CITY OF SAVANNAH MUNICIPAL SLAVERY PROJECT
PHASE II

RESEARCH SUMMARY

When exploring the topic of municipal slavery in Savannah, City records reveal that enslavement took on various forms and facilitated the work required by many of the City's departments. The cash books maintained by the City Treasurer captured payments for all the departments and their various functions. The methods used to leverage the forced-labor work force and the extent of municipal funds allocated for this purpose varied throughout the decades of the antebellum period. Likewise, the terminology used to annotate payments for contracted or hired enslaved labor morphed as City Treasurers changed and customs of language developed. This work builds on the initial project "Municipal Slavery: The City of Savannah's Ownership of Enslaved People" by Lacy Brooks. Brooks' research scope was restricted to the enslaved people who were purchased by the City between 1830 and 1864. As she noted through her research of the cash books, slavery was also used by means of labor contracts with slave owners, direct hire of free and enslaved people, and forced labor of free African Americans living under the harsh regulations of the City codes.

PROJECT SCOPE

Phase II of the Municipal Slavery Project consisted of the transcription of selected cashbook entries from the City Treasurer of Savannah from 1806-1866 and the Annual Settlements book (1819-1854).[1] The goal was to capture evidence of the use of enslaved men, women, and children by various City of Savannah departments during the antebellum period. The purpose of the project was to make existing records containing information on the topic of slavery more accessible for historians, students, and citizens, and to raise awareness of the scope of the City's use of enslaved labor to support municipal work and functions. The Treasurer's cashbooks were not digitized or indexed at the time of the project. The project captured instances where slavery was explicitly mentioned as well as instances where it was likely or possibly used.

RESEARCH TERMS

A list of twenty-six keyword terms defined the parameters for inclusion in the project. The list below is also found on the notes page of the spreadsheet and appears as Column J (Keyword) in the transcription sheets. The most prevalent terms being HANDS, LABOR, NEGRO, and SLAVE. Several keyword terms identify instances where the context of the entry in relation to the work

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[1] See section "List of Volumes Cited/Transcribed" for details about the sources that were used in the project.

being done qualified the entry for inclusion despite the absence of a logical keyword term. FIRE, NAMED LABORER or SLAVE, PUBLIC WORKS, RECEPTION, and SCAVENGERS are examples.

The City Treasurer cashbooks collection contains several overlapping volumes which appear to be two accounting methods. One method is recorded chronologically by date and the other by category in monthly increments. This duplication revealed the interchangeable nature of the terms used for labor. On September 5, 1822, the Fire Engines Department paid W.P. Beers $15.50. In Volume 2, the Treasurer recorded this transaction as "for hire of hands." Whereas in Volume 3 he recorded the same transaction as "for hire of slaves." On July 12, 1830, Jno. Hatcher was paid to provide two men to work as scavengers under the Streets, Docks, and Lanes category. In Volume 4, the entry appeared as "negro hire." In Volume 5, the same transaction stated, "for hire 2 hands." Variations in terminology and ambiguity indicate that numerous transactions for enslaved labor can be easily overlooked. This project attempts to mitigate these instances of hidden history. However, these difficulties with research are not completely diminished and therefore the data presented in this project should not be considered all inclusive.

LIST OF KEYWORD TERMS

(And the context in which they were utilized in the cashbooks)

AFRICAN – The City referred to a group of illegally captured enslaved people from the slave ship *Antelope* as Africans. While the captured Africans were waiting litigation to decide their fate, they were forced to work for the City under the proposals of William Richardson.

APPREHENDING – In several instances, the City paid rewards for the capture of a runaway enslaved person. This may have been to return people who were owned by the City.

BOY – Primarily found as "Cartboy" (Streets and Lanes) or used with a person's name, for example, "Boy John." Also Bucket Boy (Fire Department) and Negro Boy (description of hired out labor).

CARPENTER – Used sparingly in 1861, in the context of other similar work on the City Barracks. In other instances, the verb "sawing" was used.

CHAINGANG – Did not begin until 1866 after enactment of laws that put many formerly enslaved people back in bondage for crimes. Work that was previously done by enslaved people was completed by chain gangs. Payments were typically for the overseers or guards of the chain gang.

