

Clemson University/College of Charleston MS in Historic Preservation  
Research Methods: Professor Katherine Saunders

# The History of 251 East Bay Street

Charleston, South Carolina



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11/1/2011

*The History of 251 East Bay Street*

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November 1, 2011

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## Introduction

At the southwest corner of the intersection of Pinckney and East Bay Streets in the Ansonborough neighborhood of Charleston, South Carolina, stands Big John's Tavern. A former New York Giants linebacker, John "Big John" Cannady, opened the Tavern in 1955, and it is still in operation as the local, self-proclaimed "dive bar" enjoyed by students, locals, and tourists alike.

This research is the result of an assignment given in the Research Methods class taught by Katherine Saunders in the Clemson University/College of Charleston Masters of Science in Historic Preservation program in Charleston, South Carolina. Each student was assigned a property that was believed to have been affected by the Fire of 1861. The end goal of the class is to present the history of the assigned properties in a public symposium in December 2011 to mark the 150<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Fire of 1861. The purpose of this research project is to trace the history of the property from its current ownership, use and physical description back through history as far as possible. This research includes a direct chain of title from the early 19<sup>th</sup> century to the present. Resources include deed books, newspapers, diaries, history books, historic plats and maps, earthquake damage assessments, photographs, and more. This research is important not only because it tells the story of a singular property on the Charleston Peninsula, but also because it teaches us about the history of the neighborhood and Charleston in a larger sense. Charleston is a city so rich in history which has been told in many different ways. Focusing that history around

one property provides an interesting perspective through which we learn about early British settlement and expansion, the formation and growth of the colony, the American Revolution, the Fire of 1838, South Carolina's secession from the Union, the Civil War, the great Fire of 1861, the Industrial era, and modern Charleston.

This research provides a general overview of the history of the property at 251 East Bay Street; however, it should only be considered a start. There is a great amount of resources available for further research at each of Charleston's wonderful archives and libraries and other public resources such as the City Hall and the Register Mesne Conveyances.

## Early Charleston

In 1699, three ships left England in search of Carolina. Only one ship, the *Carolina*, survived the voyage, although all of the passengers of the two ships which were damaged or lost in hurricanes did survive and joined the passengers on the *Carolina*. They arrived in the colony of Carolina in the early part of 1670, docking at what is now known as Charles Towne Landing on the Ashley River; then called Albemarle Point. This was the original site of the fort, within whose walls all of the settlers lived until 1680, when they moved from Albemarle Point to Oyster Point on the present day peninsula.<sup>1</sup>

The original city plan was based on the a design proposed for London after the great fire of 1666, and was a checkerboard design bounded on the east by the Cooper River, the north and south by creeks, and the west by a large fortification wall. Like Philadelphia, Charles Towne laid out its streets before any buildings were constructed. By 1690, the population of Charles Towne was estimated to be around 1000-1200, as more settlers were voyaging to the newly laid out and growing city. The city was a trading center by 1700, selling products of the interior to other colonies and ships returning to England. By then there were plantations on the Charleston Neck which kept a steady supply of products to the ports. By 1698, a post office and a public library, believed to be the first public library in

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<sup>1</sup> Robert N. Rosen, *A Short History of Charleston* (Charleston, Peninsula Press, 1992), pp. 11-12.

America, had been established and were supported by both the Royal legislature and the Lord Proprietors of Charles Towne. Clearly, the city was thriving.<sup>2</sup>

251 East Bay Street was originally granted to James Colleton, Esq. Mr. Colleton had received a warrant for a town lot at Oyster Point in 1678, which would later be called Charles Towne. Then in 1680 he received another warrant and the certificate of survey of lot number 50 (Figure 1). He then received the grant for the lot in 1681<sup>3</sup>, which is mentioned in the Surveyor's Notebook:

*"By a warrant dated 10 Nov 1680 under the hand of the Hon. Col. Jos West, Governor and Landgrave, I have laid out unto Jam: Colleton, Esq., Landgrave one town lot at New Charles Towne known by the No. 50, bounded Northward upon a street leading Westerly by Cooper River, Southward upon the lot of Mr. Tho: Colleton, Esq., butting Eastward upon Cooper River and Westward upon land belonging to Sir Peter Colleton, Barrt."<sup>4</sup>*

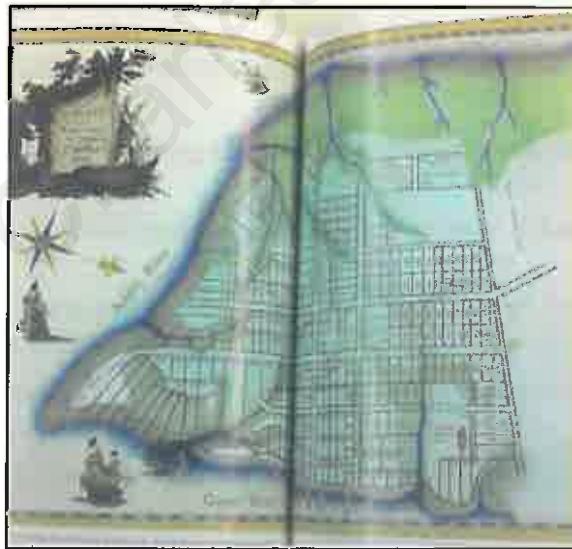


Figure 1. Map of lots of the original Grand Model, 1698 reproduction.

<sup>2</sup> *ibid.* pp. 12-14

<sup>3</sup> Susan Baldwin Bates and Harriett Cheves Leland, *Proprietary Records of South Carolina, Volume Three* (Charleston, The History Press, 2007).

