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Cultural Resources Program
Tennessee Valley Authority
Norris, Tennessee

A Documentary Survey of a
One Block Parcel in Downtown Chattanooga, Tennessee:
Carter to Fort, Twelfth to Thirteenth 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 Carter Street on the west, Fort Street on the east, Twelfth Street on the north, and Thirteenth Street on the south, is the proposed site of an expansion of the Chattanooga Trade and Convention Center immediately to the north.

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. Moreover, as the standing architecture on the property has already been demolished to ground level, 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

Following the Cherokee Removal, completed in 1838, surveyors laid out the system of streets that comprised the urban core of Chattanooga. Set down with an alignment based on the river frontage at Ross's Landing, the core of the settlement was bounded on the south by Ninth Street, now designated Martin Luther King Boulevard. South of this line early settlement developed without regard to the later street system. As the city expanded to the east and south in the 1840s and 50s, the original street pattern was altered somewhat to conform to the baseline grid of the Ocoee District, thus creating a series of triangular blocks where the old and new grids intersected. The new grid system was imposed south of Ninth/M. L. King Blvd. and thus includes the project area.

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 map was drawn prior to the building boom in 1864-5 during which the town was transformed into a marshaling yard for the Federal advance on Atlanta. The contour lines document an ante-bellum topography in urban Chattanooga now buried under considerable amounts of fill.
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 cross-hatched.
The Dorr map does not clearly show any structures in the project block, although structures are shown in the vicinity. 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.

Both the 1863 Dorr map and the 1864 map show that there are at least four structures present on the block to the east, all set off from, but parallel to, Twelfth. As drawn on the Dorr map, Carter Street is shown with clear margins, but the right of way of Twelfth Street is drawn as dashed, indicating that the road was not improved. Moreover, in the Dorr map, Twelfth is drawn somewhat south of its current position. The data suggest that Twelfth Street was resurveyed after the Civil War, moving this thoroughfare to the north.

The project area is in the vicinity of a number of important military features. A major fortification, Fort Lytle, is immediately to the southwest, and the outer line of the Federal defensive trenchworks would have crossed Carter around Fourteenth Street. Also on the map, a military hospital is shown on the high ground to the west. The proximity of the project area to the defensive trenchworks suggests that soldiers' field bivouacs may have been present in the vicinity. The Civil War photographs compiled in Hoobler (1986) do not include pictures that cover the project area.

An 1871 aerial view of the city, produced by A. Ruger, illustrates the project area as being vacant (Ruger 1871). Homes and orchards are shown to the east and west of the block. Vacant lands to the north of the project area, in the large triangular plot bounded by Carter, Chestnut and Twelfth Street (and coming to an acute point at Ninth or M. L. King Boulevard) were the property of the Nashville and Chattanooga Railroad, and are known from anecdotal data to have served as circus grounds (Council and Honerkamp 1984: 34).

Twelfth Street was named Cravens Street in honor of ante-bellum ironmaster and industrial entrepreneur Robert Cravens. Thirteenth was named Hooke in recognition of Judge R. M. Hooke, an ante-bellum resident of the general neighborhood. Carter and Fort streets were also named for prominent local businessmen, Farish Carter and Tomlinson Fort. While Twelfth (Cravens), Thirteenth (Hooke), and Fort streets had been graded and improved by the early 1870s, Carter Street was an important route south from the central business district between Seventh and Eighth streets.

The Sanborn fire insurance plat book of 1885 contains no detailed representation of the project area, an indication that the improvements were not substantial enough to warrant inclusion in the maps (Sanborn Map and Publishing Company 1885). The key map, however, does contain some minimal information. The project area was occupied in 1885 by "9 FR. DW." or nine frame dwellings. The adjacent blocks were vacant or similarly occupied by frame dwellings and barns.

