

Chisolm's Rice Mill

1830-1880

This document was compiled by Katherine S. Pemberton February 27, 2020- to provide information for HCF on the Mill in the wake of news that the Coast Guard is vacating the property.

Primary source documents included the property history for 18 Rutledge Avenue, and other secondary sources.

The western waterfront of the Charleston peninsula had become populated with lumber mills and other industrial uses by the early 19th century. By 1819 three steam powered lumber mills were active in the city and lumber mills placed along the Ashley River did well with a constant supply of water to power the mills and the steady supply of logs making their way down the river to the city.¹ Lumber was always in demand for building construction and ship building. The 1872 Birds Eye View of Charleston shows several Ashley River mills and mills ponds filled with logs waiting processing.

The first owner of the property that would eventually become the Coast Guard Station was Joshua Brown. In 1817, Mr. Brown purchased a 24 acre tract from Charleston's City Council, comprised of marsh lots as well as channel Lots. The property was described as lying between Broad and Tradd Streets on the north and south. The west to east boundary was formed by the Ashley River over to the corner of New and Tradd Streets. City Council retained the rights to construct two 50'wide roads through the property, to be named Rutledge and Lynch Streets.² This low lying area can be seen in an early configuration in the "Plan of the City and Neck of Charleston, 1844."

Brown worked to improve the property but he quickly mortgaged the property to John Duncan in 1819. That \$100,000 mortgage included the 60 enslaved people who were working at the lumber mill and various properties.³ John Duncan continued in the lumber trade until 1826 when the mill building was damaged by fire.⁴ After several legal disputes, the 24 acre parcel was conveyed to George and Robert Chisolm in 1829. The Chisolm's continued with a saw mill and lumber operation, but they also added a rice mill to the complex.

The first building of the rice mill complex was constructed in 1830. Dimensions were noted as 90' x 70' with a cupola.⁵ This mill was powered by a steam engine and ran 24 hours per day. At peak production, it could process 200 barrels of rice per day. Much of this rice was transported here by rice plantation owners as rough rice. The mill owners would then mill, transport and market the rice and then charge the owner once it sold. To keep up with the high demand, Chisolm's mill used a "walking beam" steam

¹ "Charleston: Lumber and Trade in a Declining Southern Port." Vertical File, SC Room. Charleston County Public Library, 2000.

² Charleston County, Records of the Register of Deeds (ROD), Deed Book T8, p.208-210. Charleston, SC.

³ ROD, Deed Book D9 p.10

⁴ "Handsome Mill Stood on Tradd". Vertical File (Rice Mills- Chisolm), SC Room. Charleston County Public Library, 1978.

⁵ Roy Williams and Alexander Lucas Lofton, *Rice to Ruin: the Jonathan Lucas Family in South Carolina, 1783-1929*, Columbia, SC: The University of South Carolina Press, 2018, p.117.

engine that allowed it to unload and thresh the rice when it arrived by boat. This type of engine was a condensing engine dependent on a supply of cool water that was injected into the piston chamber to help the engine cycle. For this reason, the adjacent mill pond was critical.⁶

In 1836 Alexander Hext Chisolm bought out his family members to become the majority owner of the Chisolm Mill and by 1840 added a three story west wing to the mill. Unfortunately, this addition was not as architecturally pleasing as the first building, a four story building with central pedimented pavilion, arched windows and decorative quoins all topped by a cupola. In 1859 a fire caused significant damage to the structure which necessitated a rebuilding. Caspar A. Chisolm inherited the mill complex from Alexander Hext Chisolm in 1885. Casper Chisolm sold off the Mill's engines, boilers, fixtures, machinery, lumber, tools etc for \$21,111 in 1888.⁷ In 1894, Whitepoint Mill purchased the remaining stock and continued to operate it until 1911. The mill structures, including the main building were almost completely destroyed in the great Hurricane of 1911, an event that also signaled the end to the rice culture in the Lowcountry. The main block of the main mill building was demolished in 1916.

