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Norris, Tennessee

A Documentary Survey of a
One Block Parcel in Downtown Chattanooga, Tennessee:
Broad to Chestnut, Third to Fourth Streets

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Introduction

At the request of the Cultural Resources Program of the Tennessee Valley Authority, the Jeffrey L. Brown Institute of Archaeology, University of Tennessee at Chattanooga, has prepared this brief documentary survey of a one-block parcel in downtown Chattanooga, Tennessee. The purpose of the research was to define potential targets for detailed historical research and archaeological testing within a parcel owned by the Tennessee Valley Authority. The project area, bounded by Chestnut Street on the west, Broad Street on the east, Third Street on the north, and Fourth Street on the south, is currently occupied largely by the Tennessee Valley Authority's Haney Building.

This document does not represent an exhaustive historical treatment of the block and its residential, commercial and industrial tenants, but rather is a brief survey of historic land uses as gleaned from readily accessible documents. The principal sources examined consisted of city plat books which illustrated the character and precise location of improvements on the property. The objective of the research is to provide data pertinent to an assessment of the archaeological research potential of the property. Consequently, there is a temporal bias in the periods researched, with very recent uses of the property receiving less attention. The research specifically aims at estimating sub-surface survivals of archaeological features or deposits that would contribute to an organized body of information about past urban adaptations or historic technologies.

Documentary Overview

Prior to the Cherokee Removal, completed in 1838, Chattanooga was known as Ross's Landing, taking its name from a ferry crossing and trading post operated by John Ross between 1817 and 1826. After the Removal, the Anglo-American settlers renamed the landing Chattanooga. The core of the settlement was a 240-acre parcel bounded on the north by the river; south by Ninth Street (now M. L. King Boulevard), east by high ground along the line of Georgia Avenue; and west by the eastern slopes of Cameron Hill (now occupied by the I-124 / U.S. 27 expressway). The project area is within the historic core of the city.

There were two developmental foci to the town of Chattanooga: the steamboat landing and commercial wharves along the riverbank from Market to Pine streets, and the railyards south of Ninth Street occupied by the Western and Atlantic Railroad of Georgia and the Nashville and Chattanooga Railroad. The town of Chattanooga grew between these two commercial hubs.

The avenue currently named Broad Street was originally laid out as Mulberry Street, and was given a wider-than-average width: 100 feet. While nearby Market Street (also 100 feet in width) was intended to be the main commercial street, Mulberry was to house a railroad spur line to connect the railyards south of Ninth with the commercial waterfront at Ross's Landing. In 1849, the Western and Atlantic Railroad secured a 99-year privilege of maintaining tracks down Mulberry Street and to erect a cargo hoist at the
landing. Mulberry was widened to 126 feet to accommodate the tracks and was renamed Railroad Avenue. In the same year Chestnut Street was narrowed to 60 feet (Council 1989: 23).

There are no ante-bellum maps of Chattanooga to document the location of structures in the early years of the town. Consequently, there are only verbal descriptions of the situation of a few residences and businesses (gleaned principally from Wiltse n.d.). The earliest reliable map of urban Chattanooga was produced by the U.S. Coast Survey during the Civil War (Dorr 1863; Figure 1). This topographic map shows the town as it stood in the fall of 1863, and illustrates, in addition to civilian improvements, the major military fortifications and related features. The contour lines on the map document an ante-bellum topography in urban Chattanooga now buried under considerable amounts of fill and considerably homogenized by modern street grades.

The Dorr map illustrates that in 1863 the project area was uninhabited. A related map, somewhat cleaner in its rendering, but with slightly less detail than the Dorr map, is "Map of the Battle-field of Chattanooga," compiled in 1864 and evidently using the Dorr map as a basis (O.R. Atlas, Plate 49, Map 1). The 1864 version also does not illustrate a structure in the project area. The project area was bounded by improved (but not paved) street rights-of-way on the east, west and south, but its northern boundary (Third Street) was open. In the project area, the terrain was dominated by a prominent ravine running south toward the river, with two smaller tributaries feeding in from the west. This dendritic ravine pattern drained the basin created by the eastern slopes of Cameron hill to the west, and the rising terrain around Georgia Avenue. Fourth Street passed over the ravine on an apparent bridge or culvert. This uneven, wet ground was poorly suited to habitation, at least as late as the start of the Civil War.