In contrast to the written description of dwellings on the block provided by the 1885 Sanborn map is an aerial view of the city produced in 1886 by Norris Wellge and Company. In this bird's eye view of the town, the project area is shown to be completely vacant. In contrast, the block to the east is dense with structures, as is the block to the south. This vacancy may have illustrated the first phase of redevelopment in the project area.
Figure 2. Detail from A. Ruger's "Birds Eye View of the City of Chattanooga, Hamilton County, Tennessee," (1871). At this date, the project area, bounded by Carter, Fort, Cravens (12th) and Hooke (13th), is conspicuously vacant.
Figure 3. Detail from Norris, Wellge and Co.'s "Chattanooga, Seat of Hamilton County, Tennessee" (1886). The project block is still vacant in this view, but a small wagon factory has been built on the block to the north.
Sanborn maps from 1889 (Sanborn-Perris Map Co. Ltd. 1889: Sheet 19) indicate substantial commercial development had taken place in the space of four years (Figure 4). The block measured 250 feet wide, east to west; 400 feet, north to south; and was surrounded by the 60 foot-wide rights of way of the surrounding streets. The Carter Street frontage of the block was largely occupied by a single multi-unit, three-story brick commercial unit. Five forty-five-foot wide buildings were conjoined to form the block-unit, and each building was further sub-divided into halves of 22.5-foot width. Later plats indicate that the depth of these buildings was 111.5 feet. The five-building complex was called the "Posey Block" after its developer.

Each subunit in the Posey Block was numbered, starting at 302 Carter on the north, and running to 320 at the southern end of the block-unit. There were three tenants at this date, unnamed but described as: wholesale pickled fish, 304 Carter; commission [merchant retailer], 304 Carter; and flour and feed, 320 Carter. Notes on the maps indicate that at this date, the second and third floors of the buildings were unfinished. An unsurveyed alley separated the improvements on the west and east sides of the block.

In 1889, the Fort Street frontage was partially occupied by a single industrial tenant, The Chattanooga Ice and Bottling Company. Encompassing a frontage of 150 feet, the plant featured an ice production unit on the north end of the plant; a mineral water manufacturing unit and beer bottling unit in the middle; and a steam-generation and storage facility on the south. The brick complex was one story in height, expanding to two floors in the middle, with the mineral water unit on the first floor and the beer bottling machinery on the second.

The 1901 Sanborn plats of the block demonstrate few improvements had been added to the western portion of the project area (Figure 5). The street numbers shifted slightly; the former Posey Block now ran from 300 to 318 Carter. An ornamental iron and wire company occupied 300-302 Carter with a novelty manufacturing firm being situated on the second floor. 304-306 Carter housed the Chattanooga Washing and Wringer Machine Co. 308 and 310 Carter were warehouses. The Star Pea Machine Company occupied 312 Carter, and 314 was a warehouse. 316 Carter housed a hand broom manufacturing business and a carpet cleaning enterprise on the second floor. A warehouse occupied 318 Carter.

By 1901, a coal yard had been built on the northern end of the eastern half of the block, and this facility included a stable at the southwest corner of Twelfth and Fort. The ice and bottling plant occupying the central portion of the Fort Street frontage expanded to the south by structurally incorporating some formerly detached components. Now separating the east and west halves of the block were two railroad spur lines that entered the alley from the north and terminated near the southern end of the block.

