

*The Louis G. Gregory Museum*  
2 Desportes Court



Carolyn Elizabeth Jackson  
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2 Desportes Court  
HP 611 Research Methods

*"If one wants to distinguish himself let him become distinguished as a servant of  
humanity."*

-Louis G. Gregory

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### Abstract

This report was written for the Research Methods course (HP 611) taught by Katherine Saunders in the Clemson University-College of Charleston Masters Program in Historic Preservation. The objective of the course is to prepare students to conduct their own property research by utilizing a wide number of references and resources. Course research during the Fall semester of 2009 focused its attention on properties associated in some way with African American history in Charleston, SC. The purpose of this report is to document the research gathered on 2 Desportes Court, which is currently the site of the Lewis G. Gregory Bahá'í Museum. After some initial investigation, it was determined that two significant African Americans either owned or occupied the property, and thus, the following report focuses most of its attention on their lives. While this report is in no way complete, it may provide a foundation for future research on the property.

### Historical Context

The land surrounding 2 Desportes Court was once the property of Thomas and Lucretia Radcliffe (Figure 1). After Thomas' death around 1806, his wife began to heavily develop the estate. In years following, the area was settled by three émigrés, one of which was Justice Benjamin Faneuil Dunkin, whose home was at the corner of Smith and Warren streets. Later, a nearby street took his name—although the spelling changed to “Duncan”.<sup>1</sup> Desportes Court, located right off Duncan Street, probably formed close to the year 1854 when the property, owned by the heirs of Luce Desportes, was divided and sold in auction.<sup>2</sup> During this time, many of the properties located on Desportes Court as well as on the surrounding streets were dominated by free African Americans and slaves.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Poston, Jonathan H. for Historic Charleston Foundation. *The Buildings of Charleston*. (Columbia: University of South Carolina Press, 1997). p. 617.

<sup>2</sup> Charleston County. Records of the Register Mesne Conveyance (RMC), Charleston, S.C. Plat Book A1, p. 115.

<sup>3</sup> Poston, Jonathan H. for Historic Charleston Foundation. *The Buildings of Charleston*. (Columbia: University of South Carolina Press, 1997). p. 618.

### Architectural Description

The modest, two-story building known as 2 Desportes Court is located within the Charleston Historic District in an area that once was dominated by freedmen's cottages (Figure 2). Built to house slaves sometime before 1860, the simple wooden structure runs longitudinally east to west, with a length that is five bays wide and a width that is two bays. A piazza runs along the south side of the building on both levels. The west elevation faces the court, and contains a total of four six-over-six windows (typical), two on each level. The tin roof is framed on this side with an open pediment and simple trim work. The south elevation, which opens to the piazza, is not as regular in its fenestration patterns as the west elevation. On the first level, the pattern of the first four bays from west to east reads: no opening, door, window, door. On the second level, the first four bays read: window, door, door, no opening. On both levels, the fifth bay portion of the south wall protrudes to the southern edge of the piazza and has no fenestration (Figures 3 and 4). The north and east elevations contain no windows or decoration. The exterior of the building is wood clapboard with cream-colored paint and white trim work. There are no shutters framing the windows. All doors are paneled with glazed panels at the top. The entry from Desportes Court is through a privacy door on the piazza. This piazza screen is marked by a iron sign crafted by master ironworker, Philip Simmons (Figure 5).<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>4</sup> Songer, Nancy. "Newest Charleston, SC museum celebrates African American champion of racial harmony: Louis G. Gregory Bahá'í Museum is first Bahá'í museum in the world". 01 Feb 2003. Avery Research Center for African American History and Culture Archives, Charleston, SC. p. 3.

### Summary of Findings

The history of 2 Desportes Court dates back to 1852 when the property of the heirs of Luce Desportes was divided and sold in auction (Figure 6).<sup>5</sup> 2 Desportes Court illustrates multiple facets within African American History, beginning with its purchase in 1854 by a man named Jacob Weston.<sup>6</sup> Jacob was born a free person of color around 1802. The son of a wealthy rice planter, Jacob belonged to one of the most prominent mulatto families in Charleston during the nineteenth century. He owned sixteen recorded properties as well as multiple slaves. Jacob and his family first resided on Cliffords Alley and later on Coming Street. Nearby, on Desportes Court, Jacob built two homes for his slaves, one of which was number two. Jacob died in 1864 on the brink of the Civil War. It is uncertain if his slaves remained on the property following Emancipation.

Colonel George Gregory purchased 2 Desportes Court from Caroline Weston, Jacob's second wife, in March of 1881 (Figure 7).<sup>7</sup> Col. Gregory lived the remainder of his life there with his wife, Mary Elizabeth, and her two sons, Theodore and Louis George from a previous marriage. Louis spent most of his childhood living on Desportes Court. His personal relationship and care for his stepfather was so that he later took on Gregory for his own last name. Louis Gregory attended the Avery Normal Institute, and eventually he sat on the alumni board at the school and even taught there for some time. Eventually, Gregory received a law degree from Howard University in Washington, D.C. He remained in Washington to practice law until 1909, when he left his work to devote his live to the Bahá'í Faith. He became a devoted and prominent leader of the faith, and

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<sup>5</sup> RMC, Charleston, S.C. Plat Book A1, p. 115.

<sup>6</sup> RMC, Charleston, S.C. Deed Book V12, p. 241.

<sup>7</sup> RMC, Charleston, S.C. Deed Book A19, p. 86.

in 1912, Gregory became one of the nine members of the national administrative board on which he would continue to serve until very late in life. One of the first African American leaders amongst the Bahá'ís, Gregory traveled around the country and even the world to preach on racial unity. Gregory died in 1951, but his message is still exalted within the faith today. Many schools and spiritual centers in and outside of South Carolina have taken on his name.

2 Desportes Court remained in the Gregory family until 1945, when an African American man named Ashley Perry purchased the property<sup>8</sup>. Prior to the time of purchase, the Gregory family was renting the property to a Marie Wilson.<sup>9</sup> Ashley and his wife Ethel owned the property for four years, although it was not their home. The couple resided at 142 St. Philip Street, and rented out the property on Desportes Court as well. By 1948, the property had become the Lincoln Inn Restaurant, denoted as a “colored” business in the Charleston County City Directory for that year. Ashley and Ethel were listed as employees of the Lincoln Inn, however, it is unclear if the Inn itself was located at the same address as the restaurant.<sup>10</sup> The property remained in the ownership of Ashley Perry until he sold it in 1949.

An African American man named Peter Robinson purchased 2 Desportes Court from the Perrys<sup>11</sup>. Like the Perrys, it does not seem as though Peter and his wife Geneva actually resided on Desportes Court. In city directories, the Robinsons are rather listed as residents at 62 Spring Street. Peter operated Robinson's Shoe Repair. While he owned

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<sup>8</sup> RMC, Charleston, S.C. Deed Book S45, p. 197.

<sup>9</sup> *Charleston City Directory, 1944-45*, South Carolina Room, Charleston County Public Library, Charleston, SC.

<sup>10</sup> *Charleston City Directory, 1948*, South Carolina Room, Charleston County Public Library, Charleston, SC.

<sup>11</sup> RMC, Charleston, S.C. Deed Book H51, p. 461.



the property at 2 Desportes Court, he rented it to Esau Young Jr. and his wife Rubie. Esau and Rubie's son, Esau III, was a cab driver for the Safey Cab Company.<sup>12</sup> After only two years, Peter sold the property to a Harriet King.<sup>13</sup> No information has been recovered on Harriet King.

