

76 Nassau

The Evolution of an East Side Foundry

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ABSTRACT

This report is an architectural evolution of the property 76 Nassau Street, formerly used by the Eason and Brother company as an important iron foundry

TABLE OF CONTENTS

INTRODUCTION

EASTSIDE HISTORY

 Development of Eastside

HISTORY OF IRON INDUSTRY IN CHARLESTON

 General History

 Eastside history

PROPERTY DESCRIPTION

 Changes over time

 Surviving structure

IRON FOUNDRY PERIOD

 Thomas Dotterer

 James M. Eason

 Eason and Brother Foundry

POST-FOUNDRY PERIOD

 Post iron foundry period to present

CONCLUSION

CHAIN OF TITLE

BIBLIOGRAPHY

INTRODUCTION

The property of 76 Nassau has a unique history to its Eastside neighborhood surroundings because it survives as one of the only current examples of the industrial history of Charleston's Eastside neighborhood, and is certainly a well preserved example. Within this property unfolds a story of the newly industrialized Eastside area, and the two men who help drive the production of iron goods for the nation. The buildings resilience to the changing neighborhood showcases its importance to the history of the community it is located within. The property and its occupants play a key role in the development of the Eastside neighborhood, as well as the development of the nation during the antebellum period up until the American Civil War. Its tale showcases themes such as workers rights and slavery but also manufacturing, industry and their fragility.

Charleston's East side has a history of providing industrial space as well as jobs to the city during the second half of the 19th century, most notably Charleston's Cigar Factory, which was the site of early labor protests in the early 20th century. This property predates the Cigar factory, and reaches its heyday in the antebellum period. This building survives as an excellent example of Charleston's importance during the antebellum period, not as a site for cultural preservation of slavery or states rights, but as a site for progressive industrial growth and change. I will begin this essay by providing an architectural description of the property and its evolution through time as I have come to understand it, and I will continue to provide the reader with a brief history of Charleston's Eastside neighborhood and a brief history of the iron industry in Charleston, specifically the eastside area. This will provide the reader with the appropriate background to understand the significance of this property and the history contained within it.

EASTSIDE HISTORY

The history of Charleston's Eastside neighborhood began with the expansion of Charleston in the late 18th century. The northern areas of Charleston were largely considered outskirts and countryside throughout the century, so there were many large lots with homes for wealthy planters. As the city began to spread north, different types of people began to settle in the area known as Hampstead. Many of Charleston's "merchants, manufacturers, attorneys and physicians built or rented substantial homes in the suburb."¹ The area saw an influx in German and Irish immigrants, as well as African Americans, free and enslaved. This was due to the increasing creation of jobs on the Charleston neck due to increased lot size and space for industry.²

Commercial activity soon began to boom in the Hampstead neighborhood. Groceries and retail locations prominent among them, this area saw many German immigrant owned businesses appear throughout the 19th century. There was also an influx in "tanners, butchers, tallow chandlers and dairymen" because they required open spaces to do their business, and they were seen as gritty and unwelcome downtown.³ Mills also began to be built in this area, there was a saw mill on Washington, a rice mill on Meeting, a grist mill on Boundary and so forth. People continued to move into the Neck for the same reasons they did upon its founding; cheap land and larger lots.⁴ As more industry moved in into the late 19th century after the Civil War, overpopulation and density began to alter the quality of life in the area. Illnesses and disease like typhus, cholera and yellow fever were common, and factories caused pollution and "nuisance" of population.⁵

¹ Dale Rosengarten et all, *Between the Tracks: Charleston's East side During the Nineteenth Century* (Charleston: The Charleston Museum, 1987), 9.

² Rosengarten, *Between The Tracks*, 9.

³ Rosengarten, *Between The Tracks*, 21.

⁴ Rosengarten, *Between The Tracks*, 24.

⁵ Rosengarten, *Between The Tracks*, 35.