Chattanooga was captured by Federal troops in September, 1863 and remained in their possession until the end of the conflict. After a defeat at Chickamauga, the Federal forces retired to defensive positions in the city until the Confederate siege was broken in November of that year. In 1864, Federal engineers began an intensive construction program in the city, transforming the regional railroad and river transportation hub into a marshaling yard for the advance on Atlanta. Engineers prepared maps and blue prints of the structures erected during the occupation in preparation for surplusing these structures after the war. One of these maps of Federal constructions in the city is still extant and shows that in 1865 a structure had been built along the middle of the Chestnut Street frontage of the project area block (Figure 2). The identity of the structure, (civilian or military), is not known. Its approximate size was 30 feet in width and with a length of perhaps 80 feet. As part of the military occupation, a railroad spur had been run down the center of Broad Street as far as Third, where the spur intersected the ravine as it meandered east. Another spur line was run in a broad loop around the ravine to service the steamboat landing west of the foot of Market Street.

Photographs taken by Barnard in 1864-65 and compiled in Hoobler (1986) nominally cover the project area, but there are no views that distinctly display the structure shown on the 1865 engineers plan. It is conceivable that the structure was a small barracks building or warehouse, but it is not labeled so on the 1865 plan.
Figure 1. Detail from "Chattanooga and Its Approaches, showing the Union and Rebel works before and during the Battles of 23rd, 24th and 25th November 1863 . . . surveyed under direction of Brig. Gen. W. F. Smith," (Dorr 1863). The project area is circled.
Figure 2. Detail from a plan of Chattanooga, c. 1865, drawn by Federal engineers to document the buildings constructed during the occupation. Facing north. Courtesy Tennessee State Library and Archives.
Chattanooga's vulnerability to floods was exposed during March, 1867, when the highest recorded flood inundated the town with a pond level of 679.0 feet ASL (TVA 1959). Much of the downtown area was submerged and a steamboat plied the streets between the wharf and the railyards. The project area would have been completely inundated; the current street grades, resulting from considerable modern filling, fall between 672' and 676' in elevation (TVA 1969). In response to this and succeeding floods in 1875 and 1886, city engineers began a concerted effort to raise street grades and to fill low-lying areas within the city limits.

An 1871 aerial view of the city, produced by A. Ruger (Figure 3), illustrates that structures had been built around the perimeter of the block, chiefly on the Third, Broad and Chestnut frontages (Ruger 1871). These structures appear to be residential. The railroad spur in Broad Street ran as far north as First Street on the river bank, and was supported in part on trestles. This evidences that in the path of Broad Street there was still prominent relief in the terrain. In view of later documents, the Ruger view seems to flatten the terrain in the project area when, in fact, considerable relief was still present.

City directories of this period are little help in positively identifying the residents of the project area. The early directories list inhabitants and businesses alphabetically by street and cross street, but not by street numbers. Consequently, it is impossible to tell which side of the street on which an inhabitant lived. Nonetheless, it is possible to glean some neighborhood-level information from these directories. The street directory from 1876-7 contains several references to black laborers and tradesmen living on Railroad Avenue and Chestnut Street between 3rd and 4th streets (Haddock 1876). It is likely that residential areas were racially segregated at this time, and that the block, bordering on a railroad spur, was principally occupied by African-Americans.

From the original survey of the town in the late 1830s, Broad Street, originally named Mulberry Street, then Railroad Avenue, had been intended to house the tracks of the Western and Atlantic Railroad. The intended connection of the W&A line to the public wharf never materialized, and as early as 1860 this spur line had been declared a nuisance by the city. In the late 1870s, the city succeeded in removing the tracks from that thoroughfare as far south as Ninth Street. In 1880, the city used Broad Street to house its first central sewage main that ran from Ninth to Third streets, where it emptied into the meandering ravine and thence flowed to the river. Even with the railroad spur removed, Broad Street maintained its utilitarian character. The project area block was subdivided into four large lots numbered 18, 20, 22, and 24 Broad Street. The depth east to west of each of the lots was 236 feet. Lots 18 and 24 (at the ends of the block) were 110 feet wide, the interior lots, 20 and 22, were 100 feet in width. Total length of the block was thus 420 feet.

