

General History of Fort Jackson

To understand the history of Fort Jackson, we must realize that the land surrounding the fort today is far different from what it was when European first saw the Savannah River. The river flowed through many marshy fields resembling a flat plain. The appearance of the area caused the founder of Georgia, General James Edward Oglethorpe, to name the river and town "Savannah," meaning a treeless plain or relatively flat, open region. When early Indians built large ceremonial mounds near the river, they could not find dry land to build on closer than a mile from the river. One set of these mounds was located about 1600 yards southwest of the future site of Fort Jackson. No doubt General Oglethorpe noticed these mounds as he searched for high ground for his settlement in 1733. As the river flowed around present-day Hutchinson's Island, the two channels rejoined north of a small clay island which rose just a few feet above the water at high tide. The convergence of these channels created a deepening to about 30 feet, more than ten feet deeper than normal. This part of the river became known as Five Fathom Hole.

A few years later, an illiterate brick mason named Thomas Salter chose a site for a brickyard three miles east of the city on the south bank of the Savannah River where he hoped to earn a good living making bricks for housing foundations. The spot he chose was actually the small clay island. The brick-making trade was one of intense hand labor and has not changed in hundreds of years. A crew of four could cast as many as 11,000 bricks in one day. The coast of Georgia is almost completely devoid of building stones so bricks were used for a building material.

Salter worked the island for several years and it became known as "Salter's Island." He finally moved to Hutchinson's Island in the center of the river where the clay was better. However, the marshes were very unhealthy and Salter died of fever in 1751, leaving Salter's Island to his heirs. Salter's Island eventually became the site of Fort Jackson.

The American Revolution

When the Revolution began Georgia was unprepared for war. The Royal Governor, James Wright, was placed under house arrest. But when British warships

arrived and anchored in Five Fathom Hole, he and loyal members of his government escaped to the *HMS Scarborough* on February 11, 1776. In need of supplies, the naval commander, Captain Barclay, sent 300 men up the Back River to the north of Hutchinson's Island and seized 10 rice barges after being fired upon from the south shore.

In 1778 the Rebel Executive Council authorized \$3,000 to be spent on the fortification on Salter's Island. The river opposite Salter's Island, at Five Fathom Hole, was wider and deeper than at Savannah. Many ships would anchor at Five Fathom Hole and wait for high tide before moving upstream to the bluffs at Savannah. Cargoes could also be unloaded onto barges and the difficult trip upstream could sometimes be avoided entirely. Salter's Island was the perfect place for a defensive position.

A mud battery was erected on or near the present location of Fort Jackson. A company of artillery was raised to garrison the battery and placed under the command of Captain Thomas Lee. However, Lee died of malaria in February 1778 and the battery was abandoned. A few months later, a British force was able to pass the empty dirt battery at Five Fathom Hole and seize the city of Savannah after a short engagement.

Again, in September 1779, warships anchored at Five Fathom Hole. This time, along with the Americans, a large French squadron under Admiral d'Estaing was attempting to recapture the city. After a disastrous attack on the British lines, and with the approach of the hurricane season, the wounded d'Estaing withdrew his force and the American forces retired to the interior of Georgia. Savannah was to remain in British hands until 1782. Almost a year after Cornwallis's surrender at Yorktown, triumphant American forces marched into the city on July 11, led by a young brigadier general named James Jackson. He became a Governor of Georgia and United States Senator. A hot-blooded man, he fought many duels and died in 1806 at the age of 49.

The War of 1812 Era

With the election of Thomas Jefferson in 1801 as President, an era of domination of the United States government by the Federalist Party came to an end. Jefferson, in contrast with the Federalists, emphasized a reduction in government spending. However, international events precipitated a series of crises that altered President Jefferson's planned course of neutrality and a reduction in the size of the standing army.

The Napoleonic wars in Europe increased pressure on the United States. American shipping was at the mercy of England and France. Insults to American integrity as a neutral nation came in the form of searches, boardings, and seizures by the navies of both European countries. The worst incident occurred in June 1807 when a group of sailors from the British ship *Leopard* boarded an American navy frigate the *Chesapeake* and removed several crewmen contending that they were British subjects.

The furor created by the *Chesapeake – Leopard* incident increased the existing war sentiment within the United States. Although diplomatic solutions to the crisis were immediately sought, the fear of an impending war with Britain led to hasty defense preparations: American naval vessels were recalled from the Mediterranean, gunboats were ordered to positions of defense along the East Coast, state governors were asked to be prepared in the event that their state's militia should be needed, and ordnance supplies were distributed to various locations.

More lasting preparations were planned as Jefferson, with the help of Albert F. Gallatin, Secretary of the Treasury, and Henry Dearborn, Secretary of War, evaluated the status of fortifications along the eastern seaboard. It was found that the economic measures undertaken by Jefferson and his cabinet had resulted in a state of disrepair in the existing forts and called for additional defensive sites. By November 1807 the House of Representatives *Resolved: that it is expedient to cause the President of the United States to cause such fortifications to be erected...which will...afford effectual protection to our ports and harbors.* Immediately work was begun, and by 1812, \$3,000,000 had been expended, bringing the defenses, which came to be known as the "Second System" rapidly along the road to completion.

Savannah Georgia was one of those sites that had no existing fortification. A small structure, Fort Green, had been built on Cockspur Island at the mouth of the Savannah River in 1791. It had been manned up to 1804, when a severe storm destroyed the structure and drowned part of the garrison. The need for renewed protection of the port city was pointed out in 1807 by Albert Gallatin in a memorandum to President Jefferson written a few weeks after the *Chesapeake - Leopard* incident. Gallatin noted that the city had a busy harbor and the white population was sparse, therefore, the area was a likely target for attack. It was Gallatin's recommendation that

the city receive a garrison. Henry Dearborn also proposed that Savannah be refortified when he sent a memorandum to the Senate on December 3, 1807. Savannah was listed among the more *Important Ports and Harbors* and according to Dearborn would need a *regular enclosed work, with six heavy cannon*.

