

UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR  
NATIONAL PARK SERVICE

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# NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES INVENTORY -- NOMINATION FORM

SEE INSTRUCTIONS IN *HOW TO COMPLETE NATIONAL REGISTER FORMS*  
TYPE ALL ENTRIES -- COMPLETE APPLICABLE SECTIONS

## 1 NAME

HISTORIC

Denmark Vesey House

AND/OR COMMON

Denmark Vesey House

## 2 LOCATION

STREET & NUMBER

56 Bull Street

--- NOT FOR PUBLICATION

CITY, TOWN

Charleston

CONGRESSIONAL DISTRICT

First

--- VICINITY OF

STATE

South Carolina

CODE

45

COUNTY

Charleston

CODE

019

## 3 CLASSIFICATION

### CATEGORY

\_\_\_ DISTRICT

BUILDING(S)

\_\_\_ STRUCTURE

\_\_\_ SITE

\_\_\_ OBJECT

### OWNERSHIP

\_\_\_ PUBLIC

PRIVATE

\_\_\_ BOTH

### PUBLIC ACQUISITION

\_\_\_ IN PROCESS

\_\_\_ BEING CONSIDERED

### STATUS

OCCUPIED

\_\_\_ UNOCCUPIED

\_\_\_ WORK IN PROGRESS

### ACCESSIBLE

\_\_\_ YES: RESTRICTED

\_\_\_ YES: UNRESTRICTED

NO

### PRESENT USE

\_\_\_ AGRICULTURE

\_\_\_ COMMERCIAL

\_\_\_ EDUCATIONAL

\_\_\_ ENTERTAINMENT

\_\_\_ GOVERNMENT

\_\_\_ INDUSTRIAL

\_\_\_ MILITARY

\_\_\_ MUSEUM

\_\_\_ PARK

PRIVATE RESIDENCE

\_\_\_ RELIGIOUS

\_\_\_ SCIENTIFIC

\_\_\_ TRANSPORTATION

\_\_\_ OTHER:

## 4 OWNER OF PROPERTY

NAME

Ms. Rita Goldberg

STREET & NUMBER

69 St. Margaret Street

CITY, TOWN

Charleston

--- VICINITY OF

STATE

South Carolina

## 5 LOCATION OF LEGAL DESCRIPTION

COURTHOUSE,  
REGISTRY OF DEEDS, ETC.

Register of Mesne Conveyance

STREET & NUMBER

2 Court House Square

CITY, TOWN

Charleston

STATE

South Carolina

## 6 REPRESENTATION IN EXISTING SURVEYS

TITLE

None Known

DATE

\_\_\_ FEDERAL \_\_\_ STATE \_\_\_ COUNTY \_\_\_ LOCAL

DEPOSITORY FOR  
SURVEY RECORDS

CITY, TOWN

STATE

## 7 DESCRIPTION

CONDITION		CHECK ONE	CHECK ONE
<input type="checkbox"/> EXCELLENT	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> DETERIORATED	<input type="checkbox"/> UNALTERED	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> ORIGINAL SITE
<input type="checkbox"/> GOOD	<input type="checkbox"/> RUINS	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> ALTERED	<input type="checkbox"/> MOVED      DATE _____
<input type="checkbox"/> FAIR	<input type="checkbox"/> UNEXPOSED		

DESCRIBE THE PRESENT AND ORIGINAL (IF KNOWN) PHYSICAL APPEARANCE

\*The Denmark Vesey house at 56 Bull Street faces sideways to Bull Street. The part nearest to the street is original, the rear part was added later. This building, as shown by a title search, has always been rental property as it is today.

Exterior: This one storey wooden building situated on low foundations contains two, evenly spaced windows on the south or street side. On the left or west side, sheltered by a shed porch roof with parapet are two front doors, flanked by two windows, one to a side. Beyond this, on the north side of the foregoing, is a door and a window (the later seems to date to the later addition of the rear). On the side wall of the porch is a small horizontal window. Porch roof is supported by five wooden, evenly spaced columns. Remainder of western side, the later addition, consists of a small horizontal window and a double window. Rear or north facade consists of two relatively evenly spaced windows. Eastern facade consists of four bays, all evenly spaced; however, in view of a large blank wall between the first window and the street, there may have once been a now closed window in this place.

