

**BVL** HISTORIC  
PRESERVATION RESEARCH

PUBLIC BURIAL GROUND (1790s-1807)  
COMING, VANDERHORST & CALHOUN STREETS  
CHARLESTON, SC

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The College of Charleston

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# BVL HISTORIC PRESERVATION RESEARCH

## PUBLIC BURIAL GROUND (1790S-1807) COMING, VANDERHORST & CALHOUN STREETS CHARLESTON, SC

In the decade following the American Revolution, the City of Charleston established a 3.4-acre public burial ground on the north side of today's Calhoun Street. Active between the 1790s and 1807, the property was referred to as the "Strangers and Negroes Burying Ground" and became the final resting place for many of Charleston's most vulnerable and destitute residents, including the city's poor, orphaned, enslaved, and newly arrived immigrants. Today, the land has been redeveloped and the burial ground remains unmarked.

In 2025, the College of Charleston acquired approximately 1.14 acres of this public burial ground site. The College's parcel, hereafter referred to as the "Project Area," consists primarily of surface parking and includes a one-story c. 1966 building identified as No. 106 Coming Street (Figure 1).<sup>1</sup>



**Figure 1:** A 2025 aerial showing the current Project Area within the boundaries of the "Strangers and Negroes Burying Ground."

<sup>1</sup> See [BVL HPR historic building report of No. 106 Coming Street](#) (Charleston County tax parcel #4601603017)

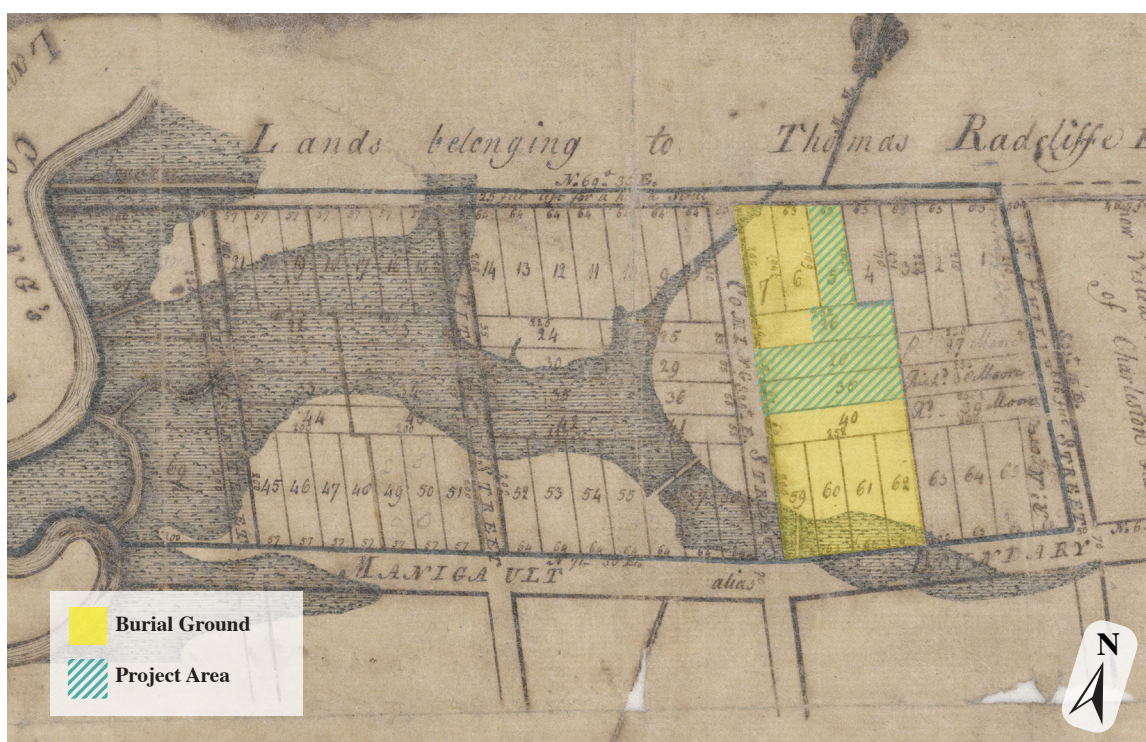


## ESTABLISHMENT OF THE BURIAL GROUND

*Between the 1670s and 1840s, Charleston established three successive public burial grounds in response to population growth, recurring epidemics, waves of immigration, and intensified participation in the Transatlantic Slave Trade. The Project Area is situated within the boundaries of the second of these municipal cemeteries and is denoted as “Public Burial Ground B” in Figure 3.*

In February of 1793, Charleston’s City Council formally purchased a 3.4-acre parcel on the “Charleston Neck” from John Poaug (1769-1796) to establish a new public burial ground.<sup>2</sup> The property was described as bounding “Manigault Street or Boundary” (known today as Calhoun Street) to the south, Coming Street to the west, Vanderhorst Street to the north, and private property to the east. Approximately 1.14 acres of this 1793 purchase was conveyed to the College of Charleston in 2025 (see Figure 1).<sup>3</sup>

Situated outside Charleston’s original city limits, the Project Area was historically part of a larger 23.4-acre tract owned by London merchant and colonial politician Samuel Wragg (1690-1750) by 1715.<sup>4</sup> Located in a landscape defined by scattered farms and marshland along the Ashley River, the parcel was likely used by the Wragg family as rental land, supported by general or tenant farming.<sup>5</sup> By 1786, Wragg’s descendants, including Poaug, subdivided the property into 69



**Figure 2:** 1786 plat of the subdivision of Wragg’s estate; the lots purchased by the City of Charleston in 1793 are highlighted (McCrary Plat 0538, Charleston County Register of Deeds)

2 Charleston County Deed Office, Deed Book F6, Page 519, Charleston, SC.

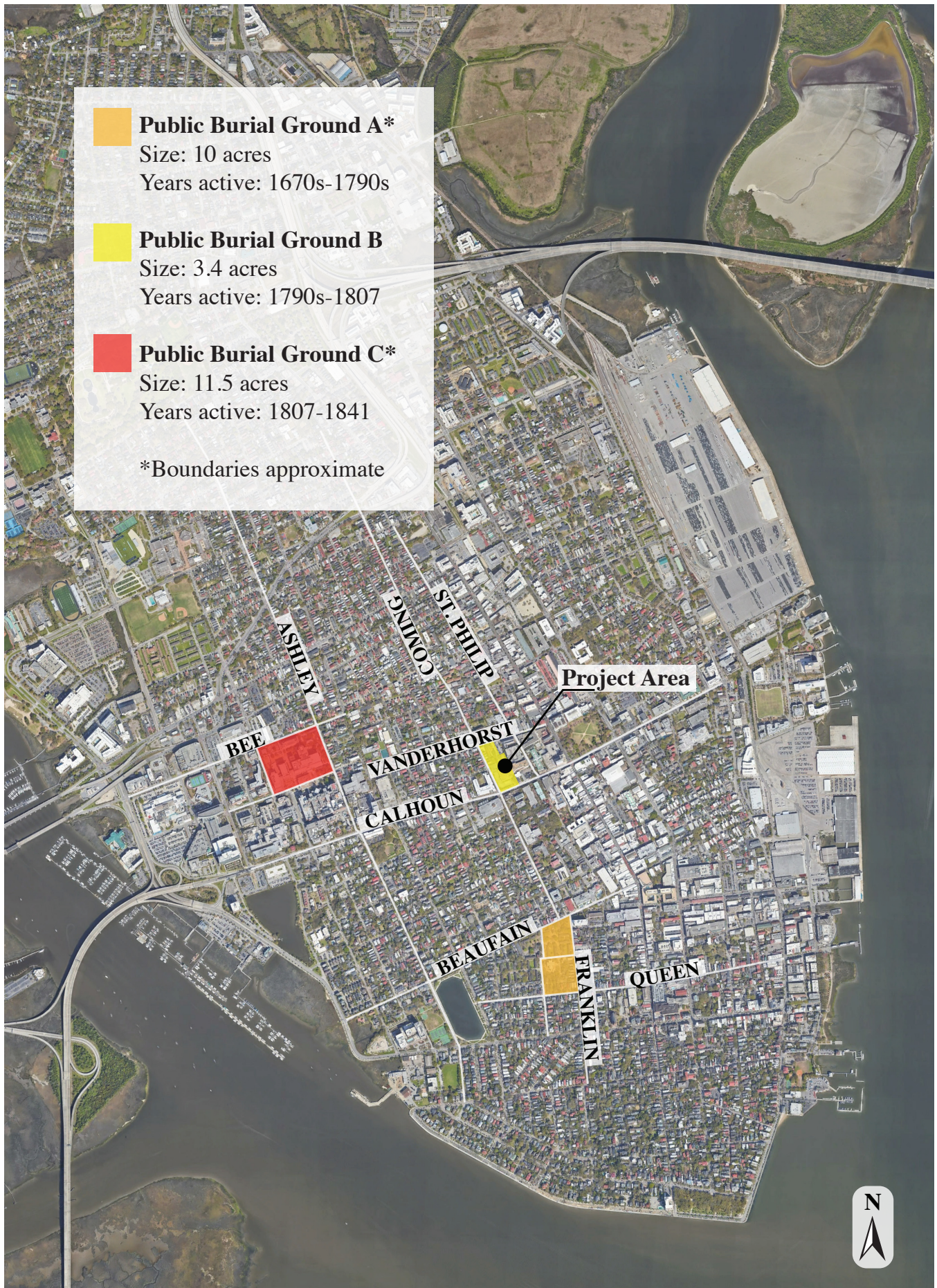
3 Charleston County Deed Office, Deed Book 1291, Page 721, 724, Charleston, SC.