Of the mill buildings, only the three story masonry west addition remains in use by the Coast Guard. The Coast Guard added a two story building in 1915 to serve as base headquarters.⁸

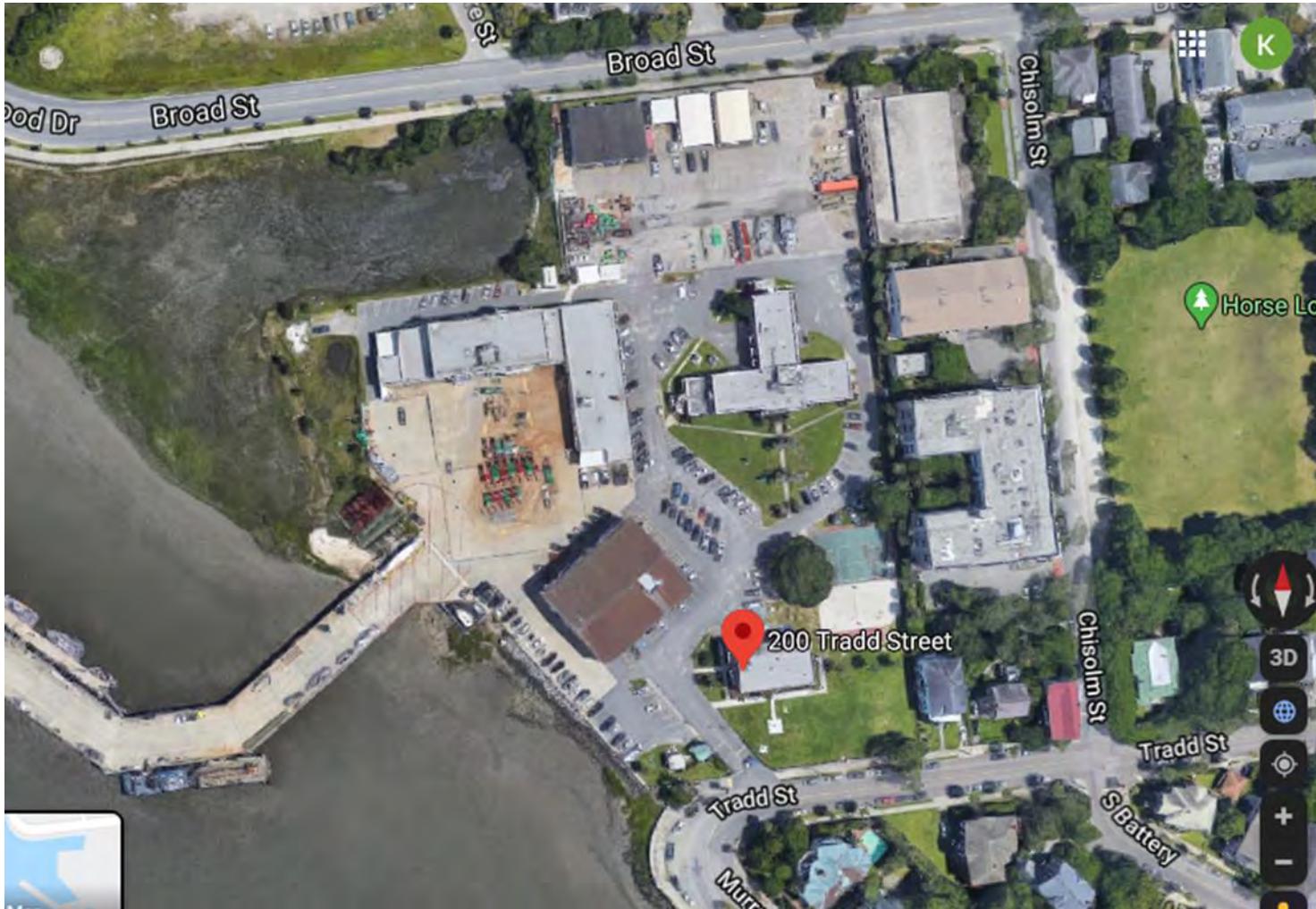
⁶ Richard Dwight Porcher and William Robert Judd. *The Market Preparation of Carolina Rice: An Illustrated History of Innovations in the Lowcountry Rice Kingdom*, Columbia, SC: University of South Carolina Press, 2014.

⁷ Roy Williams and Alexander Lucas Lofton, *Rice to Ruin: the Jonathan Lucas Family in South Carolina, 1783-1929*, Columbia, SC: The University of South Carolina Press, 2018.

⁸ Jonathan Poston, *The Buildings of Charleston: A Guide to the City's Architecture*. Columbia, SC: The University of South Carolina Press, 1997. Pp.331-32

