

SAVANNAH EASTERN WHARVES
Southern shore of Savannah River, Lamar Ward
Savannah
Chatham County
Georgia

HAER GA-157
HAER GA-157

PHOTOGRAPHS

WRITTEN HISTORICAL AND DESCRIPTIVE DATA

FIELD RECORDS

HISTORIC AMERICAN ENGINEERING RECORD
SOUTHEAST REGIONAL OFFICE
National Park Service
U.S. Department of the Interior
100 Alabama St. NW
Atlanta, GA 30303

HISTORIC AMERICAN ENGINEERING RECORD

SAVANNAH EASTERN WHARVES

HAER No. GA-157

Location: Southern shore of Savannah River
Lamar Ward, Savannah
Chatham County, Georgia

U.S.G.S. 7.5 minute Savannah, Georgia quadrangle
Universal Transverse Mercator coordinates:
17.492509.3548894

Date of Construction: 1855

Engineer: Unknown

Builder: Samuel N. Papot

Present Owner: Village at Oglethorpe Landing, LLC
348 Enterprise Drive
Valdosta, GA 31601

Present Use: Abandoned
To be demolished 2008

Significance: The Savannah Eastern Wharves are eligible for the National Register of Historic Places under criteria C, architecture and engineering. The wharves are significant at the local level for their role in shipping and commerce in Savannah.

Report Prepared by: William M. Brockenbrough
Senior Architectural Historian
Brockington and Associates, Inc.
31 Park of Commerce Way, Suite 200A
Savannah, Georgia 31405

Date: April 2007

I. Physical Description of the Savannah Eastern Wharves

Just east of downtown Savannah, below the bluff in Lamar Ward, lie the Savannah Eastern Wharves. The Wharves were developed as early as 1855 by the Eastern Wharf Company. They exist in ruin condition, their timbers fully visible only at low tide. Approximately 200 yards in length, the Wharves are oriented in an east-west direction, on the southern shore of the Savannah River, extending from the present site of the Marriot Hotel to the Lamar Canal on the eastern end (Figure 1).

II. History of the Eastern Wharves

Creation of the Eastern Wharf Company

The rise of Savannah as one of the major ports on the East Coast began when Georgia merchants and farmers began to cultivate and trade the agricultural products that would bring wealth to the young state.

General James Oglethorpe selected the high ground of Yamacraw Bluff overlooking the Savannah River as the site on which to lay out his plan for the new colony of Georgia, and with this action gave rise to the City of Savannah. An earthen fortification was constructed along the eastern perimeter of the bluff, with the land below the bluff consisting of marsh. This marshland remained in its natural state until the last quarter of the eighteenth century.¹ As Georgia transitioned from the rule of Trustees to colonial government, the colony became immersed in the rice and plantation culture that had already boosted South Carolina's economic success. Marsh land throughout coastal Georgia was transformed from its natural state to rice fields; including the eastern marsh below Savannah. Trunks and dams were constructed to control the flow of fresh water for the irrigation of rice. Whether this transition occurred before or after the American Revolution is unclear.²

By 1800, the area around the Eastern Wharves was under rice cultivation; the river's edge delineated the "margin" of the cultivated land, as is indicated on an 1800 Survey of Savannah (Figure 2). An 1805 map of the city indicates that the area is being targeted for commercial use for the first time (Figure 3). The 1805 map indicates that lots have been laid out, however, this early attempt at development proved unsuccessful.³ It was not until the late 1830s that improvements were made to these lots.⁴

¹ Council, R. Bruce and Nicholas Honerkamp. *An Archeological Survey of the Proposed Radisson Hotel Construction Site and River Walk Corridor Savannah, Chatham County, Georgia*. Prepared for Columbia Essex Corporation, Ft. Mitchell, Kentucky. Prepared by the Jeffrey L. Brown Institute of Archeology, The University of Tennessee at Chattanooga (1990):6.

² Ibid. 8.

³ Ibid. 9.