Elijah Bishop purchased 2 Desportes Court from Harriet King in 1958 for \$3000.<sup>14</sup> Elijah and his wife Sarah may have lived with their children at 2 Desportes Court soon after they purchased the property<sup>15</sup>. Elijah operated a Construction Equipment Corporation. In 1973, record show that Elijah and his family, including son Elijah Jr. who worked at the Charleston Air Force Base, lived in a house at 1021 Ashley Avenue. During that same year, 2 Desportes Court was rented to a Leo and Bernice Gibbs<sup>16</sup> who had moved one year earlier in 1972.<sup>17</sup> Prior to that year, 2 Desportes Court had been rented to a Russell Bell in 1971.<sup>18</sup> After the Gibbs moved out, Elijah rented the property to Eugene and Eddina Gillard in 1974. Eugene was an employee of H. A. DaCosta. It was also listed that Elijah owned and operated Ashley Avenue Food Store, was a truck driver for Stark Equipment and Construction, and continued his own Construction Equipment Sales business.<sup>19</sup> Eugene and Eddina Gillard continued to rent

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<sup>12</sup> *Charleston City Directory, 1950-51*, South Carolina Room, Charleston County Public Library, Charleston, SC.

<sup>13</sup> RMC, Charleston, S.C. Deed Book R51, p. 3.

<sup>14</sup> RMC, Charleston, S.C. Deed Book T64, p. 694.

<sup>15</sup> *Charleston City Directory, 1958*, South Carolina Room, Charleston County Public Library, Charleston, SC.

<sup>16</sup> *Charleston City Directory, 1973*, South Carolina Room, Charleston County Public Library, Charleston, SC.

<sup>17</sup> *Charleston City Directory, 1972*, South Carolina Room, Charleston County Public Library, Charleston, SC.

<sup>18</sup> *Charleston City Directory, 1971*, South Carolina Room, Charleston County Public Library, Charleston, SC.

<sup>19</sup> *Charleston City Directory, 1974*, South Carolina Room, Charleston County Public Library, Charleston, SC.

from Elijah<sup>20</sup> until 1977, when a Mamie Royal moved into the home.<sup>21</sup> The following year in 1978, the property was rented by a Janet Royal<sup>22</sup>, who remained even after Elijah sold the property in 1984.<sup>23</sup> The Bishop family owned the property for 26 years—longer than anyone else since the time it left the Gregory family name.

Elijah Bishop sold the property to the so-called H & M Partnership in 1984 for \$17,000.<sup>24</sup> H & M Partnership was an entity between John C. Hawk and David Moffly. John was a physical at 30 Bee Street. He lived with his wife Nancy at 1 Meeting Street. Nancy was a law partner at Hawk & Blair that was listed once at 65b Broad Street and later at 145 King Street in Suite 228. On the other hand, the only record of a David Moffley in 1985 described a student.<sup>25</sup> A listing in 1988 makes reference to a David Moffly, a General Contractor that lived at 627 Lynne Avenue on James Island with his wife Elizabeth.<sup>26</sup> From 1986 until the time it was sold, 2 Desportes Court remained vacant under the ownership of H & M Partnership.<sup>27</sup>

H & M Partnership put their property up for sale within just a few years or purchasing it. In 1989, Henry Wigfall, a member of the Spiritual Assembly of the Bahá'ís in Charleston, purchased the property for \$29,000 under the Assembly's name in

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<sup>20</sup> *Charleston City Directory, 1976*, South Carolina Room, Charleston County Public Library, Charleston, SC.

<sup>21</sup> *Charleston City Directory, 1977*, South Carolina Room, Charleston County Public Library, Charleston, SC.

<sup>22</sup> *Charleston City Directory, 1978*, South Carolina Room, Charleston County Public Library, Charleston, SC.

<sup>23</sup> *Charleston City Directory, 1985*, South Carolina Room, Charleston County Public Library, Charleston, SC.

<sup>24</sup> RMC, Charleston, S.C. Deed Book D141, p. 357.

<sup>25</sup> *Charleston City Directory, 1985*, South Carolina Room, Charleston County Public Library, Charleston, SC.

<sup>26</sup> *Charleston City Directory, 1988*, South Carolina Room, Charleston County Public Library, Charleston, SC.

<sup>27</sup> *Charleston City Directory, 1986*, South Carolina Room, Charleston County Public Library, Charleston, SC.

recognition of its value as the childhood home of Louis Gregory.<sup>28</sup> The house remained vacant until it was opened as a museum to honor Louis Gregory in 2003 (Figure 8). It had been left in much disrepair before the time that Wigfall purchased it (Figures 9, 10, and 11). Wigfall's made successful attempts to restore the house to its original state (Figures 12 and 13). Today, the property is called the Louis G. Gregory Bahá'í Museum, which houses memorabilia of Gregory including photographs, writings and teachings, and personal items (ex: his diplomas from the Avery Normal Institute and Howard University) (Figures 14, 15, and 16). It is the only museum in the entire city that exclusively "celebrates the life of an individual".<sup>29</sup>

Although the property of 2 Desportes Court significant for celebrating the life of a national promoter of racial unity like Louis Gregory, the property is also important as it represents a history of the free persons of color community in earlier Charleston history. What is also interesting in looking at the property's history is that every owner (with the possible exception of Harriet King and H & M Partnership) and renter was an African American. Even though the real estate surrounding the property took on more diverse ownership as property values increased, 2 Desportes Court has a continued lineage in African American culture and history.

### Significance

2 Desportes Court has a rich history that can largely be attributed to the people who occupied the property. Although the property has changed owners many times since

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<sup>28</sup> RMC, Charleston, S.C. Deed Book R181, p. 450.

<sup>29</sup> Songer, Nancy. "Newest Charleston, SC museum celebrates African American champion of racial harmony: Louis G. Gregory Bahá'í Museum is first Bahá'í museum in the world". 01 Feb 2003. Avery Research Center for African American History and Culture Archives, Charleston, SC. p. 1-3.

the plot was surveyed in 1852, there are two names that stick out in the property's research: Jacob Weston and Louis Gregory. Although these two men lived in very different times, both Jacob and Louis contributed so much to the way in which blacks and whites perceive one another.

Jacob Weston, a free person of color, was born in 1802. Jacob's heritage traces back to a wealthy plantation owner, Plowden Weston. Plowden was a rice farmer near Georgetown, S.C. The mills that processed Plowden's crop were managed by his slave Toney. Ever since Toney's birth in 1791, he was singled out of the 140 slaves owned by Plowden and given special attention and even gifts. A mulatto, Toney was more than likely the illegitimate son of Plowden.<sup>30</sup> According to the research of Bill Drayton, the slave mistress of Plowden Weston was named Betsy. Betsy's children included Anthony (b. 1790), Sarah (b. 1801), Jacob (b. 1802), Samuel (b. 1804), Ann (b. 1811), and Elizabeth.<sup>31</sup> When he died in 1827, Plowden's will "made Toney...a free man by 1833". Toney then took on the name "Anthony" and became a millwright in Charleston. Sometime later, he earned enough money to buy the freedom of Maria, his wife and a house servant of Plowden, as well as his two brothers, Samuel and Jacob.<sup>32</sup> With such a family history, the members of the Weston family would advance as Charleston's brown elite after their emancipation.<sup>33</sup>

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<sup>30</sup> Johnson, Michael P. and James L. Roark. *Black Masters: A Free Family of Color in the Old South*. (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 1984), 243.

