

UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR  
NATIONAL PARK SERVICE

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RECEIVED	MAY 16 1977
DATE ENTERED	NOV 21 1977

# NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES INVENTORY -- NOMINATION FORM



SEE INSTRUCTIONS IN HOW TO COMPLETE NATIONAL REGISTER FORMS  
TYPE ALL ENTRIES -- COMPLETE APPLICABLE SECTIONS

## 1 NAME

HISTORIC

Governor William Aiken House, Robinson-Aiken House

AND/OR COMMON

## 2 LOCATION

STREET & NUMBER  
48 Elizabeth Street

\_\_NOT FOR PUBLICATION

CITY, TOWN  
Charleston

CONGRESSIONAL DISTRICT  
# 1

\_\_ VICINITY OF

STATE  
South Carolina

CODE  
045

COUNTY  
Charleston

CODE  
019

## 3 CLASSIFICATION

### CATEGORY

- DISTRICT
- BUILDING(S)
- STRUCTURE
- SITE
- OBJECT

### OWNERSHIP

- PUBLIC
- PRIVATE
- BOTH
- PUBLIC ACQUISITION**
- IN PROCESS
- BEING CONSIDERED

### STATUS

- OCCUPIED
- UNOCCUPIED
- WORK IN PROGRESS
- ACCESSIBLE**
- YES: RESTRICTED
- YES: UNRESTRICTED
- NO

### PRESENT USE

- AGRICULTURE
- COMMERICAL
- EDUCATIONAL
- ENTERTAINMENT
- GOVERNMENT
- INDUSTRIAL
- MILITARY
- MUSEUM
- PARK
- PRIVATE RESIDENCE
- RELIGIOUS
- SCIENTIFIC
- TRANSPORTATION
- OTHER:

## 4 OWNER OF PROPERTY

NAME  
The Charleston Museum

STREET & NUMBER  
121 Rutledge Avenue

CITY, TOWN  
Charleston

\_\_ VICINITY OF

STATE  
South Carolina

## 5 LOCATION OF LEGAL DESCRIPTION

COURTHOUSE,  
REGISTRY OF DEEDS, ETC.  
Charleston County Courthouse

STREET & NUMBER  
2 Courthouse Square

CITY, TOWN  
Charleston

STATE  
South Carolina

## 6 REPRESENTATION IN EXISTING SURVEYS

TITLE  
Historic American Buildings Survey

DATE  
1963

FEDERAL  STATE  COUNTY  LOCAL

DEPOSITORY FOR  
SURVEY RECORDS  
Library of Congress

CITY, TOWN  
Washington, D.C.

STATE

# 7 DESCRIPTION

## CONDITION

EXCELLENT  
 GOOD  
 FAIR

DETERIORATED  
 RUINS  
 UNEXPOSED

## CHECK ONE

UNALTERED  
 ALTERED

## CHECK ONE

ORIGINAL SITE  
 MOVED DATE \_\_\_\_\_

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### DESCRIBE THE PRESENT AND ORIGINAL (IF KNOWN) PHYSICAL APPEARANCE

The main portion of the Governor William Aiken House was erected ca. 1820. It is three stories high and is constructed of stucco over brick. Quoins decorate the corners, while the basement level has been inscribed to resemble stone. The entrance facade was originally designated on that which is now the south (right side) facade. It features a Doric double piazza of two-stories with a pediment at the attic level. A semicircular fanlight graces the pediment while elaborate consoles with acanthus leaves accentuate either end (these being added during the 1833 remodeling). The tin roof is hipped and the restrained cornice features modillions.

Ca. 1833, after William Aiken, Jr. acquired the property, the structure was extensively altered. The entrance was moved to the west facade (which was originally a side facade). This portal features a Gibbs surround executed in marble. The door itself is mahogany with an oval glass opening. Sidelights and a semicircular fanlight feature decorative iron grillwork. During the remodeling, windows on the first floor were replaced by tripartite windows, measuring 8' x 10'. A three-story wing also was added to the northeast corner, housing a dining room on the first floor, and a three-story stairwell was constructed in-between the addition and the original portion of the structure. The piazzas were extended another bay to include this wing.