Sanborn fire insurance sheets from 1917 indicate a full tenancy of the lots in the project area (Figure 6). A large iron and steel warehouse facility had been built by that date on the southern end of the western half-block; the two adjoining structures were of high one-story reinforced concrete construction. Details of construction in the Posey Block (300 to 318 Carter) suggest either that the central three units of the complex were replaced or rebuilt between 1901 and 1917; the buildings at 304-6, 308-10, and 312-14 Carter were now two as opposed to three stories. The roofs in the entire Posey Block were now composite construction, replacing the former metal or slate roof shown on the 1901 edition.
Figure 4. Detail from Sheet 19, Sanborn-Perris Map Company Ltd. fire insurance maps of Chattanooga, Tennessee (1889). Facing north. The Posey Block is at upper left, on Carter Street, and the Chattanooga Ice and Bottling Company is at right, fronting on Fort.
Figure 5. Detail from Sheet 44, Sanborn-Perris Map Company Ltd. fire insurance maps of Chattanooga, Tennessee (1901). Facing north. The Posey Block changed little in over a decade, but the Chattanooga Ice Company has added a stable and coal yard on upper Fort Street. The Chattanooga Bottling Company has a stable and office at the southern end of the block.
Figure 6. Detail from Sheet 56, Sanborn Map Company "Fire Insurance Maps of Chattanooga, Tennessee," (1917). By 1917, an iron and steel warehouse built of concrete has filled out the Carter Street frontage, and the Southern Ice Company has consolidated most of the remaining structures on Fort Street.
In 1917, on the eastern half of the block, the Southern Ice Company occupied all but the northern most Fort Street lot, the latter being occupied by a two-story brick wholesale meat business. The ice company complex included a stable, and occupying the southern 130 feet of the half-block was a coal yard enclosed on two sides by a wagon shed and coal storage bins. The bottling works had been abandoned, and steam powered compressor units added to the complex.

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. The Atlantic Ice and Coal Company occupied most of the eastern block, and the Vance Iron and Steel Company occupied the southern end of the western block.

The 1955 edition of Sanborn maps (Sanborn Map Co. 1955) illustrates the full tenancy of the project area, being principally occupied by commercial wholesalers, industrial supplies and warehouses. New construction had occurred on the southern third of the east half of the block (Fort Street frontage), including a wholesale flour warehouse and a wholesale electrical supplies structure, both of concrete floor construction. The western portion of the block remained unchanged from 1917.

Table 1. Project area tenants, 1955, from Sanborn Map Co. (1955 v. 1: sheet 56).

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<table>
<thead>
<tr>
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<tr>
<td><strong>West Block</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1200-1202 Carter</td>
<td>3-story brick</td>
<td>upholstery</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1204-1206 Carter</td>
<td>2-story brick</td>
<td>wholesale tobacco</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1208-1210 Carter</td>
<td>2-story brick</td>
<td>tile and acoustical material wholesale</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1212-1214 Carter</td>
<td>2-story brick</td>
<td>doll factory</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1216-1218 Carter</td>
<td>3-story brick</td>
<td>wholesale paper</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1220 Carter</td>
<td>1-story brick</td>
<td>beer wholesale</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1222-24-26 Carter</td>
<td>1-story brick</td>
<td>wholesale drug and sundries</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1228-30-32 Carter</td>
<td>1-story brick</td>
<td>hardware warehouse</td>
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| **East Block** |         |         |
| 1201-1203 Fort | 2-story brick | wholesale meats |
| 1205-07-09 Fort | 1-story brick | wholesale paper warehouse |
| 1221-1231 Fort | 1-story brick | wholesale electrical supplies |
| 205-207 W. 13th | 1-story brick | wholesale flour warehouse |

Chattanooga flood control sheet 1-3 includes the project area and illustrates the continued full occupancy of the block in 1969. By sequentially tracing individual buildings or lots through time, the approximate age of the structures can be estimated. Of the structures standing in 1969, three were probably built during or prior to 1889. One component of a larger building unit was erected prior to 1901, and multiple units predate 1917. Interior portions of the Posey Block may also date as early as 1889, but had undergone reconstruction between the 1901 and 1917 editions of the Sanborn maps. The most recent construction occurred on the south end of the east half of the block.

Only minimal effort was made to detail the history of the structures after 1969. City directories indicate that by 1970 several units in the block were vacant (Rothberger Directory Company 1970), and the structure at 1200-1202 Carter Street had been torn down in 1979 or 1980. By the latter date, several structures were still vacant, including
1222-24 Carter and 1201 Fort, (the former Wilson and Company meat warehouse). The vacancy rate increased in the 1980s, and by the summer of 1997, the standing architecture on the block had been demolished.

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. No field investigation has been undertaken. Subsurface features of interest would include wells, privies, cisterns and other constructions resting below grade. Also of interest would be deposits of products or by-products of commerce or industry that would have been discarded onto the property by its occupants.