By the mid 19th century, the area began to make improvements. Some examples of this include centralized business districts, separate areas for industry and residence, improved inner city transportation and more. The area began to pay attention to planning and city functions, like street lighting and fire control.⁶ Into the late 19th century, the Hampstead neighborhood could boast public transportation, sidewalks, several “paved” streets (paved in Belgian block), and even drainage systems. The neighborhood fought against many other issues like flooding, disease and overcrowding, and eventually overcame.⁷

HISTORY OF INDUSTRY IN CHARLESTON

One of the first major iron production industries in Charleston was the railroad industry. In the 1820’s, Charlestonians began to understand that if they wanted to maintain status as a seaport trading center, they had to incorporate rail lines into the city to connect to growing Midwestern metropolises. In 1827, the city’s elite population put in a request that a rail line be built. In 1828, stocks paid for the South Carolina Canal and Railroad Company, “the nation’s second railroad company to carry commercial traffic, passengers, and freight.” The locomotive rail car was designed in New York, and shipped to South Carolina to be constructed by the firm Dotterer and Eason. From the 1840’s to the beginning of the Civil War, there was a 71 percent increase in the value of Charleston imports and exports. This being said, the rail company did not prove successful enough for the city, because it intensified the reliance on cotton exports. Post civil war, the railroad system in Charleston had all but collapsed.⁸

In the early 1800’s, Charleston raised its efforts to create local industries in an attempt to “free them from dependence on northern mills, factories and foundries.” The Charleston Daily

⁶ Dale Rosengarten et all, *Between the Tracks: Charleston’s East Side During the Nineteenth Century* (Charleston: The Charleston Museum, 1987), 93

⁷ Rosengarten et all, *Between the Tracks*, chapter IV

⁸ Rosengarten et all, *Between the Tracks*, chapter IV

Courier published a column on mechanics from August 17 to September 12, where they reported on the works of six iron foundries as well as other industrial companies throughout Charleston. Included also were "a woodworking business, a steam sawmill, a railroad car manufacturer, a carriage manufacturer, a gas works, and an umbrella factory."⁹

Many of these industries were located in the Eastside. One iron foundry, William S. Henereys, was at the corner on Meeting and Line streets. They produced cotton gins, steam engines, mills and general machinery. They employed around 60 – 70 men in their shop, and won various awards for their machinery. They aimed at promoting buying machinery from a "southern enterprise," who's "citizens should be fully alive to the importance of their own manufacturing interests." Another large ironworking company was the Wharton and Petsch car manufacturing company. Wharton and Petsch owned a machine shop and a blacksmithing shop where they produced 30 to 40 cars monthly on their property at the corner of King and Line streets.¹⁰ The Eason Ironworks was certainly the largest and most influential iron foundry in Charleston during this period.

PROPERTY DESCRIPTION

The ~~original~~ property was bought as a two thousand acre property from the ~~Lords~~ Proprietors of Carolina to John Bayley, son of John Bayley Landgrave to be controlled through his agent and attorney Alexander Trench, in the early 18th century.¹¹ Trench was a merchant who resided in Gran~~ville~~ county, South Carolina, and owned land in present day Hilton Head, Beaufort and Charleston.¹² Records survive of Trench's will, and a register of St. Philips church in

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⁹ Dale Rosengarten et all, *Between the Tracks: Charleston's East side During the Nineteenth Century* (Charleston: The Charleston Museum, 1987), 122

¹⁰ Rosegarten et all, *Between The Tracks*, 122

¹¹ Charleston County. Records of the Mesne Conveyance (RMC), Charleston County, SC. Deed Book F-14, p. 16

¹² Peeples, *An Index to Hilton Head Island Names (Before the Contemporary Development)*, (Hilton Head: Heritage Library Hilton Head), 41.

Charleston from 1720 – 1758 show Trench and his wife's grave sites on the property.¹³ ¹⁴ Trench (Bayley) grants this land to James Brown at an unknown date. The lease is “at the rent of one peppercorn.” The land is bound to the northeast by the Black River, northwest by an “Indian old field,” and southeast and west by vacant lands.¹⁵

The next transfer of property is the selling of land from James Brown, assumedly a descendent of James Brown and also a free person of color to Thomas Dotterer in 1839. The deed grants Dotterer two lots of land, 183'4" by 200' in the neighborhood of Hampstead, “to the south on Columbus street, to the north on the marsh now owned by the estate of Cole. To the east on land now or likely the property of _____ to the west on Nassau street.” The property was sold for 2,500 dollars.¹⁶ The property remained this size throughout its time as an iron foundry, and was later split into separate properties, with a property record showing the land being sold as a 36'8" by 125' lot in 1911. The lot continues to be bought and sold at this size until its most recent change of hands in 1995.

