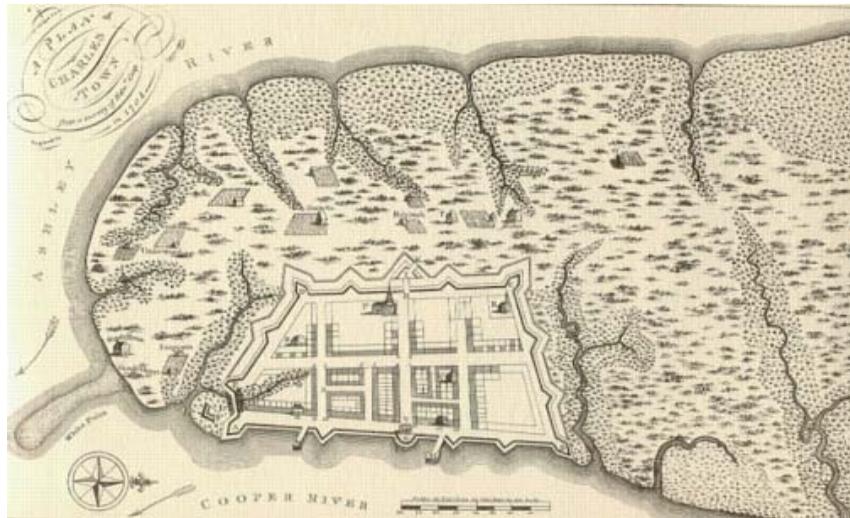# Background & History

The Berkeley Charleston Dorchester region in South Carolina is one of the most history-laden areas in the United States. From its settlement, to its role in the Revolutionary and Civil Wars, to the present day, it is a region with a rich past and a bright future.

The Early Days of Charles Town

The Colony of Carolina was given to eight Lords Proprietors by King Charles II of England in 1663. In 1666, Captain Robert Sanford explored and named the Ashley River, and took possession of Carolina. The first colonists set sail in 1669, reaching Carolina in 1670 and founding Charles Town (as the City of Charleston was then called) in honor of King Charles II. The original settlement was on Albemarle Point, across the Ashley River from its current site. The peninsula opposite the settlement was referred to as Oyster Point, and over time the colonists began to recognize the strategic importance of this location. Soon, settlers began to build houses there, and by 1679 the Proprietors selected Oyster Point as the location of the town, rather than the land chosen by the first settlers. As a result, Charles Town was moved to its current location on the peninsula.

From the beginning, the Proprietors had a vision of the town they hoped to build. The plan for the city was modeled after the "checkerboard" plan proposed in London after the fire of 1666. In this way, they hoped to avoid the narrow and winding streets of most European cities, and instead lay out the streets in "broad and … straight lines."[1] People granted lots in the town were required to build homes within two years. The town was bounded on the west by what is today Meeting Street, and on the north and the south by Beaufain and Water Streets, respectively. Land was set aside for a courthouse, a public wharf, a churchyard, and an artillery ground. East Bay Street, running north-south parallel to the Cooper River, was one of the first streets laid out, and parallel to it were Church Street and Meeting Street. Running east-west were Cooper Street (later renamed Broad Street), Dock Street (later Queen Street), and Tradd Street. A wide dirt path ran from south to north and out of town, connecting the plantations with the town. This path was first called the Broadway or Broad Path, and was renamed King Street much later.

In 1682, the Proprietors directed that counties be established to better organize the government. Three counties, each named for one of the proprietors, were established. Berkeley County, containing Charles Town, was in the center, bordered by Craven County to the north and Colleton County to the south. By 1690, Charles Town was the fifth-largest city in North America. Rice was found to grow well in Charles Town, and was fast becoming the crop of choice for exporters.

The following years were difficult ones for Charles Town, as the city weathered hurricanes, attacks during Queen Anne's War and the Yemassee Indian War, as well as invasions from pirates Blackbeard and Stede Bonnet. The failure of the Lords Proprietors to protect colonists from threats prompted the colonists to petition the King to take over the colony, and in 1721 South Carolina became a royal colony.

In the 1730s, a restriction on trade that had previously allowed the Carolinas to export only to Great Britain was removed. In the following years, Charles Town prospered with increased exportation of rice. Slaves from West Africa were imported to fuel the growing rice plantations. Tar, pitch, turpentine, leather, deerskins, corn, peas, beef, and pork were also popular trade commodities. The town grew beyond its original eighty acres and many new buildings were constructed. By 1739, eight wharves extended from Bay Street into the Cooper River, serving 500 ships annually.

The growing town, along with an increase in traffic to serve the docks, resulted in the need to build new roads and extend existing ones. By the end of the decade, the city had thirty-three streets keeping with the original criss-cross pattern.

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[1] Fraser, Walter J. Charleston! Charleston! Columbia, SC: University of South Carolina Press, 1989. Page 7.

CHARLESTON.

