

Kitty Springs

Kitty Springs, formally known as Catherine B. "Kitty" Smith Springs, was born in 1834 in the St. Stephen area. Possibly the descendant of native Lowcountry Cherokee Indians, African-Americans, and European whites, these cultures influenced her desire to help the local Indians and the multi-racial poor of the area. An ambitious young woman, Kitty moved to Charleston and opened a clothing and millinery shop. She was very good at what she did, so good that she moved to Summerville to create another successful clothing business. She married Richard Springs, a white man 19 years her elder. Interracial marriages were not recognized at the time. When he died in 1889, Richard Springs willed all his possessions and property to her for her "services for years as a housekeeper."

Over time Kitty bought a considerable amount of land around the current county offices and Hutchinson Square, unusual for a woman of color in the 1800s. She became a philanthropist in 1880.

Kitty donated a parcel of land and money to build St. Barnabas Mission, a day school that also served as a public health center and mission church. She also donated money and land to build landmark institutions such as the Church of the Epiphany and the Bank School, the beginning of public education for blacks.

Kitty is remembered not only for her economic achievements as a businesswoman but also for her benevolence and generosity. The wooden St. Barnabas Mission Chapel with bright red trim is now known as Bishop Pengelley Memorial Chapel (705 South Main Street). When Kitty Springs died in 1895, the Alston School was built on land she deeded.