The United Order of Tents and 73 Cannon Street:  A Study of Identity and Place

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THE UNITED ORDER OF TENTS AND 73 CANNON STREET: A STUDY OF IDENTITY AND PLACE

A Thesis
Presented to
the Graduate Schools of
Clemson University and College of Charleston

In Partial Fulfillment
of the Requirements for the Degree
Master of Science
Historic Preservation

by
Mary Margaret Schley
May 2013

Accepted by:
Dr. Carter L. Hudgins, Committee Chair
Amalia Leifeste
Katherine Pemberton
ABSTRACT

One hundred years ago, a group of African-American women assembled in Charleston, South Carolina under the name of the United Order of Tents of J.R. Giddings and Jollifee Union. The only organization of its kind, the United Order of Tents is a secret society comprised and operated solely by African-American women. The Order traces its roots back to the operations of the Underground Railroad in Norfolk, Virginia. The founder of the organization, Annetta M. Lane, assisted slaves during their escape from the South through their journey on the Railroad. After emancipation, Annetta Lane and United Order of Tents co-founder, Harriett Taylor, recognized a need for African-American women to join together for strength and security in the new free world. To this end, the United Order of Tents was created. The founding members viewed the Order as a “tent of salvation” amidst the turmoil of Reconstruction and intended to uplift the African-American community through mutual-aid and personal betterment.

In 1913, the Charleston chapter of the United Order of Tents convened under a similar benevolent mission and has continually served the community for a century. In 1956, the Charleston chapter embedded the organization’s history in the city’s landscape with the purchase of 73 Cannon Street. The mid-nineteenth century single house served as the headquarters of the Order for fifty-six years. Since the Order’s acquisition, the property fulfilled the multi-faceted needs of the organization serving as a meeting house, a stage for the members’ sacred rituals, office and managerial space, a fundraising events venue, and an income-producing property.

In the summer of 2012, the building and its services were extricated from the Order due to a city enforced public nuisances code, locally recognized as “demolition by neglect.” Presently, the tents are operating out of scattered venues across the city. This disjunction threatens the historic relationship between 73 Cannon Street and the United Order of Tents.

The circumstances surrounding the Order’s building attracted attention in
the local preservation consciousness. This interest served as the impetus for this investigation on identity and place. This thesis uncovers the historic narratives embedded within the structure of 73 Cannon Street and, consequently, reveals a relatively untold history of a group of African American women. Additionally, this study illustrates the power of architecture to serve as a vessel for identity and memory and to enrich the surrounding community. This study concludes with recommendations for preserving both the historic building and historic organization in order to maintain the sense of place at 73 Cannon Street.
ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

First and foremost, I must recognize and thank the women of the United Order of Tents. I am honored to have gotten to know a number of you and been allowed into your secret world for a few months. The history of your organization is fascinating and I hope that this thesis can share your remarkable story with a broader audience. In the time spent with your membership, I was truly inspired by the love you hold for one another and the Order. Your devotion serves as a constant reminder that love, and its expression, is what this life is all about.

This brings me to my own loved ones. To my family and friends, who have entertained and supported my many interests and ideas which have culminated in the completion of this thesis, I owe you a million thanks.

To my thesis advisors, Amalia Leifeste, Carter Hudgins, and Katherine Pemberton, who have refined my thoughts and words into a product I am proud of, I could not have completed this task without you and for that I am eternally grateful.

To the Preservation Society of Charleston, without whom this thesis would not have been successful, thank you for agreeing to collaborate with me. You have granted me a remarkable opportunity to intricately study both an organization and a building here in the city of Charleston. Your support and willingness to help has been overwhelming.

Finally, I owe a tremendous thank you to my classmates who have sharpened my mind and kept me smiling for the past two years of graduate school. I could not have completed this thesis successfully without this group of friends.
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CHAPTER ONE
INTRODUCTION

She is a Tree of Life to Them
That Lay Hold Upon Her;
And Happy is Everyone That Retaineth Her

The United Order of Tents of J. R. Giddings and Jollifee Union is an African-American, female secret society that traces its origins back to Norfolk, Virginia in 1867. It is the only Christian fraternal organization comprised and operated solely by African-American women. Annetta M. Lane, a former slave and orchestrator of the Underground Railroad, founded the organization to create a benevolent community amongst newly freed, black women. During Reconstruction, Lane identified the need to equip emancipated female slaves with the tools to prosper in their newfound citizenship. The members of the Order promised to care for one another through mutual-aid; in this manner, the membership of the Order created “a tent of salvation” for a vulnerable demographic. The comprehensive mission of the organization is “to incite women to the highest standards of Christian living, and to strive to achieve for the Negro race, the place it rightfully deserves.”

Throughout the decades, the organization expanded into four designated districts of the country and possessed tens of thousands of members. Today, the Order stays true to the benevolent nature of the original mission statement, yet has adapted to serve the modern needs of their respective contemporary communities.

The knowledge regarding the history of the United Order of Tents presented in the ensuing chapters is drawn from a conglomeration of sources. A member of

2 “Thanksgiving Service Program 2009,” United Order of Tents Records, Charleston, SC.
the organization, Dorothy Saunders, compiled a memoir addressing the inception of
the United Order of Tents in Norfolk that contains a helpful history of the national
organization’s development.³ Focusing on the Charleston chapter of the Order,
contemporary newspapers, oral histories, and limited access to the Charleston chapter’s
records constitute the primary sources consulted for depicting the history of the local
United Order of Tents. Due to the absence of any readily available comprehensive
history regarding the Order, the general public knows little about an organization
that has been selflessly serving America for nearly a century and a half. The secretive
nature of the organization has prevented the widespread recognition of the Order’s
work; however, after one hundred and forty-six years of undocumented activity, there
is an abundance of history to be recorded without violating the confidentiality of the
organization.

The United Order of Tents contributed to a larger cultural movement
retrospectively acknowledged by scholars as, “the black women’s club movement,”
another inadequately documented piece of American history. Emerging in the late
nineteenth century, the black women’s club movement was defined by the assemblage
of African American women across the country with the common motive to elevate
the social standing of their race. The motto of the National Association of Colored
Women’s Clubs (NACW), the eventual institutionalization of the movement, is “Lifting
As We Climb.”⁴ Like the United Order of Tents, the NACW is still active today and serves
as a living legacy of the black women’s club movement. On national and local levels, a
comparative study of the United Order of Tents and the black women’s club movement
illuminates the consistencies and anomalies between the Order and the movement.
The documentation of the United Order of Tents enhances the current perspective

³ Dorothy Saunders, “Memories and Histories of the Subordinates Tents of the United Order of Tents
of J.R. Giddings and Jollifee Union Southern District #1” (Lisky Lithograph Corp.), 1976.
org/.
of America’s heritage as the organization represents the black woman’s position as a community builder within this country.

The year 2013 represents the centennial of the Charleston chapter of the United Order of Tents. Today this chapter boasts a membership of approximately 350 organized in eleven separate tents throughout the Charleston area. Since 1956, the chamber has operated out of a three and a half story building located at 73 Cannon Street. In 2012, local newspapers outlined the legal battles concerning the stability of the chamber’s meeting house. The publicity around the condition of the building brought the attention of Charleston’s preservation consciousness and served as a starting point for this investigation.

On February 8, 2012, Charleston Livability Court cited the United Order of Tents, as the owner of 73 Cannon Street, for a violation of the city’s public nuisance code, locally recognized as “demolition by neglect.” The building was deemed structurally unsound and considered a public safety hazard due to the numerous and visible structural failures. On May 7, the city postponed the case with an order for the tents to board up their meeting house by June 11, 2012. The Preservation Society of Charleston came to the aid of the tents to monetarily assist in closing up the structure. Subsequently, Charleston’s Livability Court lifted its court summons for the United Order of Tents. Still, the Order had to evacuate the building due to safety concerns.

While the group’s legal obligations have been resolved, the Charleston chapter of the United Order of Tents is still in crisis mode. For the first time in nearly sixty years, the organization is displaced from their central meeting house and office space resulting in a scattered membership and operation. Furthermore, it will require approximately $700,000, a conservative estimate, to restore the Order’s building to a state suitable for occupancy.

7 Monetary estimate provided by Evan Thompson, Director of the Preservation Society of Charleston,
The circumstances beg the question, why amidst these legal battles, financial troubles, and structural issues does the Order insist on keeping the building and property of 73 Cannon Street? The group has reportedly received numerous lucrative offers for the purchase of their property; however, the tents do not want to sell and are presently fundraising for the renovation of their building. Testimonies from the membership indicate that the power of place is binding the Order to 73 Cannon Street. The conditions of the connection forged between the Order and the building will be explored throughout this thesis.

As the headquarters of the United Order of Tents for nearly sixty years, the Order has embedded their heritage and benevolent mission into the property. Subsequently, the neighborhood and city at large are positively affected by the Order’s presence on Cannon Street. Through the contextual study of the history of the organization and the history of the building, the place-making that has occurred at 73 Cannon Street can be understood. The interwoven history of the organization and the building suggests that while the building is threatened, the historic organization is also at risk, as much of the organization’s local identity is invested in their historic meeting house.

New historic preservation theory insists on the significance of conserving both a building and the stories interned within a structure. By preserving the building in a physically and socially sensitive manner, 73 Cannon Street has the potential to enable the continuation of a history and tradition in the city of Charleston’s landscape. The United Order of Tents’ building stands to represent the social contributions made by Charleston’s African American female population to the genesis of the local African American community.

After the introduction, the second chapter of this thesis considers the national history and inspirations for the black women's club movement. The patterns of this

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in Glenn Smith’s article, “United Order of Tents could lose home” published on June 3, 2012 in Charleston, South Carolina’s Post and Courier newspaper.
movement will be compared to the national history of the United Order of Tents to understand the context and culture from which the Order emerged. Furthermore, the unique organization and nomenclature of the Order will be explained.

The third chapter summarizes the circumstances of African American history in Charleston that resulted in the local manifestation of the black women’s club movement. The United Order of Tents’ history and objectives will be compared to other black women’s clubs in Charleston to measure the similarities and discrepancies between the Order and the other local societies. The chapter contains two subsections. The first details the evolution of the Order in Charleston, and the second documents the biographies of the organization’s historic leaders.

The fourth chapter concentrates on the interwoven history of the building and the Order. By detailing the evolution of the structure, the Order’s presence at 73 Cannon Street is elucidated.

The fifth chapter documents the building as it stands in April 2013 and applies an interpretive lens to analyze how the past and present inhabitants utilized and understood the building. Two categories are considered when interpreting the building: character defining features and structural concerns. The character defining features are defined as evident historic construction methods and historic decorative treatments exhibited throughout the exterior and interior of the structure. These features contribute to the character of the building. Due to the decrepit state of the building, visible structural concerns are also highlighted within this section. When/if a renovation campaign commences at 73 Cannon Street, these acknowledged areas of structural concern should be addressed.

The sixth chapter analyzes the theory of sense of place and how the concept has developed in academia. During the late twentieth century, the concept of sense of place emerged in preservation theory expanding the field to new realms of debate as well as broadening the range of buildings deemed worthy of preservation. This chapter applies
the many meanings of sense of place to the United Order of Tents’ building to interpret the membership’s connection to 73 Cannon Street.

The seventh chapter concludes the study of the United Order of Tents and 73 Cannon Street with a list of recommendations for the preservation of the building and the organization. The Order is in a transitory state as the membership is presently displaced from their historic building. Considering that the tent members are currently contemplating options for the future of 73 Cannon, the recommendations presented within this chapter are intended to assist the Order in the decision process. Furthermore, as the year 2013 marks the Charleston chamber’s one hundred year anniversary, the organization is evaluating how to move the historic society into the next century. These two extenuating circumstances render this moment in the Order’s history an ideal time for suggestions on how to sustain the historic relationship between the United Order of Tents and 73 Cannon Street.
CHAPTER TWO
HISTORY OF THE NATIONAL BLACK WOMEN’S CLUB MOVEMENT AND THE NATIONAL UNITED ORDER OF TENTS

National Black Women’s Club Movement

Before examining the intricate world of the United Order of Tents, it is important to understand the cultural context from which this sisterhood organization emerged. From a twenty-first century perspective, the United Order of Tents appears to be an anomaly. The United Order of Tents, however, developed as part of a widespread movement in nineteenth and twentieth century America when African American women bonded together for “self-help.” Academics concerned with this period in history have called the affiliation of African American women into clubs, societies, and associations “the black women’s club movement.” The movement has only recently gained a measure of scholarly attention. After the impetus of the Civil Rights Movement in the 1960s and the Feminist Movement of the 1970s, African American history and Women’s history scholars became interested in a discussion that featured both race and gender issues. Beginning in the 1980s, scholars sought to understand the culture of a community that has long been marginalized: black women.

After emancipation, many African American women joined together to face their newfound freedom and forge their way into an Anglo-Saxon, male dominated world. This chapter traces the origins of black women’s clubs and the motivations behind their mobilization. Through this examination of the movement, the similarities and differences between the black women’s club movement and the United Order of Tents become apparent. The continuity of the United Order of Tents over nearly a century and half distinguishes the society from the thousands of African American women’s clubs.

1 To list a few influential authors concerning the black women’s club movement, see works by Kathleen Berkeley, Darlene Hine, Beverly Jones, and Ann Firor Scott.
that emerged in the late nineteenth century and then, subsequently, dissipated. The United Order of Tents is, in fact, the oldest organization of its kind and serves as a living legacy of the convictions that mobilized thousands of African American women during the repercussions of the Civil War.

The prevailing understanding of the black women’s club movement is that it began with the emergence of the National Association of Colored Women in 1896 and dissolved in the 1920s. These three decades, the 1890s to the 1920s, coincide with a period recognized as “the nadir” for race relations in America. The “nadir” was characterized by extreme racism and violence against the African American race. In this threatening period, African American women acknowledged the truism of power and safety in numbers and assembled into a multitude of clubs, societies, and organizations across the country. Together, these women quietly fought for reform as they combated stereotypes and sought to uplift one another. The overarching aim of black women’s clubs was to elevate the social standing of their race through personal betterment. The character of these clubs ranged from benevolent to literary societies; the more radical of the women’s groups spoke out against lynching and sexual abuse.

The event, which retrospectively marked the beginning of the movement, was the emergence of the National Association of Colored Women’s Clubs (NACW) in 1896. The NACW was created through the unification of two groups: the Colored Women’s League of Washington, DC and the National Federation of Afro-American Women. The NACW created a national voice and a unified mission for black women’s clubs. In 1897, Mary Church Terrell, the first president of the organization, addressed the NACW

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3 In his 1954 book *The Negro in American Life and Thought: The Nadir, 1877-1901*, historian Rayford Logan was the first scholar to characterize this period of history as “the nadir” of race relations in America.
members stating:

We have become National, because from the Atlantic to the Pacific, from Maine to the Gulf, we wish to set in motion influences that shall stop the ravages made by practice that sap our strength, and preclude the possibility of advancement . . . We call ourselves an Association to signify that we have joined hands one with the other; to work together in a common cause. We proclaim to the world that the women of our race have become partners in the great firm of progress and reform . . . We refer to the fact that this is an association of colored women, because our peculiar status in this country . . . seems to demand that we stand by ourselves . . . Our association is composed of women . . . because the work which we hope to accomplish can be done better . . . by the mothers, wives, daughters, and sisters of the race.  

The NACW predated the formation of the National Association of Colored People (NAACP) by fifteen years. The early establishment of the NACW illustrates the strong conviction of black women to serve their race. The significance of the NACW cannot be underestimated as it afforded a rallying cry and a network of support for the female African American community across the country.

Some scholars argue that the black women's club movement was a phenomenon with roots dating back to the eighteenth century. The 1896 merger of two groups, the Colored Women's League of Washington, D.C. and the National Federation of Afro-American Women, to form the NACW indicates that the movement was a product of an earlier time. Indeed, the first evidence of African American women assembling for charitable works is recorded in Philadelphia in 1793. This group called themselves

the Female Benevolent Society of St. Thomas. The mission of the society was to provide mutual aid among members. Similarly inspired organizations existed throughout the northern half of the country. To name two, the Colored Female Religious and Moral Society of Salem was established in 1818 and the Daughters of Africa in New England began in 1821. By 1830, 27 female African American mutual aid societies were recorded in Philadelphia alone. By 1838, Philadelphia boasted 119 organizations with 7,372 members. The explosion of women groups during the 1830s was not isolated to Philadelphia. Black women throughout the North joined forces to speak out against injustices. By the 1830s, more than 300,000 free black women associated themselves with self-help organizations. The hundreds of thousands of women who joined forces before the 1830s did so without an overarching institution such as the NACW.

Undoubtedly, the ability for women to congregate and record their actions in the emancipated North explains the documented history of this plethora of organizations. Due to regional differences, similar evidence is not available in the southern portion of the country; however, the lack of documentation does not signify that analogous mobilization was nonexistent south of the Mason-Dixon Line.

Due to the confines of slavery, little is known about the exact beginning of black women organizations in the antebellum south. What has been recorded of social dynamics on plantations, however, suggests that enslaved women worked together to accomplish daily tasks. The insular character of slave life prompted an inherent sense of community. Plantations generally designated an area as the slave quarters or slave row. On that designated piece of the plantation, slaves would congregate to eat and entertain, protect and care for, love and hate one another. The proximity and common plight of the slaves promoted a tradition of reliance that scholars believed parlayed in to

9 Scott, "Most Invisible of All," 6.
10 Shaw, "Black Club Women," 12.
emancipated livelihood.\textsuperscript{12}

Furthermore, in plantation life men and women were segregated in their work, often resulting with the men in the fields and the women in the house. This work segregation further increased black women’s interdependence in a non-traditional family unit. Enslaved women created a support network to share life responsibilities, such as childcare, healthcare, and religious ceremonies. This mutual association with fellow women created a strong network amongst black women that extended into life after slavery.\textsuperscript{13} Apart from this tradition of mutual aid, black women’s ascribed gender role as caretakers also influenced this specific demographics’ participation in benevolent societies.

Due to the gender roles designated during slavery that perpetuated into freedom, African American women, as the caretakers of the race, were responsible for caring for the black community. The nurturing female instinct was monopolized by plantation owners in the form of a “mammy,” the job of a female slave who was forced to forfeit the childcare of her offspring to care for the children of her master. In subsequent years, African Americans worked to combat this degrading stereotype. Twentieth century club leader Mamie Garvin Field stated, “Dad told his daughters that we would never work carrying around anybody’s white baby.”\textsuperscript{14} A black mammy is a recognized stereotype even in the twenty-first century, and it begins to explain the caretaker status assigned to African American women post-emancipation.

After emancipation, black women often continued working the jobs assigned to them during slavery out of necessity. One of the most common jobs for the enslaved

\textsuperscript{12} On pages eleven and twelve of Stephanie Shaw’s article “Black Club Women and the Creation of the National Association of Colored Women,” the author argues that slave culture contributed to the community consciousness of African American women. She cites the group labor, folk tales, and slave songs of plantation life as evidence of the interdependency among slaves.

\textsuperscript{13} Shaw references historian Deborah Gray White’s \textit{Ar’n’t I a Woman: Female Slaves in the Plantation South} on page twelve of her article “Black Club Women” to support her argument for slave culture as the foundation for black women’s interdependence institutionalized by the black women’s club movement.

female was the role of domestic servant. As job opportunities began to increase at the turn of the twentieth century, many black women were able to work within their own communities and began to serve their race in the form of clubs and societies. Historian Kathleen Berekley, argues, “Black women, because of their socioculturally defined duties as the mothers and wives of the race... shouldered the responsibility for nurturing and caring for the health and wellbeing of both the family and community.”

The tradition of African American women as caretakers, no matter how instinctual or demeaning, played a role in the creation of black women societies aiming to care for their community in the free world.

After emancipation, ambiguous social structures compelled black women to form institutions within the white world. In 1870, the Freedman’s Bureau, a governmental agency established to assist the South during Reconstruction, dissolved. After the Freedman’s Bureau’s dissolution, many northern philanthropies also withdrew their assistance forcing the southern black community into autonomy. Black women, for the combined reasons of tradition, instinct, and necessity, rose to the challenge to create the institutions desperately needed within their communities. The Daughters of Zion of Avery Chapel of Memphis, Tennessee, and the Independent Order of St. Luke of Richmond, Virginia, both founded in 1867, represent the numerous southern self-help organizations established after the Civil War.

In the wake of Reconstruction in Memphis, the Daughters of Zion of Avery

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15 On pages seventy through seventy-one of his dissertation "Family, Life, and Culture: Black Charleston, South Carolina, 1880-1910," Walter Hill examines the extension of domestic service into the post-emancipation years of 1880-1910 in Charleston, South Carolina. Hill indicates that an average of 58.66 percent of working black women in these three decades worked in the domestic-personal service. The statistic was taken based on a 10 percent sample from the Decennial Population Census.

16 Berkeley, “Colored Ladies Also Contributed,” 188, 184.

Chapel joined together to provide healthcare for its members; healthcare was one of the many institutions unavailable to African Americans at this time. The members of the Daughters of Zion hired a doctor and pledged to pay him $200 for his service to their congregation. In a time and place where healthcare for blacks was an ongoing battle, these women made valuable medical services available to their community.\textsuperscript{18}


What began as a female, benevolent group, the Independent Order of St. Luke admitted men by the turn of the twentieth century. Walker, however, gave accolades to the women amongst her group praising, “the special strengths and talents of the inner core of the St. Luke women in particular.”\textsuperscript{19} Both the Daughters of Zion and the Independent Order of St. Luke accomplished remarkable tasks amid rampant discrimination in the south. Whether founded before or after the creation of the NACW, whether located in the north or south, all female African American groups created institutions that enhanced the African American experience. Ada Harris, a black club leader of the early 20th century, explained her inspiration for organizing by simply stating, “I want to see my people succeed. I want them to have an equal chance.”\textsuperscript{20}

During the nineteenth and twentieth century, black clubwomen were charged with financially and emotionally supporting the family, and through extension, the entire African American community. To add to their burden, these women were battling

\textsuperscript{18} Kathleen Berkeley, ““Colored Ladies Also Contributed,”” 181.
\textsuperscript{20} Darlene Hine, ““We Specialize in the Wholly Impossible:’ The Philanthropic Work of Black Women,” In Hine Sight (Brooklyn, New York: Carlson Publishing, 1994), 111.
the greatest prejudices in society, placing them in an extremely vulnerable position. Despite the enormity of the task, black women forged ahead, creating a better world for African Americans in their wake. Charleston club leader Mamie Fields recounts Mary Church Terrell’s, the president of the NACW, visit to Charleston, South Carolina and her empowering speech delivered at Mt. Zion African Methodist Episcopal Church. Terrell’s words depict how attributed female gender roles convicted the contemporaneous black woman to serve her community:

We are daughters, sisters, mothers, and wives. We must care for ourselves and rear our families, like all women. But we have more to do than other women. Those of us fortunate enough to have education must share it with the less fortunate of our race. We must go into our communities and improve them; we must go out into the nation and change it. Above all, we must organize ourselves as Negro women and work together.21

The significance of the black women’s club movement lies in clubwomen’s considerable contribution to the founding of an emancipated black America. By acknowledging the circumstances and cultural context from which the United Order of Tents emerged, the history of the Order is framed by the larger historiography of the black women’s club movement.

National History of the United Order of Tents

The United Order of Tents continues to carry out the charge of nineteenth and twentieth century black women’s organizations. Exploring the different historic aspects of the black women’s club movement aids in the comprehension of the United Order of Tents’ unique history. Little has been written about the Order, and what has been written often contradicts other narratives. Dorothy Saunders, a historian and member

21 Fields, Lemon Swamp, 189.
of the Order, compiled “Memoirs and Histories of the Subordinates Tents of the United Order of Tents of J.R. Giddings and Jolliffe Union, Southern District #1.” In the absence of such a source for all the Districts of the Order, the complete history of the society must be drawn from other records.

In 1867 Norfolk, Virginia, Annette M. Lane and Harriett R. Taylor founded the clandestine, Christian sororal organization called the United Order of Tents of J.R. Giddings and Jolliffe Union. As discussed, the assembling of like-minded African American women for self-improvement between 1890-1920 has been labeled by scholars as the black women’s club movement. The founding of the United Order of Tents and its charter predate this era. The founders of the Order, Annette M. Lane and Harriet R. Taylor, established a network and support system for black women long before the NACW emerged.

Clues to how the organization assembled are existent within the original title of the group: the United Order of Tents of J.R. Giddings and Jolliffe Union. The founders, Lane and Taylor, began their benevolent work earlier than most by acting as agents on the Underground Railroad. The word “tents” embedded within the name of the group refers to the actual shelter sought by escapees on their path to freedom. J.R. Giddings and Jolliffe were both staunch abolitionists who assisted Lane and Taylor in their efforts with the Railroad.

Joshua Reed Giddings was a native Ohioan who spent his entire career as a lawyer and statesman combating slavery. In 1864, President Abraham Lincoln rewarded him with the position as Counsel-General to Canada, a post he held for the remainder of his life. His law office in Ashtabula County, Ohio is listed as a National Historic Landmark because of Giddings’ significant political contributions to this

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22 Saunders’ resource is stored in the archives of the Norfolk, Virginia public library.
23 In interview with the author, tent member Helen McKune commented that the founding chapter of the United Order of Tents in Norfolk is currently attempting to compile enough information to write a complete account of the organization's one hundred and forty six year history.
Jollifee is a more mysterious character due to the omission of his presumed first name in the United Order of Tents’ full title. The namesake for this organization is likely John Jollifee, another Ohio native. During his four-year tenure serving as the Clermont County Prosecuting Attorney, he defended seventeen fugitive slaves. The Clermont County Courthouse is listed as a site on the National Park Service’s Network to Freedom program, which commemorates sites related to the Underground Railroad. This designation honors the life of John Jollifee and his anti-slavery work.

Very little is known or recorded about the lives of Annette M. Lane and Harriet Taylor. Minnie G. Madrey, a leader of the founding chapter of the Order in Norfolk, shared what little is known of Annette Lane’s life more than twenty years ago. Madrey explains that Annette’s position as a nurse to the master’s children on a Norfolk plantation allowed her the freedom of mobility to participate in the Underground Railroad, “Because she could move about freely… to and from the master’s house to the slave quarters and throughout the area away from the plantation, she carried messages to and from slaves to people operating the famous Underground Railroad.”

As a port town, slaves escaping from Norfolk boarded “freedom” boats heading north. Before the escapees set sail, Lane provided shelter for the fugitives in her church, St. John’s African Methodist Episcopal.

A specific story revealing the compassionate character of her work on the Underground Railroad is relayed by Dorothy Saunders:

[Lane’s] father gave her a valuable coral necklace, one that she had oft times been offered pleasing prices, but to these offers she readily declined. Yet when she heard of a family who were on board of the outgoing vessel who did not have the price of the passage, she willingly placed the necklace in the hands of the captain, and said, “Take this, and let them go free.”

The connection between the United Order of Tents and the Underground Railroad is still alive today as many members reminisce that the Railroad was the impetus for the organization’s existence. “The mission of the tents back then was to help free the slaves, help the slaves get to the North,” remarks Ann Blandin, “[b]ack in the early years, that was our great cause and our culture to help others to freedom.”

The altruistic contributions that Lane and Taylor made to the African American community inspire the members of the Order to this day.

After the Civil War and the dissolution of the Underground Railroad, Lane and Taylor’s mission to serve their race translated into the founding of the United Order of Tents. Minnie Madrey states that, “Mrs. Lane taught the young ladies about Christianity, cleanliness, morals, conduct and the various means of survival as free human beings.”

As indicated by Madrey, the club began in the Christian faith and still remains grounded in these religious beliefs today.

As the only existing organization of its nature, the United Order of Tents has remained relevant through the decades by periodically reexamining their purpose and mission. Tent leader Lorine McLeod of Fayetteville, North Carolina credits the extended livelihood of their group to the members keeness to stay strong in their beliefs whilst also adapting to contemporary times. “Many people are turned off by the idea of joining

28 Dorothy Saunders, “Memories and Histories of the Subordinates Tents of the United Order of Tents of J.R. Giddings and Jollifee Union Southern District #1” (Lisky Lithograph Corp., 1976), 3.
“a Christian organization,” explains McLeod, “They think we are preachy and a throwback to the old days. But we are flexible... we believe in progress and keeping up with what’s new... that’s how we managed to survive all these years.”

Historically, the United Order of Tents maintained relevance by adopting many of the common charges of the black women’s club movement. The tents were active institution builders establishing and supporting nursing homes, burial insurances, orphanages, and healthcare facilities across the United States. The founding chapter of the United Order of Tents in Norfolk demonstrates the type of benevolent work undertaken by the organization. In 1897, the group established a nursing home for their aging members in Hampton, Virginia. When members of the Order did not fill the sixteen-bed facility, other men and women in need were cared for at the Rest Haven Home for Adults. Over the 105 years of operation, Rest Haven was subsidized by donations from tent members and was debt-free upon its closing in 2002.

By providing a nursing home for the aged members of the African American community, the Order’s community involvement mirrored the institution building of other nineteenth century societies. The Order also adopted the rallying cry of twentieth century participants in the black women’s club movement, “Lift as We Climb.” In 1992, Madrey explains the organization’s interpretation of the “Lift as We Climb” motto of the NACW: “The race will rise no higher than the extent in which the women will stand. And during these days, we must stand up stronger and higher than ever.”

In many ways, the members of the United Order of Tents conform to the academic theories about participants in the black women’s club movement. The founding matriarch of the Order was an emancipated slave, who served as the mammy.

32 “Successful Women Bridging the Past and Upholding the Future,” The Fayetteville Press (Fayetteville, NC), June 2011.
on a plantation. After the Civil War, Lane founded the organization to extend her service to the females of the African American community. The original members of the Order sought to serve one another in mutual aid and establish social institutions for the African American community. In these capacities, the United Order of Tents mirrors many of the organizations that worked during the nineteenth and early twentieth century for cultural betterment. The Order’s associated background with the Underground Railroad and continued existence today distinguishes the organization from other black women’s clubs discussed in this chapter.

The United Order of Tents has been a part of the African American female experience for nearly a century and a half, yet there is virtually no documentation of its existence. The organization has spread throughout the country and possessed upwards of 40,000 members in the twentieth century. Since this apex, the organization’s membership has dwindled. Member Ann Blandin describes the flux in membership by referencing other social institutions. “You think about the church. The churches are not like they used to be,” insists Blandin, “We don’t know what has attributed maybe hard times, whatever. But whatever it is, it’s just like the economy. The economy peaks, and it valleys. Sometimes it’s real active and functioning good and then you have a slow down period. But then you just keep persevering.” If the United Order of Tents can only represent one thing, it is the human ability to persevere. The Order’s history begins in the days of slavery extends through the ages of Reconstruction and Jim Crow, and still flourishes in the African American community today.