Chisolm's Rice and Saw Mill

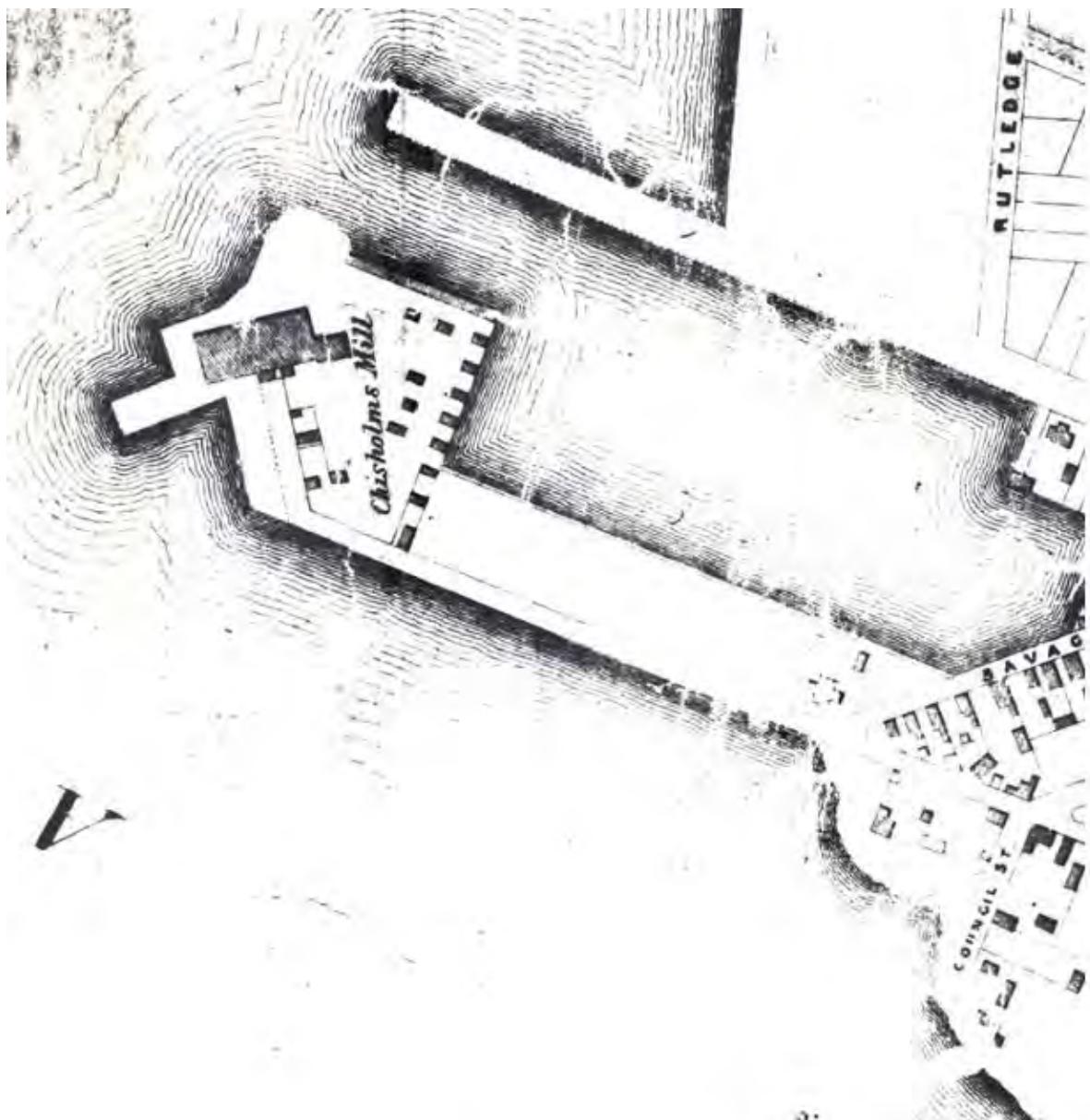
1830-80