<sup>31</sup> Drayton, Bill. "The Weston/O'Hear/McKinlay/Bonneau Connection". (Sept 2007), Avery Research Center for African American History and Culture Archives, Charleston, SC.

<sup>32</sup> Johnson, Michael P. and James L. Roark. *Black Masters: A Free Family of Color in the Old South*. (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 1984), 243.

<sup>33</sup> Powers, Bernard E., Jr. *Black Charlestonians: A Social History, 1822-1885*. (Fayetteville: The University of Arkansas Press, 1994), 182.

Jacob Weston was a member of a prominent circle of free blacks and mulattos that prided their genealogical roots and family traditions. Important among these traditions was the rite of marriage. In keeping with his peers, Jacob married Sarah Ann, the daughter of Thomas S. Bonneau who was a distinguished free black plantation owner and teacher.<sup>34</sup> The church was a cornerstone in the education of young black students. Jacob and his wife Ann attended Cumberland Street Methodist Church along with Jacob's brother Samuel Weston. They dedicated themselves to leadership and teaching Sunday school. Their class was one of the earliest Sunday school groups led by free blacks.<sup>35</sup> Before Sarah Ann died in 1848, she and Jacob had three children—Charlotte (b. 1822), Samuel (b. 1832), and Jacob (b. 1840).<sup>36</sup>

Many of the Weston siblings belonged to the Brown Fellowship Society.<sup>37</sup> Jacob was a member of the Brown Fellowship Society along with his father-in-law Thomas Bonneau.<sup>38</sup> The Brown Fellowship Society was a "benevolent society" of free blacks and mulattos founded in 1790. Associated with St. Philip's Episcopal Church, the group cared for the widows and children of its deceased members by providing a place for burial as well as other services.<sup>39</sup> Although the Society claimed to be made up of both black and

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<sup>34</sup> Powers, Bernard E., Jr. *Black Charlestonians: A Social History, 1822-1885*. (Fayetteville: The University of Arkansas Press, 1994), 40-48.

<sup>35</sup> Powers, Bernard E., Jr. *Black Charlestonians: A Social History, 1822-1885*. (Fayetteville: The University of Arkansas Press, 1994), 54.

<sup>36</sup> Drayton, Bill. "The Weston/O'Hear/McKinlay/Bonneau Connection". (Sept 2007), Avery Research Center for African American History and Culture Archives, Charleston, SC.

<sup>37</sup> Powers, Bernard E., Jr. *Black Charlestonians: A Social History, 1822-1885*. (Fayetteville: The University of Arkansas Press, 1994), 182.

<sup>38</sup> Johnson, Michael P. and James L. Roark. *No Chariot Let Down: Charleston's Free People of Color on the Eve of the Civil War*. (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 1986), 28.

<sup>39</sup> "The Brown (or Century Fellowship) Society Records". Avery Research Center. <http://avery.cofc.edu/brownfellowship.htm> (accessed Jan 2010).

mulatto members, “[e]very member whose race can be identified was a mulatto”.<sup>40</sup> Jacob was also a member of the Christian Benevolent Society. Founded in 1839, the members “distributed aid to the sick, impoverished free people of color”. Jacob sat on the executive committee during the 1850s.<sup>41</sup>

The Weston family was highly regarded by the members of Charleston society, whether black or white. During the year 1860, a daughter of either Anthony or Samuel Weston was accused of “insolence” and “violence” towards a white woman, who then whipped Miss Weston and punished her. Not only was the crime ruled a misinterpretation on the part of the white woman, but the newspaper printed a notice to correct the rumors that were spreading around town, calling them “untrue”. The Courier stated on September 1st of the same year that “[t]he Westons are very respectable colored persons and esteemed in the community for their character and deportment at all times”.<sup>42</sup>

Jacob Weston, a tailor along with his brother Samuel, had a wealthy amount of real estate that included land as well as slaves. S & J Weston Tailor Shop was located at 128 Queen Street, a property shared by the two brothers.<sup>43</sup> According to the 1861 census, Jacob owned and resided at 56 Coming Street, next to Jeanette Bonneau, the mother of his late wife, who lived at 54 Coming Street, another house owned by Jacob. His properties also included 56 Coming Street, which he leased to a Margaret McGuffie (a free person of color), and 91 Coming Street, which was leased to a J. M. Howell. Maria

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<sup>40</sup> Johnson, Michael P. and James L. Roark. *Black Masters: A Free Family of Color in the Old South*. (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 1984), 213.

<sup>41</sup> Johnson, Michael P. and James L. Roark. *Black Masters: A Free Family of Color in the Old South*. (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 1984), 222.

<sup>42</sup> Johnson, Michael P. and James L. Roark. *No Chariot Let Down: Charleston's Free People of Color on the Eve of the Civil War*. (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 1986), 109-111.

<sup>43</sup> Johnson, Michael P. and James L. Roark. *No Chariot Let Down: Charleston's Free People of Color on the Eve of the Civil War*. (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 1986), 97.

Weston, the wife of his brother Anthony, owned the property next door at 89 Coming Street (unoccupied that year).<sup>44</sup> Other properties owned by Jacob were listed in research conducted by Bill Drayton. These properties include: 56 and 58 Cliffords Alley; 58 Coming Street; 1, 3, 10, 12, 23, and 25 Duncan Street, and 5 Green Street. Jacob first lived on his property at 56 Cliffords Alley before moving with his wife Sarah Ann to Coming Street.<sup>45</sup> Of course, Jacob also owned 2 Desportes Court and also 3 Desportes Court, which were both leased to his slaves. All properties owned by Jacob in 1861 were identified as having a single wooden structure on the grounds.<sup>46</sup>

In 1861, many free persons of color—sixty-one percent—lived north of Calhoun Street. However, Coming Street was the “heart of the free colored community”.<sup>47</sup> 273 free colored residents resided on this street, taking up as much as 23 percent of the dwellings there. No other street in Charleston was populated with as many free persons of color.<sup>48</sup> Although many free persons of color lived along Coming Street, they did not represent the majority of residents. For every free person of color, there were two slaves and three whites also living on Coming Street.<sup>49</sup> Quite different were the properties on Desportes Court. According to the 1861 census, 45 people lived on Desportes Court,

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<sup>44</sup> *Census of the City of Charleston, 1861*, South Carolina Room, Charleston County Public Library, Charleston, SC.

<sup>45</sup> Drayton, Bill. “The Weston/O’Hear/McKinlay/Bonneau Connection”. (Sept 2007), Avery Research Center for African American History and Culture Archives, Charleston, SC.

<sup>46</sup> *Census of the City of Charleston, 1861*, South Carolina Room, Charleston County Public Library, Charleston, SC.

<sup>47</sup> Johnson, Michael P. and James L. Roark. *No Chariot Let Down: Charleston’s Free People of Color on the Eve of the Civil War*. (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 1986), 96.

<sup>48</sup> Johnson, Michael P. and James L. Roark. *No Chariot Let Down: Charleston’s Free People of Color on the Eve of the Civil War*. (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 1986), 96-97.

