated with economic conditions until it was assessed, in 1875, at \$400 for land and "house." The dimensions of the building are given as 19 feet by 69 feet,⁴⁵ which, if Bancroft's reference to the building's depth in

⁴¹ RMC, P-6, pp. 337-38.

⁴² RMC, S-16, pp. 102-3.

⁴³ RMC, G-17, pp. 219-21.

⁴⁴ *Census of the City of Charleston, 1861* (Charleston, 1861), p. 59.

⁴⁵ Charleston County, Tax Auditor, Ward Book I, 1871-1879, n.p.

V
2
7
/
2
J
E
8
1
UMI

the 1920s as only 44 feet is correct,⁴⁶ must refer to the lot size—unless the present building has undergone several metamorphoses since 1875, or even since 1881, when the plat for Ward III was drawn, showing a building occupying the entire lot and with a facade of the present shape.⁴⁷ Just to complicate matters, a "Bird's Eye View of the City of Charleston, South Carolina," drawn in 1872, shows no building east of The German Fire House at 6 Chalmers.⁴⁸ While the use of such evidence is risky, it does point at least to the insubstantial nature of the structure at that location. In 1879, a "Map of Charleston . . . [with] New Buildings and Those Materially Improved" designated the 6 Chalmers Street edifice as such a building, either new or "materially improved."⁴⁹

A search of petitions in the Proceedings of the Charleston City Council submitted by those seeking permission to build, expand, or in some way change a structure finally shed light on this problem. Z. B. Oakes had acquired the auction complex on February 1, 1859. Business at the site continued undisturbed over the next few months—in fact, it was never better. This may have prompted Oakes to petition the Council on July 19, 1859, "for leave to insert, in the east wall of the German Fire Company's house in Chalmers-street, the roof timbers of a shed he is about erecting for an auction mart. Referred to the Committee on Brick and Wooden Buildings, to confer with the Board of Fire-Masters."⁵⁰ The Committee approved the use of the Fire House, but modified Oakes' plan.

The Committee on Brick and Wooden Buildings, to whom was referred the petition of Mr. Z. B. Oakes, with instructions to confer with the Board of Fire Masters, would beg leave respectfully to report that they have had a conference with a Committee of that Board, and they have unanimously come to the conclusion to recommend to Council, that leave be granted—Mr. Oakes to insert Brick-Trusses in the East-wall of the German Fire Engine Company's House, for the purpose of supporting the roof timbers of the shed he is erecting, during the pleasure of Council, and to be removed at any time when desired by them, without cost to the city.⁵¹

⁴⁶ Bancroft, *Slave Trading*, p. 170.

⁴⁷ Found at the Charleston City Archives.

⁴⁸ Drawn and published by C. Drie, 1872, and found in the South Carolina Historical Society.

⁴⁹ Found at the Charleston City Archives.

⁵⁰ *Proceedings*, July 19, 1859 (CDC, July 21, 1859).

⁵¹ *Proceedings*, Aug. 2, 1859 (CDC, Aug. 5, 1859). There is a discrepancy between tradition and fact regarding the German Fire Company and its engine house. Few records remain from this volunteer company, operating under city auspices and financial assistance. Plaques on the building record its being "Instituted" in 1830, presumably begun ("German Fire Company") 1831, and "Incorporated" 1833. These dates are apparently erroneous. On August 24, 1838, Ken Boyce sold a lot of land to the city (RMC, V-10, p. 332) on which was constructed a fire house for use by the German Fire Company (*Proceedings*, Dec. 3, 1838; CDC, Dec. 5, 1838) of "recent formation," though still without a charter on April 6, 1839 (*Proceedings*, Apr. 6, 1839; CDC, Apr. 10, 1839). On December 29, 1849, a petition for a new fire house was submitted to the City Council by the German Fire Engine Company (*Proceedings*, Dec. 29, 1849; CDC, Dec. 31, 1849). Discussion continued for

This was the "Slave Mart" in Coffin's eye-witness account. While other "sheds" of the period were merely frames supporting a roof, affording protection from sun and rain, Oakes built a more substantial structure for his thriving business. Coffin's description states its dimensions as approximately 60 feet by 20 feet, though in actuality it probably extended for an additional nine feet in length, having made use of the wall enclosing the yard adjacent to Ryan's Mart/Jail for the rear of the shed, its door having led into this yard and beyond it to the Barracoon. Coffin, however, fails to draw a complete picture of the shed's facade, beyond its iron gates, sign, and gilt star. For this we can draw upon a contemporary structure, also erected for commercial use. We know that a "shed" was constructed in several stages during the 1840s as extensions of the public market. The extant rear of its final extension located on Market Street and East Bay consists of two columns connected by an intervening brick archway. This is the general shape of the front of the present museum building. The basic difference between the two structures is stylistic. Where the rear entrance to the market is an undistinguished flat brick, the Slave Mart columns are octagonal. It appears that when constructed (probably as a part of the required "Brick Trusses" in 1859), it was made to blend architecturally with the building from which it sought support, the city-owned German Fire Engine House, which was similarly framed by two octagonal columns, made of brick and having a stuccoed facade. Four additional brick columns are to be found upon examining the interior of the present structure. These descend in height (two on the east, two on the west) as they move away from the facade, indicating a pitched roof of a height lower than the present structure, stopping midway up the extant walls. Beams probably ran from the facade to the rear wall, resting on these pillars, with planks placed across the beams to create a roof.