COLOR – Appears in several forms. Colored, Col[d], Free Person of Color, Free Man of Color, and F.M.C.

DRIVER – Used sparingly to describe the cart driver for the Streets and Lanes Department.

EMIGRANTS – Only found in the Annual Settlements book. Likely used to describe the captive Africans from the slave ship *Antelope*.

FIRE – Fire Engines, Board of Fire Masters, or Fire Department payments contained terminology consistent with the use of enslaved labor; for example, "working the engines" or "for refreshments."

FORTIFICATIONS – Describes the forced labor of free people of color to build military fortifications during War of 1812.

HANDS – Prevalent term for labor; appears in various alternate forms (negro hands, time of hands, etc.) "Time of Hands" is first used to replaced "Hire of Hands" in 1853. The term's usage continued in City records well into the Reconstruction era.

HIRE – Often appears as "Negro Hire" and one of the most common terms to describe labor of enslaved people that were hired out from slave owners.

LABOR – Spelled labor, labour, laborer, and labourer.

MEN – This term was rarely found without the term "Negro." Used to denote entries that according to context may indicate enslaved labor.

NAMED LABORER – Entries that include a name for the enslaved person or free person of color doing labor for the City.

NAMED SLAVE – Entries of named slaves, particularly in the purchasing of enslaved people by the City.

NEGRO – Often found under the Fire Engines category, and for hired out labor in the Streets and Lanes, Scavengers, and Market categories. Often appeared as "Negro Hire." Instances where the term is used as "City Negro" likely indicates one of the enslaved people owned by the City.

PUBLIC WORKS – Used to describe the forced labor of free people of color to build military fortifications during the War of 1812. All entries related to this public works project were captured regardless of terminology.

RECEPTION – Indicated the use of servants or other labor sources for the reception of General Lafayette in 1825.

REINTERMENTS – Entries related to the reinterment of bodies removed from the Negro Burial Grounds to Laurel Grove Cemetery in 1853.

SCAVENGER – The Scavengers Department had recurring entries for the subsistence of the enslaved laborers who were owned by the City; this included food, clothing, shoes, and medical care.

SERVANT – The use of servants for the visit of President James Monroe in 1819.

SLAVE – Any entry that specifically used the term slave or fell under the category of Slaves.

SMALLPOX LABOR – Use of labor for the transportation and care of smallpox victims, or the building of quarantine facilities.

SURVEYOR – During the Springfield Plantation property improvements, the City Surveyor had an increase in work. For a period, the entries indicate his use of hands for assistance.

WOODCUTTERS – These entries fell under the Laurel Grove Cemetery category when trees were cleared, and the wood sold for profit.

WORK IN CEMETERY – One entry in the Laurel Grove Cemetery category for work that was consistent with other entries for laborers.

THE CITY'S RELIANCE ON ENSLAVED LABOR

Fire Engines (1806-1826): Enslaved men were required to work the engines during a fire. This would include moving the fire engine to the location of the fire. The typical crew consisted of about twenty men. The City paid fifty cents per fireman. A premium of $30.00 was paid to the fire ward manager for the first engine company to reach the fire. In 1826, the Fire Department began using certificates to keep track of work performed at a fire. This accounting system changed the transaction terminology and payments for the labor involved were indiscernible.

Streets and Lanes Department (1810-1866): The first entry captured for street improvements is a payment to the City Marshal for conducting a census of slaves available to level the streets. Entries that specify use of men to labor on street improvements are intermittent until the 1850s. This may be due to the ambiguity of payment terminology. Often, the City Marshal was paid for work on the streets and lanes without clarifying the use of labor or hands. Around 1850, numerous projects began to consistently specify the use of labor. As city development took an upswing, so did the amount of labor required by this department.

Scavengers Department (1832-1866): Although the City purchased ten slaves and employed them in the Scavengers Department, they also relied heavily on hired slaves.[2] Between 1843 and 1860, one slave owner John Hover hired out up to thirteen enslaved people for regular use in the Scavengers Department. Subsistence payments to the City Scavenger were captured to show the requirement to feed and clothe the enslaved people.

