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Research Project on Dorothea Abrahams

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Research Project

on

Dorothea Abrahams

by

Julia A. Powers
February 28, 1984

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Mrs. Dorothea Abrahams
(ca. 1779 - 1853)

Dorothea was born in Anastasia, West Indies, in 1779. She married Abraham De Lyon Abrahams in 1803. She died in 1853. In her will she left monies to open the Abrahms Home for indigent widows of Savannah.

Dorothea Connet Abrahams was born in Anastasia, West Indies, in the year 1779.¹ A lady from Philadelphia visited the island and on her return brought Dorothea with her.² During her childhood Dorothea met and went to school with Dolly Payne, later known as Mrs. Dolly Madison.³ In her early years and teens Dorothea lived with Mrs. Connet. After the death of Mrs. Connet, the banker⁴ through whom her business was transacted placed her in a boarding school for young ladies. It was during this time that Dorothea met and befriended a young girl from Savannah, a Miss Pooler.⁵

When Dorothea had completed her education, she was informed by her banker that she might choose a home anywhere she wished. Her friend Miss Pooler asked her to visit Savannah for a while. When she arrived, Captain Abraham D. Abrahams assisted her across the gangway. It was love at first sight and a few weeks later they became engaged.

¹General Index to Keepers Records Books, Laurel Grove Cemetery, Savannah, Georgia 1852-1938. Vol. 1 compiled by W.P.A. workers. 1939. pp. 1

²"Founder of Abrahams Home," Savannah Daily News, 6 October 1895 pp. 4 c. 1, 2.

³Ibid.

⁴I wrote to the Philadelphia Historical Society for any information concerning Dorothea Connet but have as yet received no reply.

⁵"Founder of Abrahams Home," Savannah Daily News, 6 October 1895 pp. 4 c. 1, 2.

Dorothea wrote a letter to her banker informing him of her engagement and provided references for Captain Abrahams. As all was found to be in order, she received permission to marry him and a check for several thousand dollars.⁶ Captain Abrahams and Dorothea were married on January 5, 1803, in Bryan County by the Hon. M. Burke at his house.⁷

Abraham De Lyon Abrahams was the son of Joseph Abrahams and Rebecca De Lyon.⁸ He was the great-grandson of Isaac De Lyon who arrived in Savannah in 1733 from Portugal.⁹ Abraham was the Military Agent Southern Department in the Chatham County Militia¹⁰ when he met Dorothea. Although he was doing well for himself in 1803, as late as 1801 he appears on the tax defaulter's list.¹¹ This list was made up of and included the names of almost every Jew in the city of Savannah.¹²

During the early years of their marriage, Dorothea and Abraham lived in Savannah. Abraham was the Military

⁶ Ibid.

⁷ M. B. Warren, Marriages and Deaths, 1763-1820 (Danielsville: Heritage Papers, 1968), pp. 2.

⁸ B. H. Levy, Savannah's Old Jewish Community Cemeteries (Macon: Mercer University Press, 1983), pp. 37.

⁹ Ibid.

¹⁰ Colonial Museum and Savannah Advertiser, 9 October 1802 pp. 3, c.2.

¹¹ Ibid., 10 March 1801 pp. 2, c.1.

¹² Rabbi Saul Jacob Ruben, (Third to None The Saga of Savannah Jewry 1733-1983 (Sa) pp. 85.

Agent for the Southern Department for the Southern Department and seems to have been earning a good living. During this period he bought eighteen pieces of land.¹³ Most of the land was later sold.¹⁴ Abraham was a member of Temple Mickve Israel. He paid an annual rent, for his pew, of \$13.00.¹⁵ Abraham was also designated hatan Torah in 1795.¹⁶

In 1806 an advertisement appeared in the Colonial Museum and Savannah Advertiser for a four and a half lease on their house and lot in Broughton Street.¹⁷ This ad would continue to run until 1825. In 1808 Dorothea and Abraham moved to Washington, D. C. James Madison was elected in that year and Dorothea's friendship with Dolly apparently earned Abraham an appointment under Madison.¹⁸ It was his own talent which kept him the job under the Monroe administration. The only reference to Abraham during this time is when he is called before the U. S. Senate to give testimony for John Smith of Ohio.¹⁹ There was also a letter from a

¹³ Chatham County Georgia, Superior Court, Index to Deeds 1785-1910 Grantor and Grantee Deed Books.

¹⁴ Ibid.

¹⁵ Rubin, Third to None. pp. 128.

¹⁶ Ibid. hatan Torah - carrier of the Torah.

¹⁷ Colonial Museum and Savannah Advertiser, 28 June 1806 pp. 2, c.1.

¹⁸ "Founder of Abrahams Home" Savannah Daily News, 6 October 1895 pp. 4, c.1.

¹⁹ Colonial Museum and Savannah Advertiser, 5 February 1808 pp. 2, c.2.