<sup>4</sup> *ibid.* p 54

James Colleton's lot No. 50 was bordered westerly by lot No. 80, which belonged to Sir Peter Colleton. Lot 80 was a large lot consisting of nine acres, fronting the Cooper River north of Market Street. In 1681 Sir Peter Colleton received a letter from Maurice Matthews, stating:

"I tooke ye Lotts of Mr. Thomas [Colleton], Mr. James [Colleton], and Mr. Cominges and squeezed them together soe as to make roome for a front lott for [your Honor] and have added in platt and patent...which makes [your Honor's] front very broade, as appears by ye towne platt..."<sup>5</sup>

Lot 50, then, was incorporated into Sir Peter Colleton's large property in what is now Ansonborough. Ansonborough was Charleston's first subdivision, constructed during the latter part of the 18<sup>th</sup> century. The eastern edge of Ansonborough, the Cooper River, was lined with wharves for incoming ships visiting the port city to sell their goods and to load up with exports to take to ports along the coast and even to Europe. One wharf, the one built by Christopher Gadsen, was said to be perhaps the largest wharf in Colonial America, jutting into the Cooper River as much as 840 feet with dock space for 12 ships. Because of the vast number of wharves there, East Bay Street (then known as Bay Street) was the trading center of Colonial Charleston. As Figure 1 shows, a creek separated the city from Ansonborough. It was wide enough to require a bridge, which was called Governor's

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<sup>5</sup>ibid.

Bridge. Bay Street in this part of the city was full of two- and three-story buildings, many with residences above and stores on the ground level. The buildings were built close to one another because the land, close to wharves, ships, and customers, was very valuable.<sup>6</sup>

Information on ownership of this lot between 1681 and 1807 was not obtained during the course of this research due to limited information and time.

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<sup>6</sup> Robert N. Rosen, *A Short History of Charleston* (Charleston, Peninsula Press, 1992), pp. 27-28

## 251 East Bay Street: Property Ownership

After lot Number 50 from the Grand Model was granted to the Lord Proprietors and passed to Sir Peter Colleton's hands in the late 17<sup>th</sup> century, it is unclear what changes the property underwent until 1807, which is the year where complete chain of title research for this paper begins. Robert Daniel Lawrence owned the property as early as 1806, as indicated by a Plat drawn by Joseph Purcell, Surveyor. The Plat shows the plan for the widening of East Bay Street, which would take several feet off the eastern boundary of Robert Lawrence's property.<sup>7</sup> The Charleston City Directory of 1807 lists Mr. Lawrence as an attorney at law<sup>8</sup>, and the City Directory of 1806 shows that he resided at 1 State House Square.<sup>9</sup> There is no indication of whom, if anyone lived at the property he owned at the corner of East Bay and Pinckney.

A deed in 1807 shows that the properties owned by Mr. Lawrence at this particular corner were seized by Sheriff Jacint Laval of the Charleston District (Figure 2). Mr. Lawrence was indebted to three men, and after his death in 1807, the Sheriff took ownership and then sold the properties to settle the debts.<sup>10</sup>

<sup>7</sup> Joseph Purcell. Plat showing the proposed widening of East Bay Street between Pinckney and Guignard Streets. McCrady Plat Collection, Charleston, SC. Plat no. 422, original drawn 1806.

<sup>8</sup> Charleston City Directory, 1807 [microfilm], South Carolina Room, Charleston County Public Library, Charleston, SC.

<sup>9</sup> Charleston City Directory, 1806 [microfilm], South Carolina Room, Charleston County Public Library, Charleston, SC.

<sup>10</sup> Charleston County. Records of the Register Mesne Conveyance (RMC), Charleston, SC. Deed Book U7, p. 278.

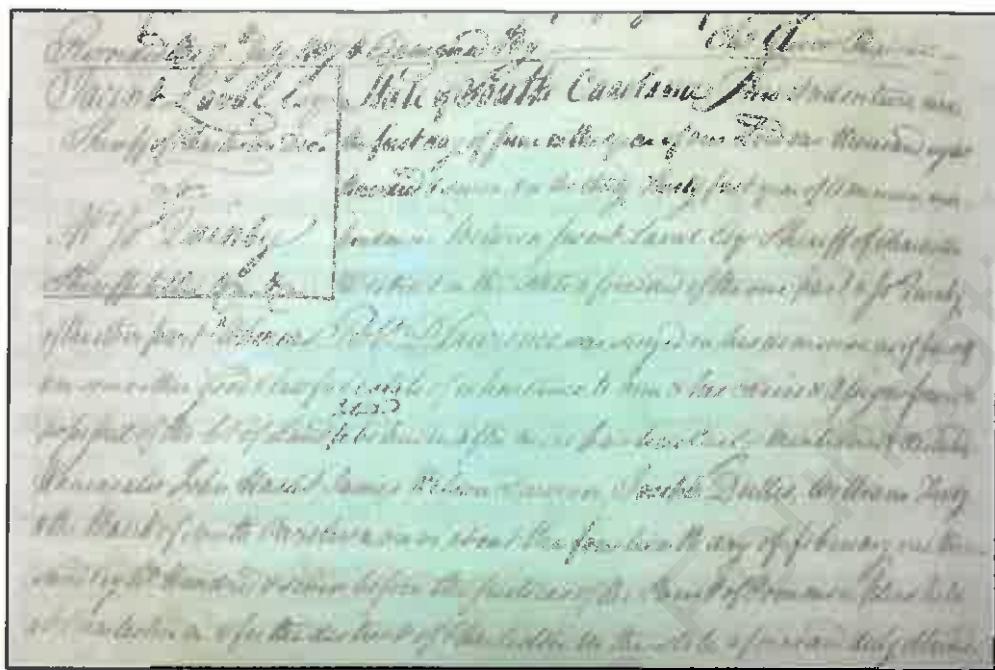


Figure 2. Deed Book U7, Page 278.

All of Mr. Lawrence's properties were sold with the exception of the small lot on the corner, which was given to his widow, Elizabeth (Eliza) Lawrence. In March 1809 Eliza Lawrence sold her right to dower to Henry H. Bacot for \$307. The lot was 20 feet along East Bay by 45 feet on Pinckney, and contained two wooden tenements.<sup>11</sup>

Henry H. Bacot was an attorney in Charleston, whose office (and possibly home) was at 16 Tradd Street.<sup>12</sup> In 1810, Mr. Bacot had 4 others living under his household – 1 free white male between ages 16 and 25 and three free white females between ages 16 and

<sup>11</sup> Charleston County. Records of the Register Mesne Conveyance (RMC), Charleston, SC. Deed Book X7, p. 297-298.

<sup>12</sup> Charleston City Directory, 1807 [microfilm], South Carolina Room, Charleston County Public Library, Charleston, SC.

25.<sup>13</sup> This may indicate that he was a widower or was not married and did not have children of his own.

