

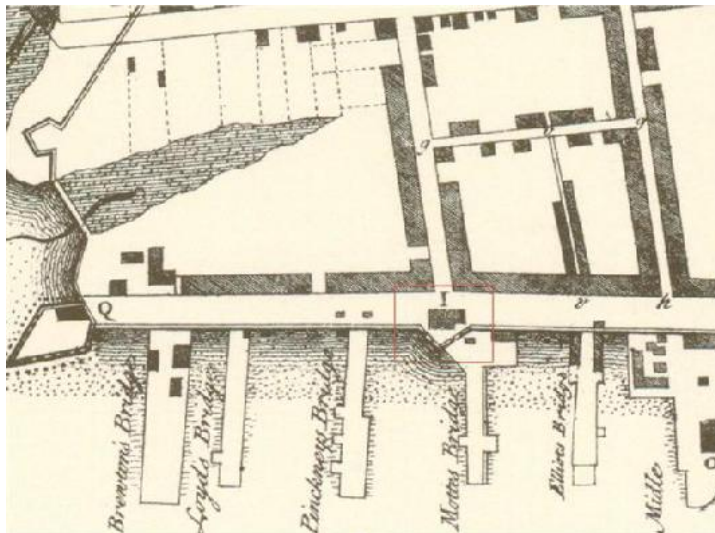
THE AMAZING HISTORY OF ADGER'S WHARF

The beautiful sight of ships filling the Charleston Harbor are legend since the founding of the colony. In 1797 the Charleston Harbormaster documented as many as sixty-seven square rigged vessels, thirty-four schooners, and sixteen sloops.¹ You can imagine the thousands of ships that passed by the Charleston Symphony Orchestra League's 2013 Designer Showhouse at 4 South Adger's Wharf containing every cargo imaginable. This is the story of the oldest surviving wharf as it evolved to remind us of the resilience of this historic community.

As one of the original lots platted in the new colony at Charleston, Robert Tradd's House sat at the north side of his street. He was also the first owner of the 'water lot' now known as Adger's Wharf.



Colonial Charleston



Southern Wharves - 1739 Map of Charleston

In 1731 Tradd bequeathed the lot to Jacob Motte, the colony treasurer.² Jacob Motte was also the first insurance underwriter in America. The 1739 map of Charleston shows Motte's Bridge outside the wall of the city adjacent to the "Lower Market". Between the 1740 fire and the 1752 hurricane, Jacob Motte's wharf and storehouses were destroyed along with his ability to pay back the colonial treasury from which he had made loans to himself. When he confessed his predicament, he was stripped of his properties but was able to keep his job as treasurer until he died in 1770.³

The French and Indian War was very costly to Britain. To recover its costs, Parliament passed a requirement that all paper from legal documents to playing cards display a purchased stamp. This did

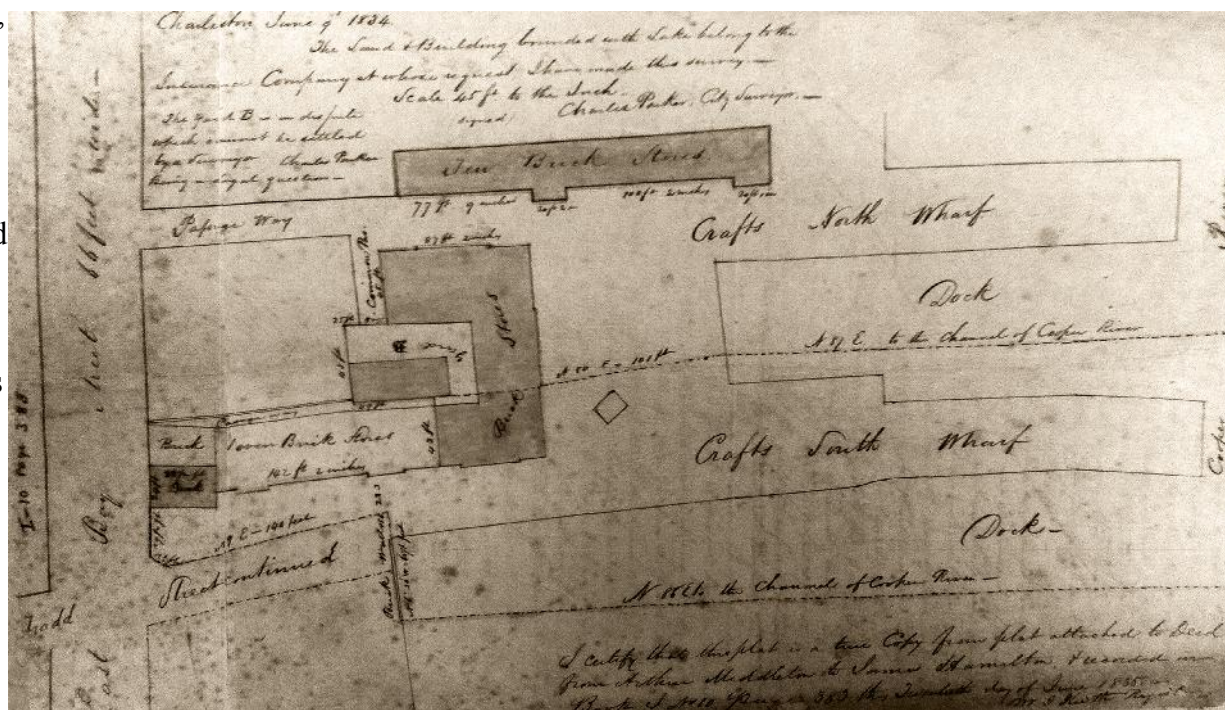
not sit well with the colonists. On October 28, 1765, George Saxby (Inspector of Stamps) and Caleb Lloyd

