

Samuel and Mary Prince House

84 Cannon Street

c. 1887



The simple, one-story frame house at 84 Cannon Street was built in the 1880s by Samuel H. Prince, but the lot—unaltered since 1799—had been the location of a residence earlier. The current house has flip-flopped between owner occupancy and rental property several times during its 130 years.

The Lot

The land, like all of the lots within Cannonborough, was once owned by **Daniel Cannon**, a wealthy builder and sawmill operator. He divided his large holdings into lots (still very

large) and began selling the suburban parcels off in the 1790s. On January 17, 1795, **James Custer** bought Lot 1 at the northeast corner of Cannon Street and Rutledge Avenue for 100 pounds sterling.¹ The parcel was about 335 feet along Cannon Street and 120 feet deep. Mr. Custer added to his holdings when he bought another of Mr. Cannon's parcels on June 24, 1795, acquiring the neighboring Lot 2 to the north for 50 pounds sterling. Lot 2 was smaller—only about 57 feet along Rutledge Avenue and 318 feet along Lot 1.² The combined parcels would eventually become 84, 86, 88, 90, 92, 96, 96 ½, and 98 Cannon Street as well as 210, 212, and 214 Rutledge Avenue.

Mr. Custer sold Lots 1 and 2 to **Edward Brown Nowell** for 100 pounds sterling on December 24, 1798.³ (The price cut from what Mr. Custer had paid for the same two lots was perhaps accounted for in a simultaneous sale of property in Ansonborough by Mr. Nowell to Mr. Custer.) Although the two lots were originally oriented east-west, Mr. Nowell began selling off pieces of this property so as to form the modern, north-south lots along Cannon Street. On March 12, 1799, Mr. Nowell sliced off the easternmost 40 feet of his holdings and sold the new parcel to **Daniel Defoy** for 50 pounds.⁴ The resulting lot was the same 40 foot wide and 175 foot deep parcel that has continued to exist to the current date.

The First House

On June 12, 1799, Daniel Lefoy (joined by his wife, Ann) sold the property to **William Lee** for 80 pounds sterling.⁵ On December 31, 1800, William Lee (joined by his wife, Harriet) sold the property to

¹ Deed book M6, page 290 (recorded Mar. 24, 1795)

² Deed book P6, page 79 (recorded Oct. 28, 1795) (the lot tapered to 309 feet wide along with northern edge)

³ Deed book X6, page 18

⁴ Deed book Y6, page 5

⁵ Deed book Y6, page 109

William Friday, a free person of color, for 80 pounds sterling.⁶ Until the sale to Mr. Friday in 1800, none of the deeds expressly referred to a house, although the quick run-up in price before to sale to Mr. Lee might suggest that a house was added then. Certainly, however, a house was added to the land at least by 1806, when Mr. Friday was listed as a butcher ("virtualler") living on Cannon Street.⁷ Mr. Friday did face a tax delinquency issue in 1819 which risked the house,⁸ but in the 1820 census, the Friday family consisted of seven free black members there. In the 1830 census, Mr. and Mrs. Friday were recorded at the house along with 15 slaves. Finally, in the 1840 census, the family included seven free people of color and two slaves.⁹

The Friday family owned the parcel throughout the first half of the 19th century, but the apparent heirs of Mr. Friday (who died about 1840) seem to have lost the house to settle debts. **Richard E. Dereef** bought the property for \$600 at a judicial auction on February 5, 1849, after a suit against John Friday and A. Friday (possibly William's widow, Alicia).¹⁰ Mr. Dereef flipped the house and sold it for \$830 to **Thomas N. Gadsden** on January 30, 1850.¹¹ Interesting, the deed specifically described Mr. Dereef as "a person of Indian descent," explaining in a special note that he had objected to signing a paper describing himself as a "free person of color."