In 1857-58 Aiken added another wing. Located on the northwest corner, this one-story wing was designed as an art gallery.

On the first floor and basement level, the 6/6 windows (which also feature sidelights on the main floor) have solid panel shutters, while those on the second and third stories have louvered shutters.

Ca. 1950 a kitchen constructed of cement blocks was added to the rear.

Interior: The structure originally had four rooms separated by a central hall on all three floors. This plan has been altered, however, by the additions and alterations made by William Aiken.

On the first story, a monumental entrance hall features a vaulted ceiling and staircase of white marble. Two fluted marble columns of the Greek Doric order support the first floor landing, while the railings are embellished with heavy cast iron decorative panels.

Double drawing rooms extend the entire length of the south facade. These rooms exhibit many noteworthy features: mahogany sliding doors (which separate the rooms), decorative cornices, plaster ceiling medallions, matching black marble mantelpieces and crystal chandeliers, and much of the ca. 1833 wallpaper. Located to the rear of these rooms is the main staircase which extends to all three floors. Although not the original staircase, it is located in the rear portion of the original central hallway.

Also located on the first floor (the northeast corner) is the 30' long dining room which was added during the remodeling of 1833. The mantel, woodwork and trim are identical to those in the drawing rooms. The ceiling features a central plaster medallion.

(continued)

# 8 SIGNIFICANCE

PERIOD	AREAS OF SIGNIFICANCE -- CHECK AND JUSTIFY BELOW			
<input type="checkbox"/> PREHISTORIC	<input type="checkbox"/> ARCHEOLOGY-PREHISTORIC	<input type="checkbox"/> COMMUNITY PLANNING	<input type="checkbox"/> LANDSCAPE ARCHITECTURE	<input type="checkbox"/> RELIGION
<input type="checkbox"/> 1400-1499	<input type="checkbox"/> ARCHEOLOGY-HISTORIC	<input type="checkbox"/> CONSERVATION	<input type="checkbox"/> LAW	<input type="checkbox"/> SCIENCE
<input type="checkbox"/> 1500-1599	<input type="checkbox"/> AGRICULTURE	<input type="checkbox"/> ECONOMICS	<input type="checkbox"/> LITERATURE	<input type="checkbox"/> SCULPTURE
<input type="checkbox"/> 1600-1699	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> ARCHITECTURE	<input type="checkbox"/> EDUCATION	<input type="checkbox"/> MILITARY	<input type="checkbox"/> SOCIAL/HUMANITARIAN
<input type="checkbox"/> 1700-1799	<input type="checkbox"/> ART	<input type="checkbox"/> ENGINEERING	<input type="checkbox"/> MUSIC	<input type="checkbox"/> THEATER
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> 1800-1899	<input type="checkbox"/> COMMERCE	<input type="checkbox"/> EXPLORATION/SETTLEMENT	<input type="checkbox"/> PHILOSOPHY	<input type="checkbox"/> TRANSPORTATION
<input type="checkbox"/> 1900-	<input type="checkbox"/> COMMUNICATIONS	<input type="checkbox"/> INDUSTRY	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> POLITICS/GOVERNMENT	<input type="checkbox"/> OTHER (SPECIFY)
		<input type="checkbox"/> INVENTION		

SPECIFIC DATES

BUILDER/ARCHITECT

## STATEMENT OF SIGNIFICANCE

The Governor William Aiken House is significant both in terms of its architecture and its history. Architecturally, it chronicles various changes in design which occurred during the first half of the 19th Century. Historically, it deserves recognition as having been owned by both William Aiken, Senior and Junior--two leading South Carolinians.

