

Morris Street: Origins and Geography

Morris Street marks the boundary between the Cannonborough-Elliottborough and Radcliffeborough neighborhoods and runs east/west in an area once known as the Charleston Neck. Historically, the Neck was a mix of marshland and high ground, and a tidal marsh bisected Morris Street at its center. Though it is now infilled, the topography of the area made it a strategically important military position. During the American Revolution, the British dug parallel siege lines on either side of Morris Street.

Morris Street was originally part of the almost sixteen-acre farm of Englishman William Elliott of Berkley. In April 1812, Ann Elliott Morris and her husband Colonel Lewis V. Morris inherited the farm from her father William Elliott of Accabee Plantation (William Elliott of Berkley's son). Upon Ann Morris' death in 1849, her estate was auctioned, prompting the development of Morris Street.¹ One notable early development was DeReef Court, an African-American residential community established in 1854 and located on the north side of Morris Street between present-day Felix and Smith streets. The developers of DeReef Court were brothers Joseph and Richard Edward DeReef free men of color and successful entrepreneurs who acquired their fortunes by starting a lumber factory and purchasing real estate.

From the late-1860s through the mid-twentieth century, Morris Street was a thriving business district where Charleston's minority populations lived, worked, worshipped, and rallied. Several German and Eastern European Jewish immigrants had grocery stores that specifically catered to the city's black population that were otherwise discriminated against in most public spaces. For many African-American physicians, pharmacists, lawyers, and entrepreneurs, Morris Street was one of the central business districts of the city. The street was also a cultural corridor where education, religion, and civil protest thrived.

¹ Brittany Lavelle, "13 Morris Street: Additional Information," Historic Charleston Foundation, Charleston, SC.

The Simonton School, 63-81 Morris Street: 1865, demolished 1970s

Segregation in the United States fostered an unprecedented duplication not only of businesses, but also of cultural institutions, including educational and religious facilities. The Simonton School, originally the Morris Street School, opened on March 4, 1865 as the first public school for African-American children in Charleston.

By the end of its first month, the school had more than 900 students, a number that continued to grow throughout the late nineteenth-century prompting the construction of the Shaw School on Mary Street. In December 1891, the name of the school was changed to the Simonton School in honor of Charles H. Simonton, a judge and commissioner of the City Board of Public Schools.²

In 1896, the Supreme Court case *Plessy v. Ferguson* determined that separate facilities were constitutional, upholding the legality of segregation in the United States for another half-century.³

Although *Brown v. The Board of Education* effectively overturned *Plessy v. Ferguson* in 1954, the ambiguous language of the Supreme Court decision allowed states to delay integration. Charleston's school system remained segregated until 1963, following the decision of Judge Robert Martin in *Millicent Brown et al v. Charleston County School Board District 20*.⁴

Morris Street Baptist Church, 25 Morris, 1865, 1902, 1969

Prior to the Civil War and the emancipation of slaves, segregated churches were uncommon. Following emancipation, African Americans formed separate churches where they could practice Christianity freely. These newly formed churches, often established by members of existing white congregations, were not only sites for religious worship, but also became beacons of community engagement and African-

² *Charleston Courier*, 6 April 1865.

³ PBS, "Plessy v. Ferguson," *The Rise and Fall of Jim Crow*, http://www.pbs.org/wnet/jimcrow/stories_events_plessy.html (accessed 30 July 2015).

⁴ Millicent Brown and John Hale, *Somebody Had to do It*, Lowcountry Digital History Initiative, http://ldhi.library.cofc.edu/exhibits/show/somebody_had_to_do_it (accessed 18 Aug 2015).

American culture, as well as advocates for civil rights.⁵ Morris Street contains two historic African-American congregations, which formed on the heels of emancipation: Morris Street Baptist Church and Morris Brown AME.

Morris Street Baptist Church was organized in 1865 when 150 members of the First Baptist Church broke away from the congregation to meet in the building on Morris Street then owned by First Baptist.

Preaching since ca. 1851, Reverend Jacob Legare led the church, which was one of the largest African-American churches in the city by the early 1880s. To accommodate its growth, several additions were made to the original building.