4 Billings, Warren M. “Sir William Berkeley and the Carolina Proprietary.” *The North Carolina Historical Review*, Vol. 72, No.

3. Raleigh: North Carolina Department of Natural and Cultural Resources, 1995. 329–42.

5 “For the City,” 1800 March 21, *City Gazette*, Charleston, SC.





**Figure 3:** Current aerial of the Charleston peninsula with the city's early public burial grounds denoted.



separate building lots. A late-eighteenth-century plat confirms that the future public burial ground was divided into eleven of these lots, with the southwest corner still partially occupied by the marshes of Coming's Creek, a former tributary of the Ashley River that once bisected most of the peninsula's western edge (Figure 2).

Charleston's City Council purchased the eleven lots from Poaug to replace an earlier public burial ground, which was approximately 10 acres in size and located within the city limits. The original cemetery, which served the city for over a century, is now the area of the Robert Mills Manor housing complex, bounded by Logan, Beaufain, and Magazine streets, and denoted as "Public Burial Ground A" in Figure 3.<sup>6</sup> It was established as a final resting place for individuals excluded from formal church burials, such as those too poor to afford private interment, those unaffiliated with a religious institution, or those explicitly barred from church graveyards. In a major port city like Charleston, this often included "strangers," such as seamen, transient workers, or traveling families who died within the city limits, as well as orphans, enslaved individuals, and free people of color, many of whom perished as a result of unsanitary living conditions or a public health crisis.<sup>7</sup>

Many of those interred in this first city-owned cemetery died while housed in municipal institutions that were located directly across the street within a large complex of public facilities (Figure 4). This particular complex included the City Hospital and Poor House, which offered limited medical



**Figure 4:** Detail of c. 1802 map of Charleston by J.J. Negrin; "Public Burial Ground A" and the associated the municipal complex as well as the Project Area are denoted (Charleston County Public Library)

6 Butler, Nic. "The Forgotten Dead: Charleston's Public Cemeteries, 1794-2021." *Charleston Time Machine*, podcast. Episode 201, 7 May 2021. Transcript available at: <https://www.ccpl.org/charleston-time-machine/forgotten-dead-charlestons-public-cemeteries-1794-2021>.

7 "Charleston, April 15," 1768 April 15, *The South Carolina and American General Gazette*, Charleston, SC.



care, shelter, and basic necessities for Charleston's impoverished residents. Others interred there had been confined in the City Jail or the Work House, the latter specifically used to punish or detain enslaved individuals for offenses defined either by their enslavers or city ordinances.<sup>8</sup> By 1790, this earlier cemetery also began to serve the Charleston Orphan House, the first municipal orphanage in the United States. Located adjacent to Poaug's estate along Boundary Street, the institution provided care for children without families or estranged from relatives who needed financial support and supervision. As the original burial ground approached capacity, the City Council's 1793 acquisition of the Project Area and surrounding parcels from Poaug was intended to sustain burial services for these same marginalized populations.

**City Council, 20th of Aug. 1794.**  
**W**HEREAS it becomes at this time necessary that a place be appropriated for the burial of strangers, those who may die in the poor house, hospitals, and negroes: therefore resolved, That the lot of land lately bought from John Pouag, on the north side of Boundary Street, be applied to the above purpose, and that the commissioners of the poor-house have the same under their direction.  
 Extract from the journals,  
**P. Bounetheau, C. C.**  
**August 23.**

**Figure 5:** *City Gazette*, August 25, 1794 (Charleston, SC)

In August of 1794, City Council declared it “necessary” to designate an additional place for the burial of “strangers, those who may die in the poor house, hospitals, and negroes” and specified that “the lot of lands lately bought from John Pouag [sic]” on the north side of Boundary Street would serve this purpose (Figure 5).<sup>9</sup> Yet in May of 1795, the Medical Society of South Carolina (MUSC) urged citizens to advocate for the procurement of a “sufficient piece of ground...without the city” for a public burial ground and cited concerns related to the prevention of disease, an appeal that implies the Project Area was either underutilized, poorly managed, or not widely recognized as serving its

intended function.<sup>10</sup> Petitions for the establishment of such a space continued well into the decade, further suggesting that the Project Area was not put into immediate use as a public burial ground and may have been active for a significantly shorter period than commonly believed.

In November of 1798, for example, a committee representing several of Charleston's churches called for the designation of a burial site “for the internment of Strangers” outside the city's limits with a separate section “for the burial of negroes, other people of color, and slaves.”<sup>11</sup> As the Project Area was both located beyond the city boundaries and intended for the burial of those specific populations, it is possible that it was not yet formally established or put to regular use as a burial ground by this time. Supporting this, newspaper reports from late 1798 confirm that the City Hospital continued to bury the deceased in the “City Hospital Burying Ground,” likely referring to the first public cemetery located directly across from the hospital complex near today's Robert Mills Manor on Logan Street (Public Burial Ground A in Figure 3).<sup>12</sup>

In response to the churches' 1798 appeal, the City Council appointed a committee to “enquire [sic] into and report whether any and what land near the city [could] be procured for the internment of dead bodies.”<sup>13</sup> By April of 1799, the committee issued a report recommending that “some

<sup>8</sup> “The Ichnography of Charles-town at High Water,” 1739. Library of Congress, Washington, D.C.

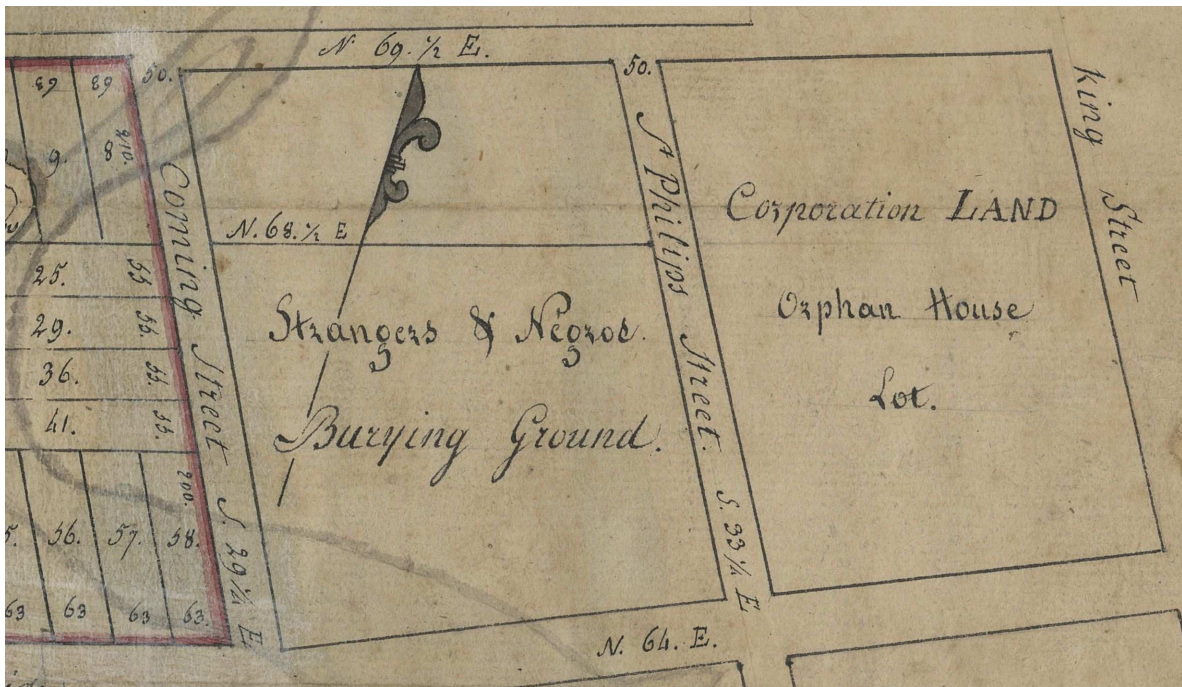
<sup>9</sup> “Proclamation,” 1794 August 25, *City Gazette*, Charleston, SC

<sup>10</sup> “In the Medical Society,” 1795 May 15, *City Gazette*, Charleston, SC.

<sup>11</sup> “For the Information of the Citizens,” 1799 May 3, *City Gazette and Charleston Daily Advertiser*, Charleston, SC.

<sup>12</sup> “City Hospital Report,” 1798 October 26, *Evening Courier*, Charleston, SC.

<sup>13</sup> “For the Information of the Citizens,” 1799 May 3, *City Gazette and Charleston Daily Advertiser*, Charleston, SC.



**Figure 6:** Detail of 1798 plat of the site as a burial ground; the dimensions; however, are not accurate (McCrary Plat 0490, Charleston County Register of Deeds)

place without the limits of the city of Charleston be purchased at the expense of the city for the internment of deceased strangers” and of citizens unaffiliated with a church in Charleston. The report further emphasized that “no such place” had yet to be “set apart for the burial of negroes, other people of color and slaves,” and urged the city to act swiftly to establish both.<sup>14</sup>

These appeals and recommendations, however, stand in direct contradiction to both the city’s 1793 purchase of the site, intended specifically for the burial of strangers, the poor, and people of color, and two contemporaneous plats produced in 1798 and 1799 that clearly depict the site as a burial ground. A 1798 plat, for example, labels the parcel as a “Strangers and Negroes Burying Ground,” while a February 1799 plat includes a notation that it was “now used for the strangers’ burial ground or cemetery,” indicating that the site had already begun to fulfill its designated public function by that time (Figures 6-7).