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. Early historic accounts of the terrain at the southern end of the town (i.e. south of Ninth Street/M. L. King Boulevard) indicate that much of the terrain was low-lying and marshy ground (Wiltse n.d.). Higher ground to the west of Carter Street drained into the project, perhaps creating marshy conditions on the tract. The matter of drainage is discussed in greater detail below.

The potential of recovering substantial ante-bellum components seems almost nil. Maps drawn in 1863 and 1864 show no structures in the project area, and there is little reason to believe that substantial improvements existed on the property prior to the Civil War. The absence of data from maps or from deed plats in the 1840s and 50s makes this point moot, however.

Battlefield maps of the Civil War do not indicate improvements or military features in the project area. The project area is, however, within several hundred feet of key military positions occupied by Federal troops during the siege of Chattanooga in the fall of 1863. Remains of soldiers' bivouacs could conceivably be present.

Improvements were evidently slow to appear in the project area, perhaps because it sat at the base of the sloping ground west of Carter Street. Although this prime commercial property was adjacent to the Union Railyards, Chattanooga's commercial core, development seemed to skirt this particular block long after neighboring blocks were covered with houses and businesses. One constraining factor might have been drainage. In the flood of March 1867, locomotives in the Union Railyards were largely submerged by ponding flood water (Council and Honerkamp 1984: 29). At elevations between 672' and 674' ASL, the project area was under seven to nine feet of water in the flood of 1867, and was also under several feet of water during the flood of 1875 (see TVA 1959).

Structures appear to be absent in the project area in the early 1870s, but by 1885, there is a brief reference to nine frame houses being present on the block, their precise locations being unknown. The earliest documented archaeological component on the block would thus be residential units from the late 1870s or early 1880s. Accompanying these residential units would potentially be such features as wells and privies. Urban utilities were slow to be developed south of Ninth Street, even though some of Chattanooga's largest heavy industries were sited there. The presence of wells and privies associated with these 1885-era houses is closely related to the timetable of the spread of urban utilities.
Sanborn plats from 1889 and 1901 indicate few targets for sub-surface research. By these dates, water mains were in place in surrounding streets, obviating the necessity for wells or cisterns. Whether sanitary mains were in place at this date is unclear. Chattanooga did not construct its first underground sewage main until 1880, and no detailed research has been undertaken to determine when city sewerage would have reached Carter and Fort streets (see Council 1989: 63). The "Posey Block" unit along the north end of the Carter Street frontage (shown in plats after 1889) does not indicate detached privies, and this suggests interior water-closet facilities had been installed. Some small semi-detached one-story structures within the Chattanooga Ice and Bottling Co. plant (near the middle of the Fort Street frontage) may be privies, perhaps vaulted units that could be cleaned. Similarly, the 1917 Sanborn maps may show one or two potential candidates for privies. By this date, however, sanitary sewers were widespread throughout the urban core of the city, and any surviving privies may have been plumbed retro-actively into the sewerage system.

There is no indication in the documentary record that any unique architectural features would be present below grade, nor do any of the properties seem to be affiliated with key historical figures or significant events or historical epochs (excepting proximity to Civil War fortifications, as discussed above).

In terms of businesses that would have produced distinctive products (and by-products) that may illustrate commercial horizons or have produced artifacts that may be useful as archaeological tools, the Chattanooga Ice and Bottling Company on Fort Street is the most likely target of interest. Beer and mineral bottles utilized at this plant may be present in the archaeological record. This facility did not manufacture glass bottles, however, but bottled beer and mineral water on the site. Artifacts from this facility may be significant at the local level as local products of industry and commerce.

Sub-surface features associated with unmapped domestic habitations constructed prior to 1885 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. In the project area, more detailed documentary research (such as lot by lot chain of title reconstruction) would be needed to isolate the location of features that could then be targeted for sub-surface exploration. Frequently, such improvements are neither discussed nor platted, however, in land deeds.

In the absence of field inspection of the site to determine the degree of disturbance caused by demolition activities, it is concluded that the archaeological research potential of the block is low, with the exceptions discussed above.
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