All windows are six over six. Building is sheathed in clapboard. Bonding in piers is flemish, but repaired in standard and American bond.

Beneath the building near the present base of the existing chimney, is the remains of an older chimney base.

Interior: House consists of three rooms (original) arranged in consecutive order. These rooms all open on to the side piazza. Behind this are four rooms, arranged in a square, of the later addition. The chimney, which originally was exterior, is now in the center of the house and has been completely enclosed by wall board. A brief view of it can be had from a closet built on the east or right side of it. No mantels or other items of interior carving or decoration exist, if they ever existed. Rooms have plastered or wall board walls.

Surroundings: House is set back a few feet from a concrete sidewalk on the next to corner lot. To the west on the corner lot is a two-story house of late 19th century. On the opposite side, to the east, are three wooden buildings placed end on end, apparently built as apartments. These buildings also date late 19th century.

See page two of Architectural Description for:

\* Methodology used in locating Denmark Vesey's House

# 8 SIGNIFICANCE

PERIOD	AREAS OF SIGNIFICANCE -- CHECK AND JUSTIFY BELOW			
<input type="checkbox"/> PREHISTORIC	<input type="checkbox"/> ARCHEOLOGY-PREHISTORIC	<input type="checkbox"/> COMMUNITY PLANNING	<input type="checkbox"/> LANDSCAPE ARCHITECTURE	<input type="checkbox"/> RELIGION
<input type="checkbox"/> 1400-1499	<input type="checkbox"/> ARCHEOLOGY-HISTORIC	<input type="checkbox"/> CONSERVATION	<input type="checkbox"/> LAW	<input type="checkbox"/> SCIENCE
<input type="checkbox"/> 1500-1599	<input type="checkbox"/> AGRICULTURE	<input type="checkbox"/> ECONOMICS	<input type="checkbox"/> LITERATURE	<input type="checkbox"/> SCULPTURE
<input type="checkbox"/> 1600-1699	<input type="checkbox"/> ARCHITECTURE	<input type="checkbox"/> EDUCATION	<input type="checkbox"/> MILITARY	<input type="checkbox"/> SOCIAL/HUMANITARIAN
<input type="checkbox"/> 1700-1799	<input type="checkbox"/> ART	<input type="checkbox"/> ENGINEERING	<input type="checkbox"/> MUSIC	<input type="checkbox"/> THEATER
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> 1800-1899	<input type="checkbox"/> COMMERCE	<input type="checkbox"/> EXPLORATION/SETTLEMENT	<input type="checkbox"/> PHILOSOPHY	<input type="checkbox"/> TRANSPORTATION
<input type="checkbox"/> 1900-	<input type="checkbox"/> COMMUNICATIONS	<input type="checkbox"/> INDUSTRY	<input type="checkbox"/> POLITICS/GOVERNMENT	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> OTHER (SPECIFY)
		<input type="checkbox"/> INVENTION		<b>Afro-American History</b>

SPECIFIC DATES                      **1822**                      BUILDER/ARCHITECT                      **Not Known**

STATEMENT OF SIGNIFICANCE

Many rebellions and rumors of rebellions occurred throughout the South during the slavery period. One of the most alarming insurrections was that planned in 1822 by a free-black man, Denmark Vesey. Vesey was a trusted member of the free-black population who could read and write. He had been a resident of Santo Domingo, the scene of an earlier rebellion. Vesey designed an insurrection plan of such precision and efficiency that mass hysteria was created throughout the Carolinas and the South.

Little is known of Vesey's early years prior to 1781. However, it seems certain that he was no more than a generation removed from his African heritage, and that he was raised in the Virgin Islands among newly imported Africans whose culture and will to be free remained strong.

In 1781, Captain Joseph Vesey, a slaver, arrived at the island of Saint Thomas. He collected 390 slaves including young Denmark. The officers and crew made a "pet" of Denmark and as a result he was brought to the attention of Captain Vesey. The ship left Saint Thomas and landed in Santo Domingo where the cargo of slaves was sold. Captain Vesey took young Denmark back aboard ship as his personal servant.