Organization of the United Order of Tents

Over the course of the organization’s existence, the United Order of Tents grew from an organization led by two women in Norfolk, Virginia to a sisterhood of thousands

across the United States. The United Order of Tents began to grow in the latter part of the nineteenth century, and the expansion of membership prompted the group to establish a formalized organizational structure. The United Order of Tents adopted qualifications for membership stating, “All women between 18 and 70 years of age are eligible for membership who are of good moral character and free from bodily ailments that would render them burdensome to the order.”

The membership is comprised of women of all ages and from various educational and professional backgrounds. One member Dorothy Saunders writes, “Neither station in life, wealth, prestige, or religious affiliation determines the right to become a member.” The membership of the tents is a complex network of women spanning the United States. In order to create unity and regularity amongst these women, the Order established organizational methods, leadership positions, and procedures for tents to follow.

The organization’s divisions and hierarchies portrayed in this chapter are an outsider’s understanding of how the Order currently functions. The Order recently underwent organizational modifications so the following description details how the group is organized from the smallest unit to the largest entity in 2013. The smallest division of members is in the concept of a tent. A tent is a group of like-minded women within a city who unite to meet in the name of the United Order of Tents. A tent can be as small as five women to as large as 300 women; as long as the tent successfully performs the business of a tent, then the group is recognized as part of the Order.

To become a tent, the assembled group of women applies to the regional governing body. After a bureaucratic process, the group of women is recognized and initiated into Tentdom. Each tent is given a number following their chosen name to chronologically indicate when the tent was established. For example, Grace Tent #6 is

36 “Eighty-Seventh Annual Thanksgiving Service of the United Order of Tents of J.R. Giddings and Jollifee Union” (2009), United Order of Tents Records, Charleston, SC. See Appendix C.
37 Dorothy Saunders, “Memories and Histories of the Subordinates Tents of the United Order of Tents of J.R. Giddings and Jollifee Union Southern District #1” (Lisky Lithograph Corp., 1976), 2.
understood to be an older tent than Rose of Sharon Tent #101. Due to the fact that the regional governing body oversees Tentdom, the numbering system represents when each tent was initiated into the region.

Multiple tents can coexist together in a city. The conglomeration of tents within a city creates a district. For example, the state of South Carolina has nine districts: Charleston district, Columbia district, Darlington district, Florence district, Marlboro district, Georgetown district, Sumter district, Pee Dee district, and Garnett district. Multiple city districts aggregate to create a regional District. The use of the word district to describe both cities and regions is confusing and complicates the explanation of the Order’s organization. For clarification purposes, district with a lowercase d indicates a city district. A regional District is signified with the use of an uppercase D. There are four regional Districts: Southern District #1, Northern District #2, Eastern District #3, and Southern District #4. The current units of classification developed over time and became more complex with the growing membership and expanding geographical reach of the organization. Originally, the individual tent was the only necessary unit of distinction.

Southern District #1 was originally comprised of memberships from the states of Virginia, District of Columbia, Maryland, Georgia, North Carolina, and South Carolina. The first tent was established in Norfolk, Virginia and was designated Lydia Tent #1. As the organization grew, the regionalism of the tents had to be distinguished by Districts. Similar to the chronological numbering methodology utilized for individual tents, the regional Districts are numbered in accordance with the order of inception. Since the founding tent was in Norfolk, Virginia, the District including this tent is identified with a #1: hence, Southern District #1. Subsequently, Northern District #2 and Eastern District #3 were formed. In the 1950s, the number of districts and tents in South Carolina was so large that the state was designated its own District, Southern

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38 Saunders, “Memories and Histories,” 2.
District #4.  

With each level of designation: tent, district and District, there is a hierarchy of leadership. At the smallest scale is the leadership of the tent. The tent Leader runs the business of the tent. Within each tent are established “stations” or function-specific leadership positions that the Leader oversees. The lowest ranking station is that of a Doorkeeper. The stations are conceived of in sequential order and with escalating responsibilities. As the member advances in station, a member is said to be serving “around the circle.”

The stations include, Outside Door Keeper, Inside Door Keeper, Mistress of Ceremony, Financial Secretary, Treasurer, Recording Secretary, Junior Matron, Senior Matron, Assistant Leader, and Leader. Apart from assisting in the business of the tent, the duties of these stations are to perform the secret tent’s rituals that open and close any meeting of the members.

A tent meets once a month to perform the rituals and rejoice in fellowship. These monthly meetings occur at varying locations. Locale is a determining factor in

Fig. 3.1 Organization of the national body of the United Order of Tents

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39 The exact date of this schism is not readily available; however, Mary Frasier, one of the eldest living members of the Charleston chapter, relayed in discussion with the author on August 29, 2012 that Southern District #4 was created in the 1950s.
40 Helen McKune, interview by author, December 13, 2012.
41 "86th Grand Lodge Convention: Southern District No. 4 Grand United Order of Tents J.R. Giddings and Jollifee Union" (2008), United Order of Tents Records, Charleston, SC.
which tent a member joins because, presumably, each member wants to meet with the tent nearest her. Friends and family are another determining factor in a member’s choice of tent. The women in a tent have a large presence in one another’s lives and ensure their peers well being; therefore, there is a natural inclination to join a tent based on pre-existing relationships.

Two governing bodies operate on the city district level: the Royal Degree Chamber and Past Officer’s Council. The Royal Degree Chamber is a voluntary association and is comprised of members who have received their “Seventh Degree,” a distinction of the Order’s secret rituals. These members of the Royal Degree Chamber served in leadership positions within their respective tents for an extended period of time. Each tent is represented within the Royal Degree Chamber during the monthly meetings held on the first Saturday of every month. The leadership positions within the Royal Degree Chamber include, Sister of Deposit, Worthy Recorder, Recording Secretary, Mistress of Ceremonies, Chaplain, Messenger, Sister of the Palace, Sentinel, Sojourner, Associate Deputy, Queen, and Deputy. The Deputy is the highest-ranking member of the Chamber and oversees all of the tents in a city district. The Queen, who is elected every six years, is under the Deputy; however, the Deputy and Queen are encouraged to work together in harmony while running the city district. The Royal Degree Chamber is also ascribed a number upon formation; this numbering system presumably functions in the same chronological manner as the tent and District numbering systems. For example, the Charleston Royal Degree Chamber is labeled #13.

The Past Officer’s Council, the second governing body of a city district, is comprised of women who served “around the circle” or were nominated for a position

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42 Helen McKune, interview by author, December 13, 2012.
43 “86th Grand Lodge Convention: Southern District No. 4 Grand United Order of Tents J.R. Gidigns and Jolliffe Union” (2008), United Order of Tents Records, Charleston, SC.
on the council due to their commendable service to their specific tent. The Council operates much like the Royal Degree Chamber and serves the same leadership function. Notably, the Council works more like an executive committee than the Chamber.\textsuperscript{45} The Past Officer’s Council meets once a month and these assemblies often coincide with the Royal Degree Chamber’s meetings.

The leaders of each city district within a regional District meet annually to discuss the business of the organization and share in fellowship. This regional meeting is known as the Grand Lodge Convention. The attendees of the Grand Lodge Conventions consider the large challenges facing the District and the Order. For example, the theme of the 86\textsuperscript{th} Annual Grand Lodge Convention hosted in Charleston in 2008 was “Tentdom: Keeping Its Legacy Alive.”\textsuperscript{46} The convention is more than an annual business meeting; it is a source of pride and pleasure for the attendees.

On a more regular basis than the Grand Lodge Convention, the Deputy and the Queen, the highest-ranking members of each city district, answer to the regional District leaders. The leaders of the regional District are the members of the Executive Board. The Executive Board contains a President and a number of Superintendents. A Superintendent is assigned to several city districts to oversee the actions of the Royal Degree Chambers and Past Officer’s Councils. The Superintendent is also responsible for the actions of the individual tents. The Superintendents from each region, as well as other delegates from city districts and tents, convene nationally every two years. This bi-annual meeting is called the National Grand Encampment. Attending the National meeting is an honor and filled with many of the bureaucratic processes and rituals that characterize the other meetings of the Order.\textsuperscript{47}

On August 3-7, 1981, the National Grand Encampment was held in Charleston,

\textsuperscript{45} Helen McKune, interview by author, December 13, 2012.
\textsuperscript{46} “86\textsuperscript{th} Grand Lodge Convention: Southern District No. 4 Grand United Order of Tents J.R. Gidigns and Jollifee Union” (2008), United Order of Tents Records, Charleston, SC.
\textsuperscript{47} Helen McKune in an interview with author on December 13, 2012 was an immensely helpful resource in understanding the heirarchies of the organization as depicted in this section.
South Carolina. The registration records illuminate how many women participated in this bi-annual meeting: Southern District #1 was represented by 106 members; Northern District #2 by 66 members; Eastern District #3 by 63; and Southern District #4 by 237 members. The number of representatives also reflects the prominence of the Order within the regional Districts. In total, there were 472 delegates from across the nation. Despite being composed of only one state, Southern District #4 had the largest attendees by far; however, the District did host the Encampment that year, making a larger representation more feasible.

While the Order’s national congregation only gathers physically every two years, the sisters all convene in spirit at the annual Thanksgiving Service held across the nation on the fourth Sunday in November. At the tent’s various meeting places across the country, every member celebrates and gives thanks in ceremonial unison. One member shares her musings on the Thanksgiving Service:

That was one of the activities that inspired me to be a member because it is a beautiful sight when all those sisters march in. Originally, it used to be those were leaders and members of the chamber that wore white. And if you weren’t a member of the chamber, you wore all black: hat, gloves, and outfit. But now the national has decreed that we all can wear white and that was pretty on Sunday . . . you look back over the crowd . . . at that sea of white. That’s very inspiring.

Though not depicted in great detail due to the secret nature of the Order’s rituals, this narrative of the Thanksgiving Service illuminates how the leadership positions parlay into the assemblage and practices of the group.

While the significance of these many stations and leadership positions are lost upon an outsider, the advanced chain of command and numerous rankings indicate a

48 “Registration National Grand Encampment United Order of Tents” (1981), United Order of Tents Records, Charleston, SC.
49 Helen McKune, interview by author, December 13, 2012.
dedication to ascension within the membership. Tent members begin at the bottom of the chain and through service and respect earn their way to leadership positions. By awarding members with progress, the Order teaches the value of discipline and hard work. The Deputy of the Charleston Royal Degree Chamber recalls:

I was in the tent twenty-five years before I got my National Honors and I worked from the day I got in there till now. I used to do Mrs. Rembert, she was the Secretary of the Superintendent Council, I used to type all her reports. The lady didn't even know my name... But we were just so happy the older ones called on us. We just wanted to do.  

Being a part of the United Order of Tents is a source of great pride and dedication for the members. The multiple organizing bodies, leadership positions, and stations guarantee that members get to participate and experience being part of something bigger than themselves. The members are offered the chance to “belong” within the Order amidst a society that has historically stereotyped and discriminated against them for both their race and gender. 

51 Ann Blandin in interview by author in 2012 expressed, “to me it’s sort of a different culture [today]. Back then [in the 70s], we just wanted to belong...”
CHAPTER THREE

HISTORY OF THE BLACK WOMEN’S CLUB MOVEMENT AND THE UNITED ORDER OF TENTS IN CHARLESTON

Black Women’s Club Movement in Charleston

The black women’s club movement in Charleston, though certainly a manifestation of the national movement, has its own defining characteristics. A number of local influences shaped the culture of Charleston’s black community, namely, a large population, the constraints of urban slavery, and the presence of an elite African American class. The unique African American experience in Charleston must be factored into any analysis or history of black women’s clubs in the city. Exploring the intricacies of Charleston society, helps explain why the United Order of Tents’ assembled in “the city by the sea.”

The African American community in Charleston is intrinsically linked to slavery. As a major port for the slave trade, Charleston harbored a large number of African Americans during the antebellum period. In fact, twenty-five percent of all slaves in South Carolina first entered America through the port of Charleston. Many of these slaves remained in the city on urban plantations. During the ages of rice, indigo, and cotton production, slaves composed a significant majority of Charleston’s population. From 1820 to 1850, African Americans made up an average of fifty-six percent of Charleston's population.1 In 1875, two-thirds of the city was African American.2 Enslaved women constituted an even greater statistical majority in Charleston. In the 1770s, enslaved women outnumbered enslaved males twelve to one.3

Black women continued to play a prominent role in the dynamics of Charleston

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1 Walter Hill, Table 1-1, “Family, Life, and Work Culture: Black Charleston, South Carolina 1880-1910” (dissertation, University of Maryland, 1989), 14.
history in the twentieth century. By 1910, black women represented eight-two percent of working women. 4 These women worked as street vendors, cooks, domestic servants, laundresses, and seamstresses. As is frequently depicted, female street vendors balanced their produce in straw baskets atop their heads while walking the streets of downtown Charleston. The vendors, according to nostalgic memories, added a memorable layer to the Charleston landscape. One observer commented, “There was something triumphant about them as they strode through the streets with their colorful burdens.” 5 African American women historically held a very visible role in Charleston from slavery and continuing into the twentieth century.

Urban slavery influenced the development of Charleston’s black community. In the city, slaves were able to establish relationships and develop advantageous skill sets that proved valuable in post emancipation livelihood. Slaves hired out for their labor and could procure an income. 6 After emancipation, African Americans utilized these contacts made throughout the city to run small businesses, such as artisan, dressmaking, delivery wagon, and barber shops. 7 The relative mobility of slaves throughout the city was distinct to Charleston compared to surrounding rural plantation settings. Residents of Charleston worked and lived along side each other on the peninsula. This interracial mingling was clearly surprising to outsiders as demonstrated by one visitor’s remark, “negroes swarm the streets.” 8 African Americans’ relative freedom of mobility to create economic and commercial networks in Charleston allowed for the formation of a black community early in the city’s history.

After emancipation, Charleston remained an integrated city and African Americans continued to perform many of the services required of them during slavery.

5 Katherine Waring was credited with creating this picture of the historic street vendors in Hill’s dissertation “Family, Life, and Work Culture”, 111.
6 Myers, Forging Freedom, 32.
8 Fredrika Bremer, the visitor to Charleston in the nineteenth century, quoted in Myers’ Forging Freedom on page thirty one.
This reality confined many African Americans to working class lifestyles. Social constraints and skill compatibility restricted the majority of black females to work as domestic servants. By 1910, eighty percent of black women workers in Charleston were employed in domestic or personal service jobs.9

Within the African American community, ripples of discontent emerged concerning job limitations for black women. This dissent was documented by Mamie Fields, a twentieth century black Charlestonian, in her memories Lemon Swamp and Other Places. “[My father] felt like the other men in our family,” Fields recalled. “None of them believed in hiring their wives out to whites.”10 By 1880 when the first generation of African Americans born in freedom entered the work force, black women were markedly dissatisfied. In reply, women honed in on a specific skill and ran laundress, seamstress, and dressmakers businesses out of their respective homes affording them more time with their own families and community.11

The presence of an elite African American class exasperated racial tensions in the city. This affluent group was composed of privileged, lighter skin African Americans. In Lemon Swamp and Other Places, Mamie Fields, a citizen of early twentieth century Charleston, described this exclusive class. She referenced the Brown Fellowship Society saying, “Another of our exclusive organizations was one they used to call the Brown Fellowship, which used to be just what it says, a group for brown, not black, Negroes to belong to.”12 This affluent African American elite class composed only about eight percent of the black population; however, it had a significant impact on the functions of the community.13

This color consciousness is theorized to have arrived in Charleston with

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12 Fields, Lemon Swamp, 23.
emigrants fleeing the Haitian Revolution from 1791 to 1804.\textsuperscript{14} Haitians were accustomed to a privileged way of living in the West Indians and harbored a prejudice for individuals of darker skin. This class-consciousness also permeated Charleston society. Mamie Fields discussed her refusal to attend the local private high school, the Avery Institute, because of the elitism associated with the institution. “I never wanted to go to Avery Institute, because the colored people there discriminated against dark-skinned children,” stated Fields, “Mother didn’t see the reason for pushing me to go to Avery. She knew my feeling about it: I was darkest one in the pack, and she didn’t want to blow that up.”\textsuperscript{15} Due to the absence of a single black public high school in Charleston, the Avery, a private institution, was the only option for higher education within the city.

Fields’ refusal to attend the Avery, and her mother’s passive acceptance, reveals the degree to which skin-color prejudices encroached Charleston’s society. For a dark-skinned young girl, presumably around the age of fourteen, to recognize her incompatibility amongst potential African American peers at the only local black high school is a striking revelation. While elite African Americans were only a small portion of Charleston’s black population, this group held a great amount of power and prestige in the community. The unique circumstances of Charleston’s large population of black women, the consequences of urban slavery, and color consciousness each significantly affected the development of the black women’s club movement within the city.

At the turn of the century, when black females transitioned from serving as domestic servants to small business owners, black women embraced the opportunity to begin vocations beyond domestic service. Simultaneously, Charleston’s African American women were drawn to join the national movement to combat social injustices. Compared to the national trend, the emergence of Charleston’s black women’s club movement in the 1910s was considerably delayed. By this decade the National

\textsuperscript{14} Hill, “Family, Life, and Work Culture,” 16.
\textsuperscript{15} Fields, \textit{Lemon Swamp}, 13.
Association of Colored Women’s Clubs was gaining momentum and had a membership of approximately 50,000. The president of the NACW, Mary Church Terrell visited Charleston to support and inspire the growing local black women’s club movement. Recounted by Mamie Fields in *Lemon Swamp*, Terrell delivered a powerful speech at Mt. Zion African Methodist Episcopal Church. Terrell called the women to rally citing the works of Harriet Tubman and Sojourner Truth for inspiration. She closed the speech asking the congregated women, “WHO OF YOU KNOW HOW TO CARRY YOUR BURDEN IN THE HEAT OF THE DAY?” The metaphorical burden Terrell refers to was the unique responsibility of the black female to be a wife, mother, and sister not only to her family, but to her race. The black woman’s charge as an active clubwoman was to provide, support, and care for her entire community.

The earliest black women’s clubs to organize in Charleston were “parlor societies.” The primary objective of these societies was to ensure proper funerals for its members. The creed of parlor societies was consistent with the original mission of the United Order of Tents on a national and local level. This common purpose indicates the limited availability of funeral parlors or burial insurances for the black community.

In Charleston, burial rites were of utmost importance in the African American culture. Funerals were a source of pride for the surviving family members. Mamie Fields explained, "Nobody wanted their relatives to pass, without giving them that proper funeral." The anxiety surrounding “proper funerals” was warranted in Charleston. There was only one burial insurance man in the city and death rates were mounting in the early 1900s. Mr. Merton Lawrence sold burial insurance to the black community, while working for a white insurance company named the Virginia Company. Much later, North Carolina Mutual came to Charleston as the sole black insurance

Premature death was an impending concern for early twentieth century black Charlestonians. The city neglected its black citizen’s sanitary needs. As a result, death by infections diseases was two-times more likely for blacks than whites. In 1917, Dr. William T. Burnner, Chief Medical Officer for the city of Savannah, Georgia, addressed the Charleston Chamber of Commerce pleading:

> Give your negro population a square deal in sanitation, and they will give you a square deal as citizens. Think this over. The negro and white health records should be the same. Your white death rate is decreasing all the time, but the death rate among your colored brethren is steadily mounting higher and higher. Give him a square deal.

Before the concern over unequal public health was raised by Dr. Burnner, African Americans in Charleston organized to provide adequate health care for their race. In 1896, the Colored Hospital and Training School for Nurses was founded to meet African Americans’ medical needs. The hospital also trained African American nurses to promote the continued care of this demographic. The hospital and training school located on Cannon Street was one of the earliest black institutions in Charleston following the Jenkins Orphanage. The orphanage was created five years earlier than the hospital to care for the city’s black orphans. Charleston’s African American population built and supported these institutions. Influential support systems for these institutions were the black women’s clubs of Charleston.

A noteworthy day in the history of Charleston’s black women’s club movement

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23 The Cannon Street Hospital was renamed the McClennan-Banks Memorial Hospital after the founding doctor Andrew McClennan and devoted nurse Anna DeCosta Banks when it relocated to 25 Courtenay Drive in 1956.
was May 16, 1916. On this day, Charleston City Federation of Colored Women’s Clubs received their charter. Thirteen clubs with approximately 175 members comprised the Federation.\textsuperscript{24} The NAACP did not come to Charleston until the following year in 1917. The early existence of the Charleston City Federation, as well as the establishment of the YWCA in 1907 and the United Order of Tents in 1913, reflected Charleston’s black women’s determination to serve their community.

The Federation was an important component of the club movement because women could join the Federation without belonging to a specific club. Affiliation with this progressive movement proved beneficial due to the exclusivity of Charleston’s club ethos. The Phyllis Wheatley Literary Society and Social Club, founded on December 5, 1916, intended to reduce the internal racial prejudices of Charleston, but had the opposite effect on the community.\textsuperscript{25} The founder of the club, Jeanette Keeble Cox, was wife of the principal of Avery Institute, the exclusive local high school Mamie Fields resented for promoting color consciousness. The Phyllis Wheatley Club focused on “self-improvement along literary lines and community work.”\textsuperscript{26} The group of twenty members, comprised mostly of teachers, met bi-monthly for guest lectures and literary discussions. In the 1930s when W.E.B DuBois, African American scholar and co-founder of the NAACP, came to Charleston, he visited the Phyllis Wheatley Club to discuss his book \textit{The Souls of Black Folk}.

The membership of the Phyllis Wheatley Club contributed to local libraries and sponsored the Phyllis Wheatley English Prize given to a promising student of the Avery Institute. The literary association also offered monetary support to other black institutions such as the YWCA, McClennan-Banks Memorial Hospital, Jenkins

\textsuperscript{24} Mamie Garvin Fields Papers, 1894-1987, Avery Research Center for African American History and Culture, College of Charleston, Charleston, SC, Box 3.
\textsuperscript{25} Johnson, \textit{Southern Ladies, New Women}, 15.
\textsuperscript{26} Phyllis Wheatley Club, “History,” Avery Research Center for African American History and Culture, College of Charleston, Charleston, SC, Box 1, Folder 1.
Orphanage, Charleston Boys Club, and Marion Wilkinson Home for Girls.  

Each of the named institutions were locally operated and sustained by the efforts of black women’s clubs in Charleston. The contributing clubs include but were not limited to, the Marion Anderson Federated Club, the Elite Art and Social Federated Club, the Marionettes Federated Club, the Book Lover’s Club, and the Modern Priscilla Federation Club. The South Carolina Federation of Colored Women’s Clubs created the Marion Wilkinson Home for Girls. This home for delinquent girls was located in Cayce, South Carolina ten miles outside of Columbia. The objective of this home was to keep young, black girls out of the state jails while simultaneously helping them build better lives. The Marion Anderson Club of Charleston sponsored a number of girls to board at the home.

Common to all Charleston’s black women’s clubs was the dedication to provide better opportunities for their community. While the objectives of these societies were similar, Charleston’s clubs were in no way monolithic. There was an element of hierarchy embedded within the broader Charleston club movement reflected in the African American community. The Phyllis Wheatley Club, for example, was recognized as one of the elite groups. The membership was said to have read as the “who’s who” of Charleston’s African American society. The Phyllis Wheatley Club was not the only group that promoted elitism. The Charleston native, Mamie Fields, complained that many willing and able women were not asked to join a number of clubs. She rememberd, “regardless to your ability, your education, your readiness to serve, you were excluded.”

27 Knowledge on the Phyllis Wheatley Literary and Social Club in Charleston is attributed to organization’s thoughtful record keeping. These records are now stored at the College of Charleston’s Avery Research Center where they are accessible to the public.
29 Joan Johnson, Southern Ladies, New Women, 15.
30 Fields, Lemon Swamp, 198.
Defying exclusivity, Mamie Fields joined forces with two nurses from the McClennan-Banks Hospital, Lem Lewis and Viola Turner, to create the Modern Priscilla Club in 1925. The club was composed of twenty women; teachers, housewives, domestics, businesswomen, and beauticians who felt a calling to serve their community. The members of the Modern Priscilla were notorious for their needlework skills and utilized their talents to clothe the residents of the Jenkins Orphanage and Wilkinson Home. The Modern Priscilla was affiliated with the Charleston City Federation of Colored Women’s Clubs and was deemed the Federation’s “model club.”

The members of the organization assisted with the Federation’s junior clubs or juvenile clubs. Mamie Fields explained her organization’s work with younger women. “We made it our business to teach these ‘daughters’ the things we knew,” explained Fields, “the point was to have the new generation coming up knowing how to organize themselves and take their rightful place in the community. A women’s organization isn’t really that if it doesn’t keep a place for the girls as well.” 31 The development of juvenile departments was a common occurrence in the black women’s club movement and was mirrored in the activities of United Order of Tents. Young, black girls were viewed as an extremely vulnerable group in society due to their age, race, and gender. Black women’s clubs worked to provide a safe haven for this group either in juvenile departments or in institutions such as the Wilkinson Home.

Elitism associated with Charleston’s clubs is legible in the clubs’ details of inception and various missions. Upper and middle class individuals were generally members of literary and social societies. The members were almost always educated and emphasized education as a solution to racial inequalities. A Women’s and Southern historian, Joan Johnson stated that black women’s “study of southern history or African American literature enabled them to influence their communities as they shaped the

telling of history and the making of history.” Education, as insinuated by Johnson, empowered women to determine their own identity and create a history for the African American race that was not solely based on their subservience to the white community.

Clubs rooted in churches or religion signified memberships of working-class origin. Religious clubs focused on self-help, mutual aid, and benevolent works. Historian Anne Scott explains the centrality of religion in the earliest black women’s clubs. “The church was so central an institution in the emerging black communities that there was never a clear line between church-related and secular associations,” explains Scott, “but by the 1890s, as a generation that had grown up in freedom came of age, explicitly secular clubs began to be founded for self-education and improvement.”

Adhering to this philosophy, the Christian missions of an organization either revealed the age of the organization or the class affiliation of its members. Before the institutionalization of the black women’s club movement in 1890, the majority of clubs were established within the boundaries of the church. In the early twentieth century, clubs social standing could be determined through the mission of the society as either religious or educational.

In the biographical sketches of elite African American Charleston women compiled by Lois Simms, nearly every entry stresses the woman’s education and her work to support education within the black community. Most of the women included in this pamphlet were daughters and granddaughters of slaves. The women dedicate one line in their auto-biographical entries to their church affiliations, while paragraphs are devoted to the individuals’ educational background. Each of these black women, including Lemon Swamp and Other Places author Mamie Fields, placed greater emphasis on their educational achievements than their religious background. While religion

32 Joan Johnson, Southern Ladies, New Women, 23.
certainly kept its place in the culture of the Southern black woman, these biographies suggest that education was an important part of Charleston’s elite African American culture.

Regardless of the class distinctions and hierarchies within the movement, Charleston’s black women’s clubs strengthened throughout the 1950s and 1960s. The national black women’s club movement lost steam as the activities of the Civil Rights Movement in the 1960s expanded the stage for African Americans to fight for social injustices. Consequently, the members of black women’s club began to meld with larger interracial and cross-gender organizations.

Charleston’s black women’s club movement is unique in that the local clubs continued to thrive while the national movement faded. In fact, the Phyllis Wheatley Club, like the United Order of Tents, remains active in Charleston today. Due to the lack of records kept by the black women’s clubs, there is little evidence of how the majority of the groups operated and who comprised the membership.\(^{35}\) Previously, the United Order of Tents was not included in the discussion of the black women’s club movement because of the limited knowledge concerning the group; however, the United Order of Tents presents an interesting case study for better understanding the heritage of the black women’s club movement. Many components of the older movement, such as burial insurance, institution building, promotion of education, and empowerment of juveniles remain concerns of the United Order of Tents today.

**History of The United Order of Tents in Charleston**

The Charleston chapter of the United Order of Tents represents many of the traditions of the black women’s club movement in Charleston. Established in 1913 and

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\(^{35}\) In Charleston, records indicate the activity of at least thirteen clubs. The majority of records pertaining to the black women’s clubs in Charleston is located at the Avery Research Center for African American History and Culture a part of the College of Charleston. Thirteen clubs were listed as part of the Charleston City Federation by Mamie Garvin Fields in her self-titled collection located at the Avery Research Center, Box 3.
based on Christian values embraced by the national body, the tents were a group of
working class women who affiliated with a national sisterhood to perform mutual aid
and secret rituals. Christian values are ingrained within the rituals of the organization.
When members of the organization formally congregate, the Order commences and
concludes the meeting with devotional singing and prayer. The Christian nature of the
society indicates that news of the Order traveled through churches from the founding
tent in Norfolk, Virginia down the coast to Charleston. Charleston member Ann Blandin
explains, “Most of the women belonged to a church. And that’s how the news got around
. . . you build camaraderie with women’s organizations in the church, but it spreads
through word of mouth.”36 As a secret society, knowledge of the group is limited for non-
members. The United Order of Tents, however, participated in many of the missions
and goals of the black women’s club movement on a national and local level. The United
Order of Tent’s centennial, this year, celebrates the decades of tent members’ quiet
service to the community.

Established in 1913, the Order was not formally incorporated until 1919. The
United Order of Tents is independent from any of the club governing bodies, such as
the NACW or the Charleston City Federation of Women’s Clubs. Accordingly, the United
Order of Tents possesses its own structure and leadership roles. The devotion required
by the group and the autonomy of the organization signifies that tent members did not
belong to the other local clubs, such as the Phyllis Wheatley, Modern Priscilla, or Book
Lover’s Club. Instead, these women joined together to develop and support one another
within the Order. In accordance with the National model, membership to the Charleston
Order is open to women between the ages of eighteen and seventy who are healthy,
upstanding citizens.37 The inclusive nature of the organization contrasts the many
exclusive contemporary black women’s clubs.

