

ELLIOTT HOUSE
(The Anchorage)
1103 Bay Street
Beaufort
Beaufort County
South Carolina

HABS No. SC-859

HABS
SC-859

PHOTOGRAPHS

HISTORIC AMERICAN BUILDINGS SURVEY
National Park Service
U.S. Department of the Interior
1849 C St. NW
Washington, DC 20240

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FILE

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WRITTEN HISTORICAL AND DESCRIPTIVE DATA

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Addendum to
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Location: 1103 Bay Street, Beaufort, Beaufort County, South Carolina.

Owners: 303 Associates Inc., Beaufort, South Carolina.

Significance: The Elliot House is the tallest, double-pile tabby structure now extant. Despite extensive alteration, this building illustrates large scale, multi-story tabby construction at its most developed stage.

PART I. HISTORIC INFORMATION

A. Physical History

1. Date of erection: The exact date is not known, however, historical information suggests it was constructed during the last decade of the eighteenth century.
2. Architect/ builder: Not known.
3. Alterations /Additions: The house was significantly altered around 1900 in accordance with plans probably prepared by the architect William G. Preston of Boston. Work included the rebuilding of the south porch in a lush Corinthian style, gutting and reworking of the interior, and rough casting all tabby exterior walls.

B. Historic Context

According to Stephen Barnwell "the great Elliot mansion in Beaufort" located at 1103 Bay Street was built by Ralph Emms Elliot (1764-1806), a planter who among other properties owned Cedar Grove Plantation on Port Royal Island. The Beaufort house has also been attributed to his father, William Elliot I (1730-78), but this seems unlikely on stylistic grounds. It is certain that in 1799 "R. Elliot" (Ralph Elliot) owned the lot formerly designated Town Lot #300 on which the present house stands, his name then appearing on a map of Beaufort drawn by Thomas Fuller.¹

Ralph Elliot was neither a leading landowner nor major slave holder. The First U.S. Census listed him as the owner of twenty-two slaves in 1790, a relatively low number for one of Beaufort District's elite. This suggests that the house was built with money left by his father whose will divided property, including plantations located on Parris Island, between three sons:

¹Copy, Beaufort County Library, Beaufort, SC.

William, Ralph, and Stephen Elliot. It is also likely that these siblings benefitted from the estate of their mother, Mary Barnwell Elliot who died in 1774 and who was a grand-daughter of the legendary *Tuscarora Jack* (John Barnwell); she possessed additional plantations in her own right. Ralph received his father's bequest in 1785 or 1786, and so construction of the house probably started sometime between 1790 and 1800. Ralph Elliot married (date not ascertained) Susannah Parsons Savage. The couple's only child, Ralph Emms Elliot Junior, was born in 1793 and died of malaria in 1805, while his father who may have suffered from the same disease succumbed after a long illness, one year later in Augusta, Georgia.

The house then passed to a nephew, William Elliot III (1788-1863), whose father William Elliot II was the first local planter to grow sea island cotton on Hilton Head Island, at *Myrtle Bank* plantation. This experiment made both father and son rich. Following his marriage to Anne Hutchinson Smith, the daughter of Thomas Rhett Smith of Charleston, on 28 May 1817, William III diversified his holdings, buying rice lands located along tributaries of the Edisto River. Already an experienced planter and contemplating a political career, William was twenty-nine years old. By contrast, his wife, betrothed at age fourteen, had only just entered her fifteenth year.

Elliot was elected to the South Carolina Senate as representative for St. Helena's Parish during the following year (1818) and held the seat until 1821. In 1819 he became Intendant of Beaufort, and in this capacity entertained the Marquis de Lafayette with a reception and ball at the house during the latter's brief visit to Beaufort Town on the night of 18 March 1825.²

Elliot remained an active planter throughout his adult life, promoting agricultural experiments in scientific articles written for the *Southern Agriculturalist*. Over the period 1820 - 60, his slave holding in St. Helena's Parish increased from 73 to 103, the U.S. Census of 1860 listing an additional 114 slaves belonging to Elliot in St. Bartholomew's Parish. But, if his agricultural activities brought him wealth, it was his popular writing which brought a measure of fame.

First published in 1846 and rarely out of print thereafter, William Elliot's *Carolina Sports* described "Incidents of Devil-fishing, &c" at the mouth of Port Royal Sound.³ Many of his

²Francis Lubbock, later Governor of Texas was an eyewitness of this event. C.W. Raines, ed., *Six Decades in Texas or Memoirs of Francis Richard Lubbock* (Austin, TX: 1900).

