

the Charleston Gazette

THE STATE NEWSPAPER — OUR 136TH YEAR

www.gazette.com

Readers' forum

Brown family played role in historic area

Editor:

I was elated to read about Anthony Kinzer and the West Virginia Center for

African-American Art and Cultures.

As a descendant of slaves in Charleston, my family played a significant role on "the block."

My uncle A.H. Brown opened half the buildings on the block. They housed offices for doctors, dentists, an art gallery, lawyers, banks, insurance companies; all on the Washington Street side. On the Shrewsbury Street side, there were barber shops, a Brown Family restaurant. My grandparents, Merle Brown had a shoe repair shop and my grandmother, Manila Brown Davis, had a tailoring shop.

There were other businesses including the M&S Pharmacy that was the meeting place for professionals and nonprofessionals, where everyone was equal. Mr. Brown had his real estate company. Hundreds of black people were hired and this had a significant impact on Charleston. Mr. Kinzer discussed the Ferguson Hotel, but Captain Ferguson's half of the building also housed the Ferguson Movie Theater, restaurant and other businesses for the segregated black community. Mr. Ferguson's property was on Washington and Spurlock Alley.

Across Washington Street from the hotel was the white front restaurant and the First Baptist Church. This property is now owned by the U.S. Postal Service. On Shrewsbury Street, across from the Brown Building, there was a pharmacy, J.L. Cleaners and a poolroom. There were other black-owned businesses on Shrewsbury Street and Leon Sullivan Way.

I'm a strong advocate for the designation as a historic area.

Joan Porter Green
Charleston