

## Records of the Port Utilities Commission, 1921–1943

*The Charleston Archive, Charleston County Public Library*

*Compiled by Kathleen Gray, 2009*

Collation: 24 Volumes; 2.5 linear ft.

Description: This collection constitutes the extant records of the Port Utilities Commission of the City of Charleston, and includes Minutes of the Board of the Port Utilities Commission (1921–1943) and Monthly Reports of Operations (1931–1943).

The Minutes of the Board of the Port Utilities Commission comprises eleven volumes of bound, typescript minutes. There is no index for the volumes spanning the years 1921–1929, however there is an index at the beginning of each volume for the years 1941–1943. In addition to the minutes, the volumes also include miscellaneous materials such as: correspondence, affidavits, operational statistics, annual reports, monthly reports, newspaper clippings, reports on various subjects (expenditures, tobacco situation, sugar, etc.), magazine clippings, financial statements and a small number of plats, illustrations, and photos.

The Monthly Reports of Operations consists of thirteen volumes containing a detailed accounting of all revenues and expenditures for every property and operation overseen by the Port Utilities Commission. Each volume represents one year of business and contains the individual reports for each month in the year. The monthly reports include the values of expenses and revenues for both the current month and the corresponding month of the previous year, in order to provide a basis of comparison. The major components of the monthly reports are largely consistent over the years and include: Summary of Revenues and Expenses, Railway Operations, Columbus Street Operations, Union Compress Operations (later Union Warehouse Operations), Union Pier No. 1 Operations, Union Pier No. 2 Operations, Adgers Wharf Operations, Army Base Terminal, Balance Sheet of Liabilities and Assets, and Cars, Steamships, and Tonnage Handled.

Historical Note: By the early 1900s, the majority of viable dock properties in Charleston, including railway tracks, equipment, and wharves, was run by a private corporation known as the Charleston Terminal Company. This company, co-owned by the Atlantic Coast Line Railway and the Southern Railway, operated under the auspices of a franchise originally granted to the East Shore Terminal Company in 1890. However, the railroad companies preferred to transact most of their shipping business out of Savannah, GA. As a consequence, the wharves in Charleston became sadly neglected and trade was significantly impeded.<sup>1</sup> This state of affairs became a central issue in the Charleston mayoral race of 1919. Former mayor and recurrent candidate John P. Grace argued that the franchise of the Charleston Terminal Company should not be renewed, and the city should take over the administration of the waterfront. Grace's opponent for the Democratic nomination, incumbent mayor Tristan T. Hyde, argued that the franchise should be renewed, but under certain stipulations. After a hard-fought political battle,

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<sup>1</sup> *History of the South Carolina State Ports Authority*. (Charleston, S. C.: State Ports Authority, 1991), 9–13.

Grace emerged the candidate of the Democratic Party and went on to win the general election to become Charleston's mayor once again.<sup>2</sup>

After his inauguration, Grace immediately put into motion his plan to transfer responsibility of the port facilities to the City of Charleston. In March of 1920, partly at Grace's urging, the South Carolina Senate passed an act "to authorize cities having a population of fifty thousand inhabitants or more to acquire, purchase, establish, improve, maintain, and operate the port utilities of such cities."<sup>3</sup> A month later, the Charleston City Council denied the Charleston Terminal Company's formal request for a renewal of their franchise.<sup>4</sup> Grace then brokered a deal with the Charleston Terminal Company to purchase the dock facilities, on behalf of the city, for \$1.5 million. In a Special Election on November 8th, 1921, Charleston's citizens voted in favor of the issuance of \$2.5 million in municipal bonds in order to pay for the purchase of the port properties. The subsequent ordinance stipulated that the newly-formed Port Utilities Commission must consist of nine individuals; five members elected by the citizens of Charleston, two members appointed by the Governor, and two ex-officio members, the Mayor and the Chairman of City Council's Committee on Railroads.<sup>5</sup>

The Port Utilities Commission functioned from 1922 to 1947. Throughout most of the 1920s, the city's administration of the port was economically successful. However, the stock market crash of 1929 and the subsequent Great Depression dealt the Commission an economic blow from which they would not recover.<sup>6</sup> In March of 1937, the Commission ceased operations at the Army Base Terminal and transferred the property to the West Virginia Pulp and Paper Company.<sup>7</sup> In 1942, the General Assembly founded the South Carolina State Ports Authority (SPA) for the purpose of increasing trade in the ports of Charleston, Beaufort, and Georgetown. On March 15, 1947, City Council surrendered all properties administered by the Port Utilities Commission to the SPA, ending municipal control of Charleston's waterfront.<sup>8</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> *John Patrick Grace and the Politics of Reform in South Carolina, 1900–1931*. (Ann Arbor, Mich.: University Microfilms International, 1993), 132–149.

<sup>3</sup> *Acts and Joint Resolutions of the General Assembly of the State of South Carolina, Passed at the Regular Session of 1920*. (Columbia, S.C.: Gonzales & Bryan, 1920), 969.

<sup>4</sup> *John Patrick Grace and the Politics of Reform in South Carolina, 1900–1931*. (Ann Arbor, Mich.: University Microfilms International, 1993), 168.

<sup>5</sup> *Year Book, City of Charleston, 1922*. (Charleston, S.C.: Daggett Printing Co., 1924), 659.

<sup>6</sup> *History of the South Carolina State Ports Authority*. (Charleston, S. C.: State Ports Authority, 1991), 18-21.

<sup>7</sup> *Year Book, City of Charleston, 1937*. (Charleston, S.C.: Walker, Evans & Cogswell, 1938), 168.

<sup>8</sup> *Year Book, City of Charleston, 1946*. (Charleston, S.C.: Walker, Evans, & Cogswell Co., 1949), 163-173

# Records of the Port Utilities Commission

## Collection Outline

### I. Minutes of the Board of the Port Utilities Commission

1921/22: 21 December 1921–28 December 1922

1923/24: 11 January 1923–17 December 1924

1925: 02 January 1925–03 December 1925

1926: 07 January 1926–02 December 1926

1927: 10 January 1927–07 December 1927

1928: 04 January 1928–05 December 1928

1929, Vol. I: 02 January 1929–12 June 1929

1929, Vol. II: 01 July 1929–30 December 1929

1941: 08 January 1941–10 December 1941

1942: 23 January 1942–09 December 1942

1943: 13 January 1943– 08 December 1943

### II. Monthly Reports of Operations

1931

1932

1933

1934

1935

1936

1937

1938

1939

1940

1941

1942

1943