³ By Burgess and James, Publishers, Charleston, SC. A second, illustrated edition published by Derby and Jackson, New York appeared in 1859. A facsimile of the first edition was published by the Arno Press, New York, in 1967 and a reprint of the second edition published by the Attic Press Inc., Greenwood, SC in 1977.

expeditions began or ended at Bay Point and he wrote about the place with enthusiasm.⁴ Sportsmen were advised to "row over from Bay Point towards the Hilton Head shore- putting the last hammock on the south western end of Eding's Island in line with the most northerly point of the same island." There, Elliot promised would be found "the best ground probably in the whole Southern country; where in their proper season" fisherman might take black-fish, sheephead, bass and drum in abundance, and, occasionally, all of them on the same day."⁵

More exciting still was pursuit of the fabled devil-fish, which Elliot determined to be a species of ray.⁶ He explained:

It was during the month of August, 1837, that, attended by my children, and by several friends, whose inducements were change of air and the benefit of sea-bathing, I made an excursion to Bay Point, a small summer settlement. There for the first time, I witnessed the sporting of these sea monsters on the surface, and conceived the idea of taking them with the harpoon".⁷

Accounts of Elliot's sometimes reckless adventures follow, adventures joined by other local planters including Edmund Rhett, William Cuthbert, John G. Barnwell, Robert W. Barnwell, Edward Means, Nathaniel Heyward, Jr., and William Mongin of "Dawfuskie" Island "whose equipments were of the first order." During July of 1843 Elliot in the company of Mongin and others harpooned sixteen devil-fish, landing "but seven" the largest of which measured seventeen feet across. By 1846, "the chase of the devil-fish had become an established diversion of the planters in the vicinity of Port Royal Sound" who, "well provided with lances and harpoons" normally met off Bay Point at or about high tide.⁸ Elliot noted "the spice of danger" served to increase the sport's flavor not knowing of course that far more deadly adversaries were destined to appear in these same waters with catastrophic effect for local elites during November of 1861.

⁴Unfortunately, Elliot gives little information about the settlement at Bay Point (located at the mouth of the Broad River in what is now Beaufort County) beyond mentioning its existence. Presumably the "Elliot House" used by Chaplin is where *Piscator*, as Elliot (who may well have owned the building) called himself, stayed and wrote his first essay on devil-fishing published by the *Charleston Mercury* on 1 August 1837.

⁵Elliot, 1846: 67.

⁶Elliot reprints a scientific description of this fish by James E. De Kay who considered it identical with *Cephaloptera vampirus* Mitchell. According to De Kay, the species was first noticed in South Carolina by Catesby. Contrary to eighteenth and nineteenth-century popular opinion, the fish is harmless to man, feeding on oceanic plankton.

⁷Elliot, 1846: 13.

⁸Elliot, 1846: 49.

Rather, the pictures Elliot paints are often idyllic ones "imagine yourself afloat on our beautiful bay" he wrote in a chapter devoted to drum fishing "the ocean before you- the islands encircling you- and a fleet of forty or fifty fishing-boats (their white awnings glistening in the sun) riding sociably around."

Following the Battle of Port Royal in November of 1861 and the abandonment of Fort Beauregard at Bay Point by its Confederate defenders, Beaufort's entire white population fled the town. William Elliot's house was probably looted before being requisitioned by U.S. military authorities who designated it Hospital No. 11 around 1862. Elliot himself fled towards Charleston, first burning 97, 000 pounds of cotton on one of his plantations to prevent it falling into Union hands. He died just over two years later on 2 February 1863 at Flat Rock, North Carolina.

Block No. 91, as the site of Elliot's house was then designated, does not seem to have been included among properties sold for delinquent taxes by the U.S. Direct Tax Commission in 1863 but is said to have been purchased from them by Thomas Rhett Smith Elliot in 1866. By 1884, ownership had become linked with its neighbor, the Sea Island Hotel, which was formerly Nathaniel Heyward's house and later General Saxton's Headquarters; Sanborn Insurance Company maps called it the "*Club House*" in 1884. After several more transfers, the property was purchased for \$ 4,450 by Rear Admiral L.A. Beardsley and his wife E.S. Beardsley in March of 1890. Subsequently, around 1900, Beardsley radically altered the house and renamed it "*The Anchorage*." Alterations met with a mixed reception, Lengnick remarking "the old house was to my eye in better taste than it is at the present time."