Denmark's extensive travels exposed him to a variety of experiences and languages. He learned to speak Danish, English, French and Spanish, and witnessed the day-to-day cruelties of slavery. He observed the operation and workings of the infamous trade in human chattel, and had first-hand knowledge of the indignities suffered by his race in the ship's hold. Denmark viewed the public auction of human beings for approximately fourteen years.

As a result of the growing restrictions placed upon the foreign slave trade, Captain Vesey was influenced to leave the trade and settle in Charleston, South Carolina. Denmark remained with the Captain until the turn of the century when he won a \$1,500 lottery and purchased his freedom for \$600.

After obtaining his freedom, Denmark took the name of his former master and used the remainder of his funds to establish a carpentry business and residence at 20 Bull Street, Charleston. [Because of several address renumbering plans in the city of Charleston, Vesey's residence of 20 Bull Street in 1822 is today the address being nominated of 56 Bull Street.]

## 9 MAJOR BIBLIOGRAPHICAL REFERENCES

An Official Report of the Trials of Sundry Negroes Charged with an Attempt to Raise an Insurrection in the State of South Carolina, Prepared and Published at the Request of the Court, By Lionel H. Kennedy and Thomas Parker, the Presiding Magistrates of the Court. Charleston: James T. Schenck, 1822.

(PARTIAL LISTING)

## 10 GEOGRAPHICAL DATA

ACREAGE OF NOMINATED PROPERTY less than 1 acre

UTM REFERENCES

A	1,7	5,991,6,0	3,62,74,4,0	B			
	ZONE	EASTING	NORTHING		ZONE	EASTING	NORTHING
C				D			

VERBAL BOUNDARY DESCRIPTION

SEE CONTINUATION SHEET: VERBAL BOUNDARY DESCRIPTION, ITEM 10, PAGE TWO

LIST ALL STATES AND COUNTIES FOR PROPERTIES OVERLAPPING STATE OR COUNTY BOUNDARIES

STATE	CODE	COUNTY	CODE
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STATE	CODE	COUNTY	CODE
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## 11 FORM PREPARED BY

NAME / TITLE

Lynne Gomez Graves, Historical Projects Director

ORGANIZATION

Afro-American Bicentennial Corporation

DATE

October 30, 1975

STREET & NUMBER

1420 N Street, N.W., Suite 101

TELEPHONE

(202) 462-2519

CITY OR TOWN

Washington

STATE

D.C.

## 12 STATE HISTORIC PRESERVATION OFFICER CERTIFICATION

THE EVALUATED SIGNIFICANCE OF THIS PROPERTY WITHIN THE STATE IS:

NATIONAL \_\_\_

STATE \_\_\_

LOCAL \_\_\_

As the designated State Historic Preservation Officer for the National Historic Preservation Act of 1966 (Public Law 89-665), I hereby nominate this property for inclusion in the National Register and certify that it has been evaluated according to the criteria and procedures set forth by the National Park Service.

FEDERAL REPRESENTATIVE SIGNATURE

TITLE

DATE

FOR NPS USE ONLY

I HEREBY CERTIFY THAT THIS PROPERTY IS INCLUDED IN THE NATIONAL REGISTER

DATE

DIRECTOR, OFFICE OF ARCHEOLOGY AND HISTORIC PRESERVATION  
ATTEST:

DATE

KEEPER OF THE NATIONAL REGISTER

UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR  
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ARCHITECTURAL

CONTINUATION SHEET DESCRIPTION ITEM NUMBER #7 PAGE TWO

The problem was to locate Denmark Vesey's House. According to contemporary accounts, Vesey owned three houses in Charleston; however, the indices of the nineteenth century deeds revealed no such ownership. If he owned houses, the ownership must have been concealed through trusteeships which would be most difficult to find. No will, administration, nor inventory of his estate seems to exist, possibly due to his color and the crime of which he was accused.

The sole mention of an address for Vesey is to be found in the 1822 City Directory which gives his address as 20 Bull Street, obviously rental property. (This directory, as is the case with all such directories, was compiled the previous year.)