The presence of a "shed" explains the "house" (a generic term for a structure of any kind) listed in the Tax War Book during the Fraser-Carrington periods. It also explains the use of the single term "mart" in newspaper advertisements after the shed's construction. However, on November 19, 1860, Wilbur & Sons opened a "new and commodious Brokers' Exchange building . . . supplying a long felt want among Brokers for a mart for the sale and disposal of Bonds and Stocks, Real Estate and Negroes." Among those celebrating, even purchasing a banner for the occasion, was Z. B. Oakes.⁵² After this date, we cannot be

some time, the suggestion of moving to a larger plot at another location made (*Proceedings*, May 20, 1850; *CDC*, May 22, 1850) and rejected (*Proceedings*, May 10, 1850; *CDC*, June 8, 1850). On March 11, 1851, the city purchased an adjoining plot to the Chalmers Street property (RMC, L-11, p. 50). By June of that year construction on the new larger fire house had begun (*Proceedings*, June 10, 1850; *CDC*, June 13, 1851). Damaged in the earthquake of 1860, it was abandoned for a new facility at the corner of Meeting and Wentworth Streets. On November 11, 1891, the fire house at 8 Chalmers Street was sold to the Carolina Light Infantry (RMC, F-21, p. 70).

CDC, Nov. 19, 1860.

certain whether the "Mart in Chalmers street" refers to No. 8 or to No. 2, Wilbur & Sons Exchange. Add to this the knowledge that slave sales were now going on at the north and south corners of State and Chalmers Streets, out of doors, and at several locations on State Street itself, and we are left with a picture of a busy mart running up State from Broad Street to the corner of Chalmers, and then down to number 6, on both sides of the street, with Oakes' place of business (the entire complex) but one of a number of locations used for the sale of slaves.⁵³ Coffin attests to this. For how long these sales took place at Oakes' complex we do not know. We know only that slave auctions ended at the "Mart in Chalmers Street" in November 1863. This would explain the rifled state of the building in 1865, having been abandoned for over a year.

What, then, can we say with certainty about the relation between Oakes' shed and the museum building? It can be demonstrated with reasonable certainty that the front portion of the museum building and the exposed front four pillars are of antebellum origin, as are the "Brick Trusses" of a shed erected for slave auctions on a lot previously used as a passageway to Ryan's Mart and its courtyard. The rear of the shed, the yard's wall, disappeared after Bancroft's visit in the early part of this century—the present rear wall having been erected when the building was extended some 22 feet in the 1920s. The west wall, shared by the Fire House, remains today as it was then. The east wall's origin, however, necessitated further documentary searching, which at the same time uncovered evidence that appears to substantiate much of what we had concluded from other sources.

A report by the architect and the engineer hired by the City of Charleston to survey the damage of the 1886 earthquake resulted in the following data on this property:

6/North Side Chalmers/ D. O'Neill, Store/ Brick [building] / Tin [Roof] / 35 [Feet Long] / 20 [Feet Wide] / 22 [Feet High] / [Condition of Walls] [North] Boarded/ [South] Partition Boarded/ [East] Cracked/ [West] Division/ [Condition of Chimney or Flues] Good. This was an open passageway, and was boarded in for tenement purposes.⁵⁴

An extremely significant document, it points to the next stage in the building's development: the original brick, arched façade, herein called the "Partition," remained, but its gates had been removed, replaced by wooden boards. Aside from this front wall, at some time after 1865, the property reverted essentially to its original configuration, that of a passageway to the main area of the Ryan's Mart complex. The west wall shared with the Fire House, to which some of the "Brick Trusses" (the façade and the two west pillars) were anchored, was intact; and an east wall, made of brick (having "Cracked"), had been added at the time of

⁵³ Cf. numerous advertisements in CDG, 1859-1863.

⁵⁴ W. H. Parkins and Fred S. Stewart, Inspectors, *Record of Earthquake Damages* (Charleston, 1886), p. 43.