The building that currently sits at the site of 76 Nassau street sits at the corner of Nassau and Columbus streets in Charleston's Eastside neighborhood. The building is an expansive two story brick building, which encompasses the footprint of its current lot. It has a rectangular floor plan, with 6/6 paired windows and a flat roof. The building is built in the Greek revival style, with a brick gable façade on the Columbus street side and a simple flat wall on the Nassau street side. The brick pattern is a common bond in a 5:1 ratio. The building has undergone major

¹³ The South Carolina Historical Magazine, (South Carolina Historical Society, 1904) Volumes 5-6, 165

¹⁴ Alexander Samuel Salley, *Register of St. Philip's Parish Charles Town, South Carolina, 1720-1758* (Charleston: St. Philip's Church), 239.

¹⁵ Charleston County. Records of the Mesne Conveyance (RMC), Charleston County, SC. Deed Book F-14, p. 13-16

¹⁶ Charleston County. Records of the Mesne Conveyance (RMC), Charleston County, SC. Deed Book S-10, p. 301-303

renovations, and with replacements to windows, windowsills, doors and much of the wall fabric.

The building is currently used as apartment rentals.

IRON FOUNDRY PERIOD



Figure 1: 1876 Birds Eye Map showing foundry site

The significance in this property certainly lies in the period during which it operated as one of the largest and most influential iron foundries in Charleston. Thomas Dotterer Sr. was born on August 11, 1796 in Pennsylvania. It is unknown when Dotterer moved to South Carolina, but he began work as a mechanic when he did. In 1825 Dotterer had started his own business. Dotterer and his business partner, Robert Eason gained fame when they designed and

built the first Charleston locomotive at their foundry on 17 Wentworth street. One of the companies employees, Nicolas Darnell “became the first locomotive engineer of the first American built steam locomotive for actual service.” The locomotive was unveiled on Christmas in 1830, weighing 3.5 tons, with a 6 horsepower engine that could reach 30 mph without attached cars.¹⁷

Dotterer married his business partner’s daughter, Mary Eason and they had their first of 9 children in 1827. Dotterer purchased the property at the corner of Columbus and Nassau streets in 1839 to expand his business. Robert Eason died August 18th 1838, leaving his share of the business to his son, James Monroe Eason.¹⁸ Dotterer died on November 22nd 1846 also leaving his share of the business to his son, Thomas Dotterer jr. Both men are buried in Magnolia cemetery. He left the property to his wife, Mary, who gave it to James Eason in 1839.¹⁹



Figure 2: Robert Eason’s gravestone in Magnolia Cemetery

¹⁷ “Thomas Dotterer Sr,” Find a Grave, Cousins by the Dozens, Last Modified December 10, 2008, <http://www.findagrave.com/cgi-bin/fg.cgi?page=gr&GRid=32095511>

¹⁸ “Robert Eason,” Find a Grave, Cousins by the Dozens, Last Modified June 14, 2008, <http://www.findagrave.com/cgi-bin/fg.cgi?page=gr&GRid=27543840>

¹⁹ Charleston County. Records of the Mesne Conveyance (RMC), Charleston County, SC. Deed Book M-11, p. 149

It was under James M. Eason that the foundry business skyrocketed. James M. Eason was born March 22nd 1819 in Charleston County, South Carolina to Robert Eason and Isabella Grassell Eason. He inherited his father's share of the business at age 20, and ran the business with his brother in law, Thomas Dotterer Jr. Eason is often credited with building the company to its size and fame in the 1850's and 60's. The Easons most famous undertaking was the Steam Dredge Boat, which was used to dredge the Charleston harbor for the first time. A lengthy newspaper article was published in the City Intelligence column of the Charleston Daily Courier on August 25th 1860 about the Eason's foundry on Nassau and Columbus streets. The paper claims about "eighty men are employed at the establishment, in the manufacture of machinery for engines, rice mills, saw mills, grist mills, thrashing machines, ginning machines, and every description of mill gearing and shafting, and iron work usually made in a complete foundry."²⁰

²⁰ "City Intelligence" *Charleston Daily Courier*, August 25 1860.

Eason Iron Works.

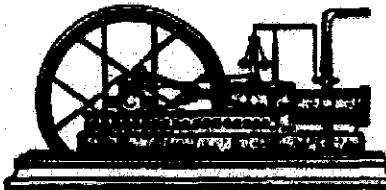
ESTABLISHED 1838.

NASSAU AND COLUMBUS STREETS,
CHARLESTON, S. C.

This Book was printed on a press driven by an Engine
built at the Eason Iron Works.

STEAM ENGINES,

Marine,



Portable,

STATIONARY.

BOILERS OF ALL CLASSES.