In February 1834, acting as executor of Henry H. Bacot, Peter Bacot, a cashier at the US Bank branch at 11 Archdale Street<sup>14</sup>, sold the lot to Frederick Schaffner as a conveyance of trust for his infant son for \$2250. The property was to be transferred to John F. Schaffner upon his 21<sup>st</sup> birthday. The sale included not only the corner lot which measured 25 feet (north-south) by 65 feet (east-west), but also the lot immediately to the south, measuring 30 feet (north-south) by 45 feet (east-west).<sup>15</sup> Frederick Schaffner was the owner of grocery stores at Queen and State Streets as well as 9 Pinckney Street.<sup>16</sup> In 1830, prior to his son's birth, he lived alongside one female between ages 30-39 and two female slaves under 10 years old in Ward 3.<sup>17</sup>

The Fire of 1838 devastated much of the Ansonborough neighborhood. The early newspaper reports from The Charleston Mercury showed an engraving of the burn district that included the properties at the intersection of Pinckney Street and East Bay Street<sup>18</sup>, however a corrected engraving was included in the paper the following day and the burn

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<sup>13</sup> 1810 US Census, Charleston, SC. Roll 60, page 322, Family History Number 0181419, Image 00176, [www.ancestry.com](http://www.ancestry.com) [accessed 8 November 2011].

<sup>14</sup> Charleston City Directory, 1835-36 [microfilm], South Carolina Room, Charleston County Public Library, Charleston, SC.

<sup>15</sup> Charleston County. Records of the Register Mesne Conveyance (RMC), Charleston, SC. Deed Book H10, p. 24.

<sup>16</sup> Charleston City Directory, 1835-36 [microfilm], South Carolina Room, Charleston County Public Library, Charleston, SC.

<sup>17</sup> 1830 US Census: Charleston Ward 3, Charleston, South Carolina, Page: 48; NARA Roll: M19-170; Family History Film: 0022504. [www.ancestry.com](http://www.ancestry.com) [accessed 8 November 2011].

<sup>18</sup> Engraving showing the burnt district after the Fire of 1838, The Charleston Mercury, May 1, 1838. [microfilm] South Carolina Room, Charleston County Public Library, Charleston, SC.

district was clearly depicted and does not include the intersection of Pinckney and East Bay Streets<sup>19</sup> (figure 3).

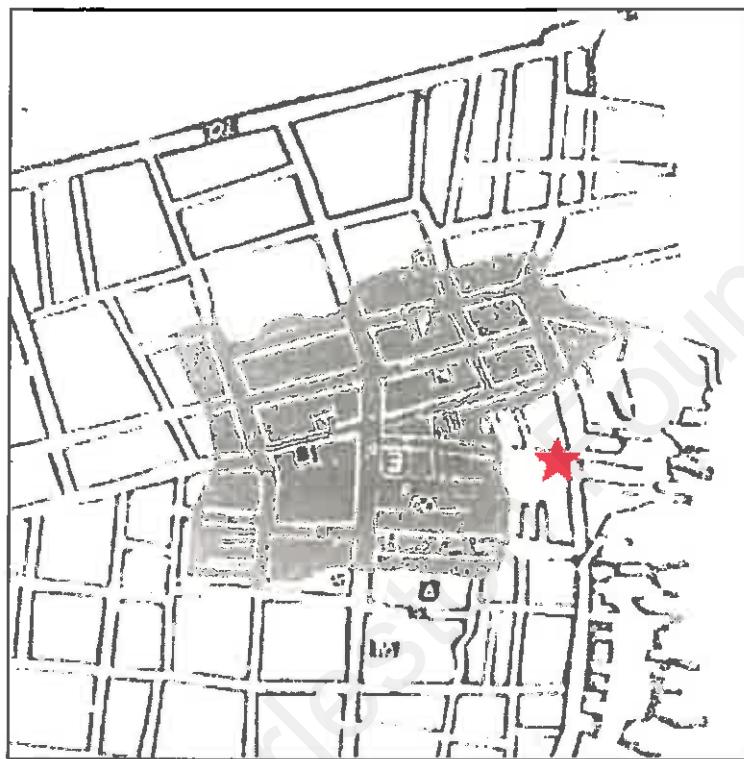


Figure 3. Corrected engraving of the burnt district from the *Charleston Mercury*, May 2, 1838. The red star shows the intersection of Pinckney Street and East Bay Street.

While there is no record of an official transfer of property from Frederick Schaffner to John. F. Schaffner, because the previous deed indicates that John F. Schaffner would receive the property upon his 21<sup>st</sup> birthday, it is assumed that the ownership transferred sometime in late 1854 or early 1855. The Ward books from 1852 - 1856 show the value of the property owned by the Schaffer's. Then, the property was known as number 207, and,

<sup>19</sup> Engraving showing the corrected burnt district after the Fire of 1838, *The Charleston Mercury*, May 2, 1838. [microfilm] South Carolina Room, Charleston County Public Library, Charleston, SC.

as did number 205, contained a wooden, two-story building. Number 207 was assessed at \$2,400 in 1852 and 1853, and went up to \$5000 in 1854 through 1856. It is not clear why the property over doubled in value; however other properties in the same ward experienced similar increases. A hand-written note in the margin of the Ward book shows that in 1865, number 205 and number 207 East Bay were valued together at \$6000, or \$3000 each.<sup>20</sup>

John F. Schaffner, who is listed as a Doctor in the 1861 US Census, owned three properties: number 235 and number 237 East Bay Street and number 13 Pinckney Street. It is most likely that the property known as number 237 East Bay in 1861 is the same lot as current-day number 251. The census also lists the occupants of the buildings on the three properties and their construction material: number 235 was occupied by Frederick W. Wagner and was made of wood, number 237 was occupied by Paul Poinsett, a free person of color (f.p.c.), and was also wooden, and number 13 Pinckney Street was a brick structure occupied by Patrick Murphy.<sup>21</sup>

## **The Civil War and The Fire of 1861**

Several significant events shaped Charleston in 1861. South Carolina had seceded from the Union in December 1860, and tensions were growing. On April 12, 1861, the first rounds of bombardment landed on Fort Sumter, and while Charlestonians watched onward

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<sup>20</sup> City of Charleston. City Tax Assessment Ward Books, Charleston, SC., Ward 3, 1852-1856.