Mr. Gadsden, one of the city's most active real estate investors and most active slave auctioneers, lived on the lower peninsula and would have kept it as a rental property.¹² Regardless, he did not keep the house long and sold it to **Samuel Morrison** on April 17, 1855 for \$1350.¹³

The Current House

The story of the current house at 84 Cannon Street begins with the next transfer of the land. Mr. Morrison sold the property to **John S. Riggs** in 1863.¹⁴ Mr. Riggs¹⁵ was a self-made man who had been the Father of Charleston Trolleys. By 1860, Mr. Riggs paid taxes on over \$60,000 in real estate (a very large sum at the time), owned 23 slaves, and had other property as well. Most notably, he was the president of the Charleston City Railway Co. from its creation in 1866 when it first ran the first horse-drawn trolleys in Charleston until his company was acquired by the later trolley company in 1898 and the operation went electric.¹⁶

Mr. Riggs did not occupy the simple wooden house on Cannon Street; in 1864 he bought the elegant Joseph Manigault House at 350 Meeting Street and resided there. Instead, Mr. Riggs seems to

⁶ Deed book E7, page 477 (recorded Mar. 9, 1802)

⁷ Despite the lack of street numbers in many early census records, it can be shown that Mr. Friday was living at 84 Cannon Street. Census records consistently identified neighboring property owners adjacent to Mr. Friday's own entry. And, while city directories also often omitted street numbers, Mr. Friday did not own any other property on Cannon Street.

⁸ Southern Patriot, Sep. 11, 1820, at 2

⁹ The Fridays' use of slave labor despite being freed people of color is briefly mentioned by Larry Koger in *Black Slaveowners: Free Black Slave Masters in South Carolina, 1790–1860*.

¹⁰ Deed book C12, page 82

¹¹ Deed book F12, page 111

¹² Francis Manning was living at the house (then known as 56 Cannon Street) in 1861 for the municipal census.

¹³ Deed book R13, page 88 (recorded on Nov. 22, 1855)

¹⁴ Deed book T14(2), page 16

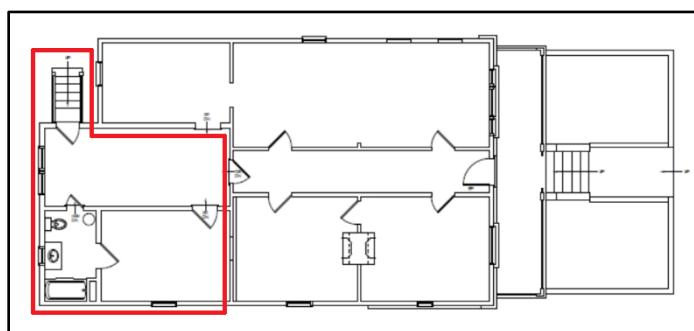
¹⁵ (b. Oct. 3, 1823 in Norfolk, Va.)

¹⁶ "The Late John S. Riggs," News and Courier, Feb. 6, 1899, at 8

have used 84 Cannon Street as a rental property.¹⁷ Although the Cannon Street house was certainly liveable, it must not have been a particularly stylish house even among its neighbors on Cannon Street. In 1873, it was worth only about $\frac{1}{4}$ the neighboring house at 86 Cannon Street.



How the back building was used during the Princes' time is unknown. No records show renters occupying it. Additionally, it seems odd that the wealthy president of the Charleston trolley would live in the Manigault House himself while his sister occupied a simple frame house that shared a lot with a workforce rental. A contemporary (2018) floorplan of the current house reveals that it was likely a very simple four-room house with a central hall. On the right of the central hall, the two rooms have been joined by removing the wall between them; evidence of a fireplace mirroring the one across the hall exists where the floorboards have been patched. The rear section of the house has been changed during its existence; the rearmost room at the northeast corner is probably original, but the northwest corner is in-fill (indicated in red in the diagram).



Meanwhile, Walter Riggs, a son of John S. Riggs, died of a cerebral hemorrhage on December 22, 1888, at the age of only 34, leaving two minor children, John S. Riggs, Jr. and Alma Shingler Riggs. To provide for his grandchildren, Mr. Riggs wrote a will in 1894 which left his two-story house on Cannon Street to them, but only at the expiration of a life estate in favor of his sister.¹⁹ Mr. Riggs' will specifically mentioned that the two-story house was still on the property but that his brother-in-law Samuel H.

¹⁷ Between 1870 and 1873, the house was rented to Terrance and May McMahon (McMann).