<sup>49</sup> Johnson, Michael P. and James L. Roark. *Black Masters: A Free Family of Color in the Old South*. (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 1984), 226-227.

which is a considerably small street even today. Of these 45 people, 17 were free persons of color, 27 were slaves, and only one was white.<sup>50</sup>

Jacob Weston was not only a property owner, but also a slave owner. According to the slave schedules, Jacob owned one slave in 1840, two slaves by 1850, and nine slaves by 1860 (although 7 were in trust).<sup>51</sup> Although Jacob owned several slaves, his intent as a master is unclear. Jacob and his brother put slaves to work in their tailor shop on Queen Street. Records show that a slave named Henry Devand worked for Jacob in 1841, and was later purchased by Jacob in 1842 for \$700. Although it is almost certain that Jacob owned multiple slaves, the distinction between slave owners and slave hirers is not clear in the 1850 and the 1860 censuses.<sup>52</sup> However, Jacob also owned a couple of slaves in trust. For example, fearing death, a man by the name of Jeremiah L. Espinard entrusted Jacob with his wife, a slave woman named Kitty. In the agreement, Espinard stated explicit conditions for the care and well-being of Kitty, and he also conveyed all of his furniture to Jacob for the comfort of his wife.<sup>53</sup> In this sense, Jacob can be regarded as a benevolent master. Jacob owned slaves for more than 20 years until he died in 1864.<sup>54</sup> As recorded in the 1860 census, he owned two slaves and his real property value equaled \$11,600. At that time, there were only eleven other free persons of color besides Jacob

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<sup>50</sup> *Census of the City of Charleston, 1861*, South Carolina Room, Charleston County Public Library, Charleston, SC.

<sup>51</sup> Koger, Larry. *Black Slaveowners: Free Black Slave Masters in South Carolina, 1790-1860*. (Columbia: University of South Carolina Press, 1985), 207-229.

<sup>52</sup> Koger, Larry. *Black Slaveowners: Free Black Slave Masters in South Carolina, 1790-1860*. (Columbia: University of South Carolina Press, 1985), 8.

<sup>53</sup> Koger, Larry. *Black Slaveowners: Free Black Slave Masters in South Carolina, 1790-1860*. (Columbia: University of South Carolina Press, 1985), 61-62.

<sup>54</sup> Koger, Larry. *Black Slaveowners: Free Black Slave Masters in South Carolina, 1790-1860*. (Columbia: University of South Carolina Press, 1985), 148.



who owned more than \$9,000 in real estate.<sup>55</sup> However, their wealth and success did not come close to comparing to that of white society. While the white aristocrat had an average wealth of \$54,000, the combined wealth of free persons of color only made up about one percent of the cities total wealth.<sup>56</sup>

On the brink of war, many free persons of color feared that an independent South would destroy their freedoms and even enslave them. In a letter written by James M. Johnson to Henry Ellison, he noted that Jacob Weston and his brother Samuel, although never before, were beginning to consider immigrating to the North.<sup>57</sup> But this is a reality that Jacob would never face. According to City of Charleston Death Records, Jacob died on March 22, 1864 of Bright's disease.<sup>58</sup> At the time of his death, Jacob owned two slaves. One slave, Henry Devand, was to be purchase by his brother Samuel, and the other slave, Harry, was to receive his freedom "upon the departure of his wife to England". A third slave, jointly owned by both brothers, was to serve Jacob's wife in Charleston until she left the country.<sup>59</sup> At 62 years old, Jacob was buried in the Brown Fellowship Graveyard.<sup>60</sup>

Nearly 17 years after Jacob Weston's death, the story of the African American struggle in Charleston continued to unfold. Col. Georgy Gregory, the father of future

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<sup>55</sup> Johnson, Michael P. and James L. Roark. *Black Masters: A Free Family of Color in the Old South*. (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 1984), 204.

<sup>56</sup> Johnson, Michael P. and James L. Roark. *Black Masters: A Free Family of Color in the Old South*. (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 1984), 205.

<sup>57</sup> Johnson, Michael P. and James L. Roark. *Black Masters: A Free Family of Color in the Old South*. (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 1984), 283.

<sup>58</sup> *Charleston Partial City Directory, 1860-1865*, South Carolina Room, Charleston County Public Library, Charleston, SC.

<sup>59</sup> Koger, Larry. *Black Slaveowners: Free Black Slave Masters in South Carolina, 1790-1860*. (Columbia: University of South Carolina Press, 1985), 148.

<sup>60</sup> *Charleston Partial City Directory, 1860-1865*, South Carolina Room, Charleston County Public Library, Charleston, SC.

leader Louis Gregory, purchased 2 Desportes Court from Caroline Weston, Jacob's second wife, and Samuel Weston, his son.<sup>61</sup> Just as Jacob worked hard to win the respect and acceptance of his white counterparts, Louis also fought for racial unity in a way that changed the lives that followed him (Figure 17).

Louis (b. 1874) and his brother Theodore were born in Charleston, SC. His parents, Ebenezer and Mary Elizabeth George, were both former slaves. Louis' mother had very little educational training, and his father died tragically of tuberculosis in 1879.<sup>62</sup> Thus, the early part of his life was filled with constant struggles associated not only with his father's illness, but also with poverty and hunger.<sup>63</sup> A major comfort to Louis and his family during hard times was the care and encouragement of his maternal grandmother, who would have a profound impact on his future contribution to racial amity.

Louis' mother and grandmother formerly lived and worked in Darlington, SC on the plantation of George Washington Dargan.<sup>64</sup> From his accounts, his grandmother, called Mariah and later known as Mary Bacot<sup>65</sup>, was in fact the "slave wife" of Chancellor Darlington and his mother the daughter. As a possible descendant of mixed blood, Louis took pride in his family heritage. Based on his grandmother's stories, the Darlingtons were paternalistic in their role as slave owners. They taught Louis' mother

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<sup>61</sup> RMC, Charleston, S.C. Deed Book A19, p. 86.

<sup>62</sup> Songer, Nancy. "Newest Charleston, SC museum celebrates African American champion of racial harmony: Louis G. Gregory Bahá'í Museum is first Bahá'í museum in the world". 01 Feb 2003. Avery Research Center for African American History and Culture Archives, Charleston, SC. p. 1.

<sup>63</sup> Morrison, Gayle. *To Move the World: Louis G. Gregory and the Advancement of Racial Unity in America*. (Baha'i Publishing Trust of the United States, 1982), 11.

<sup>64</sup> Morrison, Gayle. *To Move the World: Louis G. Gregory and the Advancement of Racial Unity in America*. (Baha'i Publishing Trust of the United States, 1982), 11.

<sup>65</sup> Songer, Nancy. "Newest Charleston, SC museum celebrates African American champion of racial harmony: Louis G. Gregory Bahá'í Museum is first Bahá'í museum in the world". 01 Feb 2003. Avery Research Center for African American History and Culture Archives, Charleston, SC. p. 1.

and grandmother religion, and they “accepted the end of slavery cheerfully”.<sup>66</sup> With such a background of favorable relations with the white race, even in the midst of slavery, Louis’ mother and grandmother continued to carry a spirit of “progress and enlightenment”. He often reflects back on his grandmother’s sense of humor that made “past and present indignities” endurable.<sup>67</sup> Even when her own husband was shot and killed at their home by members of the Ku Klux Klan, and she herself faced the same reality, she was neither silenced or filled with hate.<sup>68</sup> The courage and strength of Louis’ grandmother would lead him to a future in teaching racial acceptance to an audience worldwide.

Louis’ grandmother was but one of two key figures in his success. Louis’ father had died when he was only around five years old.<sup>69</sup> After years of his mother struggling to support her mother and two children on her own, in 1885, she married George Gregory, a union that would significantly change their lives (Figure 18).<sup>70</sup> Not only was George Gregory born a free man, he came from a family that owned large amounts of property—including slaves—before the Civil War years. Even after fighting for the Union army, Colonel Gregory was well-respected in both black and white races within the Charleston community.<sup>71</sup> Thus, he was able to provide a comfortable lifestyle for his

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<sup>66</sup> Morrison, Gayle. *To Move the World: Louis G. Gregory and the Advancement of Racial Unity in America*. (Baha’i Publishing Trust of the United States, 1982), 12.

