Old Petersburg and the Broad River Valley of Georgia

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Rivers, Roads, Bridges, and Ferries

THE UPPER SAVANNAH

PETERSBURG was situated in the fork of the Savannah and Broad rivers for the purpose of taking advantage of the navigation these rivers afforded; they were the life lines of Petersburg until land transportation was developed. From Petersburg southward the Savannah was free of major obstructions to Augusta, where there were difficult rapids on the Fall Line which separated the Piedmont Region from the Coastal Plain. Below Augusta the river was easily navigable (as river navigation went in those days) to Savannah and on to the Atlantic Ocean.

Above Petersburg the Savannah could be used by flat-bottomed boats carrying as much as ten tons, up as far as the confluence of the Tugaloo and Seneca-Keowee, which formed the Savannah. The enthusiastic Georgians considered the Tugaloo navigable as far up as Toccoa Creek. However, only a few miles above Petersburg a series of rapids began and were repeated many times on up the river. It took skillful handling of boats to prevent disaster. From Petersburg up the Broad River boats could ply thirty or forty miles as far as the Goose Pond region and even farther except in time of low water. Navigation on Georgia rivers was never impeded by ice except in the most unusually cold winters, as for instance in 1780, when the Savannah above Augusta froze over thick enough to hold up the weight of a man.

Unimpeded navigation could not be taken for granted; these streams required frequent attention, and the State of Georgia from the very early times carried out a program of improvement on its principal rivers by removing snags, driftwood, and sandbars. The Savannah afforded a troublesome problem beyond river improvements. Because it was the boundary with South Carolina
there was contention about which state owned the river. Though the Charter setting up the Colony of Georgia was not clear on this point, the State early laid claim to the whole river. The Treaty of Beaufort between the two states in 1787 seemed to imply that the river belonged to Georgia. With the confusion of its ownership never to be settled throughout the whole of the nineteenth century, the co-operation of South Carolina was never successfully obtained. In 1922 by edict of the United States Supreme Court the boundary was made the middle of the river.

The first move Georgia made to improve the upper Savannah was in 1786, when the legislature passed a bill to promote navigation on the river from Rae’s Creek, just above Augusta, to the mouth of Tugaloo River and up that river to Tugaloo Old Town, a point near where Toccoa Creek flowed into the Tugaloo. In the introductory part of the law it was recited that “nothing contributes more to the Advantage of the Citizens, or to the opulence of the State, than making easy, and extending the Navigation of Rivers” and that as “Policy and Justice” dictated that the expense should “be paid by such persons as will immediately be most advantaged thereby,” a system was, therefore, being enacted to provide for the expenses. This whole stretch of the river was divided into five districts: First, from Rae’s Creek to Little River; second, from Little River to Soap Creek; third, from Soap Creek to the “Mouth of Broad River [Petersburg]”; fourth, from Broad River to Lightwood Log Creek [about 40 miles farther up]; and fifth, from Lightwood Log Creek to Tugaloo Old Town. People owning land along the river were required to pay five shillings for every hundred acres of land “of the first quality,” and two and a half shillings for other lands, all of which lay within five miles of the river in the First District, ten miles in the Second District, and within fifteen miles for the rest of the distance up the river. As Broad River was the only navigable tributary in this stretch of the Savannah, the improvements were to extend up that river for fifteen miles. Since enthusiasm for this work had already led both Georgians and South Carolinians to subscribe “large donations,” this money was to be added to the assessments on the lands adjoining the river. Five commissioners were named, one of whom was Holman Freeman (II), to supervise the work, and to hire “Artificers, or Persons skilled in clearing Rivers,” who should be in direct charge. The plan was to clear the river, place a lock at the lower rapids at Augusta, and charge a toll of five shillings per
hogshead against all South Carolinans who had not subscribed to the expenses of clearing the river. This law was unwise and oppressive because it levied a tax on many people who made no use of the river and it did not touch many others who lived away from the river and did use it. The next year the legislature repealed that part of the law levying the tax, but made no other provision for raising money, which was, of course, equivalent to repealing the whole law. But people up the river were anxious to have the navigation improved, and one of the presentments of the Wilkes County grand jury in the summer of 1790 (no doubt actuated by the Petersburgers, who were still in Wilkes County, since Elbert County had not yet been cut off) was a complaint against not having better navigation between Petersburg and Augusta. South Carolinians were also dissatisfied and led their legislature in 1791 to pass a law, which came to nothing, to improve the navigation on the Savannah, and in 1795 the legislature passed another law establishing a lottery to raise money to be used to “clear out and remove the obstructions” from Vienna down to Augusta.