<sup>21</sup> Census of 1861, City of Charleston, [microfilm] South Carolina Room, Charleston County Public Library, Charleston, SC.

from The Battery, Union Army Major Anderson surrendered to the Confederate troops on April 13, unable to hold the Fort. A wave of Patriotism swept Charleston, and over the next several days there was much celebration.<sup>22</sup>

In December that same year, slave refugees started a campfire somewhere near Hasell and East Bay Streets. What had been a clear and calm day quickly turned to windy, and the campfire got out of control. On December 11, 1861, around 9:00 PM, the Great Fire, as it came to be known, started in the Sash and Blind factory on Hasell Street, then spread to a foundry before turning southwesterly towards Market Street, setting ablaze wooden tenements like the ones located at East Bay and Pinckney. The fire raged on southwesterly, burning nearly everything in its path. Firefighters could not keep up with the fire, so in an attempt to stop it, they blew up several houses using gunpowder from arsenal stores. While those efforts may have saved several properties, including the Roper and Marine hospitals, the fire continued to spread until it burned itself out near the Ashley River. All told, the fire burned over 540 acres and approximately 575 private residences, numerous businesses and public buildings, and five churches.<sup>23</sup> Undoubtedly, the fire of 1861 had an effect on building materials in Charleston. Today in many buildings evidence of wood shingled roofs can be seen in attics underneath metal roofs, which were laid on top of the wood shingles. Similarly, much new construction was of brick instead of wood.

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<sup>22</sup> Walter J. Fraser, Jr. *Charleston! Charleston! The History of a Southern City* (Columbia, The University of South Carolina, 1989), pp. 247-252.

<sup>23</sup> ibid. pp. 253-254.

The Civil War pulled thousands of men from Charleston and left the economy dwindling. As a result, coupled with the fact that the Confederate dollar was no longer a useable currency following the South's surrender, very few of the buildings that were destroyed during the Great Fire were rebuilt for many years. A bird's eye rendering of the Peninsula drawn in 1872 shows the path of the Great Fire, loosely defined by a visible lack of buildings where they stood previously (Figure 4).<sup>24</sup>



Figure 4. 1872 Birds Eye View of Charleston. The red box shows the area that was burned during the Great Fire, largely untouched still.

<sup>24</sup> C. Drie. *Bird's eye view of the city of Charleston, South Carolina 1872*, Library of Congress American Memory Collection. <http://memory.loc.gov/cgi-bin/query/h?ammem/gmd:@field%28NUMBER+@band%28g3914c+pm008830%29%29> {accessed 14 November 2011}

Dr. John F. Schaffner chose not to rebuild on the lot at the corner of East Bay and Pinckney. In fact, the 1872 Birds eye map shows that only a foundation and a chimney are left standing on the lot (Figure 5).<sup>25</sup> The empty lot was valued at \$1,680 in 1871.<sup>26</sup>

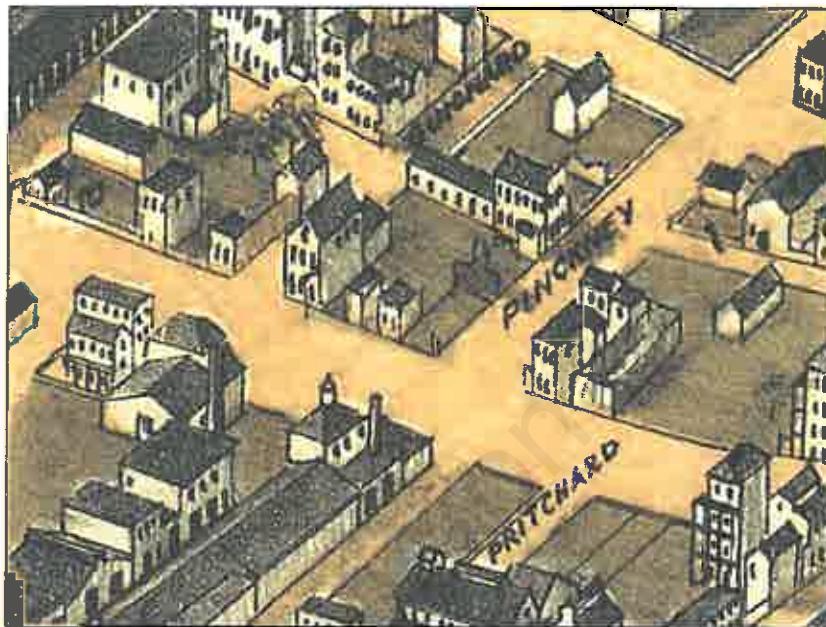


Figure 5. Close-up of 1872 Birds eye, showing an empty lot at the southwest corner of Pinckney and East Bay Streets.

Dr. Schaffner's successors, though, must have rebuilt on the corner lot sometime between when they purchased it in 1875 and 1882, when the 1882 Lamble Plat of the City of Charleston shows a lot measuring approximately 50' x 100' containing a two-story brick building with a two-story piazza and a small, one-story wood addition off the western

<sup>25</sup> *ibid*

<sup>26</sup> City of Charleston. City Tax Assessment Ward Books, Charleston, SC., Ward 3, 1871-1875.

(rear) side. The same plat shows that on the north side of Pinckney Street stood an Iron Works called Miller and Kelly's, which was a one-story wood building.<sup>27</sup>

The 1884 Sanborn Fire Insurance Company map also shows this building (Figure 6).<sup>28</sup> There is no record of when the building was built, or how much it cost, though the same building appears to exist today with several alterations which will be discussed later in the paper.

The purchaser was John F. Johanns, who immigrated to the United States from Germany sometime in the 1800s. He bought the property along with two other lots sharing boundaries from Dr. Schaffner on January 11, 1875. The corner lot measured 20' north-south by 65' east-west; the lot to the west measured 40' east-west by 56' north-south; and the lot to the south measured 30' north-south by 65' east-west.<sup>29</sup>

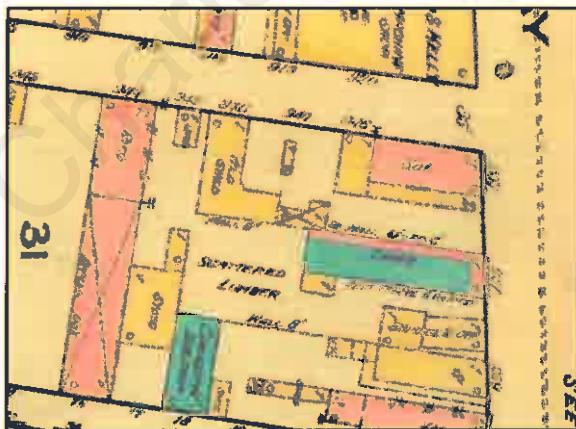


Figure 6. Sanborn Fire Insurance Company, Charleston SC, 1884

<sup>27</sup> Lamble Plat of the City of Charleston, Lamble Plat Collection, South Carolina Room, Charleston County Public Library, Charleston, SC, page 25, original drawn 1882.

