

86 Cannon Street

c. 1861-1862

The house at 86 Cannon Street is a particularly large and refined Charleston single house which has twice been the home of different chiefs of police for Charleston.

The estate of Francis Cobia sold the property—described in the deed as the sixth lot east of Rutledge—for \$1200 on June 2, 1860 to Peter J. Sires¹ and took back a \$600 mortgage.² None of the documents concerning the sale or mortgage referred to any buildings on the lot. The lot to the west was sold at the same time, and an advertisement for both lots referred to a building on only the western lot, not the site of 86 Cannon Street.³

Peter J. Sires, a merchant, did not keep the property long, and he resold it on June 14, 1861 to **Christian Baker Sigwald**⁴ for \$1400.⁵ Based on that price, it does not seem that a house existed at that time, and the deed did not refer to a house.

Capt. Sigwald had been born in Charleston on November 26, 1827. He attended the Citadel for a while, but he had to withdraw because of an illness. He worked as a bookkeeper and then opened a shoe store on King Street which he operated until the outbreak of the Civil War. During the Civil War, he served on James Island until he contracted malaria and had to return to town. Back in



¹ Deed book M14, page 22

² Deed book O14, page 188

³ Charleston Courier, May 15, 1860

⁴ Capt. Christian Baker Sigwald was born on November 26, 1827 and died on November 27, 1889. He served with the 24th South Carolina Infantry and fought in local Civil War battles as well as battles in Atlanta and Vicksburg.

⁵ Deed book J14, page 119

Charleston, he accepted the position as the chief of the police department, a position he held until the police department was disbanded by the military authorities. After the war, he was elected to city council for several terms and even returned as a lieutenant with the city police force.

It appears that Capt. Sigwald had the house built during the early days of the Civil War. When the city undertook a census in the summer of 1861, an entry was recorded for 58 Cannon Street, suggesting that a house was at least being built. But even though Capt. Sigwald was listed as the owner of 58 Cannon Street, the entry was listed as "unoccupied." A little later, in October 1861, Capt. Sigwald's contact information was given as 477 King Street in a newspaper notice, although that was possibly a business address.

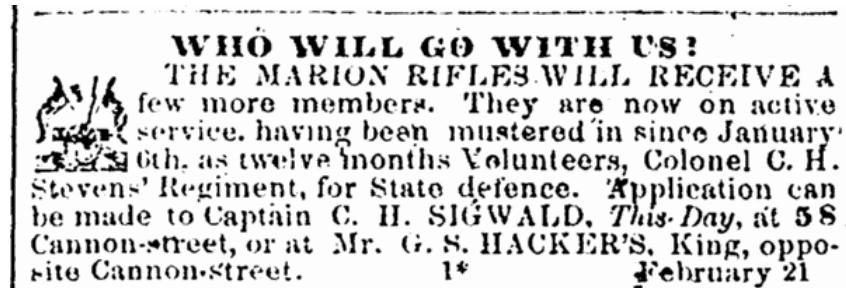
Regardless, the house was definitely built by early 1862. On February 8, 1862, a notice ran in the Charleston Courier soliciting members of the Marion Rifles, a military unit Capt. Sigwald had formed. Volunteers were told that they could apply for admission to Captain C.H. Sigwald at 58 Cannon Street (the street was renumbered in 1885, and the house became 86 Cannon Street at that time).

Therefore, it seems that the house was built by Capt. Sigwald in late 1861 or early 1862, but he was a short-term owner. On June 17, 1863, the

Charleston Courier included an advertisement for a real estate auction occurring the next day that included the following description of one of the properties to be sold:

A fine and newly built two and a half story Wooden Residence, on a Brick Basement, No. 58 Cannon-street, North side, and next to Rutledge Avenue.

The winning bidder was a trust that had been formed in 1843 by Benjamin D. Roper for the benefit of this daughter, **Anna Ward Gibbes**.⁶ The trust used the proceeds from the sale of other property to buy the Cannon Street property on

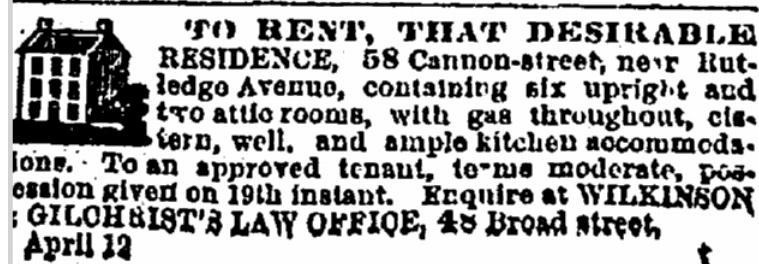


⁶ Deed book I11, page 303

June 18, 1863 for \$11,100.⁷ Whether the huge increase in price was the result of Confederate currency conversion is unknown.