Laurel Grove Cemetery (1851-1866): Savannah's new rural cemetery required clearing of trees, construction of roads and fences, as well as gardening. After the initial construction of the cemetery, a consistent workforce was maintained for maintenance and interments. The

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[2] In the context of the antebellum labor force, "hired" typically meant the temporary use of enslaved people to do various work. Similar to renting, the enslaved workers were hired from the slave owner to the entity requiring the labor. The City Treasurer either paid a City employee or department to hire the enslaved workers or payments were made directly to the slave owners.

cemetery was built on the former Springfield Plantation. Numerous contracts were executed to develop other portions of this property for sale by the City. Additionally, the contractors worked on a canal, ditch, and sewer on the old plantation property.

UNIQUE CIRCUMSTANCES OF FORCED LABOR

Public Works 1812: In order to defend Savannah against British attack, all free people of color were required to work one day a week building military fortifications. Their compensation was food and liquor.

Africans from the illegal slave ship Antelope: In 1820, William Richardson convinced City Council to fund a workforce to dismantle military fortifications. Richardson housed, fed, clothed, and attended to at least fifty-one Africans as they waited to learn their fate from the American court system. Richardson's scheme saved the City over $4,000.00 by using these vulnerable African captives.[3]

Visit of Dignitaries: In 1819, President James Monroe visited Savannah for the commissioning of the *U.S.S. Savannah*. A committee was formed to prepare a house for his stay. Many expenses were allocated for the preparation. For the President's comfort many servants were paid to work during his visit. On March 19, 1825, General Marquis de Lafayette arrived in Savannah on a tour of the southern states to celebrate his achievements during the Revolutionary War. The City hosted and entertained the General using coachmen and servants.

Constructing a fence at the Negro Burial Grounds: In 1822, the City ordered free people of color to work at the "Negro Cemetery" to enclose the grounds with a fence. The City paid only for rations to feed the laborers. The work was completed by the freemen in lieu of their mandated annual week of unpaid labor for the Streets and Lanes Department.

Building defenses during the Civil War: In 1861, the City passed a resolution to pay the state taxes for free people of color as an incentive for them to work on the fortification of Green Island. Additionally, the City paid for food while they were being transported to the island. The defense of the city necessitated a place to house troops stationed there and contractors hired enslaved workers to build the City Barracks. Later in the war, the City hired laborers to work on Savannah River batteries ordered by General Robert E. Lee.

Smallpox Epidemic: Although the threat of smallpox was prevalent throughout the nineteenth century, labor related entries in the cashbooks are few. The terminology in the 1816 epidemic

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[3] City of Savannah, Georgia, City Council Minutes, 14 August 1820; digital image of microfilmed documents, *Ancestry.com* (https://www.ancestry.com/search/collections/60565/) > City Council Minutes, 1812-1822 > Image 468, accessed 12 November 2022. For further information on this topic see Johnathan M. Bryant, *Dark Places of the Earth: The Voyage of the Slave Ship Antelope* (New York: Liveright Publishing, 2015).

clearly stated the use of enslaved labor. However, later entries under the smallpox or quarantine category were often ambiguous.

City Infrastructure Projects: Savannah relied heavily on enslaved labor for expansion and infrastructure improvements. Other than the routine maintenance of the streets and lanes, special projects utilized the enslaved workforce available to the City. Forsyth Place and the Parade Grounds are now collectively known as Forsyth Park. The beautification of Savannah's public space was completed by enslaved workers.

Work during Holidays: City Council authorized the payment of work done during normal rest days. Sundays or special holidays offered an opportunity for laborers to earn wages. However, it is unclear if this was done by choice or a mandated overtime arrangement.

Transition to Chain Gangs: Chain gangs were authorized to work on City projects in 1866 and the advantages of this system were quickly noticed by City Council. The City paid to hire the guards overseeing the chain gangs, but the prisoners received no reimbursement. The work performed by chain gangs supplanted the City's use of enslaved labor that was no longer available after emancipation.

**OVERLAP WITH MUNICIPAL SLAVERY PROJECT PHASE I**

The City purchased enslaved men between 1830 and 1864 mostly for work in the Scavengers Department and the City Water Works. Entries in this project related to City-owned enslaved men include purchases, insurance, and subsistence.

