



C H A T H A M C O U N T Y
HISTORIC PRESERVATION COMMISSION

Arthur A. Mendonsa Hearing Room
January 16, 2013 - 2:00 P.M.
Meeting Minutes

January 16, 2013 CCHPC Regular Meeting

I. Call to Order and Welcome

II. Approval of Minutes of Previous Meeting

1. [August 1, 2012 Meeting Minutes](#)

Attachment: [August 1, 2012 Minutes.pdf](#)

Board Action:

Approve meeting minutes of August 1, 2012 and October 3, 2012. - PASS

Vote Results

Motion: George Cohen

Second: Pamela Lossing

George Cohen - Aye

Jane A. Feiler - Aye

Vaughnette Goode-Walker - Aye

Stephen T. Lindell - Aye

Pamela Lossing - Aye

Dr. E. G. Daves Rossell - Aye

Lisa L. White - Aye

2. [October 3, 2012 Meeting Minutes](#)

Attachment: [October 3, 2012 Minutes.pdf](#)

III. Posting

IV. Consent Agenda

V. Regular Agenda

3. [Uncovering History: The Cluskey Embankment Stores Archeology Project- Luciana Spracher](#)

Ms. Goode-Walker explained that in the past, the Chatham County Historic Preservation Commission (CCPHC) discussed the possibility of creating an Archaeology Ordinance for the City of Savannah. While they do not have an Archaeology Ordinance, the City has been interested enough to look at the Cluskey Embankment Stores. A group of young men from the Shinholster Leadership Institute toured the stores and were told that the vaults were sacred grounds as they were used years ago as holding pens for enslaved people.

Ms. Goode-Walker said all they knew about the vaults was that they were built in 1840 and the City of Savannah basically owns them. She started doing some research with these young men in November 2011 with the help of Ms. Luciana Spracher. If they ultimately do not find out what happened here, they know that the City of Savannah will preserve the embankment stores.

Ms. Goode-Walker introduced Ms. Spracher, the City of Savannah Research Library Director. Ms. Goode-Walker recognized the retired Research Library Director, Ms. Glenda Anderson.

Ms. Spracher came forward and introduced Mr. Blake Ayala, a graduate student of Georgia Southern University. She reported that they are really excited about this project. It has been a great partnership and cooperation with many different groups. She believes that a lot of things have aligned just right to get them to this project.

Ms. Spracher said their presentation is entitled "Uncovering History – The Cluskey Embankment Stores Archaeology Project ." The Cluskey Embankment Stores are located on the Drayton Street Ramp between City Hall and Drayton Street going down to the river. The vaults are built into the bluff. There are four large open vaults. One small vault is completely enclosed with bricks. For many years the vaults were used for parking at the discretion of the City Manager's office. People are really intrigued by the vaults. People always ask, "What are they?" There is a lot of mystery surrounding the vaults. Stories are also told by various tour guides and residents. Ms. Spracher said the biggest story told about the vaults is that they were used to hold slaves, but she does not have documentation to substantiate this. All she knows about the vaults is what is documented in the National Park Service Historic American Buildings Survey of the 1960s. It was confirmed that they were built in the 1840s and were built for storage. The document does not elaborate on what was stored there.

Ms. Spracher said two things dealing with this project were going on at the same time. The Telfair Museum had the Slavery and Symposium exhibit in the fall of 2011. Someone got up at the opening event during the comment period and talked about the vaults and how historic they were. The individual stated that the vaults were used to hold slaves and how shameful it was that the City was parking cars there. Ms. Spracher said she always wanted to know what the vaults were and she did not like hearing that they were doing something "shameful." Therefore, she went to the City Manager and told her that she was going to do some real research into the City's records to see if they could figure out something. At the same time, the Shinholster Group was getting involved in the project.

Ms. Spracher said the City's records revealed that they are a part of a larger public works project that the City undertook in the 1830s and 1840s to build a retaining wall along sandy bluff to prevent erosion. Therefore, the vaults are a piece of the retaining wall. In 1840, the City awarded a contract to Charles B. Cluskey to do the section between Drayton Street and the City Exchange which is where City Hall now stands. Mr. Cluskey by this time was

already a very active architect. He had already done the Medical College in Augusta, GA and the Governor's Mansion in Milledgeville, GA before he was awarded this contract.