<sup>67</sup> Morrison, Gayle. *To Move the World: Louis G. Gregory and the Advancement of Racial Unity in America*. (Baha’i Publishing Trust of the United States, 1982), 11.

<sup>68</sup> Morrison, Gayle. *To Move the World: Louis G. Gregory and the Advancement of Racial Unity in America*. (Baha’i Publishing Trust of the United States, 1982), 13.

<sup>69</sup> Morrison, Gayle. *To Move the World: Louis G. Gregory and the Advancement of Racial Unity in America*. (Baha’i Publishing Trust of the United States, 1982), 11.

<sup>70</sup> Songer, Nancy. “Newest Charleston, SC museum celebrates African American champion of racial harmony: Louis G. Gregory Bahá’í Museum is first Bahá’í museum in the world”. 01 Feb 2003. Avery Research Center for African American History and Culture Archives, Charleston, SC. p. 1.

<sup>71</sup> Morrison, Gayle. *To Move the World: Louis G. Gregory and the Advancement of Racial Unity in America*. (Baha’i Publishing Trust of the United States, 1982), 14.

new wife and stepchildren that was deeply integrated in culture and society. It was during this time that Louis and his brother moved into the home at 2 Desportes Court with their mother and stepfather. Louis' family remained at 2 Desportes Court even after the death of his stepfather. Col. Gregory died in 1929 when he was eighty-seven years old. His care and generosity was so influential on his stepson that Louis called him his "real father" and even took on his name, making him Louis George Gregory.<sup>72</sup>

Col. Gregory made "sacrificial efforts" to ensure that Louis received the best education possible while in Charleston.<sup>73</sup> Louis first attended the Simonton School, a local public school for black children where he was taught by affluent, southern whites. Later, his stepfather sent him to private schools that were "funded and supported by Northern church groups and philanthropist groups". One of these groups, the American Missionary Association, established the Avery Institute, a private secondary school for "upper-class and aspiring" black children of Charleston (Figure 19).<sup>74</sup> Louis was fortunate to receive any type of education during such trying times for the black community, but to receive a private school education was unique. Thanks to his father's support, Louis graduated from the Avery Institute in 1891. Before beginning his college education began at the esteemed Fisk University in Nashville, Tennessee (also established by the American Missionary Association), Louis' stepfather helped him to acquire an apprenticeship with a tailor. The skills he learned as an apprentice provided him with a trade that would help fund his college education. Once again, Col. Gregory

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<sup>72</sup> Morrison, Gayle. *To Move the World: Louis G. Gregory and the Advancement of Racial Unity in America*. (Baha'i Publishing Trust of the United States, 1982), 13.

<sup>73</sup> Morrison, Gayle. *To Move the World: Louis G. Gregory and the Advancement of Racial Unity in America*. (Baha'i Publishing Trust of the United States, 1982), 14.

<sup>74</sup> Morrison, Gayle. *To Move the World: Louis G. Gregory and the Advancement of Racial Unity in America*. (Baha'i Publishing Trust of the United States, 1982), 16.

paid for Louis' first year of college tuition. However, in subsequent years, Louis was able to support himself by means of scholarship and working as a tailor or a waiter. Louis graduated from Fisk University in 1896.<sup>75</sup>

Louis returned to Charleston after receiving his bachelor's degree to teach at the Avery Institute. However, he had yet to fulfill all of his career goals. At the time that Louis decided to become a lawyer, there were few law schools that accepted black students, none of them in the south. Therefore, Louis applied and was accepted at Howard University in Washington, D.C.<sup>76</sup> To have graduated from a private school like the Avery Institute and later earn a college degree was a privilege in both black and white communities during this time (Figure 20). After graduating from Howard Law School in 1902, Louis joined the Washington, D.C. bar association just four years later. Then, he went into practice with James Cobb, another outstanding gentleman who later became the first black municipal court judge in Washington, D.C.<sup>77</sup>

Louis was young in his practice when he met Joseph and Pauline Hannen. The Hannens were a "Southern White couple" who warmed Louis' heart in the way that they showed him sincere love and their Bahá'í faith. Louis accepted this faith as his own in 1909, changing the rest of the course of his life. At that time, the majority of Bahá'í followers in the United States were white (Figure 21). Although they believed in the "oneness of God, the essential oneness of the world's religions and the oneness of

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<sup>75</sup> Morrison, Gayle. *To Move the World: Louis G. Gregory and the Advancement of Racial Unity in America*. (Baha'i Publishing Trust of the United States, 1982), 14-17.

<sup>76</sup> Morrison, Gayle. *To Move the World: Louis G. Gregory and the Advancement of Racial Unity in America*. (Baha'i Publishing Trust of the United States, 1982), 17.

<sup>77</sup> Jones, Roy I. "Biography of Louis George Gregory: Nominee for City Hall Portrait, Charleston, South Carolina". Avery Research Center for African American History and Culture Archives, Charleston, SC.

humanity”, still many believers had yet to understand this same idea of “oneness” in terms of racial division in America.<sup>78</sup>

Louis began completely devoted to the Bahá’í faith. He began to share his beliefs with others. Louis’ “pure-heartedness, kindness, and humility combined with eloquence, personal example, and unflinching attachment to principle” fostered in him a great capacity to teach and share with others about the Bahá’í community. In 1912, Louis was elected to join eight other members of the administrative body for the National Bahá’í Assembly in America.<sup>79</sup> The same year he traveled to Egypt...(SITE). While in Egypt, he met and married his wife, Louisa Mathew (Figure 22 and 23). Louisa was a “British-born, Cambridge-educated” white woman, who he would remain married to for the rest of his life. Their marriage remained strong despite the trials they faced in America. As Louis began to travel all over the country, often times Louisa was unable to accompany him as their interracial marriage was rejected and even illegal in many parts of America (Figure 24).<sup>80</sup>

Louis traveled all over the United States and in greater parts of the world speaking on racial amity (Figure 25). He continued to serve on the National Assembly of the Bahá’ís until his health began to fail in 1946. At that time, Louis and Louisa moved to Eliot, Maine, where they would remain until Louis’ death on July 30, 1951. After he died, Shoghi Effendi, the Guardian of the Bahá’í Faith, awarded him the “spiritual distinction

<sup>78</sup> Songer, Nancy. “Newest Charleston, SC museum celebrates African American champion of racial harmony: Louis G. Gregory Bahá’í Museum is first Bahá’í museum in the world”. 01 Feb 2003. Avery Research Center for African American History and Culture Archives, Charleston, SC. p. 2.

<sup>79</sup> Songer, Nancy. “Newest Charleston, SC museum celebrates African American champion of racial harmony: Louis G. Gregory Bahá’í Museum is first Bahá’í museum in the world”. 01 Feb 2003. Avery Research Center for African American History and Culture Archives, Charleston, SC. p. 2.