MACHINERY.

Rice Pounding Mills,

Rice Threshing Mills,

Saw Mills, Flour Mills,

Sugar Mills, Grist Mills,

Shafting, Pulleys, Gearing,

Castings in Iron and Brass.

J. M. EASON.
T. D. EASON.

J. M. EASON & BRO.

Figure 3: Advertisement for Eason Iron Works



Figure 4: James Monroe Eason

The newspaper article discusses the operations of the foundry with their competition with northern foundries being a highlighted subject. Another highlighted subject was the castings Eason was creating for the Blue Ridge Railroad, “to be used in the construction of the bridges across the Eighteen Mile creek, Seneca river, and Twenty-Six Mile creek.”²¹ The newspaper article gives an extremely detailed description of the foundries functions and the property itself. The article cites 6 buildings on the property, the main foundry, the brass foundry, the machine shop, the erecting shops, and the boiler shop, which adjoins the blacksmith shop. They inspected

²¹ “City Intelligence” *Charleston Daily Courier*, August 25 1860.

circular saws, rice thrashing machines, steam engine parts, boilers, cogwheels “and every conceivable kind of machinery.” They were also shown the boat used to dredge the harbor.

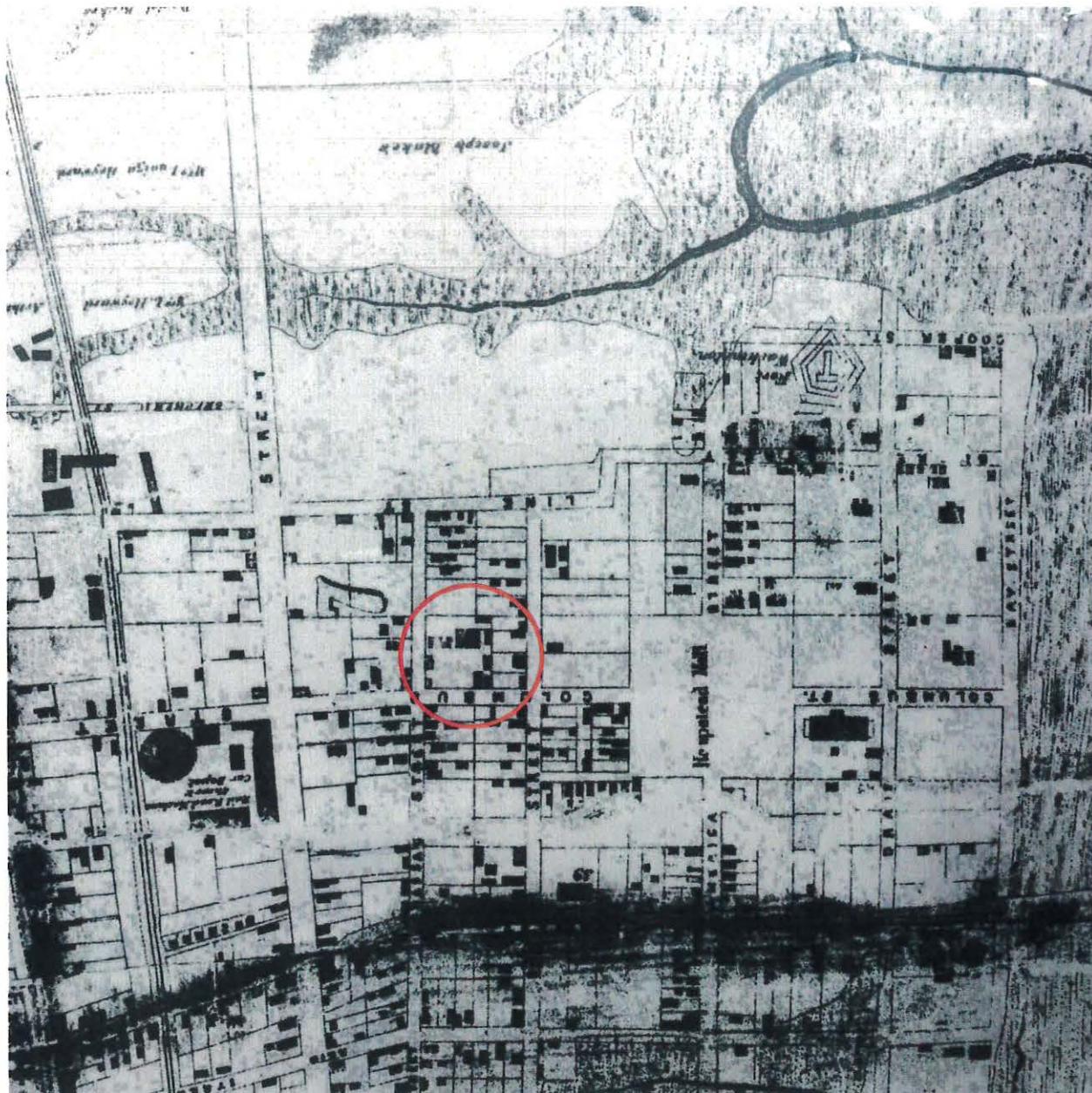


Figure 5: 1852 Bridges and Allen Map

James Eason was also a local politician. He was elected Alderman for his ward in 1850 and served until 1855. In 1860, he led a campaign for the South Carolina State Legislature and won on the campaign promise to represent the white mechanics of South Carolina. His campaign

messages were of a self-made southern man whose business could compete with any in the North. Eason campaigned as a secessionist like many other candidates. Eason campaigned heavily against free black populations in Charleston, inciting the fear that they would take the jobs of white mechanics. Records show the company owned around 12 slaves, with 6 more belonging to Eason himself. Eason owned 14,500 dollars worth of real estate in the area.²²

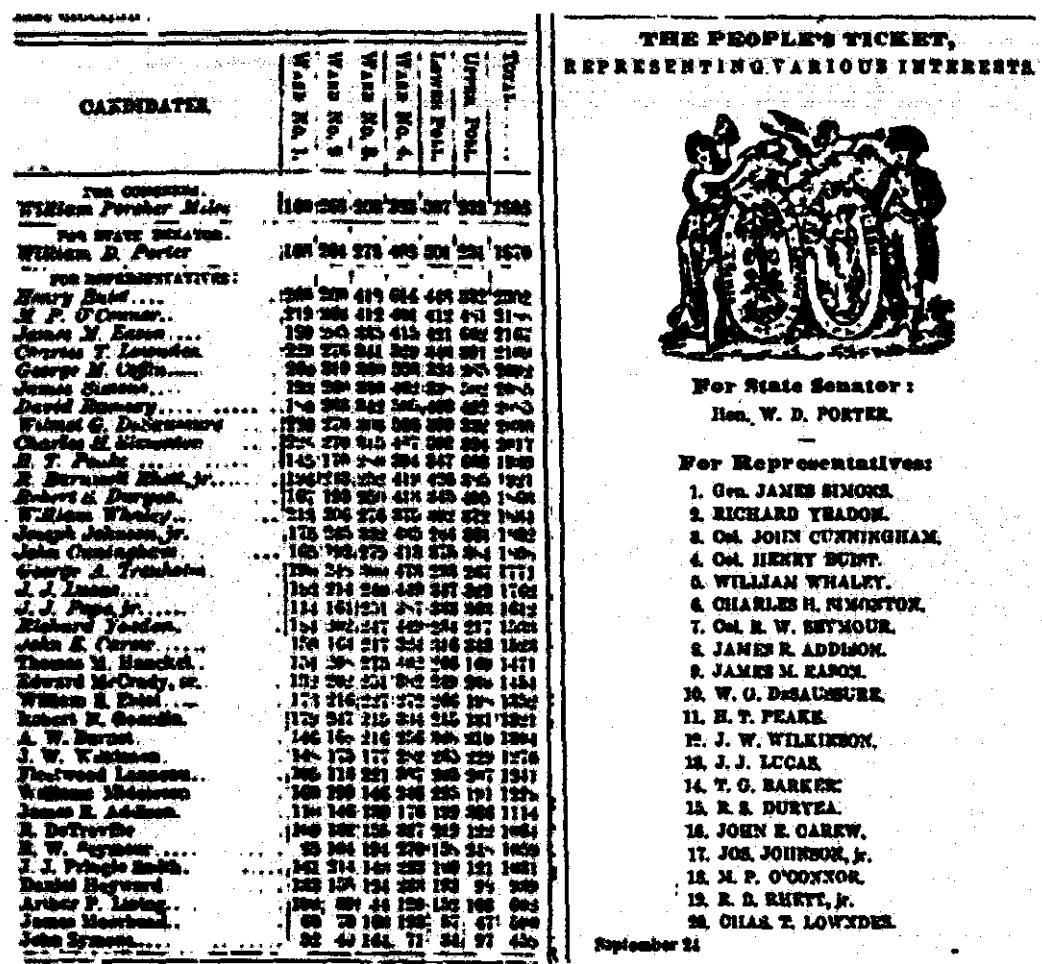


Figure 6: Election Results and Campaign for “The Peoples Ticket”

When the American Civil War reared its ugly head at Charleston, Eason not only joined the service, but also undertook the task of creating cannons for the Confederate army. Eason

²² Johnson and Roark, *Black Masters: A Free Family of Color in the Old South* (Ontario: Stoddart), 266-269.