The structure was built ca. 1820 by John Robinson, a merchant. In 1825, Robinson advertised that the mansion was for sale, and in 1827 William Aiken, Sr., acquired it. Aiken was president of the South Carolina Canal and Railroad Company and was a member of the South Carolina House of Representatives from 1824 until his death in 1831.

After his father's death, William Aiken, Junior, (1806-1887) acquired the property. A rice planter, Aiken served in the South Carolina House of Representatives (1838-1841), as well as in the South Carolina Senate (1842-1844). From 1844 to 1846 he served as Governor of the State of South Carolina, and he later served three terms in the United States House of Representatives (1851-1857).

Aiken was one of the original trustees of Peabody Educational Fund and was also an art collector. (In 1858 he added a wing to his house to display his collection, much of which is still intact and will be returned to the house once it is restored.)

Aiken died in 1887. The house remained in the possession of his descendants until the 1970s. It is now owned by the Charleston Museum which plans to restore it as part of the museum complex.

Architecture: The Aiken House exemplifies the changes which occurred in architectural design during the first half of the 19th Century. The upper floors reflect the refined qualities (in both woodwork and proportion) of the late Federal period. The main floor exemplifies the height of Greek Revival design, while the art gallery (added in 1858) indicates the movement into the Victorian period. According to An Architectural Guide to Charleston by Albert Simons and W. H. Johnson Thomas, the Aiken House was "the most imposing residence of its period."<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup>Albert Simons and W. H. Johnson Thomas, An Architectural Guide to Charleston, South Carolina. Comp. Historical Charleston Foundation, p. 96.

# 9 MAJOR BIBLIOGRAPHICAL REFERENCES

Edgar, Walter, ed. Biographical Directory of the South Carolina House of Representatives, Vol. I. Columbia: University of South Carolina Press, 1974, pp. 312, 316, 320, 324, 340, 344.

Johnson, Allen, ed. Dictionary of American Biography, Vol. I. New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1928, pp. 128-129.

(continued)

# 10 GEOGRAPHICAL DATA

ACREAGE OF NOMINATED PROPERTY less than one acre

UTM REFERENCES

A	1,7	5,9,9,7,2,0	3,6,2,8,4,6,0	B			
	ZONE	EASTING	NORTHING		ZONE	EASTING	NORTHING
C				D			

VERBAL BOUNDARY DESCRIPTION

Fronting on Judith Street (south line); Siding on Elizabeth Street (west line); Backing on Mary Street (north line); Property line (east line)

LIST ALL STATES AND COUNTIES FOR PROPERTIES OVERLAPPING STATE OR COUNTY BOUNDARIES

STATE	CODE	COUNTY	CODE

# 11 FORM PREPARED BY

Ken Jones, Curator of Decorative Arts,  
The Charleston Museum

NAME / TITLE

Kappy McNulty

ORGANIZATION

S. C. Department of Archives and History

STREET & NUMBER

P. O. Box 11,669 Capitol Station

CITY OR TOWN

Columbia

DATE

March 15, 1977

TELEPHONE

803-758-5816

STATE

South Carolina

# 12 STATE HISTORIC PRESERVATION OFFICER CERTIFICATION

THE EVALUATED SIGNIFICANCE OF THIS PROPERTY WITHIN THE STATE IS:

NATIONAL

STATE

LOCAL

As the designated State Historic Preservation Officer for the National Historic Preservation Act of 1966 (Public Law 89-665), I hereby nominate this property for inclusion in the National Register and certify that it has been evaluated according to the criteria and procedures set forth by the National Park Service.