36 Interviewed by the author, December 12, 2012.
37 “Eighty-Seventh Annual Thanksgiving Service of the United Order of Tents of J.R. Giddings and
Jollifee Union” (2009), United Order of Tents Records, Charleston, SC.
In its earliest days, the Order functioned, in part, as a burial society. Burial societies are one longstanding tradition in Charleston that addressed the historic absence of burial insurance for blacks in the city. The earliest burial societies were the Brown Fellowship Society and the Humane Brotherhood. Notably, these male groups owned their own cemeteries. The United Order of Tents does not own a cemetery, but the group offers a death benefit to finance a burial. On admittance into the group, women name a beneficiary; the beneficiary can be either male or female, relative or friend. At the member's death, a certain amount of money is gifted to the beneficiary in compensation for their loss. In 1922, the designated gift was $100, "provided that said person was a member for one year, and in good standing at the time of death." At the 1974 Grand Lodge Convention, the leaders of Southern District #1 declared that any woman who has been a member of the organization for more than five years received a $200 death benefit. Due to the uncertain financial state of the organization today, the circumstances of this death compensation is ambiguous. The Deputy of the Charleston district, Ann Blandin, speaks of this tradition as an ongoing practice, "We give a bit of money, like a death benefit or insurance, when a sister dies and it goes to their beneficiary. . .The family can use [the money] however they want." The members’ commitment to burial procedures, however, extends far past that of monetary compensation.

Apart from providing financial support at death, the Order also contributes to the funeral formalities associated with death. Helen McKune explains:

38 Records for the Brown Fellowship Society are maintained at College of Charleston’s Avery Research Center.; See Kimberly Martin, “Community and Place: A Study of Four African American Benevolent Societies and their Cemeteries” (master’s thesis, College of Charleston and Clemson University: Graduate Program in Historic Preservation, 2010).
39 “1922 Membership Certificate,” United Order of Tents’ Records, Charleston, SC. See Appendix C.
41 The United Order of Tents lost their non-profit license in 2011 because they failed to file the proper tax records and they organization could not or simply did not pay their property taxes on the building located at 73 Cannon Street. They currently have an outstanding balance for 2012.
42 Interviewed by author, December 12, 2012.
The members take care of each other. Used to prepare the body for burial, sit with the body. Back then the body used to go to the house and then to the church to be funeralized and buried. They don't take them anymore so we sit with the family at the church or funeral parlor and then at the funeral. We do things like help serve the meals after the funeral and stuff like that.\textsuperscript{43}

African American funerals are distinctive in Charleston. Mamie Fields, a black resident of Charleston in the early twentieth century, states that “deep mourning was the custom in Charleston.”\textsuperscript{44}

The cultural importance of funerals remains today. The United Order of Tents honors this practice by ensuring that members’ deaths are listed in the newspaper. Tent Leader, Ann Blandin instructs her tent members, “Sisters, any time you see the death of a member in the paper and it says on the bottom ‘All tent members are invited.’ I encourage you to go to help the tent carry on their ceremony.”\textsuperscript{45} The traditions of Charleston’s burial societies are embedded in the mission of the Order.

While burial rituals are important to the United Order of Tents, the women owe a second, more important function, to their fellow members in life. When one member experiences difficult times, such as sickness, the other women pledge to help her. The caretaking component of the Order may be attributed to the female gender role in society. Whether or not the women associate themselves with such gender roles, they absolutely recognized the value and importance in the care of one another. In the initiation ceremony of every tent member, the individual takes a pledge to care for her fellow members. Queen of the Charleston chamber, Beatrice Givens describes the initiation pledge:

\textsuperscript{43} Helen McKune, interview by author, December 13, 2012.
\textsuperscript{44} Fields, \textit{Lemon Swamp}, 26.
\textsuperscript{45} Interviewed by author, December 12, 2012.
When you join the Tents that’s a question they do ask, if you are going to be able to visit the sick, do for the sick, bury the dead and everything like that. All that’s a question we answer “yes” to. And when you answer yes, you have to live up to your answer.\textsuperscript{46}

The members look back on the periods of time spent serving the sick with fondness. “I can remember when Superintendent Duncan was sick,” Ann Blandin remembers, “We would go there in shifts . . . We were just like missionaries in the tents.”\textsuperscript{47}

When Queen Givens fell sick, her daughter remembers the members of the Order swooping in to take care of the household and provide those services that the female of the house traditionally performs; “When I was a little girl, I can recall folk coming in our house, sitting for hours at a time and kinda being by your bedside, and assisting and assuring that we as the children were fed. And those things that needed to be done that you as our mom would do, they would do.”\textsuperscript{48} Rosetta Givens, the daughter of the Queen, matured and joined the Order and continues the mutual-aid undertaking of the group.

These types of caretaking practices are primarily performed by and for fellow members of individual tents. If a member is willing, then tent distinctions do not hinder a member of Grace Tent, for example, from assisting a member of the Queen of Sheba Tent. Astutely, Queen Givens notes this as a very real and important form of community service.\textsuperscript{49} When hospitalization or burial services were not readily available for members of the black community in Charleston, the United Order of Tents filled this void to ensure the women within their ranks were properly cared for. The self-supporting nature of the Order is the essence of the organization. The Order, however, serves the Charleston community beyond the constraints of its membership as well.

\textsuperscript{48} \textit{StoryCorps}, NPR, November 10, 2012.
Similar to the other black women's clubs, the United Order of Tents supports various benevolent institutions throughout the city. The Jenkins Institute, an orphanage chartered by the state of South Carolina in 1892, is a recipient of charity from the Order. Recently, the Tents have begun contributing to the Ronald McDonald House. Members of the Order have also mentioned beginning to support the actions of the local historic preservation foundations. The Preservation Society of Charleston and Historic Charleston Foundation have offered assistance to the Order during the recent misfortunes concerning the Order's building. The extent of their help and status of the building will be discussed in the next chapter; however, it is noteworthy that the United Order of Tents recognized the community work performed by historic preservation organizations.

Member Helen McKune states that a building fund has been established to not only restore the Order's own building located at 73 Cannon Street, but also to contribute to the work of local preservation societies. One member of the Order personally donated to the Preservation Society of Charleston to demonstrate her support for the Society's Holy City Initiative, a program that aims to prevent religious structures from undergoing adaptive reuse renovations. The United Order of Tents' interest in historic preservation is a noteworthy development in the charitable works of the organization and is a direct result of their own building's destitute state.

The United Order of Tents demonstrates a devotion to education shared with the black women's club movement. Ann Blandin states the mission of the organization: “to educate, to bury our dead, and to work in the community.” Since 1948, the Order has fulfilled the education sector of their mission by helping send a young scholar to college. Rosa Gadson, a member of the Order for forty-four years, past President of the Executive Board, and SuperIntendent of District #4, is credited with starting the United Order of

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50 Helen McKune, interviewed by author, December 13, 2012.
51 Interviewed by author, December 13, 2012.
52 Interviewed by author, December 12, 2012.
Tents Scholarship Fund. Gadson proposed the concept of a District-wide scholarship fund in 1948. 53 Southern District #4 has records of their scholarship recipients back to 1997. 54 The District assisted in sending young girls to Savannah College of Art and Design, Georgia State University, University of South Carolina, Francis Marion University, and many institutions of higher learning. While Southern District #4 does not operate in this way, the other regional Districts require the recipient to be a member of the United Order of Tents’ Juvenile Department.

The Juvenile Department is an extension of the United Order of Tents in which young girls are taught the ways of the organization and develop leadership skills with “an emphasis on citizenship, education, culture, and refinement.” 55 The program helps to foster new membership and educate the next generation of the Order. Rev. Helen McKune joined the Juvenile Department at age five:

One of my grandmothers was a member of a tent and as a youth, we had what’s called a Juvenile Department and for a long time I participated with that. Then after I went away [to school] and came back and was old enough to [join the Order] myself, I had some friends who were members and I joined to be with them. 56

For members like McKune, the Order is a life-long association. McKune’s two sisters, Margaret and Virginia, have also joined local tents. The relationships that are sustained within this organization are what truly distinguish the United Order of Tents from other black women’s clubs.

The sororal nature of the Order is distinctive from Charleston’s other black

53 “86th Grand Lodge Convention: Southern District No. 4 Grand United Order of Tents J.R. Gidigns and Jollifee Union” (2008), United Order of Tents Records, Charleston, SC.
54 “United Order of Tents Southern District #4, Scholarship Recipients,” United Order of Tents Records, Charleston, SC. See Appendix C.
55 Dorothy Saunders, “Memories and Histories of the Subordinates Tents of the United Order of Tents of J.R. Giddings and Jollifee Union Southern District #1” (Lisky Lithograph Corp., 1976), 2.
56 Interviewed by author, December 13, 2012.
women's clubs. Within the realms of their organization, the members refer to their peers as sisters. The Order has created a sisterhood that extends across the country with a pledge to care for one another and their community. Blandin gives a testimony to her experience within the tents, "I've belonged to a lot of things, worked for a lot of things. But of all those things, besides my church, the tents is the dearest to me . . . I spend a lot of my time trying to give as much as I can to this organization because I think they're trying to uplift mankind."57 The United Order of Tents subscribes to the national black women's club motto stating, "We lift as we climb, realizing that our race can rise no higher than the standards maintained by its women."58 Apart from the Order's benevolent acts and participation in the national black women's club movement, the truly remarkable contribution of the organization is the network of support and friendship established within the membership.

It is the women's relationships with one another that have carried the organization through a century of challenges. As evidenced by the dissemination of many of the clubs associated with the black women's club movement, once the goals and objectives of a group have been reached the club often disbands. The deep friendships fostered within the United Order of Tents prevent the organization from fading into history:

She is a Tree of Life to Them
That Lay Hold Upon Her;
And Happy is Everyone That Retaineth Her59

Following this inscription found in the organization's records, the United Order of Tents is the “tree of life” for a population of women in Charleston. The organization’s heritage

57 Interviewed by author, December 12, 2012
58 Saunders, “Memories and Histories,” 2.
is a unique expression of the black women’s club movement in the city and the nation.

Evolution of the Order in Charleston

Deciphering the evolution of the tents within Charleston is a challenge due to the lack of documentation and the flux of tents within the city. The chronology of the tents’ emergence in Charleston is best determined through the ascribed numerical system. A number that indicates the order in which the tent joined the District follows each tent name. Golden Rule Tent #63, for example, is an earlier tent than Whipper’s Area Tent #150. The understanding of the Charleston evolution of tents presented in this chapter is derivative of such organizational methods as the chronological numbering system. Limited access to the Charleston chapter’s records, as well as interviews, provided insight for understanding the evolution of the Order’s Charleston manifestation. The Order’s membership records proved to be the most beneficial tool for tracking the growth of the organization through the years. More anecdotally, a plethora of history pertaining to the growth of the Charleston chapter remains essentially oral. As the membership continues to age, irreplaceable knowledge of the Order’s progression is lost. The following narrative is the documentation the Order’s evolution as it stands today.

In 1913, the first tent emerged in Charleston, Grace Tent #6. Grace Tent #6 was formally incorporated in 1919. The second tent formed was Providence Tent #8. Providence Tent, presumably, dissolved quickly as there is no evidence of its existence past 1922. In contrast, Grace Tent has an extensive history as it continues to function today.

The earliest record of Grace’s membership is from 1934-1935. In this first

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60 The membership records were loaned to the author by the United Order of Tents and serve as the source for the date presented throughout this chapter. See Appendix B for synthesized transcriptions of these memberships records.
61 “Membership Certificate,” United Order of Tents’ Records, Charleston, See Appendix C.
documented year, the tent had nineteen established members and inducted nine members into their tent. By the end of the 1930s, Grace Tent had twenty-three members. Records exist during the same period for Rose Anna Tent #18 and Daughters of Narcissus Tent #53. The tents’ respective membership numbers are comparable to Grace’s. At the end of the 1930s, Rose Anna Tent had twenty-seven members. On May 20, 1935, Daughter of Narcissus #53 was organized by nineteen women and by the end of the decade, the tent’s membership had decreased by seven members.

Rose Anna Tent #18 was assigned its relatively low identification of eighteen indicating the tent was formed relatively soon after the Order’s founding in Charleston. It is important to note that at this point in history the tents of Charleston were under the regional District command of Southern District #1. Therefore, the numbering system of the tents reflects the sequence in which tents were inducted throughout the states of Virginia, District of Columbia, Maryland, Georgia, North Carolina, and South Carolina. Hence, Rose Anna Tent could potentially be one of the very first tents formed in Charleston.

The estimated membership of twenty members per tent could be interpreted as insignificant; however, the Phyllis Wheatley Club and the Modern Priscilla Club in Charleston, previously discussed, were historically comprised of only twenty members each. In context, the United Order of Tents’ combined membership of sixty-two women in 1937 was a comparatively large following for a black women’s club.

There is a gap in the Charleston chapter’s membership records from 1938 to 1948. This void is unfortunate as the 1940s was a period of tremendous growth for the Order. In fact, six new tents joined the Order’s Charleston chapter during this decade. The new tents included, Golden Rule Tent #63, Progressive Tent #95, Rose of Sharon Tent #101, Jerusalem Tent #115, St. Mary’s Tent #116, and Azalea Tent #150. Furthermore, two of the earliest documented tents, Grace #6 and Daughters of Narcissus #53, each possessed well over one hundred members at the end of the
1940s. In 1949-1950, Grace Tent boasted 182 members; Daughters of Narcissus had 127 members. With this impressive following, the Order had a strong presence in Charleston’s African American community.

The organization continued to grow throughout the next decade as well. In 1950, Golden Rule Tent had a membership of 114 women and in two years grew to a membership of 188. Grace Tent was recorded to have 216 members by 1952. Rose of Sharon Tent was one of the largest of the new tents with seventy eight members. Jerusalem, St. Mary’s, and Azalea Tents were comprised of smaller memberships: nineteen, twenty-seven, and fifteen, respectively. By 1952, the United Order of Tents had a presence in Charleston of approximately nine tents with a combined membership of more than 700 members.

In thirty-nine years, the Charleston chapter of the United Order of Tents expanded from roughly twenty members in the original Grace Tent to approximately 700 members organized in nine different tents. Undoubtedly, this significant growth influenced the decision to purchase a “home” for the United Order of Tents in 1956. At this time, a centrally located building where the organization could convene, perform rituals, and conduct business surely seemed like a unifying and stable investment, if not a necessity, for the Order. The historic members who led the organization to the acquisition of their building at 73 Cannon Street will be discussed in the following section.

After the tents acquired 73 Cannon, the organization continued to develop. The 1940s, 50s, and 60s were the greatest periods of growth for the Charleston chapter of the United Order of Tents. In the 1950s, Whipper’s Area Tent #154, Julia’s Tent #190, Margaret’s Tent #192, North Area Tent #201, Queen of Sheba Tent #202, and Alpha’s #212 were all sequentially initiated into the Order. In the early 1960s, Whipper’s Area’s

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62 The building at 73 Cannon Street is repeatedly referred to as the “home” of the tents throughout the records and oral histories of the United Order of Tents in Charleston.
attendance averaged fifty one members, Julia’s averaged fifty five members, Azalea averaged twenty seven members, and Progressive averaged fifty nine members. The larger tents with memberships numbering over one hundred were still thriving as well.

These tents with larger memberships tended to be the older, more established tents, such as Golden Rule and Rose of Sharon. In the first half of the 1960s, Golden Rule and Rose of Sharon membership averaged 149 and 141 members, respectively. The Order’s records only documented the membership numbers for six of the fifteen existent tents in 1960s. The averages of the six tents’ memberships amounted to 482 total members during this decade. As the evidence is limited, there can be no numeric certainty for the United Order of Tents’ membership during this period; however, due to the increased number of tents and the constant large membership of the oldest tents, the Order’s membership in Charleston was likely greater than the recorded 700 members in the 1950s.

After the 1960s, documentation of the organization’s membership is not as readily available. The Charleston district hosted the National Grand Encampment in 1981 and the 86th Grand Lodge Convention in 2008. Most of the society’s documentation is focused on these periods of high activity. By the 1980s, there were ten active tents in Charleston. Progressive Tent #95, Jerusalem Tent #115, Azalea Tent #150, Margaret’s Tent #192, and North Area Tent #201 had disbanded. In South Carolina, there were a reported seventy-seven active tents with a membership of 3,223. While the Charleston district’s membership had begun to shrink during the late twentieth century, the organization retained relevancy with a strong contingent of members across the state.

Today, there are eleven active tents in Charleston. The newest tent of the Order is Viola Burgess Tent #218 chartered on April 12, 2008. The original fifteen members

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63 “1980 District Grand Session meeting minutes.” United Order of Tents Records, Charleston, SC.
64 Neitha Mitchell, interview by author, December 13, 2012. The tent acquired its name for the historic leader of the Queen of Sheba Tent, Mrs. Viola Burgess.
that established Viola Burgess Tent were past members of Queen of Sheba Tent #202. The women diverged from Queen of Sheba Tent to form their own entity because they were reportedly not fulfilled as part of Queen of Sheba membership. Viola Burgess Tent was created for a younger generation and is led by Neitha Mitchell. In five years, the group has grown to forty-five active members. The organization is proud of their “baby tent” and the members appear to be highly active as the newest tent routinely has the most members present at district-wide assemblies.

The existing tents in the Charleston district of United Order of Tents are: Grace #6, Rose Anna #18, Narcissus #53, Golden Rule #63, Rose of Sharon #101, St. Mary’s #116, Whipper’s Area #154, Julia’s #190, Queen of Sheba #202, Alpha’s #212, and Viola Burgess #218. The combined membership of these eleven tents is elusive. Ann Blandin, a high-ranking leader of the Charleston district, believes the membership to be approximately 350 members. While the membership is not as grand as in the 1950s, the United Order of Tents maintains its presence in the Charleston African American community.

The leadership of the Charleston district of the United Order of Tents is divided into two tiers: high-ranking members of the Royal Degree Chamber and the leaders of the individual tents. The 2013 leaders of the Royal Degree Chamber consist of Beatrice Givens, Queen of the Royal Degree Chamber #13, Ann Blandin, Deputy for the Charleston district, Evelyn G. Burwell and Henrietta Dash, Associate Deputies, and Margaret Thomas, Chairman of the Executive Board.

The leaders of the individual tents are: Beatrice Givens, Whipper’s Area Tent; Neitha Mitchell, Viola Burgess Tent; Margaret Rivers, St. Mary’s Tent; Edith Ladson, Rose Anna’s Tent; Mary Fraiser, Rose of Sharon Tent; Dorothy Smashum, Queen of Sheba Tent;

65 Helen McKune, interview with author, December 13, 2012.
67 Helen McKune, interviewed by author, December 13, 2012.
Ann Blandin, Daughters of Narcissus Tent; Lousie R. Simmons, Julia’s Tent; Annie Lee Clark, Grace Tent; Rev. Helen T. McKune, Golden Rule Tent; and Irmell Campbell, Alpha’s Tent.

These women wear many different hats within the organization. Rev. McKune, for example, is both the chaplain of the Royal Degree Chamber and the Leader of Golden Rule Tent. The ranked members hold a significant amount of power and carry a great amount of responsibility within the Order. As membership in the Order is a recreational activity, the leaders perform their assigned duties in addition to their career and other extracurricular activities. Most importantly, the current leaders of the organization are entrusted with the task of transmitting the heritage of “Tentdom” and determining the future of the century-old organization.

The Order’s Historic Leaders and the Acquisition of 73 Cannon Street

As discerned previously, in 1956 the Order purchased a building located at 73 Cannon Street, Charleston, South Carolina. The three and half-story building was previously owned by the Fraser family, who operated Fraser Auto Repair shop from the rear of the property. The building was seized from the Fraser’s and put up for auction at a sheriff’s sale in 1956. The November 15, 1956 deed lists:

Naomi W. DeLesline, Vivian E. Duncan, Arrabelle F. Harris, Mamie M. Johnson, Albertha DeVeaux, Lillian Carroll and Anna B. Aiken, as Trustees of Royal Degree Chamber No. 13 United Order of Tents. To hold the said property for the benefit of the said Royal Degree Chamber No. 13 United Order of Tents, and to convey, mortgage or otherwise dispose of the said property, as directed by the said organization.  

The United Order of Tents purchased the structure on December 7, 1956 for $6,000.

69 Charleston County RMC, Deed Book A64, pg. 465.
The original Board of Trustees guided the organization in the purchase of the building and served as the caretakers of the structure.

The original members of the Board are iconic figures within the Charleston Order’s history. The Board once included nine women: Vivian Duncan, Marguriete Rembert, Mary Frasier, Beulah Deval, Janie Gibson, Julia Gilliard, Sadie Franklin, Viola Burgess, and Margaret C. Counts. All of these trustees were active within their tent and many of them served as Tent Leaders. Vivian Duncan was the Tent Leader of Grace Tent #6; Mary Frasier served as Tent Leader of Rose of Sharon #101; Julia Gilliard was Leader to Julia’s Tent #190; Sadie Franklin, Viola Burgess, and Margaret Counts led Progressive Tent #95, Queen of Sheba Tent #202, and Alpha’s Tent #212, respectively. It was the vision of these women to physically establish the United Order of Tents in Charleston with the purchase of a building. Many of the current leaders of the organization today reminisce about the leadership skills of these women and seek inspiration from the stories of their lives. Vivian Duncan, Marguriete Rembert, Naomi DeLesline, Arabelle Harris, and Mary Frasier are five such women who current members enjoy talking about.

Vivian Duncan and Marguriete Rembert were particularly influential members of the Order and were both members of the founding tent in Charleston, Grace Tent #6. Both Duncan and Rembert’s dedication and service to the organization was recognized on a national level when they were named Superintendents. Duncan and Rembert’s methods in leading the Order were markedly different. Duncan was described as a quiet woman that led by example. “As I can remember,” Ann Blandin says, “Superintendent Duncan was a very quiet women, a pious woman. When she spoke it was in love, made you want to do the right thing, made you want to be in the tent.”

Duncan was a leader within the organization while also running Gadsden Funeral Home located at 221 St. Philip Street; the building also served as her residence. Gadsden Funeral Home is still

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within the urban landscape of Charleston.\textsuperscript{71}  

Vivian Duncan’s service to the city at Gadsden Funeral Home is an intriguing overlap between civilian life and life as a member of the Order; as part of the organization’s mission is to provide burial services for fellow members. As previously discussed, funerals were a major part of African American culture in Charleston. Duncan’s prominent position within the community as director of a funeral home afforded her the opportunity to spread the word and mission of the Order. Member Rosetta Givens testifies, “She was the proprietor of Gadson funeral home in downtown Charleston. A lot of women were attracted to her and she did a lot to build and establish the United Order of Tents in the Charleston area as we know it today.”\textsuperscript{72} As an influential member of the Charleston and United Order of Tents community, Vivian Duncan accurately represents how the members of the Order spread the light and mission of the organization throughout society at large.

Marguriete Rembert had a different approach in guiding the Order’s membership. Rembert and Duncan’s interplay undoubtedly contributed to the success of the organization during their time of involvement. Rembert was head of the Chamber serving as Queen in the 1980s. The present Queen of the Charleston Chamber relates to Rembert’s style of leadership, “Rembert was an outspoken person and just like me sometimes I can’t hold my peace and I say what needs to be said . . . She knew how to talk and she knew how to stop. She would do everything she could to help you and bring you up in the right way.”\textsuperscript{73}

As members of the same tent and both serving on the national level as Superintendents, Duncan and Rembert shared many things and worked side by side; “We learned to love both of these ladies and both of them had their positive things to

\textsuperscript{71} Gadson funeral home has recently been repurposed as an exhibition space for up and coming artists.  
\textsuperscript{72} StoryCorps, NPR, November 10, 2012.  
\textsuperscript{73} Beatrice Givens, interviewed by Rosetta Givens, StoryCorps, NPR, November 10, 2012.
uplift the Tent. It wasn't about them it was all about the organization and its members. That's what I remembered about them the most,” recalls Ann Blandin. Rembert and Duncan invested much of their time and effort in the United Order of Tents because they believed in the mission and goals of the secret society. The differing leadership styles of Rembert and Duncan exhibit how this organization simultaneously permits members to assimilate within the large membership while also maintaining their individuality. Upon Duncan's appointment as Superintendent, Margaret Counts, member of the Board and Leader of Alpha's Tent, dedicated a poem to Duncan’s work. The poem reads:

Give us women with eyes to see
Vision as they ought to be
Women who champion the right
Women with boldness to begin
And courage to fight on and win

Women who will not stoop to wrong
To please the vain applauding throng.
Women who would perish with the just,
Than violate their sacred trust
Who marshal’d hosts of hell defy
Holding Christ’s banner waving high.

The poetry lines elucidate the model characteristics the Order’s members strive to emulate. The lives of Duncan and Rembert illustrate the community building nature of the organization in the latter part of the twentieth century. The work ethic and dedication fostered by the Order often translated into the public lives of the society’s members, as exhibited by Duncan’s work at Gadsden’s Funeral Home. In this fashion, the United Order of Tents served as a hub for crafting and refining contributing members of society.

The historic leaders of the United Order of Tents were also successful as

community builders in the purchase of 73 Cannon Street. Vivian Duncan, Marguerite Rembert, Naomi DeLesline, and Arrabelle Harris were all leading figures within the Order that aided in the organization’s acquisition of the building. Naomi DeLesline was an active member of Rose Anna Tent #18 as early as 1934. She lived at 16 Wall Street and served the state in varying departments throughout her life, including, the County Department of Public Health and the Child Welfare Department. DeLesline’s name was on the original deed for the building at 73 Cannon Street dating to January 9, 1957. DeLesline was responsible for researching the organization’s housing options before deciding upon 73 Cannon Street as the best selection for the organization.

Arrabelle Harris’ name was also listed on the original deed and she served as the leader of Rose of Sharon Tent. In 1966, she held a senior position in the Order representing 3,000 members and 100 tents. Harris was assertive in her leadership and was dedicated to sharing her religion. Harris “invited women not over 50 to join [the organization] assuring them that if they are not Christians they will be before getting out of that meeting.” Harris refined her leadership skills in the classroom over her forty-year career as a teacher. At the age of sixteen, Harris was one of the first black teachers to be employed by the Charleston public school system. In 1940, Harris helped establish Haut Gap Magnet School on John’s Island. Upon her death, she was also a mother to four, grandmother to eight, and great-grandmother to one. The exemplary lives led by the leaders of the United Order of Tents, such as Harris, illustrate just how influential the members of the organization were as community builders in Charleston and how the United Order of Tents augmented their remarkable lives.

Mary Frasier is still alive today and is revered as one of the senior members of

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75 Charleston County, RMC, Deed Book A64 464.
77 “1966 Session Meeting Minutes,” United Order of Tents Records, Charleston, SC.
78 “1966 Session Meeting Minutes,” United Order of Tents Records, Charleston, SC.
the organization. Frasier joined in 1951 following in her mother’s steed. After sixty-two years in the Order, Frasier describes her impressions of the Order, “I just have a love of the organization, the sisterhood, and the chance to help others.” After Arabella Harris’ death in 1969, Frasier stepped in as the leader of Rose of Sharon Tent #101. Frasier has served as the leader for more than forty years. She has also held the positions of Worthy Recorder of Royal Degree Chamber #13 and the Chairman of the Building Fund Committee. As the Chairman of the Building Fund Committee, she led the organization in hosting crab cracks, oyster roasts, and tea parties in an effort to pay off the building’s mortgage. It took forty-five years of hosting such events, but the United Order of Tents finally paid off the mortgage in 2001.

Frasier has witnessed the many phases of the building and has worked within her career as a tent member to make the building a profitable investment for the Order. She refers to the building as “the Tents’ home.” In fact, many of the members hold such sentimental feelings towards the building and reference the building at 73 Cannon as the “home” of their organization. Associating a word like – home – with the building indicates a sense of attachment. A home is a place one returns to for verification and protection; a haven amidst the harsh realities of the world.

Interestingly, even after the years of service to the Order and the building specifically, Mary Frasier reportedly muses whether the organization would be better served to move to a one-story building where the upkeep is not as demanding. Such discord over the building is present in the organization, though not widely acknowledged by the present leaders of the organization. In the 1990s, the membership was allegedly split in half over the circumstances of the building. A portion of the membership shared the opinion of Frasier that the hassles of owning a historic building

outweighed the benefits of keeping 73 Cannon Street as their home.

There is a strong contingent, however, that believes selling the building would be of immeasurable detriment to the Order. Present Deputy and Tent Leader Ann Blandin expresses a feeling of embarrassment and shame for the present dilapidated state of the building: “those older women didn’t have the jobs we have, didn’t have the education we have, but they paid their $.25 each month and they bought their building. Kept it up too. We, who got the better jobs and the better education . . . well you see that building now.”83 The current condition of the building will be discussed at length in the following chapter.

By recognizing the choices and decisions of the historic membership credited with obtaining the building, a precedent is set for how the Order should continue to function within the confines of their historic building. Furthermore, through the study of the lives and character of historic members in the organization, a portion of the many narratives embedded within the building at 73 Cannon Street is revealed.

83 Interviewed by author, December 12, 2012.
CHAPTER FOUR
INTERWOVEN HISTORY OF THE UNITED ORDER OF TENTS AND 73 CANNON STREET

As the headquarters of the Charleston chapter of the United Order of Tents, the history of 73 Cannon Street is intertwined with the history of the organization. The Order is responsible for the majority of changes made to the building since its construction circa 1856. A pre-1944 photograph (Fig. 4.1) depicts a wood framed single house that likely indicates how the building looked and was configured originally. After the date of this photograph, the first recorded renovations occurred in 1960 during the tents’ ownership; therefore, the structure that stands today at 73 Cannon Street is largely an iteration reflecting the United Order of Tents’ visions and needs.

Even before the Order established their organization at 73 Cannon Street, the

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1 “73 Cannon Street,” Preservation Society of Charleston’s Archives, Charleston, South Carolina. Courtesy of Evan Thompson, Director of the Preservation Society of Charleston.
property at present day 73 Cannon Street had an interesting history. The property exists in the Cannonborough-Elliotborough neighborhood, which was historically two distinct neighborhoods. Between 1762 and 1800, David Cannon, a house carpenter and mechanic, owned the Cannonborough area, which was composed of generally low and marshy land. Colonel Barnard Elliott, a Revolutionary War era planter and member of the Provincial Congress, owned the neighboring Elliotborough. After the Civil War, a significant amount of landfill occurred in this area. The new land became prime real estate for the middle and working class conglomerate in Charleston. The neighborhood’s population was, hence, largely composed of free African Americans and Irish and German immigrants. Cannon Street served as the connector between these two adjacent neighborhoods as it ran through both Cannonborough and Elliotborough.²

Noting the potential of this area in 1854, William Lloyd and Alonzo S. White purchased a plot of land on the south side of Cannon Street for $4,000.³ A mere eight days later, the two business partners transferred the deed to Stephen Lloyd, presumably a relative of William Lloyd, for development.⁴ Stephen Lloyd worked as a clerk on King Street and lived on Columbus Street; therefore, the Cannon Street lot was likely an investment project.⁵ During his two years of ownership, Lloyd constructed a three and half story, wood framed Charleston single house. An 1856 advertisement featured in the Charleston Daily Courier describes the new property:

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³ Charleston County Register Mesne Conveyance Records, Deed Book F13, p. 69.