It is possible that the Project Area saw little to no use as part of a public burial ground between its purchase in 1793 and the end of the decade. While unlikely, the site may have been viewed as undesirable due to ongoing legal disputes tied to Wragg’s former estate following John Poaug’s death in 1796.<sup>15</sup> Another possibility is that the land had not yet been sufficiently filled, making portions of it unsuitable for burials initially. The 1798 plat supports this theory, showing portions of Coming’s Creek still extending into the southwest corner of the site. At that time, sections of Boundary Street (now Calhoun Street) remained submerged by the creek and would not be formally improved west of St. Philip Street until after the site closed as a public burial ground in 1807.<sup>16</sup>

By August of 1799, however, the City of Charleston again identified the site as city-owned land,

14 “For the Information of the Citizens,” 1799 May 3, *City Gazette and Charleston Daily Advertiser*, Charleston, SC.

15 “Harriet Beresford Poaug v. Christopher Gadsden,” 1801 May. *Reports of Cases Argued and Determined in the Superior Courts of Law in the State of South Carolina Since the Revolution*. Vol. 11. New York: Isaac Riley, 1811. 294.

16 “To the Editors of the Courier,” 1807 April 11, *Daily Courier*, Charleston, SC.





**Figure 7:** Detail of 1799 plat overlaid on a current aerial (City Engineering Plat, Charleston County Public Library)

describing it as a parcel “beyond the bounds of the city” purchased “for a burying place for strangers and negroes.”<sup>17</sup> The parcel measured 189’ on Vanderhorst Street, 252’ on Boundary Street, 609’ along land owned by the Manigault family, and 635’ on Coming Street (Figure 7). That October, the City Council’s committee responded to the churches’ former request for a public burial ground by stating they did “not think it necessary to make any further observations” about the matter as past councils “have already taken order for the purchase of a burial ground.”<sup>18</sup>

From that point forward, the city unequivocally used the Project Area and site as a burial ground for its most vulnerable residents. One year later, in October 1800, the City Council announced plans to erect a pine and cedar fence around the “Strangers Burial Ground,” one of the first formal acknowledgments of the site as an active cemetery.<sup>19</sup> The fence likely served multiple functions, such as deterring vandalism and preventing illegal dumping, and more importantly, establishing a formal boundary around the entire burial ground.

In July of 1801, Charleston passed a city ordinance to standardize interments within the burial ground (Figure 8). The ordinance established guidelines for grave dimensions, burial timing, registration, and appointed a superintendent to oversee its operation, a position held by John Welch for the duration of the site’s active use as a burial ground.<sup>20</sup> It also mandated the segregation of burials. A wooden fence, similar to the one enclosing the entire site, was erected to divide the site into two distinct sections. A northern section “not exceeding one acre,” a tract that likely bounded

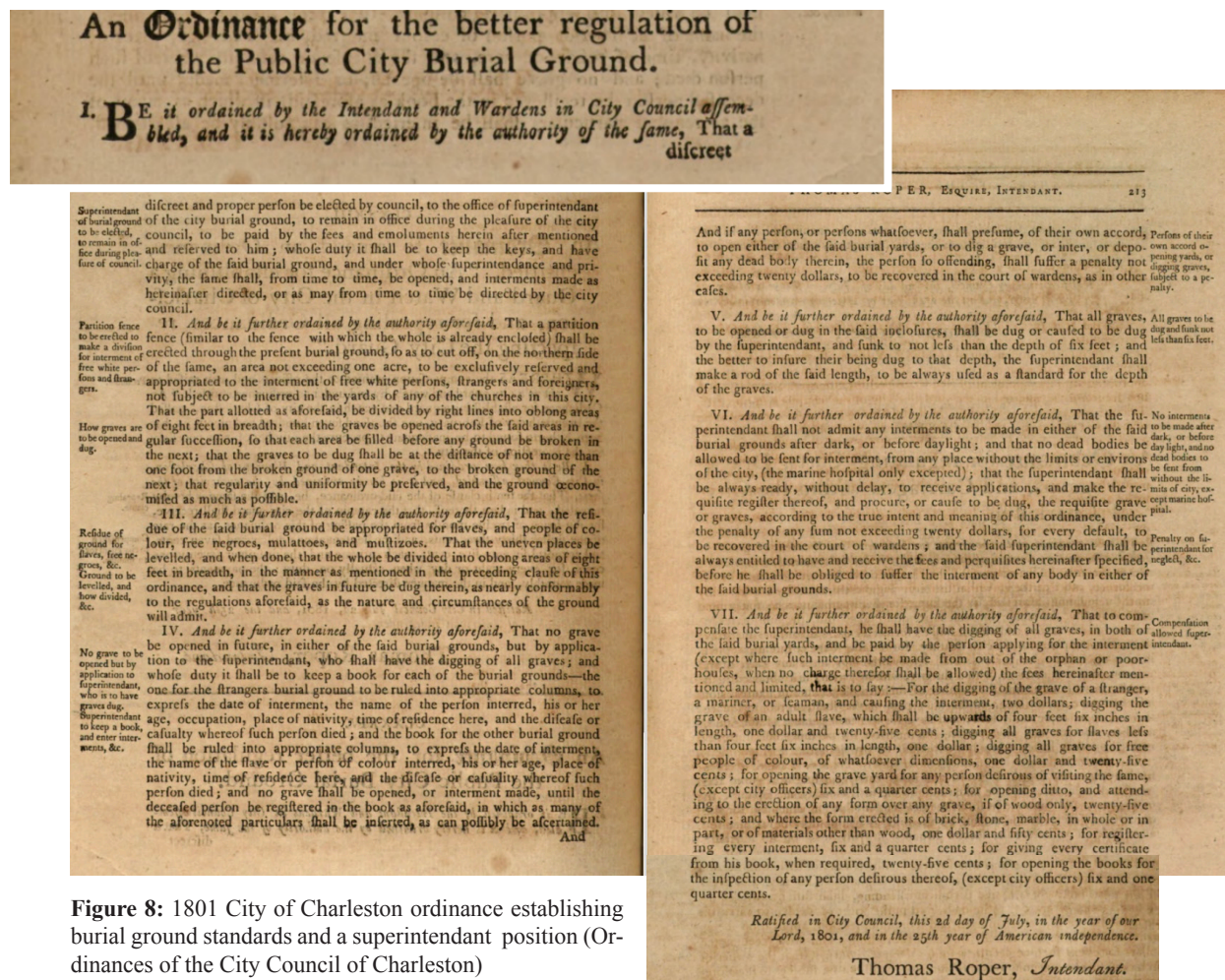
17 “The Committee on City Lands,” 1799 August 24, *City Gazette and Charleston Daily Advertiser*, Charleston, SC; “The Committee on City Lands,” 1799 August 28, *City Gazette and Charleston Daily Advertiser*, Charleston, SC.

18 “City Council,” 1799 October 31, *City Gazette and Charleston Daily Advertiser*, Charleston, SC.

19 “Contract,” 1800 October 14, *City Gazette*, Charleston, SC.

20 Edwards, Alexander, compiler, *Ordinances of the City Council of Charleston, In the State of South Carolina, Passed since the Incorporation of the City, Collected and Revised Pursuant to A Resolution of the Council. To Which Are Prefixed, the Act of the General Assembly for Incorporating the City, and the Subsequent Acts to Explain and Amend the Same.* W. P. Young, Charleston, 1802. 211; *City of Charleston Directory, 1803-1807.* Charleston County Public Library, Charleston, SC.





**Figure 8:** 1801 City of Charleston ordinance establishing burial ground standards and a superintendant position (Ordinances of the City Council of Charleston)



**Figure 9:** The footprint of the burial ground showing the Project Area boundaries and estimated location of fence that marked the segregated parcels



Vanderhorst and Coming streets and was situated on the highest ground, was designated for White burials. The remaining, larger section was reserved for the interments of enslaved individuals and free people of color, a substantial portion of which falls within the Project Area (Figure 9). By allocating only a small portion for White burials and reserving the majority for Black interments, the ordinance suggests that a disproportionate number of Black residents, both free and enslaved, were to be buried at the site.

Within the northern White section, graves were to be arranged in eight-foot-wide “oblong areas,” with each section filled before beginning the next. Individual graves were to be spaced one foot apart. A similar layout was intended for the remainder of the site, designated for Black burials, “as nature and circumstances of the ground [would] admit.” Because the southern portion of the site sat on lower, less stable land near the waterway along Boundary Street, the ordinance further required that “uneven places...be leveled” to make the land suitable for interment.<sup>21</sup>

The ordinance also established a fee structure for burials: \$2.00 for a “stranger, mariner, or seaman,” \$1.25 for an enslaved adult or free person of color in graves “upwards of four feet six inches,” and \$1.00 for enslaved individuals, to be buried in graves smaller than four feet, six inches.<sup>22</sup> Burials for those associated with the Poor House, City Hospital, and Orphan House were exempt from fees. Within the year, however, the City Council deemed these fees “too exorbitant” and reduced them to \$1.00 for strangers and \$0.75 for enslaved or free people of color.<sup>23</sup> Fees for grave markers were also outlined, confirming that not all burials were unmarked. The installation of wooden markers was \$0.25, while stone, brick, or marble markers were \$1.50.<sup>24</sup>

Although the superintendent’s early records do not survive, other municipal documents and historic accounts of life in Charleston at the turn of the nineteenth century shed light on those potentially interred within the Project Area. The following sections explore the diverse groups of people for whom the Project Area, and the broader site, served as a final resting place.