<sup>28</sup> Sanborn Fire Insurance Maps of South Carolina, University of South Carolina Library (New York, Sanborn Map and Publishing Co., Ltd.), Charleston, May 1884. <http://www.sc.edu/library/digital/collections/sanborn.html> (accessed 14 November 2011)

<sup>29</sup> Charleston County. Records of the Register Mesne Conveyance (RMC), Charleston, SC. Deed Book R16, p. 373.

## **The Earthquake of 1886**

Around 9:50 PM on August 31, 1886, one of the strongest earthquakes in United States history struck Charleston. It began as an almost unperceivable tremor, but soon roared to a rapid quiver, shaking all moveable objects in sight. The first shock lasted almost 45 seconds, and seven subsequent aftershocks occurred over the next 24 hours. The maximum intensity felt was X, and the magnitude was a 7.3. An estimated 60 persons were killed and many more were injured. Hardly any buildings on the peninsula escaped damage; some were completely destroyed. The cities of Columbia, Savannah, and Augusta even experienced damages from the quake, though the effects were felt over a five-million square mile area (Figure 7).<sup>30</sup>

<sup>30</sup> USGS, "Historic Earthquakes: Charleston, South Carolina." <http://earthquake.usgs.gov> {accessed 15 November 2011}

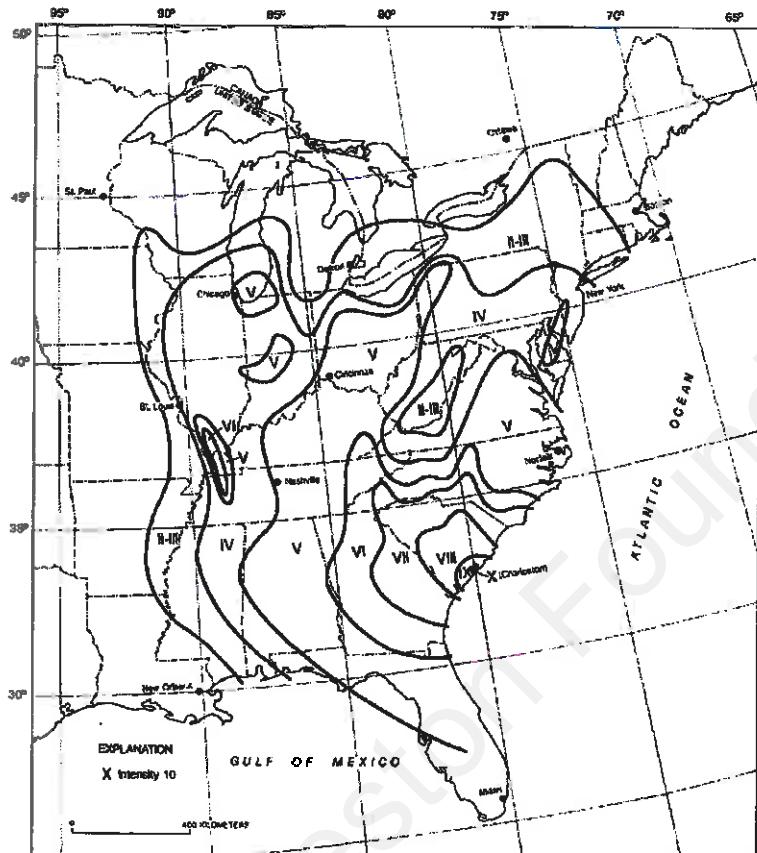


Figure 7. Charleston Earthquake Isoseismic Map

An Executive Relief Committee was formed to assess the damages from the Earthquake as well as distribute vouchers for repairs. Money from religious and civic groups as well as the government poured in to Charleston from across the nation to help its residents rebuild. Additionally, carpentry and building firms increased in number in Charleston to help repair the 6,956 buildings and construct 271 new ones.<sup>31</sup>

<sup>31</sup> Walter J. Fraser, Jr. *Charleston! Charleston! The History of a Southern City* (Columbia, The University of South Carolina, 1989), pp. 317

251 East Bay Street was spared from major damage. Its walls and chimneys remained attached to the building, and the only damage reported was bad cracking on the east wall. The Record of Earthquake Damages by Winham and Lester Publishers, Atlanta, 1886, listed the damages to #249 East Bay (as it was then known), a brick saloon building with a tin roof belonging to J. F. Johanns as "East Wall badly cracked, needs anchoring."<sup>32</sup> The Executive Relief Committee assessed the property at \$4,000 with incumbrances of \$2,500. John Johanns applied for \$645 and was allowed \$300.<sup>33</sup> There is no evidence of what repairs were made looking at the present day structure, as there are no earthquake bolts and stucco has been applied, which would cover any patching of the brick.

The 1888 Sanborn Fire Insurance Map of the property shows it listed as vacant<sup>34</sup> (Figure 8), which perhaps indicates that the Johanns lived somewhere else temporarily while it was being repaired from the Earthquake. The Johanns and their six children, all of whom were born in South Carolina, lived at the property by the year 1889, however. Also living with them was a white servant, John B. Nixon, who was a widower. By 1889, if not

<sup>32</sup> Record of Earthquake Damages, Winham and Lester Publishers, Atlanta, 1886 [microfilm], South Carolina Room, Charleston County Public Library, Charleston, SC.

<sup>33</sup> Earthquake of 1886 Damages [microfilm], Detailed Statement showing the applications filed on account of damages by the Earthquake to real and personal property, South Carolina Room, Charleston County Public Library, Charleston, SC.