⁴ Charleston County RMC Records, Deed Book J13, p. 151.

⁵ Directories for the City of Charleston (Baltimore: Genealogical Publishing, Co.), 1855.
At private sale, an elegant new RESIDENCE, with spacious two story piazza to the west, situated in the western part of the city, Upper Wards, containing 6 upright rooms, 3 attics, 2 pantries, 1 dressing room, private stairway, water communications conveniently arranged, bath and shower room, gas fixtures throughout the house, handsome chandeliers, and house elegantly furnished and carpeted; on the premises are ample accommodations for servants, &c., large cistern, and excellent well of water, tastily arranged flower garden, grape arbor, fruit tress, &c.\(^6\)

The house was set back on the lot and had an iron gate that separated the property from the street.\(^7\) The building's stepped back position on the lot became a defining feature of the property, as the majority of Charleston single houses directly front the street. Another deviation from the traditional single house plan is the small rear appendage on the south facade of the structure. The seamless brick bond on the east facade indicates that this appendage was indeed part of the original floorplan. Furthermore, the west piazza historically extended the full length of the west facade tying the southern addition into the central single-house plan.\(^8\)

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6 This advertisement was published in the article written by Robert Stockton, “The United Order of Tents Building” in the Preservation Society of Charleston’s seasonal publication titled Preservation Progress, Fall 2012.

7 The single house plan is a vernacular architectural style that refers to a house that is one-room wide and usually two-rooms deep with a central stair passage. The shorter side of the house abuts the street and the front entrance to the house is typically onto a “piazza” or porch.

8 If this southern appendage was not part of the original building structure as suggested, then the addition was certainly made before 1886 represented by the presence of architectural ties in the most southern and most northern parts of the structure. This theory is further defended by the
On October 29, 1856, Lloyd sold the property and the newly constructed house for $6,800 to Francis Seignious. As the first inhabitant of the house, the building acquired the title, the Francis P. Seignious House. Seignious worked at the local coal yard on East Bay Street and lived on Cannon Street until his death in 1886. In his thirty years of residency, no major changes were made to the structure of the building.

On July 6, 1886 “by said will [of Francis Seignious] and four thousand dollars,” the property was conveyed to George Petit. A month later in August of 1886, a historic earthquake shook Charleston. 73 Cannon Street did not reportedly suffer from any catastrophic damage due to the natural disaster; notably, architectural tie rods are present through the structure for stability.

After twenty years of ownership, George Petit, a furniture salesman, sold the property to JB Campbell, a music teacher. Two years later in 1908, JB Campbell sold the property to James Fraser, an African American carpenter. During this series of transactions, the building retained its antebellum appearance and footprint.

In contrast to the house, the outbuildings contained on the 13,420 square foot lot were subject to change over the years. The 1872 Bird’s Eye View of Charleston illustrated the extensive lot as open space aside from the main house. A few years

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9 The $2,800 increase in sales price indicates that the building was constructed during Lloyd’s ownership. Charleston Country RMC Records, Deed Book T13, p. 105.
10 Frederick Ford, *Census of the city of Charleston, SC, for the year of 1861* (Charleston: Evans & Cogswell), 1861.
11 The 1888 Sanborn Map shows that the floorplan of the house remains the same as the original 1855 layout.
12 Charleston County RMC Records, Deed Book C20, p. 399.
14 Charleston County RMC Records, Deed Book D25, p. 252.
later, however, the 1888 Sanborn Fire Insurance Map depicted two smaller dependency structures on the property. The two-story structure with a first level porch was identified as 73 ½ Cannon Street. City permit records reveal that when the two-story building was demolished in 1973, the building was listed under a different owner than the main house. In 1888, a smaller one-story structure was located further south on the lot’s east property line and was similarly demolished at some point during the property’s history.

James Fraser, the owner of 73 Cannon between 1908 and 1933, ran Fraser Auto Repair from the rear of the lot. The ownership of the property was disputed after Fraser’s death. In the Court of Common Pleas on October 22, 1934, William Morrison, “the Master in and for the County,” conveyed the property to Fraser’s wife, Catherine. Catherine Fraser lived in the house, and Fraser Auto Repair continued to operate from the rear of the property. Catherine was an African American nurse, who presumably worked at the Colored Hospital and Training School for Nurses located at 135 Cannon Street.

The Colored Hospital was one of the many African America institutions on Cannon Street during the mid-twentieth century. During the age of Jim Crow, black Charlestonians had access only to the businesses that agreed to serve their race; such establishments were distinguished in the Charleston City Directories with a “c” indicating a “colored” business. In the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries when Charleston’s black population commenced their institution building, Cannon

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15 Charleston County Records Management Department, Charleston, SC.
16 Charleston County RMC, Deed Book Y36, p. 159; Directories for the City of Charleston (Baltimore: Genealogical Publishing, Co.), 1956.
Street’s historic centrality as the connector of two working class neighborhoods made the avenue a prime location for enterprise. By the 1950s, there was an abundance of African American business on Cannon Street ranging from Pilgrim Health and Life Insurance Agency to Francis Jos Roofing Contractor to Katy’s Beauty Salon.\(^\text{17}\)

In October of 1956 when Catherine Fraser’s property was made available at public auction, the large number of black institutions on Cannon Street undoubtedly increased the property’s appeal to the United Order of Tents. In purchasing a property on this predominately African American thoroughfare, the Order established a physical presence within the black community. The November 15, 1956 deed entrusted the trustees, “To hold the said property for the benefit of the said Royal Degree Chamber No. 13 United Order of Tents, and to convey, mortgage or otherwise dispose of the said property, as directed by the said organization.”\(^\text{18}\) The language of the deed dictates the building as a physical manifestation of the Charleston chapter of the Order.

A current member, Reverend Helen McKune, explains the historic and present benefits of the building. “It’s centrally located, has ample parking, accessible to a bus line, and in the middle of the downtown district,” states McKune, “So that makes it really, really feasible to own.”\(^\text{19}\) Undoubtedly, the mid-twentieth century leaders of the organization acquired the building for the same reasons of centrality and prominence within the community.

After 73 Cannon was purchased by the Order, the organization convened two committees to care for the building. The Board of Trustees was endowed with the responsibility of overseeing the building. The Trustees’ names were listed on the deed, and they were charged with carrying out the requests of the organization regarding the property. The Building Fund Committee was formed to host fundraisers for building renovations and to pay off the mortgage. The fundraisers ranged from oyster roasts to

\(^{17}\) *Directories for the City of Charleston* (Baltimore: Genealogical Publishing Co.), 1956.  
\(^{18}\) Charleston County RMC, Deed Book A64, p. 465.  
\(^{19}\) Interview by author, 2012.
tea parties to Tom Thumb weddings, where children from the Juvenile Department would act out matrimonial ceremonies. These established managerial and financial entities suggested a deep investment in the building’s future and its continued affiliation with the Order.

Before the Order purchased the building, the numerous Charleston tents were meeting in a multitude of locations across the city. Due to the religious history and nature of the organization, the tents were likely meeting in church fellowship halls.\textsuperscript{20} As previously discussed, the 1950s and 60s were periods of exponential growth for the Charleston chapter of the Order. The total membership was easily over 700 women within fifteen individual tents. The large membership motivated the Order’s leaders to renovate the Cannon Street building to create bigger meeting spaces. In the 1960s, the Order added a three-story west wing to the structure. This addition interrupted the historically continuous west piazza. The southern appendage and rear portion of the piazza was thus divided from the rest of the house.

The first and second floor west additions greatly increased the meeting spaces for the organization. Historically, the Order convened in the second floor meeting room. Due to the aging membership and absence of an elevator, the tents eventually began meeting only on the first floor. The third floor addition created a larger apartment space, which the Order rented out until the 1990s. The half-story attic space was also an

\textsuperscript{20} During the Order’s current dislodgement from 73 Cannon Street, various churches’ fellowship halls have served as meeting places for the tents as well as the Charleston County Public Library.
In 1963, the Order enclosed the piazzas on the west and south facades of the property. On the first floor both piazzas were left open. The two upper floors were enclosed to create bathrooms, storage spaces, and additional living areas for the second and third floor apartments. The south addition also provided supplemental points of entry for the apartments. When the renovations were complete, there were two rentable apartments on the third floor in addition to the already existing rentable half-story apartment. The additions made by the Order in the early period of their ownership increased the building to the 5,724 square foot structure that exists today.

The northern most rooms in the house remained relatively unchanged through the renovation processes. The north rooms on the first and second floors served as office space where the tents stored their paperwork. These rooms contained an archive, of sorts, for the Charleston Order’s one hundred years of activity. At the first level, a bathroom was added in the southeast corner of the north room during the 1963 building work.

Modern finishes have been applied throughout these rooms; however, historic fabric is still visible below the superficial modern applications. For example, in the north room on the second floor of the building, the cornice, frieze, picture molding, 6/6 window frame, and base trim are all still intact. Furthermore, the room’s coal-burning

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21 1958 Charleston City Directories listed four individuals as living at 73 Cannon Street.
fireplace is located on the east wall, and on the west wall the original French doors that historically opened onto the piazza are still present. The many character defining features in the house will be discussed in the following section; however, it is important to note that during the many renovations conducted by the Order the structure’s historic fabric was left in place though it is frequently covered by superficial modern treatments.

Throughout the years, the building at 73 Cannon accommodated the multi-purpose needs of the organization. As previously mentioned, the building served as an income-producing property for the Order. These leasable spaces were generally confined to the third floor and half-story as the Order reserved the second and first floors of the building for the needs of their organization. By generating an income, the utilities and maintenance of the building were covered in a self-sustaining fashion. In 1970 Charleston Day Care Center, a non-profit organization that provided childcare for low-income families, rented space from the United Order of Tents. The founder of the center, Mrs. Sorenson, described the rented space saying, “It was so dark, so depressing. But everyone pitched in. Someone gave paint – others did the work . . . It makes such a difference.”22 The Cannon YMCA also rented space from the United Order of Tents.23 The presence of such commendable organizations within the tents’ building strengthened the charitable perception of the Order within the neighborhood.

The present membership desires that the tradition of housing philanthropic activities within 73 Cannon be reinstated after the building’s anticipated refurbishment. “One of the things we want to do,” expressed a tent member, “is start an after school program . . . And I hope that we will be able to send juniors and seniors to college campuses because some children have no idea what it is to go to college, and we want to at least expose them to that.”24 Another member proposed hosting a senior citizen

22 Jean May, ““Day Care Center Needs More Help,” New and Courier (Charleston, SC), April 21, 1969,
23 Helen McKune, interviewed by author, 2012.
program explaining, “They don’t want to be at home by themselves all the time. We could have a van come pick them up and they could do quilting, crocheting, and knitting.”25 The traditions and proposals of housing charitable activities within 73 Cannon reinforced the building’s connection to the neighborhood. In this medium, the building promoted and will, hopefully, once again promote the Order’s mission throughout the community.

Not all of the Order’s tenants have been respectful to the building or bolstered the organization’s benevolent image. Most recently, the Order leased the upper apartments to college students who sunbathed on the roof and barbequed in the bathtubs.26 Prompted by the damages caused by the students, the Order decided to stop renting out 73 Cannon. When the Order stopped occupying the building to its fullest extent, due to the prohibition of renters and the relocation of meetings to the first floor, the building suffered from lack of maintenance. The gradual deterioration, evident today, amassed to such a degree that the tents’ building can no longer be utilized by the membership.

In addition to its pragmatic role in housing the Order, 73 Cannon Street also helped transmit the benevolence of the one hundred and forty-six year old organization. The building and its associated congregation captured the imagination and support of the neighborhood. On the first Saturday of every month, the Royal Degree Chamber #13 assembled at 73 Cannon to perform the rituals and business of the organization. Although the knowledge of the activities conducted within the building was restricted to Chamber members, the organization’s presence animated the neighborhood. As the members arrived at the house in their ceremonial white garb, neighbors inquired about the women’s activities. The tent members politely declined to answer, but the scene of this active congregation left an impression on the neighborhood’s residents.27

26 Helen McKune, interview by author, December 13, 2012.
27 Heather Templeton, interview by author, January 2013.
The Templeton family, a neighbor of the United Order of Tents since 1999, believed in the positive role the women and the building performed in the neighborhood. To demonstrate their support, the Templeton’s helped maintain the extensive lawn and even decorated the exterior of the house for Christmas.\(^{28}\) Another neighbor, Helen Kenny, took a stance on the Order’s recent displacement from the neighborhood stating, “I would like to see this building refurbished and remain and have the women who are a part of this organization working with the Preservation Society to rebuild it.”\(^{29}\) The support demonstrated by the Templetons and Helen Kenny symbolizes the neighborhood’s endorsement of the Order’s presence and work within the area.

The sense of community associated with 73 Cannon Street was augmented through the multitude of fundraising events hosted at the property. Historically, the Order hosted a number of chicken dinners, prayer breakfasts, contests, oyster roasts, and other fundraising and fellowship activities every year.\(^{30}\) When 73 Cannon Street served as the venue for these festivities, the Order’s activity on the property enlivened the neighborhood. For example in 1980, the United Order of Tent’s Building Fund Committee hosted either an oyster roast or a fish fry nearly every weekend in pursuit of paying off the building’s mortgage. The events were attended by tent members, family, and friends and regularly drew a crowd of over two hundred people.\(^{31}\) After forty-five years of such fundraisers, the Order paid off the building’s mortgage in 2001. The money from the plethora of continued fundraising activities post 2001 enabled the Order to support local benevolent institutions, such as the Jenkins Orphanage and Ronald McDonald House.\(^{32}\)

In 2012, the United Order of Tents hosted a fish fry as part of a neighborhood

\(^{28}\) Heather Templeton, interview by author, January 2013.
\(^{30}\) Helen McKune, interview by author, 2013.
\(^{31}\) “Building Use for 1980,” United Order of Tents Records, Charleston, SC. See Appendix C.
\(^{32}\) “Building Use for 1980,” United Order of Tents Records, Charleston, SC. See Appendix C.
revival event organized by the non-profit organization, Friends of Dereef Park. At this one event, the Order raised over $1,000.\textsuperscript{33} Returning to the pre 2001 model, this sum was put into the Order’s new building fund, created to help raise money for the restoration of 73 Cannon Street. Additionally, the fund was established to permit the Order to financially contribute to local preservation foundations. As the tent’s building is currently in need of preservation, the Order is acutely aware of the financial requirements and community benefits of historic preservation, in no small part due to their partnership with the Preservation Society of Charleston.

For the combined reasons of negligence of routine maintenance and failing assemblies simultaneously heightened by the Order’s lack of income, the building’s stability is questionable and has become a danger for the owners and neighbors of 73 Cannon Street. On February 8, 2012, Charleston Livability Court summoned the United Order of Tents for a violation of the municipal public nuisances code, known locally as “demolition by neglect.” The building was deemed a public safety hazard by engineers and contractors.\textsuperscript{34} Despite these valid concerns, on May 7, the city postponed the livability court case by issuing an order to stabilize and restrict access to the property. The Preservation Society of Charleston provided the finances for the Order to enact the Court’s request by boarding up the windows and installing two cable ties to secure the enclosed piazza to the building. In response to the stabilization of the building, Charleston’s Livability Court lifted its case against the United Order of Tents.\textsuperscript{35} Still, the membership vacated the building for personal safety concerns.

Following their departure from 73 Cannon Street, the Order began a campaign to raise funds and awareness for the restoration of their building. During this ongoing

\textsuperscript{33} Helen McKune, interview by author, 2012.
\textsuperscript{34} Structural engineer Craig Bennett from 4SE, Inc. briefly reported on the building’s structural issues March 3, 2012.; General Contractor Kristopher King of King Preservation Management, LLC reported on the structural issues of the building and provided estimates for the stabilization of the building on March 16, 2012.
process, the Order formed a series of alliances to garner local recognition and, hopefully, funding for their project. The Charleston *Post and Courier* ran a number of newspaper articles concerning the Order’s livability court case for which multiple tent members contributed statements. When National Public Radio’s *StoryCorps* came to town, leaders within the Order agreed to a broadcast interview. The Order solicited the assistance of Craig Bennett of 4SE Inc. and Kristopher King of King Preservation Management, LLC to provide assessments on the structural stability of their building. Members of the Order met with Historic Charleston Foundation and the Preservation Society of Charleston to discuss the future of 73 Cannon.

The most powerful relationship has been forged between the Preservation Society of Charleston and the United Order of Tents. The Preservation Society has a vested interest in seeing the United Order of Tents succeed in their mission to return to 73 Cannon Street. In 2012, 73 Cannon was nominated to the Society’s “Seven to Save,” a list of threatened historic structures throughout the Charleston area that are in need of attention. The Preservation Society has also been working with local architect Glenn Keyes to create a preservation plan for the building. The Preservation Society’s efforts are geared towards offering a path towards the preservation of 73 Cannon to the United Order of Tents.

Conclusively, the Order opened up its records with strategic transparency and members participated in interviews for the documentation of the organization and building’s history. These acts of sharing and publicity are fairly unprecedented in the history of the United Order of Tents as the group prides itself in self-sufficiency.

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36 Heather Templeton, a Cannon Street resident and founder of the non-profit Friends of Dereef Park, suggested NPR document the stories of the United Order of Tents.
37 Katherine Pemberton, manager of research and education at Historic Charleston Foundation, provided copies of these reports in discussion with author, 2012.
Member Ann Blandin explains, “We're not good about communication with the public about our work. We mostly do it among ourselves.”40 Prompted by the building’s decrepit state, the United Order of Tents’ public outreach suggests the importance of the building to the organization.

Presently, the United Order of Tents is displaced from their building and for the first time in nearly sixty years is meeting at multiple locations throughout the Charleston area. When the organization originally purchased 73 Cannon Street, the building was intended to serve as a unifying force within the Order’s community. Throughout the years of ownership, the building has not only proven to be a force within the membership, but also within the neighborhood. Due to the current deteriorated state of the building, the compelling physical and emotional connection between the United Order of Tents and 73 Cannon Street is in jeopardy.

CHAPTER FIVE

INTERPRETIVE PHOTOGRAPHIC DOCUMENTATION AT 73 CANNON STREET

This chapter documents 73 Cannon Street as it stands in April 2013. Photography proved to be the most efficient form of documentation due to the threatened state of the building. The photographic documentation is augmented by edited versions of Glenn Keyes Architects’ measured drawings of 73 Cannon prepared for the Preservation Society of Charleston.¹

This photographic documentation is organized in the following manner. The photos are divided into five sections: exterior elevations, interior first floor elevations, interior second floor elevations, interior third floor elevations, and interior attic story elevations. At the beginning of each of these five sections, a summary of findings is presented to discuss the character defining features and structural concerns represented in the space. In the interior elevation sections, an edited version of Glenn Keyes Architects’ drawings is featured to showcase the evolution of the building’s footprint at each level over the three building phases: 1856, 1960, and 1963. After the building phases and between the photos of each room, floorplans are presented with red boxes highlighting the rooms under consideration. The photographic documentation of the individual rooms’ elevations follows. Notably, the rooms of each floor are presented beginning with the northernmost room and continuing to the south end of the structure.

Coinciding with the photographic documentation of the exterior and interior elevations is an interpretive summary discussing the character defining features and structural concerns represented within 73 Cannon Street. As previously noted, this interpretation is presented in the summary of findings at the beginning of each of the five sections. Character defining features and structural concerns are important to

¹ Glenn Keyes Architects floor plans are edited within this thesis by the author to elucidate the theories presented in this thesis. Glenn Keys Architects floor plan drawings were accessible courtesy of the Preservation Society of Charleston.
highlight for the future preservation of the building; the character defining features, such as historic construction techniques and historic decorative treatments, should be retained and refurbished, while the structural concerns should be remedied.

As will be depicted within the following photographic documentation of 73 Cannon Street, the original nineteenth century building is exceedingly more stable and aesthetically pleasing than the 1960s additions. The 1960 renovation, which resulted in the addition of a west wing, is a social significant modification of the original nineteenth century structure. The west wing expanded the meeting space of the Order; therefore, this addition represents the Order’s presence at and adaptation of 73 Cannon Street.

As will be exhibited throughout this chapter, the 1960 west wing addition has many points of failure; however, the construction associated with the 1963 enclosure of the piazzas is far less stable. Additionally, the 1963 piazza enclosure is not a socially significant addition as the supplemental space did not directly affect the Order’s membership. While the construction methods utilized in the 1960 west wing addition are not significant nor sound, the physical footprint of this addition on the property contributes to the history of 73 Cannon Street.

While this addition is socially significant and should be respected, the history of the nineteenth century single house is also significant and begins to explain both the historic and modern use of the structure. The photographic documentation of the entirety of the structure illustrates the stability of the nineteenth century structure juxtaposed to the failings of the modern additions. Similarly, the rooms completed in 1856 possess more intricacies, or character defining features, than the twentieth century additions. Furthermore, the corresponding photograph’s caption indicates whether character defining features (CDF) or structural concerns (SC) are represented in the photo through either relevant abbreviation.
Exterior Elevations

Summary of Findings

Before discussing the character defining features and structural concerns of the exterior elevations, the general presence of the building at 73 Cannon Street should be considered. The building is one of the largest single-family residences on the block and, as such, holds a prominent position on Cannon Street. The stepped back position on the lot further accentuates the building’s prominence in the neighborhood. The lot, itself, is also a unique feature measuring an immense 60 feet wide by 220 feet deep, the antebellum dimensions of the property. In the Cannonborough-Elliottborough neighborhood, empty lots, such as the one at 73 Cannon Street, are typically subjects of structural infill. In the case of 73 Cannon, the rear of the lot is empty.

The general character defining features of the exterior elevations include the roofline, the dormer windows, and the full brick basement on grade. The north, east, and south elevation retain the original window frames with 6/6 wooden sash windows. In isolated locations on the original single house, a historic wood clapboard siding is revealed beneath modern siding.

The west elevation has been subjected to the most renovations and loss of historic fabric as the west wing was added in 1940 the piazza was enclosed in 1963. The piazza's original roofline is still intact and original dormer windows are visible on the west-side of the roof. On the ground floor, the original doors that opened onto the piazza are extant, but are currently unused.
The southern elevation illustrates the nineteenth century southern appendage with the historic roofline, window frames, and 6/6 sash windows. The south piazza, which was disassociated from the original continuous piazza by the 1960 west wing addition, also retains the original roofline.

Structural concerns are evident on the west, north, and south elevations. The enclosed piazza is separating from the original structure on the building's west façade. Bracing members, to support the northwest piazza enclosure, are evident on the west façade and structural cable ties connecting the enclosed piazza to the main structure are visible on the north elevation.

On the south elevation, there is evidence of sagging on the southwest piazza enclosure. On the south facade of the west wing, there is evidence of moisture infiltration between the cinderblocks due to improper drainage from the exterior staircase. The moisture could be potentially compromising the construction of the addition.
Exterior Elevations Photographic Documentation

Fig. 5.3 North elevation
(CDF): roofline, window frames, windows, full brick basement

Fig. 5.4 East elevation
(CDF): roofline, windows, and full brick basement
Fig. 5.5 Oblique west elevation  
(CDF): peaks of dormer windows visible  
(SC): bracing of the enclosed piazza

Fig. 5.6 Oblique west elevation west wing addition  
(SC): 1963 enclosure of original piazza
Fig. 5.7 South elevation
(CDF): roofline on south appendage and piazza enclosure; windows on southern appendage

Fig. 5.8 South elevation piazza enclosure
(SC): sagging evident in the 1963 enclosure of original piazza
Fig. 5.9 North elevation of 1960 west wing addition

Fig. 5.10 South elevation of west wing addition

(SC): moisture penetration on 1960 west wing addition
First Floor Interior Elevations

Summary of Findings

The first floor of the original 73 Cannon Street is a brick basement. As such, the walls are thick and the rooms are dark and damp. Originally, this space was likely used for storage and household services. The attention to architectural detail even in this service-oriented area of the house comments on the pride of craftsmanship evident in historic Charleston.

The nineteenth century rooms within the original single house contain an architectural hierarchy transmitted through architectural details. The first floor rooms used for service are simply embellished compared to the second floor rooms used for entertaining. The interiors of the third floor are also relatively simple as the rooms were utilized by the family. Embellishment or finish details were historically reserved for public areas in a house as a display of prestige and success. As the character defining features and structural concerns of each floor are discussed, due diligence will be paid to the historic fabric that illustrates this traditional architectural hierarchy and how these architectural elements interface with the Orders employment of the space at present.

Furthermore, the United Order of Tents use of 73 Cannon was affected by the existing architecture. Until recently, the United Order of Tents primarily used the second floor, accordingly the most ornately decorated level, as their meeting and office space. The first floor, corresponding to the original intent, performed as supplemental space with a kitchen and bathrooms for overflow. The third story and attic were utilized as income-producing rental units. Interestingly, the United Order of Tents utilized the building in ways that mirrored the original nineteenth century customs.

When the Order renovated the building in 1960 and 1963, the majority of character defining features remained in situ. Modern updates, both aesthetic and functional, were applied in minimally intrusive methods due to budget restrictions.
While the modernization of the structure did jeopardize the existing historic fabric, many of the applied techniques are reversible. Where detrimental repairs or methods were employed, the remaining historic fabric leaves enough evidence for the possibility of reproduction. The character defining features highlighted throughout the structure are important to

North Office Room

The first floor office contains several character defining features. The original window and door openings on the north, east, and west elevations are all embellished with channeled surrounds and corner blocks. The east elevation window surround has floral appliques in the corner blocks. Presumably, every surround would have originally possessed a similar embellishment, but a number of appliques have been compromised over time. The decorative molding is indicative of the Greek Revival style and is seen throughout the house.¹ The north and east windows framed with Greek Revival surrounds are historic 6/6 wooden sash window.

The east elevation boasts a historic coal burning fireplace. The west elevation possesses the original French doors and associated transom, which traditionally would have opened onto the piazza.

Along the ceiling of the west elevations above the original piazza doors, a twentieth century air conditioning system was superficially installed. While aesthetically unpleasing, this non-invasive installation has minimal impact on the building’s historic fabric. The tubing for the system is featured in this location on the

first and second floors of the structure and runs the full extent of the building, from north to south.

**Stair Hall**

In the stair hall, the same Greek Revival moldings featured in the office surround the doorways. The staircase is continuous from the first floor to the attic story of the house with character defining features of a curved handrail, turned newel posts and balustrades. As the character defining features within the stair case are the same at every level, the historic fabric of the stairwell will only be mentioned in this section; however, the stair hall of each floor is photographically documented.

**East Meeting Room**

In the east meeting room, the previously described Greek Revival window and door surrounds are present on the north, east, and south elevations. The historic entrance door on the north elevation possesses recessed paneling. The closet door on the east elevation is decorated with the customary Greek Revival surround, but is embellished with wood carvings atop the architrave. This embellishment is unique to this location and is not witnessed throughout the remainder of the house. A character defining historic fireplace mantel exists on the east elevation; however, the fireplace hearth is covered with a modern, wall treatment.

Along the ceiling on the west elevation of the east meeting room, the continuous modern air conditioning system is present. Interestingly, on the south elevation where the system penetrates the south wall, the duct runs through transom’s window openings void of glass panes. By running the system through the transom, the historic door surround is preserved. This incorporation of historic fabric into the modernization of the building is witnessed throughout 73 Cannon.

**West Meeting Room**
The west meeting room is a product of the 1960 west wing addition. This addition is subject to failure on all floors of the building. The ceiling of the room is suffering from water infiltration due to a failure in the roofing system two floors above. The ceiling’s wood framing has visible wood rot and mold growth due to the persistent exposure to moisture. The ceiling covering is disintegrating due to water exposure and is breaking off in large pieces.

Kitchen

The kitchen of the original south appendage is also suffering from roof damage and water infiltration. Water is leaking through the ceiling and causing the ceiling treatment to disintegrate. Mold and wood rot are subsequent problems for the wooden framing members. The water seeping through the ceiling is held in water pockets between the wall and the painted surface.
First Floor Building Phases

Fig. 5.12 First floor building plans modified by author
Plans completed by Glenn Keyes Architects
Courtesy of the Preservation Society of Charleston

Phase I: 1856 Floor Plan
Phase II: 1960 Floor Plan
Phase III: 1963 Floor Plan
First Floor Photograph Documentation

First Floor Plan
North Office Room
Plans Completed by Glenn Keyes Architects
Courtesy of the Preservation Society of Charleston
Edited by author
Fig. 5.13 Office northeast elevation
(CDF): window surrounds, window frame, fireplace mantel

Fig. 5.14 Office east elevation
(CDF): fireplace mantel
(CDF): door surround, French door, and transom
Fig. 5.18 Stair hall east elevation (CDF): newel post and balusters

Fig. 5.19 Stair hall south elevation (CDF): door surround
First Floor Plan
East Meeting Room
Plans Completed by Glenn Keyes Architects
Courtesy of the Preservation Society of Charleston
Edited by author
Fig. 5.20 East meeting room north elevation
(CDF): door surround and door frame

Fig. 5.21 East meeting room east elevation
(CDF): door surround, door frame, fireplace mantel, window surround
Fig. 5.22 East meeting room west elevation

Fig. 5.23 East meeting room southeast elevation
(CDF): door surround and transom
First Floor Plan
West Meeting Room
Plans Completed by Glenn Keyes Architects
Courtesy of the Preservation Society of Charleston
Edited by author
Fig. 5.24 West meeting room northwest elevation (SC): ceiling degradation

Fig. 5.25 West meeting room southwest elevation (SC): ceiling degradation
First Floor Plan
Kitchen
Plans Completed by Glenn Keyes Architects
Courtesy of the Preservation Society of Charleston
Edited by author

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Fig. 5.26 Kitchen east elevation
(SC): ceiling degradation

Fig. 5.27 Kitchen south elevation
(SC): ceiling degradation
First Floor Plan
South Addition
Plans Completed by Glenn Keyes Architects
Courtesy of the Preservation Society of Charleston
Edited by author
Fig. 5.28 Bathroom west elevation

Fig. 5.29 Bathroom south elevation
Second Floor Interior Elevations

Summary of Findings

Historically, parlors received the most intricate and detailed treatment because they were used to entertain guests. At 73 Cannon Street, the most important rooms are located on the second floor. These rooms of the original single house are decorated with a plaster cornice, Greek Revival window and door surrounds, wainscoting, and a baseboard. The plaster cornice has been compromised underneath a layer of modern “popcorn” ceiling covering; however, the presence of this historic fabric indicates that the second floor rooms of the original single house were the grandest, and therefore used as public space for receiving guests.