## THE “STRANGER”

From the time the city acquired Poaug’s eleven lots in 1793, the Project Area was explicitly designated for the burial of “strangers,” a purpose clearly documented in 1794 newspaper reports and reinforced by city plats produced in the late 1790s (see Figures 6-7). In the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, the term “stranger” commonly referred to someone who had newly arrived to or was unfamiliar with a particular place. In a port city like Charleston, this typically included traveling merchants, seafarers, immigrants, and refugees, most of whom arrived by ship.<sup>25</sup> The 1801 ordinance that formalized burial regulations on the property affirmed this designation, directing that “strangers and foreigners” unaffiliated with a church be interred in the site’s segregated northern section alongside the poor.<sup>26</sup>

Death records surrounding the turn of the eighteenth century are incomplete and inconsistently

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21 Edwards, *1802*, 212.

22 Edwards, *1802*, 213.

23 Edwards, *1802*, 242-243.

24 Edwards, *1802*, 213.

25 “City Council,” 1794 September 22, *City Gazette*, Charleston, SC.

26 Edwards, *1802*, 212.

maintained, making it difficult to determine an exact number of “strangers” interred within the site. Contemporary public health statistics, however, offer context. Yellow Fever plagued Charleston throughout the period that the Project Area functioned as a burial ground. While many other factors, such as illnesses, injury, and natural causes, contributed to the deaths of strangers, Yellow Fever remains the most thoroughly documented. As a result, it provides one of the clearest links to those possibly interred in the Project Area.

Yellow Fever, often referred to as “Strangers’ Fever” due to its disproportionate impact on immigrants and travelers unaccustomed to a place’s climate, was one of the most common causes of death among visitors to Charleston.<sup>27</sup> Particularly lethal during the summer months, the disease was later discovered to be transmitted by mosquitoes that thrived in crowded port cities with standing water, making Charleston especially vulnerable. A 1795 article in a Hartford, Connecticut newspaper titled “Observations on the Yellow Fever,” for example, warned cities with “low marshy grounds near the waterside” and dense streets of the heightened risk of the disease and used Charleston’s wharves as an example.<sup>28</sup> While Yellow Fever also impacted the poor, enslaved, and working-class residents, those already acclimated to the Lowcountry climate were generally less vulnerable than recently arrived northerners or Europeans. “Strangers” who died from Yellow Fever and were interred within the site likely succumbed to the disease’s final toxic phase defined by jaundice, internal bleeding, black vomiting, or organ failure.<sup>29</sup>

If the Project Area was formally in operation as part of a burial ground in the late 1790s, those interred within its bounds may include a large percentage of the fourteen people who died of Yellow Fever during the summer of 1795, as Charleston’s Committee of Health confirmed that most were “Emigrants lately from Europe, Strangers, and other Transient Persons.”<sup>30</sup> During an outbreak in the summer of 1797, two passengers aboard Captain M. Morrison’s vessel died on route to Charleston, likely arriving from New York, a common route for Morrison.<sup>31</sup> Although the exact cause of death is unknown, the timing during the summer months strongly suggests the disease. Upon arrival, their twin children were admitted into the Orphan House. It is possible that the two adults were interred on the site, given their status as newly arrived “strangers,” as well as their two children, who died shortly thereafter.<sup>32</sup>

The summer of 1799 was particularly deadly. Charleston physician David Ramsey (1749-1815), an expert on infectious diseases, noted that Yellow Fever reached epidemic levels by August following a period of heavy rainfall. The outbreak persisted until mid-November.<sup>33</sup> From August 1 to December 1 of that year, 362 individuals were buried within Charleston’s city limits. While the exact number of Yellow Fever deaths remains uncertain, approximately 239 of the deceased were identified as “strangers,” the very population the Project Area was intended to receive.<sup>34</sup> Given the site’s intended use and the timing of these deaths, it is highly likely that the majority of these individuals, including sailors from Havana, Cuba, and Spain who died shortly after arriving at

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27 Edgar, Walter, “Epidemics,” in *The South Carolina Encyclopedia*. Columbia, SC: University of South Carolina Press, 2006. 306-307.

28 “For the *City Gazette*,” 1795 July 22, *City Gazette*, Charleston, SC.

29 Fraser, 190.

30 “Committee of Health,” 1795 October 1, *City Gazette*, Charleston, SC.

31 Murray, John E. *The Charleston Orphan House: Children’s lives in the first public Orphanage in America*. Chicago, IL: The University of Chicago Press, 2013. 57; “For New York,” 1797 June 21. *City Gazette*, Charleston, SC.

32 Murray, 57.

33 “For the City and Carolina Gazettes,” 1800 March 21, *City Gazette*, Charleston, SC.

34 Ibid.



port, were interred within the site and perhaps the Project Area.<sup>35</sup>

In 1800, Dr. Ramsey further observed that Yellow Fever primarily affected individuals from “the higher northern latitudes of Europe and America,” noting that “the danger seemed to diminish with the length of time” spent in the city and “greater assimilation” to the Lowcountry environment.<sup>36</sup> Death statistics from the early 1800s support his observations. In 1802, Ramsay attributed ninety-six deaths to Yellow Fever, stating that “most of the victims were sailors.”<sup>37</sup> By 1804, the number rose to 150 deaths, which he claimed were “exclusively confined to strangers.”<sup>38</sup> Among them was 23-year-old Irish “stucco plasterer” John Fallon, a visiting craftsman whose September 1804 death was attributed to the “stranger’s fever” by the *Carolina Gazette*.<sup>39</sup> They, too, were likely interred on the site and may be within the Project Area’s northern section.

## THE DESTITUTE AND THE ORPHANED

Since the establishment of Charleston’s first city-owned cemetery in the late seventeenth century, public burial grounds had been affiliated with the city’s poor. The association was both practical and administrative: the original burial ground (Public Burial Ground A in Figure 3) was located directly beside the municipal complex that housed the Poor House (also known as the Alms House), and until the passage of the 1801 ordinance creating a superintendent for the city’s cemetery, the public burial grounds were managed by the Commissioners of the Poor House (see Figures 4-5).<sup>40</sup> Even after the city redirected burials to outside the urban core to what is now the Project Area, this institutional link remained. In the 1794 announcement regarding the purchase of the Project Area and surrounding lots from Poaug, the City Council explicitly named “those who may die in the Poor House” as among those intended to be buried there.<sup>41</sup> Records from the “Commissioner of the Alms House (Poor House),” along with the findings from a 2024 S&ME cultural resource report, further suggest that Poor House residents likely played a role in burial operations, including grave digging, coffin construction, and transporting the deceased.<sup>42</sup>

Documents from 1802 to 1807 offer insight into the demographics of those admitted into the Poor House, and by extension, those potentially buried within the Project Area. Minutes kept by the commissioners of the Poor House in 1802, for example, reported at least fifty deaths that year, most of whom likely could not afford a formal burial elsewhere.<sup>43</sup> The Poor House also maintained a “Register of the Transient Sick and City Poor” and although it does not contain the dates or causes

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35 “For the City and Carolina Gazettes,” 1800 March 21, *City Gazette*, Charleston, SC.

36 Ibid.

37 McCandless, Peter. *Slavery, Disease, and Suffering in the Southern Lowcountry*. New York, NY: Cambridge University Press, 2011. 108.

38 David Ramsay. *The Charleston Medical Register for the Year 1802*. Charleston: W.P. Young, 1803. 5.

39 “Died,” 1804 September 28, *Carolina Gazette*, Charleston, SC.

40 Edwards, 1802, 211-214.

41 “Proclamation,” 1794 August 15, *City Gazette*, Charleston, SC; Edgar, Walter, “Charleston Poorhouse and Hospital,” in *The South Carolina Encyclopedia*. Columbia, SC: University of South Carolina Press, 2006. 155.

42 “Rules of the Board of Commissioners of the Charleston Alms House with the Rules for the Government of the House, Together with an Ordinance Relating to the Alms House.” Records: Commissioners of the Alms House (Poor House), 1800-1923. Charleston County Public Library. Charleston, SC.

43 “Minutes for 1802 January 25.” Records: Commissioners of the Alms House (Poor House), 1800-1923. Charleston County Public Library. Charleston, SC; “Minutes for 1802 December 20.” Records: Commissioners of the Alms House (Poor House), 1800-1923. Charleston County Public Library. Charleston, SC; S&ME, Inc.. “Historic Research and Geophysical Assessment of 106 Coming Street and 99 St Philip Street, Charleston, South Carolina, S&ME Project No. 24130280.” Charleston, SC: S&ME, Inc., 2024. 7.

of death, the records from February 1803 through the Project Area's closure as part of the burial ground in August 1807 list a diverse population that resided at the institution. The list included both native Charlestonians and individuals from foreign countries such as Ireland, England, Gibraltar, Bermuda, and Spain. Others came from across the eastern seaboard, from Savannah, Georgia, to Portland, Maine.<sup>44</sup> Among those who died while residing at the Poor House, and perhaps buried within the Project Area, was 19-year-old Mary Robertson. Robertson was hospitalized in October 1806 after being shot in the head with a musket ball. She died soon after from tetanus, also known as lockjaw.<sup>45</sup>

In 1802, the City Council established the Charleston Dispensary to provide medical care for people who were generally self-sufficient but unable to afford treatment when ill.<sup>46</sup> Data published in an 1805 edition of the *City Gazette* offers insight into the individuals who died under the Dispensary's care between 1802 and 1805 (Figure 10). During the summer of 1805 alone, the Dispensary recorded 234 deaths from a range of conditions. The most common causes of death were "bilious fever" (likely referring to malaria or Yellow Fever), "bowel complaints," and consumption (also known as tuberculosis).<sup>47</sup> The Dispensary's role as a medical safety net for the city's working poor strongly suggests that many were interred on the public burial ground site, although their precise burial locations are unknown.