As construction of the Second System forts got underway in 1808, engineer officers were given assignments and provided with a set of general sketches and guidelines designed to be flexible enough to adjust to a variety of locales. Major Alexander Macomb was assigned to oversee the construction of the fortifications for Georgia and South Carolina. Assisting Macomb, who operated from headquarters in Charleston, were Captain William McRee, Captain Charles Gratiot and First Lieutenant William Partridge.

It had been determined that Savannah needed protection and an engineer was assigned to the area. On May 16, 1808 land was purchased down river from the city. The site was Wharf Lot Number 12, about two miles below Savannah at New Deptford, a tract owned by Nichol Turnbull, near Five Fathom Hole, the deep water anchorage for ships. The site selected had also been the location of "Mud Fort," part of the earlier Revolutionary War defenses of Savannah. The site was purchased from Turnbull for \$1,800.

From Charleston, Major Macomb sent Captain William McRee to supervise the construction at Five Fathom Hole. McRee, a North Carolinian and son of Captain Griffith McRee, of the Continental Line of that state, was born in 1787 and in 1805 at the age of seventeen received a commission in the Corps of Engineers, having completed his studies at the Military Academy at West Point. By 1808, only twenty years old, McRee had attained the rank of captain and was supervising the military construction in Savannah. The confidence placed in so young an officer most likely came from McRee's native intelligence rather than any training received at West Point. A standard course of instruction for cadets at this time was only two years and texts were few in number and poor in quality.

The young Captain McRee brought to his assignment in Savannah a familiarity with the area, gained from having been assigned to the survey of fortifications on the southern coast from 1806 to 1808. He began work immediately and in November of

that same year Major Macomb reported to the Secretary of War Dearborn that *the works at Savannah are going on under the direction of Captain McRee. He has been very industrious, but has not more than effected a foundation at Five-Fathom Hole.*

It is probable that sometime during the latter part of 1808, or early 1809, that the Five Fathom Hole fortification received the name Fort Jackson named for Georgia's James Jackson, Revolutionary War veteran, state governor and United States Senator. An article in the Republican and Savannah Ledger on January 4, 1809 used the new name for the fort and also expressed the disapproval of the Chatham County Grand Jury for one of McRee's activities: *We present as an evil, that the negroes employed at fort Jackson should be suffered to collect in St. James square, and conduct themselves as person assembled for military discipline, and recommend, that the ordinances, of this city, for the government of Negroes, be immediately and yearly published.* This action indicated that despite the city's pleasure over the increased protection that the new work could provide for the city, news of the continued civil difficulties in Haiti had made the white population extremely nervous.

James Madison's inauguration in March 1809 brought a change to the War Department when Madison selected Dr. William Eustis of Massachusetts, as the new Secretary. Another personnel change took place sometime before June of that year when Thomas Bourke was chosen as the Military Agent for the Southern Department. Bourke's position was as critical to the fortification project as Captain McRee's for it was the Military Agent who located and paid for the building materials and laborers required in the various construction projects.

Bourke's advertisements began to appear regularly in the Republican and Savannah Ledger as the work progressed for the year, and the demand for materials grew. In June, Bourke wanted, *four hundred tons Stone Ballast, round or square if delivered at Fort Jackson, a higher price will be given* and later in the year Bourke advertised that he *Wanted immediately, at Fort Jackson, from fifteen to twenty laborers, who will be allowed 46 cents and rations per day.* By that November it was evident that the barracks had been completed, for Bourke called for sealed bids to be submitted by anyone interested in painting the barracks at the fort, *The top red, sides yellow,*

windows shutter and doors, red lead...to be done with the best materials and in the most workman like manner.

It is likely that emphasis was placed upon construction of the barracks first so that the fort could garrison a company of men should an emergency arise before its completion. Captain McRee in a letter sent directly to the Secretary of War Eustis reported that *the barracks in Savannah and Fort Jackson are finished*, but in order to complete the work, *there are 140,000 bricks to be laid. The parapet of earth to be formed, and the platform of wood to be erected.*

The shortage of funding evidently caused a temporary halt in construction in late 1810 and Captain McRee returned to the north in the company of Lieutenant Colonel Macomb. McRee spent the next year at West Point, probably as an instructor, for it was common at the time to rotate field officers through the Military Academy on one year appointments. In late 1811 he received orders from the Secretary of War to leave West Point for Washington D.C. The certainty of war had prompted new appropriations and Eustis told McRee that *It is in contemplation that you should complete the fortifications at Savannah.*

The day following his communication with Captain McRee, the Secretary of War reported to Congress on the status of fortifications in an attempt to estimate the funds required for completing necessary work along the coastline. The state of Georgia's seacoast defenses at Savannah were include in his report: *Fort Jackson in a marsh on the west side of Savannah River, three miles below the town and twelve hundred yards from the nearest dry land; an enclosed work of masonry and mud, mounting six heavy guns, two small brick magazines and a wooden barrack for one company of men and officers. The work is in an unfinished state. There is in the town of Savannah a number of two-story wooden barracks sufficient for two hundred men and officers.* Total appropriations of \$160,303.86 for the year 1811 were requested and of this \$11,571.42 were for Georgia and South Carolina.

Upon his return to Savannah in March of 1812 McRee reported to Secretary Eustis that on initial inspection he *found the battery and barracks in good preserve, having suffered no injury but what is usually consequent upon an unfinished state of any building similarly exposed....* McRee went on to say that the brickwork reported as

remaining to be done in his letter of June 4, 1810, would be completed in April 1812. He further expected the battery to be ready to have guns mounted in May and in case of an emergency, McRee added, they would be completed *in any given time*. He also projected that he would be able to stay within the budget, dictated by the War Department with the exception of the wharf, which had been damaged beyond repair.