The area below town that had been used for rice production was converted to dry culture with the passing the 1817 city ordinance prohibiting wet culture within one mile of the city limits.⁵ This action was taken after several outbreaks of yellow fever and malaria, the causes of which were mistakenly attributed to low-lying swampland and the vapors that rose from them. The transformation of the rice fields was subsidized by contracts by the city to rice planters to drain the marshes to facilitate the use of dry agricultural methods. As seen on the 1825 map of Savannah, the area remained in dry agricultural use through the 1820s and 1830s (Figure 4). The project area was eventually developed by a speculative partnership known as the Eastern Wharf Company.⁶ In 1836, the partnership purchased 75 acres of land that had previously been rice fields below the Savannah bluff. G. B. Lamar, Jacob P. Henry, Elias Bliss, George Hall, Francis M. Stone, and William Williams were the stakeholders in the Eastern Wharf Company.⁷

Early Development of the Eastern Wharves

As the seaport and rail hub of for lumber, cotton, and rice, as well as the receiving port for imported goods, Savannah experienced an economic boom in the years leading up to the American Civil War.⁸ This success fostered a sense of optimism among the city's residents that was not quelled until the fall of Savannah in December of 1864. The area was commonly known as the Eastern Wharves by 1838, when the Savannah City Council extended the eastern city limits to include the area and extended Bay Street through to the Wharves.⁹ The 1840 Stephens Savannah City Map shows the growth of the Eastern Wharves, including lot divisions (Figure 5). The map indicates that a uniform wharf line had been created, and the lots had been filled to a dry grade.¹⁰

One of the earliest businesses located in the area known as the Eastern Wharves was a foundry, which was in operation by 1840. The foundry, owned by Alvin N. Miller, was located south of Bay Street. Having previously leased this land, Miller purchased both the back lot and the wharf lot from the Central Railroad in 1846.¹¹ By the 1848 Bancroft census, several new

⁴ Butler, Scott. *Reconnaissance Survey of Approximately 20 Acres, Eastern Wharf Lots 3-6 and Cotton Warehouse Tract, Lamar Ward, Savannah, Georgia*. Prepared for Thomas and Hutton Engineering, Inc., and the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, Savannah District. Prepared by Brockington and Associates, Inc., Atlanta, Georgia (1996):9.

⁵ Ibid, idem.

⁶ Ibid. 11.

⁷ Ibid.

⁸ Fraser, Walter J. *Savannah in the Old South*. The University of Georgia Press, Athens (2003).

⁹ Council, R. Bruce and Nicholas Honerkamp.

¹⁰ Ibid.

¹¹ Chatham County Deed Book 3D:423.

businesses were also in operation along the Eastern Wharves; these included both the Hydraulic Cotton Press Company and the Bullock and Winton Steam Saw Mill. A cotton press and storage sheds were constructed by G. B. Lamar on Lots 1 and 2 shortly after the Bancroft census.¹²

The 1853 Vincent map of Savannah illustrates the extent to which the Eastern Wharves were developed at that time (Figure 6). Located on the waterfront are Baldwin's Cotton press on Lamar Creek, A. N. Miller's Foundry, and the Hydraulic Cotton Press Company. The Cooper map of 1856 shows similar development on the wharf, with the Savannah Tyler Press replacing Baldwin's Cotton Press on the eastern end of the wharf (Figure 7).¹³

III. Construction of the Eastern Wharves

In September 1854, a major hurricane struck coastal Georgia, causing significant damage to the Eastern Wharves. The full extent of the damage is not known, however "Baldwin's Cotton Press and the buildings and A. N. Miller's foundry were unroofed."¹⁴ The damage to the wharves was significant enough to warrant the rebuilding of the structure between Robert's saw mill and Willink's Ship Railway. Within a few months of the hurricane, a contract was made between the Mayor of Savannah, Edward C. Anderson, and Samuel N. Papot for rebuilding the Eastern Wharves. This contract provides the most detailed description of the wharves and their construction.

Contract with Samuel N. Papot for Building Eastern Wharves

Articles of agreement made and entered into this first day of November one thousand eight hundred and fifty-four between Samuel N. Papot of Savannah in the County of Chatham and State of Georgia on the first part hereby covenants and agrees with the said Edward C. Anderson as follows, to wit: That he the said Samuel N. Papot will excavate and remove the old wharf at the Eastern extremity of the City of Savannah situate on the south bank of the Savannah River. Between Roberts and Austin saw mill and the Willinks Ship Railway, and rebuild the same in accordance with the plan which has been shown him by the party of the second part the whole work to be done in a substantial and workmanlike manner and the materials to wit southern pine timbers and iron to be the best qualities for the consideration hereinafter named.