The numbering system of houses in Charleston is a developmental one and somewhat difficult to determine. Originally, buildings were located according to the numbered lots of the Grand Model of 1725. By 1800 the numbering system seems to have been up one side of the street to its end, then down the other side of the street to point of origin. With continuing subdivision of lots as well as destruction of buildings due to natural causes, such as fires, the city began to evolve its present method of having even numbers on the north or west side of the street, with odd numbers on the south or east sides. These numbers seem to have been changed by resolutions of the City Council. Unfortunately, such resolutions, if they still exist, are buried in the daily newspapers of the time for only the city ordinances prior to 1865 have survived.

The only way to reconstruct the numbering system of Charleston streets at any given period in the City's history is to conduct a title search of the properties along both sides of the street for whatever number of blocks are considered necessary for location of addresses. This furnishes the researcher with the home owners or persons who remain in a given location and thereby become the anchors of the numbering system. This also reconstructs the size of the lots at that moment in time. A title search also shows which lots have houses by so stating and by the selling price of the lot involved (a lot with a building always sales for considerably more than one with no building. Also, a title search gives a financial continuity of property values so that inflation and depression valuations can be shown and taken into consideration.) The Bull Street properties were researched from Coming to Rutledge (then called Lynch) Streets on both sides.

After the title search in the deeds was completed, taking the deeds back to 1800, the city directories for the years 1819 and 1822 were gone through page by page to copy the name and address of everyone who lived on Bull Street (the names are not arranged by street). These names were then arranged in ascending order according to the number of their address.

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ARCHITECTURAL  
CONTINUATION SHEET DESCRIPTION ITEM NUMBER #7 PAGE THREE

These ownerships and directory names and numbers were then placed on the Sanborn Insurance Maps of Bull Street (no early nineteenth century maps of Bull Street seem to exist) to determine who was living where and on whose land. According to this data, Vesey's house was located next to and just east of the northeast corner of Smith and Bull Streets.

The house on that lot, now numbered 56 Bull, would be the type of rental property for inhabitation by "free persons of color" (as the contemporary records call free blacks) in that the front room would have been business, the back room for living. Its Greek Revival architecture would have just come into vogue. In other words, the building had just been built when Vesey lived there. The foundations, which in two places have been repaired fairly recently in Flemish bond, were originally in American bond, a bonding which begins in Charleston about 1820. The bonding of the chimney is not viewable as the chimney (formerly exposed inside) is now covered over with wall board. The stack does not extend high enough above the roof ridge for determination. The building's shed roof probably demoted a place of business, although not enough architectural research has been conducted in Charleston to make such an assertion as fact. The parapet on the roof seems to date from about 1820, which also is about the beginning of the six over six light window sash. In typical Charleston single house style, the house is turned sideways to the street. The entrance should have been into the end of the piazza, but was probably altered at the date of the rear addition, perhaps in the first part of this century.

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CONTINUATION SHEET SIGNIFICANCE ITEM NUMBER 8 PAGE TWO

Vesey worked hard, and by 1822 had accumulated substantial wealth and established a respected name for himself. He remained in Charleston where the combined slave and free black population outnumbered that of the white.

White Charlestonians feared the possibility of a slave uprising and placed restrictions on free blacks to discourage any increase in the total black population. Although highly suspicious of the free black community, white Charlestonians were unaware of any real danger from free blacks until 1822.

As a traveling craftsman, Vesey was allowed to travel around Charleston as he engaged in his trade. However, he was not content to enjoy his freedom when his friends, as well as his family, were still held in captivity. Vesey was an avid reader, especially on all questions relating to slavery. He was intensely interested in the black rebellion in Santo Domingo and knew that a group of black men had successfully fought for their freedom in the Caribbean, so he too began to formulate plans.

Vesey was very selective in choosing followers and chose only those persons who hired their own time. His plans began as early as December 1821 when he selected Ned and Rolla Bennett, servants of Governor Thomas Bennett, as his first two deputies. Jack Purcell and Peter Poyas were chosen as lieutenants. Gullah Jack, who had influence over the slaves, and Monday Gell, an Ebo born in Africa, comprised the remaining members of Vesey's inner circle.