Following the 1801 ordinance that standardized burials within the Project Area and broader site, individuals who died while in the care of the Poor

*Of Patients admitted to the care of the Charleston Dispensary, during the Summer Months of 1802, 1803, 1804, and 1805.*

DISEASES.	1802			1803			1804			1805			Result.		
	June	July	August	June	July	August	June	July	August	June	July	August	Cured	Died	Unknown
Syphilis, . . . . .	2	1		1	1	3	2	1	2	1			10		5
Dyspepsia, . . . . .	1								3				4		
Hypochondria, . . . . .	1												1		
Sore Foot, . . . . .	1								7				3		
Pleurisy, . . . . .	1	1											2		
Worm Fever, . . . . .	2		2			1							5		
Vaccine, . . . . .	3	1											4		
Diarrhoea, . . . . .	1			1	2	4	3	1		1	1		8	4	1
Scald Head, . . . . .	1												1		
Fever, . . . . .	1			1	1	1	3	4	2	1	3		16		1
Sore Throat, . . . . .	2												2		
Ophthalmia, . . . . .				1									1		
Leucorrhoea, . . . . .				1			1			1			3		
Consumption, . . . . .	1			2	4	2	1	1	1	1			3	5	2
Abscess, . . . . .				1									1		
Rheumatism, . . . . .			1	1		1	1			1			5		
Wound, . . . . .			1	1	1								3		
Sore Leg, . . . . .			1							2	1		7		1
Intermittent Fever, . . . . .			3	1		3	3		4	2	3	1	21		1
Dysentery, . . . . .							2		1				4		
Whooping Cough, . . . . .							1						1		
Catarrh, . . . . .													2		
Parturition, . . . . .		1	1			2				1			6		
Bruises from fall, . . . . .															1
Sprain, . . . . .					1								2		
Cholera, . . . . .					2								2		
Stroke of the sun, . . . . .													1		
Hysteria, . . . . .							1				1		2		1
Diseased Spine, . . . . .													1		
Inflamed breast, . . . . .													1		
Amenorrhoea, . . . . .							2						3		
Cephalalgia, . . . . .													1		
Yellow fever, . . . . .						2	3	13					11	7	
Intemperance, . . . . .							1	1					1		1
Infirmities of age, . . . . .							1						1		1
Bilious fever, . . . . .						1	2					2	5		
Nephritis, . . . . .													1		
Constipation, . . . . .										1			1		
Dropsy, . . . . .						1								2	
Scarlatina, . . . . .													1		
Scurvy, . . . . .			1										1		1
Ulcer, . . . . .							1						1		
Tumour, . . . . .													1		
Hemiplegia, . . . . .					1								1		
Sore finger, . . . . .					1				2				1		
Hepatitis, . . . . .									2				2		
Itch, . . . . .									3				3		
Swelled ankle, . . . . .											1				1
Menorrhagia, . . . . .							1						1		
<b>Total,</b> . . . . .	<b>16</b>	<b>5</b>	<b>9</b>	<b>10</b>	<b>12</b>	<b>22</b>	<b>26</b>	<b>21</b>	<b>36</b>	<b>11</b>	<b>12</b>	<b>10</b>	<b>151</b>	<b>20</b>	<b>19</b>

Figure 10: Public health data in the *City Gazette* for the years 1802 through 1805, October 2, 1805

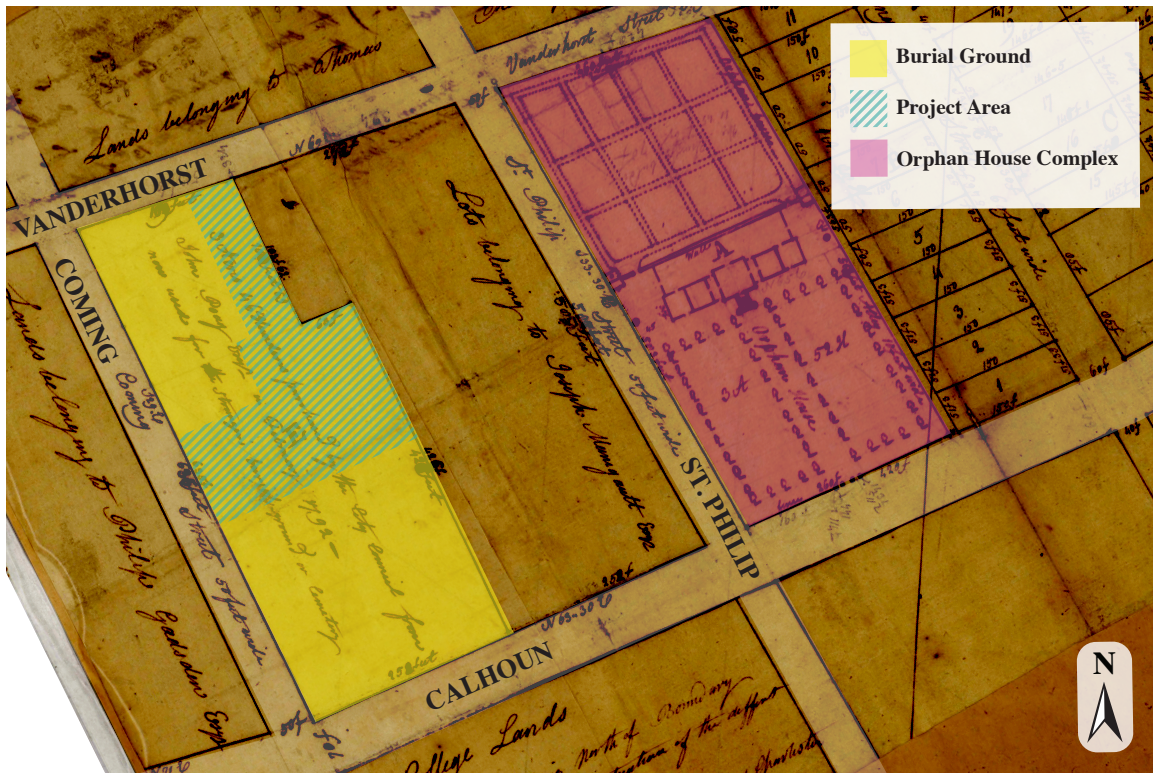
44 "Feb. 1803-Dec. 1807." Register of the Transient Sick and City Poor, 1803-1916. Charleston Archive, Charleston County Public Library, Charleston, SC.

45 "An Inquest," 1806 October 21, *Charleston Courier*, Charleston, SC.

46 "Public Information," 1802 May 4, *South Carolina State Gazette*, Charleston, SC.

47 "Comparative View," 1805 October 2, *City Gazette*, Charleston, SC.





**Figure 11:** Detail of 1799 plat showing the close proximity of the burial ground to the Orphan House complex (McCrary Plat 0538, Charleston County Register of Deeds)

House were exempt from burial fees. The same provision applied to residents of the Charleston Orphan House, the city-run institution established to care for orphaned and abandoned children one block east of the Project Area.<sup>48</sup> Many adults admitted into the Poor House or treated at the Charleston Dispensary had dependent children, who were often transferred to the Orphan House for continued care. By 1796, city regulations required that any child residing in the Poor House be moved to the Orphan House upon reaching “a proper age.”<sup>49</sup>

Very few of the children who passed through the Charleston Orphan House in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries had parents who were deceased. Many were placed there by families facing financial hardship, as it served as a refuge for the children of the city’s working poor who turned to the Orphan House for temporary care while trying to regain stability.<sup>50</sup> As a result, some children buried within the Project Area and surrounding site may have passed through both the Poor House and Orphan House, depending on their age and family circumstances.

The Orphan House was often overcrowded, creating conditions ripe for the spread of disease. Smallpox and measles were particularly contagious. The first-recorded measles case appeared in 1795 and resulted in one child’s death; four more children died of measles during an outbreak in the summer of 1802.<sup>51</sup> Given the Orphan House’s close proximity to the site, its role as a city-sponsored institution, and the economic vulnerability of the children it served, it is highly probable that those children were interred within the public burial ground and potentially in the northern, White-designated section of the Project Areas (Figure 11).<sup>52</sup>

<sup>48</sup> Edwards, 1802, 242-243.

<sup>49</sup> “Poor-House of Charleston,” 1796 August 17, City Gazette, Charleston, SC.

<sup>50</sup> Edgar, “Charleston Orphan House,” 155; Fraser, 238.

<sup>51</sup> Murray, 118.

<sup>52</sup> “Minutes for 1795 October 22.” Records: Commissioners of the Charleston Orphan House, 1790-1959. Charleston County Public Library. Charleston, SC.



The Orphan House's Register of Children, which tracked admissions, discharges, and deaths, documents several other children who died while under the institution's care. This includes Maria Finley, described as "one of the older girls" and who died in 1803 after a five-day illness, possibly Yellow Fever. That same year, 14-year-old Sarah Hutton died of a fever, and infants Ann Reynolds (of a lung infection) and Clementina Brunston (cause not noted) also passed away. Archibald McNeil, the son of Irish immigrant and hatter Archibald McNeil (or McNeal), likely entered the Orphan House after his father's death in December 1802.<sup>53</sup> He died there in the summer of 1803 at the age of three.<sup>54</sup> In 1804, 11-year-old Thomas Arnold and two-year-old John Brown died while at the Orphan House. The following year, four-year-old Margaret Scott, three-year-old Ruth McCrackin, and five-year-old Alexander Bozeman also died. In 1806, two-year-old Samuel Guy died, as well as Samuel Shilling, described by the Orphan House physician as "little boy Shilling," who died of a lingering illness.<sup>55</sup> He was likely the son of nearby Coming Street tailor Samuel Shilling.<sup>56</sup> Archival records from both the Orphan House and the Poor House, however, are fragmentary, and it is highly probable that many more burials associated with the Orphan House occurred within the Project Area and its surrounding site.