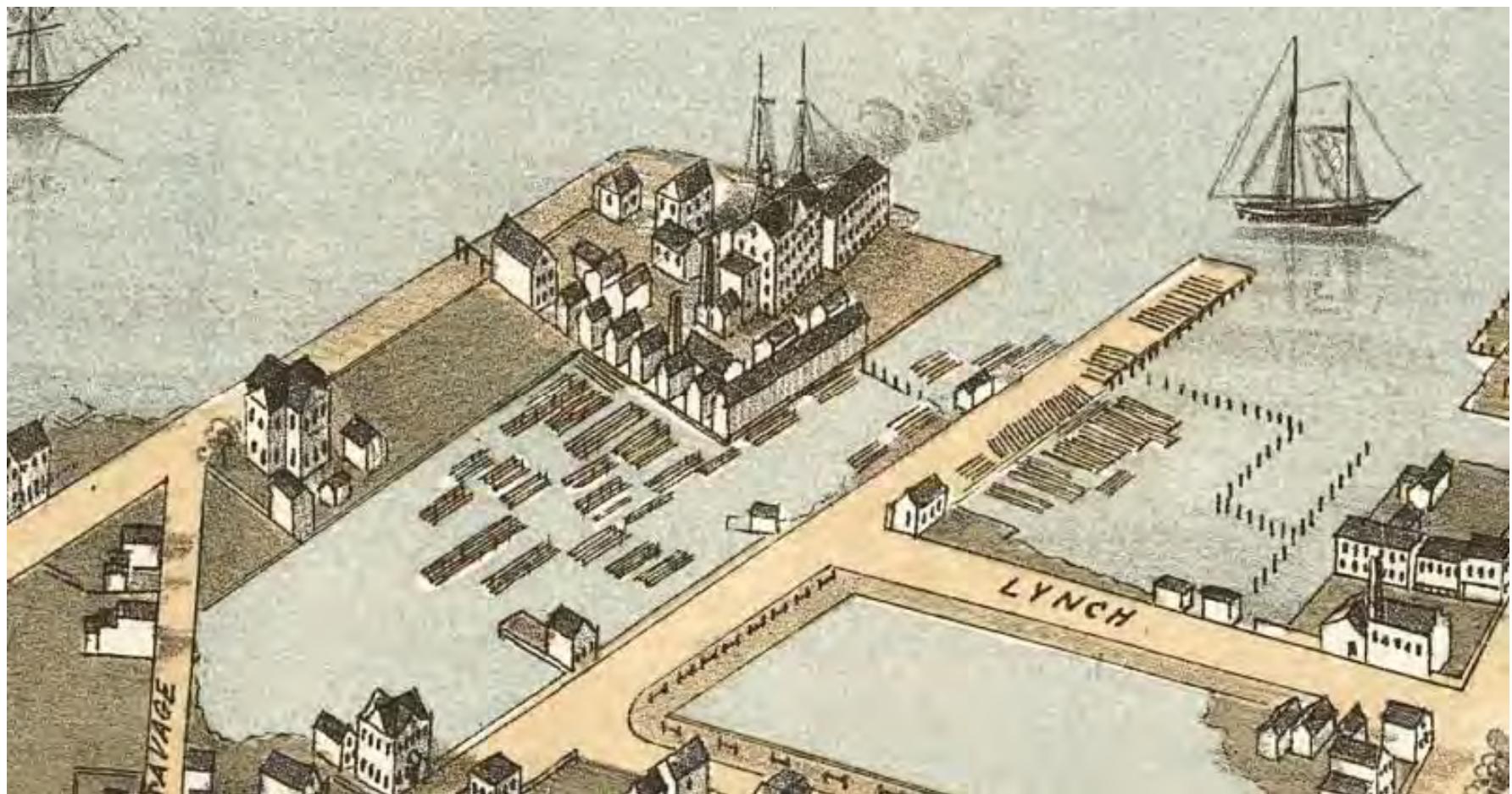
Plan of the City and Neck of Charleston, 1844