In addition to preparing fortifications for a war with Britain, Congress had made provisions for strengthening the army and had also divided the command, Thomas Pinckney of South Carolina was chosen as Major General. Pinckney visited Savannah in June 1812 to inspect the progress of the work there and instructed Captain McRee to complete the work as quickly as possible. He further ordered McRee to *make application to the governor of Georgia for as many officers and men of the quota...of militia of the state* as the post would require, since it was not possible to determine when the new enlistments would be available. Pinckney also charged McRee with securing through the Quarter Master Department, sufficient supplies for the Georgia militia companies. In a postscript to this letter of instruction Pinckney added that he had just received official notice of the declaration of war (on June 18, 1812), and had himself contacted the Governor to request four companies immediately.

McRee in addition to his engineering responsibilities had now been charged with the duties of field command. He promptly asked the mayor of Savannah for local militia units to serve in the interim until state troops arrived. He added that *Fort Jackson has eight guns mounted, but not one soldier for its defense, or to secure it from insult*. The response of the local militia was rapid for by June 29th, McRee communicated to headquarters in Charleston that an artillery detachment and a company of militia were stationed at Fort Jackson. McRee was able to return to his primary task of engineer officer, when a week later on July 5, 1812, Major Mossman Houston of the newly raised 8th United States Infantry assumed command of the fort.

Soon after the arrival of the 8th Infantry McRee reported to Major Swift, the department engineer in Charleston, outlining his plan for the most effective defense of Savannah and a status report on Fort Jackson. The fort brickwork was almost completed and the cannon had been mounted in June, *thus, although not exactly in fighting trim* Fort Jackson had *too respectable a countenance to invite insult*. The

declaration of war stimulated comment from McRee as to the best measures for protection Savannah: *I would defend Savannah at five fathoms. I would obstruct the channel 300 yards below fort Jackson by means of rafts...the object in obstructing the channel is simply to compel an enemy to stop and fight the batteries....This plan is simple, its execution easy and expeditious and the cost, compared to an other efficient mode which presents itself nothing....* Soon after he submitted this report Captain McRee was sent from Savannah to Beaufort, South Carolina, and in October he was transferred officially to Charleston and given the position of engineer of the Southern Department replacing Major Swift. In November McRee was promoted to Major in the Corps of Engineers.

Fort Jackson was in an unfinished state when McRee was transferred, and although the fort had received a garrison it still required supervision by an engineer. In October of 1812, Captain Prentice Willard assumed responsibility for completing Fort Jackson and the works in Beaufort. Captain Willard and Thomas Bourke, who was now Agent for the Ordinance and Quartermaster Departments, worked together and corresponded with McRee giving status reports and seeking advice. These communications often revealed the lack of sophistication in the engineering of the fort, for Captain Willard was uncertain of the size gun platforms he should build and sought Major McRee's advice. Thomas Bourke later communicated that *if (the gun is) fired several times double shotted the small wheel (of the carriage) would have gone over....the edges of the platform.* Bourke had also noted that complete fired power coverage of the channel was not given by the fort, for guns on one side of the work could not fire within twenty or thirty feet of the opposite shore.

Finishing touches were ordered in April 1813 by General Pinckney to Major McRee: a wooden palisade was erected around the rear of the works, a wooden rail was added to the platform and a hot-shot furnace was built. These additions virtually completed Fort Jackson as a Second System fort and ended the first phase of its history. McRee was transferred out of the Southern Department in the summer of 1813 and Captain Willard died in Beaufort on October 13th. A new engineer officer, Colonel Walker Armistead was assigned to duties in Savannah in early 1814 but the pressures of other war campaigns resulted in little attention being paid to Savannah.

Although there was no military engagement at Savannah during the three years of the war with Great Britain the area was garrisoned with units at Fort Jackson and Fort Wayne inside the city. The 8th Regiment of United States Infantry, which arrived in Savannah in July 1812, was later joined by a detachment of the 2nd Artillery. These troops probably rotated among Forts Wayne and Jackson and the United States Barracks in the city, with the artillerists performing their primary garrison duty at Fort Jackson.

Although a peace agreement was signed on December 24, 1814, troops were kept in the Savannah area for the next few years. In 1817 Captain Adrian Neil's detachment of United States Artillery was stationed at Fort Jackson. The assignment was not comfortable because of the irritation of mosquitoes and the danger of fever. A newspaper article in 1819 gave a clear indication of the problems: *Fort Jackson (is) one of the most distempered spots on earth, in the midst of fogs and poisons of a putrid marsh.* Desertions were frequent and were posted in the Savannah newspapers with rewards of \$10 being offered for the return of an escaped recruit. In the early 1820s an artillery detachment under Captain Ewing was assigned to Savannah and used quarters on Tybee Island to escape the fever season. In October 1822 they were ordered back to Fort Jackson, probably to complete needed repairs to the work.

Post War of 1812

The condition of Fort Jackson in the postwar years deteriorated rapidly. The action of the river on the structure and the extreme heat and humidity made maintenance difficult, and in 1818 an editorial in the Savannah Daily Georgian reported that *Fort Wayne and Fort Jackson...are now in a state of dilapidation.* This disrepair was not improved for Fort Jackson received no appropriations between 1815 and 1823. The attention of Congress had been directed toward new fortifications projects that had been in the planning stages since 1816.

This new system of coastal fortifications was born of the humiliation of having had the nation's capital easily captured by the British. The Secretary of War, William H. Crawford recommended in 1816 that the army and navy conduct a survey to determine the defensive needs of the seacoast, and Crawford further urged Congress to consider hiring a French engineer, Simon Bernard to assist in the planning for a new defense

system. Bernard was hired and a board of officers was convened to create what became the Third System of defenses. Completed in 1821, the board's first report recommended eighteen works as being of urgent necessity, with an additional thirty-two works of lesser importance planned for future construction. Little mention was made of the earlier works of the First and Second Systems, for the board evidently felt that these older works were of little or limited value.