Then in 1902, the congregation constructed a new, Romanesque Revival church building. The congregation continued to grow in the twentieth century and became a site of community uplift and civil rights organization. In 1963, civil rights activists met at Morris Street Baptist Church to demand basic rights and freedoms including the "use of courtesy titles, equal employment opportunities, desegregation of fitting rooms and rest rooms," among others. In February 1964, the 1902 church building burned. From 1964 to 1969, the Morris Street Baptist congregation held worship services in Simonton School. During this time, the church commissioned architect Augustus E. Constantine to design the Neoclassical-style building that stands at 25 Morris Street today.

Morris Brown AME, 13 Morris, 1867, 1882, 1967, 1985

The Morris Brown AME Church was organized in 1867 by Reverend Richard Harvey Cain, formerly a pastor of Emanuel AME Church, whose membership had grown to an overwhelming size. The building was purchased from the Zion Evangelical Lutheran Church in 1866, and was enlarged by 1882 to accommodate Morris Brown AME's growth. In the early twentieth century, the church building was again

⁵ Lourie F. Maffly-Kipp, "An Introduction to the Church in the Southern Black Community," *Documenting the American South*, University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, May 2001, <http://docsouth.unc.edu/church/intro.html> (accessed 3 Sept. 2015).

expanded and apartments for senior members [The Morris Brown Home] were constructed at the rear of the property.

Under the supervision of contractor H. A. DeCosta, Morris Brown AME Church was renovated in 1957 and 1985. Not only was the congregation regarded as one of the strongest African-American congregations in the city, but the church was also the site of rallies for local civil rights efforts in the mid-twentieth century. Notably, the Morris Brown AME Church served as a meeting place for the Hospital Worker's Strike in 1969. In the wake of the June 2015 shooting at Emanuel AME Church, Morris Brown AME again served as a place for community uplift.⁶

13 Morris Street: The Missionary Record

Another important outlet that shaped and responded to African-American culture following the emancipation was the black press. At least five newspapers were published for and by African Americans in Charleston from 1865 to 1900. Among the five was the *Missionary Record*, which Reverend Cain of Morris Brown AME published and edited in the church's dependency building, numbered 11.5 Morris Street. The *Missionary Record*, which started as The South Carolina Leader in 1865, was a significant news source and outlet for African Americans and included articles relating to state and national news, especially regarding education and civil rights, as well as advertisements for local African-American-owned businesses.⁷ While the precise dates of publication are unknown, copies from 1868 to 1879 exist and some have been digitized and made available online through the Library of Congress. Unfortunately, the buildings at 11 and 11.5 Morris were demolished by 1951.

⁶ "The Colored Churches of Charleston," News and Courier, 1881/1882, Pamphlets 1837-1882, compiled by E. Willis, The Library Society, Charleston, South Carolina.

⁷ For a complete list of historic African-American newspapers digitized by the Library of Congress through the Chronicling America project see: <http://chroniclingamerica.loc.gov/newspapers/?state=ðnicity=African+American&language> (accessed 3 Sept 2015).

Immigrant and African-American Relationships on Morris Street

Since the 1870s, at least a quarter of the Morris Street population was made up of German, Greek, and other Eastern European immigrants. From 1900 to 1925, the total population of Jewish immigrants in Charleston doubled. Many of these immigrants owned and operated businesses along King Street north of Calhoun Street, including clothing, grocery, and furniture stores.⁸ Morris Street had a particularly high concentration of immigrant-owned grocery stores.⁹ While black-white relations during Jim Crow were tenuous, immigrant minorities and blacks lived and worked in relative harmony. Many German immigrants opened stores that sold goods almost exclusively to African Americans, while other public spaces excluded or discriminated against the black population.¹⁰

60 Morris Street has been the site of two important commercial buildings that catered to the minority population that lived on and near the Morris Street Business District. From the 1920s to the 1950s, Andrew Andreatos Grocery Store stood at the northwest corner of Morris and Felix Streets. Andreatos emigrated from Cephalonia, Greece to the United States in 1914, and by 1924 opened his grocery store on Morris Street. In 1963, the property at 60 Morris Street was transferred to Benjamin and Albert Brooks, prominent businessmen and investors who owned several businesses that served the African-American residents and visitors of Charleston. On this site, the Brooks Brothers constructed a hotel that served the African-American community and civil rights activist during the mid-twentieth century.