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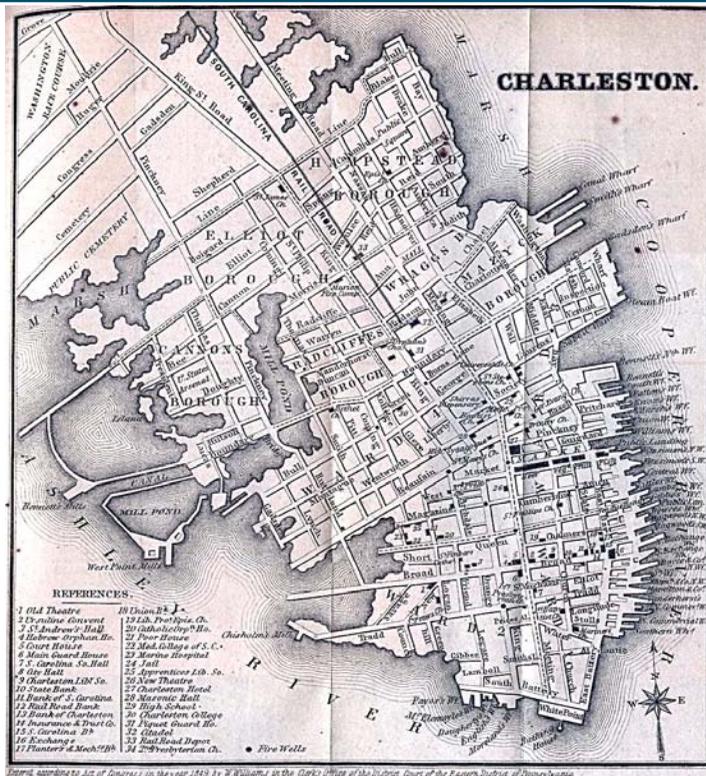
Since its early days, Charleston has been ahead of its time in urban planning. When the construction of an Exchange was planned in 1767 to house trade, it was sited "to harmoniously relate spaces and uses."[2] As the city grew, expenditures were planned for roads, bridges, and filling in of low-lying areas. The city also began to spread out in the 1760s and 1770s as private developers planned suburbs around the city.

The City of Charleston

During the American Revolution, Charles Town endured capture by the British army in May 1780. The town was returned to Carolinian control October 1782, and in 1783, the name was changed and it was incorporated as the City of Charleston.

In the early 1800s, the expansion of rice and cotton-growing fueled a boom in Charleston. The first industry, a cotton mill, opened in Charleston in 1789. The City built the first bridge over the Ashley River in 1808. The War of 1812 led to a boom in the shipbuilding business. Following the war, trade in rice and cotton once again boomed.

In 1819, cotton prices fell due to overproduction, and by 1830, Charleston had fallen on harder times as other port cities took over, new market towns emerged, and the advent of the steamboat meant that planters no longer had to bring their cotton to Charleston by wagon. The steam locomotive was seen as a solution to the City's economic problems, by helping to connect Charleston to inland markets. The *Best Friend*, put into service on December 25, 1830, was the first steam locomotive to be used in a business venture in the United States. However, leading Charlestonians refused to let the rails go through the town to the wharves, and the railroad did not produce the expected economic boom. However, several other railroad lines were built in the 1830s and 1840s,

and increasingly, Charleston's imports and exports traveled by rail instead of by sea, contributing to somewhat of a decline of the port. Public transportation made its debut in Charleston in 1861, with the formation of the Charleston City Railway, which operated a horse-drawn car line in the City.

The first shots of the Civil War were fired by Confederate forces on Fort Sumter, in the Charleston harbor on April 12, 1861. The Civil War raged for the next four years, with Charleston enduring bombardment and fire. When General Lee surrendered in 1865, there was much rebuilding to be done in Charleston. Steamship service to New York resumed, and railroads were repaired to open up the lines of trade once again. In 1878, federal money was appropriated for the modernization of the harbor, including dredging and the construction of jetties.

Improvements were also made to the streets starting in the 1870s. As of that time, Charleston had 53.5 miles of streets, of which about one-third were paved with a variety of materials, including wood and shells. When Mayor Courtenay took office in 1879, he began a program to improve the streets by paving them in blocks of granite. The South Carolina Rail Road was reorganized in 1881 and became the South Carolina Railway Company. The railroad was at long last extended to the docks, and a waterfront terminal was built.

Electric streetcar service was introduced in Charleston in 1897 and was run by the Charleston Consolidated Railway Gas & Electric Company. In 1899, the first gasoline-powered automobile made its appearance in Charleston. Shipped from Boston, it was taken for a few trips along the Battery before the police banned it as a public nuisance. In 1903, Mayor Rhett established the Board of Public Works to establish a systematic approach to planning and maintenance. This organization was abolished in 1912 by Mayor Grace, who appointed his own Committee on the Streets. In 1913, a state law permitted the city to assess property owners half the cost of street improvements that abutted their property. As a result, vast improvements were made in paving, sidewalks, curbs, and drains. Asphalt was used to pave the major thoroughfares, which improved driving conditions for automobiles, which were appearing in greater numbers.