Fort Jackson, however, was not completely overlooked following the establishment of the Bernard Board. In January 1823 the Board prepared a report on the status and value of both the Tybee Tower (at the mouth of the Savannah River) and Fort Jackson. Despite the extensive repairs required at the fort, it was the board's opinion that *if but one of these works is to be put in a state of Defense the preference should be given to Fort Jackson*, and in March Congress appropriated \$8,000 for that purpose.

In all probability repairs were carried out, but lack of interest in maintaining the site led to concern for the city's defenses again in 1826. Georgia Congressman Edward F. Tattnal wrote to Bernard in February of that year asking for improved works in the city: *There is but one Fort Jackson in the Harbor of Savannah – and this fort is so located that it is never occupied, being in summer a perfect graveyard for the men, and at all times...totally useless...* Tattnal was disturbed because Savannah had been placed in the category of those works of secondary importance, forts that were to be deferred for several years. Bernard explained that the board recognized the need for a Savannah River works and that once thorough surveys were completed the plans would be drawn and work would begin. Tattnal's concern and pressure evidently were successful for in March of 1826 revisions to the initial board report of 1821 included preparations for a projected fort on Cockspur Island at the mouth of the Savannah River.

In 1829 construction of the fort, which was to become Fort Pulaski, began on Cockspur Island. For the next seventeen years the emphasis of the Corps of Engineers was on that work while the abandoned Fort Jackson was left to decay. In April 1833 a local newspaper reported that the buildings at Fort Jackson were burned, probably by vandals.

The engineer officer assigned to Cockspur Island during most of the construction at Fort Pulaski was Joseph King Fenno Mansfield. One of Captain Mansfield's last acts, before reporting in 1845 for duty in Texas under General Taylor, was a thorough survey of Fort Jackson. Although most of the structures at Fort Pulaski had been completed under Captain Mansfield's supervision, it was not yet ready for a garrison, thus Savannah had no fortified defense. Concern for the city's vulnerability led Georgia's Congressman, Richard W. Habersham to attempt, unsuccessfully, to have Fort Jackson repair funds included in the military appropriations bill of 1841. It was not until 1845 however that conditions were favorable for the old fort. Fort Pulaski was structurally complete freeing some of the engineer officer's time and the Corps of Engineers had begun to express interest in several other Second System works as a secondary line of defense. Appropriations were approved and for the next sixteen years, from 1845 to 1861, a series of engineer officers would be assigned to the Savannah area and charged with the completion of Fort Pulaski and the repairs at Fort Jackson.

In the thirty-three years since William McRee had been Fort Jackson's engineer officer, many changes had taken place within the Corps. The Second System works constructed by McRee and officers like him, were not systematized - very general drawings had been given to those officers allowing them great latitude in interpreting defense requirements in individual locales and many problems were created by the "trial and error" nature of these projects. The recognition of the drawbacks in the Second System was partly responsible for the establishment of the Bernard Board which exercised total control over planning and execution for the Third System. The engineer officers who were working under the board were receiving a far more sophisticated course of instruction from West Point. Denis Hart Mahan, Professor of Engineering, had completed several textbooks for use in his courses at the Academy including ***A Treatise on Field Fortifications*** and ***Course of Civil Engineering***.

Not only were the engineer officers better trained but only the best of the graduates were assigned to the fortifications projects. Second Lieutenant Barton Stone Alexander, who had been Captain Mansfield's assistant, assumed full responsibility for Forts Pulaski and Jackson upon Mansfield's transfer. Alexander had graduated from West Point in 1842 number seven in a class of fifty-six cadets. Lieutenant Alexander

was succeeded in 1848, by First Lieutenant Jeremy Francis Gilmer, fourth in the 1839 class of thirty-one members. Gilmer remained on the Savannah projects for ten years being replaced in 1858 by Captain William H. C. Whiting, first in his 1845 graduating class of forty-one students. Whiting served as Fort Jackson's military engineer up to Georgia's seizure of the property in January 1861.

All of these engineers worked under the close supervision of Colonel Joseph Gilbert Totten, Chief Engineer. Totten is considered one of the great engineers of the period and was without equal in his expertise on coastal fortifications. The Third System which he supervised so solicitously from 1816 to his death in 1863 was often referred to as the "Totten System." A format of monthly, quarterly and annual reports outlined within the Regulations for the Government of the Engineer Department flowed from each Corps of Engineers project into the headquarters in Washington. These reports along with frequent letters discussing details of construction insured Totten's close control of each site.

Paralleling and generating many of the changes within the Corps of Engineers were the enormous technological innovations in industry and transportation. Materials ordered for the construction of Fort Pulaski and Fort Jackson came from locations such as Charleston, Baltimore, New York and the Connecticut River. Technology brought steam power into use as a construction technique at Fort Pulaski as early as 1834 for pumping, pile driving and operating power tools such as lathes. The primary use of steam, however, was in pumping water from the foundation first at Fort Pulaski, and later at Fort Jackson during the active construction years of 1855 to 1859.

Although steam was available as a power source Totten would still occasionally express a preference for the use of such a basic time honored tool as an Archimedean screw pump. Recommendations like this often illustrated the conflict between Totten, older and more conservative, and the young officers working under him. Lieutenant Gilmer was often anxious to use new materials or tools. On one occasion after requesting that a steam engine be purchased for a particular job he was told that a simple box pump would do the job as well. On another date Gilmer requested a portable steam engine for use at Fort Sumter in Charleston Harbor and was tuned down on the basis that the engine would not effect enough savings to justify its expense.