STATE HISTORIC PRESERVATION OFFICER SIGNATURE

*Charles E. Lee*

TITLE

Charles E. Lee  
State Historic Preservation Officer

DATE

4/12/77

FOR NPS USE ONLY

I HEREBY CERTIFY THAT THIS PROPERTY IS INCLUDED IN THE NATIONAL REGISTER

*Robert B. Rettig*

DATE

11/21/77

ATTEST

*Charles E. Lee*

CLERK OF THE NATIONAL REGISTER

DATE

11/18/77

KEEPER OF THE NATIONAL REGISTER

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CONTINUATION SHEET

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On the other side of the house, on the northwest, is the one-story wing which was added in 1858. Designed as an art gallery, this room features an extremely ornate plaster cornice with raised fruit and leaf motifs. Also notable is a four-sided raised skylight.

The second story remains basically as constructed. Throughout this floor there is paneled wainscoting, plaster cornices and paneled doors -- all of which are typical of the period (ca. 1820). The northeast addition on this floor contains a large room with ornate decorations.

The details on the third floor are simple in comparison with those of the rest of the house.

Surroundings: Included within the nominated acreage are several outbuildings. The kitchen is a large building, having been doubled in size by Aiken. It contains three kitchens, workrooms, and servants' quarters on the second story. Located on the north side facade are two Gothic arched windows. The stable building, which is directly across the courtyard from the kitchen also has Gothic arches and is a two-story building. Located between these buildings, extending from the rear of the main house, is a brick courtyard which is laid in a herringbone pattern.

Also included within the yard are two Gothic-style brick privies and two shed structures.

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CONTINUATION SHEET

ITEM NUMBER 9 PAGE two

Ravenel, Beatrice St. Julian. Architects of Charleston. Charleston: Carolina Art Association, 1964, p. 115.

Reynolds, Emily B., and Joan R. Faunt. Biographical Directory of the Senate of the State of South Carolina, 1776-1964. Columbia: South Carolina Archives Department, 1964, p. 170.

Simons, Albert, and W. H. Johnson Thomas. An Architectural Guide to Charleston, South Carolina. Comp. Historic Charleston Foundation, p. 96.

Charleston Courier, September 21, 1825, p. 3, col. 4.

Charleston Mercury, March 7, 1831, p. 2, col. 2.

Charleston News & Courier, September 8, 1887, p. 4.

Charleston News & Courier, August 31, 1931, p. 10, col. 3.

Charleston News & Courier, September 18, 1967, p. 1-B.

Charleston Deeds, V-8, p. 394; V-9, p. 41; F-10, p. 161.

**United States Department of the Interior  
National Park Service**

**National Register of Historic Places  
Continuation Sheet**

Section number \_\_\_\_\_ Page \_\_\_\_\_ Aiken, Gov. William, House Charleston Co., SC

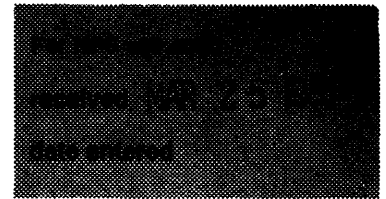
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ADDITIONAL INFORMATION

5/1/87 Date/Signature  
Keeper John J. Knowl  
Attest \_\_\_\_\_

**United States Department of the Interior  
National Park Service**

**National Register of Historic Places  
Inventory—Nomination Form**



Continuation sheet 1

Item number 8

Page 2

Historical Archaeology

The Governor William Aiken House (now known as the Aiken-Rhett House), located at 48 Elizabeth Street in downtown Charleston, South Carolina, was listed in the National Register of Historic Places on November 21, 1977, based upon the historical and architectural significance of the property. The following addendum to the National Register of Historic Places nomination evaluates the archaeological potential of the Aiken-Rhett House and establishes the significance of the property in the area of historical archaeology.