A lottery! Here was an idea for raising money which the Georgians must have got from South Carolina. Impelled, no doubt, by the Petersburgers and Broad River Valley settlers up the river, the legislature declared the next year (1796) that the improvement of navigation would greatly increase the value of land lying along the Savannah and Broad rivers and provided for a lottery to raise $4,000 to be used on the Savannah from Augusta to Lightwood Log Creek and from Petersburg up the Broad to its South Fork (about fifty miles). The managers of the lottery were made up of five citizens, three from Petersburg and two from up Broad Valley—Benjamin Taliaferro, William Barnett, Oliver Whyte, Robert Watkins, and Memorable Walker. The commissioners to superintend “opening and clearing” the rivers were from the same region as were the lottery managers—six of them among whom were Robert Thompson from Petersburg and Thomas Gilmer up Broad River and father of the future governor George R. Gilmer. Like all previous attempts of both Georgia and South Carolina to improve navigation on the Savannah, nothing came of this legislation.

In 1799 Georgia tacked her sails in another direction. Taxing land along rivers had failed; a lottery had failed; now the state would try incorporating a company to carry on the work. Since
“the improvement of the inland navigation of every country is of primary importance to its inhabitants, and few countries enjoying greater natural advantages than this state for the extension of commerce, and it being conceived that the clearing out and removing the obstructions in that part of Savannah River, between the town of Petersburg and the city of Augusta, would greatly conduce to the convenience and interest of the inhabitants settled in the north and northwestern part of this state,” therefore, the legislature hereby established a company to be known as the Savannah Navigation Company with a capital of $40,000, which was to be divided into 400 shares at $100 each and offered to the public at Petersburg. This was almost entirely a Petersburg undertaking, with those in charge consisting of the following Petersburgers: LeRoy Pope, Robert Thompson, Memorable Walker, Robert Watkins, and John Oliver. Three others closely associated with Petersburg were Robert Ware, Newell Walton, Jr., and James Hugh.

Whenever the company should have improved the river sufficiently for boats to be able to carry fifteen hogsheads of tobacco, it might charge the following tolls: 37½ cents per hogshead of tobacco, 10 cents per 1,000 feet of lumber, 4 cents per barrel of flour, and 2 cents per 100 pounds for all other articles of commerce. The company never developed beyond the paper setting it up. Besides the failure of this company, there soon arose problems other than snags, sandbars, and rapids which were provided by nature. There were also dams and fish traps, which interfered with navigation as well as with the free passage of fish up stream. Now the question was, which was more important fish or boats. Devising a plan to deal with the situation, the legislature held an even hand over both as expressed in the preamble of a law passed in 1802: “Whereas the keeping open of the River Savannah, is of the greatest importance to the citizens of the back country, as well in consequence of navigation, as the advantages resulting to the citizens generally, by having an annual supply of fish therefrom, And whereas, many persons on the said river, have so obstructed the passage of boats by dams, as to render it highly injurious to commerce, and almost totally prevented the fish from getting up the same. . . .” Petersburgers were more interested in commerce up and down the Savannah than in fishing, and were, undoubtedly, largely responsible for the legislation here enacted. Applying to the upper stretches of the Savannah from Augusta and far on up the Tugaloo, the law forbade anyone to stop up
or obstruct the water for more than two thirds of the distance across, and the third left open must include “the main sluice.” Experience during the next seven years indicated that some changes should be made. Leaving open just a third of the Savannah River was not considered sufficient for the passage of boats, and so in a law passed in 1809 it was forbidden to anyone “to obstruct, or cause to be obstructed, more than one third part of Savannah river, by dams, fish traps, or other obstructions, and the main current shall at all times be kept open for the free passage of fish and boats.” The uppermost stretches of the Savannah, called the Tugaloo above the point where it was joined by the Keowee, was considered so precarious for navigation that the old law allowing two thirds of the stream to be obstructed was continued.

Some of the fishermen along the upper Savannah above Augusta paid little attention to this legislation; and complaints came in from both boatmen and those fishermen who lived above some of the most effectual obstructions which prevented the passage of fish up to their part of the river. As the commissioners who had been appointed to enforce the 1809 law failed to carry out their inspection of the river, the legislature in 1812 passed further legislation designating a new set of commissioners to view the river and if they found any obstructions forbidden by law they were required to notify the owners of such traps or dams to remove them within two days. If they refused, then the commissioners were empowered to call out the militia, and if the militiamen refused to respond, then the commissioners were required to remove the obstructions and to enter prosecutions against the offenders, who were subject to a fine of $100 a day for every day they had allowed the obstruction to remain.