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[2] Fraser, Walter J. Charleston! Charleston! Columbia, SC: University of South Carolina Press, 1989. Page 119.

When World War I broke out, Charleston became the headquarters of the Sixth Military District, resulting in an economic boom for the city. Civilians worked at the Navy Yard, in the clothing factory, and on construction projects including the Army Port Terminal. The prosperous city reached a population of almost 100,000 by 1920, at which time there were 3,462 automobiles registered in Charleston.

A statewide initiative to pave farm-to-market roads began in the 1920s, resulting in a vast expansion of the secondary highway system in South Carolina. Complementing the statewide program, Thomas Stoney, who was elected mayor in 1923, continued the street-paving program begun in the City by Mayor Grace, paving more than 35 miles of road with asphalt. The Ashley River Bridge was also completed under his administration in 1926. The Cooper River Bridge, at 2.7 miles the fifth-longest in the world at the time, was completed in 1929. To pay for the $6 million cost of construction, a toll of 50 cents was charged, which lasted until 1946. The bridge was later renamed the Grace Memorial Bridge, for its champion supporter, John P. Grace. During the same week in 1929 that the Cooper River Bridge opened, the original privately-owned Charleston Airport was also officially opened.

In 1931, the Preservation Society and Mayor Stoney pushed a measure that set aside 23 blocks of the downtown area as "Old and Historic Charleston." This zoning ordinance became a model for historic districts across the country. In 1938, the use of streetcars was discontinued in Charleston. The streetcars became viewed as obsolete as buses became more popular.

The economy lagged, however, until the onset of World War II, which brought much-needed money into Charleston. The Navy enlarged its facilities, and the first Ports Authority in the nation was established to examine port commerce. In 1941, the state Highway Department took over responsibility for maintaining major arterials in the city, and funding continued to be provided by the federal government for paving projects. In 1942, the Charleston Municipal Airport was given to the U.S. Army and became Charleston Army Base, though commercial flying continued to operate. The population of the area boomed during the war, reaching 225,000 by 1944.

In 1960, Charleston was finally linked to the west by a major corridor when I-26 opened as part of the Interstate Highway system. The flow of traffic in the area was further improved by the opening of a new bridge over the Ashley River in 1961 and a second Cooper River Bridge in 1966. The State Ports Authority also continued to expand and improve the Port of Charleston, and in 1962 a lighthouse, the most powerful in the Western hemisphere at the time, was completed on Sullivan's Island.

The Charleston Naval Base on the north side of town expanded throughout the 1960s due to the influence of Congressman Mendel Rivers. The area attracted associated industries, and grew into a military-industrial complex that spurred the local economy. The growth of the Naval Base and the Port resulted in significant growth in the region through the 1960s. In 1972, the city of North Charleston was incorporated. Port activity increased and by 1971, Charleston became the top container ship port on the east coast.

The 1970s also saw a boom in tourism in Charleston. The forts had been refurbished, and old homes were being restored by the Historic Charleston Foundation. The Foundation also worked to restore and beautify commercial areas. By the mid-1970s, the city had 162 miles of streets, 160 of which were paved. The oceanside areas thrived, including Sullivan's Island, the Isle of Palms, Seabrook Island, and Kiawah Island. The Town of Mount Pleasant doubled in population in the 1970s and again in the 1980s, and Dorchester County nearly doubled in population in the 1970s also. In 1979, the Charleston Municipal Airport was placed under control of the newly-formed Charleston County Aviation Authority, and continued to operate under joint use by the U.S. Air Force.

Transportation in the Charleston region continued to improve in the 1980s and 1990s. Several new regional roadways, including I-526, the James Island Connector, and the Isle of Palms Connector, opened during this period. In addition, the Charleston Visitor Reception and Transportation Center, housed in a restored 1856 railroad freight station on Meeting Street, opened its doors in 1991.

The bus system was operated by the South Carolina Electric & Gas Company until 1995, when it was taken over by the City of Charleston. The Charleston Area Regional Transportation Authority (CARTA) was formed to run the transit system, and took over operations in 1999. Services provided by CARTA are integral to regional transportation system and will only expand the mobility and productivity of the region.

In 2005, the Arthur J. Ravenel Bridge, replacing the two bridges spanning the Cooper River (Grace and Pearman Bridges), was opened to traffic. The diamond-tower design have been named the John P. Grace Tower and the Silas N. Pearman Tower to remember the men and the bridges that served Charleston, which now serve as an iconic symbol representing the region. For years, there had been a need to replace the Cooper River Bridges, but this effort would not have been possible without partnerships to design and build the new bridge and especially the fund innovative partnerships to fund the project. This spirit of collaboration will allow our region to flourish into the next century, setting the standard for the delivering a vision and addressing the region's transportation needs.

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