Morris Street Business District: Medicine

Morris Street Business District included several offices of African-American physicians, dentists, and pharmacists. Most notably, the southwest corner of Morris and Smith Streets included the offices of several African-American physicians including dentist Alywood Cornwell and physicians M. A. Sanders, W. M. Thorne, and Thomas Carr McFall. The corner was also the site of the John Allan McFall's Pharmacy, a community landmark and one of the longest-running African-American businesses in the

⁸ Stuart Rockoff, Dale Rosengarten, and Alyssa Neely, "Charleston Jewry: 320 Years and Counting," *Jewish Historical Society of South Carolina*, Volume XIV, No. 2, Fall 2009, 4-6.

⁹ Statistical information was gathered from Charleston City Directories from the 1870s to the 1970s.

¹⁰ Jeffery G. Strickland, *Ethnicity and Race in the Urban South: German Immigrants and African-Americans in Charleston during Reconstruction*, (Ph.D. Diss.: Florida State University, 2003), 64.

community, from 1900 to the early-1950s. African-American physicians and doctors in the South during Jim Crow had a particularly high level of import and influence in black communities that stemmed from their level of education, wealth, and independence from white society.¹¹ The McFalls, for example, were significant members of Charleston's black community who advocated teaching positions for African Americans in public schools and helped establish the McClennan-Banks Memorial Hospital. Dr. Thomas Carr McFall served as Medical Director of the McClennan-Banks Memorial Hospital. The hospital, which opened in 1956 as the successor to the Hospital and Training School for Nurses, provided a place for African-American physicians to practice and treat black patients.¹²

Morris Street Business District: Beauty Culture

Beauty parlors and barber shops also held a significant place in black communities in the Jim Crow South. Beauty culture offered black women one of the few occupations available outside of agricultural, industrial, or service-oriented positions, and also served as the place for cultivation of black female identity in the early to mid-twentieth century.¹³ Several women in the area, including Leonora Beard, wife of Morris Brown AME Reverend Jesse E. Beard, studied the Poro System, a nationally-known beauty care line invented by Annie Malone. Mrs. Beard was one of the first to bring the Poro System to Charleston.¹⁴ In the 1930s, Ethyl Richard Brown established the Palmetto Beauty Culture School at 155 Coming Street, just a few blocks from Morris Street.¹⁵ For black men, barbering was an occupation that provided a degree of economic independence and achievement. African Americans required a public pace

¹¹ Thomas J Ward, *Black Physicians in the Jim Crow South*, (Fayetteville: University of Arkansas Press, 2003).

¹² "McClennan Banks Hospital & Training School for Nurses," an online exhibition of the Waring Historical Library, Medical University of South Carolina Library, (Charleston, SC: Waring Historical Library, 2012), <http://waring.library.musc.edu/exhibits/McClennanBanks/> (accessed 22 July 2015).

¹³ Julia Kirk Blackweider, *Styling Jim Crow: African American Beauty Training during Segregation*, (College Station, TX: Texas A&M University Press, 2003).

¹⁴ Mamie Garvin Fields and Karen Fields, *Lemon Swamp and Other Places: A Carolina Memoir*, (New York: The Free Press, 1983), 187-189.

¹⁵ Ethyl Richards Brown Papers, Avery Research Center, Charleston, South Carolina.

where they could gather outside the surveillance and purview of whites. The barber shop, and likely the beauty shop for women, became this public/private space for socialization and political discourse.¹⁶

Morris Street Business District: Goods and Services

Morris Street was also home to several African-American owned businesses that provided goods and services ranging from grocery stores to music schools.

Music teacher James D. Parker lived in 26 Morris Street from the 1890s through the early twentieth century. In January 1900, Parker advertised piano, organ, and vocal lessons given from his residence on Morris Street in the *Afro-American Citizen*. The same issue of the *Afro-American Citizen* publicized the Parker Concert Company's upcoming show at Emanuel AME Church. The *Afro-American Citizen*, thought to have been published from 1899 to 1902, was an African-American owned newspaper published in Charleston. The January 17, 1900 issue is the single surviving copy that has been uncovered to date.

Like many of the buildings on Morris Street the southeast corner of Morris and Smith Streets (166 Smith) was the location of several different businesses during the early twentieth century. From the turn of the twentieth century through the mid-1910s, John A. Sanders managed a corner grocery at 166 Smith, and also resided in the building with his wife Paralee and their children. Sander's advertised his grocery in *The Afro-American Citizen*. Following Sanders, Horace G. Ilderton became proprietor of the corner grocery until ca. 1924. In the 1930s, the building was converted into a barbershop for James W. Brockington. The two-and-a-half-story building shared the block with Simonton Public School, which expanded its campus in in the early 1940s resulting in the demolition of several buildings at the southeast corner of Morris and Smith Streets, including 166 Smith. Today, a three-and-a-half-story residential building stands at the site of 166 Smith, constructed in 2007 by Smith Morris Company LLC.

