

# Records of the Commissioners of Streets and Lamps and the Board of Commissioners for Opening and Widening of Streets, Lanes and Alleys, 1806–1866

*The Charleston Archive, Charleston County Public Library  
Compiled by Harlan Greene and Kathleen Gray, July 2008*

Collation: 0.5 linear feet

Description: This collection consists of the Journal of the Commissioners of Streets and Lamps, 1806–1818 and the Journal of the Board of Commissioners for Opening and Widening of Streets, Lanes and Alleys, 1818–1866.

The Journal of the Commissioners of Streets and Lamps is a bound journal that contains the minutes of the meetings of said commission from 20 October 1806 through 02 October 1818. Entries list the names of those commissioners attending, as well as frequent lists of newly elected members and recapitulations of the rules governing the board. For a more detailed listing of subject headings, please see the Collection Outline below.

The Journal of the Board of Commissioners for Opening and Widening of Streets, Lanes and Alleys is a bound journal that contains the minutes of the meetings of said commission from 09 February 1818 to 09 August 1866. The minutes detail meeting attendance, elections, and debates on the opening and widening of streets. Tipped into the pages or drawn on them are plats of properties or areas showing the original layout of streets to be widened, and detailing the structure or structures to be demolished or remodeled to achieve the goal. A rough alphabetical index appears at the beginning of this volume. For a more detailed listing of plat locations, please see the Collection Outline below.

Historical Note: The two agencies represented in this collection, the Commissioners of Streets and Lamps and the Board of Commissioners for Opening and Widening of Streets, Lanes and Alleys, are distinct entities that served separate functions within the city of Charleston. In the latter years of the nineteenth century, the tasks of both commissions were placed under the umbrella of the City of Charleston Street Department.

Before the incorporation of the city of Charleston in 1783, South Carolina's provincial general assembly administered the town's infrastructure needs. On 10 August 1764 that body passed "An Act to Empower Certain Commissioners therein mentioned, to keep clear and in good order and repair the streets of Charlestown; and for establishing other regulations in the said town." This act created a group of nine commissioners to contract for and to oversee the maintenance and repairs of the streets, the employment of scavengers to remove and dispose of garbage and filth, the upkeep of all drains and sewers, and other related tasks.<sup>1</sup> Similarly, the provincial general assembly also established the first public lamps in Charleston by ratifying "An Act for a Fish Market; and for Preserving the Lamps in Charlestown" on 7 April 1770.<sup>2</sup> Although this act did

<sup>1</sup> David McCord, ed., *Statutes at Large of South Carolina*, Vol. 9 (Columbia, S.C.: A. S. Johnston, 1841), 697–705.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, 9: 705–8.

not articulate who should bear the responsibility for the said public lamps, it appears that such responsibility was left to the commissioners of the streets. When the city of Charleston was incorporated in 1783, the new municipal government inherited these established modes of maintaining the city's streets and lamps.

In 1806, the earlier iteration of the Commissioners of Streets was repealed in favor of a new board of Commissioners of Streets and Lamps. This commission was responsible for all tasks involved in the upkeep of the city's streets and lamps, including: ensuring that streets are free of goods, wood, and other materials and that buildings do not encroach into the streets; employing and supervising scavengers to keep the streets free of dirt, carrion, and other filth; making certain pavements are unimpeded and in good repair; monitoring and cleaning drains; electing lamplighters and protecting lamps from damage.<sup>3</sup> By an ordinance of 1830, all duties pertaining to the city's lamps were contracted out to a city-elected lamplighter, who was accountable to and under the direction of the Commissioners of Streets and Lamps.<sup>4</sup> The Commissioners of Streets and Lamps continued its duties until it was abolished by ordinance in 1848. At that time, maintenance of the streets became a responsibility of the Mayor and Alderman, and issues pertaining to lamps were referred to a committee of City Council on lighting the City.<sup>5</sup> By 1850, the cleanliness of the city's streets was entrusted to the Superintendents of Streets, who were elected by City Council for both the Upper and Lower Wards.<sup>6</sup> The Superintendents of Streets were abolished in 1858, and their work doled out to contractors.<sup>7</sup> An ordinance detailing the better regulation of the Street Department appears in 1868, implying the creation of said department sometime between 1858 and 1868.<sup>8</sup> However, no such ordinance has been located.<sup>9</sup>

The Board of Commissioners for Opening and Widening of Streets, Lanes, and Alleys was created by an Act of the South Carolina General Assembly in 1817. The primary duty of the Board was to review and approve any plans for the opening or widening of streets as submitted by the City Council of Charleston. The Board was therefore concerned solely with the planning of streets and was not responsible for their maintenance or cleanliness.<sup>10</sup> This supervisory board remained in use until 1866, at which time the power and responsibility for opening and widening streets was fully vested in the Mayor and Aldermen of the city of Charleston.<sup>11</sup> Charleston City Council referred decisions pertaining to the opening and widening of streets to its Committee on Streets.