partner in the South Carolina Insurance Company which wrote policies against marine risk. Nathaniel Russell died the same year as William Crafts. Russell's son-in-law Arthur Middleton eventually purchased the buildings Russell owned on Crafts' Wharf.

The buildings on the wharves housed a variety of activities that were not all related to shipping. When the Charleston Daily Courier was first published Jan 10, 1803, its office was located at No. 6 Crafts' South Range. It stayed there until 1806 when it was moved to No. 1 Broad Street. A notable story in its first year was of a man named Withers who attempted to rob the South Carolina Bank via a drain at the intersection of Broad & Church Streets, then tunneled a passage close to the bank's vault. Withers had come from the 'West' and had gambled away any monies he had.¹³

In 1836 Charleston prohibited steam locomotives from entering the city or steam engines to be erected within its boundaries. This was supposedly a fire safety measure, but the planters consistently blocked any attempts at bringing industry to the city because they felt it was not compatible with a genteel life. This prohibition required railroad terminals be located north of the city, blocks from the wharves. Freight was hauled by dray, then reloaded at the waterfront.¹⁴ This was not a very efficient method and many of Charleston's wharves were not able to reach their full potential. The beginning of passenger travel from Charleston with the launch of ocean-going steamship lines was a welcome addition to the area.

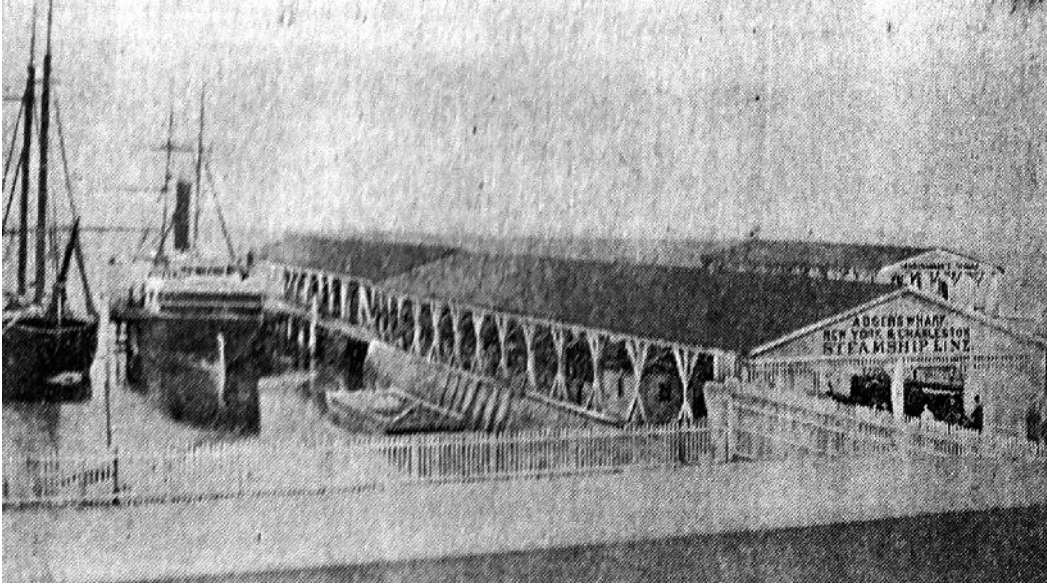
James Hamilton, a former mayor of Charleston, Governor and state senator of South Carolina, became involved in a number of money-making activities, including Craft's wharves. Hamilton was a partner in the Charleston Insurance Company, the Charleston and Liverpool Line Packet



