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THE WISKEY ARSENAL

A property history of 107 Brigade Street, that property being bounded by Brigade Street, Morrison Drive, North Romney Street, and Romney Street.

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Introduction

107 Brigade Street is located in an area known historically as the Charleston Neck, just northeast of the neighbourhood known as East Central or North Morrison Drive. This property is a parcel of land bounded by Brigade Street, Morrison Drive, and North Romney Street, and is 16 acres in size. The property has changed hands throughout its short but rich history and has served many different purposes. This report focuses on the history of this tract of land, which is currently known as 107 Brigade Street. Research for this paper was conducted for Middle Street Partners, LLC.

The last business to actively use the property was the Charleston Steel and Metal Company. This company moved to a new location in 2009 but left behind multiple buildings on the property. The condition of each of these buildings vary. Currently, none of the buildings are in use.

History of Charleston Neck

Located north of the historic boundary of the City of Charleston, the Neck was full of marshlands and small creeks. On August 17th 1676, “a grant was made to Hugh Cartwright

[Carterett] for 117 acres between George Bedon and Thomas Thompson.”¹ The Lord’s Proprietors gave out these grants, after which the land was surveyed by the Surveyor General.

Following the death of Hugh Cartwright, the land passed to his son Richard Cartwright, who also bought up a majority of Bedon's land. After acquiring his land, Cartwright started to sell off parcels of various sizes; many of which became large plantations. Throughout the centuries, plantation owners infilled the marshland in order to extend their properties to the Cooper River. Today, many of these plantations no longer exist. Some of the

plantations have been converted to public use, including Magnolia Plantation which is now Magnolia Cemetery. Many of these sites are currently the focus of new urban development.

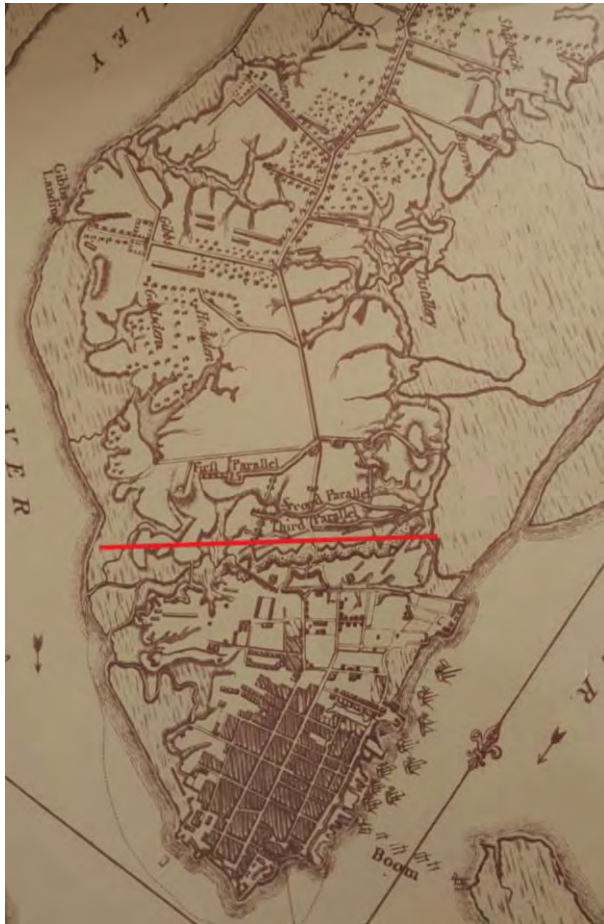


Figure 1. The peninsula of Charleston. The red line shows the border of the city, this part of the area known as Charleston Neck. You can see the distillery marked on the east side of the peninsula, north of the border.

¹ Henry A. M. Smith, "Charleston and Charleston Neck: The Original Grantees and the Settlements along the Ashley and Cooper Rivers," *The South Carolina Historical and Genealogical Magazine* 19, no. 1 (1918): 16.