The property is part of the historic suburb of Wraggsboro, and is bounded by Judith Street to the south, Elizabeth Street to the west, Mary Street to the north, and other dwellings to the east. The present property lines are the original boundaries, described in the Aiken-Rhett House nomination. The property was first built upon in 1817, and its buildings were enlarged in the 1830s and again in the 1850s. All except one of the known buildings and their additions are extant. These include the main house, kitchen, stables, two privies, and a chicken coop. A cow shed identical to the chicken coop was destroyed in the 1886 earthquake, but its former location is evident. The entire site is surrounded by a brick wall, and the rear yard from the back door to the rear edge of the kitchen and stable buildings is paved as a brick courtyard (see Figure 1). An avenue of magnolias leads from the edge of this courtyard to the gate located in the center of the rear wall; approximately half of these magnolia trees are still standing.

Archaeological testing was conducted in October 1985 in the rear yard between the paved brick courtyard and the back wall. Three five by five foot units and three five by ten foot units were dispersed throughout this area (Figure 1). Excavation of 225 square feet revealed three temporally stratified zone deposits and twelve discrete features.

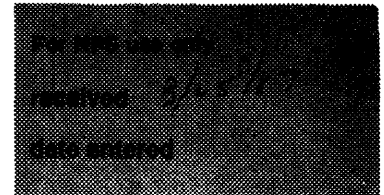
Zone 1 was a dark brown sandy soil, averaging .4 feet in depth. Zone 2 consisted of medium brown, grey, and yellow mottled soil, flecked with charcoal and mortar. This zone varied in depth, with a maximum depth of .8 feet along the eastern side of the site, and .3 feet along the western side. Zone 3 was present only along the eastern side of the site and was .2 feet deep. This zone consisted of mottled tan and yellow sand.

Dates of deposition for these zones were derived from the stratigraphic point of initiation, Terminus Post Quem (the initial manufacture date of the latest dating item in the provenience), and relative proportions of datable materials contained within the deposit. These data were augmented with similar data from the features encountered. Based on this information, it appears that Zone 1 was deposited in the twentieth century, Zone 2 was deposited ca. 1830 to 1860, and Zone 3 ca. 1820-1830. Depth of these zone deposits as well as artifact density varies across the site, with the deepest



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and densest deposits occurring in the southeast corner, behind the kitchen building. The five by 10 foot unit excavated in this vicinity, N95E145, contained six of the twelve features encountered.

Of the features encountered, the most impressive was a network of brick lined drains. The drain is 1.3 feet wide on the interior. The base of the drains consists of two courses of bricks laid end to end, while the sides consist of single bricks laid end to end, two bricks high. The feature is covered by a "cap" of large, irregularly shaped slate paving stones, which are mortared to the top of the bricks. The drain runs northwest/southeast in the southeast corner of the yard (through unit N95E145), and then turns and runs parallel to the east wall property line (through unit N108E138). Augering revealed that the drain continued parallel to the east wall to the vicinity of the rear wall. The drain itself was filled with a loamy black soil and quantities of artifacts. These materials suggest that the drain was abandoned ca. 1880 to 1900. Artifacts contained in a builder's trench suggest it was constructed ca. 1840. Connected to this drain line are auxiliary lines, a small stucco-lined basin, and a vault at the rear of the kitchen building, which is interpreted as a slave privy.(Figure 2).

Other features encountered in the excavation include two builder's trenches; one to the cow shed and the second of presently unknown function. Another feature was also associated with construction. This is a large pit filled with brick and slate rubble. Other features include a paved brick driveway dating to the twentieth century and small trash-filled pits. All features contained datable material; it appears that these features were deposited ca. 1820 to 1900.

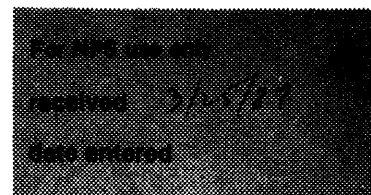
The archaeological testing resulted in the recovery of 4570 cultural artifacts, plus floral and faunal samples suitable for analysis and interpretation. From their excavations at the Charleston Convention Center site, Honerkamp et al. (1982) calculated a measure of occupation density. This is expressed as artifact and feature frequency per square foot of excavated area. The Charleston Center site produced .4 features, 74.9 grams of bone, and 35.4 artifacts per square meter of excavated area. In contrast, the Aiken-Rhett site produced .56 features, 106.2 grams of bone, and 184.2 artifacts per square yard. These figures suggest a relatively dense site.