Another significant demographic interred at the site was Charleston's population of free people of color. At the turn of the nineteenth century, free Black residents comprised roughly 3% of the city's population.<sup>57</sup> Among them was a distinct and relatively affluent class often referred to as the "Brown Elite," who, while adopting many of the cultural values of the White upper class, also cultivated independent social and economic networks in the city's northern neighborhoods, not far from the Project Area. In response to discriminatory burial practices, including exclusion from White churchyards such as St. Philip's Episcopal Church, members of the Brown Elite formed mutual aid organizations. This included the Brown Fellowship Society in the 1790s, which established a cemetery of their own near the Project Area, on the site now occupied by the College of Charleston's Addlestone Library.<sup>58</sup>

However, the majority of Charleston's free Black population belonged to the working class and were unlikely to be members of burial societies, which required membership fees. Therefore, many of Charleston's free Black residents during the late 1790s and early 1800s were likely buried in the segregated southern section of the site and Project Area. At the turn of the nineteenth century, most free women of color served as cooks, bakers, seamstresses, and shopkeepers, while men found employment as dock workers, general laborers, and tenant farmers.<sup>59</sup> Because many free Black residents labored along the port and resided in overcrowded housing, their vulnerability to infectious diseases was also significantly heightened. In 1800, Dr. Ramsay recorded that by August of 1799, Yellow Fever took the lives of 544 people. Of those, 123 were "negroes."<sup>60</sup>

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53 "Archibald McNeal," 1802 December. *South Carolina, U.S., Wills and Probate Records, 1670-1980*. Charleston County Public Library. Charleston, SC.

54 "Register 1791-1834." Records: Commissioners of the Charleston Orphan House, 1790-1959. Charleston County Public Library. Charleston, SC; S&ME, 8.

55 Ibid.

56 City of Charleston Directory, 1802. Charleston County Public Library, Charleston, SC; "Register 1791-1834." Records: Commissioners of the Charleston Orphan House, 1790-1959. Charleston County Public Library. Charleston, SC; S&ME, 8.

57 1800 U.S. Federal Census.

58 Koger, Larry. *Black Slaveowners: Free Black Slave Masters in South Carolina, 1790-1860*. North Carolina: McFarland & Company, Inc. 2012. 167.

59 City of Charleston Directory, 1801. Charleston County Public Library. Charleston, SC; Edgar, Walter, "Free persons of color," in *The South Carolina Encyclopedia*. Columbia, SC: University of South Carolina Press, 2006. 341-342.

60 "For the City and Carolina Gazettes," 1800 March 21, *City Gazette*, Charleston, SC.

## THE ENSLAVED

The southern section of the property and Project Area served as the final resting place for a substantial number of enslaved individuals. This included those who died while at the Work House, a city-run prison where enslavers paid wardens to have enslaved people disciplined, and those enslaved by municipal institutions, such as Sarah, the Orphan House's enslaved washwoman, who died in May of 1805.<sup>61</sup> The site also received the remains of numerous African captives who died shortly after enduring the transatlantic voyage in bondage and transported in overcrowded cargo ship into the port of Charleston.<sup>62</sup> Additionally, the 1801 ordinance identified the site as a burial ground for "mestizos," a term used at the time to refer to individuals of mixed Indigenous ancestry, many of whom were also enslaved.<sup>63</sup>

A significant factor contributing to the rapid filling of the site with burials was the 1803 repeal of the federal ban on the Transatlantic Slave Trade, which had been in place for nearly two decades. This legislative shift led to a dramatic increase in the arrival of enslaved Africans in Charleston during the years the Project Area was active as a public burial ground. In 1788, the South Carolina General Assembly passed a law prohibiting the importation of enslaved people to stabilize the state's economy following the American Revolution. The act barred the import of any "negro or other slave...either by land or water" until January 1, 1793, and was subsequently renewed for the next sixteen years.<sup>64</sup> However, on December 17, 1803, the law was repealed, and South Carolina resumed the transatlantic importation of Africans.<sup>65</sup> This continued until the federal ban on the international slave trade took effect on January 1, 1808.<sup>66</sup>

For five years beginning in late 1803, Charleston experienced an unprecedented surge of slave ship arrivals, described by historian Nic Butler as "a mad scramble to import as many Africans as possible" during "the most horrific episode in the history of the trans-Atlantic slave trade to North America."<sup>67</sup> Between December 1803 and December 1807, approximately 40,000 enslaved Africans arrived at the port of Charleston.<sup>68</sup> At the time, local regulations mandated that sea captains quarantine arriving ships at designated points near the entrance of the Charleston Harbor, primarily on present-day Sullivan's Island and James Island. There, individuals who were ill or had died during the voyage were removed to "pestilence houses," or quarantine stations, to prevent the spread of disease. Given the constant threat posed by epidemics, health officials were then tasked with inspecting every vessel before granting permission to dock.<sup>69</sup> Yet even after clearance and docking at the Charleston port, the surviving Africans remained confined, either aboard the ships or in dockside holding facilities along the wharves, while awaiting their sale at auction. Those

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61 Felice F. Knight. "Slavery and the Charleston Orphan House, 1790-1860." unpublished dissertation, 2013. Graduate Program in History. Ohio University. 79. accessed 2025 June 14. [https://etd.ohiolink.edu/acprod/odb\\_etd/ws/send\\_file/send?accession=osu1374152542&disposition=inline](https://etd.ohiolink.edu/acprod/odb_etd/ws/send_file/send?accession=osu1374152542&disposition=inline) .

62 Edwards, 1802, 212.

63 Ibid.

64 "An Act," 1788 November 7, *City Gazette*, Charleston, SC.

65 Fraser, Walter J.. *Charleston! Charleston!*. Columbia, SC: University of South Carolina Press, 1989. 185, 188; "State of South Carolina," 1804 January 19, *Carolina Gazette*, Charleston, SC.

66 Fraser, 188.

67 Butler, Nic. "The End of the Trans-Atlantic Slave Trade." *Charleston Time Machine*, podcast. Episode 50, 26 January 2018. Transcript available at: <https://www.ccpl.org/charleston-time-machine/end-trans-atlantic-slave-trade>; Butler, Nic. "The Story of Gadsden's Wharf." *Charleston Time Machine*, podcast. Episode 51, 2 February 2018. Transcript available at: <https://www.ccpl.org/charleston-time-machine/story-gadsdens-wharf>.

68 Fraser, 188.

69 "For the City Gazette," 1804 July 24, *City Gazette*, Charleston, SC.



who died during this period of confinement were likely among those interred within the site and potentially the southern portion of the Project Area.

This included at least two enslaved individuals from Mozambique, who arrived aboard the *Horizon* on July 12, 1804, along with hundreds of others, and died shortly after arrival.<sup>70</sup> Of the estimated 543 captives who embarked from Africa on the large cargo ship, only 55% survived the Middle Passage and arrived in Charleston. Approximately 300 people died from what the *City Gazette* described as “malignant fever,” dysentery, tuberculosis, and “neglect and ill-treatment.”<sup>71</sup> While it is likely that the bodies of those who died en route were removed from the ships before reaching Charleston’s wharves, at least two individuals died of contagious illnesses after docking and were likely buried within the site.<sup>72</sup> The remaining captives were sold at a series of auctions between July 18th and August 17th, some held on the dock for up to a month.<sup>73</sup>

Another example is the British slave trading ship *Perseverance*, which arrived in Charleston Harbor on January 15, 1805, after a 90-day voyage from the Congo River region in Africa.<sup>74</sup> Carrying 367 enslaved people, the ship lost five crew members and 42 enslaved people, and it remains unclear how many deaths occurred after docking.<sup>75</sup> On January 31, however, the ship’s surgeon and officers signed a sworn statement, published in the *City Gazette*, affirming “no negro whatsoever that has died on board said ship, since her arrival, has been thrown overboard” but “that all who died since...have been decently interred in the Public Burying Ground, in the Suburbs of this City” (Figure 12).<sup>76</sup> This public declaration suggests that such burials within the site and Project Area were not uncommon but an expected practice, making it highly probable that the southern section of the Project Area contains the remains of individuals who were among the final victims of the Transatlantic Slave Trade in the United States.