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<sup>3</sup> Alexander Edwards, comp. *Ordinances of the City Council of Charleston, Passed between the 24th of September 1804, and the 1st Day of September 1807* (Charleston, S.C.: W. P. Young, 1807), 407.

<sup>4</sup> *Collection of Ordinances. from 10th October, 1826 to 13th March, 1832* (Charleston, S.C.: A. E. Miller, 1832), 34.

<sup>5</sup> H. Pinckney Walker, comp. *Ordinances of the city of Charleston, from the 19th of August 1844, to the 14th of September 1854* (Charleston, S.C.: A. E. Miller, 1854), 67. A committee report recommending the abolition of the Commissioners of Streets and Lamps, presented to City Council on 30 October 1848, summarizes the history of that board. See *Charleston Mercury*, 1 November 1848.

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.*, 95.

<sup>7</sup> John Horsey, comp. *Ordinances of the City of Charleston from the 14th September, 1854, to the 1st December, 1859* (Charleston, S.C.: Walker, Evans & Co., 1859), 61.

<sup>8</sup> D. T. Corbin, comp. *Ordinances of the City of Charleston, from December 1st, 1859, to September 6th, 1870* (Charleston, S.C.: Charleston Courier Book and Job Presses, 1871), 51.

<sup>9</sup> All ordinances passed between 1 December 1859 and 20 October 1865 have been either lost or destroyed.

<sup>10</sup> David McCord, ed., *Statutes at Large of South Carolina*, Volume 7 (Columbia, S.C.: A.S. Johnston, 1840), 136.

<sup>11</sup> Corbin, comp., *Ordinances of the City of Charleston, from December 1st, 1859, to September 6th, 1870*, 120.

The Ordinances for the city of Charleston for the year 1895 contain an extensive section devoted to the Department of Streets. This comprehensive regulation covers all aspects of street management for the City of Charleston, including both maintenance and planning.<sup>12</sup> In 1904, Charleston City Council established the Board of Public Works, which assumed responsibility for the city's streets.<sup>13</sup> As part of the restructuring, the office of Superintendent of Streets was consolidated with that of the City Engineer, although the changes were not put into effect until 1906.<sup>14</sup>

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<sup>12</sup> *General Ordinances of the City of Charleston, South Carolina*. (Charleston, S.C.: Lucas & Richardson, 1895), 45.

<sup>13</sup> *Year Book, City of Charleston, 1904* (Charleston, S.C.: Lucas-Richardson Lithograph & Printing Co., 1905), 339.

<sup>14</sup> *Year Book, City of Charleston, 1906* (Charleston, S.C.: Daggett Printing Co., 1907), xv.

# Records of the Commissioners of Streets and Lamps and the Board of Commissioners for Opening and Widening of Streets, Lanes and Alleys, 1806–1866

## Collection Outline

- I. Journal of the Commissioners of Streets and Lamps BOX 1
- Topics include:
- Plans for numbering of buildings (p. 3, 6, 61, 174, 176, 181, 207, and others)
  - Cleaning and constructing new drains
  - Accounting of oil amounts used to fill lamps and amount of oil on hand
  - Construction and repair of street lamps
  - Maintenance and creation of sidewalks
  - The duties of scavengers cleaning city streets and alleys
  - The removal of old buildings deemed hazardous
  - Interactions with the Medical Society re: eliminating hazardous conditions in the city
  - Neglect of duty by particular city scavengers
  - Creation of divisions in the city to be patrolled by different scavengers (p. 282, 287)
  - Filling in lots and keeping them clean
  - Filling in and extending various streets
  - Examination of suspected encroachments on City property and rights of way
  - Negro hire (p. 26, 105)
  - Damage done to neighborhoods and buildings by fires and storms
  - "Old" city jail in King Street (p. 55)
  - Machinery invented by T. West for preventing filling of drains
- II. Journal of the Board of the Commissioners for Opening and BOX 1  
Widening of Streets, Lanes and Alleys
- Plats include:
- Broad Street (p. 7)
  - Clifford Street (p. 19)
  - Parsonage Lane (Market Street between King & Archdale Sts., p. 29)
  - Lynch's Lane (Atlantic St., p. 31)
  - Beresford Street (Chalmers St., p. 48, 50)
  - King Street (South of Lamboll, p. 56)
  - Church Street (at St. Philip's Episcopal Church, p. 61)
  - Area South of Market Street, including Linguard and Amen (Cumberland) Streets (p. 69)
  - Cumberland and Amen Streets (p. 71)
  - King Street (from Society to Clifford, p. 77)
  - Pritchard Street and Hard Alley [no longer extant] (between Concord and E. Bay, p. 79)
  - Radcliffe Street (between Rutledge and Smith, p. 99)
  - Vanderhorst Street (between Rutledge and Smith, p. 100)