In summary, the artifact density, temporal stratification, and presence of discrete feature deposits suggest that the site is an adequate data base for sound scientific research.

Urban archaeological sites, while often deep and highly complex, may also be badly disturbed, and even nonexistent, as a result of twentieth century land altering activities. Continued examination of urban sites, however, suggests that such disorganization and the resulting lack of closed contexts may in fact be characteristic of urban sites, and may serve as an index of

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the intensity of occupation (Honerkamp and Fairbanks 1984). Honerkamp and Fairbanks (1984) suggest that controlled excavation and analysis of even recently disturbed contexts can provide meaningful urban site data. These researchers suggest that the archaeologists must develop new methods appropriate to the conditions of the urban archaeological record, including more sophisticated field and analytical methods as well as more innovative use of the documentary record (Figure 3).

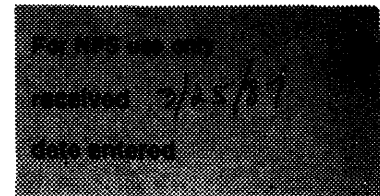
It is with these factors in mind that the Aiken-Rhett site assumes much of its significance. Previous archaeological investigations at seven urban Charleston sites were only partially successful in associating specific archaeological proveniences with specific site occupants; all of these sites were combination business-residences. Other factors affecting this research were changing property lines, rental of the properties, incomplete knowledge of trash disposal practices, etc. (Zierden and Calhoun 1986). What we see operating at these sites is an averaging of human behavior. While such data are important in understanding broad generalities of urban life, they are not suitable for baseline studies used to derive testable models for issues such as status and consumer choices, for example.

Most of these variables are not operating at the Aiken-Rhett site. The Aiken-Rhett property represents a domestic-only site within a suburban area. Six of the original seven known buildings are still standing; the site experienced only three building phases and no rebuilding. This suggests that the site did not experience the major reorganization that often characterizes sites within the core of the city. The site exhibits the original boundaries and has been enclosed by a high brick wall. This significantly lowers the chances of refuse from other sites being discarded there, although it does not affect the possibility of refuse being discarded off site. Finally, the site was owned and occupied by a wealthy household for which there is extensive documentation. Therefore, the Aiken-Rhett site is an excellent data base for establishing baseline urban models.

In 1981, the City commissioned The Charleston Museum to conduct a survey of the city, and to prepare the Archaeological Preservation Plan for Charleston (Zierden and Calhoun 1984) to guide future investigations. This document outlined long term research goals, which have been used to unite subsequent excavation projects in a comparative framework. The Aiken-Rhett site is a significant data base for urban studies because of the extensive documentary base and the reduction of site variables. Issues addressed in the initial Aiken-Rhett investigations include site function, site formation processes, spatial patterning, socioeconomic status, subsistence strategies, and corporate responses to urban environmental demands. The study suggested that the Aiken family's high socioeconomic status is reflected in the archaeological record, in both the cultural and biological remains. This is the first time such correlations have been recorded in Charleston. The testing also provided preliminary data on site formation processes and spatial patterning in

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suburban areas, complementing similar studies within the commercial core. Finally, the investigation facilitated initial studies of the replacement of individual adaptive behaviors with corporate systems, through an examination of the drainage system. This study is an important aspect of the ongoing investigation of adaptation to the urban environment (Zierden and Calhoun 1986).

Because of the large quantity of available documentary information for the site, and the relatively clear aspects of site function, the Aiken-Rhett site is an important data base for future comparative studies. The presence of a coherent archaeological resource, reflected in discrete features, temporally distinct zones, and significant quantities of cultural, faunal, and floral materials, demonstrates that the site is a significant resource for local and regional studies.

