

5600-GSM-gau (USMARC); GSG (OCLC/SOLINET)
City of Savannah, Research Library & Municipal Archives, Savannah, Georgia

Record Group #: 5600 (mf)
Name: City of Savannah, Georgia Records Microfilm
Dates: 1790-1912
Extent/Size: 66 reels of microfilm (2.0 cubic feet)
Language: English

Organizational History:

The history of Savannah's City government dates from the settlement of the Colony of Georgia at Savannah in 1733. Until 1741, the Common Council of Trustees governed the Colony from England through their appointed officials at Savannah - three bailiffs who supervised two constables, a recorder, two tythingmen, and eight conservators of the peace (Walter McElrath, A Treatise on the Constitution of Georgia, p. 5).

In 1741, the County of Savannah was established and placed under the jurisdiction of a president and four assistants, who served as the Trustee's representatives. These appointees were required to make reports to the Trustees, enforce laws, oversee the granting of land, and record marriages, births, and deaths. However, the only power they possessed was to appoint and remove constables and tythingmen (Allen D. Candler, ed., Colonial Records of the State of Georgia, vol. 5, p. 494; James Ross McCain, Georgia as a Proprietary Province, the Execution of a Trust, pp. 154-59).

In June of 1752, the Trustee's Corporation was dissolved. The proprietary colony then became a royal colony, administered by a Royal Governor, his council, and an elected legislature. Through the years, various public offices were created, and legislation was enacted to regulate the city. Many public commissions were filled by appointed lay officers of Christ Episcopal Church, who were charged with such duties as keeping records of vital statistics and supervision of the fire department (Alexander A. Lawrence, "The Development of Municipal Government in Savannah from 1732 to 1790," GEORGIA HISTORICAL SOCIETY vertical files; Candler, vol. 18, pp. 267, 270-71, 315-16).

Savannah's municipal government had been inefficient and inadequate from the beginning and failed to meet the needs of the growing population. During the 1780's grievances were presented, and grand juries recommended that the town be incorporated, but no charter was immediately granted. However, laws continued to be enacted by the legislature for better regulating the town, including an act of 1787, which created seven wards and provided for the election of wardens who, in turn, elected a president from their body. This board made and administered regulations and assessed and collected taxes (Robert Watkins, A Digest of the Laws of the State of Georgia, p. 354).

Finally, under an act of December 23, 1789, the legislature incorporated the City of Savannah, providing for the annual public election of one alderman from each ward, comprising a board of aldermen. The aldermen then elected a member of their board as Mayor (Watkins, p. 416; William H. Crawford and Horatio Marbury, Digest of the Laws of the State of Georgia, p. 123).

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The first election of aldermen was held March 1, 1790, and the first City Council meeting was held on March 8th, at which time John Houstoun was elected the first mayor of Savannah. This first council created offices, established salaries for officeholders, adopted rules for governing the council, and set about addressing the needs of the city (Thomas Gamble, Jr., A History of the City Government of Savannah, Ga., from 1790 to 1901, pp. 47-48).

In 1843, the state legislature reduced the number of aldermen from fourteen to twelve and made the mayorship and several City posts publicly elected offices. In December of 1844, Dr. Richard Wayne became the first mayor elected by the people of Savannah (A Digest of All the Ordinances of the City of Savannah, 1858, p. 318; Gamble, p. 186).

Through the years, various departments, bureaus, boards, committees, and commissions have been created, abolished, merged, and/or divided to meet the increasing needs of the city. Since 1954, the City of Savannah has operated under a council/manager system. The elected Council now consists of the Mayor and eight aldermen who appoint a City Manager. The City Manager is the chief administrative officer of the City government, advising the Council and supervising the implementation of the policies and legislation it adopts (Laura Urban, compiler, Serving Savannah, p. 2).

For a more detailed history of Savannah's municipal government, consult Thomas Gamble, Jr.'s A History of the City Government of Savannah, Ga., from 1790-1901. Although not included in these record descriptions, the researcher is also referred to the Mayor's/Municipal Annual Reports (1856-1923, some gaps); digest of the City ordinances (1854 and 1858); and the City codes and supplements (1871-79, 1888, 1907, 1818, 1936, 1945, and 1958).

Scope and Content:

Record Group 5600 (mf), City of Savannah, Georgia Records Microfilm (1790-1912), includes 66 reels of microfilm of records of the Clerk of Council's Office and the City Treasurer's Office. See Scope and Content notes for each series for further information about the content and arrangement of the materials.

System of Arrangement and Ordering:

Record Group 5600 (mf), City of Savannah, Georgia Records Microfilm are arranged according to City office/department into the following series:

5600CL Clerk of Council (1790-1900)

5600CT City Treasurer (1809-1912)

Conditions Governing Access:

None.