<sup>34</sup> Sanborn Fire Insurance Maps of South Carolina, University of South Carolina Library (New York, Sanborn Map and Publishing Co., Ltd.), Charleston, May 1888. <http://www.sc.edu/library/digital/collections/sanborn.html> {accessed 14 November 2011}

sooner, the Johanns ran a grocery and saloon out of 251 East Bay Street<sup>35</sup>, most likely having the business on the first floor and residing on the second floor.

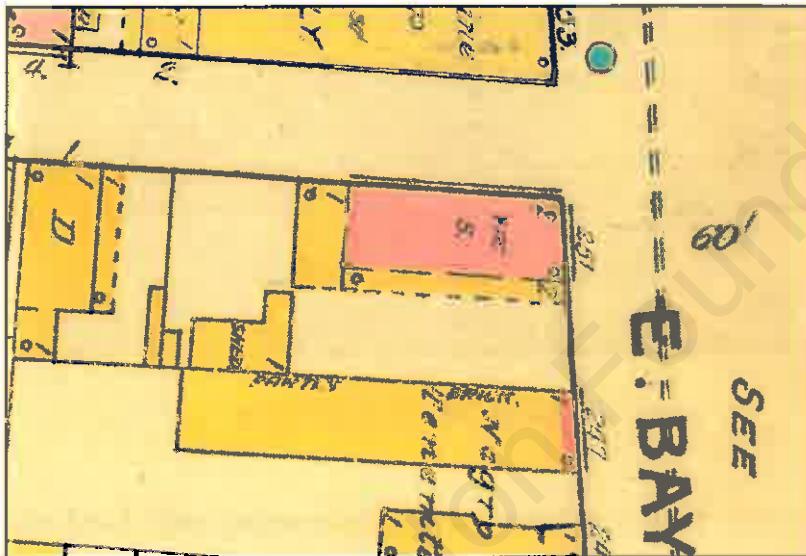


Figure 8. 1888 Sanborn Fire Insurance Map

John F. Johanns' wife, Meta M. Johanns, became the deed holder when he died in 1916. Meta held the deed until her death in 1929, at which point it was transferred to one of their daughters, Sophie R. Johanns. Both John and Meta Johanns are buried in the Bethany Cemetery in Charleston County, South Carolina (Figure 9).<sup>36</sup>

<sup>35</sup> Ancestry.com. Charleston, South Carolina Directory, 1888-90 [database on-line]. Provo, UT, USA: Ancestry.com Operations Inc., 2000 [accessed 8 November 2011].

<sup>36</sup> Johann F Johanns and Meta M Johanns gravestone, in Bethany Cemetery, Charleston County, SC. From [www.findagrave.com](http://www.findagrave.com) [accessed 14 November 2011].



Figure 9. Johanns gravestone.

Sophie Johanns maintained ownership of the property until 1943, when Peter Leventis purchased it. When he died, he willed it to the "Heirs of Peter Leventis" who transferred ownership to the Leventis Realty Corporation,<sup>37</sup> which was probably created as a holding company. They held the property from 1955 until 1965, when Paul C. Stanford purchased the property for \$18,000.<sup>38</sup> In 1977, Mr. Stanford sold the property to John H. Cannady for \$35,000,<sup>39</sup> and he later sold it to J. Ryan Condon (3/4 interest) and William Stacks (1/4 interest) for \$175,000.<sup>40</sup> William Stacks sold his share of the property to John Gissell, Jr., for \$55,000 in 1995,<sup>41</sup> and in 1999 Mr. Gissell sold his share to J. Ryan Condon

<sup>37</sup> Charleston County. Records of the Register Mesne Conveyance (RMC), Charleston, SC. Deed Book B44, p. 201.

<sup>38</sup> *ibid* Book V10, p. 310

<sup>39</sup> *ibid* Y113, p. 409

<sup>40</sup> *ibid* M222, p. 514

<sup>41</sup> *ibid* O251, p. 158

for \$59,617, making Mr. Condon the sole owner.<sup>42</sup> In 2005 J. Ryan Condon conveyed the property to JRC Real Properties for \$9.<sup>43</sup> Today the property is valued at \$591,000.<sup>44</sup>

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<sup>42</sup> *ibid* G324, p. 066

<sup>43</sup> *ibid* U525, p. 725

<sup>44</sup> Charleston County GIS, Charleston County, South Carolina, Parcel #4580503029, [charlestoncounty.org](http://charlestoncounty.org) {accessed 15 November 2011}

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November 1, 2011

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## Architectural Description

251 East Bay Street is based on a Charleston Single House plan, built between 1875 and 1882 in the Ansonborough neighborhood of Charleston, South Carolina. It sits at the southwest corner of the intersection of Pinckney and East Bay Streets. The piazza is located on the south side of the building and is on the second story of the building, as a later one-story addition created an access-way where the first floor piazza would have been between the original building and the addition. The addition was created to provide more space for the tavern's patrons lies to the south; it is unknown when it was added. The overall footprint measures 56 feet along Pinckney Street by 52 feet along East Bay Street. The façade is stucco over brick, painted "Peninsula City Red."<sup>45</sup> The entire east façade along the ground level is brick. A molding string course, painted a shade of white, defines the tops of the ground and second floors on the original single house plan. A small parapet skirts the entire perimeter of the original building, and it is unclear what the current roof construction is, though it was likely a gable roof with the gables on the east and west when originally built. Two chimneys are located just inboard of the north wall, dividing the roofline into thirds, and one chimney with two flues is located in the center of the east wall, flush with the outside wall.

The second floor piazza is supported by wooden Doric columns and has turned balusters. There is no parapet on the piazza roof.

<sup>45</sup> City of Charleston, Color Schedule for 251 East Bay Street, Board of Architectural Review, Charleston, SC, March 1993

There are no windows on the entire first floor. The second floor, east wall has three double-hung 6/6 windows, approximately 3 feet wide. Each window has a small projecting pediment, painted a shade of white. None of the windows have shutters. The outside two windows have corresponding decorative recesses in the parapet wall above. The north wall has seven 6/6 windows, more or less evenly spaced across the façade. These windows, too, have the same projecting pediments, and each window on this side have the same decorative recesses in the parapet.