Still the Savannah did not flow to the sea unvexed by dams and fish traps; as a remedy, the legislature in 1816 appointed a new group of commissioners, who no longer had authority to call out the militia, but on the refusal of the owners of fish traps and dams to remove them, the commissioners were then required to do so and charge the cost to the offenders. But now the legislature retreated from forbidding the obstruction of two thirds of the river, to its original position of one third for all obstructions set up after February 15, 1817. For violating this section of the law, offenders were subject to a fine of $30 a day, one half to go to the informer and the other half to the commissioners to be used in the performance of their duties.
The battle between the boatmen and the fishermen now simmered down on the Savannah as the day of navigation by steamboats dawned. In 1788 Georgia had granted a patent to William Longstreet on a steam engine, which two years later he attached to a boat at Augusta and forced it up the river at the rate of five miles an hour; but it remained for Robert Fulton to gain fame as the inventor of the steamboat when in 1808 he ran the Clermont by steam up the Hudson River in New York. Soon Fulton joined a company which got a monopoly of running steamboats on all the rivers of New York. In Georgia the legislature in 1814 gave Samuel Howard such a monopoly on all the rivers of Georgia, reciting that Howard proposed “to adopt a new and improved mode of transporting merchandise upon the waters of the state of Georgia, by towing and warping the ships, vessels, boats and rafts, in and upon which the same may be laden, by means of other boats or vessels impelled by the aid of steam.”[14] Two years later the Enterprise steamed up the Savannah from Savannah to Augusta, towing a boat laden with 3,000 bushels of salt.[15] A new era in navigation now began on the lower Savannah, but Petersburg was only indirectly affected, for no steamboat could ascend the rapids at Augusta and continue on to Petersburg. However, Petersburg and all upper Georgia and South Carolina profited in having quicker transportation to the sea for their commerce.

To provide needed capital Howard got a charter three years later for the Steam Boat Company of Georgia[16] but after a few years the company went bankrupt. In 1824 the United States Supreme Court freed all navigable waters throughout the country from steamboat monopolies.

Up until 1815 Georgia had assumed no costs of improving navigation on her rivers; she merely empowered private individuals through lotteries and stock companies to act. As was painfully evident, the results had been nothing. But “many years past” South Carolina had appropriated $10,000 for improving navigation on the Savannah when Georgia should provide a like amount; but Georgia had never acted. Now the legislature in December, 1815 appropriated rather tardily its $10,000, making its use contingent on whether the South Carolina appropriation still held. The law named five commissioners to act with any whom South Carolina might appoint to supervise the work. They were empowered “to employ a general superintendent or undertaker of said work.” The money was to be expended beginning at
Augusta and to continue up the river as far as the appropriation would permit. The state still hoping for private donations, the commissioners were authorized to receive subscriptions at such places as they thought expedient.\textsuperscript{17}

The commissioners met in Augusta in June of the following year and arranged to hire laborers to work on the river, two thirds between Augusta and Petersburg and the other third north of Petersburg. The commissioners divided themselves into two committees, one group to meet in Augusta the next month, and the others to hold a conference in Petersburg in October.\textsuperscript{18}

Over the years of futility and failure Georgia, always impressed with the importance of river navigation for the prosperity of the state, evolved in 1817 a general state policy calling for state appropriations for improving the navigation on all of its navigable rivers, and setting up an internal improvement fund of $250,000 to be invested in bank stocks “or other profitable stock.” The governor was authorized “to appoint some person of known talents and practical knowledge” to examine the rivers of the state and to report on “the practicability of improving the navigation on said rivers, . . . the expense thereof, and the best mode by which the object can be effected.” In addition to appropriating various sums for the principal rivers, the act provided $20,000 (the largest amount for any river) to be used on the Savannah from Augusta on up to the Tugaloo and up that stream to Panther Creek, a few miles above Toccoa Creek. But the troublesome point of the Savannah and Tugaloo being the boundary with South Carolina was ever present, and it was provided in this act that the appropriation was contingent on South Carolina making a like appropriation.\textsuperscript{19}