References Cited

Honerkamp, Nicholas and Charles Fairbanks

1984 Definition of Site Formation Processes in Urban Contexts.  
American Archaeology 4(1):60-66.

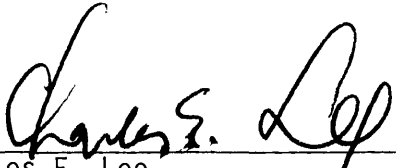
Honerkamp, Nicholas, R. Bruce Council and M. Elizabeth Will

1982 An Archaeological Investigation of the Charleston Convention Center Site, Charleston, South Carolina. Ms. on file, U.S. Department of the Interior, National Park Service, Atlanta.

Zierden, Martha and Jeanne Calhoun

1984 An Archaeological Preservation Plan for Charleston. The Charleston Museum Archaeological Contributions 8, Charleston.

1986 Urban Adaptation in Charleston, 1730-1820. Historical Archaeology 20(1):29-41.

  
\_\_\_\_\_  
Charles E. Lee  
State Historic Preservation Officer

3/12/87  
Date

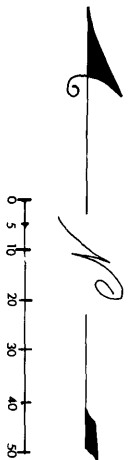
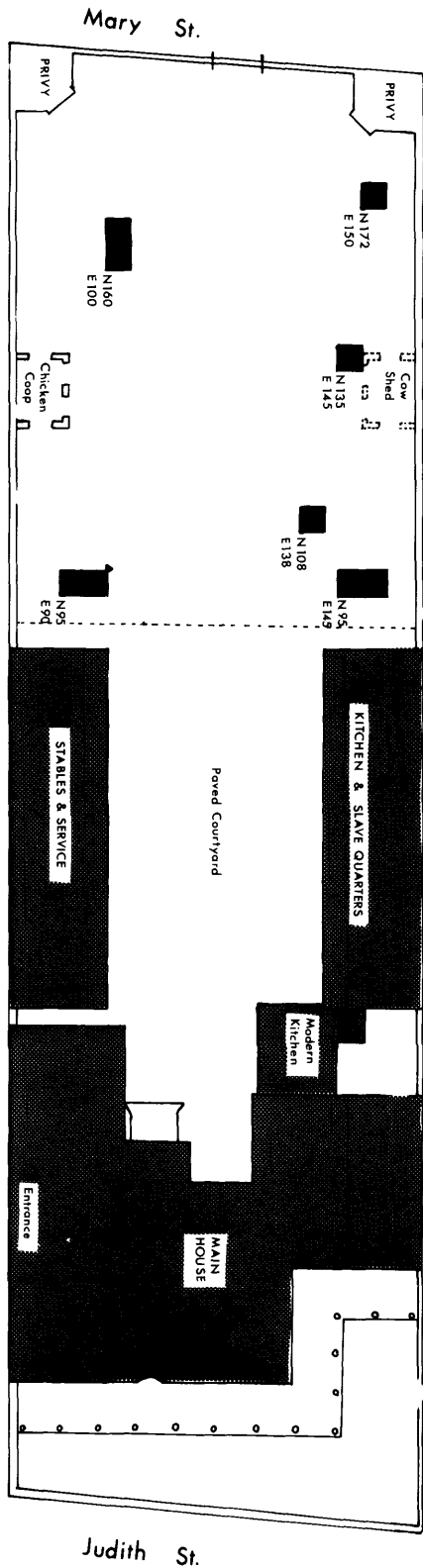


Figure 1

Map of the Aiken-Rhett site.  
shaded areas indicate standing  
structures.