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Access Points:

City of Savannah, Georgia (Savannah, Ga.)
City Treasurer (Savannah, Ga.)
Clerk of Council (Savannah, Ga.)

Related Collections at the City of Savannah, Research Library & Municipal Archives:

City of Savannah, Georgia City Council Meeting Papers.
Record Group 5600, City of Savannah, Georgia Records.
Savannah Area Local Government Documents Collection.

Sponsors/Funding:

None.

Preferred Citation:

Record Group 5600, City of Savannah, Georgia Records. City of Savannah, Research Library & Municipal Archives.

Processed by:

T. Bearden, 1990, revised by A. Wilson, 1998.

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Record Series #: 5600CL (mf)
Name: City of Savannah, Georgia Records Microfilm – Clerk of Council
Dates: 1790-1900
Extent/Size: 27 reels of microfilm (1.0 cubic feet)

Organizational History:

The office of the Clerk of Council for the City of Savannah was created by the first City Council in 1790. The first clerk elected by that Council, John Gibbons, served as both clerk and treasurer for the new municipal government (Gamble, History of City Government, 1790-1901, pp. 48-49).

Ordinances of 1839, 1857, 1858, 1860, and 1917 outline the responsibilities of the Clerk through the years as follows: to receive applications and petitions of citizens and present them to the Council; to attend and record the proceedings of Council meetings; to keep valuable City documents in fire-proof safes; to swear in City officials and police officers; to advertise City elections; to attend Police Court and record and submit the proceedings to Council; to make an annual report on the condition of the City's records, at the request of the Mayor; to make out, attest, and record the titles to purchases of City lots or parts of City lots; to maintain dry culture contracts; to maintain City contracts and cemetery deed books; to issue liquor licenses; to attest to City bonds; to sell badges (for licensing and identification) to vendors, for Negroes to work, and to free persons of color; to keep a register of free persons of color; to receive port reports; to issue passports; to keep a bound, indexed book of real property owned by the City; to keep a record of purchases and conveyances of the City and of leases, encumbrances, or liens; and to license anyone in possession of ammunition (Code of Savannah 1858, p.107,109; Code of Savannah 1871, pp. 139-42; Code of Savannah 1918, p. 114).

In 1989, the Clerk of Council continued to maintain the records of the Council meetings, City contracts, cemetery deeds, and the City code; to receive citizen's petitions; and to supervise municipal elections (Urban, Serving Savannah, p. 44).

Scope and Content:

The City of Savannah, Georgia Records Microfilm – Clerk of City Council (1790-1900) includes 5600CL-005 Minute Books (1790-1900) on 24 reels of microfilm and 5600CL-130 Registers of Free Persons of Color (1817-1864) on 3 reels of microfilm. The original minute books are housed at the Clerk of Council's Office and the original registers are housed in the Research Library & Municipal Archives. Researchers are requested to use the microfilm to help preserve the original volumes. See sub-series descriptions for more information.

Related Collections at the City of Savannah, Research Library & Municipal Archives:

Record Series 5600CL, City of Savannah, Georgia Records – Clerk of Council.

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City of Savannah, Research Library & Municipal Archives, Savannah, Georgia**

Sub-series #: 5600CL-005

Name: Minute Books (Indexed)

Dates: 1790-1900

Extent/Size: 24 reels of microfilm

Sub-series description:

These minutes record the business of the City Council, including date of meeting, who was present, committee reports, and public petitions. The index, at the beginning of each book, includes the date, name of petitioner, and the subject of the petition. Minutes from meetings for several years were copied in two books, leading to an overlap in dates for several books. Until 1883, minute books had internal indexes; minute books dating from 1883 were indexed in separate volumes.

Note:

Both minute books and index volumes were microfilmed onto 24 rolls on November 7, 1991.

Arrangement:

Chronological

Inventory:

Roll #X-5600CL-005-01	Minute Books General Index, 1877-1883
Roll #X-5600CL-005-02	Minute Books, 1790-1796, 1800-1804
Roll #X-5600CL-005-03	Minute Books, 1805-1812
Roll #X-5600CL-005-04	Minute Books, 1812-1822
Roll #X-5600CL-005-05	Minute Books, 1822-1827
Roll #X-5600CL-005-06	Minute Books, 1825-1837
Roll #X-5600CL-005-07	Minute Books, 1834-1842
Roll #X-5600CL-005-08	Minute Books, 1838-1844
Roll #X-5600CL-005-09	Minute Books, 1844-1850
Roll #X-5600CL-005-10	Minute Books, 1850-1855
Roll #X-5600CL-005-11	Minute Books, 1855-1863
Roll #X-5600CL-005-12	Minute Books, 1863-1869
Roll #X-5600CL-005-13	Minute Books, 1869-1872
Roll #X-5600CL-005-14	Minute Books, 1872-1877
Roll #X-5600CL-005-15	Minute Books, 1877-1881