In the meantime the commissioners, who had been designated in the act of 1815 appropriating $10,000, continued their activities, even though South Carolina had not matched the amount. But a Major Wilson, who was the chief engineer of South Carolina, promised to make an exploration of the river a part of the way up to Petersburg immediately, and as time permitted to continue it. The commissioners, meeting in Augusta, in May, 1818, now designated a part of them to accompany Major Wilson up to Petersburg, and another part to continue with him on beyond Petersburg. The commissioners decided to meet the following month in Petersburg.\textsuperscript{20}

But as so often happened in Georgia’s efforts to improve her rivers, nothing came of all this activity, and on December 18,
1818 the state, abandoning all hope in securing the co-operation of South Carolina, repealed the part of the law requiring it and confirmed the appropriation of the $20,000. The next day the legislature removed the condition attached to the appropriation of the $10,000 in 1815 requiring South Carolina's co-operation, and combined the $10,000 with the $20,000, making a fund of $30,000 to be used on the upper Savannah. Half of this amount was to be spent on the river from Petersburg down to Augusta, with the other half applied on the river up to Panther Creek. And still expecting some private contributions to be made, such monies were to be added to the $30,000 and spent proportionally. In the meantime South Carolina had appointed some commissioners relative to the navigation of the Savannah, but no money had been appropriated. The Georgia commissioners who were designated in this act were instructed to associate themselves with the South Carolinians if it could be arranged.

During the year 1819 work on the Georgia rivers was pushed forward, but with varying results. At the end of the year the Joint Committee on Internal Improvements of the legislature after examining the reports of the several commissioners was much discouraged with what it had learned. It was “compelled to remark, that the want of science and experience has been severely felt in almost every attempt which has been made to improve the navigation of water-courses.” It recommended that some attempt be made “to call in to our aid the talents and experience of the most enlightened persons on this subject.” Some of the river commissioners had done better than others. From Petersburg up the river “Skill and industry” appeared “to have been used in the work”; but from Petersburg down the river to Augusta little appeared to have been done, though some partial surveys had been made as well as “several ineffectual attempts to procure the counsel and aid of the state of South Carolina.”

During the next several years Georgia got some co-operation from South Carolina in planning though not in financing the improvement of the river from Petersburg to Augusta; and in 1822 the commissioners for this part of the river, reporting that there was no necessity for the further expenditure of money here, turned back to the state $4,556.46 of the $15,000 which had been appropriated. In fact, in 1823 South Carolina had so changed her attitude toward the improvement of the Savannah that the governor proposed to the Georgia governor that a treaty or convention be drawn up by which both states would fully co-operate with
each other in the whole Savannah River navigation. Before the end of the year an elaborate treaty, providing for appropriations, supervision, and tolls was worked out, which Georgia ratified in December of that year. Two years later South Carolina ratified it; however, as the Federal Constitution forbade any state without the consent of Congress to “enter into any Agreement or Compact with another State,” it was necessary for this treaty to be submitted to that body. As the two state delegations in Congress could never agree on acting in the matter, the agreement was never put into effect. And within a few years South Carolina lost complete interest in improving the navigation on the Savannah River below Augusta, for in 1833 the Charleston and Hamburg Railroad had been completed, and was now intended to divert all the river commerce possible over the road to Charleston—rather than let it continue down the river to enrich Savannah. Any attention she would now give to Savannah River navigation would be above Augusta—this attitude was not objected to by the Petersburg traders, for this was the part of the river with which they were most concerned. In 1824 the commissioners for that part of the Savannah River from Petersburg up to Andersonville (a South Carolina river port at the confluence of the Keowee-Senaca and the Tugaloo) reported that they had improved the river sufficiently for boats carrying eighty bales of cotton (about nine tons as measured in the weight of cotton bales at that time) to navigate the river.

By 1821 Georgia’s internal improvement fund had been increased to $500,000, yielding a substantial annual income, and plans began to mount for a more scientific expenditure of it. In 1825 a Board of Public Works was set up which should be guided in its work by an experienced engineer. This bright prospect of progress lasted only a year, when the board was abolished and the engineer dismissed. Soon Georgia was to follow South Carolina in her interest in railroads, and the rivers were again to revert to private initiative.

However, the rivermen were determined never to give up, for no promise was held out that there would ever be a railroad to serve the commerce of the upper Savannah. After Georgia had quit making appropriations for improving river navigation, the legislature in 1845, yielding to Petersburgers and others, appointed commissioners for the Savannah above Augusta and gave them authority to use any unexpended appropriations for improving navigation from Petersburg to Augusta.
lum times the Petersburgers and other upper Savannah River inhabitants never lost interest in their river. In December, 1859, only a year before the secession movement began, they secured a charter from the Georgia legislature for a company to be known under the cumbersome title of the Augusta, Petersburg and Savannah River Steam and Pole Boat Navigation Company of North-Eastern Georgia, to be capitalized at $100,000 with the privilege of increasing the amount to $1,000,000. Its purpose was to open a channel in the Savannah and Tugaloo rivers above Augusta to accommodate pole and steam boats of fifty tons burthen. The Civil War soon put a stop to any activities in which this company had hoped to engage.