Meetings were held at Vesey's house. Money was secured for weapons and horses, and recruitment began. Plans were made to secure arms and supplies by seizing the well-stocked arsenal in Charleston. Vesey set the rebellion date for Sunday, July 14, 1822. Many whites left the city during the hot weekends and on Sundays large numbers of slaves were allowed to freely visit. Therefore, the commencement of the insurrection would not attract suspicion. Vesey also knew that from the 11th to the 18th the moon would not be visible and his insurgents could strike several points simultaneously under cover of darkness. The group prepared to fight for their freedom or die in the process.

On Saturday, May 25, Peter (also called Davany), a slave of Colonel John C. Prioleau, went to the fish market for a purchase and was informed of the impending crisis. Peter informed his master's wife of the news. Colonel Prioleau informed the City Council and Peter's informant was arrested. Peter Poyas and Mingo Harth were implicated. However, they maintained their composure during the interrogation and consequently were released for lack of evidence.

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Vesey feared that the plot would be discovered and rescheduled the date of insurrection to June 16. Vesey had lost the element of surprise. The city went on alert and Governor Bennett ordered the militia to be prepared.

Charleston was in an uproar. Whites were afraid to retire and the City Council appointed an investigative committee to discover the men behind the plot. Within twenty-four hours, ten men were arrested including Peter Poyas, Mingo Harth and four slaves of Governor Bennett. Members of the Charleston Bar were asked to organize a court to try the accused. The court was convened on June 19 and continued its hearings for two months.

Vesey was arrested June 21 and placed on trial the following day. For three days no one was able to present any positive proof of Vesey's involvement. He and his men remained faithful to their pledge of secrecy. Three of Vesey's men were offered immunity from punishment if they confessed. Subsequently, all three testified against him in the belief that by so doing their lives would be spared.

Three hundred and thirteen alleged participants were arrested, and of that number 67 were convicted and 35 executed. One of the South's most frightening exposures to an abortive insurrection was ended on July 2, 1822 when Denmark Vesey was sentenced to death.



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Aptheker, Herbert. American Negro Slave Revolts. New York: Columbia University Press, 1970.

Lofton, John. Insurrection in South Carolina. Yellow Springs, Ohio: The Antioch Press, 1964.

Wade, Richard C. "The Vesey Plot: A Reconsideration." Journal of Southern History XXX  
(May, 1964).

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CONTINUATION SHEET VERBAL BOUNDARY ITEM NUMBER 10 PAGE TWO

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The Denmark Vesey House sits on a city lot at 56 Bull Street, Charleston, South Carolina. The house is set back some few feet from a concrete sidewalk. This lot is second from Smith Street going east. To the west, on the corner lot, is a two-story house of late nineteenth century design. On the east side are three nineteenth century wooden buildings, apparently built as apartments.

Beginning at the point of intersection of the west property line and on adjoining lot, proceed in an easterly direction along the north curb of Bull Street to the east property line of the Vesey lot, then proceed north along the east property line, then west along the rear property line, then south along the west property line to the point of origin. This lot is shown on an accompanying plat map.

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CONTINUATION SHEET RESEARCHERS

ITEM NUMBER #11

PAGE

TWO

Dr. Elias Bull, Historian  
Berkeley-Charleston-Dorchester  
Regional Planning Council  
2 Court House Square  
Charleston, South Carolina 29401  
October 30, 1975

LEGEND

○ Circled numbers designate owner occupants in 1822.

⓪ Underlined circle numbers are those verified by Title Search.

Uncircled numbers within lot lines are per Charleston City Directory of 1822.

▨ Lots without construction in 1822.

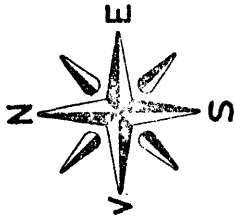
Names written above lot lines designate lot owners in 1822.

Names written within lot lines designate occupants in 1822.

