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CHARLESTON

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AVERY RESEARCH CENTER  
FOR AFRICAN AMERICAN  
HISTORY AND CULTURE

## Inventory of the DeReef Court and Park Collection

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## Descriptive Summary

<b>Title:</b>	DeReef Court and Park Collection
<b>Bulk</b>	1990-2012
<b>Inclusive</b>	1854-2012
<b>Creator:</b>	Miller, Mary S.
<b>Abstract:</b>	<p>DeReef Court is a former African-American residential housing community in the City of Charleston, South Carolina established in 1854. Named after Joseph and Richard Edward DeReef, free men of color who were successful entrepreneurial brothers. Presently, the residential park known as DeReef Park represents the last green space in the Cannonborough/Elliottborough neighborhood.</p> <p>The collection holds ancestral histories, photocopied deeds and census reports regarding the DeReef brothers; correspondence with emails; documents regarding United Missionary Chapel in 9 DeReef Court, local African-American churches and praise houses; information regarding Cannonborough/Elliottborough and Radcliffeborough neighborhoods; signed petitions regarding "Save DeReef Park;" City of Charleston planning commission reports; city council minutes; meeting notes taken by Mary Miller; transcripts from community residents interviews; Smith-Morris Neighborhood planned unit development reports; and various newspaper articles regarding DeReef Court and Park and the City of Charleston.</p>
<b>Extent:</b>	0.25 linear foot (1 archival box)
<b>Repository:</b>	Avery Research Center
<b>Call Number:</b>	AMN 1128
<b>Language of Material:</b>	Material in English

## Historical Note

DeReef Court was named for Joseph (1802-1876) and Richard Edward DeReef (1798-1876), two successful free men of color in 19th-century Charleston. The brothers obtained their wealth through the purchase of real estate and establishing a lumber factory. Refusing to allow Charleston tax collectors to describe their status as "free mulattoes," the brothers claimed their mother's (Nancy DeReef), Native American ancestry. The DeReef brothers challenged and won their case in the Court of Common Pleas (1823). Richard DeReef was appointed to Charleston City Council in 1868. The brothers were founding members of the Brown Fellowship Society, a benevolent society for free men of color.

DeReef Court is located between Jasper and Smith Streets and DeReef Park is bordered by Morris Street in Charleston, South Carolina. From 1854 to the 1960s, DeReef Court and Park held a vibrant African-American residential and business community. During the 20th century, the Court and Park's neighbors included the former Brooks Motel, Shiloh AME Church, and the Cannon Street YMCA (which remains in existence). The neighborhood fell into decline during the latter 20th century.

Currently DeReef Park represents the last green space situated in an largely urban residential area. The former United Missionary Chapel, located at 9 DeReef Court, has been identified as an historic "praise house" church, (traditionally non-denominational African-American congregations that were typically located in rural locations). The small wood frame building is a notable example of early 20th-century African-American vernacular architecture in Charleston, SC. In the past, the Chapel was utilized as a church and meeting hall by various groups.

With the City of Charleston's approval, initial redevelopment of DeReef Court and Park occurred in 2002 with the Smith-Morris Neighborhood Planned Unit Development. "In 2011, a contingent of residents petitioned Charleston City Council to intervene in land development formally known as "Morris Square," and force the developers to meet with the group regarding their concerns." The challenge to "Save DeReef Court" from the construction of forty-one (41) condominium units was challenged by numerous individuals, the Cannonborough/Elliottborough and Radcliffeborough Neighborhood Associations and organizations including the Preservation Society of Charleston.

Mary S. Miller is a former librarian, community activist, and resident of the Radcliffeborough community. She is a member of the non-profit Charleston, SC organization, "Friends of DeReef Park." The citizen-led group is "dedicated to limiting further residential and commercial development with the objective of preserving green space and a mission of fostering the development and creation of an American heritage park site, including historical Native American, African American and Jewish social, cultural and economic institution." The group seeks to achieve their objective by "fundraising monies to purchase part or all of DeReef Court (Morris Square, Phase II) from the developer, and educating the public on the history of the site."

## Collection Overview

The collection holds ancestral histories, photocopied deeds and census reports regarding the DeReef brothers; correspondence with emails; documents regarding the history and structural condition of United Missionary Chapel in 9 DeReef Court; information regarding local African-American churches and praise houses; information regarding Cannonborough/Elliottborough and Radcliffeborough neighborhoods; signed petitions regarding "Save DeReef Park;" City of Charleston planning commission reports; city council minutes; meeting notes taken by Miller; transcripts from community residents interviews; Smith-Morris Neighborhood planned unit development reports; and various newspaper articles regarding DeReef Court and Park, and the City of Charleston.