The Broad River

The other water life-line on which Petersburg's commerce depended was the Broad River. The history of the improvement of navigation on this river paralleled that on the Savannah, but with more and greater emphasis on preserving fishing rights as opposed to boats and mill dams. Noting that it was "just and reasonable that all citizens residing within the vicinity of Little river and Broad river should enjoy the natural and equal privilege of taking the fish of said rivers," the legislature in 1796 forbade the construction of mill dams across these streams without providing a sluice a tenth as wide as the river to be kept open from the twentieth of February to the first of April to allow fish to go upstream; and anyone building a fish dam was required to leave a fourth of the stream open. Some citizens who were about to set up flour mills and sawmills were much discouraged by this legislation, and their complaints led the legislature two years later to make certain exceptions, observing that it was of much more "consequence to the community at large, to encourage the manufactory of flour, than the inconsiderable advantage resulting to a few individuals, from the egress of the fish." This legislation was not taken seriously by the fish trap and dam men, and by 1808 enough protesting by the citizens of five counties who depended on getting to market down the Broad and who also fished that stream for the delectable shad, led the legislature to agree that many citizens of those counties were "improperly and unjustly restrained from partaking of the advantages and benefits which nature has ordained and granted them, by a number of persons whose interest it has become to obstruct and
hinder the passage of fish up Broad River, by stopping the current and stream, in divers places, by fish dams and traps, so as to really become a monopoly to individuals, and detrimental to the inhabitants bordering on said river.” The legislature recited further that some of these citizens had made personal contributions and others were expected to do so to keep Broad River open whereby they might “convey their produce to market with more ease and convenience.” It reiterated former legislation that at least one fourth of the river, including the main channel, must be kept open to provide “a free passage for boats, rafts or fish.” Anyone so bold as to disregard this law should be subject to a fine of $50 a day as long as he allowed his obstruction to remain in the river.\footnote{32}

It was soon found that the terms of this law did not make it self operative; so the next year the legislature came back with an amendment requiring a third instead of a fourth of the stream to be kept open and set up machinery for its enforcement. The fine of $50 a day was reaffirmed, the procedure for prosecution was provided, and anyone who reported a forbidden obstruction should receive one half of the penalty incurred. Thirteen commissioners were named whose right and duty it was to view the river and report any illegal dams, first, however, giving the owner five days notice to remove the obstruction; and if the notice were not complied with, then the commissioners should themselves with any aid of other citizens needed destroy the obstruction.\footnote{33}

As more people filled up the Broad River Valley and began providing articles of commerce for the market in Petersburg and a reverse trade up the river, the promotion of navigation on the river became of primary importance, but not neglecting the fish men and mill men, for they also provided articles of commerce. If the laws were obeyed, then planters, millers of flour and meal, lumber manufacturers, and fish men all would be properly served by the river. Following the practice for the upper Savannah, commissioners were given permission by the legislature in 1800 to set up a lottery to raise $1,000 to be used in improving Broad River; but like the Savannah River lottery nothing came of this effort.\footnote{34}

And now belatedly in 1810 taking a leaf out of the Savannah River book, a group of Broad River Valley citizens got themselves incorporated by the legislature as the Broad River Navigation Company, asserting that few countries enjoyed “greater natural advantages than this State, for the extension of commerce,” and that removing obstructions in Broad River “would
greatly conduce to the convenience and interest of the inhabitants settled on the north and north western parts of this State.” The company was capitalized at $10,000, divided into 1,000 shares, and was to continue for twenty years. By implication, this law gave the company permission to obliterate the fish men and the mill men (though it would certainly not be to their interest to do so) in granting it the power “to proceed to improve the navigation of the said river from the confluence of the same with the Savannah river to the mouth of Hudson’s fork [about seventy miles or more upstream], in such manner as the company shall deem best calculated to promote the object of their association, and for this purpose shall be, and they are hereby authorized to remove all and every obstruction in the said river, which may tend to obstruct the navigation thereof.” And any one felling trees into the river or otherwise obstructing navigation should on conviction be fined not more than twenty dollars. When the company should have cleared the river, then it might charge tolls on all articles carried up or down the river, of not more than 25 cents per 100 pounds, except that for lumber the toll could not be more than 50 cents per 1,000 feet (on the face of the law pounds would be inferred but in a subsequent law, feet was stated). It might also levy an unstated toll based on the river mileage “for the keeping the navigation in repair.” Although this law seemed almost to have deeded the river to the company, it was not quite so, for people living along the river might carry on seineing operations, keep ferries for crossing the river, and travel on the river in canoes carrying anything which they could put into them, provided they did not come “under the denomination of boats of burthen.”

