

House To Be 'Showplace' For Baha'is

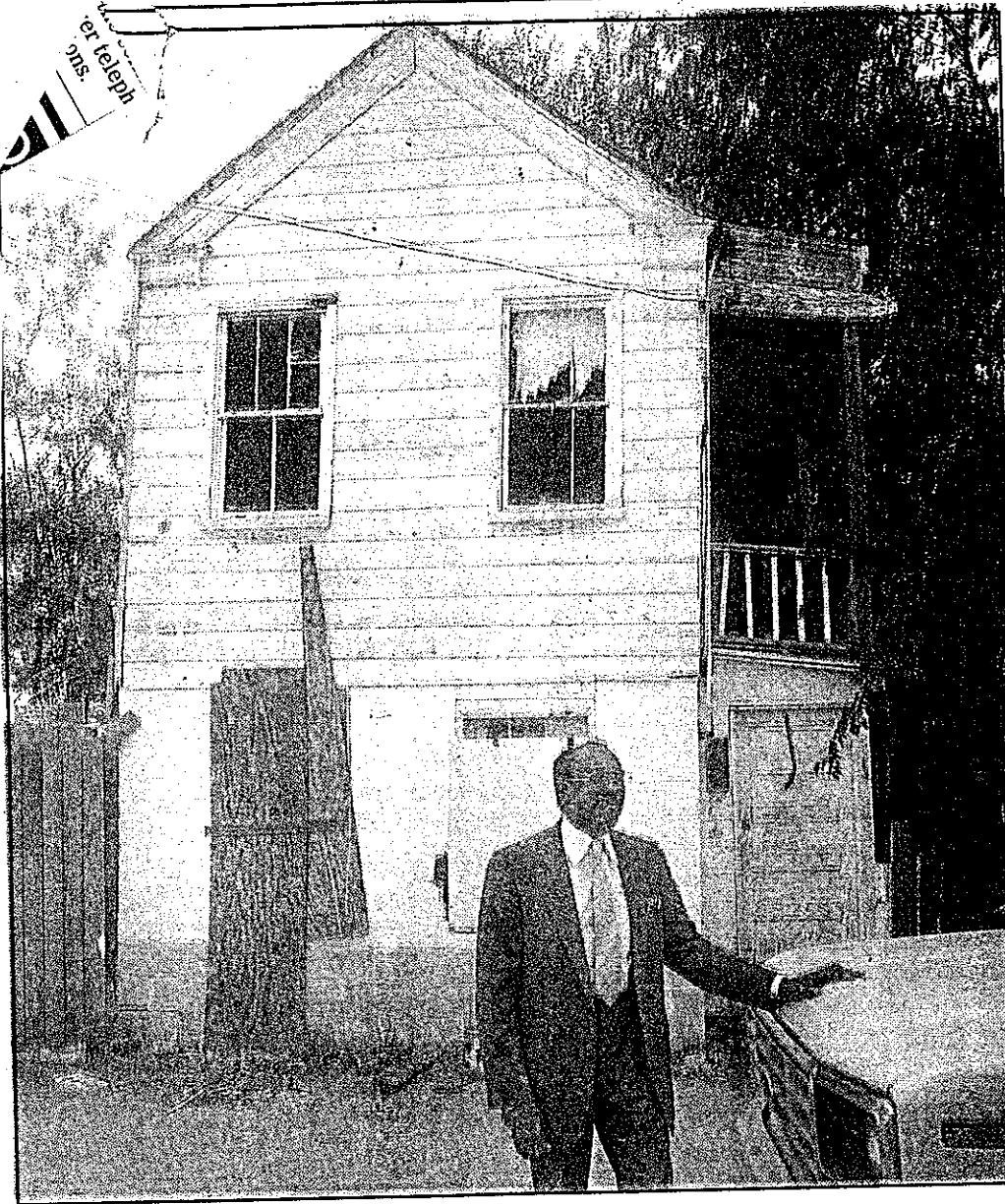
By HERB FRAZIER
Post-Courier Reporter

The restoration of a dilapidated house on Desportes Court is expected to begin in July to make it a showplace that Baha'is in the world may want to see.

The house at 2 Desportes Court is the boyhood home of Lewis G. Gregory, a black man who in 1922 was one of the original members of the faith's first National Spiritual Assembly of the United States and Canada.