Although conservative in many respects Totten was certainly as anxious as his young officers to see the work at Pulaski and Jackson completed, and he probably shared in the frustration caused by the lack of congressional appropriations. In the initial stages, under Lieutenant Alexander, work seemed to progress quickly. By 1847 Alexander had overseen the construction of a masonry parade wall, strengthened the main part of the battery with masonry arches and begun work on the gun platforms. Jeremy Gilmer, arriving to replace Alexander in 1848, began preparations for continuing the work but appropriation problems were to hamper him. Very little progress had been made when Gilmer reported on June 30, 1852, and described the work that remained to be done: *...finish the counterscarp and sub-scarp walls; build the walls of the permanent wharf; make and erect the drawbridge with its machinery...grade the parade ground; build the officers and Soldiers Quarters, and arrange the flank battery.* Gilmer continued that *should the prosecution of the repair be delayed for another years, the entire cost will be considerably increased.* Funds were not appropriated for continuing work until 1855 but additional duties occupied Lieutenant Gilmer's time. In 1852 responsibility for river improvements of all the Atlantic Coast was returned to the Corps of Engineers. Since 1839 the work had been done by the Topographical Bureau but now Lieutenant Gilmer, in addition to supervising Fort Jackson and Fort Pulaski, was to supervise the dredging and general maintenance of the Savannah River.

The labor force employed at Fort Jackson, when funds were appropriated in 1855 was predominantly Irish and they received room and board at the fort as part of their wage. The unhealthy climate of the marsh and rice fields took a toll on the health of the workers and Lieutenant Gilmer made several purchases of medicine for his workers in an attempt to keep them efficiently employed. It was also necessary for work to be suspended during the summer months or the "fever season" usually stopping in June or July and resuming in November. During Gilmer's final three years in Savannah he was able to supervise the work at Fort Jackson to near completion. Exterior details, the moat, the wharf, the parapet and the drawbridge were being finalized by 1857 and attention was turned to the interior *to establishing the pile and grillage foundation for the two building designed for barracks; and to completing the masonry and slate roofing of the same...*

In 1858 when Lieutenant William H.C. Whiting succeeded Gilmer, the construction of the officer's barracks remained. Work began in 1859 but an unusually early outbreak of illness which claimed the life of F. A. Rebara, foreman at Fort Jackson, caused Whiting to suspend operations in March of that year. Some additional work was done on the barracks during the winter of 1859 but this structure was never completed. For much of the time from January 1860 until its seizure by Georgia troops in January 1861 Fort Jackson was under the care of "one Fort Keeper."

The engineers who had helped construct Savannah's defense made their personal decisions in the early months of 1861: Joseph King Mansfield, Brigadier General in the United States Army was killed September 17, 1862 in the battle of Antietam; Barton Stone Alexander, brevetted Brigadier General in the United States Army, served as Chief Engineer during the Civil War and continued his military service until his death in 1878, with the rank of Lieutenant Colonel; Jeremy Francis Gilmer, Major General in the Confederate States Army, served as Chief Engineer for the Confederacy and after the war was President and Engineer of the Savannah Gas Light Company until his death in 1883; William H.C. Whiting, Major General in the Confederate States Army, was wounded in defense of Fort Fisher and died March 10, 1865 while a prisoner of war at Governor's Island, New York.

The changes effected at Fort Jackson during its second phase of construction between 1845 and 1861 were extensive but the fort remained the same basic structure planned and built by William McRee before the War of 1812. It was a far stronger work though, having benefited from the sophistication available in technology, personnel and materials.

The Civil War

Tensions between the North and South increased with the presidential campaign of 1860. With the election of Abraham Lincoln, Southern states began exercising the option to secede. Prior to Georgia's secession, Governor Brown authorized a military budget, ordered federal troops to leave the state, and had all federal property seized on January 3, 1861. Included in the federal property were Fort Jackson and Fort Pulaski. Both forts were without permanent garrisons and were manned by Savannah militia companies who rotated duty in the forts. But by the time Georgia joined the

Confederacy in March, newly raised state troops were vying for the privilege of manning the forts.

Excursion boats passed up and down the Savannah River with civilians viewing these newly captured prizes. Companies paraded on the city squares and at Forsyth Park on the edge of the city. A gala atmosphere prevailed. The firing on Fort Sumter in Charleston was greeted with cheers and bonfires. Savannahians were proud that the last shot fired at that fort was fired by a Savannah man and a member of the Republican Blues, a local military unit that rotated duty at Fort Jackson.

Companies with fanciful names formed in Savannah and the surrounding counties. They took their turn in the river forts but as the summer wore on they began risking malaria for their patriotism. Governor Brown of Georgia armed these new troops with muskets purchased months before, but the supply was almost exhausted by June 1861. At this time, commanders in Virginia were demanding more troops. However with an exhausted supply of muskets, Governor Brown refused to release Georgia troops, but they left for the front anyway.

The novelty of the river forts wore off quickly when the news of the first battles came. Excursion boats were less frequent. The civilians were more concerned over their relatives on the battlefield far away than the soldiers only a few miles away. The tours of duty for the garrison troops became longer. Two of the companies who manned Fort Jackson at this time were the Republican Blues and the Irish Volunteers. The commander of the fort was Captain J. W. Anderson, whose brother was in England purchasing weapons for Georgia and the Confederacy. Earthen fortifications continued to be constructed along the rivers both in South Carolina and Georgia from Hilton Head to the north to Cumberland Island in the south.

President Lincoln authorized a blockade of Union warships, which made it quite difficult for the Confederacy to get supplies in and out of Charleston and Savannah. This would not be intensified until a few months later. The revenue cutter, *Harriet Lane*, appeared off of Tybee Island from time to time. The port of Savannah remained open through the first summer of the war. In New England, northern soldiers were enlisting in three-year regiments specifically for duty in South Carolina and Georgia. They expected to take the war to the heart of the secessionists and crush the rebellious states. By

November 1861, these soldiers, veterans of only two or three months, sailed in the largest troop convoy in history and appeared off the coast of Port Royal Sound, South Carolina on November 8, 1861. Steam-powered warships shelled Fort Walker and Fort Beauregard, on Hilton Head Island, and after an intense bombardment the forts were evacuated and Federal soldiers waded ashore. Federal forces had gained access to one of the finest harbors on the Atlantic Coast, protected by the swamps and marshes on the landside. It was only 25 miles north of Savannah.