The City contracted with Cluskey to build the retaining wall and to raise the level to Bay Street and install an iron railing. Cluskey came back early in the project to City Council and proposed to build storage vaults in the area. He estimated that the vaults would cost \$3,000.00. After much discussion, City Council negotiated a 20 year lease. The City did not incur any additional expense to install the vaults. Cluskey got the lease, but did not hold it one year. He transferred the lease to John Dillon in 1841 for a debt of \$2,900.00. Ms. Spracher said this is the last thing they know about the lease. They do not know if John Dillon carried the lease for the remainder of the 20 years or whether it reverted back to the City or whether the City kept leasing it. The project dragged on for some time and Cluskey ended up having to surrender the project to Williams S. Walker who completed it in 1842. They know that at the time it was surrendered, the railings still needed to be installed. It is, therefore, unclear how much of the project Cluskey finished. The total City investment for the retaining wall, the railing and the vaults were \$2,957 plus the lease.

Ms. Spracher explained that in addition to looking at the different records in the City's archives, she looked for some visual documentation. The City's Engineering Department has a large map collection. She found the bulks on many, but it is similar to what is shown on the Sanborn Insurance Map of 1888. The map confirms that the storage cellars are here, but does not give any more information. There are lots of pictures of the area, but unfortunately they are for other areas. They found pictures where you can tell the individuals are standing right in front of the vaults, but their backs are to the walls. The most thorough documentation on the vaults prior to this project was the Historic American Building Survey (HABS) of 1962 which consisted of photographic documentation, measured drawings and minimal historical research. She pointed out that as seen in the elevation on the far left; the small opening has been bricked. This factors into their project as well. Ms. Spracher explained that the HABS documentation is also the first time that they saw where it was referred to as the Charles Cluskey Embankment stores. Consequently, they adopted this as the official name for the project.

Ms. Spracher reported that the vaults are contributing structures in the Savannah National Landmark Historic. They are also one of the oldest structures owned by the City. They predate City Hall, Police Headquarters, and the Thomas Gamble Building. These structures are important to Savannah's history.

Ms. Spracher said there is a lot, however, that they do not know about the vaults. They do not know exactly what Cluskey intended to store in the vaults when he proposed them. They do not know how John Dillon used them or if he even held the lease for the full 20 years. They are not certain whether the lease came back to the City in 1860 or if they continued to lease it. When the lease came back to the City, what were they using the vaults for? They know from HABS that they were already being used for parking. But, they do not know what the City was using them for in the 19th century. Because they do not have visual documentation looking at the vaults, they are not entirely sure about any kind of doors or gates that were on the structures or anything such as bars or shutters on the window openings. The number one question is they still do not know what was stored here. Everyone wants to know if slaves were there.

Ms. Spracher said at the same time she was picking up information in the City's records, the Shinhoster Leadership Group under the direction of Richard Shinhoster got involved.

Each summer girls and boys from the local schools learn how to be young leaders. They are taught how to do various projects. After taking a walking tour of vaults and being told that they were used to store slaves, Ms. Goode-Walker told the students that she was told the vaults were sacred ground. Four of the young men, lead by Bobby Battle, decided this would be their project. These young men set up a meeting with the City Manager and said it is horrible that parking is allowed in the vaults as they are sacred grounds. At that point, the City Manager got the young men involved with Ms. Vaughnette Goode-Walker to look into what the vaults were really used for.

Ms. Spracher said one of the interesting things that these young men focused on was when City Hall was being constructed and they were excavating for the foundation, the larger vault collapsed in 1904. Several African-American laborers were trapped during the excavation. The young men were really interested in this aspect and they grasped on how the African-American population was a part of the workforce in building City Hall. These young men believed that even if slaves were not stored in the vaults, it is very possible that slaves helped to build the vaults and started a discussion about the slaves' impact in public works.

Ms. Spracher said these young men's research culminated with them appearing before City Council in February, 2012. The young men made several recommendations, talked about their project and then informed City Council that more focus is needed on historic preservation and local African-American history. The group then made specific recommendations about the vaults. They wanted to see parking discontinued to help preserve the vaults; they wanted the fifth (5th) vault to be opened so they could see what was inside; they wanted to honor the injured workers through a historical marker; they wanted to organize an archaeological dig and continue doing research to see if they could find out more about the slaves. City Council was really impressed that a group of young men who were still in high school brought this to their attention. Council was very supportive. Ms. Spracher said she was able to jump on this momentum and move forward with some of their recommendations. Specifically, the archaeological investigation. At this point is where things really began lining up. As they all know, last summer MPC started doing a big community outreach public education about archaeology and one of those things was a panel discussion. Dr. Sue M. Moore, Professor of Anthropology and Director of the Camp Lawton Project at Georgia Southern University in Statesboro, was a part of the panel. At the end of the event, she approached Dr. Moore and told her about the project and that she was looking at how to jumpstart an archaeology investigation. Dr. Moore immediately took an interest in this project. They worked out an agreement between the City of Savannah and Georgia Southern University where they were able to bring the best of both partners to the table.