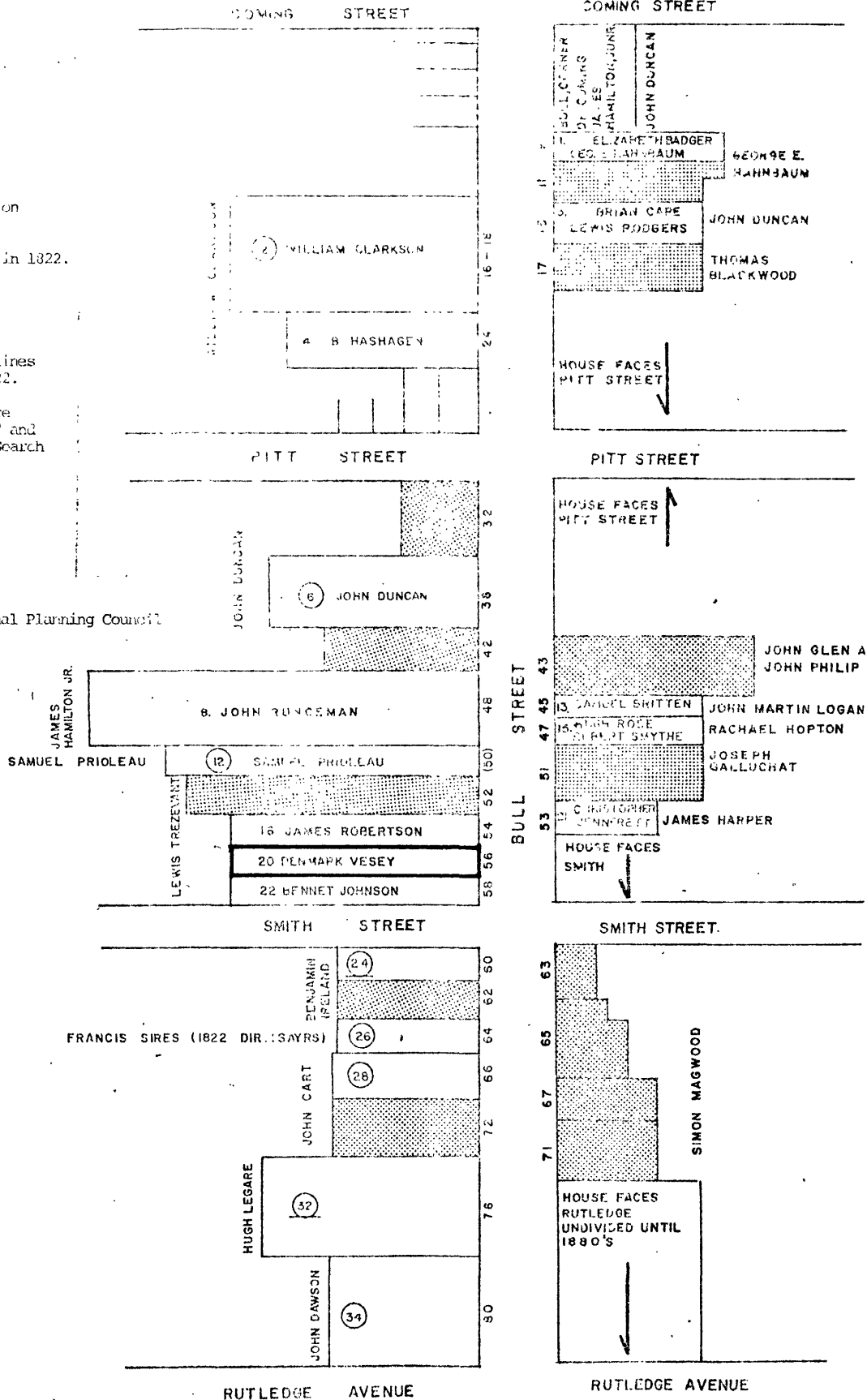
Lot shapes and position are based on Sanborn maps # 37 and #39 of Vol. 1, and Title Search of all lots shown below.

Not to Scale

Map produced by BCD Regional Planning Council



Charleston Property Plat Map  
Denmark Vesey House



RUTLEDGE AVENUE