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Roll #X-5600CL-005-16	Minute Books, 1882-1885 (The book dated 1882-1883 is not indexed - See roll no. X-5600CL-05-01 for general index including those years)
Roll #X-5600CL-005-17	Minute Books, 1886-1887
Roll #X-5600CL-005-18	Minute Books, 1888-1889
Roll #X-5600CL-005-19	Minute Books, 1890-1891 (Part of this book is indexed on Roll #X-5600CL-005-18. The rest of the index is filmed out of order and follows p. 17 of the minute book)
Roll #X-5600CL-005-20	Minute Books, 1891-1893
Roll #X-5600CL-005-21	Minute Books, 1893-1894
Roll #X-5600CL-005-22	Minute Books, 1895-1896
Roll #X-5600CL-005-23	Minute Books, 1896-1898
Roll #X-5600CL-005-24	Minute Books, 1898-1900

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Sub-series #: 5600CL-130

Name: Registers of Free Persons of Color

Dates: 1817-1864 (some gaps)

Extent/Size: 3 reels of microfilm

Sub-series description:

According to a City ordinance of 1839, owners of slaves and guardians of free persons of color were required to register and obtain badges from the Clerk of Council before hiring out or permitting the employment of their charges. Badges were only to be issued to "old, decrepit, and infirm" individuals for purposes of vending.

All free persons of color 16 years of age (lowered to 14 in 1854) or older were required to register annually with the Clerk of Council. Notice of removal from the city was also required. By state law, all registered free persons of color between the ages of 15 and 60 were liable for public service in the county/city of their residence for an annual term not to exceed 20 days. If a person of color entered and remained in the state and failed to register, he/she faced arrest, trial, a fine of \$100, and/or punishment of labor (Savannah Ordinances 1854, pp. 339, 342, 347; Code of Savannah 1858, pp. 174-77).

The information in each volume varies (original volumes housed in the Research Library & Municipal Archives). **Volume 1** (1817, 1823-1829, 1835) includes the name, place of residence, occupation, property owned, and name of guardian. **Volume 2** (1828-1835) includes name, place of residence, name of guardian, occupation, and remarks. It also contains a register of aliens who declared their intent to not become U.S. citizens for 1824-1856. This register is 3 pages long. **Volume 3** (1828-1847) includes name, place of birth, place of residence, occupation, name of guardian, and date qualified. **Volume 4** (1837-1849) includes name, place of birth, date of arrival, occupation, name of guardian, and date appointed. **Volume 5** (1861, 1863-1864) includes name, age, parentage, place of birth, place of residence, occupation, description, and name of guardian.

Note:

All five volumes, plus a sixth volume not held in the 5600CL record series, were microfilmed onto 3 rolls in 1960 by the Georgia Department of Archives and History.

Arrangement:

Alphabetical by surname

Inventory:

Roll #5600CL-130-01

Free Persons of Color Register, 1828-1835 (Volume 2).

Roll #5600CL-130-02

First item: Free Persons of Color Register, 1817, 1823-1829 (Volume 1).

Second item: Free Persons of Color Register, 1860-1863.

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Roll #5600CL-130-03

Seventh item: Free Persons of Color Register, 1828-1847 (Volume 3).

Eighth item: Free Persons of Color Register, 1837-1849 (Volume 4).

Ninth item: Free Persons of Color Register, 1861, 1863-1864 (Volume 5).

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Record Series #: 5600CT (mf)
Name: City of Savannah, Georgia Records Microfilm – City Treasurer
Dates: 1809-1912
Extent/Size: 39 reels of microfilm (1.0 cubic feet)

Organizational History:

The office of City Treasurer was created at the first meeting of the newly established City Council in 1790, and the Treasurer was selected by the Council (Gamble, History of the City Government, 1790-1901, p. 48). As Savannah's financial officer, the Treasurer's responsibilities included: the collection of monies due the City from taxes, license fees, rents, and duties; payment of vouchers approved by the City Council; acting as custodian for redeemed bonds and coupons; keeping accurate books on the City's financial affairs; and attending meetings of the City Council (Code of Savannah, 1858, pp. 100-07). Nonpayment of taxes was reported to the City Marshal for collection. Assessments of property values were assigned to appointed freeholders who turned them over to the Treasurer (Code of Savannah, 1854, pp. 422-25, 443-44). The City Treasurer also acted as the secretary and treasurer of the Water Works in 1888 (Code of Savannah, 1888, p.72).