¹⁶ Quincy Terrell Mills, *'Color-Line' Barbers and the Emergence of a Black Public Space: A Social and Political History of Black Barbers and Barber Shops, 1930-1970*, Ph.D. Diss.: University of Chicago, 2006.

Morris Street Business District: Hospitality and the Brooks Brothers

In 1963, Benjamin and Albert Brooks, purchased the site of the former Andreatos Grocery Store on the northwest corner of Felix and Morris Streets. The Brooks Brothers were prominent businessmen and investors who owned several businesses that served the African-American residents and visitors of Charleston. The Brooks Motel, constructed ca. 1963, was the lodging place for several national figures in the Civil Rights Movement including Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. who stayed there in 1963, as well as participants in the Charleston Hospital Workers Strike of 1969. In September 2000, the Brooks Motel was demolished for the construction of several residential buildings. The one-story brick veneer and stuccoed building at 56 Morris Street is one of the only remaining buildings that is representative of a commercial and real estate conglomerate owned and operated by Benjamin and Albert Brooks. In addition to their hotel and real estate business, the Brooks Brothers owned residential rentals and restaurants on and near Morris Street.

Changes on Morris Street: The Automobile

In the late-1930s, the first fueling station was introduced to the Morris Street Business District. Gas stations increasingly occupied street corners throughout the mid-twentieth century and were symbols of the transportation revolution. In addition to the Robert F. Morrison's Esso Station on the southwest corner of Morris and Coming Streets, Morris Street also had several automobile repair shops including Dave's Paint and Body Shop, which operated at 51 Morris Street from the mid-1940s to the 1960s.¹⁷

Changes on Morris Street: White Flight and Suburban Development

Beginning in the mid- to late-1920s, the number of African-American businesses on Morris Street significantly increased, while the number of immigrant-owned businesses and eastern European residents decreased. The shift in Morris Street's population is indicative of several trends: the migration of city residents to the suburbs, and the increasing efforts to racially segregate all aspects of public and private

¹⁷ For more on the history and preservation of gas stations see: Chad Randl, *Preservation Brief 46: The Preservation and Reuse of Historic Gas Stations*, National Park Service, September 2008, <http://www.nps.gov/tps/how-to-preserve/briefs/46-gas-stations.htm> (Accessed 30 July 2015).

life. Beginning in the mid-1920s, areas west of the Ashley River were developed into some of West Ashley's earliest residential suburbs. As suburban living became popular, Charleston's Jewish population began to move into the South Windermere neighborhood of West Ashley. In the 1960s and 1970s, cultural institutions, including the Jewish Community Center and Emanu-El Synagogue, moved to the area demonstrating the shift in Charleston's demographics.¹⁸ Although African Americans began to make strides for civil rights during this period, where *de jure* segregation was outlawed, *de facto* segregation was sustained or increased, resulting in "white flight" to the suburbs and more dense African-American populations in the city. The increase in consumer culture of the mid-twentieth century and removal of the immigrant-owned businesses that served the city's black residents left an economic whole to fill. Black entrepreneurs opened restaurants, hotels, and clothing and grocery stores on Morris Street, both contributing to the economy of the neighborhood and filling the void in goods and services available to Charleston's African-American residents and visitors.

Changes on Morris Street: The Civil Rights Movement in Charleston

Morris Street was not just a cultural and commercial corridor. Its residents, institutions, and even businesses were politically involved in the Civil Rights Movement that swept the American South in the mid-twentieth century. Both Morris Street Baptist Church and Morris Brown AME held rallies for strikes and protests in Charleston, and the Brooks Motel on the corner of Felix and Morris Streets provided accommodations for national Civil Rights figures and local movement leaders. In October 1944, the newly formed Cigar Factory union held their first meeting in Morris Street Baptist Church, which set the stage for the Cigar Factory Strike of 1945-1946. Morris Street Baptist and Morris Brown AME also served as the meeting place for Civil Rights activists for both the Charleston Movement in 1963 and the Charleston Hospital Workers Movement in 1969. For both landmark events in Charleston's Civil Rights