Interestingly, the United Order of Tents utilized this very space for decades as their primary office and meeting area for the business and rituals of the secret Order. The prominence emanating from the architectural details and the abundance of natural light undoubtedly attracted the members of the organization to constitute the second floor rooms as their principal space. In 1960, the Order reconfigured the east meeting room by adding a west wing to the structure. The Order, however, retained much of the historic fabric on the north, east, and south elevations of the east meeting room.

These spaces are among the most significant in the building and, thus, should receive special attention during the restoration of the structure. The north office room as well as the east and west meeting rooms were highly utilized by both the nineteenth century residents of the building as well as the Order. The preservation of historic and modern treatments within these rooms should be carefully considered.

North Office Room
The north elevation possesses the following historic fabric: a plaster cornice, Greek Revival window surrounds, two 6/6 sash window frames, wooden paneling beneath the window sill, and a baseboard. A structural cable tie runs through the northwest window securing the enclosed piazza addition to the original building.

The east elevation promotes the same historic fabric as the north elevation with the addition of a historic coal burning fireplace. The south elevation has a plaster cornice, Greek Revival door surround, a recessed paneled door, and a baseboard. The west elevation possesses the previously described plaster cornice and baseboard with the two French doors that open on to the enclosed piazza addition.

**North Living Room**

The 1963 west enclosure of the piazza is a structural concern. At this level, a living room and a bathroom were added to the second floor by enclosing the original northwest portion of the piazza. The structural failings of this addition are evident as a cable tie connects the addition to the original structure.

**East Meeting Room**

The east meeting room features the same historic fabric as the north office room; namely, the plaster cornice, Greek Revival window and door surrounds, 6/6 sash window frame, wainscoting isolated below the window sill, paneled doors, baseboard, and a fireplace mantel.

**West Meeting Room**

The roofing failure in the 1960 west wing addition is evident in the west meeting room. The ceiling is degrading due to excessive water exposure and the wood framing members are subject to root and mold. The water leaking from the ceiling is pooling on the floor exacerbating the water infiltration issues on the first floor.

**Storage/Mechanical Room**

In the southeast corner of the ceiling, the ceiling material appears to be damp or stained from moisture infiltration.
Fig. 5.31 Second floor building plans modified by author
Plans completed by Glenn Keyes Architects
Courtesy of the Preservation Society of Charleston

Phase I: 1856 Floor Plan          Phase II: 1960 Floor Plan                Phase III: 1963 Floor Plan
Second Floor Photographic Documentation

Second Floor Plan
North Office Room
Plans Completed by Glenn Keyes Architects
Courtesy of the Preservation Society of Charleston
Edited by author
Fig. 5.32 Office north elevation
(CDF): cornice, window surround, window frame, wainscoting, baseboard

Fig. 5.33 Office northeast elevation
(CDF): cornice, window surround, window frame, wainscoting, fireplace mantel, baseboard
Fig. 5.34 Office southeast elevation
(CDF): cornice, fireplace mantel, baseboard

Fig. 5.35 Office south elevation
(CDF): cornice, basebord, door surround, paneled door
Fig. 5.36 Office west elevation
(CDF): cornice, door surrounds, French doors, baseboard
Second Floor Plan
North Living Room
Plans Completed by Glenn Keyes Architects
Courtesy of the Preservation Society of Charleston
Edited by author
Fig. 5.37 Living room northwest elevation
(SC): cable tie supporting the 1963 northwest piazza enclosure
Second Floor Plan
Stair Hall
Plans Completed by Glenn Keyes Architects
Courtesy of the Preservation Society of Charleston
Edited by author
Fig. 5.38 Stair hall west elevation (CDF): newel post and balustrades

Fig. 5.39 Stair hall southwest elevation (CDF): balustrades
Second Floor Plan
East Meeting Room
Plans Completed by Glenn Keyes Architects
Courtesy of the Preservation Society of Charleston
Edited by author
Fig. 5.40 East meeting room northeast elevation
(CDF): cornice, window surround, wainscoting, fireplace mantel

Fig. 5.41 East meeting room southeast elevation
(CDF): cornice, door surround, paneled door, baseboard
Fig. 5.42 East meeting room west elevation
Fig. 5.43 West meeting room west elevation
Second Floor Plan
Storage/Mechanical Room
Plans Completed by Glenn Keyes Architects
Courtesy of the Preservation Society of Charleston
Edited by author

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Fig. 5.44  Storage south elevation

Fig. 5.45  Storage southeast elevation
(SC): moisture infiltration
Fig. 5.46 Storage southwest elevation
Second Floor Plan
Stair
Plans Completed by Glenn Keyes Architects
Courtesy of The Preservation Society of Charleston
Edited by author
Fig. 5.50 Bathroom southwest elevation
Second Floor Plan
Kitchen
Plans Completed by Glenn Keyes Architects
Courtesy of the Preservation Society of Charleston
October 9, 2012
Fig. 5.51 Kitchen south elevation

Fig. 5.52 Kitchen west elevation
**Third Floor Interior Elevations**

**Summary of Findings**

The character defining features on the third floor are progressively simpler than those on the second, underscoring the architectural hierarchy of 73 Cannon Street. As the third floor was utilized by the family in the traditional single house layout, ornate decoration would have historically been perceived as extraneous. Accordingly, the first and third floor architectural elements are similar, including 6/6 sash windows, Greek Revival window and door moldings. The cornice and baseboard featured on the third floor are unassuming. The room south off the stairwell lacks a cornice altogether.

In the 1960s, the United Order of Tents expanded the footprint of 73 Cannon. In so doing, the third floor evolved into two rentable apartments. Metal staircases were affixed to the exterior of the southwest piazza enclosure to create additional points of egress for apartments. The Order’s employment of this floor and the attic story as income-producing spaces logistically made sense, and reserved the more prestigious rooms on the second floor for the Order.

The structural concerns witnessed throughout the building are most pronounced on the third floor due to its close proximity to the faulty roof system. The top layer of west wing’s roofing system is visible from the attic story’s dormer window and is covered in felt paper. Felt paper is customarily found below a protective roof covering, such as roofing tiles or shingles. The misuse of this product explains the water penetration realized throughout the building. A three by six section of plywood is applied as a patch over a particularly weakened section of the roof. Though potentially slowing water infiltration, this is not a highly effective, or enduring solution.
North Bedroom

The north bedroom contains the Greek Revival window surrounds and the 6/6 sash window frames observed throughout the building. The cornice and baseboard are simple in nature. The fireplace is a noteworthy character defining feature with Tuscan pilasters supporting the entablature. The hearth of the fireplace is covered with a decorative metal fire screen emplaced to transition the wood-burning fireplace to coal. On the west elevation, the original piazza French doors are present.

North Sitting Room

In this room, the historic board and batten piazza roofing is evident underneath degraded modern ceiling covering. This revelation further emphasizes the theory that unobtrusive construction methods were utilized when the Order modernized 73 Cannon. An abundance of historic fabric could potentially be revealed below the surface of modern applications.

On the north elevation, a significant and visible gap exists between the enclosed piazza and the original structure. A cable tie connects the north sitting room to the bedroom; however, the north sitting room appears to be buckling under the pressure exhibited by cracks throughout the room. The structural concerns in this room illustrate the fundamentally endangered state of the 1963 enclosed piazza.

Stair Hall

In the third floor stair hall, a large door is centered on the west elevation. The customary
Greek Revival molding surrounds the edge of a door frame that is flanked by sidelights and a transom. The doors leading in to the south and north rooms off the stairwell are of a more typical size for this building and possess the customary moldings.

**East Living Room**

Greek Revival window and door molding are extant on the east elevation as well as a character defining fireplace mantel. The water staining above the fireplace indicates improper water drainage, which could be a potential structural concern. The baseboard is simple and the room lacks a cornice.

**West Living Room**

Due to persistent water exposure resulting from an inadequate roofing system, the ceiling and floor of this room are extremely degraded. Maintenance negligence allowed the water pooling on the floor of this room to seep down to the first floor. This room exhibits the extremely threatened condition of the 1960s west wing addition. The owners have temporarily blocked off access to this room because of the visible structural concerns.

**South Bedroom**

Water staining on the south elevation of this room indicates a structural concern in the roofing or draining system of the southwest enclosed piazza.
Third Floor Building Phases

Fig. 5.56 Third Floor building plans modified by author
Plans completed by Glenn Keyes Architects
Courtesy of the Preservation Society of Charleston

Phase I: 1856 Floor Plan
Phase II: 1960 Floor Plan
Phase III: 1963 Floor Plan
Third Floor Photographic Documentation

BEDROOM

Third Floor Plan
North Bedroom
Plans Completed by Glenn Keyes Architects
Courtesy of the Preservation Society of Charleston
Edited by author
Fig. 5.57 Bedroom north elevation
(CDF): cornice, window surrounds, window frame, wood paneling, baseboard

Fig. 5.58 Bedroom northeast elevation
(CDF): cornice, window surround, wood paneling, baseboard, fireplace mantel
Fig. 5.59 Bedroom west elevation
(CDF): cornice, door surround,
French door, baseboard
Third Floor Plan
North Sitting Room
Plans Completed by Glenn Keyes Architects
Courtesy of the Preservation Society of Charleston
Edited by author
Fig. 5.60 Sitting room north elevation
(SC): gap between enclosed piazza and original structure

Fig. 5.61 Sitting room west elevation
(CDF): board and batten piazza roofing
Third Floor Plan
Stair Hall
Plans Completed by Glenn Keyes Architects
Courtesy of the Preservation Society of Charleston
Edited by author
Fig. 5.62 Stair hall northeast elevation
Fig. 5.63 Stair hall southeast elevation

Fig. 5.64 Stair hall west elevation
(CDF): large central door and modlings on north and south elevation
Third Floor Plan
East Living Room
Plans Completed by Glenn Keyes Architects
Courtesy of the Preservation Society of Charleston
Edited by author
Fig. 5.65 East living room northeast elevation
(CDF): window and door surrounds
(SC): water staining above fireplace

Fig. 5.66 East living room east elevation
(CDF): fireplace mantel
Fig. 5.67 West living room southwest elevation
(SC): extreme degradation of ceiling and flooring due to continued water exposure
Fig. 5.68 Kitchen south elevation
Third Floor Plan
Bathroom
Plans Completed by Glenn Keyes Architects
Courtesy of the Preservation Society of Charleston
Edited by author
Fig. 5.69 Bathroom south elevation
Third Floor Plan
South Bedroom
Plans Completed by Glenn Keyes Architects
Courtesy of the Preservation Society of Charleston
Edited by author
Fig. 5.70 Bedroom southwest elevation

(SC): water staining indicates improper roofing or drainage system
Attic Floor

Summary of Findings

The attic floor retains the original configuration of the 1856 building. While adding character to the building, the dormer windows also serve a functional purpose. The dormers provide natural light and ventilation making the attic an inhabitable space and, thus, a rentable apartment during a portion of the Order’s ownership.

There are no notable character defining features or structural concerns in the attic. Safety issues should be addressed, however, as vagrants appear to occupy the rooms. The intruders access the building by breaking through the boarded up dormer windows, which are easily accessible due to the 1960s exterior staircase additions.
Attic Floor Building Phases

Fig. 5.71 Attic Floor building plans modified by author
Plans completed by Glenn Keyes Architects
Courtesy of the Preservation Society of Charleston
Attic Floor Photographic Documentation

Attic Floor
Bedroom
Plans Completed by Glenn Keyes Architects
Courtesy of the Preservation Society of Charleston
Edited by author
Fig. 5.72 Bedroom north elevation
Fig. 5.73 Living room east elevation

Fig. 5.74 Living room southeast elevation
Fig. 5.75 Living room east elevation
Attic Floor
Kitchen
Plans Completed by Glenn Keyes Architects
Courtesy of the Preservation Society of Charleston
Edited by author
Fig. 5.76 Kitchen south elevation
CHAPTER SIX

THE SENSE OF PLACE AT 73 CANNON STREET

Over the decades of ownership, the members of the Charleston chamber of the United Order of Tents have formed an attachment to the building at 73 Cannon Street. This attachment, in part, is attributed to the Order’s historic leadership. The revered past leaders of the organization, such as Vivian Duncan and Marguerite Rembert, were central to the organization’s acquisition of the building. The membership views the forfeiting of the building as a disservice to their work. Helen McKune states:

Because it’s our building we don’t want to let go. What significance would that bring? We own this building debt free. We have a place to meet. We have parking space. We have facilities to do other things. We don’t want to get rid of our building. This is an inheritance that we can pass on to younger women.¹

As emphasized by McKune, the building accommodates a multitude of the organization’s needs; more significantly, however, 73 Cannon Street is the physical legacy of the United Order of Tents’ in Charleston. The members have embedded their heritage and historic narrative within the structure. When a building serves as a vessel for memories and identity, historic preservationists deem the building significant because of its “sense of place,” a concept that denotes a building’s social contribution to history. The many implications of the concept of place and how it applies to the United Order of Tents’ building will be explored in this chapter.

The modern discussion of place and preservation is a highly political dialogue led by Tim Cresswell, Ned Kaufman, and Daniel Bluestone among a plethora of other

¹ Interview by author, 2012.
scholars. Cresswell, a human geographer, believes place to be “a way of understanding the world” both for personal and collective identities. Notably, Cresswell theorizes that place identities are subject to politics; hence, a place is either eternally memorialized through its preservation or allowed to fade from the public memory. Cresswell’s collaborative work with geographer Gareth Hoskins “Place, Persistence, and Practice: Evaluating Historical Significance at Angel Island, San Francisco, and Maxwell Street, Chicago” explores the politics of place and memory.

In this joint article, the authors analyze why sense of place was a contributing factor to the success and failure of two nominations to the National Register of Historic Places. Angel Island, San Francisco, an early twentieth century immigration station for Asian immigrants, and Maxwell Street, Chicago, a historic immigrant neighborhood with a famous open-air market, are two American places equivalently entrenched with history and personal stories. The Maxwell Street National Register of Historic Places nomination, however, was denied. In so doing, the Keeper of the National Register deemed the memories connected to the place known as Maxwell Street less significant than those memories rooted to Angel Island. Public history is shaped by such decisions for years to come.

Similarly, Daniel Bluestone theorizes that the buildings chosen to be preserved (or not) through the regulated systems of the National Register or federal tax incentives programs are always political decisions. In accordance with Tim Cresswell’s theories,

3 Creswell thoroughly and succinctly explores the meaning of place in his 2004 publication Place: A Short Introduction.
5 Daniel Bluestone, Buildings, Landscape and Memory: Case Studies in Historic Preservation (New York: W. W. Norton & Co., 2011); For more information on the theoretical failings of these
Bluestone believes that greater weight and influenced should be placed on the meanings of places. Preservation, according to Bluestone, is the packaging of the past and the deliverance of this particular history to the people in the form of place. In this manner, preservation is a powerful political tool as professionals chose which places to preserve according to the stories represented.  

The acceptance of the National Register nomination for the United Order of Tents building could potentially contribute to the representation of black women's history in America. According to Women's historian Anne F. Scott, the story of African American women is severely underrepresented in America's history. Scott theorizes that the lack of knowledge concerning black women's histories is, in part, due to the fact that this topic has received limited academic attention. “The subject has hardly made its way into the minds of most historians,” states Scott, “much less into the view of the past that ordinary citizens carry around in their heads.” The communication of history through physical means renders historic narratives more accessible to the average citizen; therefore, while a national distinction is not essential to the Order's preservation efforts, a National Register designation would render 73 Cannon Street a more visible African American heritage landmark and, thus, share the Order's story with a larger contingent.

Due to the relative deficiency of architectural integrity, 73 Cannon Street's National Register nomination could potentially be determined ineligible or controversial. Built in 1856, the building certainly meets the National Park Service's qualifications for a historic structure; however, 73 Cannon's importance to the community lies more in the social history represented by the building rather than its
government organized programs for preservation concerns consult Thomas King's Our Unprotected Heritage (Walnut Creek, CA: Left Coast Press), 2009.
6 Daniel Bluestone, Buildings, Landscape and Memory, 2011.
7 The Preliminary Information Form for the National Register of Historic Places nomination was completed by the author. To view the nomination and a synopsis of the nomination's standing see Appendix D.
architectural history.\footnote{The National Park Service considers a building eligible for the National Register of Historic Places after fifty years after its construction date.}


Heritage conservator Ned Kauffman comments on this new reality of preservation:

> If preservation were fundamentally a technical discipline, then it would be appropriate to gauge its success by technical measures. But it is not: it is a social practice, part history and part planning. Its ultimate goal is not fixing or saving old things but rather creating places where people can live well and connect to meaningful narratives about history, culture, and identity.\footnote{Ned Kaufman, \textit{Place, Race, and Story: Essays on the Past and Future of Historic Preservation}, (New York: Routledge, 2009), 1.}

Adhering to this novel preservation philosophy, the preservation of 73 Cannon Street is not only important to the members of the organization, but to the citizens of Charleston as well. Kaufman's practice of historic preservation emphasizes the preservation of “storyscapes,” places invested with identities and memories. Kaufman considers the future of historic preservation to lie in the protection of these storyscapes, in spite of the buildings noncompliance with the traditional criteria of architectural significance.\footnote{Kaufman, \textit{Place, Race, and Story}, 2009.}

The stories vested in 73 Cannon Street are multi-faceted. The building communicates the history of the black women’s club movement in Charleston, the history of Cannon Street as an African American thoroughfare, and the history of the United Order of Tents. The resounding theme of these stories is the history of African
American women as community builders. Urban historian Dolores Hayden suggests ethnic women’s stories in an urban context are overlooked by preservationists and, in turn, forgotten by the public. She insists that these stories are important to public histories as they teach lessons of perseverance and hope. Each story discredits the homogeneity of the American experience, yet, endorses the connectivity of the human story. Preserving the historic connection between the United Order of Tents and 73 Cannon Street contributes to the representation of the ethnic woman’s experience. By designating or recognizing 73 Cannon as a African American heritage landmark, the story of black women as community builders can resonate in its authentic landscape.

Historian Antoinette Lee proposes the deficiency of individualized structures embodying the minority experience as a reason for the lack of minority representation in preservation. Due to limited financial capital, Lee argues that minorities are often unable to construct buildings particular to their traditions. Many scholars of vernacular architecture would argue against Lee’s theory, referencing such building styles as the Charleston Freedman’s Cottage as architectural manifestations of minority cultures.

Lee convincingly speculates that minority communities must adapt pre-existing structures to satisfy their needs. For many communities, these alterations create a sense of place within pre-fabricated environments. Lee’s theory correlates to the United Order of Tents’ experience in Charleston. Over fifty-six years of ownership, the United Order of Tents created a sense of place at 73 Cannon Street. The membership financed two building campaigns to remodel the structure to accommodate their

15 A nineteenth century vernacular style of housing original occupied by emancipated slaves after the Civil War.
functional needs. The nineteenth century single house was not built to host the secret rituals or activities of the Order; however, the tents have transformed this structure into a headquarters specific to their functions. This theory should inform the preservation treatment of 73 Cannon Street by recognizing the significance of the Order’s adaptations in 1960.

The Order created a sense of place at 73 Cannon evidenced by the construction renovations and furniture arrangement on the second floor. Historically, the Order assembled on this floor of the building for meetings. In 1960, the Order added a west wing to the building to enlarge this meeting space. The rituals of each meeting, the details of which are reserved for the members, involved the presence of an Inside Door Keeper and an Outside Door Keeper to monitor egress. The leader of the assembly stood behind a podium, while high-ranking members sat behind the podium. The general membership sat in the audience.

The use of this physical space to perform rituals and delineate the hierarchies of the organization illustrates how architecture impacts and reflects social structures. Sergio Sismondo, a specialist in science and technology studies, describes the role of architecture in place-making. “Architecture provides a good example of the ways in which technologies have effects and embody social structure,” states Sismondo, “a building is a piece of technology, one that shapes the activities, interactions, and
flows of people.” The Order's repetitious congregation in one location creates human associations with the architecture of a space and motivates minor changes within that space, such as the placement of the podium and the seating arrangements, to influence an individual's experience of a place.

When tent member, Helen McKune entered the second floor meeting room, she “recalled how the older women sat in a group in one section of the room, ready to impart wisdom and instructions to the younger members, who clustered near the dusty old piano. There, each generation learned the ways of the Tents.” McKune lamented, “Those were the good old days.” McKune's testimony speaks to the sense of place embedded in 73 Cannon Street; the physical spaces within the building offer the membership a chance to connect to their heritage. According to historian David Lowenthal, the human race desires such physical representations of memories, hence, the existence of the human phenomenon nostalgia. Lowenthal insists the past in the guise of memory is a powerful tool for providing a sense of identity and direction for the future.

The concept of collective memories is another theory that explains the feelings evoked by architecture. Collective memory has been explored at length by a multitude of authors through a variety of case studies. Essentially, the premise details that

collective memories are embodied in landscapes either natural or man-made. A variety of physical spaces hold the collective memories of different cultures. To overgeneralize, but showcase the spectrum of collective memories nonetheless, one may assume that Native Americans identify with the past through natural landscapes of their respective tribal locations while college graduates identify with the past through their respective university campuses. The power vested in these memory-holding landscapes is poignant, and this phenomenon has been identified as the power of place.

The collective memory of the Charleston chamber of the Order is embedded within the building at 73 Cannon Street. Generations of tents have congregated within these walls. “There are too many memories; too much a sense of home,” insists Ann Blandin, “We don’t want to move. It sounds sentimental, but it’s something about never forgetting where you come from.” The collective memory vested in 73 Cannon is the nexus behind the Orders’ reluctance to sell the building for an enticing profit. “It probably is a money forfeit, but we’re just not interested in being rich,” vocalizes a member, “We want to be in the community.” The testimonies from the membership concerning the importance of the building to their heritage supports the academic theories of the identity and power transmitted through place.

The building at 73 Cannon also has a role in communicating the Christian ideals and benevolent nature of the organization to the membership and the community. The Queen of the Chamber, Beatrice Givens, explains the role the building played in fostering good character in her membership. “You did not do anything wrong in this building,” testifies Givens, “You would have to stand before the altar and asked to be excused.” 73 Cannon enforces the Order’s standards of conduct to the membership and embodies the traditions and morals of the organization to the community. Accordingly, the outside

community associates the organization’s virtuous and generous reputation with the building.

Daphne Spain, a women’s historian, studies the redemptive places established by African American women in their respective communities. Often, these places serve as beacons of hope in neighborhoods affecting the overall atmosphere of the community. Spain argues that, regrettably, African American women are not equipped with the tools to recognize that the impromptu or temporal communities of refuge that they create are worthy of preservation. In accordance with Spain’s philosophy, the Order’s presence on Cannon Street positively impacts the community because the building is the physical representation of the organization’s compassion. The Charleston residents who understand the mission of the Order recognize the important contributions that the Order and the building both make to the community. Even the Municipal Court Judge, who ruled on the Order’s violation of the public nuisances code in Livability Court, recognized the type of role such institutions have in the community. “I remember this African American church as a boy,” expressed the judge, “and I hate to see it deteriorate any further.” While the United Order of Tents’ building is certainly not a church, this analogy interprets an outsider’s humanitarian perception of the organization.

Contradicting Spain’s argument, the important role of the building in the community is not lost on the Order’s membership. “It’s just part of us [73 Cannon Street],” explains Ann Blandin, “I think it’s good for the city. To be an example to young people because there is a need for organizations like ours.” The many theoretical implications of sense of place explain Ann Blandin and other member’s strong connection to 73 Cannon Street. As insinuated by Blandin, the building is part of the

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26 Letter from Associate Judge Michael Molony to Historic Charleston Foundation. Courtesy of Katherine Pemberton, Manager of Research and Education at Historic Charleston Foundation.
organization's identity and memory. While the building enhances the Order's existence, the United Order of Tents simultaneously enriches 73 Cannon and the surrounding neighborhood.

The interplay between architecture and humans was succinctly expressed by Winston Churchill: "We shape our buildings; thereafter they shape us." The connection between the United Order of Tents and 73 Cannon Street is an interesting case study for analyzing sense of place in the context of historic preservation. The way the Order's membership has shaped 73 Cannon renders the building a complex candidate for restoration, yet extremely worthy of preservation, investment, and recognition.
CHAPTER SEVEN
RECOMMENDATIONS AND CONCLUSIONS

The extremely dilapidated state of the 73 Cannon Street places the United Order of Tents in a perilous position. While it is evident that the membership desires to remain in the building and wants to see the building preserved, there are many trials to overcome before the Order can be reinstated in their home. The Order is in limbo as the membership explores the options for the future of their building and their organization. While the compromised condition of the building is distressing to the Order, it has provided an opportunity for reflection. In some ways, the building’s condition prompted the membership to analyze the circumstances of their organization. “We are doing things to put in place once this building is renovated,” explains tent member Rev. Helen McKune, “so when the building is finished we [the organization] will be established and ready to function.”¹ The building’s uncertain status renders this moment in the Charleston chamber’s one hundred year history an opportune time for recommendations both for the preservation of the building and the organization.

In the up-and-coming neighborhood of Cannonborough-Elliottborough, the United Order of Tent’s property on Cannon Street is a very desirable lot for development. Over the years, developer’s chronic interest in the Orders’ property has generated feelings of animosity within the membership towards outsiders. “They wanted to take [the building],” explains Helen McKune, “They can’t afford to buy it and then they started harassing us.”² When the United Order of Tents was summoned to livability court in 2012, the Order’s qualms surrounding the availability of their property culminated. Margaret Thomas, chairman of the Order’s Board of Trustees, expressed, “We know what this is about. They’ve been trying to get that property from

¹ Interviewed by author, December 13, 2012.
² Helen McKune, interviewed by author, December 13, 2012.
us for years. We won’t sell it, so they found another way to sneak in and try to take it from us.” As illustrated by Margaret Thomas, a degree of skepticism has grown out of the membership’s relationships with developers. Regrettably, the Order brings this skepticism into new partnerships with entities actually interested in assisting with the preservation of 73 Cannon.

In this gentrifying neighborhood, a degree of skepticism is not unwarranted. The membership of the United Order of Tents has witnessed the gradual relocation of the historic residents of Cannon Street. An African American thoroughfare when the Order purchased their building, Cannon Street is now home to college students and trendy businesses. These new residents bring different dynamics and alternative priorities into the neighborhood. The Charleston preservation consciousness is cognizant of the implications of rapid growth and gentrification on the built environment and residents of historic Cannonborough-Elliottborough. Organizations, such as Friends of Dereef Park and the Preservation Society of Charleston, are working to preserve the historic structures and narratives associated with this area before the full implications of gentrification are realized. As the neighborhood and the Order continue to move into the twenty-first century, the United Order of Tents’ cooperation with preservation minded organizations will be essential for raising the awareness and the funds necessary to restore the United Order of Tents’ building.

In fact, Friends of Dereef Park and the Preservation Society of Charleston have already activated advocacy campaigns for the preservation of 73 Cannon Street. Friends of Dereef Park is a non-profit organization aiming to prevent further residential and commercial development within the Dereef Park and to share the Native American,

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4 A source particularly helpful in understanding community attitudes towards gentrification was Japonica Brown-Saracino’s *A Neighborhood That Never Changes: Gentrification, Social Preservation, and the Search for Authenticity* published in 2009 by the University of Chicago Press in Chicago.
African American, and Jewish histories of the area. Dereef Park lies directly south of the United Order of Tents’ property and is the namesake of the Dereef brothers, two influential black businessmen in nineteenth century Charleston. Friends of Dereef Park has a vested interest in the preservation of the tents’ building due to the property’s close proximity as well as its contribution to African American history.

Heather Templeton, a founder of Friends of Dereef Park, envisions the park, the United Order of Tents’ building, and the Cannon Street YMCA, located at 63 Cannon Street, serving as a black heritage corridor. The proximity of these three landmarks and their respective contributions to black history in Charleston are powerful testaments to the influence of African Americans in the Cannonborough-Elliottborough neighborhood. As Friends of Dereef Park continues to thwart new development and promote the concept of a black heritage corridor, the United Order of Tents stands to benefit from Friends advocacy for preservation within the area.

Another organization advocating for the preservation of 73 Cannon is the Preservation Society of Charleston. The society nominated the building to their “Seven to Save” list, a program that highlights seven buildings in need of preservation throughout the Charleston area. The “Seven to Save” program has been awarded a number of grants and the Preservation Society has hosted many fundraising events for the preservation of the seven buildings nominated. The collaboration between

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5 “About,” Friends of Dereef Park: Saving a Charleston Heritage Park, http://dereefpark.wordpress.com/about/ (accessed January 18, 2013). Dereef park has been a controversial topic in Charleston over the past decade as the park transitioned from public to private land. The majority of the green-space is now owned by Riverside Captial LLC and is undergoing a residential development project, locally recognized as Morris Square Phase II. When Riverside Capital is finished with construction, Dereef Park will be significantly diminished in size.

6 Heather Templeton, a leader of the Friends of Dereef Park organization, expressed the idea of a heritage corridor to the author in discussion on January 18, 2013. The Cannon Street YMCA also accesses the park from the rear of their property. The Cannon Y contributes to the African American story in Charleston because of the eminence of the 1955 Cannon Street All-Stars. The All-Stars were the chosen team from the YMCA’s African American Little League Baseball program to compete in the South Carolina state tournament. When it came time for the Cannon All-Stars to play at the state level, every white baseball team withdrew from the tournament refusing to compete against the African American players on the Cannon All-Stars. The state tournament was cancelled, and the Cannon All-Stars won by default.
the Preservation Society and the Order is an important partnership that should be supported. The Preservation Society is extremely connected within the local, state, and national preservation community and the Order benefits immensely from these established relationships. This thesis, in fact, is a by-product of the Preservation Society’s interest in the building and inhabitants of 73 Cannon Street.

Furthermore, the Preservation Society of Charleston is sponsoring the creation of a historic marker to be placed on the property of 73 Cannon Street acknowledging the cultural heritage associated with the building. The installation of such a marker will assist in the dissemination of the social significance of the United Order of Tents and their meeting house throughout the neighborhood and larger community. The Preservation Society plans to erect this marker in September of 2013 to commemorate the Order’s centennial in Charleston.