The restoration of the two-story house is a project local Baha'is believe will bring recognition to Gregory outside the Baha'i community, Henry Wigfall, chairman of the Spiritual Assembly of Charleston, said Monday. Gregory is noted for unselfishly promoting the faith's belief in the oneness of man and world peace through the oneness of religion, Wigfall said.

The Baha'is purchased the Gregory home in February and they plan to spend \$70,000 to restore it and add a third floor, Wigfall said. The work is scheduled to be finished in time for a dedication during the first weekend in February to coincide with Black History



Staff Photo by Brad Nettles

Henry Wigfall stands in front of house at 2 Desportes Court.

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Month.

Wigfall said the house will be a place to display items related to Gregory's life. A portrait of Gregory, being done by Mount Pleasant artist Nina Jones, will hang in the house, he said.

Gregory was born in Charleston in 1874, and he was an 1891 graduate of Avery Institute. He graduated from Fisk University in Nashville in 1896 and returned to Charleston to teach at Avery. He received a law degree in 1902 from Howard University in Washington, D.C.

He died in 1951 after serving on the Baha'is administrative body for 24 years. The Lewis G. Gregory Institute near Hemingway was opened in 1972 to honor Gregory. The institute distributes information about the teachings of Baha'u'llah, founder of the faith. The Baha'is also own and operate radio station WLGI near Hemingway.

Gregory was introduced to the Baha'i faith while he was a lawyer in Washington. In 1911 he traveled to Egypt to meet Abdu'l-Baha, the son of Baha'u'llah, an Iranian teacher whose extensive writings are regarded by followers as revelations from God. Abdu'l-Baha referred to Gregory as noble-minded and golden-hearted.

Baha'is believe that by getting to know all people, regardless of race, religion, nation or economic status, man will be able to establish a peaceful and productive society.

This belief is based on the teachings of Baha'u'llah who wrote: "The Earth is but one country, and mankind its citizens."

Baha'is believe that Baha'u'llah (glory of God) is the latest in the series of divine messengers of God and the Promised One of all religions.

Abraham, Moses, Krishna, Buddha, Zoroaster, Christ and Muhammad were manifestations of God, according to the faith, and each of the prophets met man's needs for a period of time until another messenger arrived to show man the way to fulfillment.

Baha'u'llah, who was born in Persia in 1817, declared himself in 1863 to be the fulfillment of all the prophets of the past. He announced the advent of a new era of world unity and peace and is said to have initiated moral and spiritual reform throughout the 19th century in Persia, now known as Iran.

The faith has no priesthood or rituals. Administration is through elected bodies at local, national and international levels. Services consist of selected readings, prayers and meditations.

THIS WEEK

Restoration project

House is boyhood home of early Baha'i leader

■ **CITY INVOLVED:** Lewis G. Gregory was early adherent to faith that stresses world unity.

By **PATRICIA B. JONES**
Of The Post and Courier staff

The city of Charleston may lend a hand in a restoration project on Desportes Court.

The house at 2 Desportes Court is the boyhood home of Lewis G. Gregory, a black man who in 1922 was one of the original members of the Baha'i faith's first National Spiritual Assembly of the United States and Canada.

Because the street leading to the house is public property, the city has to approve improvements to it.

Henry Wigfall, chairman of the Spiritual Assembly of Charleston, said the Baha'is would like to see the street bricked, landscaped and lighted, as well as a street sign installed to identify it.

The Baha'is have spent more than \$100,000 to

purchase and restore the property. A third floor has been added since they purchased it in 1989.

With donations from Baha'is worldwide, the finished product will include memorabilia of Gregory's life, a conference room and library.

Wigfall said the house has been designated a museum by the city of Charleston.

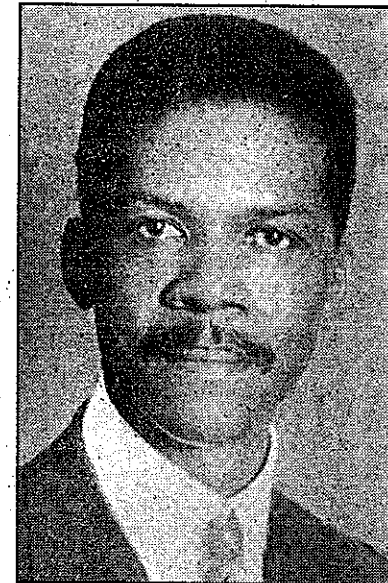
Most of the work has been done by members of the faith, Wigfall said. He added that the area is one in which most free blacks first built their homes. The property was purchased by Gregory's adoptive father during the 1900s.