¹⁸Stuart Rockoff, Dale Rosengarten, and Alyssa Neely, "Charleston Jewry: 320 Years and Counting," *Jewish Historical Society of South Carolina*, Volume XIV, No. 2, Fall 2009, pg 6, http://jhssc.org/wp-content/uploads/2015/04/2009_Fall_JHSSC_Newsletter.pdf (Accessed 3 Sept 2015).

history, local advocates aligned with national figures like Martin Luther King, Jr., Coretta Scott King, and Ralph and Juanita Abernathy, making significant gains for African-American rights in South Carolina.¹⁹

After Civil Rights: The Effects of Desegregation

On July 2, 1964, the United States Congress approved and President Lyndon B. Johnson signed into law the Civil Rights Act of 1964. The act formally outlawed discrimination based on race, color, religion, sex, or national origin, required equal access to public space and employment, and enforced school desegregation and voting rights.²⁰ While the act did not completely end discrimination, it was a pivotal step toward equality and laid the foundation for progress nationwide.

Progress for the Civil Rights Movement, however, had an unintended consequence for African-American business owners. Segregation required separate facilities, stores, restaurants, and hotels for the races.

While businessmen like Albert Brooks, the co-owner of several businesses on Morris Street, acknowledged that he “would not want to go back to the way it was before,” he confessed that desegregation hurt his businesses.²¹ African Americans in Charleston, as in other places throughout the country, had the opportunity to shop in stores, dine in restaurants, and stay in hotels that were once off-limits to them. The white community, however, did not frequent black-owned businesses.²²

After Civil Rights: Demolition and Gentrification

Following desegregation, the duplication of businesses providing the same goods and services was no longer necessary, forcing many African-American-owned businesses to close their doors. The landscape of the once-thriving business district of Morris Street is, for the most part, a memory. While several buildings retain their commercial-front character, entire blocks have been demolished for the construction

¹⁹“The Charleston Movement: Walking in the Footsteps of Civil Rights,” Presentation, http://claw.cofc.edu/digital/tours_data/Charleston_Movement_Tour.pdf (accessed 13 Aug 2015); Dwana Waugh, Charleston’s Cigar Factory Strike, 1945-1946, Lowcountry Digital History Initiative, http://ldhi.library.cofc.edu/exhibits/show/cigar_factory (accessed 13 Aug 2015); Kerry Taylor, “The Charleston Hospital Workers Movement, 1968-1969,” Lowcountry Digital History Initiative, http://ldhi.library.cofc.edu/exhibits/show/charleston_hospital_workers_mo (accessed 13 Aug 2015).

²⁰ National Park Service, “Civil Rights Act of 1964,” *Civil Rights*, <http://www.nps.gov/subjects/civilrights/1964-civil-rights-act.htm> (accessed 3 Sept. 2015).

²¹ Jim Young, “Albert Brooks: Learn from Others,” *News and Courier*, 16 Mar 1982.

²² Jim Young, “Albert Brooks: Learn from Others,” *News and Courier*, 16 Mar 1982.

of modern residential buildings. In the 1970s, the Charleston County School Board sold Simonton School, and it was subsequently demolished. The lot, which encompassed the block bound by Morris, Jasper, Marion, and Smith Streets, remained empty for many years until it was redeveloped by the Smith Morris Company LLC in the early 2000s.

The mixed-use nature of Morris Street has changed through the years to that of a predominantly residential thoroughfare.

After Civil Rights: Morris Street Rallies Again

My first week on the job as the Advocacy Research Intern for Preservation Society was a tragic week for the city of Charleston and the African-American community. I had just begun my research on the churches on Morris Street when I heard on the news about the Emanuel AME shootings, and the prayer rally that took place in front of Morris Brown AME on June 18, 2015. I remember sitting at my desk on that Friday reading history in the making, realizing how relevant it was to the research I was currently doing. The images of Charlestonians gathered together on Morris Street, mourning the state of race relations, tragedy, and loss seemed like history. History I was hired to research and write about. Here are just a few of the headlines and images from that day that continue to resonate. My personal hope is that this research will not only tell the story of Morris Street, but that it will spark conversations. My hope is that this project is a catalyst, and that more information about the Morris Street Business District will be uncovered.