Creating the Distillery

In circa 1680, seventy-seven acres were sold to John Whitfield, who built a plantation (part of this land is part of the property that becomes 107 Brigade Street). Over the next 50 years, the land was exchanged three more times. It was first sold to Sir John Colleton in 1730 who then “sold to Thomas Boone Royal Governor of the Province of Carolina...and who sold it to Felix Long.”² When Thomas Boone bought the property in the mid-18th century, which he called Bachelor’s Hall. Boone sold his estate to Felix Long on December 10, 1768.

Unfortunately, no records exist of the next transaction. In 1774, there are records of a distillery that had been built. Although the builder of the distillery is unknown, Nathaniel Russell, Aaron Loocock, and Andrew Lord owned the distillery. However, many details of the distillery are lost; several sources reference the distillery. Plats for neighbouring parcels of land and newspaper articles are able to shed some light on the distillery as well.

In 1784, the first of many advertisements for the distillery was published describing auctions resulting from the death of Andrew Lord, one of the distillery owners. Among the items to be sold were “three very valuable Copper Stills...a Tract of 400 Acres of Land.”³ The company which sought to sell his holdings was Colcock and Gibbons. The company was located “near the Exchange,” and the items to be sold were “The Dwelling House and Out-



Figure 2. The Halsey Map, 1949, shows the land and waterways before infill. The circled portion of land is the part of the property where the distillery was situated in 1774.

² Ibid., 18.

³ “Advertisement,” *South-Carolina Weekly Gazette*, September 8, 1784.

Houses, with all that part of Rumney...supposed to be about ten acres.”⁴ These types of advertisements populated the Charleston newspapers for the next 10 to 15 years.

During these 10 to 15 years, different people bought the land of the short-lived Distillery, previously owned by Andrew Lord. Initially, one of his partners, Nathaniel Russell, leased the land to the west of Meeting Street in 1785. He intended to have it “laid out in twenty three lots or parcels of land.”⁵ This was the first division of the property that would eventually give it the boundaries that it has today.

The eastern portion of the land that would eventually become 107 Brigade Street was leased to John Langstaff. On February 17, 1792, John Langstaff signed an agreement with

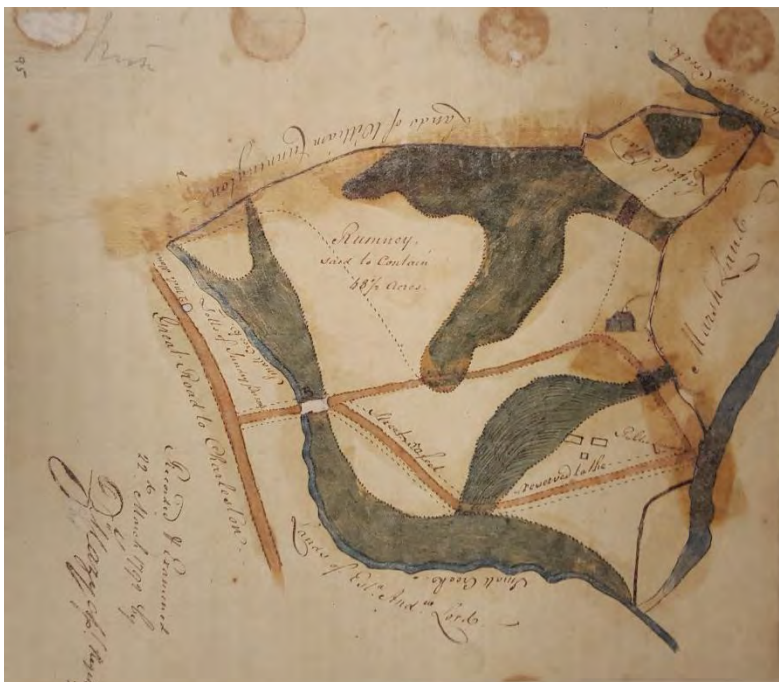


Figure 3. The plat above is from the deed signed in 1792. The plat is oriented with the north direction at the top of the plat.

Aaron Loockock agreeing to a year lease. The land that Langstaff was interested in was “All that Plantation Farm, piece or Parcel of land Situate lying and bring on Charleston Neck in the State aforesaid commonly called or known by the name of Rumney Distillery being part of Long, containing or said to contain Forty Eight Acres and one half Acre of high land and

⁴ Ibid.