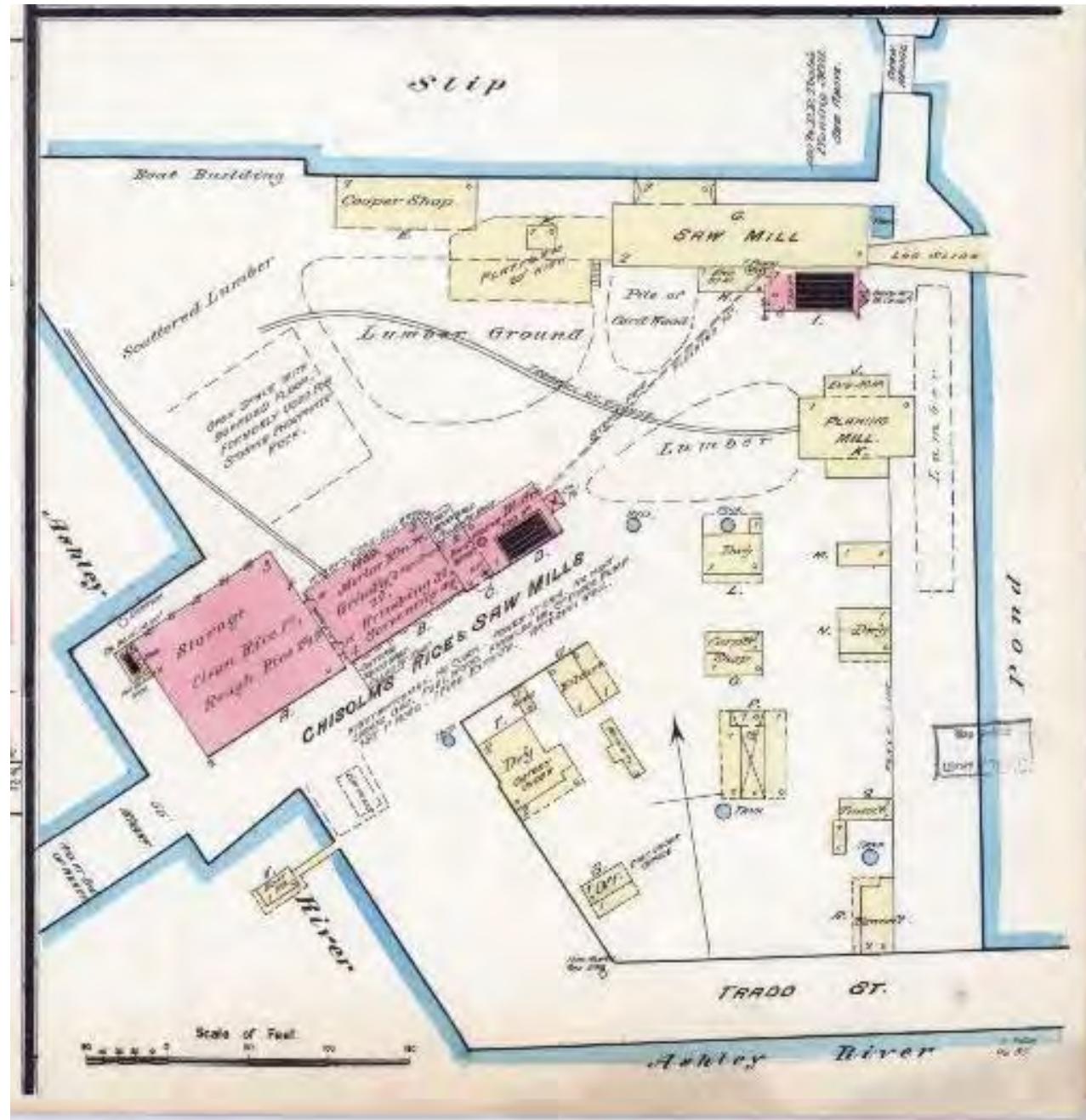
Bridgens &
Allen , 1852



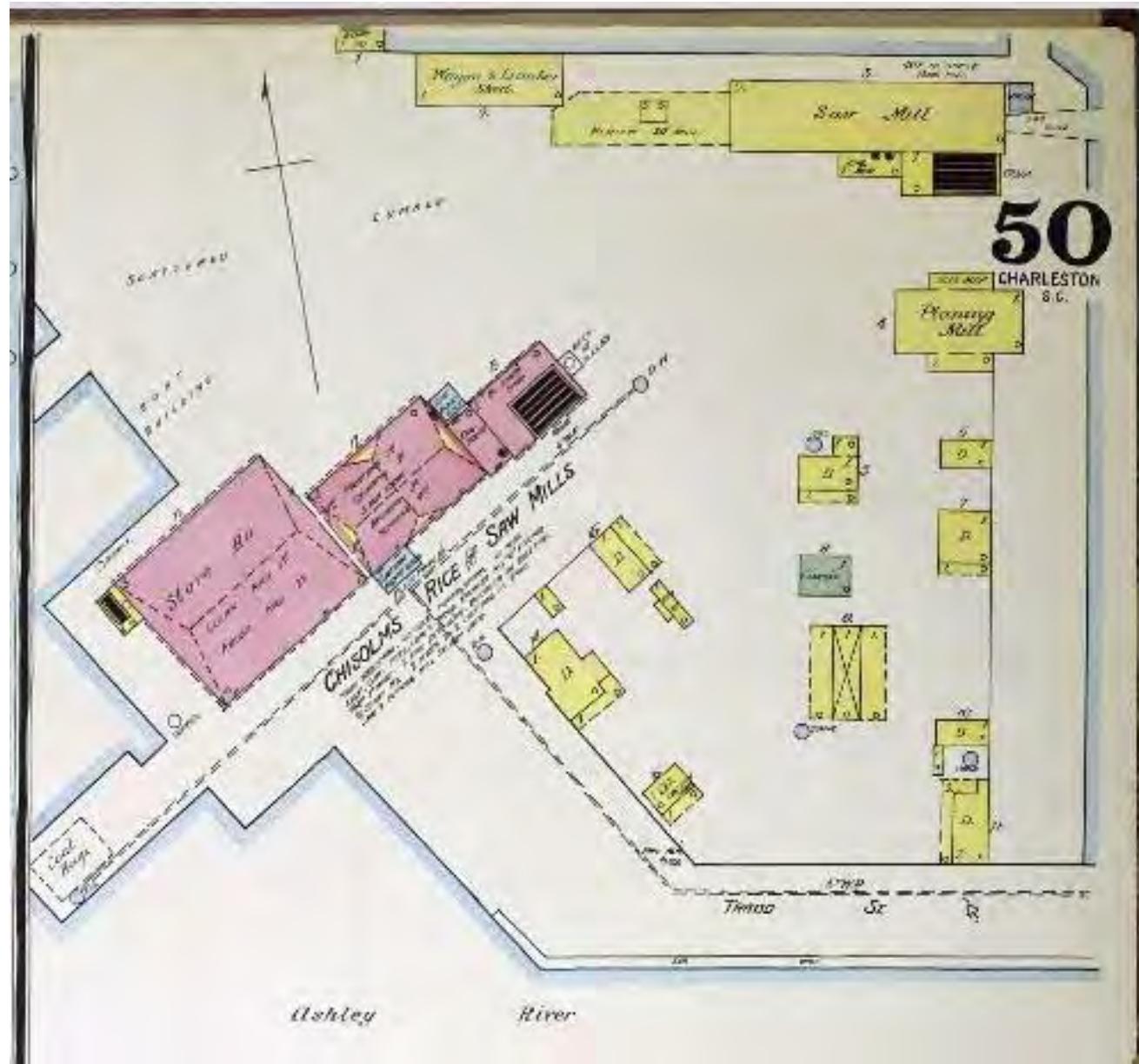
1872 Birds Eye



1884



1888



1893

2006.007.47 Print, Photographic

Historic Charleston Foundation



OLD CHISOLM RICE MILL.

Description

Photograph of the front of Chisolm's Rice Mill, located at the