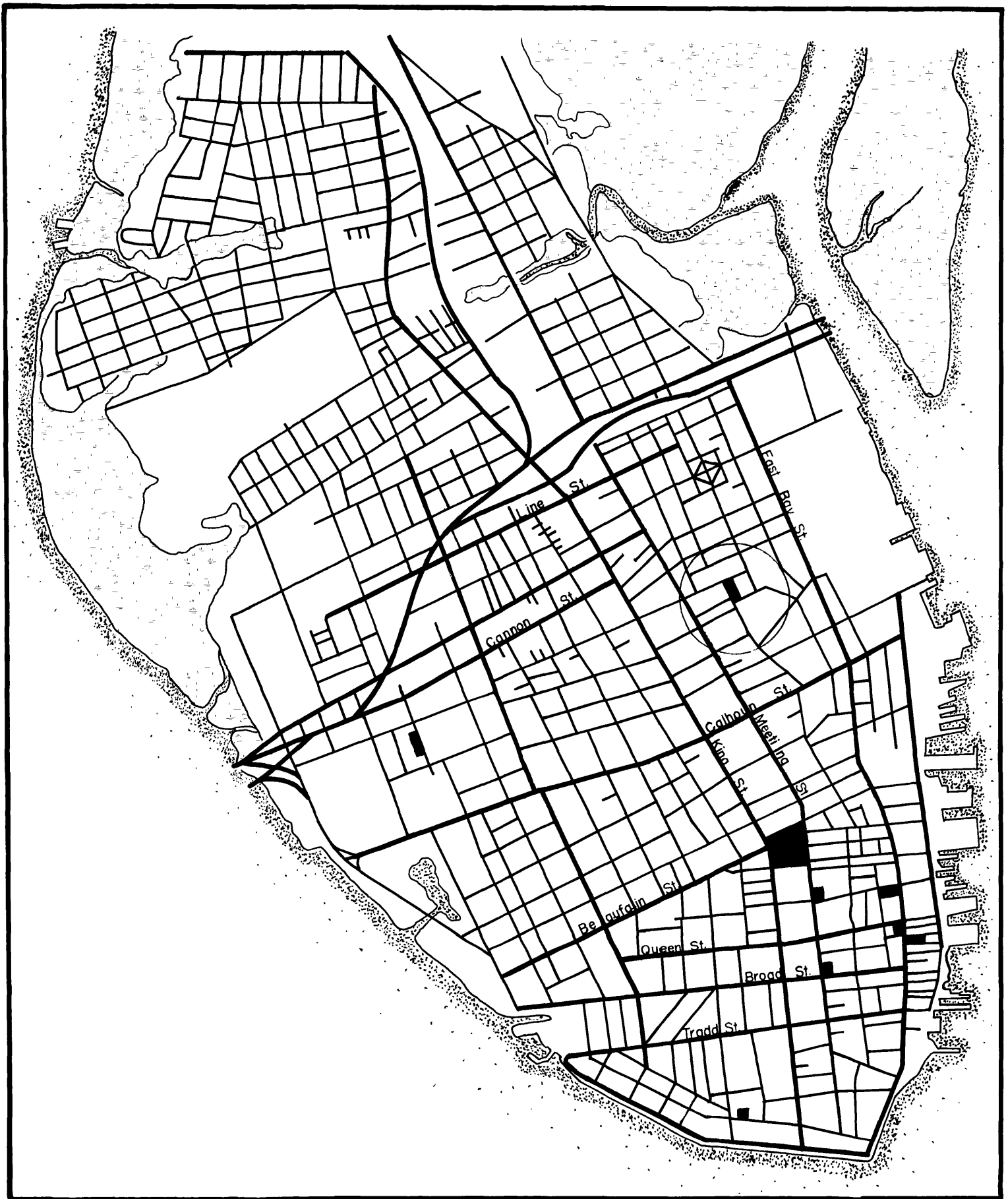


Figure 2

Location of sites excavated in  
Charleston; Aiken-Rhett is circled