The collection contains one series: DeReef Court and Park Historical Information, 1854-2012.

## Collection Arrangement

1. DeReef Court and Park Historical Information, 1854-2012

## Restrictions

### Access Restrictions

No restrictions.

### Copyright Notice

## Subject Headings

DeReef, Joseph, 1802-1876

DeReef, Richard Edward, 1798-1876

Miller, Mary S.

African American churches--South Carolina--Charleston

African Americans--South Carolina--Charleston--History

Cannonborough/Elliotborough Neighborhood--South Carolina--Charleston

DeReef Court--Charleston, South Carolina

DeReef family.

DeReef Park--Charleston, South Carolina

Radcliffeborough Neighborhood--South Carolina--Charleston

United Missionary Chapel--South Carolina--Charleston

## **Administrative Information**

### **Preferred Citation note**

[Identification of item], DeReef Court and Park Collection, Charleston, South Carolina, Avery Research Center, College of Charleston, Charleston, SC, USA.

### **Acquisitions Information**

The donor of this collection is Mary S. Miller, a retired librarian, community activist, and resident of the Radcliffeborough neighborhood. As a member of the "Friends of DeReef Park," Miller researched and collected documents pertaining to the history of DeReef Court and Park in an interest to preserve and save DeReef Park from redevelopment.

### **Processing Information**

Processed by Georgette Mayo, March 2014

Edited by Aaron Spelbring, March 2014

Encoded by Aaron Spelbring, March 2014

## **Works Cited**

Friends of DeReef Park. "About: Saving a Charleston Heritage Park." Web. 18 Mar 2014. Preservation Society of Charleston. "Save DeReef Park" 18 Nov. 2011. Web 18 Mar 2014.

## Detailed Description of the Collection

### Series 1: DeReef Court and Park Historical Information, 1854-2012

This series contains documents pertaining to the DeReef Family history, and their property known as DeReef Court and Park. Also, included are materials relating to the cause of "Save DeReef Park."

Box 1 Folder 1	DeReef Family, 1854, 1877, 1980, 1981, 1990, 2011
	Re: Richard and Joseph DeReef with ancestral history; photocopy of land deed (1854); handwritten transcription of Richard E. DeReef's will (1877); notes regarding land purchases.
Box 1 Folder 2	DeReef Court, 1861, 2011, undated
	Includes histories, property chronologies and census records (1861).
Box 1 Folder 3	DeReef Court, 1943, 1971, 2008, 2011, undated
	Includes photocopy of property title to City Council of Charleston (1943); emails; and plats (1971, 2008, 2011).
Box 1 Folder 4	9 DeReef Court: United Missionary Chapel, 1930, 1980, 1985, 1988, 1994, 1996, 2008, undated
	Includes property records; architectural drawings; photocopied (black & white) images of church structure; correspondence; and essays regarding "Praise Houses."
Box 1 Folder 5	DeReef Park, 1999, undated
	Contains history of location; "Community Outreach" essay by Lois Simms; and newspaper article.
Box 1 Folder 6	Cannonborough/Elliotborough and Radcliffeborough Neighborhoods, 1994, 2003, 2011, undated
	Information pertaining to neighborhood associations: emails, letters regarding DeReef Park/Court meetings and development concerns; newspaper article regarding Cannon Street YMCA. Also, includes the signed petitions from "Save DeReef Park," regarding request to Charleston City Council to cease development plans for the Park, initiated by "Concerned Citizens of Cannonborough-Elliotborough and Radcliffeborough."
Box 1 Folder 7	Interview transcripts, 2011
	Transcripts from informal interviews from community residents, Eugene Graves, Mary Miller and Lois Simms.
Box 1 Folder 8	Charleston City Council minutes, 1972, 1993, 2002
	Meeting minutes with references to DeReef Court.
Box 1 Folder 9	Smith Morris Neighborhood, 2002, 2003, 2006, 2011, 2012
	Reports created by Civitas regarding planned unit development; and City of Charleston Planning commission rezonings for DeReef Court (2002).
Box 1 Folder 10	City of Charleston Plans, 2000, undated

Re city development plan in various locations throughout the city; (not involving DeReef Court).

Box 1 Folder 11 Information regarding Community Churches, 1988, 2011, undated

Church programs and newspaper articles regarding African American churches.

Box 1 Folder 12 Various Newspaper Articles regarding Charleston, South Carolina, 1997, 1999, 2011