foot of Tradd Street (~200 Tradd Street). Building is now used by the U.S. Coast Guard. Two African-American women peddlers(?) in mid-ground, with their baskets nearby.

From Art Work of Charleston, vol. 10, pg. 4.

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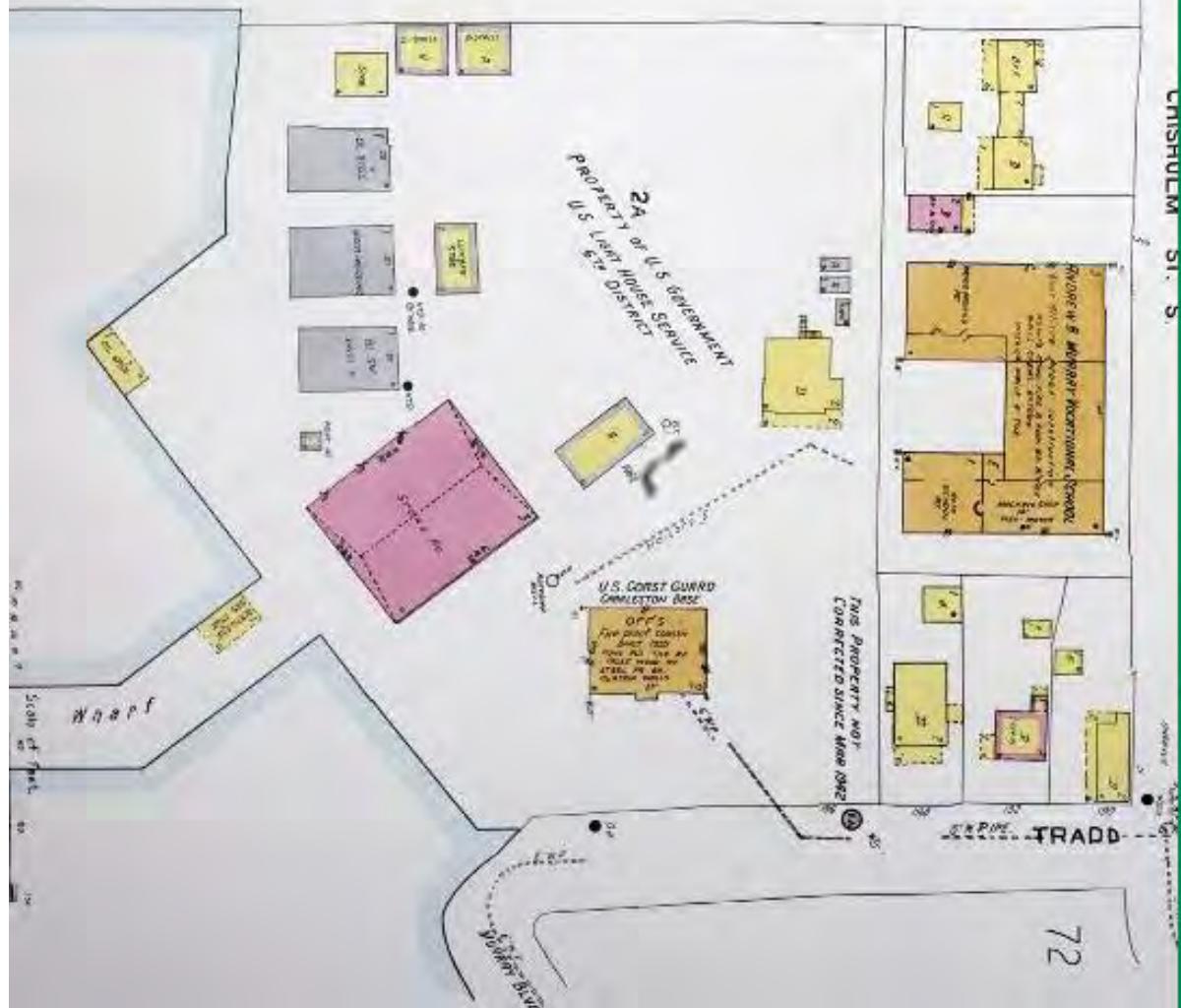
1902