The trust seems to have used the Cannon Street house as a rental property. Short-term occupants included M. Cahill (1864) and R. Rhett (1865). On April 21, 1867, an

advertisement for the rental of the house appeared in the Charleston Courier describing the “desirable residence” as having six rooms and two attic rooms with gas throughout, a cistern, well, and ample kitchen accommodations.



Once the original beneficiaries of the trust had all either died or come of age, the trust decided to sell the property on March 4, 1871 for \$4000 to commercial merchant and factor **John H. Holmes**.⁸ Mr. Holmes used the house as his own dwelling, but he lost the house when he quickly fell behind on mortgage payments. The house was auctioned off on January 27, 1874 as a result of a mortgage foreclosure, and the high bidder was **Adelaide S. Gibbes**, one of the ultimate beneficiaries of the trust that had sold the house to Mr. Holmes. She paid \$2250 for the house, and the sale was recorded July 18, 1874.⁹

Adelaide S. Gibbes kept the house for more than thirty years and used it as a rental property, sometimes for short periods, but sometimes for years at a time to the same tenants.¹⁰ At times, family members also occupied the house.

Eventually, Ms. Gibbes sold the house to **James R. Cantwell** on September 22, 1910,¹¹ and he and his family occupied the house. Mr. Cantwell was born on November 15, 1876 in Charleston and was a veteran of the Spanish-



⁷ Deed book U14 (#1), page 52.

⁸ Deed book X15, page 76

⁹ Deed book P16, page 150

¹⁰ Renters included Evan Edwards (1875-1877); Jacob and Ruth Weinges (1882-1896); C.W. Cleapor (1898-1900); Mrs. Marie Meyer (1901); J.R. Lewis (1902-1905); and Charles Lowndes Addison (1906-1910).

¹¹ Deed book R25, page 298

American War. Afterward, he held a variety of public and private positions. He worked as a machinist for the railroad and an iron foundry before twice serving as the chief of police (1912-1915 and again 1920-1923) under the administration of Mayor John P. Grace. In 1924 he formed a private detective force, and from 1928 until his death in 1940, he was an investigator for the state highway department.

Following Mr. Cantwell's death, the house was used by his family, but part of the house was also rented out. Eventually, after a lawsuit over the disposition of the property by his heirs, the house was sold to **Peter T. Poinsette** for \$12,600 on February 13, 1952.¹² Advertisements for the house in the months leading up to the sale mentioned two apartments in the main house and another unit in the still-detached dependency.



Mr. Poinsette was born in Charleston on December 10, 1900 to a former slave and a Haitian immigrant. His sister was Septima Poinsette, the noted civil rights leader. Mr. Poinsette attended the schools of Charleston and also worked at a neighborhood grocery near his family's house at 26 Henrietta Street. The owner of the grocery store asked Mr. Poinsette to remain at the store instead of going on to college as he had planned. Mr. Poinsette did, and when the store's owner died, he left half of his estate to Mr. Poinsette. For the next 33 years (1936-1969), Mr. Poinsette worked as a mailman.¹³

Mr. Poinsette conveyed it to his wife, **Lucille Poinsette** on August 20, 1996.¹⁴ She retained a life estate but immediately conveyed it to a trust on the same day.¹⁵ Peter Poinsette died on

¹² Deed book A55, page 33

¹³ "Mailman Enjoys Retirement," Charleston Evening Post, June 6, 1982, at 2-E

¹⁴ Deed book E273, page 174

¹⁵ Deed book E273, page 178

November 24, 1997, and Lucille died on December 16, 1999. His three daughters, **Marguerite P. Mosley and her siblings, Elizabeth A. Poinsette-Fisher and Alice P. Frazier**, received the house on June 6, 2002.¹⁶

The three siblings sold the house to **Marion D. Hawkins and Lori G. Hawkins** for \$675,000 on June 9, 2015.¹⁷ A complete restoration of the house began in 2015.

¹⁶ Deed book M408, page 39

¹⁷ Deed book 0481, page 80