Ms. Spracher said Georgia Southern is supplying the archaeology expertise and tools, while the City of Savannah is paying for graduate assistance that Dr. Moore was able to identify through their program. Therefore, this was a great collaboration. On the City's side, numerous departments got involved, Streets Maintenance, Park & Tree, Water Conveyance, Mobility and Parking and the Public Information Office.

Ms. Spracher said, however, there were a couple of things that they needed to deal with before they could start the project. She explained that the split that connects to the first two vaults was found to be structurally deficient in a great part due to the deterioration of the ironwork brackets, but also because cars going in and out of the vaults had damaged the brick. This caused stress to the archways. This was closed and the ironworkers repointed

and repaired this. During this repair time, the persons were not allowed to park here until the work was completed. When they got ready to start the archaeology dig, she went to the City Manager and told her that the City recently paid to fix the problem and that they did not want to create the problem again. The City Manager told her that parking would no longer be allowed in the vaults. The parking was finally discontinued. However, they still had problems from people who work down there on the weekend as they would park there. Therefore, enforcement had to be reinforced on the weekends. Ms. Spracher said the research is ongoing.

Mr. Ayala reported that he is the graduate assistant that is taking on this project. The first thing they decided to use with this project was Lidar. This created a three dimensional model and this is very beneficial to the City. It can be used in a number of different ways. Firstly, it creates a model which can be preserved in time. Therefore, if something happens with the vaults, there will always be a record of what they looked like and where specific bricks were placed. This is really a good tool for the City. He showed a picture of Matt Luke, who is their Lidar person at Georgia Southern. Matt has made very good progress in this area.

Mr. Ayala said their next step was to use Ground Penetrating Radar (GPR). This process was used to ensure that whenever they started their investigations, they would not hit a water line or gas line. GPR was used in all the vaults. Some very interesting things surfaced. In the first vault, the GPR picked up an old stoneware pipe that possibly the City used for water or probably sewage. He showed a slide of their first day of excavation in the vault closest to City Hall. They found some interesting stuff and most of it seems to be fill, possibly from when the vaults were rebuilt after they collapsed in 1904. Most of it is a hodge-podge of things that seem to have been brought in and used to level the ground. They found lots of stoneware, probably from the pipes and glass. They found some bones, but believe they are food bones, no human remains have been found.

Mr. Ayala showed a slide of their public work day in vault 1. They are trying to bring the public in as there seems to be a lot of curiosity about the history of this area. It turned out to be a huge success. They had a lot of people to come, show support and interest in what these vaults actually were. One day when they came to the vaults, some people were actually here taking wedding photos. This is a very beautiful part of Savannah and everyone wants to know more about these vaults.

On their first work day, Mr. Ayala said the electricity was out. Therefore, they could not continue their work in the back on the first unit, but they opened up a unit in the front where they had light and would be able to see. To their surprise as soon as they lifted up the cement layer that was over the top, they found an intact brick floor. They are not quite sure how far the intact floor extends, but in order to preserve it, they decided to take out each one of those bricks, one-by-one. They secured the bricks in the Gamble Building. They plan to be as minimally invasive as possible and try to preserve as much as they possibly can. Mr. Ayala said approximately eight (8) students helped with the screening. He showed a slide of the artifacts that they determined were from around the 19th century and would have been the period possibly from the time when the vaults were built. They have a piece of pipe which is fairly interesting. Most of what they found was bits of iron that were too eroded to make a determination. They also have some nails, but, they too, are so eroded they cannot determine what date these nails are. They have pieces of oil lanterns (kerosene).

Ms. Spracher said they are actually just in the first vault, which is the largest vault. The excavation in these two units needs to be completed. They will resume this with a field school this Friday. They are going to move methodically up the hill to the smaller vaults. There is some erosion in the brick and mortar for the 5th bricked up vault and they will get a micro lighted video camera that they can snake in and see what is behind the wall. They have no plans currently to open this vault. They believe it was probably bricked up for a reason. Perhaps, structurally, it needed to be closed.

Ms. Spracher said part of the agreement with Georgia Southern includes public outreach for the public work day. They actually have four (4) public work days that have to be worked into this. The first public work day was in December, 2012. The next public work day will be Saturday, January 26, 2013 from 10:00 a.m. to 3:00 p.m. They are reaching out to the youth who want to learn more about archaeology. They also encouraged others who want to come and learn more about archaeology to come on the public work day.