The Sanborn fire insurance plat book of 1885 does not include a detailed plat of the interior of the project area (Sanborn Map and Publishing Company 1885). Notes in the key map of the city indicate that the area west of Broad contained "shanties." This notation implies that the improvements in the project area were of marginal economic importance and not located in immediate proximity to industrial or commercial structures that would be detailed in the fire insurance maps.

An aerial view of the city produced in 1886 by Norris Wellge and Company illustrates that the terrain in the interior of the project area was still quite uneven at that date (Figure 4). The terrain dropped from south to north, and Third Street was supported on an embankment. In appearance, these structures seem to represent residential units; following an artistic convention of the day, industrial or commercial structures with steam power plants are typically drawn with belching smokestacks.
Figure 3. Detail from A. Ruger, "Birds Eye View of the City of Chattanooga," (1871). The project area is circled. Facing southwest.
Figure 4. Detail from Norris, Wellge and Co.'s "Chattanooga, Seat of Hamilton County, Tennessee" (1886). The project area is circled. Facing southwest.
Sanborn maps from 1889 (Sanborn-Perris Map Co. Ltd. 1889: Sheet 3) illustrate a block occupied by widely-spaced residential units (Figure 5). The only brick structure on the block is at the southwest corner of the project area, and housed two stores and one dwelling (336-338-340 Chestnut). The remainder of architecture on the block is mostly individual single-family frame houses, several of small size. There are at least three multi-unit buildings or tenements on the block: duplexes at 106 and 108 W. Third Street, and a row-house block of four units at 333, 335, 337, and 339 Broad Street.

Few of the houses show small attached one story sheds that may have originally housed privies. Chattanooga's first closed-conduit, brick-arch sewer main was constructed down the center of Broad Street from Ninth to Third in 1880, and by 1886 it was illegal not to tie into the sewer if one was present on a contiguous street (Council 1989: 62-63).

The 1889 Hopkins real estate map of Chattanooga (Hopkins 1889) does not contain the same amount of structural detail as the Sanborn map but in other respects is largely identical. The Hopkins map also includes references to Civil War features in the area, and includes a tracing of the route of the drainage ravine that was rapidly disappearing from the landscape (Figure 6).

The 1901 Sanborn plats show large areas of the block as vacant. New tenement structures had been built at 316 and 316 1/2 Chestnut, the former with two units, and the latter with eight one-story units. But a half dozen houses shown on the 1889 maps had disappeared. Interestingly, the 1901 Sanborn shows one small house at 323 Broad Street as projecting several yards into the street right-of-way (Figure 7). At this late date, Broad Street was still unpaved adjacent to the project area, while Chestnut Street had been macadamized.

G. M Hopkins Company real estate plat books of 1904, Plate 7, matches the details shown on the 1901 Sanborn map in the lower half of the block, but differs somewhat on the layout of the northern end of the property. The 1904 plat book shows an additional duplex unit on the Third Street frontage and adds a small stable in the rear of 318 Chestnut.

Sanborn fire insurance sheets from 1917 show that much of the area of the block was vacant (Figure 8). Most of the surviving residential units fronted on Chestnut Street, and near the northern end of the block there was a series of ten tenement units, eight of them in a single block. Several of the houses at the northwest corner of the block are subdivided into duplexes, and at least four of these units show what may be attached privies. The two story brick building at the southwest corner of the block was then solely in residential use.

