

Removal and Rediscovery

Because of development pressures to expand the town and a reduced threat of attack, the earthen north, west and south walls were mostly dismantled by the 1730s. The more substantial harbor side fortifications, however, remained largely intact until after the American Revolution. In fact, it was not until 1784 that several of the bastions and redans along the Cooper River waterfront were sold at auction; at that time the land went out of public ownership and into private hands. Subsequently, the above-ground remains of the works were cleared away, leaving no evidence on the landscape that they existed. Some key traces of the brick fortifications were located below ground in the 1920s and 1960s. Archaeological investigations from the late 1990s to the present continue to shed light on the colonial walled city of Charles Town.



COLLECTION OF HISTORIC CHARLESTON FOUNDATION

▲ Members of the Mayor's Walled City Task Force and the archaeological crew stand with the exposed brickwork of the Tradd Street Redan during excavations in 2008.

The Mayor's Walled City Task Force

The Mayor's Walled City Task Force was appointed by Charleston Mayor Joseph P. Riley, Jr. in 2005 to further the study, identification, protection, and interpretation of the walled city of Charleston. Since its inception, this group has engaged in a number of educational activities, including a lecture series, a living history program and encampment, and "Walk the Walls" events.

Task Force members continue their on-going research efforts and also sponsor archaeological excavations to better locate and understand the colonial fortifications. Eventually, the group hopes to mark the outline of the fortifications in the streets and sidewalks so that the public can have a heightened sense of the size and scope of the colonial walled city.

For More Information or to Support These Efforts:

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PLAN OF CHARLESTOWN FROM A SURVEY, EDWARD CRISP, 1711, U.S. LIBRARY OF CONGRESS

Walk the Walls
Of Charles Town

The Only
English Walled City
in North America

Self-Guided Tour

Walk the walls using the map and the information inside. A total circuit is approximately 1.5 miles in length. You can begin at any location.

The WALLED CITY of Charles Town

From the 1690s to the 1730s, thick walls of brick and earth enclosed sixty-two acres of high ground on an otherwise marsh-riddled peninsula. The professionally engineered fortifications provided protection to the inhabitants of Charles Town from the French, Spanish and hostile Native Americans. This was the only English walled city built in North America.



POWDERHORN, 1762-1764, COLLECTION OF THE MUSEUM OF EARLY SOUTHERN DECORATIVE ARTS, WINSTON-SALEM, NC

▲ This powderhorn carved by a soldier, in the 1760s shows the fortifications fronting Charleston Harbor

"Anatomy" of the Walled City

Small, four-sided forts or bastions were located at each of the four corners of the walled city. These were named for some of the Lords Proprietors of Carolina. A drawbridge guarded the land entrance to the town at present day Meeting and Broad Streets. The rounded Half Moon Battery, which provided the formal entrance to the town from the water, was located at the halfway point along the water side between the two easternmost bastions, Granville and Craven.

A combination of materials and building techniques was utilized in these early fortifications. The three landward walls and outworks were likely of earthen construction with wooden components. These sides were more temporary in nature and would have been sufficient against a land assault. The defenses that fronted the Cooper River waterfront were built solidly of brick to provide the best protection against a sea assault with cannon fired from enemy ships.



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▲ Artifacts found during the S. Adger's Wharf excavation in 2008 included bone, ceramic, shell, glass, and leather

TERMS

CURTAIN WALL

A wall connecting two bastions, i.e. the scarp or main wall of the fort or fortification.

BASTION

A four sided salient that projects from the curtain wall of the fortification. They typically contain small buildings and platforms for cannon.

REDAN

A triangular projection along the curtain that provides additional coverage with lines of fire.