The National Register of Historic Places nomination presented as a component of this thesis is an additional form of advocacy for the preservation of the United Order of Tents building. The nomination analyzes and recognizes the historic character and social significance of the building. The Preliminary Information Form, the first step in the National Register nomination process, was submitted to the South Carolina State Historic Preservation Office [SHPO] in February of 2013. As of April 5 of the same year, the SHPO determined that 73 Cannon Street would not be eligible for the National Register due to the structure’s 1960s alterations. The enclosure of the piazza, addition of the synthetic siding, and the addition of the three-story west wing were declared compromising to the historic character of the house, thus, procuring the United Order of Tents building ineligible for the Register.

While the singular structure of 73 Cannon Street was declared ineligible for the Register, the neighborhood surrounding the property was deemed eligible for the

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7 See Appendix D for the progress of the National Register nomination and a copy of the submitted Preliminary Information Form.
National Register in 1989 as an expansion of the already listed Old and Historic District of Charleston. When applying for future grants and funding for the preservation of the structure, the eligibility of the district for the National Register should be acknowledged and emphasized. The building at 73 Cannon Street could be successfully argued as a contributing structure to the neighborhood’s historic character and, therefore, worthy of preservation.

While not all advocacy campaigns will be successful, it is important to broadcast the circumstances and needs of the building to outside parties. The more relationships the United Order of Tents fosters with external organizations, the more people their story reaches; subsequently, the Order heightens the reality of raising the funds necessary to restore their home.

Thus far, the surrounding community’s role in advocating for the preservation of 73 Cannon Street has been emphasized; however, the United Order of Tents membership should play a central role in contributing to this multi-faceted advocacy campaign. The secretive and self-sufficient nature of the United Order of Tents contradicts the concept of advocacy; however, the membership’s endangered building needs to serve as the impetus for the Order’s exploration of new tactics. With a membership approximated at 350 individuals, the Order has a broad platform from which to spread the news of their organization’s needs. After a century of serving the community, the Order is now in need of assistance and needs to seek contributions for the preservation of their 73 Cannon Street meeting house.

Additionally, the methods previously employed by the organization for the maintaining the building can no longer be considered effective. It is advisable that the leaders of the Order devote time to developing advocacy and fundraising programs to restore the building. If and when the Order is reestablished at 73 Cannon Street, the organization needs to invest in, and diligently carry out, a maintenance plan for the historic building to ensure the structure’s stability is not compromised again.
If the building undergoes restoration, the property’s character defining features highlighted in chapter five should be a priority of preservation. As previously noted, many of the modern treatments applied on the exterior and interior of the building could potentially be masking the presence of additional historic fabric. Demolition of the failing modernizations should be delicately handled in order to discern the existence of further original character defining features. More invasive means of architectural study than those undertaken in this thesis would supplement the understanding of the original 73 Cannon Street. Strategic areas of demolition are recommended to reveal further information concerning the original configuration and appearance of the building. A paint analysis campaign could also prove to be a beneficial tool in understanding the building’s evolution of appearance and use.

In consideration of the confines of this research, basic recommendations can be made with respect to the physical fabric and aims to reinstate the United Order of Tents at 73 Cannon Street. Structural engineer Craig Bennet of 4SE, Inc. and contractor Kristopher King of King Preservation, LLC have both created brief reports for the structural issues of the building. Both of these reports are primarily concerned with the twentieth century additions made by the Order to the building. The two building campaigns undertaken by the Order are understood to be the west wing addition in 1960 and the enclosure of the piazzas in 1963. Since both twentieth century additions are failing, these areas of the building must/will be prioritized in renovation.

To honor the evolution of the building during the tents’ ownership, it is recommended that the year 1960 be recognized as a period of significance for 73 Cannon Street. The year 1960 is chosen because of the Order’s renovation of the building’s footprint to include a west wing. This addition was the most socially significant alteration performed by the Order as the additional square footage created

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8 Katherine Pemperton of Historic Charleston Foundation shared these brief structural reports with the author in August of 2012.
the Order’s meeting spaces on the first and second floor. Within the meeting rooms on
the first and second floors, generations of tents have congregated to honor the United
Order of Tents’ heritage. If the building is restored, it is recommended that this west
wing addition be respectfully addressed as a physical representation of the Order on
Cannon Street.

The Order’s 1963 enclosure of the piazza is a less symbolic renovation as
the affected rooms on the second and third floors do not directly impact the Order’s
membership. The piazza enclosure did not create socially significant spaces on the
second floor, but rather an additional bathroom, a sitting room, and a kitchen. The third
floor layout was affected by the piazza enclosure through the creation of additional
living spaces for the leasable apartments. In contrast to the west wing addition, the
supplemental spaces afforded by the enclosed piazza do not enhance the sense of place
at 73 Cannon Street. Considering the reduced social significance of this addition, the
primary concerns for the piazza renovations are pragmatic and structural.

Reopening the piazza would allow 73 Cannon to function as the tents utilized
the building in 1960 as well as more closely to its nineteenth century intention. The
northwest piazza is visible from the street and reopening this portion of the piazza
would create an interesting juxtaposition. From the street, evidence of the original
single house configuration would be apparent as would the west wing addition
constructed by the Order. While this particular scenario may prove ineffective in
practice, the employment of a preservation method that values both structural histories
– those of the first inhabitants of the 73 Cannon as a residence and the Order’s use of the
building as a meeting house – would be most appropriate.

As plans develop for the renovation of 73 Cannon Street, the United Order of
Tents should also consider taking measures to preserve their own heritage. Proper
record keeping is an important factor to understanding the Order’s longevity. The
request to study the organization’s records for the purposes of this thesis served as
a catalyst for the Order's stabilization of their documents collection. As of August 2012, the United Order of Tent’s records were stored within an environmentally and structurally compromised 73 Cannon Street, putting the documents at risk. These valuable records chronicle the historic membership, activities, and philanthropic services of the organization and are very worthy of conservation methods. The membership's records were essential to understanding the evolution of the Charleston. When these historic membership records were recovered from the building for the purposes of this study, the documents appeared to be subjected not only to water damage, but also fire damage. The condition of these records is indicative of the compromised state of the entire collection.

In September of 2012, a meeting was arranged with the archivist, Aaron Spelbring, at the College of Charleston’s Avery Research Center. Spelbring explained the implications of record keeping and offered to store the records at the Avery Research Center if the Order would consider donating their documents to the Avery’s permanent collection. The Order was not interested in donating at that time; however, the meeting prompted the organization to move their records out of 73 Cannon Street and begin a cataloguing process. Each tent was assigned the responsibility of storing and organizing the records pertaining to their individual tent. The Chairman of the Board, Margaret Thomas, intends to have a stable collection of records upon the organization's reinstatement to 73 Cannon Street.

The most important recommendation for the future posterity of the United Order of Tents is for the leaders of the organization to ensure that within their membership a cohesive understanding of the society’s history and mission exists. Due to the large membership of the organization, many individuals have their own adaptations and perspectives of the Order’s existence. A recommendation is that

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9 The Avery Research Center concentrates on the documentation of African American history in Charleston.
every tent leader be charged with transmitting a concise history and mission of the organization to her tent members. By establishing a congruous knowledge of the organization, the membership would be better equipped to recruit new members and advocate for the preservation of their building.

Moreover, by recognizing the remarkable history of the organization, tent members may better understand the significance of their organization to American history. The Charleston membership has been notably surprised by the attention their building and organization garnered following their summons to Livability Court. This confusion augments the membership’s skepticism concerning public interest. Because the members are inherently connected to the history of the Order, many tent members fail to recognize how intriguing and important the United Order of Tents’ story is to the community at large. Through the acknowledgment of their unique contribution to society, the Order can begin to share their historic narrative. A story, which will undoubtedly capture the interest of many, will assist in the Order’s acquisition of the awareness and funds necessary to restore their building.

During this transition period for the building and the organization, the United Order of Tents is going to be faced with many important decisions. When the time comes to make these decisions, procedures must be in place to either entrust those decisions to high-ranking leaders or leave those decisions up to a majority vote. Comprised of a large membership, the Charleston chamber of the United Order of Tents needs to ensure that every member’s opinion is represented either by a leader or their own vote. Through this medium, the Order’s decisions can be made in powerful unison.

In the time spent with the membership for this study, it became readily apparent that the leaders of the Order were extremely cognizant of not making decisions on behalf of the membership without the body’s explicit permission. Presently, this permission can only be granted at the chamber’s monthly meetings. This bureaucratic process is ineffective for making quick decisions. In order to diminish this time
lapse, the recommendations above were proposed: either entrust the leaders of the organization to make the correct decisions or establish a system for obtaining majority votes more efficiently than once a month. These suggestions are meant to prepare the Order to effectively decide how to face the many choices concerning their building’s renovation.

The connectivity of the United Order of Tents and 73 Cannon Street illustrates how architecture impacts lives. As the circumstances surrounding this case study progress, the membership should be equipped with the knowledge of just how significant their organization and their building are to the community. This thesis theoretically explains the Order’s feelings of connectivity to the building. The inherent connection between the membership and 73 Cannon Street has precedent and is a justifiable reason for preservation. Resulting from the membership’s temporary displacement, the transitory state of the Order could not have come at a more opportune time on the eve of the Charleston chamber’s centennial. The conditions of the building have warranted a moment of self-reflection for the organization, which will undoubtedly benefit the Order as it enters another century of activity in Charleston.

List of Recommendations

**Organization**

- Continued collaboration between the United Order of Tents membership and preservation-minded external entities
- Creation and implementation of advocacy campaign by the members of the United Order of Tents
- Creation and implementation of a building maintenance plan by the Order of the Tents
- Preservation of the Order’s record collection employing recognized archival standards
• Dissemination of a concise history and mission statement of the Order throughout the membership
• Creation and implementation of an effective decision-making process for the Order’s membership
  - a majority vote system on a more regular basis than once a month
  - a restored trust in the established leadership hierarchy

**Building**
• Increased security on the property to ward off vagrants
• Recognition of 73 Cannon Street’s social significance as 1960
• Sensitive restoration of the building acknowledging the heritage of the original construction date, 1856, and the Order’s alteration of the structure in 1960
• Preservation of the character defining features of the building throughout the exterior and interior as outlined in chapter five
• Attention to the failing modern construction techniques employed throughout the building with particular attention to the pronounced failings of the 1960 and 1963 additions
APPENDICES
INTERVIEW TRANSCRIPTION

Ann Blandin

Introduction

My name is Mary Margaret Schley. I am a graduate student with Clemson University/College of Charleston’s program in Historic Preservation. Today is December 12, 2012 and this interview is taking place at Charleston County Public Library on Rivers Ave in North Charleston.

Questions

- Will you please state and spell your name for the record?
  
  My name is Ann Blandin.

- Where were you born? And when were you born?
  
  Charleston, SC. March 17, 1944.

- What was your occupation?
  
  I was a social worker and now I’m retired.

- When did you join the Tents?
  
  1977

- Why did you join?
  
  My Pastor’s wife took me in the Eastern Stars. Then she asked me on a different date to go in the United Order of Tents with her. And I said to her, “What’s that?” Of Course, she says it’s a fraternal organization run entirely by black women and that sort of caught my attention. And she says it’s a Christian base religion almost like the Eastern Star but the difference is its run strictly and entirely by black women. In the Eastern Stars, you know, you have to have a worthy patron to have an official meeting, but in the United Order of Tents you don’t have to.

- What does that mean ‘a worthy patron’?
  
  That’s a male.
- The Eastern Star is a female Masonic Order, right?

*Yes. You won’t have an official meeting unless you have a worthy patron. But the United Order of Tents runs entirely my women. There’s no men. Men aren’t allowed.*

- When I was looking through the Tents membership records, beneficiaries were listed next to each woman’s name. Sometimes it would be their daughter; sometimes it would be their husband, niece or nephew.

*We give a bit of money like a death benefit or insurance when a sister dies and it goes to their beneficiary.*

- Is it a set amount of money for each member?

*Yes, it’s a set amount of money for every member at their death given to the beneficiary. The family can use it however they want.*

- Which Tent are you a member of?

*Narcissus Tent #53. I’m the leader of that Tent.*

- How long have you been the leader?

*I’ve been the leader probably 10 years because my leader Ms. Waring had a stroke and me being the assistant leader, I served, but as long as she was living I wouldn’t let them choose another leader out of respect for her. I just carried on as an assistant leader and when she died, I still waited another year before I went to be the leader out of sole respect for her. Now, once the leader dies, the assistant leader can move in her place or elect a new leader because the Tent must go on, but I did it out of respect for her.*

- Why is the job of a leader?

*She keeps the Tent running. I oversee the finances, any activity we have. I preside over the monthly meetings. I encourage our sisters in other functions. All of our members death announcements are put in the paper. Then I ask the sisters, I said, “sisters, any time you see the death of a member in the paper and it says on the*
bottom all Tent members are invited. I encourage you to go to help the Tent carry on their ceremony because it’s there time now but it might be our time and then we’re going to want folks to come to our ceremony."

- Is Narcissus Tent the only Tent you’ve been a part of since you joined?
  Yes. Sometimes you change Tents if you get a job for instance and its more convenient for you to go, once you get off work, to a Tent near where you work so you don’t have to go all the way home and change your clothes. Then you can move, but you must be financial and get the approval of the Deputy and the two Tent leaders of the Tent you’re leaving and the Tent you’re going to.

- So what’s a Deputy? What does a Deputy do?
  I’m over the district because I’m the Deputy.

- You’re the Deputy of Charleston and the leader of your tent?
  Yes I’m the Deputy, the leader, and endowment secretary of Southern District #4.

- When did you become the Deputy?
  May or June of 2010.

- When did the Narcissus Tent begin?
  I believe it was in 1953. I can’t remember the name of the first leader, but the second leader was Ms. Ellerby Waring. That’s the leader I came in under.

- There are eleven active tents in Charleston right now. So why are there different tents? Is it a matter of convenience or family?
  They encourage us to get other woman to come in and a lot of time the location of most of those women. Sometimes, for instance, tents out on the islands they get most of their members, now other members might join, but they get most of their members from that area. A lot of times its the convenience In the city, there were so many people and someone might come in and say you know, “I think I know sixteen women who might be interested.” And then they form a tent. But when you
form a tent you must have the Deputy. It used to be you had the Superintendent, and that’s they way they’ve been doing it to have the Superintendent to come also.

- All the Tents meet in different locations monthly?
  Yes.
- And then you used to meet at 73 Cannon monthly?
  Yes.
- So you are meeting a lot and you are with your fellow tent members a significant amount.

Oh yeah. Now, I don’t go to their individual Tents. The constitution says that I should have interactions with each Tent twice a year since I’m the Deputy. That doesn’t necessarily mean all the time a meeting. If they are having like a breakfast, one Tent had a breakfast while I was out of town for my convention. But I bought the tickets, of course I couldn’t go because I can’t be in two places at one time, so I could go to their function. If another Tent had a chicken supper, I would buy a dinner and go and be with them that would constitute my two visits as long as I had some interaction with them.

- Do you do breakfasts and chicken dinners to raise money?

Those are fundraisers for that individual Tent. And remember, when we had that fish fry that was for the building fund for the Tents.

- Do you have a building fund committee?

We have Trustees over the building.

- What is the role of the Trustees?

Their job is to take care of the building. Any thing that has to do with that building comes under the Trustees.

- How many Trustees do you have for the building?

8 or 12.

- Is Margaret Thomas one of the Trustees?
She is the Chairman of the Trustees.

- Ms. Thomas was telling me that a few years ago half of the members of the organization wanted to sell the building and half of them wanted to stay in the building. Is that true?

  Yeah because some of us are getting older and climbing those stairs was a lot. So I guess they really wanted to sell to get a one-story building, but then some of the stick-in-the-muds like me wanted to keep it. So we said we would try to do everything we could to keep it because that’s a part of our heritage especially here in Charleston. We used to meet at a place called the Robert Shore Center on Mary Street then we use to meet at Dot’s Hall that was somewhere off of Bogard Street then they bought that building so then we had a building of our own to meet in. Its just like your heritage, its almost like selling your grandmother’s house you just don’t want to do it.

- What would you say is the mission of the Tents?

  To educate, to bury our dead, and to work in the community, to build our community.

- Is your organization more insular helping within the membership or more outreach focused?

  Each tent takes care of their own. If a sister gets in distress, the tent she’s in tries to help her not that the other tents wouldn’t. If there is a cry or plea for assistance, you are at liberty to help that sister if you are able or would like. Each tent is primarily responsible for their own.

- Why did the tents come to Charleston?

  The mission of the tents back then was to help free the slaves, help the slaves get to the North. Back in the early years that was our great cause and our culture to help others get to freedom. That was an excellent cause and I think that would have
brought them. And of course, most of the women belonged to a church. And that’s how the news got around.

- So the Order started in Norfolk, Virginia and then through the different churches word spread of the tents?

Yeah! Because many of our members are AME, African American Methodist Episcopal, and, of course, other church affiliations like Baptist and other things, but that’s how you build camaraderie with the women’s organizations in the church, but then it spreads through word of mouth.

- The tents purchased the building at 73 Cannon Street to serve as a home base or office?

Yeah office and meeting space. Where I go now to Florence, to the home office or visitors office, that used to be in that building.

- Southern District #4’s home office was once at 73 Cannon Street. Southern District #4 is only comprised of the state of South Carolina, right?

Yes, but it has 9 Districts. Charleston, Darlington, Marlborough, Pete, Garnite, Columbia, Florence, I can’t remember right now.

- When was Southern District #4 created?

Our mother district was Southern District #1. For years, the Superintendent from Southern District #1 would come to our conventions once a year. They would send the Superintendent so all we had was a President, Ms. Gadson. Then later years, they made her the Superintendent so we didn’t have to have another Superintendent from Southern District #1 to be over our convention. We had our own. Then it was Ms. Vivian Duncan. After Ms. Duncan, it was Ms. Rambert. Next it was Ms. Donella Wilson, then it was Ms. Burley Armstrong, and now it is Ms. Ruth Jordon.
- Did you think they bought the building at 73 Cannon Street because it was close to members home?

*As I understand it came up on sheriff sale, I think they paid $6,000 for the building back then. And it was for one central place to meet and do the business for the Tents.*

- It’s a huge lot, have there been other buildings on the lot?

*When I looked up the history, it said it had a garage, gas station, or something.*

- Before the Tents were there a woman named Catherine Frasier had an auto garage. Did she or did the Tents put on the back addition to the building?

*I don’t know because the cinder block part was there when I got there.*

- What have the purposes been of the different floors within the building?

*Now when I started, we used to meet on the second floor and some would meet on the first floor then when I couldn’t, we started meeting on the first floor before I got to be Deputy or anything, but I guess it was because we were getting older and just can’t climb the stairs. That was one of the things we were hoping that in the future we could get an elevator or something. But, of course, that’s way down the road.*

- Do you think the building serves your needs as an organization?

*Yes because it’s centrally located. There are folks that could use our services. One of the things we want to do is start an after school program. When we applied for the 501 c(3), that’s one of the things we said we would try to do have an after school program. And I hope that we will be able to send juniors and seniors to college campuses because some children have no idea what it is to go to college and we want to at least expose them to that so they can be thinking in terms of that.*

- The Orders gives a scholarship to high school juniors and seniors now?

*Yes, every year.*

- Have there been a lot of renovations to the building since you joined the Tents?

*No, just trying to keep it up.*
- Has it been a hardship trying to keep the building up?

  Yes because we are not a rich organization. We try to be self-sustaining and not solicit a lot of help. We just try to do our own and live off our own.

- Why is the organization secret?

  Because that’s the way it was founded like the Masons. It’s just a part of it.

- I have heard that many developers have made the tents offers to purchase 73 Cannon Street. Is that true?

  Oh yes and it probably is a money forfeit, but we’re just not interested in being rich. We want to be in the community. I feel like that because when I was younger I came to the tents at about 33 years old and I’m 68 now. Coming into this organization is like coming into church. I had one foot in the church and one foot in the world, you know? Going to the clubs on the weekend and being around those older, settled ladies and seeing them trying to serve the Lord and serving the community, it got me sort of grounded. I made up my mind that all that was behind me. I’m getting older and needed to do something else that life was good, but after a while it’s just like something is missing and I tried to find that something. I got stronger in the Lord and I wouldn’t trade my place for nothing in the world. I tell people, “I was a good servant for the devil and I’m going to try to be better serving the Lord.” And I’m happy! I’m happy! Don’t you think Oh Ms. Blandin can’t go to the clubs no more. All that’s behind me. I’m happy in the Lord!

- Have the tents played a role in you coming to the Lord and changing your lifestyle?

  Oh yeah. Like I told you my Pastor’s wife back then brought me in the Eastern Star and in the Tents. In all the things I belong to, because I was recently named a sister to the women’s department of my denomination at the conference and chairman of the section of the women’s department. I’ve belonged to a lot of things, worked for a lot of things. But of all those things, besides my church, the tents is the dearest
to me. It’s more closer to the Lord than any other organizations I belong to other than the church. I spend a lot of my time trying to give as much as I can to this organization because I think they’re trying to uplift mankind. I’ve given a lot of myself to them.

- They appreciate you. And I appreciate you.

  I appreciate them! They give me just as much joy as I give them. My daughter told me, “you be around like a cat not able to do anything and as soon as you get around them [and you come alive]”

- It seems you are a support group for each other and make each other very happy.

  I love the church. I love the tents. And I won’t tell you everything goes right all the time. But you keep your tongue in your mouth and you get bitten by your teeth so you gotta move on.

- How many active members are in the Charleston chamber?

  350

- How many members are there in Narcissus Tent?

  Thirty three, but we’ve had sixty-plus at one time. I got one tent that has five people in it because a couple of ladies died. There are several people in this tent that don’t have any legs. But they’re still trying to meet and pay their dues. You look at these folks and their just admirable. You marvel at them trying to go.

- Is membership down from when you joined in the 1970s?

  Yes because to me it’s a sort of different culture. Back then, we just wanted to belong, but I’ve noticed that the young people coming now don’t want to put no time in, but they want to jump to the top. They don’t want to work. I was in the tent 25 years before I got my National Honors and I worked from the day I got in there till now. I used to do Mrs. Rambert, she was the Secretary of the Superintendent Council, I used to type all her reports. That lady didn’t even know my name. She used to call me Narcissus. She would say, “Come here Narcissus.” But
we were just so happy the older one’s called on us. We just wanted to do. But to me this group coming now, they don’t want to work they just want to be ahead. They push you aside and they get in your place, but I don’t pay them no attention. I just go ahead because I paid my dues.

I may not know a lot, but I know tent. I know that like the back of my hand. That don’t mean I know everything now, but I know the struggle we’ve had. I know what we’ve been through and I’m not going to just turn over for someone that really don’t care. They’ll do it, but they’ll do it when I’m fixed in my grave. Because those older women didn’t have the jobs we have, didn’t have the education we have, put they paid their $.25 each month and they bought that building. Kept it up too. We who got the better jobs and the better education, well you see that building now? And I’m not blaming them. I’m not blaming us. But we just haven’t been together and that’s what happens. The Bible says a divided house can’t stand so we’ve got to come together and I’m praying for it every day.

I can’t tell you how much I’ve prayed for you all to come. I can’t tell you! I see the Lord working. I see God working! When I started out, I wanted just what you’re doing. For years, I tried to do it myself and then almost out of the ground, here springs up you, springs up Mr. Evan, Mrs. Pemperton. All of them God put in place. And you’re a product of them coming together. Oh child, you can’t tell me about the Lord, cause I’ve seen him work. When I look at you, that’s the Lord working. And child when I see you, I see you just like a star. I asked the Lord for you, and look at you. I know I don’t move like you ask me to all the time, but I’m coming because I asked the Lord for you.

I don’t want to make you sad. But the Lord has been good to us, child. I can’t always tell you what I go through, but I trust the Lord. I told the Lord, if you lead me, ill be lead. I will follow. Because I know if you blessed me, I’m blessed. And it might get hard. I said Lord, “when it gets hard, when I open my mouth. Let
you speak for me.” I don’t want to be ugly or rude to people. People aren’t in our organization because they have to be. They’re there because they want to be so you can’t talk down to people because they’re coming in and trying to help. No, I don’t believe in that.

When we seem like we’re dragging, don’t you mind that, do what you set out to do. I know I’m old and don’t move good, but anything I can help you do let me know.
INTERVIEW TRANSCRIPTION

Rev. Helen McKune

Introduction

My name is Mary Margaret Schley. I am a graduate student with Clemson University/College of Charleston’s program in Historic Preservation. Today is December 13, 2012 and this interview is taking place at the Tents Building at 73 Cannon Street, Charleston, SC.

Questions

- Will you please state and spell your name for the record?
  
  My name is Reverend Helen T. McKune.

- Where were you born?
  
  I was born right here in Charleston, South Carolina. My parents lived at 39 Line Street and I was born in 1941, November 23.

- When did you join the tents?
  
  1976

- Which tent are you a member of?
  
  Golden Rule Tent #63

- Why did you join the tents?
  
  It was an organization that I liked their mission and objectives. One of my grandmothers was a member of a tent and as a youth we had what’s called a Juvenile Department and for a long time I participated with that. Then after I went away and came back and was old enough to do it myself, I had some friends who were members and I joined to be with them.

- How old were you when you joined the Juvenile Department?
  
  From about five years old to twelve or thirteen. Once my grandmother died, I dropped out because you were responsible for getting to and from the meetings
and my mother wasn’t going to let me come way over here by myself that ended until 1976.

- Was the Juvenile Department held here at 73 Cannon? 

Some tents that meet here, their Juvenile Department met here too, but other tents say on Johns Island or James Island or East Cooper, the young girls in their tent meet where they met.

- What do you do in the Juvenile Department?

It’s a program for young girls development of leadership skills, awareness of your community by doing community service projects, participating in how to conduct a meeting or act in a meeting. And then they took us on trips various places because back then Charleston was segregated, even the schools, so you did just what happen in your community or in your school. The ladies in the tent were really training us to take over the tent when we got old enough.

- How many people are in the Golden Rule Tent?

Right now we have 23 active members.

- Where do y'all meet?

Well we were meeting here [at the Tents Building] but now we meet at the Charleston County Public Library on Calhoun Street.

- Do you hold a leadership position in the Golden Rule Tent?

I’m the leader.

- How long have you been the leader?

I know I was the leader in 2000.

- Are all the different tents divided because of location or family and friends? Why are there multiple tents?

Because when you start a tent, you invite people to be a member. You make application to the state what’s called the Grand Lodge Executive Board and when you have garnered enough people to be a thriving tent you are issued a charter.
The requirements I don’t remember anymore but you don’t just get up and start a tent you have to have enough people. It’s a procedure that you go through. Enough people to handle the business of a tent, Christian women that want to be a part of the organization, and willing to do the things we are noted for. When the Tent first started nationally, we were part of the Underground Railroad. Well that’s no longer an issue so the focus of the organization has changed from being available to help black people escape to the North to becoming an organization that looks out: the members take care of each other. Used to prepare the body for burial, sit with the body. Back then the body used to go to the house and then to the church to be funeralized and buried. They don’t take them anymore so we sit with the family at the church or funeral parlor and then at the funeral. We do things like help serve the meals after the funeral and stuff like that. And now, I know I do with my tent, we visit the members who are sick, shut in and can’t go out. At least if I don’t visit them each month, I call to make sure they’re alright. And the caretakers and their family members have my phone number so they can get in touch with me or any one of their assistant leaders. I have two assistant leaders.

- So its really a fellowship. You have created a fellowship.

It’s a sisterhood, a sisterhood of like people. Our coordinating body here, we have two. One is the Royal Degree Chamber #13, Sister Beatrice Givens is over that. The other is Past Officers Council.

- What is the Past Officers Council?

A group that’s made up of past Senior Matrons.

- What do they do?

Same thing. We are more like the executive committee than the Royal Degree Chamber. Its made of women that have served around the circle. You start off as a Doorkeeper and their various positions when we meet that we call stations that
someone has to be in when we conduct the ritual for opening the tent and there's a ritual for closing it.

- A ritual for each meeting?
  Yeah, you open the tent with your ritual, take care of the business, fellowship sometimes we have covered dish get together, or myself or Margaret if we have knick-knacks, so you don’t just meet and dart out because we only get together once a month.

- So a member works her way up from the Doorkeeper?
  Yes from the Doorkeeper to the Senior Matron Station. Once you’ve served as the Senior Matron, then you’re ready to serve on another level like the Royal Degree Chamber or the Past Officers Council. The Past Officers Council is made of strictly person who have served around the stations or done enough work in the Tent that their leader recommend them for that position. Everybody that has gotten her 7th Degree, which is another part of our ritual, is invited to the Royal Degree Chamber. Again, it’s where you learn to function within the walls of the tent. You start at the door, have various stations. I am the chaplain for the Royal Degree Chamber and you are can serve there until you are able to move up to the next level.

- The Royal Degree Chamber is meeting once a month.
  Yes, the first Saturday of every month at the Fellowship Hall of Mrs. Givens church in the North Area. My Tent meets at the Library because we are located in this building. But there are Tents that meet at different churches in different community centers. It depends where most of the members live in your Tent or how accessible it is for them to get there.

- There's also a Board of Trustees, correct?
  Yeah that’s Margaret.

- Do they work for the building?
  They are totally in charge of the building that’s the Trustees responsibility.
- How many members are on that Board?

You have one member from each tent and an alternate which makes it twenty-two. Exofficial members would be the Deputy, she’s not a member but can come represent the tent, Sister Givens, whose over the Royal Degree Chamber, and myself, but I represent my tent. Sister Fraiser is one of our oldest members and she keeps all the financial members with Margaret.

- Margaret told me that the Board of Trustees changed at some point.

Most all of them are dead so we had to replace them with people are alive. Because of the law we had to do that expeditiously because if my grandmother’s name was down as a trustee and I could claim it when she dies off. I don’t know if that law has changed yet, but we had to very quickly replace them once it became evident that was a possibility.

Then people started wanting to buy the building. One guy even wanted to give us a building and take this building. We told him no.

- You mean other developers and people in the community wanted to buy this building.

They wanted to take it. They can’t afford to buy it, and then they started harassing us. That’s when we had to do something very quickly and we organized the new Board of Trustees.

- When was that?

End of the 1900s. Until then the Trustee Board had dwindled down to three or four people, and then some of them died. The only original member of the Trustees Board is Mary Fraiser.

- Why didn’t the organization sell the building?

Because it’s our building we don’t want to let go. What significance would that bring? We own this building debt free. We have a place to meet. We have parking space. We have facilities to do other things. We don’t want to get rid of our
building. This is an inheritance that we can pass on to younger women. That’s why it’s important to keep your membership levels. I don’t invite anyone to join my Tent over fifty because we are getting people who are already old and don’t want to do anything. So our focus is on the younger women.

- Have you had new members join?