Between the drafting of the 1917 edition Sanborn map and the 1928 Chadwick map, the fundamental character of the block changed from residential to commercial utilizations. The 1920 city directory (Connelly Directory Company 1920) indicates that all the inhabitants of the block - some eleven families - were black. By 1925, the black residents of the block were absent, and there was one eating house at the northwest corner of Broad and Fourth (Connelly Directory Company 1925). The sole residents of the block were white, and these four individuals (or single families) apparently lived at 336-338-340 Chestnut Street, (the southwest corner of the block).
Figure 5. Detail from Sheet 3, Sanborn-Perris Map Company Ltd. fire insurance maps of Chattanooga, Tennessee (1889). Facing north.
Figure 6. Detail from Plate 2, G. M. Hopkins "Atlas of the City of Chattanooga and Vicinity," (1889). Facing north. Arrow points to project area block.
Figure 7. Detail from Sheet 3, Sanborn-Perris Map Company Ltd. fire insurance maps of Chattanooga, Tennessee (1901). Facing north.
Figure 8. Detail from Sheet 10, "Insurance Maps of Chattanooga, Tennessee," Volume 1 (Sanborn Map Company 1917). Facing north.
The Chadwick plat book of Chattanooga (1928) shows little detail of the structures occupying the project area, being drawn for real estate purposes rather than fire insurance evaluations (Figure 9). By 1928, the bulk of the block had been subdivided into 25-foot-wide lots fronting on Broad and Chestnut and extending 118.87 feet to the centerline. Identified on the Chadwick map as the E. R. Howard and M. S. Woods subdivision, twenty-eight numbered lots encompassed all but the southern 80 feet of the block. There, the two-story brick structure at the southwest corner of the block, built prior to 1889, still remained; the property at 336-8 Chestnut Street was owned by Harriet W. Cooke. On the other side of the block, at 331 Broad, was a garage owned by W. H. and W. L. Lancaster.

The city directory from 1930 documents the transformation of the block into a commercial area dominated by automobile sales and service facilities. The sole residents of the block continued to reside at 336-338-340 Chestnut Street. The commercial tenants of the block are listed in Table 1. By 1934, the last individual residents of the block had disappeared, and a new business was under construction at 336-340 Chestnut Street. In the 1930s and 40s, the D. S. Etheridge Ford dealership dominated the commercial occupancy of the block. The exact nature of the structures on the block at this time is not clear, but later documents suggest that the structures were one-story brick buildings on concrete slabs with steel-truss roofs.

Table 1. Block tenancy, 1930, from Rothberger Directory Company (1930).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Address</th>
<th>Tenant</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>301-303 Broad</td>
<td>Levan Bros. Auto Company (repairs)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>305-309 Broad</td>
<td>Newton Chevrolet (used car department)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>311-315 Broad</td>
<td>Bryant Motor Co.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>317-323 Broad</td>
<td>D. S. Etheridge Co. Inc. (used car dept.)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NW Cor</td>
<td>Sharp Batt. and Elec. Co.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>300-302 Chestnut</td>
<td>Trimble Auto Co.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>304-308 Chestnut</td>
<td>Newton Chevrolet (used car dept.)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>310-314 Chestnut</td>
<td>Bryant Motor Co. (used cars)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>316-324 Chestnut</td>
<td>Newton Chevrolet (used car dept.)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>326-328 Chestnut</td>
<td>Chattanooga Finance Co./Thompson Printing Co.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>336-338-340 Chestnut</td>
<td>individual tenants, names withheld</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The 1951 (revised) and 1955 edition of Sanborn maps (Sanborn Map Co. 1951, 1955) illustrate the block was occupied by six main structures, each of high one-story height with steel-truss arched roofs over concrete floors (Figure 10). Occupying most of the block was the car dealership, Furlow-Cate Ford, the successor to D. S. Etheridge in the late 1940s. A small lithography business was situated at 326-328 Chestnut, and Sharp Automotive Supply, (formerly Sharp Battery and Electric Company) occupied the southern end of the block at 336-338-340 Chestnut/333-335-337 Broad.
Figure 9. Detail from "Plat Book of Greater Chattanooga, Tenn. District," (Chadwick 1928). Facing north.
Figure 10. Detail from Sheet 10, "Insurance Maps of Chattanooga, Tennessee." Volume 1 (Sanborn Map Company 1955). Facing north.
In the late 1960s, urban renewal arrived in Chattanooga, and the west side of town underwent a dramatic transformation. As part of the creation of the I-124/U. S. 27 expressway, the southern end of the project area block (about 60 feet) was cut off and subsumed as part of a widened W. Fourth Street entrance/exit ramp. In 1969, developer Franklin Haney purchased the entire block and removed virtually all of the commercial concrete and steel-truss structures built in the late 1920s and early 1930s. The last major tenant of the property was Forrest Cate Ford. Some elements of the earlier structures remained at the southern end of the block. The new structure occupying most of the block was called the Haney Building after its developer, and its new tenant was the Mapping and Survey Division of the Tennessee Valley Authority.