The Union blockade was now being enforced and Savannah was rapidly being cut off. One of the ships in the Union fleet was a frigate named the *U.S.S. Savannah*. Few vessels were able to pass the Union warships. Port Royal, Beaufort and Hilton Head had all been captured. At Hilton Head the Union troops began to build a massive military installation and supply depot to stage their operations against Charleston to the north and Savannah to the south. Port Royal Sound became headquarters for the South Atlantic blockading squadron. Many citizens were terrified and began to evacuate Savannah. Confederate troops were ordered from the inland camps to the Savannah. The construction of earthwork defenses was intensified and quickly thrown up by slaves drafted as laborers. In response to the crisis, President Jefferson Davis ordered an experienced army officer to oversee the military operations between Charleston and Savannah. The officer was Robert E. Lee. Lee's first assignment out of West Point had been to assist in the construction of Fort Pulaski so he was quite familiar with the geography of the coastal area.

In November 1861, only a few days after the fall of Hilton Head, the Irish Jasper Greens and Republican Blues stationed at Fort Jackson under J.W. Anderson cheered as they witnessed the blockade-runner, *Fingal*, pass Fort Jackson. This iron-hulled steamship had the largest shipment of weapons and war materials to be transported in one vessel. On board was Captain Anderson's brother, Edward, who had purchased the ship as well as much of her cargo in England. Major Edward Anderson confided in his diary, *I smiled as I looked at the guns on the parapet. They were mounted on two logs placed parallel with each other, with the trunnions (sic) of the cannon supported upon them. They could never have been fired without jumping off into the area of the fort.*

The supplies of weapons from the Fingal were a welcome addition, and Major Anderson himself, who had graduated from Annapolis many years before and had recently retired from the U.S. Navy, was a significant reinforcement. General Lee charged him with equipping the batteries around Savannah's water approaches. Edward Anderson's knowledge of artillery gained as a midshipman in the U.S. Navy had become more valuable than his skills as a naval officer. By November 27th records indicated that *Fort Jackson had one 32 pounder rifled navy gun, five 32 pounder navy guns and three 18 pounders.* Anderson tested the rifled gun and found it to have a range of 1¾ mile, more than double that of a conventional smoothbore of the same caliber. It had been rifled and banded locally. On February 18, 1862, Edward C. Anderson was ordered by General Lee to take command of the battery below Fort Jackson. Originally known as Alligator Battery, because it sat low on the water, it would later be named Battery Lee. Major Anderson would maintain his overall command of Fort Jackson and the river batteries for the next two years and ten months.

Fort Jackson went through a series of strengthening exercises. Traverses were placed between the heavy guns on the parapet. A covered way or earthen embankment was constructed along the eastern wall of the fort to protect it from shellfire. Railroad iron was brought in and placed against the magazine and over the entrances of the fort.

While Major Anderson was completing the construction of earthworks and arming them with artillery, Union forces on Tybee Island had advanced toward Fort Pulaski. They were preparing for a major bombardment on the fort with newly untested rifled cannon. One company garrisoned inside the fort had exhausted their enlistments and returned to Savannah to see their families and to reenlist. However, in this short interval, newly constructed Union batteries had blocked off the river. The company, the Irish Jasper Greens, was ordered to *Battery Lee*, one hundred yards down river from Fort Jackson.

On April 10, 1862, the bombardment of Fort Pulaski commenced. The horrific thunder of these new rifled cannon began to tear down the seven-foot thick walls of this considered impregnable fortress. In just 30 hours, the fort was surrendered. These rifled cannon had opened a breach in its walls, knocked cannons off their carriages, and nearly blown up the fort's main magazine. Colonel Olmstead, commander of the

Confederate garrison, had no choice but to surrender. The 7th Connecticut seized the fort and would later trade duties with the 48th New York, which remained at Fort Pulaski through 1863.

Savannah was shocked at the loss of its impregnable fortress. Union gunboats were now seen on the river, halted only by the outer line of defenses in the river about two miles from Fort Jackson. These defenses consisted of brick piers, piles driven in the channel, and a series of underwater torpedoes and iron-tipped obstructions. The river obstructions were guarded by five batteries and over 2,000 artillery men manning more than 50 heavy-caliber guns. Earth batteries in several dozen locations were hurried to completion. Cannons were mounted all likely approaches to the city. Confederate Navy and Army boats patrolled the river, and ships were being covered with armored plating.

During the summer of 1862 garrison duty became more and more harsh for those men stationed on the river batteries. The intensity of the summer sun was hotter than usual, and a drought made conditions even worse. Dirt traverses and wooden blindages that had been ordered by General Lee were finally completed. After General Johnston was killed at the Battle of Shiloh General Lee was ordered to go to Richmond for a new assignment. This would be his greatest challenge of the war, commander of the largest Confederate army in the field, the Army of Northern Virginia.

By the fall of 1862 a reorganization of the military was taking place in Savannah. On September 24th General P. G. T. Beauregard replaced General Pemberton in command of the Department of South Carolina and Georgia. Beauregard inspected the batteries and considered them to be well thought out but incomplete. He conferred, with the now, Colonel Edward C. Anderson and the strengthening began anew. Companies thrown into batteries in the spring were now being grouped into Commands. Several such companies, including two that had been captured at Fort Pulaski and exchanged by October 1862, were formed into the 22nd Battalion of Georgia Heavy Artillery. The companies were made part of the State's regular army and many enlisted for three years. Placed in command was Colonel Edward C. Anderson. Several unattached companies were also detailed to the river batteries, bringing the total to almost 1,000 men.

The winter of 1862-63 brought relief from malaria, but no action. The batteries that had been constructed in 1861 and early 1862 were in need of repair and rebuilding. A spur railroad track was built to Battery Lee and Fort Jackson. The track was needed to bring heavy ordnance and supplies to the river batteries as well as sand with which to rebuild Battery Lee. The train became known as the Sand Train and it brought sand from the Deptford Indian Mounds (the corner of President Street and Woodcock Road). Telegraph lines connected the fort with the city and the other main batteries. Watch towers were built to keep an eye on the enemy and for signaling, using a system developed by E.P. Anderson. Work continued through the spring of 1863, when the garrisons of the river batteries were removed to Savannah to lessen their suffering from malaria. A guard was maintained at each battery and rotated daily.

