

First Presbyterian Churchyard Ironworks: Historic Columbia

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About Historic Columbia

Historic Columbia was founded on November 14, 1961 with the goal of preserving historic properties and sites in Columbia and Richland County¹. Historic Columbia believes that understanding Columbia's history is important for the city's future. The organization works to raise awareness of Columbia's past through public outreach and education and by inspiring the community to become involved in local history.

Research

My first course of action was to gain a better understanding of what iron foundries were operating in Columbia from 1870-1900. The best source of information for businesses are the City Directories. The South Caroliniana Library at UofSC has Columbia City Directories from 1859 to 1927, though there are missing years throughout this period. The directories I used were from 1859, 1860, 1868, 1875-1876, 1879-1880, 1888, 1891, 1895, 1897-1898, and 1899. The directories contained advertisements for iron companies and information about which businesses were operating and who worked for them. There were even a handful of people who were listed as working for specific ironworks and foundries for years. The city directories helped me to narrow down which foundry likely created the decorative wrought iron at First Presbyterian.

The two main businesses operating during this time were Congaree Iron Works and Palmetto Iron Works. There were other iron foundries but these two had the most workers and advertisements². Congaree Iron Works was owned by John Alexander and located across the street from First Presbyterian. Palmetto Iron Works was owned by George A. Shields and located at present day Finley Park. Given its nearby location, it was mostly likely Congaree Iron Works that supplied the fencing for the church.

Photography Collection

In addition to searching for information about the foundry where the iron work at First Presbyterian might have been produced, I also documented the iron work through photography. There were fourteen different subjects I photographed. The white backing behind the photos was to allow for a more uniformed collection and for finer details to be distinguished easier. The ruler was added for a quantitative element. I created a Word document with a short caption of whose graves the fencing surrounded and the date the pictures were taken.

Experience Gained

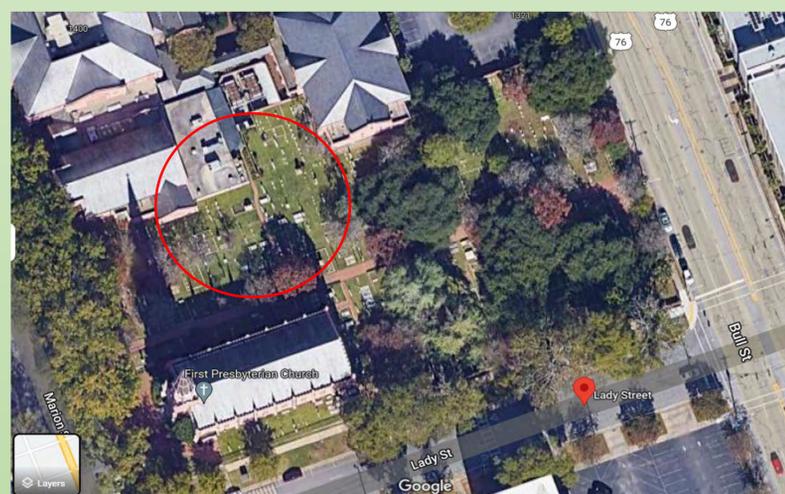
This internship was heavily focused on library research. While I have had multiple research opportunities in previous classes, none have involved this extent of primary-source research. I hit many dead ends, spending hours on documents that turned out to be useless. But in doing so, I learned how challenging it is to understand and to reconstruct the past. This internship gave me the opportunity to use resources at the South Caroliniana Library, an institution dedicated to the preservation of documents and the cultivation of research. Most of the documents I needed were available only in-person at the Granitville Room, so I was able to gain experiences in reaching out to the archivists working at the library and learned how helpful and knowledgeable they are.

Project Description

My project focused on documenting the use and history of ironwork around Columbia. My work was part of a larger project to track the evolution of wrought and cast iron as an architectural element in the historic city. Future research will be added to what I have compiled, and eventually the completed findings will be presented. I focused on gaining a general background of iron foundries in Columbia and on documenting ironwork in one location, the First Presbyterian Church graveyard. My specific plan was to find who made the iron fencing around the graves and memorials.

My next step was to comb through documents at South Caroliniana to find any records of bill statements, letters, wills or any other papers that would detail information pertaining to the commission of these iron fenceings at the graveyard. After spending hours searching through documents, I was unsuccessful, but I did manage to find a photograph taken in 1922 at the graveyard that depicts some of the iron fencing. This confirmed my initial assumption that the fencing had been added sometime in the late 19th or 20th century, if not earlier.

Many of the graves with decorative fencing belonged to family names that are present in Columbia today. These were the local elites who had the notoriety to have their names on buildings and streets. By the 19th century, many church graveyards were becoming overcrowded so only select few would have plots within church grounds³. The First Presbyterian Church graveyard is home to members within influential standings such as legislators, university presidents, and ministers⁴.



The red circle is around the First Presbyterian Churchyard. The red pin is the location of 121 Lady St, where the Congaree Iron Works address is listed in the city directories. Image taken from Google Maps.



Photo of First Presbyterian Church⁵.



Fence around the Howe family graves.



Entrance to the plot that belongs to the Moore family.



Fencing surrounding the graves of Elizabeth Ann, John Robeson, and Harriet Russel.

1. Sherrer, J. (2021, November 14). Historic Columbia: 60 Years in the Making [web log]. Retrieved May 2, 2022, from <https://www.historiccolumbia.org/blog/historic-columbia-60-years-making>.
2. Columbia, South Carolina City Directories, 1859-1927. digital images, *South Caroliniana Library*. Retrieved May 2, 2022, from <https://digital.library.sc.edu/collections/columbia-city-directories/>.
3. *South Carolina's Historic Cemeteries: A Preservation Handbook*, South Carolina Department of Archives and History, 1997 Rev. ed. 2007. retrieved May 2, 2022, from <https://libraryguides.vu.edu.au/jeereferencing/handbooksandmanuals>.
4. *Churchyard Information*. First Presbyterian Columbia. (n.d.). Retrieved May 2, 2022, from <https://www.firstprescolumbia.org/churchyard>
5. Blackburn, J. (2014). *Columbia, S.C.: Blackburn Album: First Presbyterian Church, 1324 Marion Street*. South Carolina University Archives. Retrieved May 4, 2022, from <https://digital.tcl.sc.edu/digital/collection/colph/id/76>.