<sup>80</sup> Songer, Nancy. “Newest Charleston, SC museum celebrates African American champion of racial harmony: Louis G. Gregory Bahá’í Museum is first Bahá’í museum in the world”. 01 Feb 2003. Avery Research Center for African American History and Culture Archives, Charleston, SC. p. 2.

of ‘Hand of Cause’”, which has only been given to 47 others in the history of the faith. Today, many still honor the name of Louis Gregory. Schools, centers, institutes, even many people take on his name.<sup>81</sup> In Charleston, Mayor Joseph P. Riley has even declared February 8<sup>th</sup> as Louis G. Gregory Day.<sup>82</sup>

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<sup>81</sup> Songer, Nancy. “Newest Charleston, SC museum celebrates African American champion of racial harmony: Louis G. Gregory Bahá’í Museum is first Bahá’í museum in the world”. 01 Feb 2003. Avery Research Center for African American History and Culture Archives, Charleston, SC. p. 2-3.

<sup>82</sup> Ferrell, Adam. “Museum honors life of Gregory, Bahá’í notable from Charleston”. Charleston Post and Courier. Avery Research Center for African American History and Culture Archives, Charleston, SC.

### Conclusion

2 Desportes Court represents the ways in which African American society and culture has persevered and advanced within Charleston and America. Beginning with the ownership of Jacob Weston, an elite free person of color before the Civil War, the property honors a history that is unknown to many, even in the Charleston area. Weston's life demonstrated how free African Americans struggled to be part of a greater society belonging to whites. This history continues to be illustrated in the legacy of Louis Gregory, who grew up at 2 Desportes Court. Many people of the Bahá'í faith are familiar with the huge contribution that Louis paid towards racial amity. However, a larger audience is still unaware for the great feats he accomplished well before his time in bringing unity among all races. Between the time that Louis lived in the house and the time that a museum was established there in his honor, it is possible that every occupant was an African American—a unique situation for its neighborhood in more recent history. Today the property honors and celebrates the life and teachings of Louis Gregory, but 2 Desportes Court represents much richer traditions in African American history. Although it currently contributes to the Old and Historic District of Charleston, this property merits the designation of being recognized individually.



## Chain of Title

Date	Book/Page	Grantor	Grantee	Type	Lot Size	Price	Comments
3-Feb-1989	R181/450	H & M Partnership	Spiritual Assembly of the Baha'is of Charleston, SC, Inc.	Conveyance	23'-0" x 30'-0"	\$29,000	
2-Nov-1984	D141/357	Elijah Bishop	H & M Partnership	Conveyance	23'-0" x 30'-0"	\$17,000	
11-Jan-1958	T64/694	Harriet King	Elijah Bishop	Conveyance	23'-0" x 30'-0"	\$3,000	
8-Feb-1950	R51/3	Peter Robinson	Harriet King	Conveyance	23'-0" x 30'-0"	\$2,100	
7-Oct-1949	H51/461	Ashley Perry	Peter Robinson	Conveyance	23'-0" x 30'-0"	\$750	
7-Jul-1945	S45/197	Lauretta Gregory	Ashley Perry	Conveyance	23'-0" x 30'-0"	\$700	
		George Gregory	Lauretta Gregory	Will	23'-0" x 30'-0"	n/a	George Gregory died on 16- Oct-1929.
1-Mar-1881	A19/86	Caroline S. Weston et. al Exec.	George Gregory	Conveyance	23'-0" x 30'-0"	140	
		Jacob Weston	Caroline S. Weston et. al Exec.	Will	23'-0" x 30'-0"	n/a	
31-Aug-1854	V12/241	James W. Gray Master in Equity	Jacob Weston	Auction	23'-0" x 30'-0"	\$1,550	

Annotated Chain of Title

**3-August-1854**

*Grantor:* James W. Gray (as Master of Equity)

*Grantee:* Jacob Weston

*Book & Page:* V12/241

*Type:* Auction

*Lot:* 23'-5" x 30'-0"

**1-March-1881**

*Grantor:* Caroline S. Weston et. al. Exec.

*Grantee:* George Gregory

*Book & Page:* A19/86

*Type:* Conveyance

*Lot:* 23'-5" x 30'-0"

**7-July-1945**

*Grantor:* Lauretta Gregory

*Grantee:* Ashley Perry

*Book & Page:* S45/197

*Type:* Conveyance

*Lot:* 23'-5" x 30'-0"

On October 16, 1889, George Gregory died in Charleston, leaving the property to Lauretta Gregory during the term of her natural life, and in part to his grandson, Leroy Gregory Noisette, "subject to said life estate". Lauretta Gregory and Leroy Noisette sold the property, having been in the Gregory name for 64 years, to Ashley Perry for \$700. Leroy's wife Helen B. Noisette was a witness in this transaction.

**7-October-1949**

*Grantor:* Ashley Perry

*Grantee:* Peter Robinson

*Book & Page:* H51/461

*Type:* Conveyance

*Lot:* 23'-5" x 30'-0"

With his wife Ethel D. as a witness, Ashley Perry transferred the property into the possession of Peter Robinson for \$750.

**8-February-1950**

*Grantor:* Peter Robinson

*Grantee:* Harriet King

*Book & Page:* R51/3

*Type:* Conveyance

*Lot:* 23'-5" x 30'-0"

**11-January-1958**

*Grantor:* Harriet King

*Grantee:* Elijah Bishop

*Book & Page:* T64/694

*Type:* Conveyance

*Lot:* 23'-5" x 30'-0"

After eight years of occupancy, Harriet King sold the property to Elijah Bishop, his heirs and assigns for \$3,000.

**2-November-1984**

*Grantor:* Elijah Bishop

*Grantee:* H & M Partnership

*Book & Page:* D141/357

*Type:* Conveyance

*Lot:* 23'-5" x 30'-0"

With his wife Sarah Leas as a witness, Elijah Bishop sold the property to the H & M Partnership and their successors for \$17,000. Alfred G. Ray was the represented dower for the H & M Partnership on the day of the transaction.

**3-February-1989**

*Grantor:* H & M Partnership

*Grantee:* Spiritual Assembly of the Baha'is of Charleston, SC, Inc.

*Book & Page:* R181/450

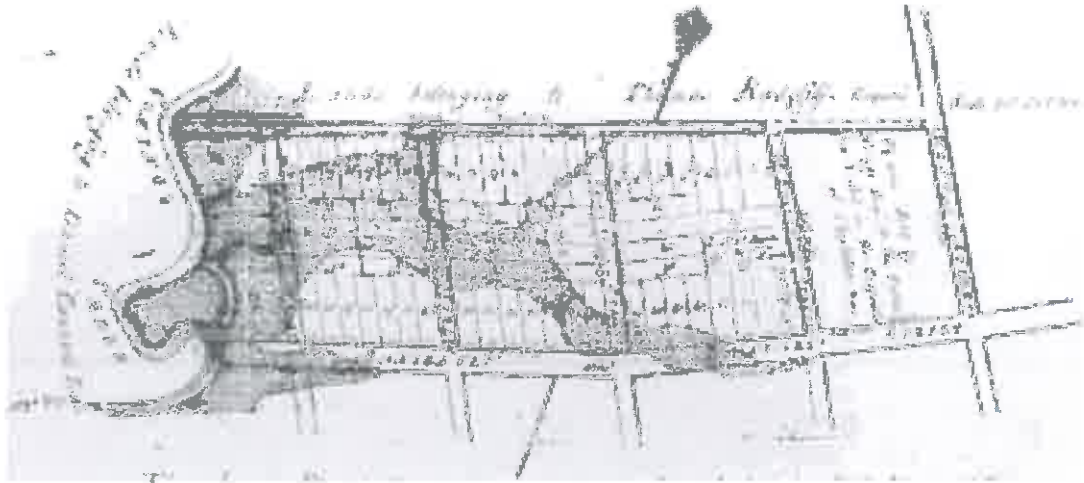
*Type:* Conveyance

*Lot:* 23'-5" x 30'-0"

In the latest transaction to date, the H & M Partnership sold the property to the Spiritual Assembly of the Baha'is of Charleston, SC, Inc. for \$29,000, having only occupied the property for five years. The Baha'is continue to occupy 2 Desportes Court today.