1834 plat of buildings sold to James Hamilton

Company, and the Charleston Hotel. He purchased the buildings from South Carolina Insurance Company in 1834 (see plat above).¹⁵ He immediately rebuilt the building at the corner of East Bay and Crafts' wharf which became the main office used by various steamship companies.¹⁶ Hamilton did not remain an owner long. He sold his interest in Craft's wharves to James Adger in 1836.¹⁷ Hamilton became so involved in banking, railroads and rice that by the 1841 he landed in court as a defendant for money he had misappropriated. His creditors would not advance him any more money and by 1842 his debts were over \$700,000.¹⁸

The first 100 years was not kind to the owners of Craft's wharves but James Adger turned things around. The new owner of Craft's wharves had come to America from Ireland in 1794. After working in New York, James



Newspaper photo of Adger's South Wharf before the Civil War

Adger moved to Charleston in 1801. With John Bones, he started a wagon business, then opened a wholesale hardware store. He became a partner in the Charleston & Columbia Steam Boat Company in 1821 with John Fraser.¹⁹ In addition to his ships, he became an agent for the Bank in Columbia and a partner in the Union Insurance & Trust Company to insure marine vessels and their cargo.²⁰ James Adger completed his wharf acquisitions by purchasing Arthur Middleton's

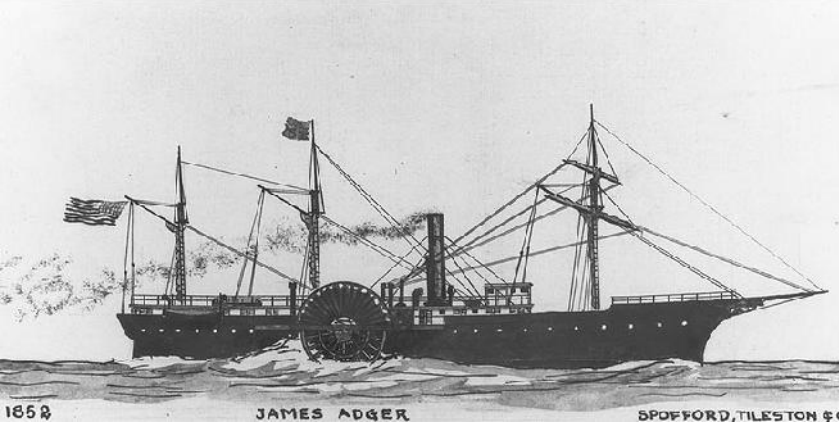
remaining interest in the wharves.²¹ Adger brought in granite from New Hampshire to improve his wharves and it was promptly dubbed Adger's Folly. This granite wharf survived the Civil War in good shape, counter to the other wharves built of palmetto logs.

In 1846, James Adger established the first coastal steamship line to depart from his upgraded wharves. The New York & Charleston US Mail Steamship Line consisted of 4 steamers: The *Marion*, the *Union*, the *Southerner*, and the *Adger*. The *Southerner* made the first trip between New York and Charleston in 56 hours. This steamship line sailed every Wednesday and Saturday between New York, Charleston, Savannah and Florida from Adger's Wharf. Often passengers were associated with the Charleston Theater. In 1855, you could book cabin passage to New York for \$20. The "Dinner Bill of Fare" in beautiful calligraphy listed the entrees, vegetables, salads, soups, pastries, and desserts.

The harbor bottom went 'uphill' to Adger's Wharf so it was not possible to dredge and make it easier for boats to enter the docks there. Adger was not deterred. He became the first to use a tugboat to bring ships across the bar into the Harbor and consequently created a profitable fleet of tugs.