General Wilkinson to Mr. A. Abrahams, military agent for New Orleans.²⁰

In 1826 Abraham and Dorothea returned to Savannah and Abraham took up the reins of his life here. In April of 1826 he served on a committee appointed by the Grand Jury of the Superior Court of Chatham County to investigate the conditions of the jails in Savannah.²¹ In July of the same year Abraham served on the committee to select a citizen to deliver the funeral eulogy of Thomas Jefferson.²²

In 1830 the Abrahams household consisted of eleven people: Dorothea. Abraham, six male slaves, ages ranging from ten to one hundred and three female slaves, ages ranging from thirty-six to one hundred.²³

In 1837, Abraham started renting the houses on Broughton Street, four in all.²⁴ This ad would run every year until his death. Abraham died on April 17, 1844 of Apoplexy; a Dr. Richardson was in attendance on him.²⁵ He was 71 years old when he died. Abraham was buried in the Jewish Cemetery in Savannah. In his will he left all his property

²⁰ Ibid. 27 July 1809 pp. 3, c.2.

²¹ Savannah Georgian 26 April 1826 pp. 2, c.2.

²² Ibid. 15 July 1826 pp. 2, c.1.

²³ Census for the State of Georgia Chatham County 1830.
#9 on 281.

²⁴ Savannah Georgian 23 September 1837 pp. 3, c.6.

²⁵ Chatham County, Georgia; Death Certificate Abraham De Lyon Abrahams 1844.

and estates to Dorothea.²⁶

In 1849 Dorothea was living at 179 Broughton Street.²⁷ The house was in Liberty Ward which was originally laid out soon after the Revolutionary War.²⁸ In July 15, 1852, Dorothea bought a mulatto girl, aged twelve, from George Wyllly.²⁹ On January 7, 1853, Dorothea bought land from the City Council for her burial plot. The land was lot #10 in Laurel Grove Cemetery.³⁰

On February 6, 1853, Dorothea Abrahams died from Dropsy at the age of 73.³¹ Her funeral was held at 10 o'clock on February 7, 1853.³² When her will was read, it was discovered that, after making a few small bequests, Dorothea had left the bulk of her estate for the establishment of a home for indigent or widowed ladies.³³ Lots number thirty-three and thirty-four on Broughton Street were left to build moon.

²⁶ Jewish Cemetery Records Savannah Georgia, pp. 1 Lot #22.

²⁷ Chatham County, Georgia; Probate Court file #83.

²⁸ David H. Galloway, Directory of the City of Savannah for the Year 1849 (Savannah, Edward C. Councell 1848).

²⁹ Ibid, 1848.

³⁰ Chatham County, Georgia; Superior Court Book 3'E'339.

³¹ Ibid, Book 3'K'431.

³² Chatham County, Georgia; Death Certificate Dorothea Abrahams 1853.

³³ Daily Morning News, 7 February pp. 2, c.5.

upon. ³⁴

In 1856 two pieces of her property were sold for a total of \$8570.00. The land was sold to George Wymerly Jones and Joseph V. Connerat.³⁵ On July 3, 1856, the cornerstone for the Abrahams Home was laid.³⁶ John S. Norris was the architect;³⁷ he was also one of the executors of Dorothea's will. The building was finished in 1858, and opened for residency in April of that year.³⁸

The building is located at the corner of Broughton and East Broad Streets. It is ninety by forty feet and three stories high. In the year it was built it was described as follows:

"On the first floor are ten chambers and a dining room. The second floor and third floor contain eleven chambers each, and two larger rooms, the large room on the second floor being for directresses, and on the third for a sick ward. The chambers are thirty-two in number, and each has a fireplace and closet. The entire cost for building was under \$14,000.00."³⁹

³⁴Chatham County, Georgia; Probate Court file #95.

³⁵Chatham County, Georgia; Superior Court Books 3.0.548 and 3.P.456.

³⁶Daily Morning News, 4 July 1856 pp. 2, c.2.

³⁷Mary Lane Morrison, John S. Norris, Architect in Savannah 1846-1860. (Savannah, Beehive Press; 1980) pp.32-34

³⁸Daily Morning News, 9 April 1858 pp. 2, c.2.