The Confederate Navy had converted the *Fingal* to an armored warship, which they named the *C.S.S. Atlanta*. In July 1863, the *Atlanta* made a daring attempt to break out of the blockade and destroy Union shipping. Her attempt was unsuccessful and she was captured when she ran aground. Her crew was sent to Fort Warren in Boston, Massachusetts. The ship was converted into a Union warship and sent to the James River in Virginia. Other ironclads in Savannah at that time were the *C.S.S. Savannah*, the *C.S.S. Georgia*, and the *C.S.S. Milledgeville*. After the capture of the *C.S.S. Atlanta*, the Confederate Navy in Savannah assumed a defensive role and added their firepower to that of the river batteries to repel any possible attacks.

During the month of July 1863 major battles in Gettysburg, Pennsylvania and Vicksburg, Mississippi helped determine the outcome of the war. Union forces on Hilton Head did not advance toward Savannah. Instead, they focused their attention on Charleston. This would last until the end of the war when Sherman's troops entered the city. Troops from Savannah would be sent to Charleston to reinforce its defenses. Colonel Anderson was ordered to go as well. While Anderson was gone discipline and morale declined. Upon his return however he restored the sharpness in his men. Only a few weeks after his return, inspecting officers commented that the appearance and performance of his battalion was again superior.

By the fall of 1863, full garrisons again manned Fort Jackson and the river batteries. A dance piece entitled the "Battery Schottische," had been written in their

honor. But a private soldier's pay was still \$25.00 every two months with inflation making it virtually worthless. The tide had turned against the Confederacy with the fall of Vicksburg and the defeat at Gettysburg. To inspire confidence in his government and the soldiers, President Jefferson Davis visited Savannah and went to Fort Jackson in November 1863. However, his popularity and the faith in the cause remained low.

The third winter of the war passed uneventfully in Savannah. Morale suffered as well as discipline. Equipment was reported as shoddy. Much of it was simply worn out, having been brought over on the *Finegal* more than two years before. Desertions and rumors of mutiny were common. The winter was cold enough to freeze the moat at Fort Jackson. Guards were not sufficiently supplied with greatcoats or even blankets. General Jeremy Gilmer was now commander of the defenses at Savannah. During his duty there Colonel Anderson and he became close friends.

The spur railroad to Battery Lee and Fort Jackson was now complete and that earthen fort was greatly improved. New batteries and barracks were built at other sites, and the size of Anderson's command increased. However, units were now being transferred from Savannah to the battlefields around Atlanta. One of these units, the Irish Greens, had requisitioned a new drum and paint to stencil their knapsacks. They also exchanged their smoothbore Springfields for the rifled Enfields of Co. B. 22nd Battalion Georgia Heavy Artillery stationed at Fort Jackson. Anderson complained that his best troops were being taken from him. Replacements were often poorly trained home guards, conscripts, or even worse. With the summer of 1864 approaching, the barracks at Fort Jackson and the river batteries were again boarded up and guards rotated, while the main body of troops stayed in Savannah. Anderson had ordered a large-scale garden to be planted and men detailed to work it.

In September 1864, the city of Atlanta fell to the Union army under the command of General William Tecumseh Sherman. This was a major blow to Georgia and the Confederacy. In Savannah General Gilmer was replaced by General Lafayette McLaws, whom Anderson detested. McLaws had been stationed at the battery on Thunderbolt Point, located along the St. Augustine Creek. In McLaws' frequent absences from the city, command of the district would fall to Anderson, who often was unaware that

McLaws was even gone. General McLaws was once arrested drunk by the Naval guard to the amusement of Colonel Anderson who had him released.

General Sherman left Atlanta by September 1864 and began his march through the Georgia heartland with approximately 60,000 infantry and 5,000 cavalry under the command of General Hugh Judson Kilpatrick. Lincoln had been elected to a second term, and Farragut had forced an entrance through Mobile Bay to Mobile, Alabama. Colonel Anderson confided in his diary that he felt the war was nearing its end. Luckily, he would not have to serve under McLaws again.

Savannah was not prepared for a land attack and defenses on the western side of the city were begun. Most of the artillerymen and 54 guns were moved from the river batteries to these new defenses. Two 32-pounders were moved from Fort Jackson and its armament now consisted of two Columbiads, one 6.4" rifle, and three 32-pounders, along with a 12-pound mountain howitzer for signaling and flank defense.

Union prisoners began being transferred from the prison at Andersonville, Georgia to prisons farther out of reach of Sherman's line of march. Thousands were routed through Savannah to other parts of Georgia and South Carolina. Many would remain in Savannah for a brief time. The commander of the guard was Colonel Edward Anderson. Confederate troops had to be transferred from the river batteries and naval vessels to guard the Union POWs harbored in Savannah as well as ride with them to their new prison camps located in Blackshear, Thomasville, Charleston, and Florence, South Carolina.

Sherman's battle hardened troops advanced through Georgia virtually unopposed. Once they arrived at the outer gates of Savannah he ordered General William B. Hazen to take a force of 5,000 men and overtake Fort McAllister, a small earth-works fort that had successfully guarded the Ogeechee River for much of the war. Under the command of Anderson's nephew, Captain George W. Anderson, he was heavily outnumbered with a garrison of fewer than 200 men. The fort was taken by force within a matter of about 15 minutes. Siege lines were being constructed all around the city of Savannah by Union forces and Sherman demanded the surrender of Savannah.

Just days earlier General William Hardee had arrived to take command of the defenses of Savannah. He refused Sherman's demand and ordered the evacuation of

the city and all defenses around Savannah. On the night of December 20, 1864 troops from all the fortifications began to assemble at Fort Jackson and downtown River Street to begin their hasty retreat toward Hardeeville, South Carolina. Garrisons began spiking their cannon and destroying anything of military value they could not take with them. The main Confederate army began crossing the Savannah River by pontoon bridges while the Fort Jackson garrison and other assembled troops crossed by way of a steamship. All naval vessels were either scuttled or burned except the *CSS Savannah*. By morning, Colonel Anderson and his command were well on their way to Charleston.