Phase I of the Municipal Slavery Project included a description of two previously unidentified enslaved men (Unknown Man Three and Unknown Man Four). These men are identified in Phase II as Joe (purchased June 1842) and London (purchased in July 1842).[4] The Phase I report mentions that the City Marshal sold the enslaved man London after he was seen as a threat of running away.[5] It was discovered in Phase II that Joe likely resisted the harsh conditions of the Scavengers Department. The Treasurer paid B.F. Doncin for the apprehension of Joe, "a

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[4] For Joe *see* City of Savannah, Georgia Records-City Treasurer. Cash Books, Volume 8, 1839-1844, Record Series Number: 5600CT-410, entry dated June 17, 1842. For London *see* entry dated July 1, 1842. Lacy Brooks identified that two unnamed men were purchased between 1841-1842, through City Council Meeting Minutes and the Cash Book purchase entry of one man in June 1842. Brooks also suspected that London sold in November 1842 was one of these men (Unknown Man Three or Four). This information gathered during Phase II clarifies that Unknown Man Four and London were the same person. Unknown Man Three was Joe purchased in June 1842.
[5] City of Savannah, Georgia Records-City Treasurer. Cash Books, Volume 8, 1839-1844, Record Series Number: 5600CT-410, entry dated December 31, 1842.

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runaway slave," on March 30, 1844.[6] One month later, the City sold Joe to John McPalin for $200.00.[7]
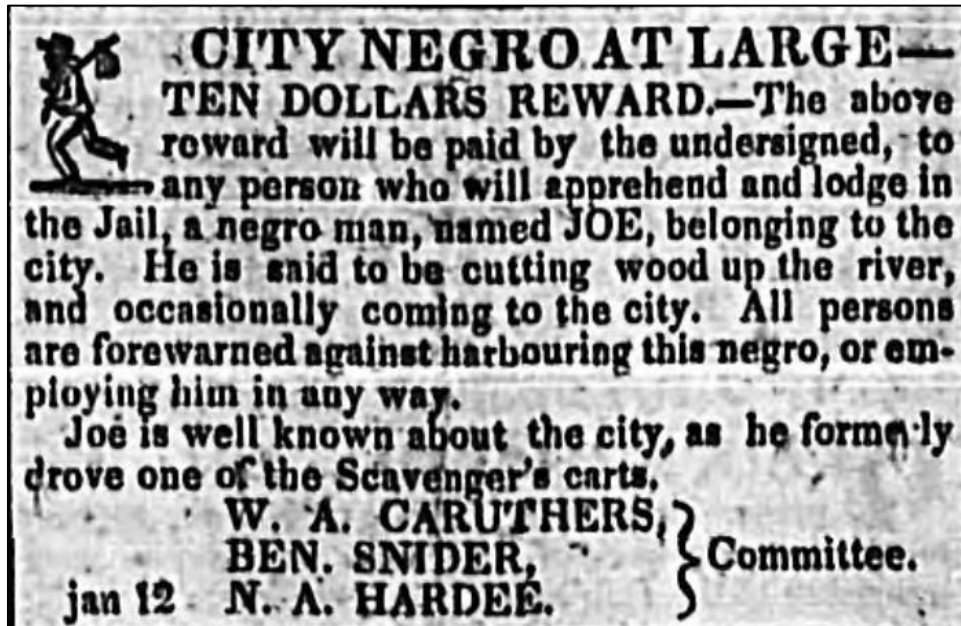
City advertisement published in the *Savannah Daily Republican* on January 17, 1844
offering a reward for the apprehension of Joe.[8]

FURTHER RECOMMENDED RESEARCH

Using the data extracted in this project, researchers can develop further research on named individuals in three categories: enslaved laborers, slave owners, and free people of color. Additionally, researchers can explore identified projects that capitalized on enslaved labor. The City's development from enslaved labor towards wage labor along with the use of chain gangs is represented in this project and could benefit from a more thorough treatment by historians. City Council Meeting Minutes and City Ordinances contain the historical context for the cash book entries and are certainly the next logical step in researching Savannah's Municipal Slavery. Further discovery of the individuals involved in the City's labor force can also be obtained from researching historical collections at other repositories. Slave owners' wills, Savannah's *Register of Free Persons of Color*, and historical newspaper holdings are just a few options for answering questions of identity.[9]

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[6] City of Savannah, Georgia Records-City Treasurer. Cash Books, Volume 8, 1839-1844, Record Series Number: 5600CT-410, entry dated March 30, 1844.