“rifled and banded the first smooth bore cannon ever altered, and so successful was he in this single branch of the military service that the defeat of the Iron-clad Fleet and the sinking of the Keokuk was due to this improved ordnance.”²³ He is also credited for building that first ironclad gunboat in the South, the CSS Chicora, CSS Columbia and CSS Charleston.²⁴ Up to 20 cannons were built by Eason by September 1861, and were used to defend Fort Moultrie in Battery Bee. Two of the Columbiads survive today and are on display at Fort Moultrie.²⁵

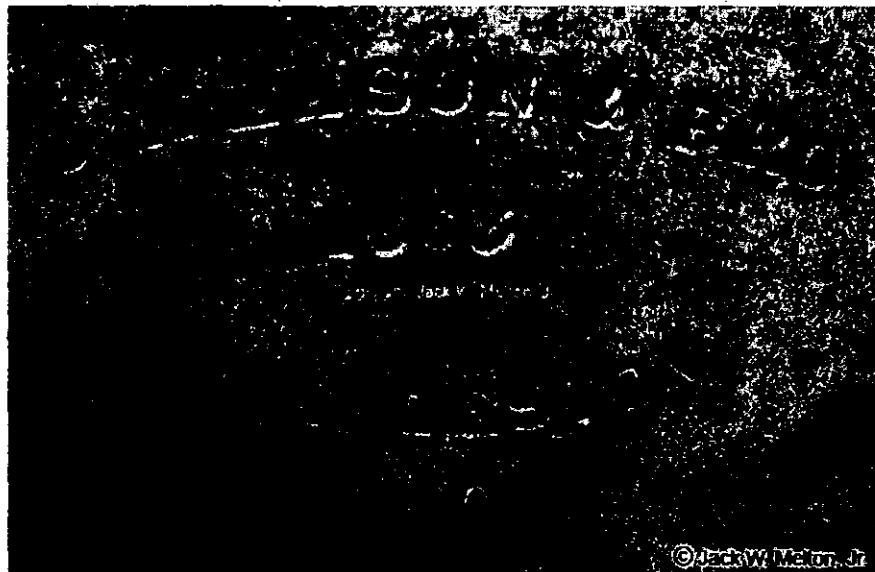


Figure 7: Inscription on Civil War Fort Moultrie cannon

²³ “James Monroe Eason” Find a Grave, Cousins by the Dozens, Last Updated December 10, 2008, <http://www.findagrave.com/cgi-bin/fg.cgi?page=gr&GRid=32095462>

²⁴ “Armored Ships, Rifled Cannon, &c” Year Book, pg 549.c

²⁵ “Famous Cannons and Mortars: 10-inch Columbia smoothbore, rifled and banded by J.M Eason and Brother,” Civilwarartillery.com