At 7:00 a.m., on December 21, 1864, the 28th Pennsylvania and the 29th Ohio Volunteer Infantry, under Colonel Flynn, entered Fort Jackson. The barracks and kitchens had been burned, the magazine booby trapped, and the guns spiked. Upon raising the U.S. flag, shots were fired at the fort by the *C.S.S Savannah*. The *Savannah* was struck by a shot from a field gun on Bay Street and retired upstream to be blown up that evening. The war was over for Savannah and Fort Jackson.

One of the last Federal regiments to garrison Fort Jackson was the 55th Massachusetts Infantry, an African American regiment, which had just fought on the other side of the Savannah River at the Battle of Honey Hill, South Carolina. The defenses of the city were surveyed and repaired. However, by July 18, 1865, Battery Lee and Fort Jackson were reported in to be in miserable condition. The cannon were dismantled and taken away for scrap.

A new mayor, Edward C. Anderson, formerly the Confederate commander of the garrison at Fort Jackson, led Savannah through the trials of Reconstruction. General Gilmer returned to Savannah to become president of the gas company. Robert E. Lee made several visits to Savannah to see his friends Joseph Johnston, former commander of the Army of Tennessee, and Andrew Low. The city began removing the wrecks and obstructions that had blocked the Savannah River during the war so it could become a profitable seaport once again. The U.S. Army was being reduced in size and the U.S. Congress was engaged in trying to bring the Southern states back into the Union without major conflicts.

Post Civil War

After the worst excesses of Reconstruction, the Engineer Department again inspected Fort Jackson. In the early 1870's, new plans were drawn up to increase the thickness of the walls, add guns on the east wall, and strengthen the powder magazine. Guns of 15" caliber, weighing 25 tons each, were to be mounted. The work began, but progressed only piecemeal. The problem was that masonry forts could not withstand rifled cannon. The man in charge of the Southeastern district, General Quincy A. Gilmore, knew this better than anyone. He had been promoted from captain to brigadier general for his brilliant plans in the bombardment of Fort Pulaski. Congress had no interest in funding works that were already obsolete. In 1877, work ceased on forts all over the country, including Fort Jackson.

A caretaker lived in Fort Jackson as a guard for the structure and the government properties stored there. He spent most of his time repelling the attacks of mosquitoes and dealing with drunken fishermen. He made his home inside the old casemate of the fort. The site was inspected yearly, noting the deterioration of the gun platforms and the structural condition. These reports usually contained the following quote, *Amount of work needed, \$20,000.00, amount expended in last fiscal year, nil.* The Engineer Department focused most of its attention on the improvement of the river channel rather than coastal defenses. Fort Jackson was used as a storage facility for materials used in the harbor project. Across the river in Five Fathom Hole, several ironclads were anchored. They included six monitor-class vessels, as well as the *U.S.S. Kearsarge*. Even the now *U.S.S. Atlanta* had been anchored there until 1869 when she was sold to the king of Haiti, the final destination of this war seasoned vessel.

The U.S. Congress, hoping to avoid the confusion of having two Fort Jackson's, changed the name of Fort James Jackson to Fort Oglethorpe in 1884. Jeremy Gilmer had died the year before, and Edward Anderson was to follow soon. The old fort that both of these men had spent so many years of their lives building and defending, survived on U.S. Army rolls until 1905, when it was officially abandoned. The cannons were removed, and the fort keeper was dismissed.

Twentieth Century

The fort remained empty for the next six decades. In the 1920's, it was purchased by the City of Savannah as a possible park site, but the Great Depression and World War II ended those plans. A short distance upstream, Southeastern Shipyard was established during World War II where the 15,000 people who worked there built eighty-eight Liberty Ships. The yard was sold in 1946 and Fort Jackson with it. At this time, the abandoned fort was almost destroyed. Again, in 1958, plans were made to level the structure. The American Cyanamid Company, unable to give the fort to any group, decided to sell it for scrap brick. This drastic action triggered a response, and after negotiations, Fort Jackson was turned over to the State of Georgia.

A road was built to Fort Jackson, as well as administrative buildings. Archeology commenced, and the fort was altered to house exhibits. At this time, the Georgia Historical Commission (today the Georgia Department of Natural Resources) began to interpret Fort Jackson as a maritime museum. Its history was not as substantial as it is today, with postcards dating the fort's construction beginning in 1842. Unfortunately, this preservation project was halted in September 1975, when the site was closed due to statewide budget cuts.

It was at this time the Coastal Heritage Society, a nonprofit group dedicated to preserving the memory and the culture of the areas, became interested in the future of Fort Jackson. Permission was granted by the State of Georgia to open the fort, dedicated volunteers built new exhibits, and damaged areas were repaired. The Coastal Heritage Society opened Fort Jackson to the public on Labor Day weekend 1976. Progress continued to inch along through fundraising projects such as dinner programs and educational school tours. Neither the State of Georgia nor the Federal government provided any financial support for this historic structure.

Finally, in 2000 Fort James Jackson was recognized and designated as a National Historic Landmark. It is now one of only eight remaining Second System coastal brick fortifications in the United States. The Coastal Heritage Society continues its development and preservation efforts for Fort James Jackson. Research is still being compiled to determine its historic value to the community. The fort is operated as an interpretive historic site and allowing it to achieve its fullest potential. Through the

interest of visitors and citizens of Savannah, Fort Jackson continues to be a part of the life of the community. The brick walls of the fort form a stage to present the history of the site and the community it once protected. With hard work and the support of the community, the fort's ability to stimulate historic interest will increase steadily and Georgia's oldest standing brick fort will play a significant role in the story of Georgia.

(Authors: Phil Brinson, 1995; John Guss, 2004; Fort Jackson Staff)