Archaeological Research Potential

Determination of the archaeological research potential of the project area is made solely on the basis of the documented improvements to the property as evidenced in the series of plat books of Chattanooga. Since the project area is currently occupied by the Haney Building and adjoining units, no field investigation has been undertaken.

The principal objective of this documentary survey has been to obtain a general overview of the project area through time and to apply these data toward a statement of the archaeological research potential of the block. This necessarily involves estimating what archaeological features might potentially be extant under the existing structures. Sub-surface items of interest would include discrete-context features such as wells, privies, cisterns and other constructions resting well below the current grade. Also of interest would be sheet refuse deposits of domestic debris or products/by-products of commerce or industry that would have been discarded onto the property by its occupants or nearby businesses.

There are no documented prehistoric sites in or near the project area, and any aboriginal occupation in the downtown area of Chattanooga remains undocumented from an archaeological standpoint. Despite documentary evidence of historic Cherokee occupation in the vicinity of Ross's Landing prior to the Removal, archaeological remains from this period remain elusive.

The potential of recovering substantial ante-bellum components seems almost nil. Although anecdotal accounts of improvements in the ante-bellum period are available (i.e. Wiltse n.d.), none are sufficiently precise as to permit archaeological targeting.

Battlefield maps of the Civil War do not indicate improvements or military features in the project area in 1863. However, by 1865, one structure had been erected along the Chestnut Street frontage of the block. The identity of this structure (military or civilian, tenement/barracks or warehouse) is unknown.

The earliest documented archaeological component on the block would be residential units from the early 1870s. City directories from the late 1870s indicate that the residents in this neighborhood were primarily African-Americans, occupying small single-family units or multi-unit tenements. Accompanying residential units built prior to the early 1880s would likely be such features as wells, cisterns and privies. When abandoned as urban utilities were introduced, these features may have collected domestic refuse reflecting the ethnic and economic identity of the neighborhood. The low-lying central ravine area probably collected a great deal of sheet (surface-deposited) refuse through time, and was subsequently sealed by filling in the late 1880s.
Closed-context features (e.g. privies) and sheet refuse deposits buried by aggradation would potentially survive grading and construction activities of subsequent occupations, particularly given the nature of the terrain. The central portion of the block was occupied by a drainage ravine running north-south, and by lesser ravines entering from the west. Historically, this feature was erased by deliberate filling, and thus early features may be protected under a blanket of fill dirt. Moreover, the ravine itself acted as a site of urban refuse disposal into the 1880s, at the same general time that urban utilities were introduced.

Information provided by TVA properties specialists indicates that the Haney Building is built slab-on-grade with a sub-grade network of footing trenches. Only one small basement or crawlspace is present under the 326-328 Chestnut Street structure adjoining the Haney Building. These data suggest that deep contexts may survive on the property.

Sub-surface features or deposits associated with domestic habitations constructed prior to the late 1880s may be present below grade, and may useful in the reconstruction of residential adaptations to urban environments in the late-nineteenth century as explored by the Institute at other southern towns such as Charleston (Honerkamp, Council and Will 1982) and Savannah (Honerkamp, Council and Fairbanks 1983). In such settings, the transition from individual household-level to municipal-level adaptations can be observed (Honerkamp and Council 1984). For example, the shift from wells to water lines, and from privies to central sewerage systems, mark the change in scale of the response to sanitation needs as occupation density increases in the urban setting. Other archaeological contexts are more appropriate to examine the dynamics of neighborhoods as opposed to individual households (Honerkamp 1987).

There is little archaeological data from Chattanooga on domestic habitations from any period or associated with any ethnic group. The bulk of contemporary research in the city proper has concerned industrial archaeology. As such, any information gleaned from a late-19th century neighborhood would be considered baseline data. The contents of the "Broad Street" ravine and deep closed-context features such as privies may illuminate the lifestyles of the block's inhabitants in the post-bellum period.

More detailed documentary research (such as lot by lot chain of title reconstruction) might be needed to isolate the location of features that could then be targeted for sub-surface exploration. Frequently, however, such improvements are neither discussed nor platted in land deeds. In this light, the only feasible proposal for archaeological testing would involve monitoring during demolition and removal of sub-grade building elements, followed by a focused program of secondary testing to sample the drainage ravine and mid-to rear-lot areas of documented habitations.
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