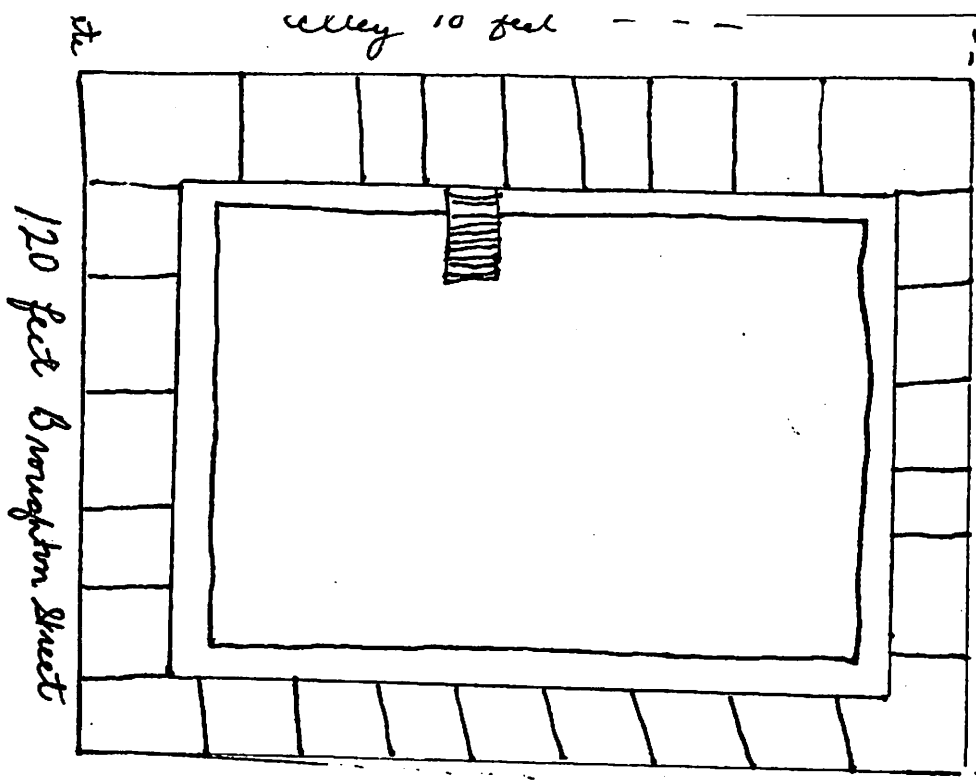
³⁹Ibid.

The Abrahams Home of today is a boarding home for aged women who are basically in good health and can care for themselves. There are accommodations for thirty permanent residents. The residents pay their room and board on a sliding scale according to their income.⁴⁰

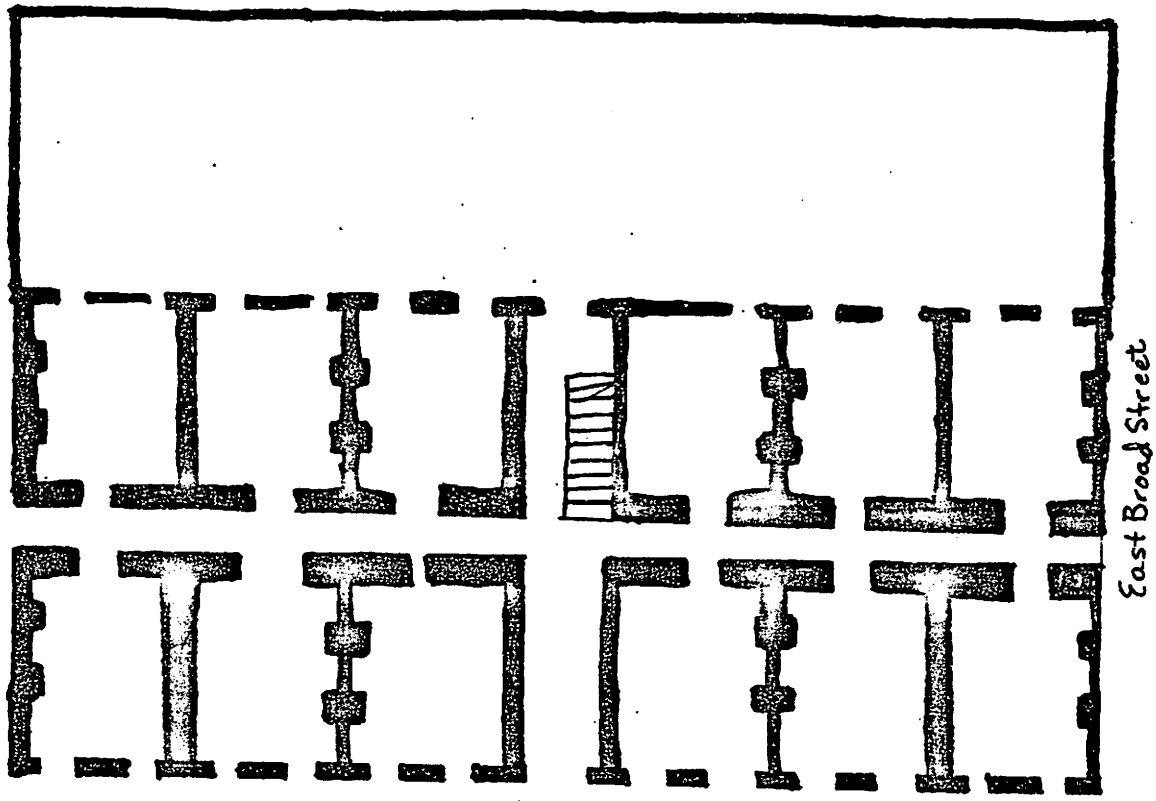
The general running of the Home is done by a Board of Managers, women who are dedicated to helping others. The Home operates on gifts and bequests from local citizens and receives no public funds. It is strictly a private benevolent society and depends entirely on resources from guests and friends of the home.⁴¹

⁴⁰The Abrahams Home. privately printed pamphlet.