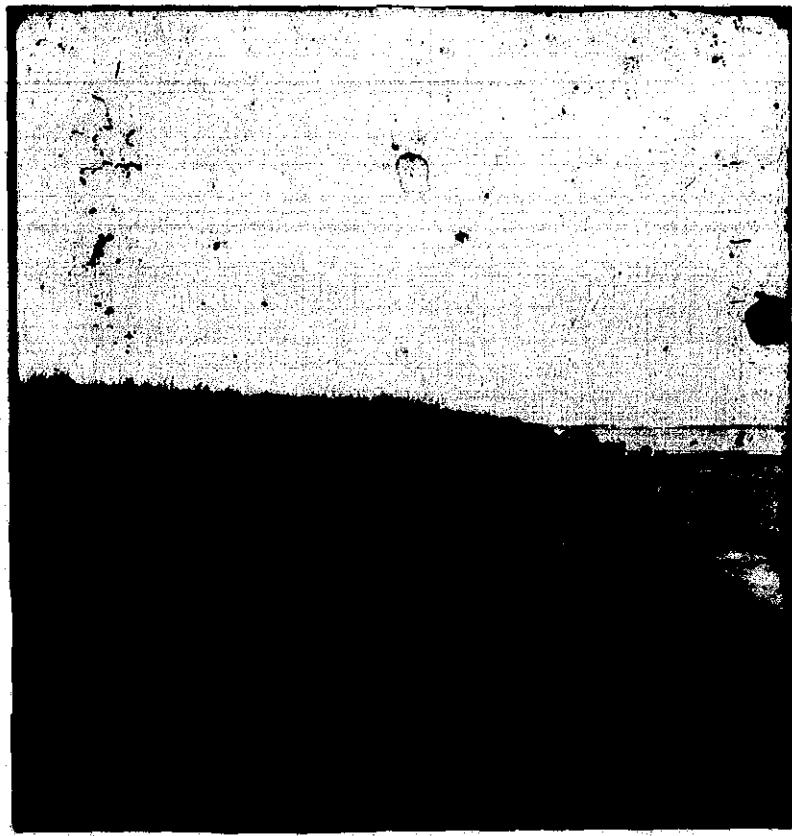


Figure 8: Bason Cannons at Fort Moultrie

POST FOUNDRY PERIOD

It is unclear when the iron foundry ceased operation. In 1897, the property is conveyed to G.H. Master, who conveys the property to Theodore Poppen of the Follin Wings Company in 1911. It is most likely that the building which currently sits on the site was built by Follin Wings in 1911, though there is no research to help us understand this. In the deed from G.H. Master, the name of the grantor was removed with X's. The lot size also seems to shrink from the original 183'4 x 200' lot to the 36'8" x 125' lot it currently is today around 1897. It is sold in 1911 for only 3,000 dollars, so it is possible the lot was divided up and sold as separate plots around 1897. The building goes through a series of general conveyances throughout the 20th century. These are listed in the annotated chain of title, which is attached below.

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In 1979, a woman by the name Susan McNeil owned the property. She subsequently could not pay her mortgage and sold the property and mortgage to Aaron A. Brown for \$27,455.62.²⁶ Brown worked with the Department of Housing and Urban Development and took out a mechanic lien on the property. He contracted Pointsett Construction Company to renovate the building. The building was in bad shape, and Pointsett renovated the building for \$279,003.²⁷ The building project was to renovate the building into apartments to house the elderly and handicapped. The building was “renovated through the Department of Housing and Urban Development’s Section 312 loan program, Community Development funds and private monies.”²⁸ Section 312 states:

LEGISLATIVE AUTHORITY. Section 312 of the Housing Act of 1964 as amended by the Housing and Urban Development Act of 1965 authorizes the Secretary of HUD to make direct loans at an interest rate that may not exceed 3 percent to owners or tenants of residential or business property in urban renewal and code enforcement areas to finance the rehabilitation required to make the property conform to code requirements in a code enforcement project or to carry out the requirements and objectives of the urban renewal plan in an urban renewal project. The Section also authorizes loans to residential owner-occupants in certified areas to conform their property to local code requirements. In addition it also authorizes loans to owners and tenants to correct physical hazards in properties, not located in federally assisted areas, to make these properties insurable under a HUD-FHA approved statewide FAIR plan.²⁹

In August of 1995, Brown foreclosed on the property for failing to pay his mortgage. In the same year, Daniel McDonough bought the property at a foreclosure auction. McDonough converted the property to apartments, and it remains in McDonough’s hands today and still functions as apartments. The apartments range from 500-700 sq ft.

²⁶ Charleston County. Records of the Mesne Conveyance (RMC), Charleston County, SC. Deed Book M120 page 408.

²⁷ Charleston County. Records of the Mesne Conveyance (RMC), Charleston County, SC. Deed Book M124 page 268.

²⁸ “135 Year Old Renovated Brown Bldg. On Eastside Will House Elderly, Handicapped” Charleston Post and Courier, April 4, 1981.

²⁹ “Section 312, Processing” U.S Department of Housing and Urban Development. January 30, 1973



Figure 9: Apartments in 76 Nassau Today

CONCLUSION

This property is still shrouded in mystery. Charleston's historic Eastside is not an area of extensive research or documentation. I encountered many issues while researching this property. Incorrectly indexed deeds, deeds with names crossed out or names that were illegible, lack of maps, earthquake records, photographs, war records, letters, etc of any part of the Eason or Dotterer families. Some areas of further research may include the search for first hand accounts of anyone who worked in the foundry, as well as interviewing any of the members who owned the abandoned building previously, to discuss their understanding of the property. An archeological dig of this site would be extremely beneficial, as likely many metal artifacts and architectural artifacts from the original 8 buildings on the property lie underground. There are still a great many holes in my research, some which I hope can be filled one day.