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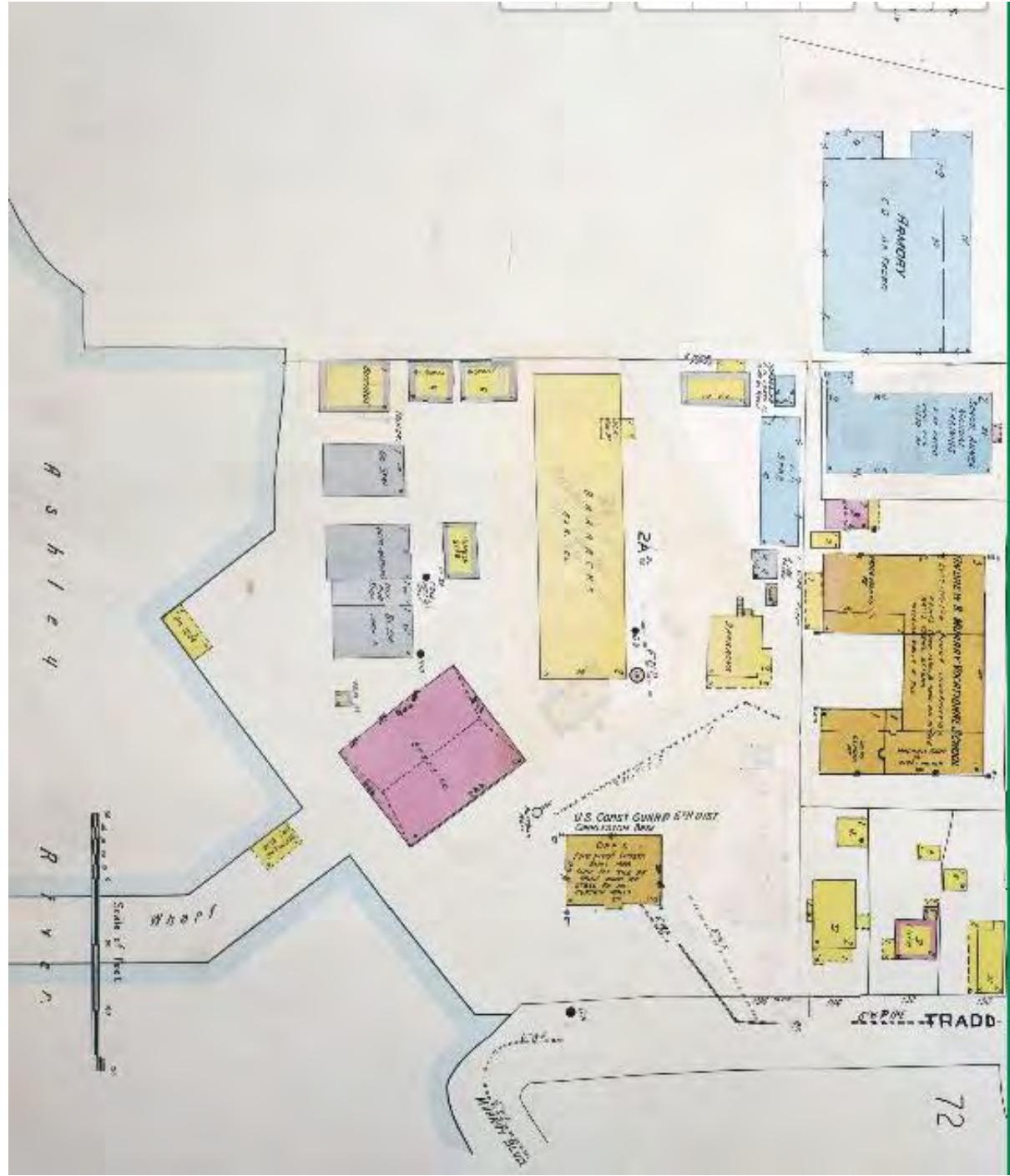
1939 Aerial View