Besides hurricanes, fires continued to be the scourge of the wharves. Adger was no luckier in this respect but he was insured. On May 17, 1850 at 1:30 am, fire was discovered at the shed at the SE corner of Adger's South Wharf. The fire spread west destroying cotton sheds and the block of buildings used as offices and warehouses. Three men who occupied the upper story of one of the buildings as sleeping rooms escaped with their lives, but nothing else. The loss of the buildings and cotton was estimated between \$400,000 and \$500,000.²²

James Adger became quite wealthy through the activities at his wharves, and helped many young men emigrate from Ireland after the famine of 1846. Adger died in New York of pneumonia on September 24, 1858 at the age of 83. His portrait is in the Hall of the Hibernian Society in Charleston. He laid the cornerstone and served as President and Vice-President. He was also a member of the Fellowship Society and St. Andrew's Society. His body was conveyed to Charleston on the *James Adger* and buried at the Second Presbyterian Church.²³ His third son, Robert Adger took over the company, along with a brother Joseph Ellison Adger.



The War of Northern Aggression ultimately wrecked Charleston wharves, but much money was made by its blockade runners. Bringing supplies in from Europe and the North and exporting southern goods for sale was the life line of the Confederacy. The risks were worth the rewards so it made sense to convert the passenger steamships for blockade-running.²⁴ The *Nashville*, originally a ship with Hamilton's Charleston and Liverpool Line, completed seven runs through the blockage.²⁵ John Fraser and George Trenholm, current occupants of

Adger's Wharf, converted their ships for blockade-running and the warehouses at the wharf were used to store the precious goods.

Ironically, the *USS James Adger* was used by the United States Navy against the South. She was seized while in New York at the onset of the War and converted for military duty. With Comdr. John B. Marchand in command, the *James Adger* departed New York on the 16th of October 1861 in pursuit of the *Nashville* which was reported to have escaped from Charleston with the South's ministers to England and France, James M. Mason and John Slidell. She arrived in Ireland in October and spent November searching for the *Nashville*. It was a quest in vain. Instead the diplomats were on the *RMS (Royal Mail Steamer) Trent* and had been apprehended by the *USS San Jacinto* in the Caribbean as 'contraband' and never made it to Britain. While in port, Marchand created a legal stir when he had a little too much brandy and spoke about his mission. His disclosure made the British Crown question the status of the diplomats. The envoys were ultimately released by Abraham Lincoln to resume their voyage and the incident became known as the 'Trent Affair'.

Robert Adger was considered one of Charleston's postwar business successes.²⁶ Robert had saved the family fortune by sending it to England, then became the first Charleston capitalist to enter the phosphate river-mining business in a big way. It enabled him to transition the use of the wharves to handle the fertilizer cargo when competition for passengers developed.



Courtesy of the Charleston Museum

When the earthquake of 1885 took its toll on much of Charleston, surprisingly the Adger's wharf building damage was repairable as seen in this photograph.²⁷

In 1886 Robert Adger transferred the ownership of his wharves to the NY & Charleston Warehouse & Steam Navigation Company.²⁸ This company had financial difficulties and ultimately reorganized as the South Carolina Terminal Company. Births at the lower end of the Peninsula were now too shallow for the larger ocean vessels, so they were only used by smaller local ships. The South Carolina Terminal company

finally built a belt-line railroad which the Adgers used primarily to transport their river-mined fertilizer inland via the Santee Canal.²⁹

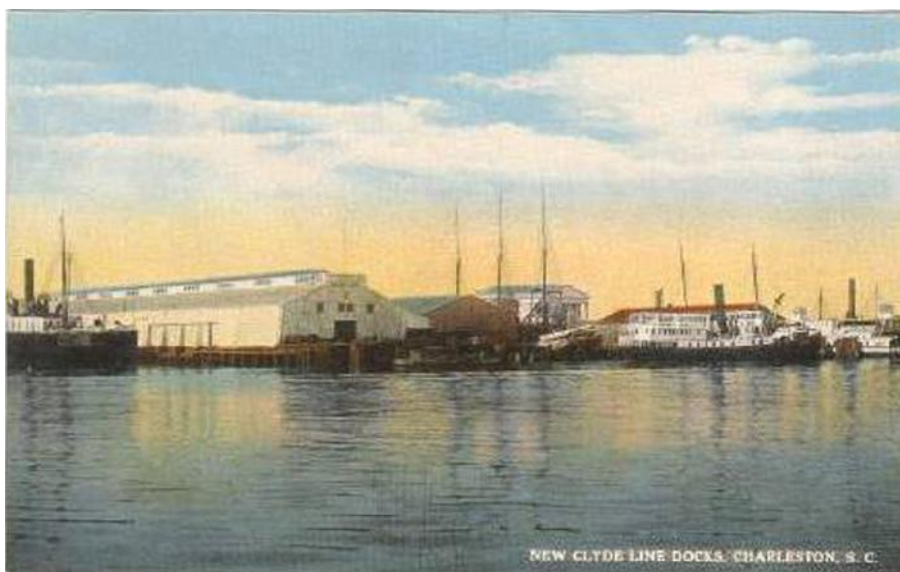
The configuration of the wharves on a 1902 Sanborn Fire Insurance map shows a myriad array of office buildings and storehouses along with the railroad tracks. In 1903 the South Carolina Terminal Company sold its interest to the Charleston Terminal Company.³⁰ Henry Charles Cheves' rice brokerage was listed as a tenant of Adger's Wharf in the 1904 Charleston City Directory and the Cheves family continued to be important occupants.