Ms. Spracher said on their first public work day, they had ten (10) students who represented the public school system - early college historic preservation program and also a member of the Shinhoster Youth Group. It is really exciting for her to bring the public and youths into this project. She reported that starting tomorrow, they will kick off another component of this project with Savannah State University. Dr. Felicia Bell, who is a history professor, is interested in getting her students involved. Therefore, the students will work with Mr. Ayala and Dr. Moore learning the archaeology methods and then they will work with her in getting deep into the City's records. Ms. Spracher said her research in the records focuses on the time of construction, but the hope is that there is further documentation about the leasing and use through the financial records of the City. Their research will focus on the period of 1842 through 1865, the period of slavery when the vaults were open.

Ms. Spracher said that they also have some structural repairs that they have to focus on. The largest of the vaults closest to City Hall shares a wall with that staircase that goes down next to City Hall. She noticed that as this project was getting started, the crack there is growing. Therefore, they have already put in a temporary repair work order on the wall, but a permanent repair work order bid is being done now. The Park & Tree actually oversees the retaining wall. They are looking at the retaining wall along the river for structural issues. Therefore, she believes this is really good timing that they are bringing awareness to this historic structure while they are in this process.

What does the City hope to get out of this? Well, they want to really add to the body of knowledge. They want to know more and want to be able to better interpret these vaults. If they can prove that the vaults were used for slaves, they want to be able to tell people that. But, they may never be able to solve that. She anticipates that the research will probably never be completely done; it will be ongoing. They want to look at more appropriate use for the vaults. They have taken the parking out, but now what do they do? Will this be a historic site that becomes a sort of museum site that they want people to come visit? This is the City's initial purpose, but a nice side goal is to educate people about archaeology and getting them to participate. All of the finer products from this collection, any artifacts found, all of the documentation photographs, the Lidar model, and all the research will come together in one collection of the municipal archives and will be available for the future generations to use. They will continue with the public reach special exhibits and really just see how this project progresses.

Ms. Spracher entertained questions from the Commission.

Ms. Feiler said she moved to Savannah more than 50 years ago and when she was doing some research for a project in the Historic District, she was told that those vaults were used for resin and other flammable materials to keep away from the cotton that was stored in the warehouses so that there would not be a combustible fire.

Ms. Spracher said this is a very good lead for them to follow up on. A lot of people look at the vaults and because of their structure they ask are they good for dry storage? Are they good for human storage? Are they good fire-proof storage? They can look at the structure, but they are also trying to get some primary documents that say that.

Ms. Goode-Walker said the Commission had a very interested audience. Persons were in attendance from the Historic Savannah Foundation and Coastal Heritage Society. She asked the public if they had any questions.

A representative from Brockington Associates said the resin production did not become popular until the late 19th century. Therefore, they need to figure out what the vaults were used for prior to this time.

Ms. Spracher said presently, their focus is taking them through the 1865 to see if they can clear up the slave issue. But, then they have the period of 1865 to the emergence of the automobile. She believes that it is safe to say that once the City started really to having automobiles, this was probably used for parking. But, there are several distinct periods that they were probably used for different things.

Ms. Goode-Walker said she has been at the site as early as 7:00 a.m. taking pictures. It was delightful seeing the vault on the end having undergone much work. She wonders if the last vault was ever the same height as the smaller vaults. The large vault is huge. She said that Patrick Shay read the buildings for the Shinhoster Leadership Group. Mr. Shay made the grand gesture of how big the last vault is. He asked the young men what could have been inside the vaults. The young men replied, "Horses and wagons." When they read the articles from the newspapers of 1904, they talked about them as "receiving vaults," a term which also referred to funerals.

Ms. Spracher said the way the ramp goes up and the bluff is built, the vaults are forced to get smaller. A part of the contract requirement said that Cluskey had to leave four (4) feet between the tops of the vaults and Bay Street. Therefore, they had to become shallow in height and the way the ramp is curved, they become shorter in depth as well. Ms. Spracher said all the documentation that the City has always talk about four (4) vaults. They never talk about the fifth (5th) vault. She believes the fifth (5th) vault might have been a later addition. As they can see, there is not as much space between it and the top railing. She does not know for sure, but assumes this vault was filled-in for structural reasons and put in later. She does not believe that this vault was a part of Cluskey's original plan.

Ms. Goode-Walker asked Ms. Spracher if she was talking about the door.

Ms. Spracher answered yes; the little fifth (5th) door on the left. It is different. They are looking at it as a part of this project, but she does not believe that it is original. They have not opened it yet. Their plan is not to open it, but get in it through one of the small holes to be able to look inside. Now, they may change their minds once they see what is back there. But, as of now, their plan is not to open it. She believes it was bricked up for a

reason. But, she does not believe that a dead body is behind there.