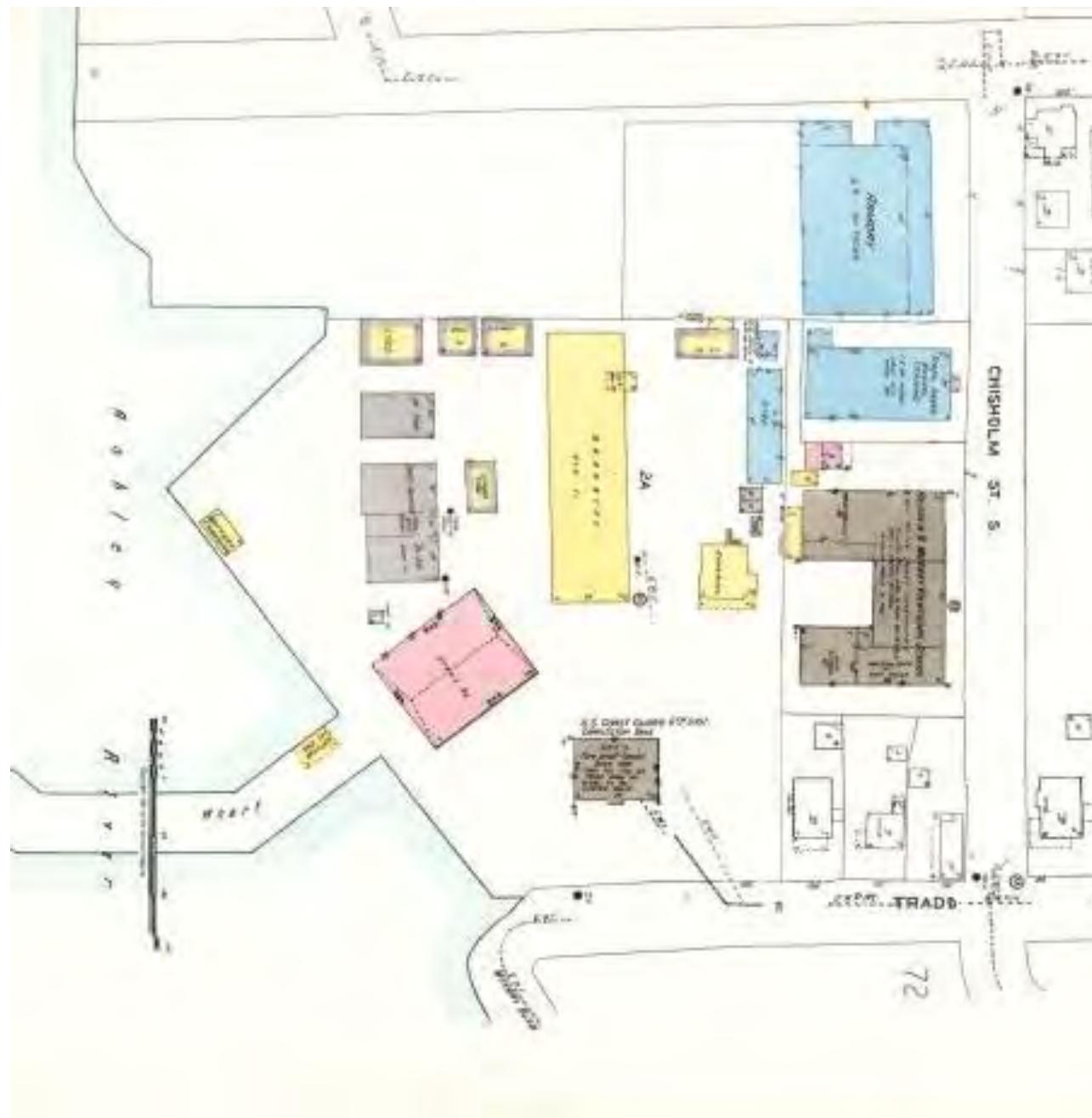


1944



1951





1955

HABS 1977



HABS 1977