The house is expected to bring recognition to Gregory outside the Baha'i community.

"Gregory dedicated his life to world unity and peace among mankind, even when his contemporaries didn't see what he saw," Wigfall said.

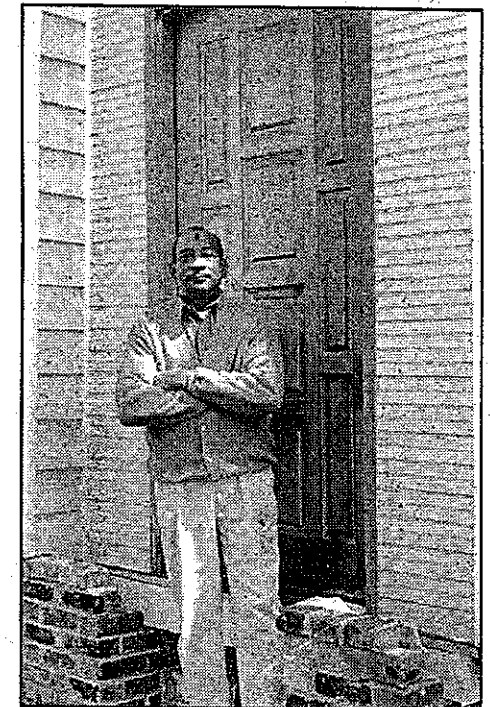
"Mayor (Joseph P.) Riley and the public service and parks departments have really worked with us and we hope to have this project completed soon."

He added that the opinions of residents living



Lewis Gregory

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Staff Photo by Patricia B. Jones

Henry Wigfall stands in front of Lewis Gregory's boyhood home at 2 Desportes Court.

HOME

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nearby will also be taken into account.

Wigfall said many Baha'is visiting the Charleston area call asking for directions to the site.

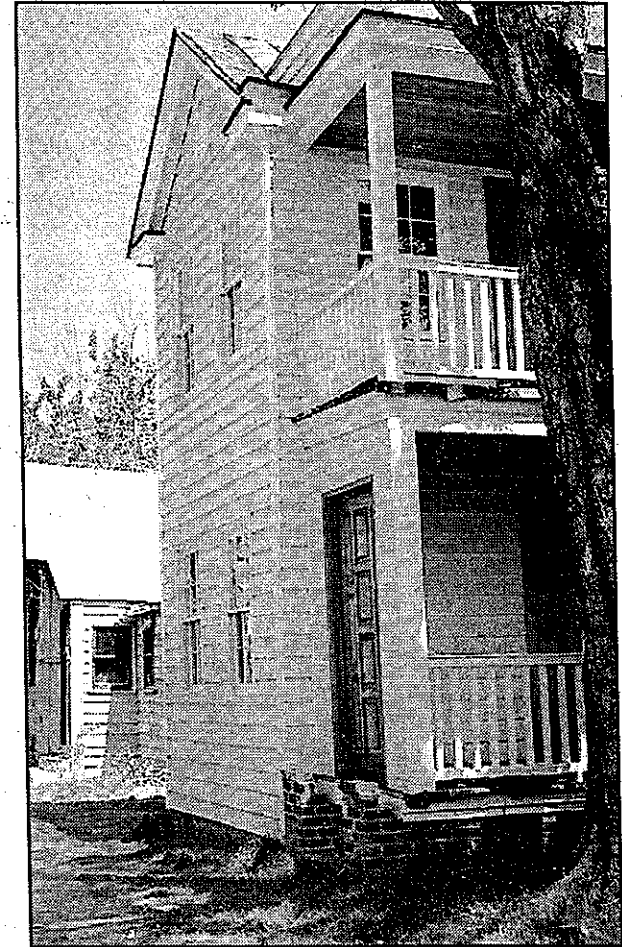
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Staff Photo by Patricia Jones

2 Desportes Court