

City of Savannah
Hunter's Rope Walk

HUNTER'S ROPE WALK

The City of Savannah entered into a ground lease agreement with John Hunter in 1807 for a parcel of land located in what was then known as the South Common, now part of Jasper Ward, for the purposes of establishing a rope walk. Hunter's Rope Walk only appears on one map of the City Savannah dated 1812 and shows a long and narrow structure located in the South Common measuring approximately 25' x 700'.¹ This shape and size of building was typical of the type of structure required to house rope-making operations in the early 1800s.² City Council meeting minutes record approval of a five-year ground lease with Hunter for the property dated February 1807. The City Treasurer's Tax Roll records reflect that Hunter commenced rent payments in March 1808 with the last payment occurring in November 1818. There are several references to Hunter's Rope Walk in Savannah newspapers with regard to the annual payment of rent and also notifications that the rent payments fell behind and were in arrears. Other than these records, no other information was located referring to Hunter's Rope Walk.³

John Hunter individually is listed as a commercial merchant in the Digest for City Taxes for the years 1809 and 1810.⁴ Literally hundreds of references to Hunter in the Savannah newspapers from 1800 – 1818 show that he was involved in various business enterprises relating to the shipping industry and sale of goods.⁵ This factor indicates that Hunter would have been aware of the demand for rope products in the shipping industry as a result of frequent replacement of rope and rigging required on sailing vessels due to salt rot and perhaps established the Rope Walk to capitalize on that market.

In addition, leading up to the War of 1812, with supplies of products being cut off by the British, it could be that Hunter may have started this Rope Walk to keep rope products available for ships coming in and out of Savannah. Around 1813, however, a British blockade hampered trade along the coast of Georgia and that blockade and disruption lasted until the end of the war in 1815.⁶ This may be the reason that Hunter's Rope Walk was short-lived and appeared in the records for only brief period of time.

¹ Georgia Historical Society, MS 1018 Waring Map Collection, Volume II, Plate 11, drawn by Col. Mussman Houston showing the Rope Walk in the City Common. Map is dated "1812?" and is included in this volume due to the similarities with regard to the development of the City of Savannah.

² Melvin G. Herndon. "The Manufacture of Hemp in Virginia during the Revolution," *The Virginia Magazine of History and Biography*, Vol. 74, No. 3 (July, 1966): 307.

³ The City of Savannah Ground Rent Books for the years 1807 through 1824 are not archived.

⁴ Digest for City Taxes 1809 and Digest for City Taxes 1810, occupation listed as "Comm. Merch" in both.

⁵ Savannah City Council Minutes dated December 22, 1806, p. 325, indicate that a contract with John Hunter was approved to provide oil for lamps. There are other entries in City Council minutes authorizing approval of payments for contracts with Hunter. There are many newspaper advertisements for the sale of goods by Hunter or Hunter partnerships. See *Columbian Museum & Savannah Advertiser*: May 1, 1807, p. 3, c. 3, September 15, 1807, p. 3, c. 3, and November 20, 1807, p. 3, c. 4 for examples.

⁶ New Georgia Encyclopedia. <http://www.georgiaencyclopedia.org/articles/history-archeology/war-1812-and-georgia>. (Accessed May 1, 2015).

City Council Minutes, Volume: 1805 – 1808 (January 14, 1805 – January 27, 1808)

February 16, 1807, page 338: Approval of proposal of John Hunter to establish a Rope Walk and enter into a six-year ground lease for property in the South Common.

February 23, 1807, page 341: Approval of five-year lease with John Hunter for land for Rope Walk in the South Common for \$100 per year, payable quarterly.

City Treasurer Tax Roll Book, Volume I: 1806 -1808

March 15, 1808, page 69: Received \$100.00 from Hunter's Rope Walk.

November 17, 1808, page 108: Received \$75.00 from Hunter's Rope Walk.

City Treasurer Tax Roll Book, Volume II: 1808 – 1825

April 2, 1809, page 27: Received \$50.00 from Hunter's Rope Walk.

November 15, 1809, page 39: Received \$50.00 from Hunter's Rope Walk.

Savannah Daily Republican

August 28, 1810, p. 4, c. 1: City Treasurer Report of August 21, 1809 through August 21, 1810 showing receipt of \$100.00 from Rope Walk.

City Treasurer Tax Roll Book, Volume II: 1808 – 1825

January 19, 1811, page 73: Received \$75.00 from Hunter's Rope Walk.

May 22, 1811, page 84: Received \$25.00 from Hunter's Rope Walk.

Savannah Daily Republican

November 9, 1811, p. 3, c. 3: City Council notice that rent for Rope Walk is in arrears and action to seize would occur after December 9, 1811 if not paid.

Columbian Museum and Savannah Advertiser

November 14, 1811, p. 2, c. 2: City Council notice that rent for Rope Walk is in arrears and action to seize would occur after December 9, 1811 if not paid (Microfilm #990210).