In accordance with the plan mentioned above and now in the hands of the said party of the second party the said Samuel N. Papot covenants and egress to

¹² Ibid, idem.

¹³ Butler, 13

¹⁴ Ibid, idem., 14

establish the foundations by driving piles along the front line of the proposed wharf at intervals of three feet six inches in the clear or four feet six inches from center to center and to drive each pile until the resistance is such as to ensure perfect stability in the superstructure, the piles to be cut with shoulder and tenons at the level of mean low water and capped with square timbers not less than fourteen inches to the side, let on with close fitting mortices. Having thus established the foundation piles and caps the latter will be secured by land ties eighteen feet in length and four feet apart in the clear dovetailed as represented in said plan and notched into an anchor timber resting behind a row of substantial piles driven at intervals of eight feet on a line parallel to the wharf front and fifteen feet from said front, each of said land ties to be further secured by iron bolts not less [than] 7/8 inch diameter. To prevent the mud from washing out from beneath these, the lowest land ties to drive a row of four inch plank or sheet pile immediately behind the foundation caps with their edges in contact with the adjacent ones and to lay a flooring of three and one half inch plank on top of the above described land ties for the purpose of supporting the ballast and earth to be used for filling the wharf. To build the front of the wharf with square logs of pine timber placed on top of the other up as high as ten feet above mean low water level and secured there by iron bolts of not less than 7/8 inch diameter at intervals of four and a half feet and by land ties at intervals of eight feet in the clear extending back in the bank twenty eight feet and there secured to the first row of anchor piles in the same manner as the foundation ties. The land ties to be placed and secured as above described between every other course of lags forming the wharf front, the upper ties of set of ties to have the additional security of anchor timbers placed on each side of the row of anchor piles nearest of the row nearest the wharf front to be long enough to extend three feet above the top of the wharf flooring for post to fasten a lone to. To place substantial fender piles at intervals eighteen feet along the front of the wharf with these points firmly secured in the bottom of the river and the tops well fastened with iron bolts to the main timbers.

In consideration of the full and faithful performance by the said Samuel N. Papot of the first part, of all the above described and as set fort in detail in the aforesaid plan Edward C. Anderson the party of the second part covenants and agrees to pay him the said Samuel N. Papot at the rate of fourteen dollars and seventy five cents (14.75) per running foot measuring along the front line of said wharf partial monthly payments to be made in the following manner, to wit, at the end of each month the amount of work done as ascertained by reference to the time roll exhibiting the number of days labor performed and the materials applied during the month to be paid for by the said party of the second part withholding twenty five per centum of the amount found to be due at the end of each month, the said twenty five per centum to be held in the hands of the said party of the second part until the whole work herein covenanted and agreed upon between parties to these present shall be fully abide faithfully executed in strict accordance

with the terms and stipulations hereinbefore set forth. And it is further expressly understood and agreed by the parties to these presents that the whole work herein contracted for shall and if the said work is at any time abandoned by the said Samuel N. Papot that he shall have no claim upon the said Edward C. Anderson for any pro rata compensation or upon and quantum merint [sp?] for the work which is done, but the said work shall be forfeited and enurr to the benefit of the said Edward C. Anderson. In addition to the foregoing it is expressly understood, stipulated and agreed between the parties above named that the said Samuel N. Papot will at his expense and as part of this contract fill in said wharf with earth and other materials in a solid and substantial manner up to the flooring of 3 ½ inch plank so that the bottom ties and said flooring shall rest firmly and solidly on said filling. In witness whereof the said Samuel N. Papot hath hereunto set his hand and seal and Edward C. Anderson hath set his and hand and seal the day and year first above written.

Signed and Sealed and Delivered	(seal)	Saml N. Papot
In presence of		
	(seal)	Edwd C. Anderson
A. C. Davenport		
Tho. H. Harden		

The new wharves were completed in 1855.¹⁵ The contract between Papot and the City of Savannah gives the most accurate description of the wharves and their construction. The methods described in the document are visible in the extant remains of the wharves, including the land ties, square timbers, sheet pile, flooring, and fender piles. The methods of attachment, including tenon joints and iron bolts are still evident. The ballast that filled the wharf remains on the site.

