

HCF and Bennett Rice Mill

Historic Charleston Foundation has had a long association and interest in the Bennett Rice Mill. In fact, the Mill was one of the first targeted projects by the Foundation's early trustees and represented their first major victory in saving a structure from demolition.

In **1952**, Bennett Rice Mill was condemned as a fire hazard by its then owner Seaboard Air Line Railroad. A letter writing campaign by HCF and the Preservation Society forestalled the demolition even as a search for a viable adaptive re-use for the building was unsuccessful.

By **1958**, the State Ports Authority owned the land and the mill building which was by then under a city condemnation order. In October of 1958, the SPA entered into a joint five-year lease agreement with HCF and the Preservation Society. Both the Foundation and the Society contributed \$3,000 towards its stabilization.

Unfortunately, two years later, in September **1960**, a tornado spun off by Hurricane Donna effectively destroyed much of the structure. With the encouragement of the preservation groups, the SPA hired Dawson Engineering to remove all walls except the West (front) façade and erect a system of steel braces.

Over the next several decades, there were several attempts at re-establishing a lease agreement between the SPA and the preservation groups. Communication was spotty at best, although one other lease was signed (**1966-1971**). In the late 1970s and early 1980s, HCF trustees worked to re-establish communications between HCF and the SPA and had some success with debris clearance and limited maintenance of the façade. In **1989**, Hurricane Hugo did some minor damage but more than 90% of the braced structure survived.

In the early **1990s**, Historic Charleston Foundation worked out an agreement to use the Bennett Rice Mill façade as the canvas for its grant-funded Craft's Training program. HCF restored about 33% of the extant brickwork at that time using brick salvaged from the site. Missing bricks were replaced and the repaired areas were re-pointed using a soft lime mortar. The interior of the west wall (facing the bracing) was partially re-stuccoed with an oyster shell/ lime mortar. Unfortunately, the grant was not enough to cover the remaining two-thirds of the brickwork or the wooden components that were in need of repair.

In the **2000s**, the Foundation expressed interest in inspecting the structure but the SPA cited heightened security issues after September 11, 2001 and access was complicated.