City Treasurer Tax Roll Book, Volume II: 1808 – 1825

Prepared by Stephanie Heher (MFA Candidate in Architectural History) for ARLH 700 Research Methods In Architectural History, SCAD, May 2015

December 23, 1811, page 120: Received \$50.00 from Hunter's Rope Walk.

Republican and Savannah Evening News

September 5, 1812, p. 2, c.1: City Treasurer Report of August 21, 1811 through August 21, 1812 showing receipt of \$50.00 from Rope Walk (Microfilm 990222).

City Treasurer Tax Roll Book, Volume II: 1808 – 1825

June 3, 1813, page 188: Received \$100.00 from Hunter's Rope Walk.

October 27, 1813, page 206: Received \$37.25 and \$25.00 from Hunter's Rope Walk.

May 16, 1814, page 231: Received \$25.00 from Hunter's Rope Walk.

Savannah Daily Republican

September 13, 1814, p. 2, c. 1: City Treasurer Report of August 21, 1813 to August 20, 1814 showing receipt of \$87.25 from Rope Walk.

City Treasurer Tax Roll Book, Volume II: 1808 – 1825

May 27, 1815, page 275: Received \$12.50 from Hunter's Rope Walk.

March 29, 1817, page 459: Received \$25.00 from Hunter's Rope Walk.

Savannah Daily Republican

August 30, 1817, p. 3, c. 1: City Treasurer Report of August 21, 1816 to August 20, 1817 showing receipt of \$50.00 from Rope Walk.

City Treasurer Tax Roll Book, Volume II: 1808 – 1825

November 10, 1817, page 491: Received \$37.50 from Hunter's Rope Walk.

November 27, 1818, page 531: Received \$12.50 from Hunter's Rope Walk.

Bibliography

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Herndon, Melvin G. "The Manufacture of Hemp in Virginia during the Revolution." *The Virginia Magazine of History and Biography*, Vol. 74, No. 3 (July, 1966): 301-311.

Herndon examines the significance of the hemp industry in the State of Virginia prior to and during the American Revolution. The article provides background information relating to the production of hemp in general; how it is manufactured into fiber, spun into cloth, and made into rope. This research offers specific information relating to both public- and privately-owned rope walks located in or near Richmond, Virginia during the time prior to the Revolutionary War. Herndon also delivers information relating specifically to rope making which explains the process and provides insight into the shape of rope walk structures. This research is useful for several reasons: first, it provides historical data with regard to the manufacturing of rope in the mid-to-late 1700s; secondly, it provides an explanation of how a rope walk operates; and lastly, Herndon includes 75 footnotes that provide ideas for the types of research sources that could be accessed on a local level to find information relating to rope walks.

Still, William, N., Jr. "Facilities for the Construction of War Vessels in the Confederacy." *The Journal of Southern History* 31, No. 3 (August, 1965):, 285-304.

Still examines the deficiencies of the Confederate navy with regard to a lack of facilities for the construction of war vessels. As part of his study, Still methodically reviews the facilities that were available and utilized in the Confederate States and provides details with regard to their location. He also includes the locations of businesses that manufactured materials required to equip the vessels. Still's research indicates that by 1865, the navy's only rope walk was located in Petersburg, Florida. This research is useful in that it provides additional background with regard to the location of rope walks in the southern states circa 1865, yet it does not provide the locations of rope walks prior to that time and by 1865, Savannah's rope walk was already gone.

New Georgia Encyclopedia. <http://www.georgiaencyclopedia.org/articles/history-archeology/war-1812-and-georgia>. (Accessed May 1, 2015).

Primary Sources:

Savannah Daily Republican:

August 28, 1810, page 4.

A copy of the City Treasurer's Report dated August 21, 1809 to August 21, 1810 is included on this page. In that report, there is a reference to "Hunter's Rope Walk" and a balance with regard to rents in the amount of \$100.00. This is important information as it associates a name with the rope walk and further indicates that the land where the rope walk stood was

owned by the City of Savannah. This will help in further research of property records where a lease agreement may be located that will provide additional information about the rope walk.

November 9, 1811, p. 3.

The publication includes an excerpt of resolutions of city council listing the rope walk as a property in arrears with regard to rent. The resolution prescribed that an action to seize the property would be taken if payments were not made by December 9, 1811.

September 13, 1814, page 2.

A copy of the City Treasurer's Report dated August 21, 1813 to August 20, 1814 is included on this page. In that report, there is a reference to "Rope Walk" and a balance with regard to rents in the amount of \$87.25. This report provides information that the rope walk was still in existence during this period.

Nov. 20, 1822, page 1.

The publication includes a notification of public sale by the Bank State of Georgia of properties with a reference to Lot No. 16 with boundaries described by adjacent properties including a reference that reads, "...and on a line with the old rope walk." This source is important as it provides information that the rope walk did not exist in November of 1822.

Waring Collection, Savannah Historical Society, Map of Savannah dated 1812.

This map is significant because it documents the structure and orients in time.