In 1945, the office of Paymaster was created to handle disbursement of salaries (Code of Savannah, 1945, p. 81). The Finance Department was organized in 1958, and the director of this department was assigned the responsibilities of maintaining a set of general books for the City; keeping accounts with every official authorized to receive, collect, or disburse money, property, or effects of the City; auditing all departmental vouchers and papers against or in favor of the City; and preparing monthly statements and an annual statement and balance sheet for the City Manager (Code of Savannah, 1958, pp. 276-78).

By 1989, the office, called the Revenue Department and headed by the Revenue Director, had three divisions: Treasury, Utility Services, and Parking Services. The Department's responsibilities include the collection of revenues, the provision of public services, and the enforcement of regulatory ordinances (Urban, Serving Savannah, p. 11).

Scope and Content:

The City of Savannah, Georgia Records Microfilm – City Treasurer (1809-1912) includes 5600CT-070 Tax Digests (1809-1900) on 31 reels of microfilm and 5600CT-090 Tax Assessment Books (1854-1912) on 8 reels of microfilm. The original volumes are housed in the Research Library & Municipal Archives. Researchers are requested to use the microfilm to help preserve the original volumes. See sub-series descriptions for more information.

Related Collections at the City of Savannah, Research Library & Municipal Archives:

Record Series 5600CT, City of Savannah, Georgia Records – City Treasurer.

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City of Savannah, Research Library & Municipal Archives, Savannah, Georgia

Sub-series #: 5600CT-070

Name: Tax Digests

Dates: 1809-1900 (some gaps)

Extent/Size: 31 reels of microfilm

Sub-series description:

These digests record the property owner's name; description of the property; the valuation of buildings, lots, merchandise, improved lots and wharfs, vacant lots and wharfs, slaves (prior to 1865), carriages, saddle horses, and dogs; owner's profession; poll; total; and remarks.

Note:

The original volumes are in poor condition and were microfilmed onto 31 rolls on November 7, 1991.

Arrangement:

Alphabetical by surname

Inventory:

Roll #C-5600CT-070-01	1809-1815
Roll #C-5600CT-070-02	1816-1818, 1819-1820, 1821, 1823, 1824
Roll #C-5600CT-070-03	1826-1832
Roll #C-5600CT-070-04	1834-1837
Roll #C-5600CT-070-05	1839-1843
Roll #C-5600CT-070-06	1844-1848
Roll #C-5600CT-070-07	1849-1853
Roll #C-5600CT-070-08	1854-1857
Roll #C-5600CT-070-09	1858-1860
Roll #C-5600CT-070-10	1861-1863
Roll #C-5600CT-070-11	1864, 1866-1867
Roll #C-5600CT-070-12	1868-1870
Roll #C-5600CT-070-13	1871-1872
Roll #C-5600CT-070-14	1873-1874
Roll #C-5600CT-070-15	1875-1876
Roll #C-5600CT-070-16	1877-1878
Roll #C-5600CT-070-17	1879-1880
Roll #C-5600CT-070-18	1881-1882
Roll #C-5600CT-070-19	1883-1884
Roll #C-5600CT-070-20	1885-1886

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Roll #C-5600CT-070-21	1887-1888
Roll #C-5600CT-070-22	1889
Roll #C-5600CT-070-23	1890-1891
Roll #C-5600CT-070-24	1892-1893
Roll #C-5600CT-070-25	1894
Roll #C-5600CT-070-26	1895
Roll #C-5600CT-070-27	1896
Roll #C-5600CT-070-28	1897
Roll #C-5600CT-070-29	1898
Roll #C-5600CT-070-30	1899
Roll #C-5600CT-070-31	1900

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Sub-series #: 5600CT-090

Name: Tax Assessment Books

Dates: 1854-1912

Extent/Size: 8 reels of microfilm

Sub-series description:

These volumes, also called Tax Returns, contain the lot number, owner's name, value of the lot, value of improvements, and taxable value.

Arrangement:

Alphabetical by wards

Inventory:

Roll #5600CT-090-01	1854, 1861, 1866
Roll #5600CT-090-02	1870, 1871, 1873
Roll #5600CT-090-03	1876, 1878-1879, 1879-1883
Roll #5600CT-090-04	1883, 1884, 1884-1885
Roll #5600CT-090-05	1888, 1889-1893
Roll #5600CT-090-06	1900, 1904
Roll #5600CT-090-07	1905-1910
Roll #5600CT-090-08	1911-1912