⁵ Charleston County Register of Mesne Conveyance, Deed Book C6, Page 524, Charleston, South Carolina, 1785.

inland Marsh.”⁶ On the 18th of February, a day after leasing the plantation land, Langstaff signed a release for the land.⁷ Although the deed was passed from Aaron Loocock to John Langstaff, Nathaniel Russell had to sign off because of the death of Loocock. When Aaron Loocock died in 1791, he appointed Nathaniel Russell to be one of his exectors in his will. Therefore, Russell was able to conduct business after Loocock died. The deed was signed, “I Nathaniel Russell one of the heirs of Aaron Loocock Do acknowledge to have Recieved full payment.”⁸ The plantation was then handed down to Langstaff’s son, Benjamin.

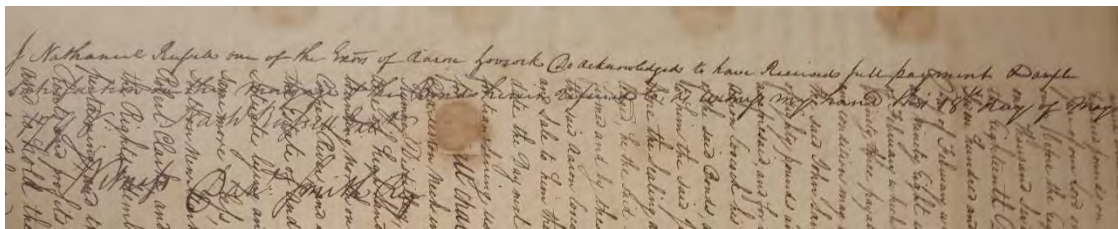


Figure 4. Shows the deed signed by Nathaniel Russell, acknowledging John Langstaff as the owner of the property.

⁶ Charleston County Register of Mesne Conveyance, Deed Book H6, Page 170, Charleston, South Carolina, 1792.

⁷ A release shows that all payments have been paid in full; the buyer now owns the rights to the land.

⁸ Charleston County Register of Mesne Conveyance, Deed Book H6, Page 175, Charleston, South Carolina, 1792.

The State Arsenal

In 1823, Benjamin Langstaff sold his land, which included a place called Laurel Island, to the state. The state gave the land to Charleston born architect Robert Mills, who was working for the Board of Public Works, to design a new State Arsenal. The arsenal was complete with a “complex of nine powder magazines, barracks, and a gatehouse.”⁹

Unfortunately, plans for the arsenal have not survived, but Robert Mills described the arsenal in his writings. Mills explained that the “powder magazines are nine in number, all of a



Figure 5. Exterior of one of the powder magazines, taken in 1934 by the Historic American Buildings Survey (HABS). The building in the background is not identified; this may have been a barrack.

circular form, with conical roofs, and disposed in three ranges, 130 feet apart. The centre building is the largest, and intended exclusively for the public powder.”¹⁰

Along with being the largest, the

⁹ John Morrill Bryan, *Robert Mills : America's First Architect* (New York : Princeton Architectural Press, 2001.), 198.

¹⁰ Robert Mills, *Statistics of South Carolina, Including a View of Its Natural, Civil, and Military History, General and Particular* (Charleston, S.C., Hurlbut and Lloyd., 1826), 421.

central building was what Mills considered “bomb-proof.”¹¹ In addition to the set of nine powder magazines, Mills included fortifications and other buildings for the site. In his description of these additional structures, Mills stated that:

a high wall of enclosure, or fosse and embankment, will surmount these buildings, and be so arranged as to admit a walk for a sentinel all round the premises. Against the outside of the east wall of enclosure, a range of barracks is erected, two stories high, and covering the grand gateway leading into the magazine court, from that of the officers’, where the boat landing is. Close by this landing stands the officers’ and magazine-keepers’ quarters.¹²

All of these buildings were noted to be protected with slate roofs. The gateway, on the other hand, was considered a “triumphal arch incorporating a residential interior in the manner of Ledoux.”¹³ Before the gateways demolition, it was considered a picturesque ruin. This gateway was thought to be the inspiration for the College of Charleston Gatehouse designed by Edward Brickell White in 1852. The State Arsenal was completed circa 1827.

