

Walled City Task Force hopes to continue excavations

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In August 2005, at the request of Historic Charleston Foundation, Mayor Joseph Riley created the Mayor's Walled City Task Force and appointed a group of 15 people representing the Charleston Museum, Charleston City Council, the City Public Service Department, the Charleston County Public Library, Charleston Water System (formerly CPW), Historic Charleston Foundation, the Mayor's Office, the Old Exchange Building, the Old Powder Magazine and others. The purpose of our Task Force is to further the study, identification, protection and interpretation of the colonial walled city of Charleston.

One of the motivations behind the creation of this group was the realization that the city of Charleston would soon have an unusual, one-time opportunity to excavate a small portion of South Adger's Wharf, (now a one block cobblestone street opposite the east end of Tradd Street) and search for the remains of some of the early defenses. Specifically at this location, we anticipated finding one of the brick interme-

diary redans, a salient angle that projected outward from the main defensive line toward the harbor. A plat, drawn by Joseph Purcell in 1785 showed the redan's point located in the middle of South Adger's Wharf, almost directly opposite the center line of Tradd Street.

In the summer of 2005, Charleston Water System was about to begin a phase of its city waste water system modernization at the northwestern corner of Hazel Parker Playground. The contractor and its engineers needed access to the site for heavy equipment but did not want to damage the cobblestones. They carefully removed about 60 feet of stones from the western end of South Adger's Wharf, stored the stones and replaced them with a temporary layer of asphalt. This was an "a-ha" moment for those of us who share a fascination with the city's old walls.

Charleston was one of only three walled cities in North America and the only English walled city. Construction of these fortifications was begun here in the 1690s. They eventually consisted of a brick wall and outworks along the Cooper River and, most probably, earthen works along the other three sides. Granville



Saunders McGee

Jan. 3, and lasted for nearly two weeks. On day one, Charleston Water System's skilled backhoe operators, dug a trench where we expected to find the redan. To our surprise it was not there, but there were other noteworthy archaeological finds, including the brick pavers which floored the Lower Market that was located on the site in the last half of the 18th century. On day two, remnants of the demolished parapet of the redan were found along with a deeply buried arched brick drain running east-west through the site. Day three, we celebrated our first glimpse of the north face of the Tradd Street Redan. The dig continued for another seven days with new discoveries and mysteries at every turn. Late Wednesday, the 16th, as the rain clouds began to gather, the backhoe began filling in the trenches. Thus began the process, which is continuing, of returning the street to its earlier cobblestone appearance.

In sum, we were able to learn a great deal about the early harbor-side defenses. We also now know that the point of the redan and its southern face are not in the street, but rather are located a few feet to the

south of our excavations underneath a city-owned surface parking lot. We hope to be able to investigate a small portion of this lot eventually.

This archaeological project generated a great deal of interest in the community and an almost overwhelming number of early artifacts, including imported and domestic ceramics, wine bottles, animal bones, clay smoking pipes, and even several leather shoes from the early 18th century. The archaeology was conducted by Eric Poplin and crew from Brockington and Associates and by Martha Zierden and Ron Anthony of The Charleston Museum under the auspices of the Task Force. The city of Charleston provided the bulk of the funding with additional funding provided by Post and Courier Foundation and private donors. Major in-kind support was provided by Charleston Water System in the form of equipment and crew and by Historic Charleston Foundation with signage, educational materials and staff time.

A special word of thanks is due to historian Dr. Nic Butler, who joined us every day and whose knowledge of the relevant historical documents was an amazing asset. Nic also cre-

ated a Web log for the Task Force, which provides details about the project and shows how the archaeology progressed day by day. To learn more and to see photos of the dig, go to <http://walledcitytaskforce.org/>. We were also thankful to be joined by more than 40 volunteers and hundreds of onlookers and school groups each day.

We want to express our appreciation to everyone associated with this exciting project. Special thanks go to our donors and to Charleston Water System for all of their support. Equipment operators, James Bonnett and Leroy Young were helpful and incredibly skilled. Thanks, too, are due to the citizens of Charleston for their encouragement and interest in colonial Charleston history and in urban archaeology. The Task Force will continue its work in promoting both. We hope to conduct additional excavations in the future and to interpret our findings with signage near the intersection of East Bay and South Adger's Wharf.

Joseph McGee and Katherine Saunders are co-chairs of the Mayor's Walled City Task Force.