No, but right now I have three new members that we are going to initiate. One is a manager of a First Citizens Bank; we definitely want her. The other two are young women that want to be members. They read some of the articles in the newspaper and been to some of our programs and they want to become a member.

- Do you reach out to them or did they come to you?

Several of them have reached out to us. They want to know how you become a tent member. That’s usually the first question, “I want to be a member. How do I get to be a member?” In other Masonic Orders, you have to have a husband or brother or father to become a member, but we don’t have men in our organization. All you have to do is be upright, Christian, clean living. You know someone that is honest and trustworthy can join. Like some organizations now, I’m in the Eastern Stars and they do a background check to make sure you’re not a criminal. We don’t do that.

- In the Eastern Star, you have to have a man present to have a meeting.

A man serves as an advisor and you have to have a man on your side to join. Like my husband was a Mason so then I was eligible to join Eastern Stars. If you don’t have a male counterpart in Charleston, you can’t become. In other areas and other States say my daughter can become a member because I’m a member, but that doesn’t happen in all States. They call it bloodline. You have to have someone in your family to become an Eastern Star.

- What has it meant to you to be a part of the Tents?
I like what the organization stands for: helping each other, educating our youth, taking care of our senior members, being visible in the community as a community service organization. Like this year, we’ve adopted another group and are collecting tabs for the Ronald McDonald House. We’ve been working with Jenkins Institute, which is an orphanage, for years.

- Where is Jenkins Institute?

    On Azalea Drive. Joanna Karington is the person over there. They take in orphans or abandoned children or children who can’t be placed by the department of social services. They stay there until they become 18 or we had one girl that became an emancipated youth. She was 16. She wanted to take care of her baby sister: she had two [sisters]. She petitioned the court to become an emancipated youth. At 17 they granted her that and she got an apartment for her and her two sisters to live in. Her mother was a drug addict.

- You all are involved in the Ronald McDonald house, the Jenkins Institute, and a scholarship fund. How are the scholarship girls chosen?

    They are recommended by a tent member. Kids that are smart and going to college. The other part of that is some districts, not in ours, only give the scholarship to girl’s that have been in the Juvenile Department for some time. Even on the state level, the person who gets the scholarship must be a member in a Juvenile Department when they get ready to graduate from high school.

- Do you think this building helps with your presence in the community?

    Yes, that’s why everybody wants it. There is enough space in the footage of this building that you could do anything you want to. Its central located, has ample parking, accessible to bus line, and in the middle of the downtown district so that makes it really, really feasible to own. About 10 years ago when the lawyer that was helping us to try to get on the historic register had someone come in to assess this building and in the condition it’s in it’s worth a million dollars. 1.75 million.
So think about what it would be worth if it was fixed up. That’s what I tell Ravenel and even Judge Maloney, why would we give away a fortune? That makes us ignorant and we are far from being ignorant. This building can’t mean more to you than it does to us because we own it. It’s not for sale.

- Have there been hardships associated with owning this building?
  
  What has been the hardship is when Hugo happened. We got the money to fix the roof and all the stuff that leaks, but now we need to completely rewire, bring the wiring up to standards, the plumbing up to standards, and that takes money. Keep the parts of the building that are historic. I forgot how old this building, but it’s over a hundred years old.

- It was built in around 1855 actually.
  
  Let me ask you another question. In your research, have you found any information about the different tents in Charleston. For example, Grace Tent. Do you know when they were organized?

- No I haven’t been able to find that out. I only have been able to discern information from the records you have given me.

  Grace Tent was the first in this district.

- When did the Golden Rule Tent start?

  I don’t know.

- The earliest records I’ve seen is 1949, but I’ve had to rely on word of mouth for the most part.

  We had Grace #6, then Rosanna #18, Narcissus #53, Golden Rule #63. You can tell by the numbers what was the earliest. After Golden Rule was Rose of Sharon #101 then St. Mary’s #116, St. Margaret’s Tent, then Julia’s Tent #190. The last one to be organized was Viola Burgess #218.

- That’s the newest one? When did they start?
About four or five years ago. Queen of Sheba #202 and then after Alpha’s #212. St. Margaret’s Tent doesn’t really function. They have about six members. The woman that’s the leader is handicap. She has one leg and in a wheelchair.

- If someone from St. Margaret’s Tent wanted to join a new tent that is more active, could she do that?

It’s called getting a dement. You move from one tent to another. This tent Viola Burgess practically all of their members were initially in the Queen of Sheba Tent.

- Why did Viola Burgess start?

Because they weren’t happy where they were. They couldn’t get any satisfaction. So they started their own.

- The name that I’ve seen on the deeds at the RMC is Naomi DeseLine. Who is she?

She was one of the original members. She’s dead, been dead. She was one of the original members that even got the Tents in the state of South Carolina, her and Sister Duncan. She owned her own funeral parlor over on St. Phillips Street. She was the first leader of Grace Tent #6.

- Does that mean that she started the Tents in South Carolina?

In Charleston, yes. Vivian Duncan, Rosa Gadson, and Naomi DeseLine.

- Those are the three founders here in Charleston. Were they friends? Members of the same church?

I don’t know.

- Do you know why the Tents started in Charleston in the beginning?

Well as part of the Underground Railroad. They knew about it and also it’s a burial society. We didn’t have insurances or undertakers that would embalm our bodies and see that they were buried. After the Civil War based on what was the mission of the church, they brought the idea and the concept from Virginia to Charleston.

- Do you think this building still suits the organization’s needs?
Yes. We have members that don’t drive and they can get on the city bus and get off on the same block and be here in a few steps. Then we are visible. That’s why everybody thinks it’s a unique thing because we are visible in this area.

There was a building on St. Phillips Street that they sold, a Masonic Temple. That was the worst thing they did. They didn’t get enough money from it and they built a little building on Azalea Drive diagonal from where Jenkins Institute is and the size is not adequate. Say you want to have a banquet and you want to have 200 people well that would be the limit that the Fire Department would let you have. Some of the Masonic orders have one hundred members and if each member has one person, well, you are over so now they are talking about putting a floor upstairs. That doesn’t make sense. You should have stayed where you were because you don’t have enough money to do what you really need to do or take what you have and don’t owe anything on and make it fit.

So if money wasn’t an obstacle for this building, what would you like seen done to his building?

That it would be more community friendly. This room would be an area where senior citizens would come and do the handy craft kind of thing. They don’t want to be home by themselves all day. We could have a van come pick them up and they could do quilting, crocheting, knitting. The room over there I would make multi-purpose extend it all the way to the end of the porch, move the kitchen further back and make that a multi-purpose hall that could sit comfortably maybe 150 people auditorium style. There is a lot that can be done to enhance the functions of this building. Upstairs we want to do rental space and we already have one tenant, the historic preservation society. They said they would like to rent. That would be a source of income to help maintain the building to pay the water bill, power bill, things like that.

When the Charleston Chamber gets together, how many women come?
Well the Chamber that’s voluntary. The chamber has over 100 members, but they don’t come to every meeting.

- What do you see as the future for the Tents here in Charleston?

Since we changed our direction, we are doing things to put in place once this building is renovated that we won’t be knocking things down trying to get in place so when the building is finished we’ll be established and ready to function. Just being in the community itself helps because you’d be surprised to know how many people walk by and want to know, “what are y’all doing today?” And so people pay attention when you are visible and that’s what we want to do become more visible in this community.

- Is that part of the direction change you are talking about?

Well we aren’t changing the direction we are just making it community knowledgeable and visible. Everybody pays attention to a freshly painted building, a building that has been renovated, and of course it will increase the value of the building. If we could make this building available say you wanted to have a meeting here for some group you are a member of, you would pay us like $25 or $30 an hour. Say you wanted to rent the kitchen and the meeting room that would be a different cost. That in and of itself would be income generating. We were going through stuff right now and seeing where other organizations met in this building. Household of Ruth, my sorority North Charleston chapter of AKA. Every December we would have our Christmas get together in the room over there because it was close to the kitchen. They didn’t charge us rent, but we would give them a donation of $100 for the use of the building and then that in itself caused other women to come here and see what we’re doing and get interested in joining.

- Do you have anything else to say or ask?

I wanted to locate information about Golden Rule. There is a file cabinet that has stuff related to our Tent, but I’m going to have to get a locksmith because I can’t
find the key. I thought the keys Ms. Barnes gave me, she was one of the oldest members about 98, would work. Some of them work on the doors but not one of them works on the file cabinet. I’m going to ask the Endowment Department if they have any information on our tent because they are writing a book on the United Order of Tents.

- Who is writing a book?  
  The National Office in Virginia.

- How long have they been writing this book?  
  They started last year. What they’re doing now is collecting the history of all the tents, when they got started, who the original members were, how many members started it.

- How are they doing that?  
  Well there are some Tents’ that have bound copies of their records. Keeping records, as a historian myself, I keep trying to tell them keeping records and making more than one copy is key to the longevity of your organization. You’ve got to have records documenting your existence. Especially know with just based on the age of this building is a plus. So we have to get our act together.

- What do you think about all the attention the organization has been under recently?  
  All I know is they’re not getting this building.

- The man that first lived in this building was Francis Seignious. Do you know anything about him?  
  Used to be a big name in Charleston.

- When did you buy this building?  
  1957. I had one old lady tell me that when she was a young woman coming up as a nurse’s assistant that a part of this building was a hospital. In the old part, not the new part we put on.
- Did your organization put the addition on in the back?
  
  That was before my time. I guess Mrs. Duncan and them did that.

- I read an article in the newspaper that the upstairs was rented as a day care.

  Yes there have been a number of things. We also rented the upstairs to the YMCA. They had a program here for the young fellows. Then at one time we had college kids here and they tore the building up. They were barbequing in the bathtub, sunbathing naked on the roof. They were going to get us banded from Charleston. Reverend T. Middleton called me one evening late in the summertime. “I don’t know what all they doing up on your roof but they’re naked.” They were sunbathing. Then they inspected the building near the end of the school year. The bathtub was black where they put the barbequing thing in the bathtub that was the last time we rented to the College of Charleston.

- Did you rent to anyone after that?

  No. It wasn’t profitable because we spent more money repairing the damages. Then that building next door, they rent to college kids and they were up on the roof and broke into this building. I guess they got mad because there was nothing in here to take. We would be stupid to leave money in here. After they found out there was nothing to take on the inside, they stripped all the copper wiring out of the pipes and stuff. We had to go to court because these vagrants were sleeping on the back porch. Then this one guy got up and told the judge he didn’t see no harm in what he was doing. There wasn’t anybody in the building and it was a nice spot out of the rain. The judge put him in jail for sixty days. He could set the building on fire or something and we don’t want him to do that.

- What do you see happening on the large lot?

  That’s going to be parking because it’s very limited out front. The selling feature would be to be able to tell people they can park there. We would designate a certain amount of parking to the historic society when they rent and then have...
a handicap section and then have a section where the tent members form the different tents can park while they’re having their meetings. And we are going to do it like the YWCA does it; each Tent will get parking permits that they put on their dash because we have had to had cars towed because the people next door park and then when you go ask them whose car it is they don’t know until the towing people come.

- I was here one time when that happened.

Then they say we aren’t being neighborly. Yes we are. You aren’t being neighborly parking without permission. Then Margaret filed a complaint with the people that rent that building out and they have been trying to get more responsible people. Every year we have to have cars towed. Then last time Margaret called the towing people they new whose car it was but when the towing company came they suddenly had all the information. But the man told him he had to go where he was taking it because once they come you have to pay. She said “But I’m a college student. I don’t have any money.” He said “Well, you better call home.” He wasn’t playing. So they took the car. But that lady across the street she’s dangerous. Say we are sitting here and that door is open she’ll come in. One time she went upstairs and took some stuff and she wanted that big basin we had with the pitcher in it. Margaret had to fight her for it. She said “What are you going to do with it.” Margaret said, “The same thing you’re going to do with it.” “It’s not yours. You don’t need it. Can I have that heater?” I’m not nice to her so she won’t come when I’m in here. I said, “Listen cat lady. I don’t have time for you today. Now go on back on your porch and communicate with your cats.” She’s squatting on that man’s property. For the longest time, she didn’t have electricity. She wanted him to turn it on. She had what was like a storage shed or something back there. I told her, “You know God has an angel looking over you because you will not squat on this property. I will take a broomstick and bet you so bad you’ll be glad to get out
of here." I'll go to court and tell the judge that a vagrant was in my building and she was stealing. I can document it. So she doesn't come over here when she sees me. She came over here one day and asked why she couldn't have that pitcher. Then Corona let her in one day and Corona said she had a stack of stuff she wanted to take and sell. Margaret said she didn't want her in here anymore. She has no business being in here and we aren't open to the public yet. That ended that. If the Templeton's see her sneaking around they make her leave also her.

- The Templeton's hung these Christmas Decorations for you. Is purple your color?
  Yes purple, gold, and white. We attend our meetings in white especially the Royal Degree Chamber. Sister Givens, our Queen, her colors and the color for the chamber are purple and gold. When we go to Grand Lodge we wear all white and the Queens wear purple. The Superintendents were black.

- What is a Superintendent?
  They are like the state offices or state heads of our organization and they wear black robes in the winter and white in the summer. I'm glad that they changed for us to wear all white to our different activities because the Tent girls wearing black and others white was ridiculous and it kept people from coming to some of our activities. At the Thanksgiving service this year we had a crowd.

- Where did you have your Thanksgiving Service?
  St. John's Episcopal Church on Anson Street. Viola Burgess Tent gets the award for the most members again, but guess who was second? Whipper's Area. And you know why because of Rosette and Janice Bowman. But they had twelve people present with Ms. Givens.

Shirley[McKune’s friend and fellow tent member]: Well we didn’t do to bad because Rosanna had eleven.
It was Viola Burgess, Whipper’s Area, and Rosanna. After that it went down, but we stop at the three top. Then at our Past Officers’ Council meeting we are going to give y’all a certificate. Let me tell you why we couldn’t do it at the thing because the people that never went said, “Y’all don’t need to be doing that foolishness at the Thanksgiving Service.” We had two ways of checking attendance. Down where they were lining up and then when they introduced the leader and asked the members to stand. So you can’t stop something that is well and good, but I told Nietha Mitchell we are going to null and void any Tent that has over 20 members. Did you know she is headed for 45 members? Active members. Active.

Shirley: And that’s the baby Tent.
The youngest one. I’m trying to help Ermel.

Shirley: Her membership is down?
Lower than ours! They don’t come.
Shirley: I’ve got to tell her that I couldn’t come to that last thing, but I’m going to pay her for it.
That girl had standing room only.
Shirley: Wonderful!
They had over 100 people.

What are you and Shirley talking abou?
Alpha’s Tent on James Island had a prayer breakfast last Saturday and she had over 100 people there. Ermel sold 50 tickets by herself and the food was good.
Shirley: Well call it 51 because I’m going to buy one.
Margaret’s going to give her a donation too. You know that used to be one of the biggest Tent.

What Tent?
Alpha’s Tent #212. Some of the girls started out as young women under the counts came to the breakfast. You remember Seymore? They had members that paid
their dues but weren’t coming to the meetings, but they came to the breakfast.

Ermel was a little puffed up. One girl said one of the reasons they stopped coming and only pay there dues is because she doesn’t let anybody do anything. She was running around like turkey without a head last Saturday doing everything so I made her sit down. I said, “It doesn’t look nice to have the leader running around handing people water, collecting ticket money.” I said, “Ermel, can I speak to you for a minute. Let’s have a seat.” Then the girl sitting next to me said, “I’m so glad you said something. She doesn’t let anybody do anything. If she asks someone to do something and she doesn’t do it the next day, Ermel goes ahead and does it. “Well that’s just how I am.” And I said, “Yeah that’s how you are and you’re killing your tent because if you can do it all by yourself then you don’t need Tent members.”

But we are having a workshop in January and it’s going to deal with the new constitution and by laws, duties of officers, how to organize your tent for meeting because they said that she doesn’t set up. She says well if the person that is responsible to set up isn’t there then she’s not going to do that and they can all sit at the table and everybody sits together. I said, “Yeah but they aren’t learning the organization of the tent.” You are at a meeting and someone says, “Sit in the Misters of Ceremonies seat.” They will not know that that’s the Chaplains seat if you didn’t teach them that so we have a lot of work to do. That’s why we need this building because there are things that we need that if we didn’t have this building we’d have to rent a place. Even now the churches don’t let you use their facilities.

Her church wanted $700 to have a breakfast. We meet at Sister Givens Church.

Right now, most of the tents are meeting at a church or the County Library. My problem with using my church is my members don’t want to come in the North Area. My church is on Union Heights. These older women that held things 50 years ago say, “Aint nobody want to go up on the Height.” And I can’t convince them that
we are on the corner of Meeting Street and Groveland Avenue. But the Height is not like that any more. There are more killings in downtown Charleston.

St. Mary’s Tent meets on John’s Island. Nietha Mitchell’s tent, Viola Burgess, meets on John’s Island. They meet on Highway 162 on the way to Baptist Hill High School. The name of the area is Hollywood, South Carolina. Queen of Sheba meets at Wesley United Methodist Church right across from Baptist Soul. Viola Burgess meets on highway 162 at Bethel Baptist Church that’s where they were chartered. Ermel’s Tent meets on James Island in her church, the Presbyterian church right across from her church. Whipper’s Area Tent meet at the leader’s church up in North Charleston, New Francis Brown. Now I don’t know where Rose of Sharon meets must be at her church Morris Brown.

- What other functions do you host?

The Prayer Breakfast is a fundraiser. The Thanksgiving Service is celebrated all over the United States where there are tents. It’s the fourth Sunday in November. Did you know 4:00 is the hour of celebration? That’s what Ruth Jordon told me.

Shirley: I told me Tentesses the other day did you realize that this day Thanksgiving Service is being held all over the United States. And they didn’t know that. That is the day of celebration of Thanksgiving. That was one of the activities that inspired me to be a member because it is a beautiful sight when all those sisters march in. Originally, it used to be those were leaders and members of the chamber wore white. And if you weren’t a member of the chamber, you wore all black: hat, gloves, outfit. But now the national has decreed that we all can wear white and that was pretty Sunday. You look back over the crowd and it reminds you of when you are presiding at the Grand Lodge and look out at that sea of white, that’s very inspiring. It is.

- How many women were there at that past Thanksgiving Service?

A hundred and something.
What other fundraisers do you have?

*We had the chicken dinner. This year one of the big things was when we had the thing in the yard. We made over $1,000. That was nice. I had to fast and exercise I ate so much.*

  *Every tent tries to have a prayer breakfast and the district will have one.*

*We have a crab crack where you sell tickets, boil crabs, and eat them outside. We’ve had an oyster roast. We’ve done everything from selling donuts, to selling candies and cookies and then we’ve had Queen Contest. That’s the big fundraiser for the chamber.*

What's the Queen Contest?

*Every Tent sends a sister and her lady in waiting. Two people one is suppose to be the Queen and the other the lady in waiting to participate in the Queen Contest. It’s a fundraiser. The Queen that raises the most amount of money will be the delegate from Charleston for the National Convention.*

That happens every two years?

*Yes and they’ve raised more than enough money to support that activity to not raising enough. It depends on the flow and when the start the activities. Two years ago I was over the Queen Contest and we raised over $3,000. The Tent that won raised $1,030 by themselves. My Tent was the next highest with $800 and then Sister Givens’ Tent won $90.*

Do you have a fund for the building?

*The building fund is strictly for when say the Historic Society is doing something and they would need help from us financially we would have funds available. And there are grants you can get with matching funds.*
MEMBERSHIP RECORDS

1934-1935
Grace Tent #6
Abraham, Eloise
Brown, Ella
Carr, Sarah
Chapman, Grace
Dixon, Eloise
Fludd, Mamie E.
Ford, Betsy
Gantt, Julia
Grant, Eliza
Guy, Anna
Izzard, Anna
Jenkins, Bessie
Jenkins, Lottie
James, Rosa
Mayzck, Diana
Mitchell, Irene
Mitchel, Beatrice
McNeil, Henrietta
Porcher, Lydia
Payat, Emma
Smalls, Julia
Simmons, Harriot
Whitlock, Susan
McCoy, Frances
Morrison, Irene
Duncan, Vivian
Singleton, Bessie

1935-1936
Grace Tent #6
Abraham, Eloise
Brown, Ella
Carr, Sarah
Chapman, Grace M.
Dixon, Eloise
Fludd, Mamie E.
Gantt, Julia
Grant, Eliza
Greene, Eula
Guy, Anna

1936-1937
Grace Tent #6
Abraham, Eloise
Brown, Ella
Carr, Sarah
Chapman, Grace M.
Dixon, Eloise
Duncan, Vivian
Fludd, Mamie E.
Gantt, Julia
Grant, Eliza
Greene, Eulia
Guy, Annie
Hughe, Caroline
Izzard, Anna
Jenkins, Bessie
Jenkins, Lottie
James, Rosa
Mayzck, Diana
Mitchell, Irene
Mitchel, Beatrice
McNeil, Henrietta
Porcher, Lydia
Payat, Emma
Smalls, Julia
Smalls, Harriot
Simmons, Harriot
Whitlock, Susan
McCoy, Frances
Morrison, Irene
Duncan, Vivian
Singleton, Bessie
Payat, Emma
Smith, Isabel
Smalls, Julia
Simmons, Harriot
Singleton, Bessie
Whitlock, Susan
Jones, Maggie B.

1937-1938
Grace Tent #6
Abraham, Eloise
Brown, Ella
Chapman, Grace M.
Duncan, Vivian
Fludd, Mamie E.
Grant, Eliza
Greene, Eulia
Guy, Annie
Hughe, Caroline
Izzard, Anna
Jenkins, Bessie
Jenkins, Lottie
James, Rosa
Jones, Maggie B.
Mitchell, Irene
McNeil, Henrietta
Porcher, Lydia
Smalls, Julia
Simmons, Harriot
Mazyck, Diana
Whitlock, Susan
Holmes, Sarah

Bourne, Alice
Bolds, Mary
Butler, Catherine
Bryant, Hattie
Brown, Sarah
Brown, Evelyn
Brown, Josephine
Barnwell, Henrietta
Butler, Albertha
Bunch, Ethel
Crum, Ida
Campbell, Victoria
Cox, Nellie
Copers, Mary
Campbell, Mary E.
Carter, Annie
Carter, Clara
Carson, Dora
Duncan, Vivian
Deas, Amelia
Drayton, Evelyn
Dennis, Pauline
DeVeaux, Albertha
Dixon, Lillian
Dunning, Matta
Edwards, Susanna
Edwards, Lena
Edwards, Georgianna
Frasier, Louise
Fobbs, Annie S.
Ford, Rita
Fiester, Evelyn R.
Fludd, Mamie
Ficking, Virginai
Frasier, Sadie
Fleming, Etta
Green, Margaret
Alston, Louise
Fludd, Florence
Gray, Louise
Gadsden, Isabella
Gilliard, Evelyn
Gilliard, Julia L.
Gadsden, Catherine
Guy, Anna
Gadsden, Susan
Greenwood, Fannie
Gilliard, July S.

1949-1950
Grace Tent #6
Anderson, Beatrice
Alston, Mary
Abraham, Eloise
Ancrum, Lenora
Alston, Estelle
Anderson, Martha
Behren Della
Brown, Josephine
Brown, Florence
Brown, Irene
Blake, Alma

Butler, Catherine
Bryant, Hattie
Brown, Sarah
Brown, Evelyn
Brown, Josephine
Barnwell, Henrietta
Butler, Albertha
Bunch, Ethel
Crum, Ida
Campbell, Victoria
Cox, Nellie
Copers, Mary
Campbell, Mary E.
Carter, Annie
Carter, Clara
Carson, Dora
Duncan, Vivian
Deas, Amelia
Drayton, Evelyn
Dennis, Pauline
DeVeaux, Albertha
Dixon, Lillian
Dunning, Matta
Edwards, Susanna
Edwards, Lena
Edwards, Georgianna
Frasier, Louise
Fobbs, Annie S.
Ford, Rita
Fiester, Evelyn R.
Fludd, Mamie
Ficking, Virginai
Frasier, Sadie
Fleming, Etta
Green, Margaret
Alston, Louise
Fludd, Florence
Gray, Louise
Gadsden, Isabella
Gilliard, Evelyn
Gilliard, Julia L.
Gadsden, Catherine
Guy, Anna
Gadsden, Susan
Greenwood, Fannie
Gilliard, July S.
Gadsden Estelle
Hamilton, Katie
Heyward, Florence
Hilton, Eula
Hudson, Christine
Hill, Clara
Heyward, Anna
Hill, Dolly
Hart, Tyrah
Huger, Caroline
Irving, Susan
Johnson, Rosa M.
Johnson, Mary
Johnson, Mary E.
Jenning, Lavinia
James, Rosa
Johnson, Dianna
Jenkins, Lottie
Jenkins, Anna
Jenkins, Theresa
Jenkins, Bessie
Jenkins, Martha
Johnson, Virginia
Jones, Elnora
Joiner, Juanita
Joynes, Evelyn
Joyner, Beatrice
Jones, Florence
Jenkins, Ethel
Jenkins, Victoria
Kelly, Carrie
Mack, Janie
Middleton, Ethel
Marion, Hester
Middleton, Sarah E.
Middleton, Christine
Matthews, Jestine
Murray, Janie
Mitchell, Irene
Morris, Clara
Jones Eloise P.
Moultrie, Rebecca
Middleton, Wilhelmina
McCoy, Francis
McCoy, Jsoephine
McCalverty, Mary
Nelson, Pauline
Nebo, Janie
Perkins, Annie
Pinkney, Lillie
Perry, Ethel
Poaches, Lydia
Primus, Dicola
Rivers, Florence
Reaves, Beatrice
Rose, Carrie
Rembert, Margaret
Richardson, Isadora G.
Rowe, Lillie Mae
Rhodes, Elizabeth
Scrivens, Rosalie
Simmons, Lena
Stoney, Vivian
Smith, Susan
Sheares, Lucile
Sheares, Albetha
Sanders, Mary
Sanders, Orna B.
Seabrooks, Florence
Stoney, Josephine
Simmons, Harriet
Simmons, Luvinia
Small, Grace
Smith, Etta May
Small, Maggie F.
Talbert, Helen
Talbert, Geogianna
Taylor, Ottie
Williams, Lillina
Williams, Eloise
Washington, Viola
Washington, Violet
Washington, Carrie
Washington, Evelyn
Washington, Julia
Wright, Irene
Walker, Maggie W.
Williams, Rosa
Williams, Dottee
Walton, Janie
McKinsey, Mary
Wright, Lottie
Walker, Louisie
Williams, Hattie L.
Ward, Louise B.
Wimmons, Rebecca
Walton, Ethel
Walker, Lucinda
Youngblood, Emma
Alston, Dorothy
Pendarvis, Queenie
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Washington, Lottie B.
Young, Ella
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Ferguson, Lillie
Mack, Cornelia
Smalls, Georgia
Taylor, Florence
Granthum, Florence
Purvis, Ethil
Williams, Anna
Upshaw, Helen P.
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Burgess, Janette J.
Rhymes, Ella
Thomas, Viola
Fuller, Mary,
Benton, Roberta
Hazel, Miriam
Henderson, Ruby
Gilliard, Lottie
Simmons, Hattie
1951-1952
Grace Tent #6
Anderson, Beatrice
Alston, Mary
Alston, Louise
Alston, Estelle
Anderson, Martha
Anderson, Lenora
Abraham, Eloise
Alston, Dorothy
Behren, Delta
Brown, Josephine
Brown, Florence
Brown, Irene
Blake, Alma
Bourne, Alyce
Bolds, Mary
Butler, Catherin
Bryant, Hattie
Brown, Sarah H.
Brown, Evelyn
Barnwell, Henrietta
Butler, Albertha
Bunch, Ethel
Benton, Roberta
Burgess, Jeanette
Campbell, Victoria
Canty, Nancy
Crum, Ada
Cox, Nellie
Capers, Mary
Campbell, Mary E.
Carter, Annie
Carter, Clara
Carson, Dora
Daniels, Rebecca
Deveaux, Albertha
Dennis, Pauline
Dixon, Lillian
Duncan, Vivian
Drayton, Evelyn
Dunning, Mattie
Edwards, Susan
Frazier, Lena E.
Frazier, Louise
Frobes, Anice
Ford, Ritta
Flaster, Evelyn
Fludd, Florence
Fludd, Mamie
Fickling, Virginia
Frazier, Sadie
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Flamming, Etta
Fuller, Mary
Gleaton, Dorothy
Gilliard, Lottie
Green, Margaret
Gray, Louise
Gadsden, Isabelle
Gilliard, Evelyn
Gilliard, Julia L.
Gadsden, Catherine
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Guy, Annie
Greenwood, Fanny
Gilliard, Julia
Gardener, Estelle
Granthurm, Florence
Hamilton, Katie
Heyward, Florence
Hilton, Eular
Hudson, Christine
Hill, Clara
Hill, Dollie
Heyward, Annie
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Hazel, Miriam
Huger, Carolina
Irving, Susan
Johnson, Rose W.
Johnson, Mary E.
Johnson, Dianna
Jennings, Luvinia
James, Rosa
Jenkins, Lottie
Jenkins, Anna
Jenkins, Hazel
Jenkins, Bessie
Jenkins, Theresa
Jones, Elnora
Jones, Eloise
Joyner, Bernice
Joyner, Evelyn
Jenkins, Ethel
Jenkins, Victoria
Laque, Wilhelmina
Legare, Alice
Kelly, Carrie
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Marion, Hester
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1934-1935
Rose Anna #18
Bennett, Lousia
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Houston, Claudia
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Morrison, Ella
McQueen, Lucy
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Young, Elosie E.G.