The type of tenants at Adger's Wharf evolved as the industries in Charleston changed. Henry C. Cheves, Jr. formed Charleston Constructors, Inc. and used Adger's Wharf for his offices. In the early 1900s, the Caro-Cola Company of America occupied the area as shown in the photograph to the right. The Caro-Cola company was based in Spartanburg and was dissolved in 1920 after Coca-Cola made a concerted legal effort to eliminate all copycats.



Early 1900's photo from Historic Charleston Foundation Collection

The city still did not give up on developing Charleston as an enterprising port. In 1918, Mayor Hyde offered the 1100 feet between the Clyde Line docks and the Charleston Yacht Club to the US War Department on the condition it would be used to open up Charleston as a shipping port. The docks in the section that included Adger's Wharf were dilapidated and in disrepair because they were no longer useful. Former Mayor Rhett had purchased large tracts of land in North Charleston and circumvented the city's proposal by proposing an



1928 Postcard

alternate site. Even though it would cost over \$500,000 more to improve Rhett's land, the government chose North Charleston and only a few years later concluded that the money had been ill-spent by placing the terminal in the wrong location. John Grace and Rhett had a very public disagreement over the debacle and Grace won the mayoral race. He soon led the City into purchasing the Charleston Terminal Company³¹ and creating the Port Utilities Commission (PUC), the predecessor to today's South Carolina State Ports Authority.

Charleston's major trade had changed. The hurricane of 1911 ruined the islands for producing rice and by 1920 the boll weevil destroyed the cotton industry. The Clyde line had been bringing its luxury ships to the area since 1870 and used the dock at the base of Queen Street (Vendue Range). Also in

port were the Hawaiian-American Line to pacific coast ports, the Baltimore & Carolina Company to Baltimore & Miami, and the Palmetto Line and Carolina Co. to principal European ports. The city realized its best industry had been overlooked – tourism – and major efforts were refocused.

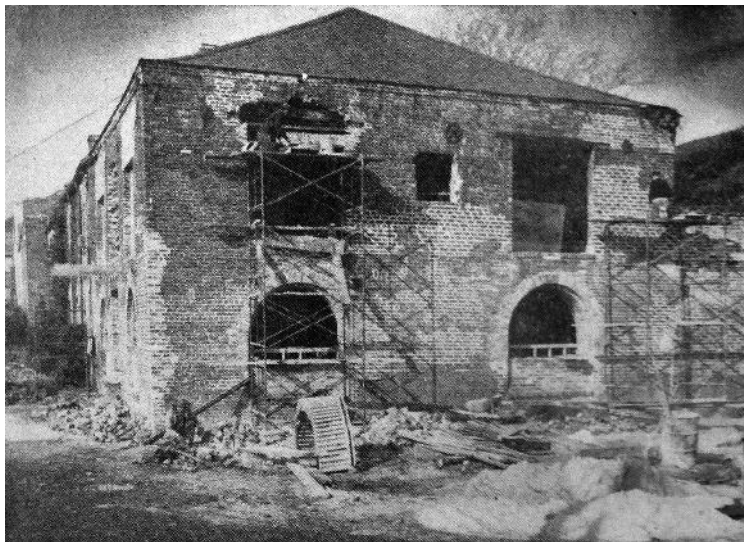
In November, 1930 the 'City of New York' docked at Adger's Wharf as a unique tourist attraction. The vessel served as a supply ship anchored in the Bay of Whales while Admiral Richard Byrd flew over the South Pole and back. The fee charged to view the collection of relics was used to help defray costs that put the exploration \$100,000 in debt.