V
2
7
/
2

J
E

8

1

UMI

the "boarding-in." It is also likely that the original roof had been taken down in the closing days of the Civil War or during Reconstruction when wood was sorely needed, in which case the tin roof had probably been added when the structure was converted into a tenement.

All this would explain the fact that not until Dennis O'Neill purchased the property in 1877 is a building mentioned in a deed. Apparently Charles Carrington was responsible for the construction of the tenement at 6 Chalmers Street by enclosing the facade (whose present appearance may be a true reproduction of Carrington's work, as a 1907 photograph appearing in Bancroft shows a similar design)⁵⁵ and adding an east wall, a new roof, and a chimney or flue. The tax records appear to confirm this, as the assessed value of the property jumped from \$400 in 1875 to \$1,600 in 1876.⁵⁶ So, too, does the plat of Ward III, the map of "materially improved" Charleston, and the Sanborn Insurance Map of 1888 based upon it.⁵⁷ (This last map, however, failed to reflect the shortening of the building by 1886—having used the 1881 plat book as its model. A new rear wall, and perhaps a second new roof, were apparently added when O'Neill converted the structure into a shop for himself, as indicated by the earthquake report.) The city directories point to 6 Chalmers Street's having been "boarded in for tenement purposes." As late as the 1875-1876 edition, no mention is made of 6 Chalmers Street. Presumably, it was vacant. Not until 1878 do we read of tenants.⁵⁸

On its way to becoming the Old Slave Mart Museum, 6 Chalmers Street underwent several more changes in ownership and occupancy. The Charleston County Court of Common Pleas ruled against Dennis O'Neill, ordering his property to be sold at auction; on January 24, 1899, John C. Simonds paid \$520 for "all that Lot of land with the buildings thereon situate lying and being on the North side of Chalmers Street in the City of Charleston State aforesaid measuring Nineteen (19) feet six (6) inches in front by Sixty nine (69) feet six (6) inches in depth Bounding North on lands of John Fraser & Company South on Chalmers Street east on lands of E. Thwing and West on lands of the German Fire Engine Company."⁵⁹ The building continued to be occupied as a tenement through 1916,⁶⁰ becoming vacant (or at least without a listing in the city directories) until 1927, when Earl Fischer Auto Repair Company moved in. During this period ownership changed hands, as when Elizabeth Baker purchased 6 Chalmers on October 16, 1917, for \$500.⁶¹

Following upon Miss Wilson's published *Strolls*, the city directory list-

⁵⁵ Bancroft, *Slave Trading*, photograph facing p. 170.

⁵⁶ Charleston County, Tax Auditor, Ward Book I, 1875-1876, n.p.

⁵⁷ Charleston Sanborn Insurance Map, 1888, p. 11.

⁵⁸ Sholes' *Directory of the City of Charleston* (Charleston, 1878), p. 377.

⁵⁹ RMC, F-23, pp. 172-73.

⁶⁰ Walsh's *South Carolina, 1916, City Directory* (Charleston, 1916), p. 115.

⁶¹ RMC, T-28, p. 52.

ed the building at 6 Chalmers as "The Slave Mart" for the first time, even though the auto repair shop continued to occupy it for another year.⁶² Three years later, the Slave Mart was the sole name listed at 6 Chalmers, already an accepted landmark. In 1938, Miriam Wilson exhibited a bill of complaint in The Charleston County Court of Common Pleas against Mary Baker. The court ordered the real estate to be sold, and on March 9, it was purchased by Miss Wilson.⁶³ Several months later, after restoration was completed, the Old Slave Mart Museum opened to the public.

Miriam Wilson died on July 7, 1959. Her will, dated June 12, 1948, bequeathed the Slave Mart to the Charleston Museum, which declined the terms of the gift. It then passed to the Vestry and Wardens of St. Paul's Church, Radcliffeboro, which had in the meantime merged with St. Luke's Church in April 1951. The present owners and directors, Judith Chase and Louise Graves, friends of Miss Wilson, acquired a lease for the Museum from the Church in an effort to continue its founder's work. On June 12, 1964, they paid \$7,000 for much more than merely "all that lot of land with the buildings thereon."⁶⁴

There can be no question that 6 Chalmers Street is historically significant, worthy to be designated as such by the Nation Register, though with modifications in its description and history as detailed above. That portion of the present structure which is almost certainly of antebellum origin stands upon ground made sacred by the travail of those who passed over it in bondage. They, the ground they walked, and the structure they occupied are an important part of America's heritage which must be protected by the force of historical accuracy.

⁶² Walsh's 1931-1932 *Charleston, South Carolina, City Directory* (Charleston, 1931), p. 60.

⁶³ RMC, W-23, p. 311.

⁶⁴ RMC, L-81, p. 432.

V
2
7
1
2
J
E
8
1
UMI