

SEAC Public Outreach Grant 2012 – Final Report
Archaeology of the Walled City of Charleston, South Carolina:
Interpretation of the Redan at Tradd Street

by
Martha Zierden (The Charleston Museum),
Katherine Saunders Pemberton (Historic Charleston Foundation),
and Mayor Riley’s Walled City Task Force

Charleston, South Carolina was the only English walled city in North America. The first defenses were built by 1686; by 1711 the 62-acre town was completely fortified. The three landward walls were earthen, and largely abandoned by the mid-18th century. The east wall was a massive brick seawall, complete with two corner bastions, a half moon battery at the center, and redans, or salient angles, between the forts. The brick seawall and outer works remained intact through the American Revolution. In 1784, the lands were sold at auction, the above-ground portions of the defensive works were cleared away, and the foundations were buried under new commercial waterfront construction. The only visible remnant of the walled city is a congested urban landscape within the footprint of the fortifications.



In 2005, the Walled City Task Force was appointed by Mayor Joseph P. Riley, Jr. to address the invisibility and vulnerability of the walled city. The task force includes scholars, preservation leaders, City and County employees, and concerned citizens. The first goal of the Task Force was protection of the archaeological remains of the city wall through communication and identification. The second was interpretation, through lectures, web sites, tours, and exhibits.

A small portion of the Half Moon Battery, excavated in 1965, is the only portion of the city wall visible to the public. A 2008 excavation opportunity, only the third in 80 years to excavate and record the features of the brick seawall, focused on a redan, or triangular projection at the foot of Tradd Street. The dig in two phases was successful in locating, exposing, and recording the brick feature; it was enormously successful in building local support for the Task Force mission. Excavations exposed much of the redan, and explored the base of the feature on the south side. The project retrieved over 50 cubic feet of 18th century artifacts from stratified deposits. These materials were associated with the later Lower Market, as well as the early defenses. A final archaeological report was completed in late 2012.

Funds from the SEAC 2012 grant, as well as a number of private donations and fees raised from events, were sufficient to design and install two wayside panels and a

portion of the retrieved parapet, as well as mark the outline of the redan on the ground surface. History Workshop Inc. was hired to design and produce the panels. The text was written by the archaeological project directors, revised by editors at History Workshop, and reviewed by numerous individuals and groups. The design was then submitted to multiple City agencies and advisory panels for review and approval. Work began on the panels in April and they were installed in August, 2012.



Additional aspects of the project implemented during this time include installation of artifacts and text in the permanent exhibitions at The Charleston Museum and completion of a web component, including photos of the dig, images of artifacts, maps, and links to other web sites. The Walled City web site is maintained by The Charleston Museum and can be accessed from the Tradd Street exhibit and the Museum exhibit gallery via a QR code.



The Tradd Street site, the actual location of the city wall and the redan, is unique in Charleston for its open vista of the harbor. (The two other excavated portions of the wall are in the basements of later colonial structures. You don't see the waterfront from the seawall.) The visitor can literally stand on the wall here and view three blocks of filled land that developed in the ensuing three centuries. While the virtual tours available on the web will enhance the visitor experience, interpretation at the site of excavation will ground this learning experience. The portion of the parapet, the 'real thing' is distinctive in color and texture, and gives the visitor an opportunity to see and touch a part of Charleston's history that remained buried for three centuries.

The project was reviewed in two ways. The Evaluation team, consisting of a material culture specialist and a historian, both with undergraduate training and experience in archaeology, and a neighborhood resident, inspected the installation and made recommendations concerning its clarity, flow, and overall presentation. The neighbor recorded the number of visitors per hour, at various times of the day and week. Members of the Charleston Tourguide Association completed an on-line survey. The 6-question survey included ranking and free response questions, and addressed archaeological as well as historical interpretation. Results were overwhelmingly positive, though not all tourguides choose to include the text panels in their walking tour. Our overall evaluation suggests the wayside exhibit principally serves local residents and casual visitors to the area. "Visitors" are those who actually stop and read one or both panels. Usually, a group of readers will attract additional readers. Walk-by visitation of the site is very heavy; our survey indicating an average of 40 visitors in three hours on weekends.

Marking the footprint of the redan remains the final task of the project. The proposal engendered lengthy discussion between the WCTF and the City. In addition to the usual challenges of expense, weathering, and visibility, the site presents a unique situation in that the paving must traverse a public thoroughfare as well as a parking lot, with two different paved surfaces. The street is paved in historic cobblestone, while the parking lot is asphalt. Charleston is well-known for a high standard of design, material selection, and presentation in public places, and treatment of this site will set a precedent for (hopefully) future installation of city wall footprint. (Yes, we hope to eventually locate and mark the entire footprint of the city wall).

The City determined that the outline should be marked in brick, removing sections of the cobblestone to lay brick paving. Estimated costs for this are in excess of \$10,000, while the current plan anticipated an expense of \$500 for a painted surface. Our funds of \$500 will be transferred to the paving budget, with the City assuming the remainder of the cost. The schedule for completion of this project, as well as the budget, is now controlled by the City. When completed, photos and written description will be forwarded to the SEAC Public Outreach Grant Committee.