After the death of Mrs. Beardsley ca. 1923, the house passed through several more hands, narrowly escaping destruction in 1971 when a permit for its demolition was sought by the Bay Street Corporation. Action was delayed long enough for the property to be purchased (for resale) by Historic Beaufort Foundation. The Anchorage was entered in the National Register of Historic Places on 23 November 1971.

PART II. ARCHITECTURAL INFORMATION

Located overlooking the Beaufort River, the Ralph Emms Elliot House (or The Anchorage) is a double-pile "T" shaped tabby dwelling incorporating three full stories over an elevated basement. Originally, interior spaces above basement level were grouped in pairs off a central stair-hall. On all floors, rear (north) rooms of the building project east and west into a shallow wing enclosed by angled walls on two sides. A pair of interior chimneys are located between north and south rooms. The roof is hipped.

Exterior tabby walls diminish in thickness at each floor level, but details and dimensions are obscured by twentieth-century alterations. On outer faces, these walls were originally

stuccoed and scored in imitation of coursed stone, a raised stucco band running around the house at third floor level. The timber roof frame survives more or less intact, principle members comprising a pair of parallel king post truss spanning approximately 42' -6" between front (south) and back (north) exterior walls without intermediate support.

Before alteration ca. 1900, Civil War period photographs show the five -bay, south facade was surmounted by a pediment supported right and left on two elaborately carved timber brackets. Extending along the length of the south facade and approached by splayed masonry steps, a raised, single story porch gave access to the principal entrance. The south porch featured six slim Tuscan columns supported on an arcade (probably of brick) closed by metal railings. The porch roof was flat, or nearly so, and could be reached from the building's second floor via a central window equipped perhaps with job doors as often was the case in Beaufort. First-floor and second-floor windows appear to have incorporated two sashes with nine-over-nine lights, the top sash perhaps fixed and the lower one sliding vertically. Third floor windows were similar but smaller, glazed only with six-over-six lights.

Around 1900 the house was extensively remodeled, an unconfirmed newspaper report attributing this work to the architect William G. Preston of Boston who in 1886 had designed the Savannah, Georgia, Cotton Exchange. During alteration, first-floor and second-floor spaces were re-configured, circulation spaces gutted, and the original staircase removed. According to *Historic Resources of the Lowcountry* "the delicate Adam style interior was altered to the heavier Victorian Style. Oak paneling, brick mantles, frescoed ceilings and the first elevator in Beaufort were installed during the remodeling."⁹

The south porch was largely rebuilt as part of the same program, a raised two-story tiered porch with double height Corinthian columns and an enriched entablature replacing original construction. Above, the pediment received a lunette window designed to light attic spaces. Cornice elements of the same style were introduced in the pediment and more generally on exterior facades at eaves level. Exterior changes included reworking of window frames and introduction of undivided double hung sash. Following completion of a small, three and one-half story addition centered on the north facade, all exterior walls were roughcast on their outer faces with a dark brown colored gravel and cement mix.

PART III. SOURCES OF INFORMATION

1. Drawings and early photographs: No original drawings are known. The house was surveyed by Russell Wright, who produced a set of floor plans, in December of 1971; the originals are located at the Historic Beaufort Foundation. Civil War period stereoscopic views of the house (probably by Samuel Cooley) are held by the Beaufort County Library.

⁹*Historic Resources of the Lowcountry*, 1979: 55.

2. Bibliography:

a. Unpublished Sources:

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b. Published Sources:

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PART IV. PROJECT INFORMATION

This project was sponsored by the Historic Beaufort Foundation and by the Historic American Buildings Survey (HABS) division of the National Park Service, Paul D. Dolinsky, Chief, HABS. This report is one component of a larger survey of extant examples of tabby architecture within Beaufort County, South Carolina. The documentation was undertaken by HABS under the direction of Paul D. Dolinsky with assistance from Virginia B. Price, HABS Historian, who worked with Jefferson G. Mansell, (formerly of) the Historic Beaufort Foundation, Ian D. Hill, Beaufort County Planning Department, and Colin Brooker, Brooker Architectural Design Consultants, to identify subjects of study and locate them in the field in 2002 and 2003. Colin Brooker, whose research underpinned the project, wrote the historical report. Evan Thompson, now with the Historic Beaufort Foundation, assisted Brooker in the

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production of the reports. Jack E. Boucher, HABS Photographer, took the large format photographs.