Adger's Wharf was also heavily used by the 'mosquito fleet' in the 1930s. The mosquito fleet was simply small wooden boats owned by black fisherman. They were painted 'haint blue' to ward off the deadly ghosts lurking outside of Charleston Harbor. Many boats would disappear, enforcing the Gullah superstitions of the 'Devil's Triangle', one of only two places in the world where the magnetic compass points due North.

WWII caused the War Department take over many of Charleston's docks and vessels. By 1942, waterfront commerce had shrunk to nothing and passenger traffic was non-existent.³² Unfortunately for the city of Charleston, the Adger's Wharf property was now a financial sink hole. The offices used by Henry Cheves, Jr. and Charleston Constructors only rented for \$100 per month. A proposed sale in 1945 brought considerable controversy. When the PUC (Port Utilities Commission) received an offer of \$18,000 for the buildings and \$20,000 for the wharf, the question asked around Charleston was 'Smokestacks & Industry or Azaleas & Playgrounds'. Neighbors were deeply concerned about the planned shrimp refrigeration plant and the sale was ultimately rejected.³³

The sale of the brick warehouses for residential use took place in 1947 to Charleston Constructors, owned by C.M. Trott and Henry Charles Cheves, Jr. Charleston Constructors worked on many public buildings in the mid 20th century. They refinished City Hall floors, repaired First Scots tornado damage, added a one-story addition to Murray Vocational School, built the Altman Cadillac Building, built the foundations at MUSC hospital, built the Burke School addition, and the new Porter-Gaud School across the Ashley River. Henry C. Cheves, III was the first of the family to have a residence at South Adgers Wharf when he renovated #10 in 1948.

On January 6, 1950. Lenora Cheves Tarrant married Wilson Harvey Brockinton and first made their home at 6 Adger's Wharf.



*Renovation of 4 S. Adger's Wharf
Charleston Evening Post, 1956*

Lenora's doting father, Henry C. Cheves, Jr., deeded 4 S. Adger's Wharf to Lenora in 1956.³⁴ Douglas Ellington was hired as an architect to renovate the space into a 'very modern living structure with little change to the exterior'.³⁵ The old pine beams in the ceiling were left exposed and a beautiful staircase wound from the first to second floor. The property has been unchanged in her family since that time.

Henry Charles Cheves Jr. of Sullivan's Island, co-founder and past president of Charleston Constructors Inc., died Sunday.

The funeral will be 11 a.m. Tuesday at St. Andrew's Episcopal Churchyard, according to Connelly's.

Mr. Cheves was born April 30, 1889, a son of Henry C. Cheves and Mrs. Langdon McCord Cheves. He attended Sewanee Military Academy and the University of the South and was an engineer, surveyor and contractor.

After being associated with construction and engineering firms here, he joined with Cambridge M. Trott to form Charleston Constructors, now one of the state's oldest construction enterprises.

He was a member of St. Philip's Episcopal Church, the Carolina Yacht Club, the South Carolina Society and the University of the South Alumni Association.

His first wife was the late Mrs. Leonora Foster Cheves.

Surviving are: his widow, Mrs. Blanche Ridenour Beltinger Cheves of Sullivan's Island; a daughter, Mrs. W. Harvey Brockinton; six grandchildren and five great-grandchildren.

*April 11, 1978
Obituary*



News & Courier Photo, 1956

The last disaster for the wharf itself was a fire on September 5, 1951. The residents of Adger's Wharf had shared the area with the shrimp trawlers, tugs, the Richardson Brother's water taxi, and the Charleston Branch Pilots Association. A 70 year-old tug named Cecilia of the White Stack Towing

Company went up in flames along with the wharf. Her hull was wrought iron so she was salvageable, but all that remained of the dock was the granite. In 1955 the Clyde Line dock to the north was also destroyed by fire, so the entire southern waterfront area was a mess of charred ruins.

In 1960, the SC State Ports Authority decided to raze the historic wharf as part of a beautification project. It took almost 30 years, but the area has remained useful while becoming more beautiful.



View of the old dock area between North and South Adger's Wharf, 2013

Concord Street now takes the path of the former railroad tracks and across the street sits the City's 13 acre Waterfront Park. The park has two piers for the public to enjoy, but neither of these allow boats to dock. The southern-most pier is built on the granite foundation of Adger's North Wharf. The park was a vision as part of 1978 Tourism Impact and Management Study and the 1982 Visitor Accommodations Study. It was completed in May, 1990 despite setbacks by Hurricane Hugo in 1989. This park, as Mayor Riley describes it, is like an outdoor cathedral surrounded by sky and stars, trees and water, and Charleston's downtown skyline.