One 42" modern door with raised paneling is located sixteen feet from the northwest corner of the building on the north wall. The principal entrance to the tavern is located on the east wall. A shallow recess in the stucco wall, five feet across, frames the entry door, which is 42" wide and has a semicircular top with a small semicircular pane of glass set in it. There are two raised panels below the glass, and a semicircular burgundy awning above the door. A 36" door provides access to the space where the first floor piazza once was, and eleven feet to the south of that door is another recess, eight feet across but approximately two feet deep, with double doors providing access to the addition.

Elevation drawings of the east and north sides are included in Appendix A. Due to limited resources the height of the building and elements that could not be measured from the ground were not obtained, therefore the horizontal scale is correct, but not all of the vertical elements are drawn to scale.

## **Significance**

### **Architecture and Area**

251 East Bay Street is relatively unremarkable from an architectural perspective. Its original form, prior to the additions made during its time as a bar, is a typical Charleston single house with a two story piazza. What is interesting about the form, however, is that it is a masonry structure. Alone, this is not unique, but in the context of the devastating Fire of 1861 which destroyed the previously wooden structure, the fact that it was rebuilt as a brick building with a metal roof reflects the changing building requirements resulting from the several large fires in Charleston in the 19<sup>th</sup> century.

Second, the property was located in what was, and still is, a vibrant commercial area. Like many buildings in Ansonborough, 251 East Bay Street served as a mixed-use structure, with a business on the ground level and a residence above. It served as a grocery, providing food and general goods to locals as well as to sailors and merchants visiting Charleston at the wharves on the Cooper River to the east. This part of Charleston was a driving force in establishing Charleston's prominence as a port city in the United States and in the World.

## **Use**

The most interesting link between the past and the present at the property is that through two campaigns, it has been a place for locals to meet and have a drink. The Johanns Family, who was German, operated it as a saloon in the 1880s, at the same time as it was a

grocery. There were no details on the operation of the Saloon found during this research, though it is possible that information exists. Subsequent researchers should look to the South Carolina Historical Society, The Charleston Archives, and The South Carolina State Archives for further information on the Saloon and the Johanns family. Of course, today the property exists as it has since 1955 as Big John's Tavern, which has been a favorite bar amongst Charlestonians and, with hope, will continue to be well into the future.

### **Big John's Tavern**

John "Big John" Cannady was born in Charleston in 1923 and made his name known as a high school football player. He chose to play college football at Indiana, where he played both offense and defense as center and linebacker, respectively. During his time at Indiana, the team earned the Big Ten conference title for the first time in 67 years. John Cannady was named to the All-American team in 1945, and in 1970 was named one of the 11 greatest Indiana football players.

After college, Big John was drafted in the second round of 1947 to the New York Giants, and played on that team until 1954. He played in the league's Pro Bowl game in 1950 and 1952, and was named All-Pro in 1951 and 1955. In 1955, he returned to Charleston and opened Big John's. Though he is not the current owner, Big John's Tavern continues to carry the name of the who started it. It is a self-proclaimed "dive bar," and is

known to be frequented by Cadets from The Citadel as well as hoards of locals and College of Charleston students.<sup>46</sup>



Figure 10. Big John's Tavern. Photo by Author



Figure 11. Big John's Tavern. Courtesy [www.facebook.com](http://www.facebook.com)

<sup>46</sup> The Legend of Big John, [www.bigjohnstavern.com](http://www.bigjohnstavern.com) {accessed 14 November 2011}

The character of East Bay Street has changed somewhat through the years, though it has largely remained the same – a place for commerce and hospitality, which is a truth for much of Charleston. That is true of 251 East Bay Street, which has served as a permanent home to multiple families, a tenement house, a grocery, and a bar, twice in its history. This research paper merely scratches the surface of the history of 251 East Bay Street, a history that is capable of providing information about the area around it and the City of Charleston as a whole. It has been a privilege learning about this property and working with the wonderful people in the libraries, archives, and various county and city departments in Charleston and in Columbia.

**APPENDIX A: 251 EAST BAY STREET: ELEVATIONS**

*The History of 251 East Bay Street*

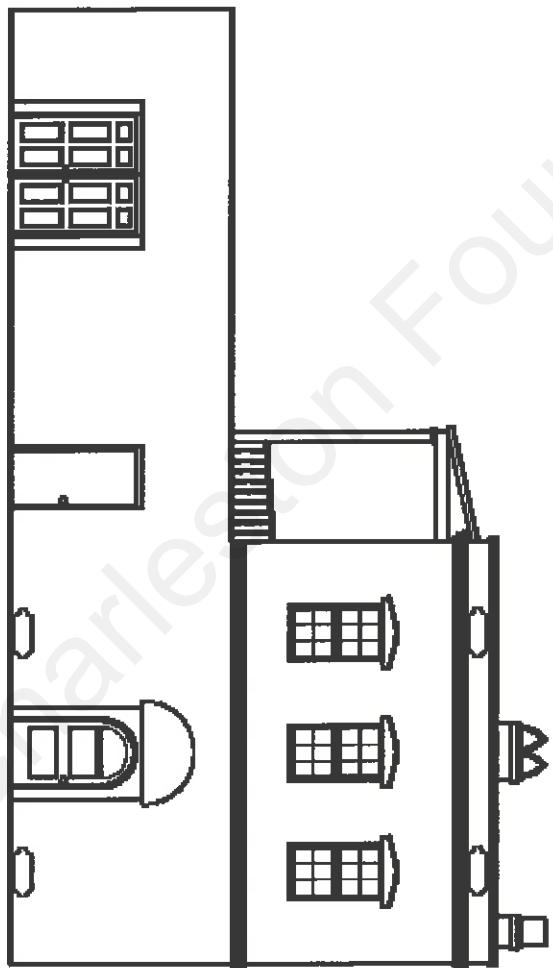
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251 EAST BAY STREET  
EAST ELEVATION