Although many of the documents surrounding the State

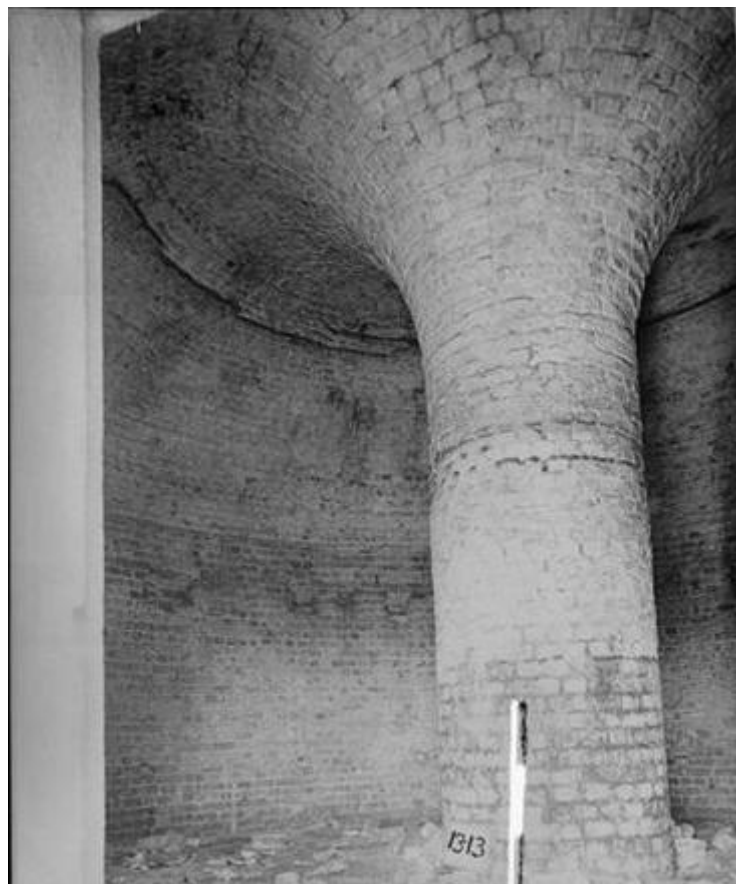


Figure 6. Photo of the interior of the central and largest of the powder magazines, taken by HABS in 1934.

Arsenal no longer exist, there is a Muster Roll from November 1830. A Muster Roll contains a list of officers or soldiers in a military company or brigade. This Muster Roll gave the

¹¹ Ibid. Mills became known for his efforts of fireproofing buildings. After creating the fireproof building in Charleston, SC. He was an advocate of fireproofing after a fire burned down a building he designed in Kingstree, SC.

¹² Ibid., 422.

¹³ Bryan, *Robert Mills*, 191.

names of ten guards stationed at the State Arsenal.¹⁴ Nearly one hundred years later, the magazines have been almost completely forgotten; it is unknown when the magazines stopped being used.

¹⁴ South Carolina Archives and History, *Muster Roll*, Series S390008, Year 1830, Item 00011, Columbia, South Carolina, 1830. The list of these men include the names: John Andrew, Samuel Champlain, Bernanrd Dickson, John Flemming, Jacob Frederick, Alexander Hamill, Francis Hughes, David Murphy, James Osborne, and William White.

The Industrial Age

On the 1902 Sanborn, the area of the Charleston Neck was shown divided into lots; it is evident from earlier maps that areas of the marsh had already been infilled by this point. The Sanborn map excludes the State Arsenal. In an article from the Charleston News and Courier published in 1934, the powder magazines are described as “comparatively unknown and undoubtedly are the most neglected of the historical treasures of the city.”¹⁵ Before two of the magazines were destroyed for the construction of a railroad, “local dealers in dynamite and other high explosives” used the magazines as a place to store their products.¹⁶

Although changing owners multiple times in the mid 1900’s, one company that owned the property was the N. Goldberg Company, which was named after Nathan Goldberg, the owner. Since the use of the N. Goldberg Company, the site has maintained a metal salvage yard.¹⁷ On the 1952 Sanborn, the land bordered by Brigade Street, Morrison Street, and North Romney Street, included multiple one-storey dwellings along with one two-storey dwelling. The metal salvage yard is notated along with a metal crusher. Throughout the years, many newspaper advertisements announced openings for the N. Goldberg Company. Some of the positions that were available included welders and cement mixers. In August of 1980, the Charleston News and Courier reported that the land had been abandoned.¹⁸

¹⁵ “Only Relics of 1812 War Left Here Are 7 Circular Houses on Railroad Tracks.”