Ms. Goode-Walker said it could be bricked for safety reasons.

Ms. Spracher said she believes that when you talk about cemetery receiving vaults, it has to do with bodies, but she was thinking more in terms of receiving from the port. Over the years, the terms have been used for stores, storage vaults, and receiving vaults. Therefore, they know the vaults were used for storage and this is all they know.

The vaults have changed differently over time. Some of them have stucco and the vaults' floors are different. Some are concrete; a paving stone in another and a recycled asphalt material in another and is dirt. It is interesting how these vaults were not uniformly treated over time. All the vaults do have an opening in the ceiling and people wonder if the opening were there for the people to get air.

Ms. Goode-Walker asked if these are drains. Have the openings always been here?

Ms. Spracher said yes. When you are inside the vaults, the opening lets down water, leaves and all sorts of things. If you walk along the retaining walls, there are other areas that look like the little small bricked up vault. One thing she would like to do as they are doing this project, is to take a walk the entire length of the retaining wall and document every single opening. This is not completely unique. The series of large vaults are unique as there is not another set like them on the river. But, there are other things and she read a research recently where someone said they were privies that have been bricked up down there. Ms. Spracher said she wants to explore this further to see if they can document which ones are privies and what are the sizes of those openings to compare them to the size of these.

Ms. Goode-Walker said in an article of 1904, it was said that the opening between the two vaults was created to dig the dirt out after the collapse.

Ms. Spracher said there are some clues. They were able to be closed at some point. There are remnants of hinges and so forth. They will document these clues as well. There are two little windows between the arches. There are a lot of unknown and a lot of mysteries. Her goal is to learn more. She believes this is a long process and they may never fully be able to answer all the questions. But, she believes that the great thing about historical research in Savannah is adding to this knowledge about our history for the next generation to work on.

4. Officer Elections

The Nominating Committee presented the following members for Chair and Vice-Chair for 2013:

Lisa White, Chair and Pamela Lossing, Vice-Chair.

The Commission extended their appreciation to Ms. Goode-Walker for a job well done as chair for 2011-2012.

Board Action:

Approval to accept the Nominating Committee recommendation for 2013 Officers: Ms. Lisa White, Chair and Ms. Pamela Lossing, Vice-Chair. - PASS

Vote Results

Motion: Jane A. Feiler

Second: George Cohen

George Cohen - Aye

Jane A. Feiler - Aye

Vaughnette Goode-Walker - Aye

Stephen T. Lindell - Aye

Pamela Lossing - Aye

Dr. E. G. Daves Rossell - Aye

Lisa L. White - Aye

5. 2013 Schedule of Meetings

Attachment: [2013 Meeting Schedule.pdf](#)

Ms. Harris stated as the Commission knows, the meetings are held on the first Wednesday of the month on a quarterly basis. The meeting today is a little off schedule because of proximity to a holiday. The next meeting would be scheduled for April 3, 2013, but there is a conflict with the Arthur A. Mendonsa Hearing Room. The meeting could be held on Thursday, April 4, 2013 at the same time. The meeting in July will be on the 3rd and October meeting will be held on the 2nd.

Ms. Harris said if applications are received in-between these meetings, the Commission will have a Special Called Meeting and will try to keep the meeting as close as possible to the first Wednesday at 2:00 p.m.

Board Action:

Approval of the following Quarterly Meeting Schedule for 2013: Thursday, April 4; Wednesday, July 3 and Wednesday, October 2. The meetings are held at 2:00 p.m. - PASS

Vote Results

Motion: Lisa L. White

Second: Pamela Lossing

George Cohen - Aye

Jane A. Feiler - Aye

Vaughnette Goode-Walker - Aye

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|-------------------------|-------|
| Stephen T. Lindell | - Aye |
| Pamela Lossing | - Aye |
| Dr. E. G. Daves Rossell | - Aye |
| Lisa L. White | - Aye |

VI. Request for Extensions

VII. Staff Reviews

VIII. Other Business

IX. Notices, Proclamations and Acknowledgements

X. Adjournment

6. Adjourned.

There being no further business to come before the Commission, Ms. Goode-Walker adjourned the meeting at 4:00 p.m.

Respectfully Submitted,

Ellen Harris
Cultural Resource and Urban Planning Manager

EH:mem

The Chatham County - Savannah Metropolitan Planning Commission provides meeting summary minutes which are adopted by the respective Board. Verbatim transcripts of minutes are the responsibility of the interested party.