There are many important themes discussed in this research which we can use to analyze the history of iron industry and industry in general in the South during the antebellum period.

Competition with northern industries, slavery within industrial spaces, and politics and industry are only a few. These topics are important in understanding the antebellum period in one of the South's most influential cities, but also in understanding the course of history and the causes of the American Civil War. I hope this research will prove helpful in aiding another who is interested in Charleston's industrial history. Hopefully, the foundry building can help us understand something about the history of Charleston's Eastside and its importance to the cities history as a whole.

CHAIN OF TITLE

Date: 1729

Grantor: Unknown

Grantee: Alexander Trench

Book and Page: Book F pg 14

Type: Conveyance

Lot: Eight Thousand Acres

Notation: Alexander Trench was lawyer for John Baylay, who owned the land. Trench was charged with overseeing the land as well as dealing with all sales and transactions. Trench was given a piece of the land himself to live on.

incorrect

Date: around 1729

Grantor: John Baylay

Grantee: James Brown

Book and Page: Book F page 15

Type: Conveyance

Lot: Two Thousand Acres

Notation: Trench sold Baylay's land to James Brown at an auction. The land is stated to be located in Craven county.

incorrect



Date: 1839

Grantor: John Brown (descendent of James Brown)

Grantee: Thomas Dotterer

Book and Page: S10 pg 301-303

Type: Conveyance

Lot: 183'4" x 200"

Notation: This was a simple transaction between John Brown and Thomas Dotterer. Dotterer purchased the property for 2,500 dollars.

Date: 1849

Grantor: Mary Dotterer

Grantee: James M Eason

Book and Page: M11 pg 144

Type: Conveyance

Lot: 183'4" x 200"

Notation: Simple conveyance of property from Mary Dotterer, wife of Thomas Dotterer to James M. Eason, Dotterer's business partner Robert Eason's son. There is no price listed.

Date: 1897

Grantor: Not Listed (X'd out)

Grantee: G.H. Master

Book and Page: F14 pg 55

Type: Conveyance

Lot: Illegible

Notation: Lot was sold for 3,000 dollars. There were likely no buildings on the lot at this time

Date: 1911

Grantor: Follin Wings Company (G.H. Master)

Grantee: Theodore Poppen

Book and Page: D26 pg 141

Type: Conveyance

Lot: 36'8" 125'

Notation: The property was sold to Mohrmann for an unknown price. There was likely a building on the property at this time

Date: 1932

Grantor: Emma Marie Mohrmann

Grantee: Meta M. Rodewolt

Book and Page: G36 pg 327

Type: Conveyance

Lot: 36'4" x 125'

Notation: Sold for \$50, upon the execution of Mohrmann's husband's (Theodore Poppen) will.

Date: 1937

Grantor: Meta Marie Rodewolt

Grantee: Ida Sokol

Book and Page: M39 pg 375

Type: Conveyance

Lot: 36'8" x 125"

Notation: Lot was sold for 4,700 dollars

Date: 1973

Grantor: Ida Sokol

Grantee: Susan McNeil

Book and Page: N102 pg 88

Type: Conveyance

Lot: 36'8" x 125'

Notation: Lot was sold for 25,000 dollars

Date: 1979

Grantor: Susan McNeil

Grantee: Aaron A. Brown

Book and Page: M120 pg 408

Type: Conveyance

Lot: 36'8" x 125"

Notation: Lot was sold with unsatisfied mortgage on building. Sold for 27,455.62.

Date: 1980

Grantor: Aaron A Brown

Grantee: U.S Department of Housing and Urban Development

Book and Page: M120 pg 409

Lot: 36'8" x 125"

Notation: Brown used the Section 312 rehabilitation loans from the Department of Housing to complete his renovation project in 1891. The building was converted to housing for the elderly and handicapped.

Date: 1995

Grantor: Foreclosure Commissioner

Grantee: Daniel McDonough

Book and Page: B 261 pg 28

Type: Foreclosure auction

Lot: 36'8" x 125'

Notation: Brown foreclosed the property for unsatisfied mortgage in 1995. McDonough purchased the building at auction and converted it into upscale apartments.

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