The Eastern Wharves began to play a key role in the state's economic growth during the years leading up to the Civil War, especially given the importance of foundries and the ability to manufacture war material for the Southern States. In 1860, the state of Georgia contracted with the Fort Pitt Foundry of Pittsburg for cannon, only to have the delivery declined as tensions between the north and south increased. Instead, Georgia ordered cannon made in Richmond at the Tredegar Iron Works; the State also contracted with A. N. Miller for six 32-pounder seacoast guns. Other guns were ordered from Miller in addition to the 32 pounders, including 24 pounders, 10-inch seacoast mortars, as well as projectiles and shells.¹⁶

¹⁵ Georgia Historical Society, Wayne-Sites-Anderson Papers, Manuscript collection 846, Box 22, Folder 511. Transcribed in Council and Honerkamp, 71.

¹⁶ Ibid, idem., 19.

Consistent with the Eastern Wharves' prominence as a center for producing and receiving war materials, the Miller's Foundry was chosen for the 1862 launching of the ironclad *Georgia*. The wooden hull was armored and fitted out at the site. Though the ship was designed as a self-propelled ironclad, the fact that the ship was under-powered became apparent upon its completion. As a result, the *Georgia* served as a stationary gun-platform, moored off Fort Jackson, below Savannah. To the west of the project tract, several ships were constructed for the Confederate Navy at Henry Willink's shipyard. The ironclad *Savannah* and the gunboat *Macon* were launched from Willink's ways, and the hull for the ironclad *Milledgeville* was complete when both the shipyard and Miller's foundry were burned by retreating Confederate troops on December 20, 1864.¹⁷

The full extent of war damage to the Eastern Wharves is not known; however, it is likely that the cotton presses and warehouses survived the war. Sherman seized all of the South's commercial assets, particularly cotton, as war prizes, famously giving President Lincoln Savannah as a Christmas present. Local officials agreed to end resistance, thus sparing the city the destruction Sherman wrought on the countryside on his way to the coast, and Columbia on his way north.¹⁸ As valuable war prizes, cotton and other commodities were sold to help finance the war debt. In his official report to General Grant, General J. G. Foster stated that "the rebel iron-clads were blown up and the navy-yard [Willinks shipyard] burned. All the rest of the city is intact... 32,000 bales of cotton safely stored in warehouses."¹⁹

While most of the south experienced depressed economic conditions during the postbellum years, development continued on the Eastern Wharves. The United Hydraulic Press Company and the Tyler Cotton Press Company were in operation on the waterfront after the war. The 1884 Sanborn maps indicate the location of the businesses on the wharf, as well as the location of the two presses (Figure 8). A devastating fire occurred in 1889, destroying most of the structures on the Eastern Wharves.²⁰ It is not known whether or not the wharf structure sustained any damage. The 1891 *Koch Birdseye View of Savannah* depicts the rebuilt structures on the Eastern Wharves and the wharves in use (Figure 9).

The early twentieth century saw continued prosperity on the Eastern Wharves. A 1900 plat shows the wharf and structures owned by the United Hydraulic Cotton Press Company (Figure 10). The Eastern Wharves experienced a gradual decline through the mid twentieth century, eventually being abandoned by the industries that originally brought so much prosperity.²¹ Shipping in Savannah was greatly consolidated by the Georgia Ports Authority and other major national companies and, along with standardization in the form of container

¹⁷ Ibid.

¹⁸ Sullivan, Buddy. *Georgia: A State History*. Arcadia Publishing, Charleston, South Carolina (2003).

¹⁹ Ibid, idem. Quotation taken from *Official Records of the War of the Rebellion*, Series I, Volume 44:786.

²⁰ Ibid. 24.

²¹ Council, R. Bruce and Nicholas Honerkamp.

transport, wharves gave way to massive shipping terminals that have little resemblance to the late nineteenth century Savannah wharves.

IV. Sources Consulted

Babits, Lawrence E., and Julie A Barnes. *Archeological Investigation of the Marine Railway Site, Hutchinson's Island, Savannah, Georgia*. Prepared for the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, Savannah District, Environmental Resources Branch, Savannah, Georgia (1985).

Bancroft, Joseph. *Census of the City of Savannah*. E. C. Councell, Savannah, Georgia (1848).