## Illustrations

Figure 1



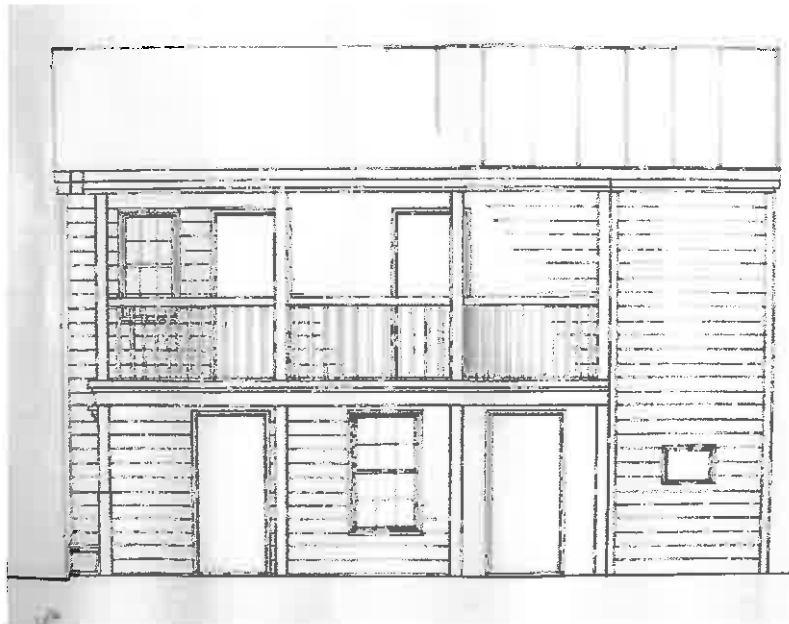
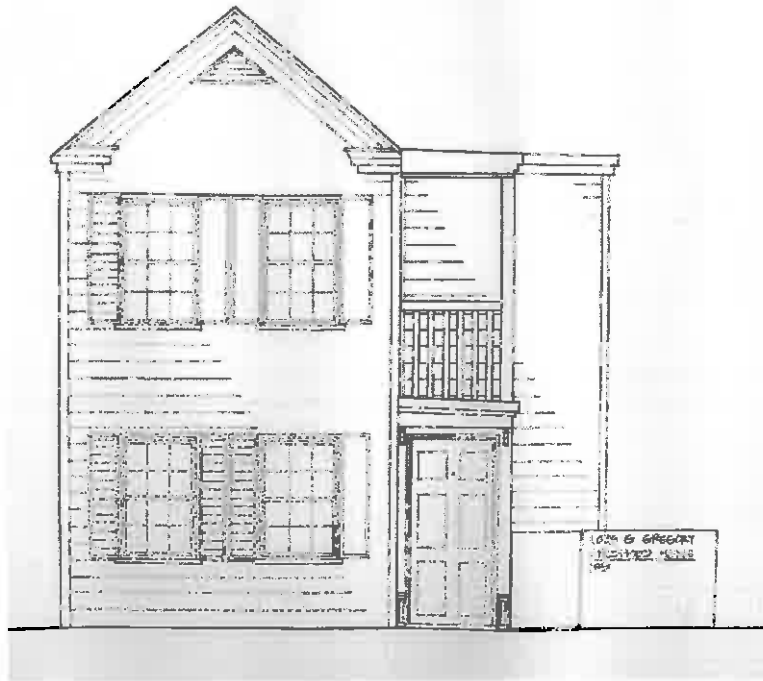
Plat of the Wragg lands, below Thomas Radcliffe's parcel, Radcliffeborough, 1786. Poston, Jonathan H. for Historic Charleston Foundation. *The Buildings of Charleston*. (Columbia: University of South Carolina Press, 1997). p. 618.

Figure 2



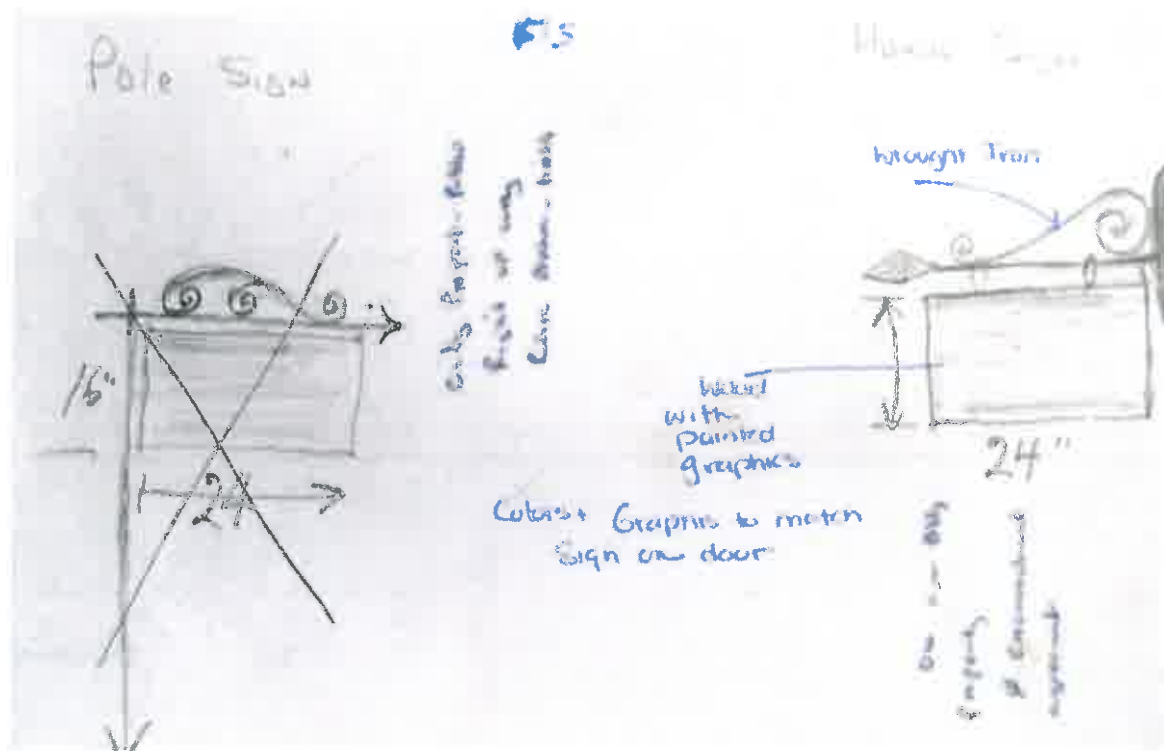
The 1975 Old and Historic District (included 2 Desportes Court for the first time). <http://www.historiccharleston.org/>.

Figures 3 and 4



Western (above) and Southern (below) Elevations.  
Property of the Louis G. Gregory Museum.

Figure 5



Sketch for iron sign for the Louis G. Gregory Museum by master ironworker Philip Simmons.

Board of Architectural Review, Charleston, SC.