NOT TO SCALE

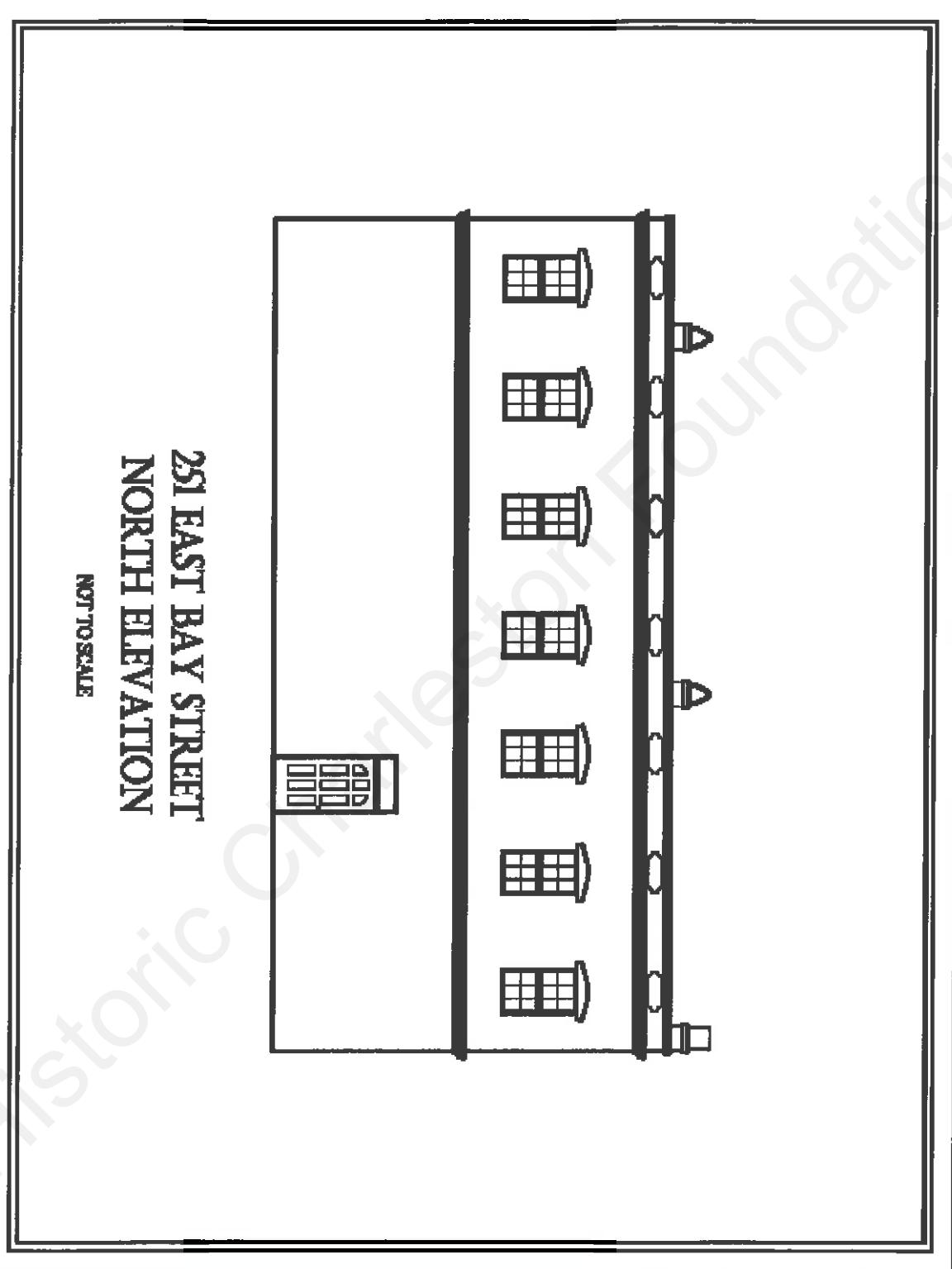


*The History of 251 East Bay Street*

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**APPENDIX B: 251 EAST BAY STREET: CHAIN OF TITLE**

*The History of 251 East Bay Street*

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| Chain-of-Title Record |               |   | Property Address- Date:                 |                 |   | 247 East Bay Street - Big Island - Taupra |  |  |
|-----------------------|---------------|---|---|-----------------|---|---|--|--|
| Date                  | Book and Page | Grantor                                 | Grantee                                 | Type            | Lot Size                                    | Mat                                       | Comments   |  |
| 2/15/1905             | 1525/725      | J. Ryan Condon                          | JMC Real Properties                     | Conveyance      | 51x62x5.1x55                                |   |  |  |
| 4/13/1906             | 6331/635      | J. Ryan Condon and John M. Gissell, Jr. | J. Ryan Condon                          |                 |   |   | \$50   |  |
| 4/12/1905             | 0351/158      | J. Ryan Condon and William Stocks       | J. Ryan Condon and John M. Gissell, Jr. |                 |   |   | \$14,671 / \$14,671  |  |
| 3/12/1903             | 1522/534      | John H. Canby                           | J. Ryan Condon and William Stocks       |                 |   |   | \$14,671   |  |
| 10/28/1977            | 11174/850     | Stanford, Paul C.                       | John H. Connelly                        |                 |   |   | \$25,000   |  |
| 11/1/1959             | 160/710       | Leventis Realty Corporation             | Stanford, Paul C.                       | Conveyance      |   |   | At this time, lot is known as 251 E Bay and 1 Phoebe   |  |
| 4/9/1943              | B-44/203      | Sophie R. Johannes                      | Peter Leventis                          | Conveyance      |   |   | Paula Leventis died in 1944 and Peter Leventis died in 1946. Both bequeathed ownership to the Leventis family corporation  |  |
| 3/7/1954              | 4716/741      | John T. Schaffner (or Shaffner)         | 14-11-11-11-11                          | Conveyance      | 20'10" x 30' and 14' x 44' (south of [lot]) |   | J.L. Johnson sold the property to John Leventis, who sold it to Siegler. Confining to building only lot.                   |  |
| 8 Feb 1934            | 1120/24       | Peter S. Col, executor of Henry Becht   | Frederick Schaffner                     | Conveyance      | 23'x35' and 23'x45' [south of [lot]]        |   | M.R. Schaffner bought the property in 1934 for \$12,000, F. J. Schaffner   |  |
| March 1900            | 157/257       | Ella Lawrence                           | Henry Becht                             | Conveyance      |   |   | John Lawrence sold the lot to M.R. Schaffner in 1934.  |  |
| 5/3/1907              | 117/278       | Robert H. Lawrence                      | Flora Lawrence                          | Transfer - will |   |   | Robert Lawrence died in 1907. His property was sold by Elmer's Law to wife Flora. The Flora was worth more than \$100,000. |  |

*The History of 251 East Bay Street*

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**APPENDIX C: 251 EAST BAY STREET: BIBLIOGRAPHY**

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