Butler, Scott. *Reconnaissance Survey of Approximately 20 Acres, Eastern Wharf Lots 3-6 and Cotton Warehouse Tract, Lamar Ward, Savannah, Georgia*. Prepared for Thomas and Hutton Engineering, Inc., and the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, Savannah District. Prepared by Brockington and Associates, Inc., Atlanta, Georgia (1996).

Coleman, Kenneth editor. *A History of Georgia*. The University of Georgia Press, Athens (1977).

Council, R. Bruce and Nicholas Honerkamp. *An Archeological Survey of the Proposed Radisson Hotel Construction Site and River Walk Corridor Savannah, Chatham County, Georgia*. Prepared for Columbia Essex Corporation, Ft. Mitchell, Kentucky. Prepared by the Jeffrey L. Brown Institute of Archeology, The University of Tennessee at Chattanooga (1990).

Fraser, Walter J. *Savannah in the Old South*. The University of Georgia Press, Athens (2003).

Honerkamp, Nicholas and Brina Agranat. *Phase II Archaeological Research at the Radisson Hotel Site, Savannah, Chatham County, Georgia*. Prepared for Columbia Sussex Corporation, Ft. Mitchell, Kentucky. Prepared by the Jeffrey L. Brown Institute of Archeology, The University of Tennessee at Chattanooga (1991).

Sanborn Fire Insurance Company
Various Years, Maps on file at the Georgia Historical Society, Savannah

Sullivan, Buddy. *Georgia: A State History*. Arcadia Publishing, Charleston, South Carolina (2003).

Wood, Judy L. *A History of the Development and Use of the East Coast Terminal Property Wharves and Shoreline, Savannah Harbor, Savannah, Chatham County, Georgia*. Prepared by the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, Savannah District, Environmental Resources Branch, Savannah, Georgia (2001).

Waring Collection

Manuscript file # 1320. On file at the Georgia Historical Society, Savannah

V. Project Information

The City of Savannah, in conjunction with the real estate development firm Ambling Inc., plan to extend the Savannah Riverwalk eastward from its present terminus at the Marriot Hotel in downtown Savannah. The project is part of a planned development of Lamar Ward, a former industrial site on the Savannah River that is, currently, mainly vacant land.

The construction of the Riverwalk extension will require the demolition of wharf remains that are located on the project tract. A 1996 reconnaissance survey of the tract conducted by Brockington and Associates, Inc. recommended that the wharf remains located on the river's edge be considered eligible for listing on the National Register of Historic Places. The Georgia Department of Historic Resources, Historic Preservation Division and the U. S. Army Corps of Engineers, Savannah District concurred with this recommendation. In January 2006 a Memorandum of Agreement (MOA) was signed to mitigate the adverse effects of the proposed riverwalk extension on the effected wharf remains. The MOA stipulated that the Eastern Wharves be documented to HAER specifications and be submitted to the National Park Service.

Will Brockenbrough, of Brockington and Associates, Inc., prepared the historical narrative and the description the Eastern Wharves. David Diener, also of Brockington and Associates, Inc, served as the project photographer. The historical research and written documentation was completed in April 2007 and was based on fieldwork completed in May 2006. A sketch plan of the wharf remains was created based on field measurements (Figure 1).

VI. Previous Investigations

Several comprehensive investigations pertaining to the Lamar Ward and the Eastern Wharves have been undertaken; these document much of the area's history. These reports include:

- Reconnaissance Survey of Approximately 20 Acres, Eastern Wharf Lots 3-6 and Cotton Warehouse Tract, Lamar Ward, Savannah, Georgia (Butler 1996)
- Phase II Archaeological Research at the Radisson Hotel Site, Savannah, Chatham County, Georgia (Honerkamp and Agranat 1991)
- A History of the Development and Use of the East Coast Terminal Property Wharves and Shoreline, Savannah Harbor, Savannah, Chatham County, Georgia (Wood 2001)

These reports are useful resources in the study of Lamar Ward and the Eastern Wharves and should be consulted for additional background information during any extensive study of the Ward, as a whole. The nature and purpose of this documentation dictate that its subject area will

overlap, to some degree, with the Butler, Honerkamp and Agranat, and Wood documents; however, the scope of this documentation was limited to the research of the remains of the wharf structures.