¹⁸ "How the City Was Rebuilt," News and Courier, Sep. 5, 1887, at 1

¹⁹ Charleston County estate case number 423-0024

Prince had built a one-story house on the property as his residence. When Mr. Riggs died on February 2, 1899, the title to the property passed to his sister, but only for the duration of her life.

Mr. Prince,²⁰ a clerk with the South Carolina Railway, died on June 10, 1896. His widow, Mary,²¹ remained in their house until she died on September 9, 1906. Mr. Riggs' grandchildren John and Alma²² then received the property, but John very quickly sold his interest in the Cannon Street house and other real estate to his sister for \$1129 on November 7, 1906.²³ On July 31, 1908, Mrs. Alma Riggs-Sanders sold for \$2000 to the executors of Frances K. Merrill (who had died in 1896) for the benefit of Ms. Merrill's siblings, **Sarah Kinsman and Warren Kinsman.**²⁴ During those short ownerships after the Princes, the house seems to have been used as a rental property again.²⁵

Warren died in 1909, and Sarah became the undivided owner of 84 Cannon Street. When Sarah herself died in May 1912, her estate sold the property for \$2800 to grocery clerk **Theodore F. Gruber**²⁶ on February 19, 1914.²⁷ Mr. Gruber and his wife, Elizabeth, returned the house to owner-occupation and lived there until 1924; thereafter the Grubers began using their own house as an income property again²⁸ while renting a house for themselves in Ansonborough.

Mr. Gruber sold the house for \$6500 to Palmetto Shipping employee **Harry²⁹ and Daisy Simmons Rhett**³⁰ on July 25, 1955.³¹ The Rhetts once again returned the house to owner-occupation. Mr. Rhett, on March 21, 1968, conveyed his interest in both the Cannon Street house and also 7 Kennedy Street to his wife.³²

Mrs. Rhett sold the house for \$15,500 to **James and Ethel S. Brown** on April 2, 1971.³³ James Brown, a worker at Morris Motors, lived at the house with Ethel for nearly twenty years before he died on May 20, 1991. Ethel S. Brown took the house by a deed of distribution on January 6, 1992.³⁴

The house has maintained its basic form over time, although some alterations have been made to the rear. The building is a simple, frame house with gable, metal roof. The front of the house has unfortunately had its wood siding covered with (but not replaced by) a brick veneer, but only on the

²⁰ (b. Dec. 21, 1824)

²¹ (b. Oct. 22, 1831)

²² Alma Riggs (b. abt. 1887) married Edward Rembert Sanders (b. abt. 1887) on November 26, 1905. They seem to have lived in Chatham, Georgia in 1910 and maybe Savannah, Georgia until about 1922.

²³ Deed book H25, page 1

²⁴ Deed book O24, page 613 (recorded Aug. 10, 1908)

²⁵ Occupants included Mrs. John Dukes (1908), Rev. R. Maynard and Hattie Marshall (1910-1912), and J.H. Scott (1912-1914).

²⁶ (b. Aug. 6, 1881)

²⁷ Deed book R26, page 485

²⁸ Occupants included railroad yard master William P. and Geraldine Cahill (1925-1932), John J. Howard (1934), Clarence R. Ashworth (1938), Benjamin and Ida Viorde (1940), Vernon Viorde (1940), Carroll and Marie Tumbleston (1940), Mr. and Mrs. Herbert Lee Powell (1941-1942), Ernest A. Park (1942), Mrs. William E. Enter (1943), Charles H. VanGlahn (1948), Miss Joan Nelson (1951), and Mrs. Margaret Hendricks (1955).

²⁹ (b. Oct. 30, 1903; d. Mar. 10, 1989)

³⁰ (b. abt. 1910; d. bef. 1994)

³¹ Deed book O60, page 452

³² Deed book G76, page 178

³³ Deed book H96, page 284

³⁴ Deed book K209, page 301

front. The framing indicates that there were two windows on either side of the front door, and two more along the sides in each room. Additionally, the front porch has had metal columns installed instead of wood and mid-20th century windows have been used as replacements. One original two-over-two window remains in the back corner room. Happily, what seems to have been an original turned column was found under the house, giving a basis for recreating the original porch.