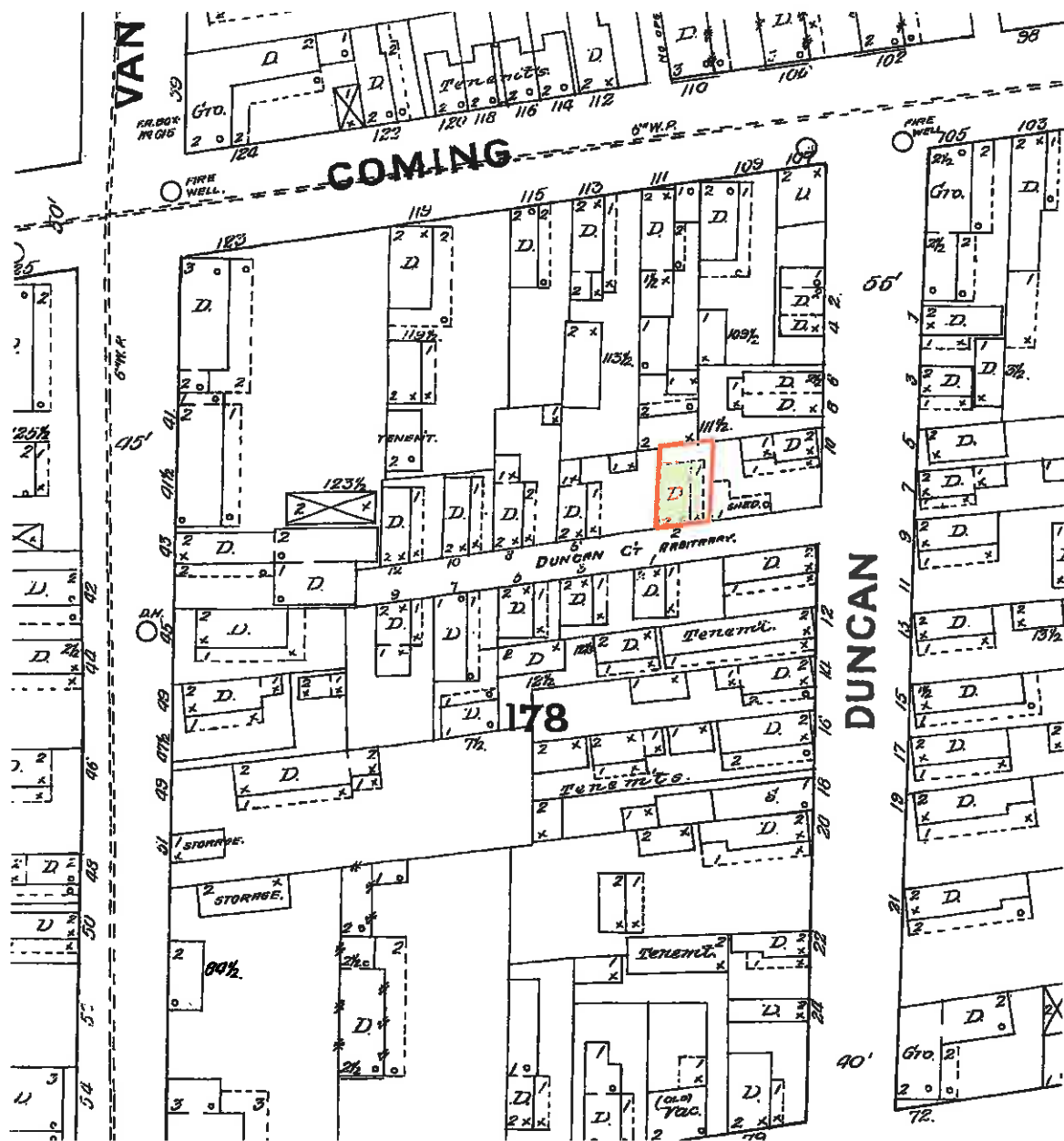


Figure 6



The original 1954 Plat of Desportes Court. The orange line is outlining the property line for 2 Desportes Court, and the light green highlights the structure on the property at the time of the survey. Interestingly, the light blue highlights a lot "of Jacob Weston". Charleston County. Records of the Register Mesne Conveyance (RMC), Charleston, S.C. Plat Book A1, p. 115.

Figure 7



A 1988 Sanborn Map Showing the 2 Desportes Court in Orange and the home highlighted in green. The structure must have been erected some time between 1854 and 1881 when the Gregory family moved on the premises (see Figure 5).  
<http://sanborn.umi.com.ezproxy.ccpl.org:2048/sc/8124/dateid-000002.htm?CCSI=7101n>.

Figure 8



Invitation to the Opening and Dedication of the Louis G. Gregory Museum.  
Property of the Louis G. Gregory Museum.

Figures 9, 10, and 11



Images of the home when purchased by the Spiritual Assembly of the Baha'is in 1989  
(represented by Henry Wigfall).

Property of the Louis G. Gregory Museum, Charleston, SC.

Figures 12 and 13



Repair work being done to the house after 1989.  
Property of the Louis G. Gregory Museum, Charleston, SC.

Figure 14



The Louis G. Gregory Museum today (November 2009).  
Photograph by Author.



Figures 15 and 16



Inside the Louis G. Gregory Museum today (November 2009).  
Photographs by Author.

Figure 17



Louis G. Gregory.  
Avery Research Center for African American History and Culture Archives, Charleston,  
SC.

Figure 18



Col. George Gregory.  
Avery Research Center for African American History and Culture Archives, Charleston,  
SC.



Figure 19



Inside the Avery Research Center for African American History and Culture Archives, Charleston, SC. Now a museum and research center, this is the school that Louis Gregory once attended.

Photograph by author.

Figure 20



Portrait of Louis G. Gregory, displayed in the Avery Research Center for African American History and Culture Archives, Charleston, SC.  
Photograph by author.

Figure 21

Year of admission to present Baha'i community (19th 21) 8 August, 1925

A. By transfer from previous community Yes B. By admission to Baha'i for first time

C. Previous members (name, rank) Yes Gregory Yes Gregory

(2) General information you would like to have preserved in this historical record  
(about Baha'i service, connection with the Cause in early days, special talents, etc.)

Member, Baha'i Temple Society, 1912 to 1913  
Member, National Spiritual Assembly, 1922 to 1924  
and 1927 to 1928, 7 years in all, as chairman  
Served as either secretary, of National Race Unity  
Committee, 1927 to 1933. As travelling worker helped to  
spread the Message in Georgia and in nearly all of the United  
States, especially the Southern states. Also served with  
Race Unity Conferences in many cities. Pilgrimage to Akra  
and Haifa in 1911, meeting 'Abdu'l Baha and Shoghi Effendi,  
the latter a youth of fifteen, at Rasid, Egypt. Here also  
met Louise A. V. Mathew of England, whom I married a year  
later by the advice and instructions of 'Abdu'l Baha.

(3) Additional information (do not fill in)

Transferred to the Baha'i community Oct. 1924.

By Signature Louis E. Gregory

(If possible, please attach photograph of this record. If not, name and date the photograph and attach on back of photograph.)

Louis Gregory's commitment to the Baha'i faith.

The Avery Research Center for African American History and Culture Archives,  
Charleston, SC.

Figures 22 and 23



Photographs of Louis Gregory and Louisa Mathew.  
The Avery Research Center for African American History and Culture Archives,  
Charleston, SC.

Figure 24



Louis and Louisa Gregory.  
The Avery Research Center for African American History and Culture Archives,  
Charleston, SC.

Figure 25



Louis Gregory speaking on racial amity.  
The Avery Research Center for African American History and Culture Archives,  
Charleston, SC.

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