⁴¹Ibid.



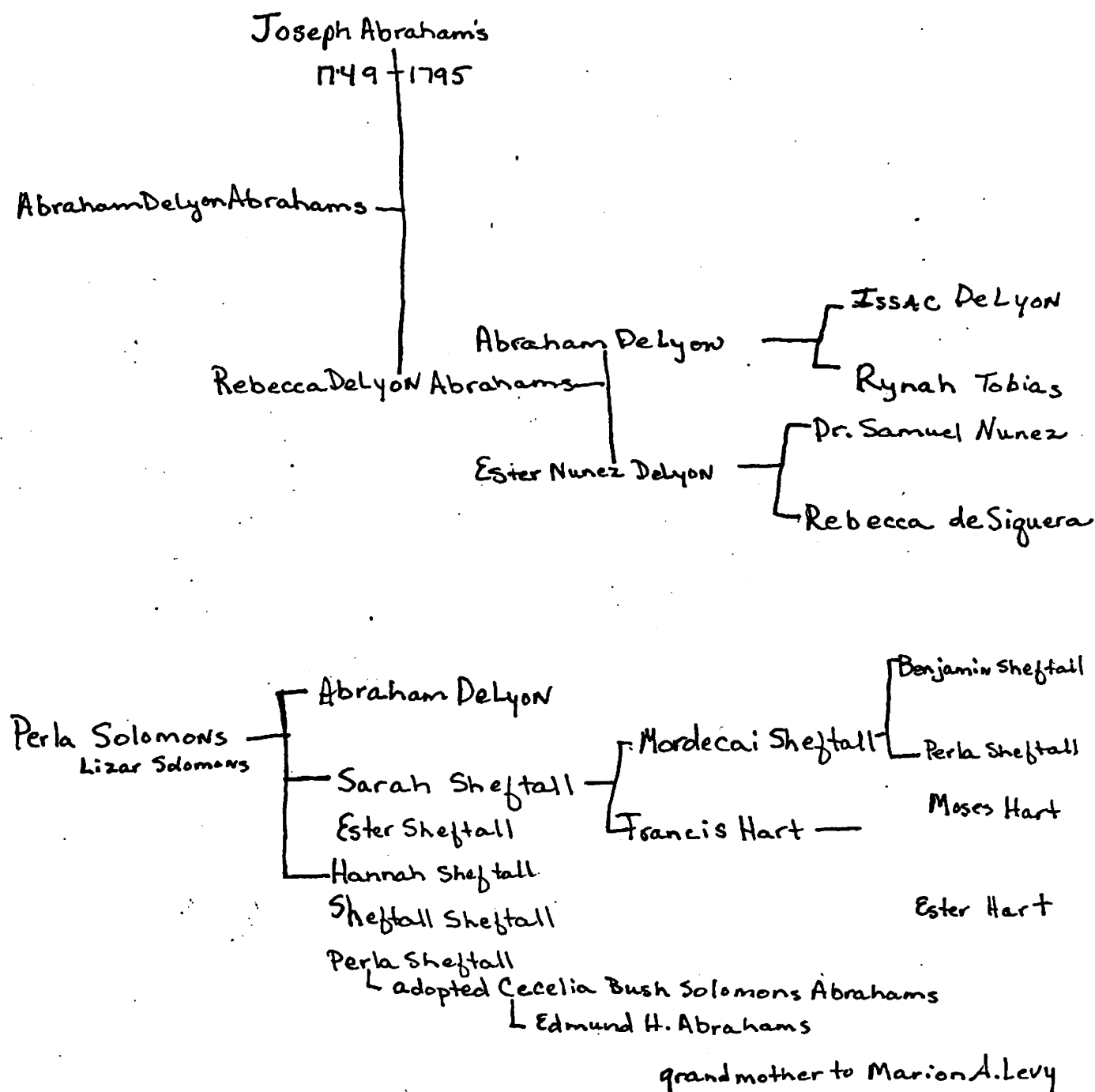
E. Broad street 90 feet
 Building 2 feet from ground the first story 10 feet high
 2 second story 8 feet high
 (Dorothea's plan)



Broughton Street

(actual building)

Family Tree of A.D. Abrahams



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