[7] City of Savannah, Georgia Records-City Treasurer. Cash Books, Volume 8, 1839-1844, Record Series Number: 5600CT-410, entry dated April 25, 1844.

[8] "City Negro At Large," *Savannah Daily Republican*, 17 January 1844 (https://gahistoricnewspapers.galileo.usg.edu/), accessed on 7 December 2022.

[9] City of Savannah, *Register of Free Persons of Color,* (Savannah, GA), 5 vols., microfilm, Bull Street Public Library, Savannah, GA. "Georgia Historic Newspapers," *Digital Library of Georgia* (https://gahistoricnewspapers.galileo.usg.edu/).

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HOW TO USE THE SPREADSHEETS

The extracted transcriptions are provided in a Microsoft Excel spreadsheet, as well as .pdf reports generated from it, for researcher use. All cashbook volumes are contained in one tab. In addition, there is a tab for the annual settlements book, and a tab for notes. The notes tab contains summary data (list of volumes, terms, and categories).

The spreadsheets can be sorted by desired fields such as date, category, or keyword term. The overlapping volumes have duplicate entries. Researchers should be aware of this when attempting to calculate frequency of transactions or totaling costs. The project website contains two .pdf files of presorted spreadsheets based on Category > Volume > Date and Keyword Term > Volume > Date.

Special formatting:

The phrase "use of ditto marks" appears in the notes column (I) for entries that use the words "ditto" or ditto marks to repeat key information from the line above. The City Treasurers often used a double-shafted P symbol to represent the word per, as in "per City Resolution." The abbreviation etc. was drawn as a plus sign with a superscript c ($+^c$) in the cash books. This term was transcribed as etc. The use of fractions of a cent were converted to decimal format in the transcription to accommodate spreadsheet formatting. Slight variations in the spelling of Category Names were corrected to enable sorting in the Category Field only. For example, Savh Fire Department was transcribed as Savannah Fire Department. Brackets indicate the transcriber's best interpretation of nineteenth century handwriting. Identifying intended spelling was especially difficult in uncommon names. Question marks were added where the word was partially illegible. The word [illegible] indicates that the word or name is completely not known to the transcriber. No attempt to correct misspellings was made in the transcription field. The transcription represents the best effort to replicate capitalization from the original cash books. However, due to handwriting variations it was often not clear whether the letters were upper or lower case.

LIST OF VOLUMES CITED/TRANSCRIBED

5600CT-360 Volume 1 Account Ledger – City Departments, 1837-1844

5600CT-360 Volume 2 Account Ledger – City Departments, 1844-1851

5600CT-360 Volume 3 Account Ledger – City Departments, 1853-1857

5600CT-360 Volume 4 Account Ledger – City Departments (Indexed), 1859-1876

5600CT-400 Volume 1 Annual Settlements, 1819-1853

"Georgia, US, Wills and Probate Records, 1742-1992, *Ancestry* (https://www.ancestry.com/search/collections/8635/).

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5600CT-410 Volume 1 Cash Book, 1806-1808

5600CT-410 Volume 2 Cash Book, 1808-1825

5600CT-410 Volume 3 Cash Book, 1817-1825

5600CT-410 Volume 4 Cash Book, 1824-1832

5600CT-410 Volume 5 Cash Book, 1825-1830

5600CT-410 Volume 6 Cash Book, 1832-1835

5600CT-410 Volume 7 Cash Book, 1835-1839

5600CT-410 Volume 8 Cash Book, 1839-1844

5600CT-410 Volume 9 Cash Book, 1844-1851

5600CT-410 Volume 10 Cash Book, 1851-1853

5600CT-410 Volume 11 Cash Book, 1853-1856

5600CT-410 Volume 12 Cash Book, 1856-1858

5600CT-410 Volume 13 Cash Book, 1858-1861

5600CT-410 Volume 14 Cash Book, 1858-1861

5600CT-410 Volume 15 Cash Book, 1861-1866

5600CT-410 Volume 16 Cash Book, 1861-1864

5600CT-410 Volume 17 Cash Book, 1865-1869 (No qualifying entries)

5600CT-540A Volume 1 Cash Book, 1806-1809

5600CT-540 Volume 1 Cash Book, 1824-1831