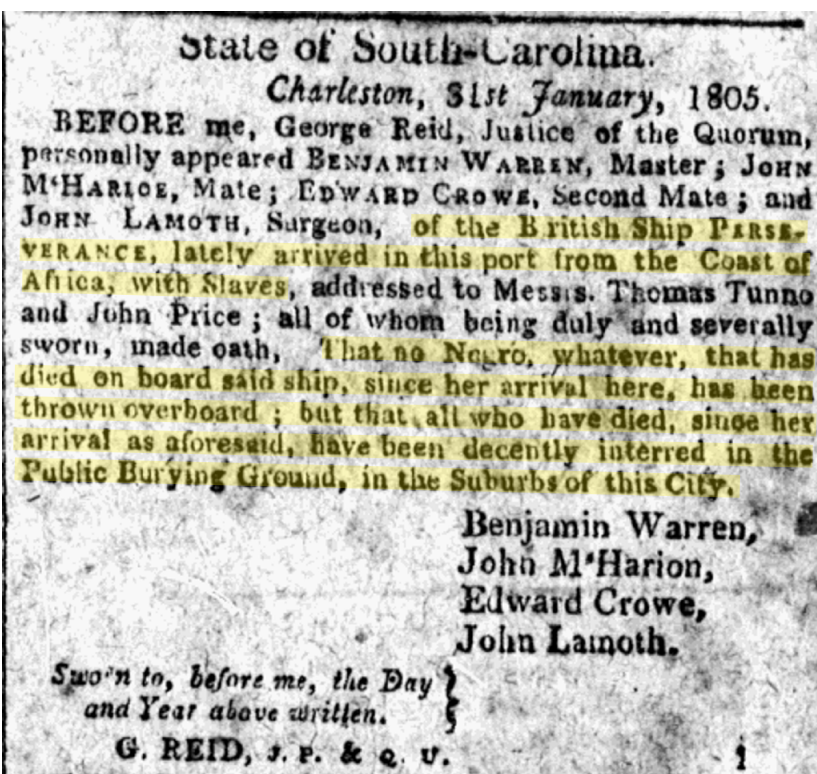


Figure 12: Announcement in the *City Gazette* confirming that enslaved Africans from *Perseverance* have been buried in the public burial ground (February 2, 1805)

70 “For the *City Gazette*,” 1804 July 24, *City Gazette*, Charleston, SC; “Sale of Negroes and Wines,” 1804 August 4, *Daily Courier*, Charleston, SC.

71 Ibid.

72 Ibid.

73 “Sale of Negroes and Wines,” 1804 August 4, *Daily Courier*, Charleston, SC.

74 *The Trans-Atlantic Slave Trade Database, 1793-1807*, v 2.0. 2019. Distributed by The Slave Voyages Consortium. Accessed June 9, 2025. <https://www.slavevoyages.org/voyages/HkWzZyGY>.

75 Ibid.

76 “State of South Carolina,” 1805 February 2, *City Gazette*, Charleston, SC.

Later that year, in October of 1805, the body of an African girl was discovered along the shoreline of what is now East Battery. She was found wrapped in a “Guinea matt,” or cloth, with her feet bound in yarn. According to the *City Gazette*, she had likely been aboard a recently arrived slave ship, died shortly after arrival, and was discarded overboard. The paper condemned what it called “the shameful practice” of ships throwing the dead into the harbor and urged police and port authorities to take action.<sup>77</sup> While her name and origin remain unknown, the city’s public condemnation of such mistreatment suggests that she was likely formally interred within the site.

Shortly thereafter, the City Council passed an ordinance prohibiting the disposal of “bodies into any of the rivers, creeks, or marshes within the harbor of the city,” explicitly identifying slave ships arriving from Africa as primary offenders.<sup>78</sup> Contemporary newspaper reports reveal that health officials and the City Council enforced the new law, publicly naming ships and individuals who violated it.<sup>79</sup> Given that the Project Area was part of the only active public burial ground at the time, it likely served as the designated site for the interment of those who died under such circumstances, and if so, this ordinance played a significant role in its rapid and substantial filling during the next two years. Between this 1805 ordinance and the site’s closure as a burial ground in 1807, over 30,000 enslaved individuals arrived in the city (Figure 13).<sup>80</sup>

**The importation of Slaves from Africa, ceases this day, according to act of Congress. There have been imported, since our ports have been opened, the following number :—**

In the year 1804,	5,386
1805,	6,790
1806,	11,458
1807,	15,676
<b>Total,</b>	<b>39,310</b>

**Figure 13:** *Charleston Courier*, January 1, 1808

In February of 1806, the City of Charleston enacted regulations mandating that all vessels importing enslaved Africans dock exclusively at Gadsden’s Wharf, which was located just blocks away from the Project Area at the base of Boundary (now Calhoun) Street (Figure 14).<sup>81</sup> That year, over 200 advertisements were published in local Charleston newspapers for the sale of enslaved people at the wharf, further confirming that Africans arriving in Charleston disembarked and were housed in close proximity to the Project Area. At this time, author John Lambert visited Gadsden’s Wharf and published a first-hand account of its conditions:

The planters who were pretty well stocked, were not very eager to purchase; and the merchants, knowing that a market would ultimately be found for them, were determined not to lower their demands; in consequence of which hundreds of these poor beings were obliged to be kept on board the ships, or in large buildings at Gadsden’s Wharf together.<sup>82</sup>

On the rampant mortality of Gadsden’s Wharf, Lambert wrote:

Close confinement and improper food also created a variety of disorders; which together with the dysentery and some cutaneous diseases to which the negroes are subject, considerably increased the mortality. Upwards of seven hundred died in less than three months, and carpenters were daily employed at the wharf in making shells for the dead bodies.<sup>83</sup>

77 “Communication,” 1805 October 29, *City Gazette*, Charleston, SC.

78 “Communication,” 1805 October 29, *City Gazette*, Charleston, SC, S&ME, 8.

79 “Proclamation,” 1807 April 28, *Charleston Courier*, Charleston, SC.

80 “Announcement,” 1808 January 1, *Charleston Courier*, Charleston, SC.

81 “State of South Carolina, City of Charleston,” 1806 February 20. *Charleston Courier*, Charleston, SC.

82 John Lambert. *Travels through Canada, and the United States of North America, in the years 1806, 1807, & 1808*. Vol. II. London, UK: C. Cradock and W. Joy, 1814. 166.

83 Lambert, *Travels through Canada, and the United States of North America*, 166..





**Figure 14:** Locations of the burial ground and Gadsden's Wharf overlaid on a current aerial

Given the strict 1805 ordinance prohibiting the disposal of bodies into the city's waterways, it is highly probable that the estimated 700 individuals who died during this period were interred within the site and Project Area.

On a single day, May 4, 1807, at least six slave ships were docked at the wharf to unload hundreds of enslaved Africans for sale: the *Alice*, the *Anne*, the *Neptune*, the *Morning Star*, and the *Aspinall*. The ship *Alice* departed the African coast with 405 captives and arrived at Gadsden's Wharf with 364.<sup>84</sup> The *Anne* disembarked at Gadsden's Wharf with 368 of the 409 individuals it had taken from Africa.<sup>85</sup> The *Neptune* arrived with 140 out of 156.<sup>86</sup> The *Morning Star* began its transatlantic journey with 509 enslaved people and reached the port with 383, reflecting a loss of 126 lives.<sup>87</sup> The *Aspinall* advertised 300 "prime Congo slaves" for sale upon arrival, and another unnamed ship began its journey with 334 captives, arriving with 300.<sup>88</sup> In total, 2,047 enslaved individuals were either brought into Charleston or advertised for sale that day.

It is not possible to determine precisely how many enslaved Africans arrived at the Charleston port deceased or died while housed along the wharves, but historical records confirm that the site reached capacity as a burial ground and was officially closed in the late summer of 1807. This closure coincided with the final months of the Transatlantic Slave Trade and is a powerful indicator of how the trade's brief reopening and the unbridled rush to import as many enslaved individuals as possible before the federal ban impacted the burial ground's use and hastened its end. Although the precise number of those who perished during the Middle Passage versus those who died

<sup>84</sup> "The Sales of the Ship *Alice*'s," 1807 May 4, *Daily Courier*, Charleston, SC.

<sup>85</sup> Ibid.

<sup>86</sup> "Prime Gold Coast Negroes," 1807 May 4, *Daily Courier*, Charleston, SC.

<sup>87</sup> "Prime Windward Coast Negroes," 1807 May 4, *Daily Courier*, Charleston, SC.

<sup>88</sup> "Prime Congo Slaves," 1807 May 4, *Daily Courier*, Charleston, SC.

shortly after disembarkation remains unknown, several factors point to the Project Area as the most probable site of interment for the final wave of Africans forcibly brought to the United States: its designation as Charleston's only active public cemetery for the enslaved and impoverished, its immediate proximity to Gadsden's Wharf, and the 1805 municipal ordinance prohibiting the disposal of bodies into city waterways.

## THE CLOSURE

In June 1807, the *City Gazette* reported that the “burying ground in Boundary Street” was “so filled with graves as to be no longer fit for interments.”<sup>89</sup> The site officially closed on August 1st, 1807 (Figure 15).<sup>90</sup> Unlike the city's first burial ground (Public Burial Ground A in Figure 3), which remained in use for nearly a century, the Project Area and surrounding site reached capacity in less than 15 years, a strong representation of the death toll exacted by poverty, illness, and the final years of the Transatlantic Slave Trade. Based on vital records, death statistics, average grave dimensions, and varying interpretations of the site's period of use, historians and cultural resource specialists estimate that between 4,600 and 12,000 individuals may be buried on the site.<sup>91</sup>

In the summer of 1807, burials were directed to a new public cemetery farther west on the Charleston peninsula and denoted as “Public Burial Ground C” on Figure 3. The graveyard was bounded by Thomas (now Ashley Avenue), Bee, President, and Doughty streets on a property occupied today by the Medical University of South Carolina (MUSC) and recently subject to



**Figure 15:** Detail of the 1807 “Plan of a part of Charleston Neck,” identifying the site as the “old burying ground” (South Carolina Historical Society)

<sup>89</sup> “Council Chamber,” 1807 August 1, *City Gazette*, Charleston, SC.

<sup>90</sup> City of Charleston, SC. *Digest of the Ordinances of the City Council of Charleston, from the Year 1783 to July 1818*. Charleston, SC: A.E. Miller, Printer, 1818. 138-139.