The shrimp boats and water taxis are gone, but Adger's South Wharf is still an active place. The Charleston Branch Pilots Association has moored its pilot boats at Adger's Wharf since it formed in 1890. These seamen are responsible for assuring the safe navigation of ships in and out of Charleston Harbor, and operate 24 hours, 7 days a week without regard to weather. The group purchased the wharf from the State and its beautiful modern office sits high on the wharf overlooking the harbor.

As you come visit the CSOL's 2013 Designer Showhouse between March 21 and April 21, make sure you also take a stroll out to the pier and soak up the history of this maritime center.



View of home at 4 South Adger's Wharf from the water



Intersection of East Bay and South Adger's Wharf, 2013

- 1 Charles Fraser (1854). *Reminiscences of Charleston*.
- 2 Charleston Will Book (1729-1731). Volume 2, page 73.
- 3 It is not known how the wharf was managed after Motte relinquished his property to a group of trustees. A marriage settlement between Jacob Motte Jr. and Miles Brewton, et. al. was recorded in RMC Book E, p 391 in 1765 that implies the wharf was retrieved. Jacob Motte, Sr. also referenced the property in his will recorded in Charleston Will Book, Volume 13, page 797. Jacob Motte Jr. married Rebecca Brewton, daughter of Robert Brewton, in 1758.
- 4 Robert Jordan as Reagan O'Neal (1980). *The Fallon Blood*.
- 5 The Charleston Chamber of Commerce Tourist & Convention Bureau (1924). *Seven Hours in Charleston*.
- 6 Residents of Motte's Wharf listed in the 1790 Charleston Directory: Hector Alexander, shopkeeper; Bryan Conner, shopkeeper; Samuel DeCosta, shopkeeper; James Gorton, shopkeeper; Heith Heine, shoemaker; Benjamin Peckham, storekeeper; and John B. Thomas, shopkeeper. Nathaniel Russell, merchant, was listed at 16 E. Bay.
- 7 William Crafts purchased Motte's Wharf from Rebecca Motte for 8000 £. The conveyance was recorded in RMC Deed book F6, p 238 on April 6, 1792. Rebecca held a mortgage on the property until January 19, 1796 (RMC Deed Book R6, p 1.) William Crafts also purchased Greenwood's wharf to the north for 6500 £. The conveyance was recorded in RMC Deed book F6, p 499 on February 6, 1793.
- 8 William Francis Crafts (1893). *The Crafts Family: A Genealogical and Biographical History of the Descendants of Griffin and Alice Craft, of Roxbury, Mass. 1630-1890*. p 189.
- 9 The South Carolina Insurance Company was the creditor and purchased the property at auction for \$22,000 as recorded on September 14, 1882 in RMC Deed book L9, p44.
- 10 Nathaniel Russell held a mortgage of \$20,000 on the brick stores #4, 5, 6, and 7 on Crafts' South Range as recorded November 2, 1801 in RMC Deed book F7, p89. The mortgage was satisfied in 1804 when Crafts deeded property of Crafts' North Wharf to Russell on June 13, 1804, RMC Deed book I7, p 282.
- 11 Nathaniel Russell (May 18, 1769). *Letter to Messrs. Samuel and William Vernon*. Slavery Collection, New York Historical Society.
- 12 James A. McMillin (2004). *The Final Victims: Foreign Slave Trade to North America, 1783-1810, Volume 2*.
- 13 William L. King (1882). *The newspaper press of Charleston, S.C. A Chronological and Biographical History, Embracing a Period of One Hundred and Forty Years*.
- 14 Don H. Doyle (1990). *New Men, New Cities, New South: Atlanta, Nashville, Charleston, Mobile, 1860-1910*. p.75.