1935-1936
Rose Anna #18
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Brown, Lula
Chisolm, Sarah
Chisolm, Julia
Delesline, Naomi
Gibbs, Bessie
Green, Sarah
George, Charlott

1936-1937
Rose Anna #18
Aiken, Edna
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Brown, Lula
Chisolm, Sarah
Chisolm, Julia
Doty, Elizabeth
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1937-1938
Rose Anna #18
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Prova, Lear
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Davis, Bertha J.
Duval, Florine
Edmonds, Hattie
Edwards, Elisabeth
Emanuel, Wilhelmina
Elmore, Anna
Freeman, Alice T.
Fields, Hattie
Fields, Julia
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Fleming, Elvira
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Poilte, Anna
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Powell, Ellen
Pryar, Edith
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Reddick, Vernesa
Rivers, Maggie
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Robinson, Lottie
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Summons, Anna
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Small, Lucile
Sapon, Mary
Scott, Mary
Scott, Lena
Snife, Margaret
Smith, Margaret
Smith, Jaunita
Smith, Viola
Secinton, Josephine
Smith, Catherine
Taylor, Susie
Temple, Ines
Terry, Mabel
Tobin, Marie
Thomas, Clara
Washington Anna
Walker, N. G.
Walker, Estelle
Williams, Elizabeth
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Williams Theresa
Wallace, Charlotte
Wison, Elizabeth
Ticklin, Corine
Dingle, Mary
Shears, Leila M
Walker, Ella
Dickerson, Minnie B.
Purvis, Lillian
Smith, Essie Elizabeth
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<tr>
<td>Johnson, Laura</td>
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<td>Scott, Sallie</td>
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Dorche, Lillie Mae
Finney, Burnice Ella
Freeman, Gertrude
Wigfall, Janie
Welch, Mattie
Williams, Ethel
Washington, Rosa Bell
Williams, Helen
Williams, Hester
Williams, Susie
Abels, Lillisna H.W.
Wright, Elizabeth
Wright, Marie
White, Celia W.
Washington, Julia
White, Rebecca
Wilson, Marion
Young, Marie Wright
Alsont, Hessie
Gilliard, Ida Mae
Mack, Florence
Gadsden, Almeta
1949-1950
Jerusalem Tent #115
Legare, Pearl
Moore, Lucile
Brown, E.L.
Wrighten, Elizabeth
Simmons, Edith
Fields, Gertrude
Jones, Lottie
Reide, Irene
Lucas, Viola
Jamison, Rachel
Wallace, Beatrice
Heyward, Georgianna
Simmons, Bertha Lee
McGill, Thomisina
Anderson, Rosa
Gallashaw, Bernice
King, Alethia
Eady, Peral
Washington, Mary Bell
1949-1950
Rose of Sharon Tent
#101

Harris, Arabell
Davis, Ellen
Dubose, Annabell
Brown, Abbie
Johnson, Johndella
Gregory, Evelina
Mention, Delia
Graham, Hannah M.
Hardy, Rebecca
King, Belle
Emanuel, Mamie
Baily, Fredricka
Logan, Susie
Hamilton, Mirl
Johnson, Francis
Vandross, Pauline
Brook, Rachel E.
Jones, Janie
Johnson, Isabella
Ford, Sarah
Singleton, Pearl
Brown, Anna
Hartly, Charlotte
Jones, Sarah
Green, Srah
Rutledge, Eliza
Poinsette
Edna
Butler, Tomisina Smith
Grant, Daisy
Williams, Ella
Stroble, Ruth
Talbert, Maggie
Ford, Irene
Johnson, Rebecca
Crosson, Marie
Rhodes, Elnora
Felder, Henrietta
Sinclair, Ruth
Gray, Martha
Johnson, Rebecca
Campbell, Mary E.
Felder, Christine
Robinson, Catherine
Simmons, Gertrude

White, Mary
Nearing, Maggie S.
Brightman, Bertha
Durant, Patricia
Brown, Bessie
Smith, Alice N.
Gerideau, Nellie
Walker, Ella
Gregg, Lena
Ponteau, Lucille
Thomas, Sarah
Cash, Louise
La Prince, Wilhelmena
Smiley, Lucille
Manigault, Martha
Butler, Eva
Rambert, Janie
Anderson, Rosetta
Rivers, Mary
Brown, Josephine
Crioleau, Elizabet
Munnill, Marydenline
Chambers, Viola
Capers, Emily
Brown, Anna
Corkers, Ethynl M
Vernan, Isabelle
Kimlauch, Sadie
Dawson, Emma
Wright, Richardine
Seabrook, Henrietta
Bryant, Harrietta
Miliner, Ethel
Bruns, Sadie Ruth
1948-1949
St. Mary’s Tent #116
Singleton, Evelyn
Evans, Pearl
Green, Juila
Wright, Lillie Bell
Heyward, Emma
Brown, Evelyn
Jackson, Rosa Lee
Macky, Albetha
Frasier, Rosalee
Brown, Delphine
Holmes, Corine
Mitchell, Rosa
Mitchell, Clara
Gibbs, Christine
Pinckney, Eliza
Coakley, Louisa
William, Alma
Gethers, Juila Owens
Taylor, Rosalie
Mack, Jamie

1949-1950
St. Mary’s Tent #116
Singleton, Evelyn
Evans, Pearl
Green, Juila
Wright, Lillie Bell
Heyward, Emma
Brown, Evelyn
Frasier, Rosalee
Brown, Delphine
Holmes, Corine
Mitchell, Rosa
Mitchell, Clara
Gibbs, Christine
Pinckney, Eliza
Coakley, Louisa
William, Alma
Gethers, Juila Owens
Taylor, Rosalie
Mack, Jamie
Lewis, Margaret
Brown, Margaret
Bryant, Eloise
Forrest, Victoria
Kennedy, Viola
Western, Wilhelmina
Smalls, Hattie
Purshay, Henrietta
Haring, Anna
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<th>Tent: Whippers Area #154</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Location: Charleston Heights, SC</td>
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<tr>
<td>Leader: Anna Johnson</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Financial Secretary: Beatrice Givens</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Year: 1960</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Average # of Members: 52</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Year: 1961</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Average # of Members: 44</td>
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<tr>
<td>Year: 1962</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Average # of Members: 48</td>
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<tr>
<td>Year: 1963</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Average # of Members: 55</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Year: 1964</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Average # of Members: 56</td>
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<th>Tent: Julia's #190</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Location: Chas, SC</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Leader: Julia Gillard</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Financial Secretary: Ethel Davis</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Year: 1960</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Average # of Members: 56</td>
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<tr>
<td>Year: 1961</td>
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<td>Average # of Members: 52</td>
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<tr>
<td>Average # of Members: 57</td>
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<td>Year: 1964</td>
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<td>Average # of Members: 53</td>
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<tr>
<td>Year: 1965</td>
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<td>Average # of Members: 55</td>
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<table>
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<tr>
<th>Tent: Golden Rule #63</th>
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<td>Location: Chas, SC</td>
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<tr>
<td>Leader: Naomi W. DeLesline</td>
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<tr>
<td>Financial Secretary: Beulah W. Duval</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Year: 1960</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Average # of Members: 166</td>
</tr>
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<td>Year: 1963</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Average # of Members: 144</td>
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<tr>
<td>Year: 1964</td>
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<table>
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<th>Tent: Rose of Sharon #101</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Location: Chas, SC</td>
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<tr>
<td>Leader: Arabelle F. Harris</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Financial Secretary: Hannah M. Graham</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Year: 1959</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Average # of Members: 146</td>
</tr>
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<td>Year: 1960</td>
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<td>Average # of Members: 154</td>
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<td>Average # of Members: 143</td>
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<td>Average # of Members: 131</td>
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<td>Average # of Members: 130</td>
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<td>Year: 1965</td>
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<td>Average # of Members: 141</td>
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<tr>
<td>Tent: Azalea Tent #150</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>------------------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Leader: Florence Thomas</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Year: 1959</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Average # of Members: 25</td>
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<td>Average # of Members: 26</td>
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<td>Average # of Members: 28</td>
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<td>Average # of Members: 27</td>
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<td>Leader: Lillen Davis</td>
<td>Financial Secretary: Margaret Cowen</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Year: 1963</td>
<td>Average # of Members: 59</td>
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1922 United Order of Tents’ Membership Certificate
UNITED ORDER OF TENTS
SOUTHERN DISTRICT NO. FOUR
SCHOLARSHIP RECIPIENTS

June 17, 1997 – 1st Recipient – KATRINA HAMPTON - Timmonsville High School - Savannah College of Art and Design – FLORENCE DISTRICT.

June 17, 1998 – 2nd Recipient – CERICE NASHANE FORD - Georgetown High School - USC Columbia - GEORGETOWN DISTRICT.

June 21, 1999 – 3rd Recipient – CAROLYN A. BURRELL - Eau Claire High School - Bennett College – COLUMBIA DISTRICT.


June 18, 2002 – 6th Recipient – MARIAH LaRE MYER - Barke High School - Georgia State University-CHARLESTON DISTRICT.

June 16, 2003 – 7th Recipient – EDWINA JANETTE GEORGE - Dartington High School - Francis Marion University - DARLINGTON DISTRICT.

June 22, 2004 – 8th Recipient – KENDALL LATRICE McFADDEN - Sumter High School - Francis Marion University – SUMTER DISTRICT.

June 21, 2005 – 9th Recipient – SHALEY’S BECKETT - Estill High School - Clemson University – GARNETT DISTRICT.

June 20, 2006 – 10th Recipient – STRATTON SPEARS - Marlboro High School - Johnson & Wales University (attended FMU) – MARLBORO DISTRICT.


June 22, 2009 – 13th Recipient – TAYLOR FRANCES PATERSON - Crestview High School - Francis Marion University - COLUMBIA DISTRICT.

June 23, 2010 – 14th Recipient – BRENNY WILLIAMS - Timmonsville High School, Winthrop University - FLORENCE DISTRICT.


These are the Scholarship Recipients as per the records of H.U.W.G. Superintendent Ruth E. Jordan, Grand Recorder as reported by H.W.G. Sister Ivy Stakle, Chairperson of the Scholarship Committee.
In Memory of Our Beloved Superintendent:

During the June of 1948 District meeting, Sis. Rosa G. Gadson, who was then the state President, suggested that District #4 select a deserving girl who needed help in attending college. Thus began the history of the Scholarship Fund.

She will live in the hearts of the friends she made, and be known for the foundation she laid.

Sis. Rosa G. Gadson R. W. N. G. Superintendent of Southern District No. 4

Rosa Gadson Dedication
Dear Sisters,

The Right Worthy National Grand Encampment of the United Order of Tents of J. B. Oldings and Jolliffe Uddon will convene in Charleston, South Carolina, Monday, August 3, through August 7, 1981.

Only eighth degree sisters are eligible to be a part of this convention. If there are other eligible sisters who wish to attend, the eighth degree will be conferred on Monday night, August 3, 1981.

All request for National Honors must be recommended by the leader and approved by the Queen or Deputy. Send requests to the Superintendent in your district.

In order to receive your honors, you must be financial for the past three bitermial.

The convention will be held in the Sheraton Charleston Hotel, 103 Lockwood Drive, Charleston, South Carolina, 29403.

Membership dues are $5.00 bi-annually. Degree Chambers will send $30.00 and Circles $50.00 with credentials.

Leaders are asked to collect National Members dues in their Subordinates and send a list of member names and dues to the National Grand Financial Secretary, making checks payable to the National Grand Encampment.

Every Subordinate Tent of Southern District #1 is asked to send $10.00 National Tax to the Home Office in Norfolk, Virginia. Every juvenile Tent is asked to send $5.00 National Tax to the Home Office also. Checks made payable to Superintendents Council.

All Subordinates, Juveniles Royal Degree Chambers and Circles are to make checks payable to the Superintendents Council and send to the National Grand Financial Secretary.

All District Tax—Make checks payable to the National Grand Encampment and send to the National Grand Financial Secretary.

The deadline for all National dues for assessments is April 15, 1981. Each member will receive a membership card.

Richmond, Virginia
January 19, 1980
God bless each of you. We are looking to seeing you there.

Your National Grand Superintendent

Alma D. Christopher, 
Financial Secretary of Grand Encampment
Mr. Martin,

Here is the 1980 Calendar of activities held at the United Order of Delta Home, 73 Cannon Street. The building and rooms were used for the activities. You listed the months, dates, activities and the approximate number of persons attending.

Jan. —
15th Oyster Roast — 150 persons

Feb. —
1st Oyster Roast — 100 persons
8th " " — 250 persons
15th " " — 50 persons
29th " " — 100 persons

March —
14th Oyster Roast — 100 persons
28th " " — 250 persons

April —
4th Oyster Roast — 200 persons
11th " " — 75 persons
15th " " — 100 persons

June —
11th Fish Fry — 200 persons
18th " " — 175 persons

Date —
3rd " " Oyster Roast, 115 persons
10th " " " " 250 persons
17th " " " " 250 persons

Elders
Mrs. Mary L. Green
100 Cannon Street
Charleston, S. C., 29403
724-8337

Mrs. Elizabeth E. Vance
220 W. Calhoun Street
Charleston, S. C., 29401
724-3617

Mrs. Margaret M. Knowlton
1901 Calhoun Street
Charleston, S. C., 29403
724-3617

Mrs. Victoria M. Simmons
220 W. Calhoun Street
Charleston, S. C., 29401
724-3617

Mrs. Velma E. Simmons
220 W. Calhoun Street
Charleston, S. C., 29401
724-3617

Very truly yours,

Mrs. Margaret M. Knowlton
Mrs. Victoria M. Simmons
Mrs. Velma E. Simmons
M. W. Simmons, M. Russell

1980 Building Use of 73 Cannon Street
65th ANNUAL

CIVIC NIGHT
of the
R.W. NATIONAL GRAND ENCAMPMENT

THEME

"SHE IS A TREE OF LIFE TO THEM
THAT LAY HOLD UPON HER; AND
HAPPY IS EVERYONE THAT RETAINETH
HER"

170 LOCKWOOD DRIVE
CHARLESTON, SOUTH CAROLINA 29403

8:00 P.M.,
TUESDAY, AUGUST 4, 1981

S H E A R T N O T E L
PROGRAMME

OPENING SELECTION ... LIFT EVERY VOICE AND SING.

PRESENTATION OF MISTRESS OF CEREMONIES
SIS. BUNICE C. WILSON, DEPUTY OF SUMTER DISTRICT

MISTRESS OF CEREMONIES
SIS. BURLEY D. ARMSTRONG, DEPUTY OF PE R DIX DISTRICT

SCRIPTURE ... SIS. CONA JONES

INVOCATION ... SIS. KOSA MAE LATTEN

SELECTION ... YOUNG ADULT CHOIR OF MORRIS BROWN A.M.E. CHURCH

PRESENTATIONS OF SUPERINTENDENTS
SIS. ERNESTINE M. JOHNSON, DEPUTY OF GEORGETOWN DISTRICT

** GREETINGS **

MINISTERS ALLIANCE ... DR. OMAR F. HENRY, PRESIDENT
N.A.A.C.P. ... ATTY. MURRILL BROWN, SECRETARY, CHARLESTON BRANCH

EDUCATION ... REV. DAVID MACK, AREA A.D.D. SUPERINTENDENT

PATERNAL ORDERS ... SIS. LOUISE NEMAN

SELECTION ... YOUNG ADULT CHOIR OF MORRIS BROWN A.M.E. CHURCH

CITY COONCLER-WOMAN OF CHARLESTON
MS. BRENA SCOTT

REMARKS ... R.W.N.G. SUPERINTENDENTS
CHARLOTTE D. WILLIAMS and IVA WHITE

CLOSING SELECTION ... GOD BLESS AMERICA

BENEDICTION ... REV. J.L. GRADY, PASTOR OF MORRIS BROWN A.M.E. CHURCH

*** SONGS ***

GOD BLESS AMERICA

While the storm clouds gather
far across the sea,
Let us swear allegiance
to a land that's free;
Let us all be grateful
for a land so fair,
As we raise our voices
In a solemn prayer.

chorus

God bless America, Land that I Love,
Stand beside her and guide her
Thru the night with the light from above.
From the mountains, to the prairies,
To the oceans white with foam,
God Bless America,
My Home, Sweet Home.

1981 Annual Civic Night of the National Grand Encampment (b)
A RAINBOW, TOM THUMB WEDDING

TIM TUT CONTEST

sponsored by

THE SPECIAL BUILDING FUND COMMITTEE of

UNITED ORDER of TENTS
J.R. GIDDINGS AND JOLLY HE UNION
CHARLESTON DISTRICT #4

\[ \begin{align*}
\text{\begin{music}
\text{\large\myupright{B}B}
\end{music}}
\end{align*}\]

Sunday, October 31, 1982, Time 4:30 P.M.

OLD BETHEL UNITED METHODIST CHURCH
222 Calhoun Street
Charleston, S. C.

Rev. Edward H. McDowell, Jr., Pastor

MRS. VIVIAN E. DURCAN, SUPERINTENDENT
A TRIBUTE TO OUR CHAIRMAN

Sis. Margaret Celista Counts


Though I speak with the tongues of men and of angels, and have not Charity, I am become as sounding brass, or a tinkling cymbal.

And though I have the gift of prophecy, and understand all mysteries, and all knowledge; and though I have all faith, so that I could remove mountains, and I have not Charity, I am nothing.

And though I bestow all my goods to feed the poor, and thought I give my body to be burned, and have not Charity, it profiteth me nothing.

Charity suffereth long and is kind, Charity envieth not; Charity vaunteth not itself, is not puffed up.

Dost not have itself unseemly, seeketh not her own, is not easily provoked, thinketh no evil.

Rejoice not in iniquity, but rejoiceth in the truth.

Beareth all things, believeth all things, hopeth all things, endureth all things.

Charity never faileth: but whether there be prophecies, they shall fail; whether there be tongues, they shall cease; whether there be knowledge, they shall vanish away.

And now abideth faith, hope, Charity; these three; but the greatest of these is Charity.

1 Cor. 13:13 – 13
May God always find favor in your efforts, is my prayer.

Ann Pendleton &
THE SPECIAL BUILDING FUND COMMITTEE

The Best Memory

Forget each kindness that you do, as soon as you have done it.

Forget the praise that falls to you, the most moment you have won it.

Forget the slander that you hear, before you can repeat it.

Forget each slight, each spite, each sneer, whenever you may meet it.

Remember every kindness done to you, whatever it measure.

Remember praise by others Won, And pass it on with Pleasure.

Remember every promise made, and keep it to the latter.

Remember those who lend you aid, and be a grateful debtor.

Remember all the Happiness that came your way in Living.

Forget each worry and distress Be hopeful and Forgiving.

Remember, remember, remember, Remember heaven's above you.

And you will find through age and youth That many hearts will love You.

SPECIAL BUILDING FUND COMMITTEE

Leaving On The Everlasting Area

1. What a fellowship, what a joy divine
Leaving on the Everlasting Area;
What aPSRENACE, what a Peace of mind
Leaving on The Everlasting Area.

2. Oh, how sweet to walk in this Pilgrim way
Leaving on the Everlasting Area,
Oh, how bright the path ahead from day to day
Leaving on The Everlasting Area.

REMEMBER:
Leaving, leaving, safe and secure from all alarms,
Leaving, leaving, leaving on the Everlasting Area.

1982 Building Fund Committee Fundraiser Pamphlet (b)
SPECIAL THANKS TO:

THE PARENTS OF THE CHILDREN IN THE VOTIVE TUFF CONTAINERS FOR THEIR GENEROSITY.

THE A.R.E. BRANCH COLD BEAD CHILDREN'S ORDER, ENRICO G. CHURCH

AND MEMBERS OF THE VOTIVE ORDER OF TENTS, AND TO MANY OTHERS FOR THEIR HELP.

OLD BUTLER, MR. H. W. ROPER, JR., SISTER RAPER

SISTER EUNICE, MRS. JIM FROST & THE CHURCH,

MR. DAVE CHRISTOPH & S.P.A.D. BOARD MEMBERS

PASTOR, OFFICERS, AND MEMBERS OF OUR CHURCH.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Sis. Ann Breslin	* Program Co-ordinator
Sis. Elizabeth Groggs
Sis. Florence Back
Sis. Rachel Pitt
Sis. Anna Bell Thomas
Sis. Rosetta Givens
Sis. Elta Reid
Sis. Florence Fuller "SERMISTESS"
Sis. Beatrice Johnson, Beauty
Sis. J.M. McConnell * Chr. Finance Committee
Sis. Janie Gibson
Sis. Dorothy White
Sis. Ethelene Kington
Sis. Glaze Brown
Sis. Lillie Mae Cheadle
Sis. Marie Fields * Chr. Refreshment Committee
Sis. Louise Williams
Sis. Helen Patterson
Sis. Mary Doctor
Sis. Elizabeth Scott

** MEMBERS OF THE UNITED ORDER OF TENTS **

Sis. Jeanita Doak
Sis. Florence Boyd
Sis. Bessie Taylor Clark * Chr. Publicity Committee
Sis. Lillie Bell White
Sis. Celestine Williams
Sis. Rosina Reid
Sis. Margie Gardner
Sis. Sadie Franklin
Sis. Louise Mooreman

And,

THE SPECIAL BUILDING FUND COMMITTEE

OF

THE UNITED ORDER OF TENTS

J.B. Geddings and Jolliffe Union

Charleston District #4
APPENDIX D
South Carolina Department of Archives & History
National Register of Historic Places
PRELIMINARY INFORMATION FORM (PIF)
to evaluate National Register eligibility

Please return to: South Carolina Department of Archives & History
Historical Services Division
8301 Parklane Road
Columbia, SC 29223-4905

Please complete every blank that applies to the property in which you are interested.

NAME OF PROPERTY
United Order of Tents Building

STREET ADDRESS
73 Cannon Street

CITY (OR VICINITY)
Charleston

COUNTY
Charleston

MAPS
Tax Parcel # 46012601003
USGS Topo Quad Sheet Name
Charleston Quadrangle

Attach a county tax map and a USGS Topographic Map. Contact the county assessor's office for a tax map. A USGS Topographic Map can be purchased from www.store.usgs.gov (click map locator button). Mark the location of the property and the boundaries in pencil on both maps.

OWNER OF PROPERTY (as recorded in city/county tax or land records)

Name
DeLeslie, Naomi and Trustees

Address
P.O. Box 22824

City/Charleston

State/SC

Zip Code/29413

Telephone (provide area code) Home: 

Work:

PROPERTY DESCRIPTION

Present Use
United Order of Tents Meeting House

Original Use
Single family residence

Date(s) of Construction
Circa 1855

Date(s) of Major Alterations
1980, 1983

Moved? (check if yes) 

Original Location

Date(s) of move(s)

Outbuildings/Other Features
None

Archaeological Remains/Potential

SIGNIFICANCE OF PROPERTY

In the space provided below and on a separate page if necessary, please provide a brief (paragraph or two) statement about why this property is worthy of recognition by the National Register of Historic Places. You may wish to consider the following questions when formulating a statement.

A. Did an important event happen there? Is it important for its association with the development of a town or community? Was it used, for instance, as a meeting place of an important local organization? Is it the site of an important battle of the American Revolution or Civil War?

B. Who built it and when? Who lived there over the years? Can you document that he/she/they were prominent or important in the community, county, region, state of South Carolina, or nation? Did they live or work there during the productive years of their lives?

C. Did an architect, landscape architect, or master carpenter/brickmason design and/or build it? If so, please provide biographical information on him or her.
SIGNIFICANCE OF PROPERTY continued

Please include copies of pertinent sources, including summaries of interviews and documents that are not readily available. Do not send copies of pages from secondary sources unless they are from a rare book. In researching the history of the property, check records at your local library, church, historical society, and county courthouse. Interviews with local historians may also yield information. Label all published sources with the name of the author, name of publication and publisher, date and place of publication, and page number(s). In the case of unpublished manuscripts, provide the name and page number(s) of the particular document, the name of the document collection, and the name and location of the repository.

Use the space below for your statement of significance.

See Attached Statement of Purpose.

PHOTOGRAPHS

Send at least six (6) clear photographs showing the front, side and rear elevations, additions, interior, and outbuildings, and at least two (2) additional photos of the surroundings. Take extra shots of significant interior and exterior details. Label each photograph with the name of the property, what the photo shows, the name of the photographer and the date taken. Either write the label information on the back of the photo with a soft lead pencil or permanent ink marker, attach a post-it note to the back, or attach a list of the photos.

Photographs cannot be returned.

PRELIMINARY INFORMATION FORM (PIF) COMPLETED BY:

Name: Mary Margaret Schley
Address: 292 Meeting Street
City: Charleston  State: SC  Zip: 29401
Phone (include area code):  (803) 503-3504
FAX: (803) 503-3504
E-mail address: mmsschley@gmail.com
Date completed: ____________________________

DID YOU REMEMBER TO ENCLOSE:
- County Tax Map
- USGS Topo Map
- Photos (exterior, interior & setting)
- Copies of Sources
- Statement of Significance
As the headquarters of the Charleston chapter of the United of Order Tents, 73 Cannon Street’s history is intertwined with the history of the organization. The United Order of Tents of J. R. Giddings and Jollifee Union is an African-American, female secret society that traces its origins back to Norfolk, Virginia in 1867. It hails as the oldest and only Christian fraternal organization comprised of and operated solely by African-American women. After the Civil War, Annetta M. Lane, a former slave and orchestrator of the Underground Railroad, founded the organization to create a benevolent community amongst newly freed, black women. The comprehensive mission of the organization was “to incite women to the highest standards of Christian living, and to strive to achieve for the Negro race, the place it rightfully deserves.” In this manner, the membership of the Order created “a tent of salvation” for the black community. Throughout the decades, the organization’s membership expanded into four regions of the country and attracted tens of thousands of members.

The year 2013 represents the centennial of the Charleston chapter of the United Order of Tents. Today this chapter possesses eleven tents and approximately 350 active members in the Charleston area. The Order adheres to the benevolent nature of the original mission statement but has adapted to serve the modern needs of the community. For example, the Charleston chamber currently contributes to the Jenkins Orphanage, the Ronald McDonald House, and assists in annually sending a student to college through the United Order of Tents’ Scholarship Fund.

Since 1956, the chamber has operated out of the Francis P. Seignious House at 73 Cannon Street, a nineteenth century wood framed single house, named after its first resident. The three-and-a-half story building was constructed between 1854 and 1856 during Stephen Lloyd’s two-year ownership of the property. A century after its construction date, the single house was still standing on the original sixty by two hundred and twenty foot lot when 73 Cannon Street was put up for public auction. The United Order of Tents purchased the property for $6,000 and irrevocably impacted the history of the structure.

After the Order acquired the building, the Charleston membership underwent a period of exponential growth. In the 1950s and 60s, the total membership was easily over 700 women. The large membership prompted the Order’s leaders to renovate the building to create adequate meeting spaces. In the 1960s, the Order added a three-story west wing to the structure augmenting the meeting rooms on the first and second floors as well as the rentable apartments on the third floor.

In 1963, the Order enclosed the piazzas on the west and south facades of the structure to create bathrooms, storage spaces, and additional living areas. It is important to note that during these renovations the building’s character defining features were left in place and historic fabric was hidden underneath superficial modern treatments, such as the exterior wood clapboard visible in localized areas underneath the modern siding. The renovations and additions to 73 Cannon Street increased the building to the 5,724 square foot structure that stands today. The building holds a
prominent position on the block as one of the largest historic single-family residences in the neighborhood.

Presently, the United Order of Tents is displaced from their headquarters and for the first time in nearly sixty years is meeting at multiple locations throughout the Charleston area. The series of events that led to the organization's displacement began on February 8, 2012 when Charleston Livability Court summoned the United Order of Tents for a violation of the public nuisances code, “demolition by neglect.” The building was deemed structurally unsound and was considered a public safety hazard due to the numerous and visible structural failures. On May 7, the city postponed the case with an order for the organization to stabilize and board up the house. The Preservation Society of Charleston monetarily assisted the Order in the stabilization of the house. Subsequently, Charleston’s Livability Court lifted its court summons for the United Order of Tents; however, the Order still had to vacate the building for safety reasons.

While the group’s legal obligations have been resolved, the Charleston chamber of the United Order of Tents is still in crisis mode. The current deteriorated state of the building jeopardizes the nearly sixty-year connection between the United Order of Tents and 73 Cannon Street. The building provides a sense of place for the organization as it reflects their identity and historic narrative. A National Register of Historic Places designation would share the United Order of Tents’ story with a broader audience and serve as a foundation for acquiring funds to stabilize their historic asset.

In conclusion, 73 Cannon Street is both a historically significant and devastatingly threatened building, which has garnered local interest and support from the displaced members, neighbors, and preservation organizations. This National Register nomination is seeking to recognize an enduring and often overlooked community in Charleston by ensuring that the legacy of the United Order of Tents’ remains within the city’s landscape.
April 5, 2013

Ms. Mary Margaret Schley
292 Meeting Street
Charleston, SC 29401

Re: Francis P. Seignious House (United Order of Tents), 73 Cannon Street, Charleston, Charleston County

Dear Ms. Schley:

Thank you for submitting a Preliminary Information Form (PIF) for the above-referenced property. Based on the information you provided, we do not believe that the house qualifies individually for the National Register and do not recommend that you move forward with a formal nomination because we do not believe such an effort would prove successful. The house is in an area of Charleston that was determined eligible for the National Register in 1989 as an expansion to the already listed Charleston Historic District. The Francis P. Seignious House would contribute to this district expansion if nominated and ultimately listed in the Register.

We do not recommend a nomination for the house individually because the cumulative effect of alterations that have occurred since at least 1963 have changed its historic character substantially. The enclosure of the piazzas, addition of synthetic siding, and the addition of a three-story west wing have the combined effect of altering the historic character of the house to the point that there is insufficient integrity for individual National Register eligibility. While these alterations are at least fifty years old, the period of significance for the house would likely have to be the single year 1963. We do not believe it is possible to make a sufficient case for significance based on one year of occupancy by the United Order of Tents.

I am sorry that our finding is not a positive one for you in terms of the house’s eligibility for the National Register. We appreciate your efforts to document and preserve the history of this property, particularly through oral history interviews, and appreciate your interest in the preservation and recognition of this property. If you have any questions or if I can be of further assistance to you in any way, then please do not hesitate to contact me at [803] 896-6179 or by email at chandler@scdah.state.sc.us. Enclosed is your PIF for your files.

Sincerely,

Andrew W. Chandler
Architectural Historian/National Register Coordinator
State Historic Preservation Office

enclosure

S. C. Department of Archives & History • 8301 Parklane Road • Columbia • South Carolina • 29223-4905 • (803) 896-6100 • http://scdah.sc.gov
REFERENCES

Primary Sources

Bell Family Papers 1890-1972. Avery Research Center. College of Charleston, Charleston, SC.


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Simms, Lois. “Profiles of African-American Females in the Low Country of South


“Successful Women Bridging the Past and Upholding the Future.” The Fayetteville Press (Fayetteville, NC), June 2011.


**Historic Preservation References**


**African American History References**


Black Women Club Movement References

Berkeley, Kathleen. “‘Colored Ladies Also Contributed’: Black Women’s Activities from Benevolence to Social Welfare, 1866-1896.” In The Web of Southern Social Relations: Women, Family, and Education, edited by Walter J. Fraser, Jr., R. Frank Saunders, Jr., and Jon L. Wakelyn, 181-203. Athens: University of Georgia Press,
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