<sup>91</sup> S&ME, 9; Butler, Nic. “The Forgotten Dead: Charleston’s Public Cemeteries, 1794-2021.” *Charleston Time Machine*, podcast. Episode 201, 7 May 2021. Transcript available at: <https://www.ccpl.org/charleston-time-machine/forgotten-dead-charlestons-public-cemeteries-1794-2021>.



archaeological excavation for hospital expansion.<sup>92</sup> Originally planned to encompass an entire city block, the public burial ground was ultimately established on an 11.5-acre parcel. It remained active for over three decades, closing in November 1841, and is estimated to contain the remains of approximately 10,600 to 11,000 individuals.<sup>93</sup>

As for the Project Area, the City of Charleston subdivided the entire site by 1817 into eleven lots, which largely mirrored the dimensions of the late-eighteenth-century division of Wragg's estate (see Figure 2). At the time, parcels were leased on 25-year terms at a rate of \$5 per year.<sup>94</sup> As outlined in a rental notice published in the *Charleston Daily Courier*, tenants were permitted to improve the lots: buildings of wood would be demolished upon lease termination, and those built of brick would be appraised and purchased by the city.<sup>95</sup> One such structure, the brick single house at No. 110 Coming Street, remains standing today as a rare architectural remnant of this period of redevelopment. Notably, the advertisements made no mention of the land's prior use as a public cemetery.

Upon the expiration of all leases in 1842, the City began selling what the *Southern Patriot* referred to as the "former burial ground lots," effectively ending its decades-long ownership of the site.<sup>96</sup> The parcels were acquired by a diverse range of buyers, including affluent merchants and investment companies who developed the land for rental housing.<sup>97</sup> By the mid nineteenth century, the block was home to a mix of residents such as enslaved laborers, free people of color from both the working and middle classes, as well as schoolteachers, tailors, and other tradespeople.<sup>98</sup> Years later, Judge Joseph Travis Walsh (1835-1904), who grew up at the corner of Vanderhorst and Coming streets, recalled his childhood on "the site of the old city Potter's Field" and digging for bones, including one memory of finding "a skull wearing a dragoon's helmet, worn by French soldiers."<sup>99</sup>

Despite redevelopment over time, much of the Project Area appears to have experienced less ground disturbance than other portions of the site. Significant development was historically concentrated along the frontages of Coming, Boundary (now Calhoun), and Vanderhorst streets, where a mix of working-class wooden dwellings and more substantial masonry buildings were constructed, the latter likely involving formal footings that would have disrupted subsurface soils. Known subterranean disturbances within the interior of the burial ground, much of which overlaps with the Project Area, primarily consisted of nineteenth-century residential cisterns, privies, and

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92 "Council Chamber," 1807 August 1, *City Gazette*, Charleston, SC.

93 Butler, Nic. "The Forgotten Dead: Charleston's Public Cemeteries, 1794-2021." *Charleston Time Machine*, podcast. Episode 201, 7 May 2021. Transcript available at: <https://www.ccpl.org/charleston-time-machine/forgotten-dead-charlestons-public-cemeteries-1794-2021>; Edwards, Alexander, ed. *Ordinances of the City Council of Charleston, Passed between the 24th of September 1804, and the 1st Day of September 1807. To Which is Annexed, a Selection of Certain Acts and Resolutions of the Legislature of the State of South-Carolina, Relating to the City of Charleston*. Charleston, SC: W. P. Young, 1807.

94 Charleston County Deed Office, Deed Book V8, Page 278, Charleston, SC; Charleston County Deed Office, Deed Book W8, Page 151, Charleston, SC; Charleston County Deed Office, Deed Book B9, Page 216, Charleston, SC; Charleston County Deed Office, Deed Book C9, Page 54, Charleston, SC; Charleston County Deed Office, Deed Book D9, Page 75, Charleston, SC; "City Lands," 1817 February 7, *Charleston Daily Courier*, Charleston, SC.

95 "City Lands," 1817 February 7, *Charleston Daily Courier*, Charleston, SC.

96 "Report," 1842 December 14, *Southern Patriot*, Charleston, SC.

97 Charleston County Deed Office, Deed Book K11, Page 275, Charleston, SC; Charleston County Deed Office, Deed Book Y10, Page 629, Charleston, SC; Charleston County Deed Office, Deed Book Y10, Page 633, Charleston, SC; 1840, 1850 U.S. Federal Census.

98 1840, 1850 U.S. Federal Census.

99 "Autobiography of Joseph Travis Walsh, written in Boston, Mass., December 16, 1897." *The Independent Republic Quarterly*, vol. 12, no. 4. Conway, SC: Horry County Historical Society, 1978. 5.

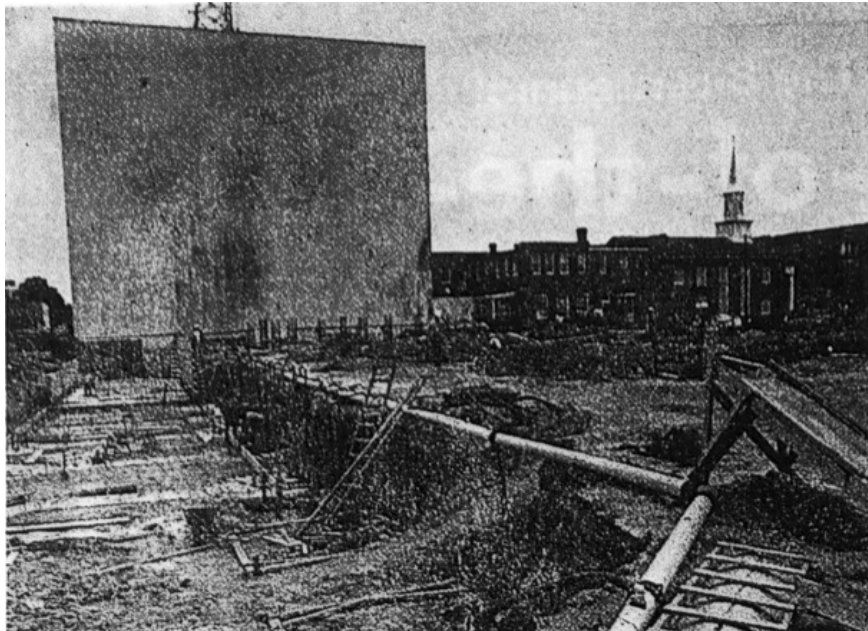


**Figure 16:** Detail of 1944 (top) and 1967 (bottom) Sanborn Fire Insurance maps showing the nature of development within the site and Project Area boundaries (Charleston County Public Library)



shallow foundations associated with a series of modest wooden dwellings that defined the area for most of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. Additionally, the southern portion of the burial ground was eventually infilled to stabilize low-lying terrain and marshland that continued to define the area well into the nineteenth century.

In the twentieth century, large-scale development projects caused substantial ground disturbance within the southern portion of the site, compromising the historic integrity of that section. By the 1930s, for example, a gas station with underground fuel tanks was constructed at the northeast corner of Calhoun and Coming streets and demolished by the 1960s for surface parking (Figure 16). In the late 1970s, that same site was redeveloped by the Southern Bell Telephone Company into a major telecommunications facility, which included the installation of an extensive “underground cable vault” (Figure 17).<sup>100</sup> Contemporary newspaper reports announcing the construction made no mention of the discovery of human remains during excavation.



**Figure 17:** 1975 photograph of the Southern Bell Telephone Co. building under construction and the installation of underground cables within the southern parcel of the burial ground (*Evening Post*, September 22, 1975)

Today, the Project Area consists primarily of surface parking and a one-story building constructed c.1966, which likely sits atop a concrete slab. These conditions suggest relatively minimal subsurface impact compared to the more heavily developed sections of the surrounding parcels. Therefore, the Project Area may retain a higher degree of historic integrity and has the potential to yield a significantly greater amount of archaeological data and human remains associated with the city’s use of the site as a public burial ground from the 1790s through 1807.

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100 “Oil Concerns Get Property,” 1936 January 15, *Evening Post*, Charleston, SC; “Now Showing: Improvements,” 1975 September 22, *Evening Post*, Charleston, SC

## KEY DATES

### 1793

Charleston's City Council purchased a 3.4-acre parcel on the "Charleston Neck" to establish a new public burial ground.

*Approximately 1.14 acres of this parcel, referred to in this report as the Project Area, was conveyed to the College of Charleston in 2025.*

### 1798

City plats first label the site as the "Strangers and Negroes Burying Ground."

### 1799

A severe Yellow Fever epidemic struck Charleston, disproportionately killing "strangers," such as sailors, visitors, and immigrants.

*Yellow Fever outbreaks would continue to plague the city throughout the site's period of use as a burial ground.*

### 1801

Charleston passed an ordinance to standardize burials on the site by requiring specific grave dimensions, establishing segregated plots and appointing a superintendent to oversee operations.

### 1803

The federal ban on the importation of enslaved Africans was repealed. Charleston resumed participation in the Transatlantic Slave Trade.

### 1805

A new city ordinance prohibited the disposal of deceased individuals into the city's waterways, explicitly citing cargo ships arriving from Africa as violators. From this point forward, African captives who died while held aboard ships along the wharves or in dockside holding facilities were to receive "decent burials," many likely within the site and Project Area.

*Approximately 40,000 enslaved Africans arrived at the Port of Charleston between 1803 and the end of 1807. It is unclear how many perished while housed along the wharves.*

### 1807

The *City Gazette* reported that the site was "so filled with graves as to be no longer fit for interments," and the burial ground was officially closed in less than 15 years, a strong representation of the death toll exacted by poverty, illness, and the final years of the Transatlantic Slave Trade.



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