- 15 Conveyance from SC Insurance Company to James Hamilton was recorded on July 15, 1834 in RMC Deed book H10, p 308.
- 16 The building was renovated as a two story building per old literature of the Preservation Society of Charleston and as referenced by Stoney (1958), *This is Charleston*, p. 42: "This two story stuccoed brick building at 90 East Bay with a hipped roof was built c. 1835 as the office of James Hamilton and Co., whose presiding officer was Intendant of Charleston, Governor of South Carolina, a general and a leader of the Nullifiers". The building was then used by the Savannah and Charleston Steam Packet company owned by William Seabrook and Walter DuBose. Today's 90-92 East Bay (corner of East Bay and South Adger's Wharf) has a marker by the Preservation Society that indicates it was the Ancrum's Wharf building built by Parker Quince & John Ancrum circa 1781 (during the Revolutionary War). This is an interesting conundrum since John Andrum died in 1779, the curtain wall didn't come down until 1785, and before 1787 Charleston law did not allow buildings within 50 feet of the wall. The 1834 plat shows a building there when Hamilton bought it, so it was probably built by William Crafts after 1792.
- 17 On July 2, 1836 conveyance of Crafts' Wharf from James Hamilton to James Adger was recorded in RMC Deed Book I10, p 363
- 18 Robert Tinkler (2004). *James Hamilton of South Carolina*.
- 19 Vennie Deas Moore (2008). *Scenes from Columbia's Riverbanks: A History of the Waterways*. p 17. "The Congaree River was navigable for steamboats from Columbia to the Santee River. The waterway of more than 175 miles in length eventually drained into the Atlantic Ocean. Steamboats, tugs and canal boats regularly made the trip from Columbia to Charleston, via the Santee Canal, with more than 30,000 bales of cotton annually, and with full return freights. In 1822, the Carolina made the trip upriver in 4 ½ days."
- 20 A. S. Johnson (1840). *The Statutes at Large of South Carolina: Acts relating to corporations and the militia*. The Union Insurance and Trust Company incorporated with \$500,000 shares of stock.
- 21 April 27, 1843 conveyance of Crafts' North & South Wharves from A. R. Middleton, et al to James Adger was recorded in RMC Deed Book I11, p 362. Robert Bee conveyed Crafts' Wharf to Middleton on August 12, 1834 as recorded in RMC Deed book G10, p 336. This possibly the land originally owned by William Bull.
- 22 Charleston Mercury News (May 18, 1850)
- 23 The *New York Herald* in September 1858, stated that he died at the Saint Nicholas Hotel. The *Charleston Courier* on September 28, 1858, reported that he had arrived in New York from Kinderhook ten days before his death. His body was taken to the house of James Brown of the banking firm Brown Bros. & Co. It was kept in Brown's burial vault at Second-street Cemetery until it was conveyed to Charleston in the steamer *James Adger*. The funeral was held November 27, 1858, at Second Presbyterian Church in Charleston.
- 24 Andrea Mehrlander (2011). *The Germans of Charleston, Richmond and New Orleans During the Civil War Period, 1850-1870: A Study and Research Compendium*. P 214. Thomas Lockwood, a legendary captain, received \$2000 in gold as early as 1862 for every successful trip made by Trenhom blockade-runner *Kate*. He reached Charleston 20 times before she sank in November

1862.

- 25 Stephen R. Wise. *Lifeline of the Confederacy: Blockade Running During the Civil War*. p 212.
- 26 Don H. Doyle (1990). *New Men, New Cities, New South: Atlanta, Nashville, Charleston, Mobile, 1860-1910*. p 126.
- 27 MK86, Charleston Museum Earthquake Photographs, Digital image copyright 2009, The Charleston Museum Archives
- 28 May 22, 1886 conveyance of Adgers North & South Wharves from Robert Adger & John B. Adger to NY and Charleston Storehouse & Steam Navigation Company was recorded in RMC Deed Book D20, p 581
- 29 South Carolina Supreme Court (1894). *Reports of Cases Heard and Determined by the Supreme Court of South Carolina, Volume 52*
- 30 November 20, 1903 conveyance of Adgers North & South Wharves from the South Carolina Terminal Company to the Charleston Terminal Company, August Belmont, President, was recorded in RMC Deed Book F24, p 373
- 31 July 18, 1922 conveyance of Adgers Wharves from the Charleston Terminal Company to Charleston City Council was recorded in RMC Deed Book D31, p 457.
- 32 The News and Courier (November 15, 1942). Charleston Docks are idle. City turns to War Industry, p 5.
- 33 The News and Courier (January 27, 1945). *Letters to the Editor*. P 8.
- 34 February 9, 1956 conveyance of 4 South Adgers Wharf from Henry C. Cheves, Jr to Lenora Cheves Brockinton was recorded in RMC Deed Book Z60, p 9.
- 35 The Charleston Evening Post (January 27, 1956). *Warehouse To Get New Look*.