¹⁶ Ibid.

¹⁷ South Carolina Department of Health and Environmental Control, Voluntary Cleanup Contract, *Application for Non-Responsible Party Voluntary Cleanup Contract* (Charleston, SC 2014), 4.

¹⁸ “Notice of Names of Persons Appearing to Be Owners of Abandoned Property,” *Charleston News and Courier*, August 16, 1980.

In 1988, the Goldberg family started a new company, the Charleston Steel and Metal Company. In the early years of the company, different Charleston newspapers wrote of



Figure 7. Photo taken of remaining Charleston Steel and Metal Company in May of 2010.

multiple crimes being committed on the property. Crimes such as burglary, larceny, and trespassing with “a possession a long blade knife” defaced the property. After a short period of 21 years, the Charleston Steel and Metal Company moved to a new location. The property has been vacant since this time.

Conclusion

The parcel of land bordered by Brigade Street, Morrison Drive, North Romney Street and Romney Street has a rich history and diverse past. From its first ownership, the land has maintained an excellent location for different uses. Starting as undesirable marshland, the land quickly gained character as Sir John Colleton owned and then sold to the then Governor of South Carolina, Thomas Boone. The story of the land was enriched with the creation of a Distillery owned by Nathaniel Russell and his two partners Andrew Lord and Aaron Loocock.

After a short occupation in distilling, Russell sold the land to the Langstaff family, who became prominent plantation owners in South Carolina. The property changed hands again and was touched by America's first architect, Robert Mills. Although they were once military buildings, the powder magazine only has "a surviving foundation. These are the only visible remnants of a significant military facility built in Charleston."¹⁹ Losing its military function, the property fell out of use until the 20th century. The property was utilized as an industrial site until 2009, when it became vacant. Today, the property continues to sit in a prominent area, close to the historic downtown district of Charleston.

¹⁹ Robert Behre, "Mills' Lost Magazines - Little Evidence Remains of Military Facility," *Post and Courier, The (Charleston, SC)*, February 1, 2010.

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Figure 2: Alfred O. Halsey, *Historic Charleston on a Map*, 1949, Charleston, SC.

Figure 3: *Plat of John Langstaff's Land*, 1792, City of Charleston Records Management Index of Building Permits, Charleston, SC.

Figure 4: "Photo of Deed Book H-6, page 175," 1792, City of Charleston Records Management Index of Building Permits, Charleston, SC.

Figure 5: M.B. Paine, "Elevation Typical Magazine (Barracks Ruin in Right Rear) - State Powder Magazines & Administration Buildings, Charleston Neck, Charleston, Charleston County, SC." Photograph, Historic American Buildings Survey, National Park Service, U.S. Department of the Interior, 1934. From Prints and Photographs Division, Library of Congress (HABS SC,10-CHAR,67--5; <http://www.loc.gov/pictures/item/sc0224.photos.148963p/> accessed February 4, 2016).

Figure 6: M.B. Paine, "Interior Detail of Central Magazine - State Powder Magazines & Administration Buildings, Charleston Neck, Charleston, Charleston County, SC." Photograph, Historic American Buildings Survey, National Park Service, U.S. Department of the Interior, 1934. From Prints and Photographs Division, Library of Congress (HABS SC,10-CHAR,67—6; <http://www.loc.gov/pictures/item/sc0224.photos.148964p/> accessed February 4, 2016).

Figure 7: "Photo of Charleston Steel and Metal Company Building," 2010, <http://www.panoramio.com/photo/35735341> accessed February 29, 2016.

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