In none of the legislation relating to navigation on either the Broad or the Savannah was there any mention of passenger service or rates. The law incorporating this company required it to sell all of its shares before it could become a legal body. As the sale of its 1,000 shares proceeded slowly, the legislature the next year allowed it to reduce the number needed to be sold for this purpose, to 250; but it repealed the provision giving it a life of twenty years and allowed the state to extinguish its charter on paying for the original stock with a few accretions and deductions.

The incorporators not having met with success in organizing their company, after five years of inactivity, they induced the legislature in 1815 to grant them a reorganization. Now additional men were brought into the corporation and the toll rates were reduced; but the charter could be annulled as formerly and the
capitalization remained the same—$10,000. Their powers to improve the navigation were described in more detail—now being authorized “to build dams, cut canals, open sluices, and to do and perform all and every act which may appear necessary to promote the object of their association”; but in building dams they must not obstruct the passage of fish. Now their tolls must not be more than 12½ cents for “every hundred pounds of tobacco, cotton, flour, iron, steel, and all heavy articles”; nor more than 6¼ cents “for every cubic foot contained in all bales, trunks, and boxes of dry goods”; and not more than 25 cents per 1,000 feet of lumber.37

Shaler Hillyer, who was one of the incorporators and the leading spirit in the Broad River Navigation Company, secured a bit of special legislation for himself a few days before the reorganization of the company. In providing power for his mill at Muckle’s Ferry Shoals he was given permission to build across Broad River a dam not more than four feet high, however, over the main current he must construct a section of the dam twenty feet wide in such a way that it could be lowered “to admit shad to ascend and descend without difficulty” during the time when they were running, which was from the first of February to the first of May. And as a further protection to the fish, in that area of two hundred feet above and below the dam no one should be allowed to fish “with nets, gigs, or any other instrument or machine whatever, (other than the hook and line),” during the season when the fish were running. Any free person convicted of violating this provision was subject to a fine of $50.00, and any slave so offending was subject to ten lashes along with the owner of the slave paying a fine of $20.00. The punishment for a free person of color was thirty-nine lashes.

Boats should be accommodated by a canal or mill race which would run from the dam down to the mill at the Shoals. This canal must be of sufficient width and depth to accommodate “boats of the size of those usually navigating between Petersburg and Augusta.” Locks at the mill permitted boats to enter and leave the canal. The enforcement of all these provisions guarding both fish and boats was provided for in elaborate sections of the law relating to the commissioners for keeping open the navigation of the river.38

The general state-wide policy of improving river navigation adopted by Georgia in 1817 led to the river appropriation act of that year, previously noted. It allotted $5,000 to Broad River
but only on condition that no tolls should be charged on the river commerce.\textsuperscript{39} Apparently the company refused to give up this valuable privilege, for without the right to levy tolls it could not spend money on the river. The state had the right to vacate the charter by indemnifying the company, but it must have felt that the promise of $5,000 to improve the Broad was recompense enough. In 1824 the committee of the legislature charged with making recommendations for any further appropriations for the Broad and Savannah rivers recommended that none be voted until a survey should have been made “by a competent engineer” and the “practicability” of further expenses be established. It observed further that the Broad River Navigation Company operated “as a serious injury” to the citizens of Broad River Valley because of its failure to use its privileges and a neglect of its duties provided in the act of incorporation. It recommended that the governor induce the company to surrender its charter.\textsuperscript{40}

In the absence of official records long since lost, it is logical to assume that the state refused to recompense the company and that the company, therefore, refused to give up its charter. But finally, in 1828, the patience of the state (and also of the Broad River Valley people) gave out and the legislature proceeded to repeal the company’s charter, “any law to the contrary notwithstanding.”\textsuperscript{41} There is no implication in the repeal law or evidence otherwise that the company was recompensed.

In the meantime with the company resting on its privileges but performing none of its duties, the Broad River people got a law passed in 1824, striking out on a new principle. Reaffirming all the old regulations as to width of the stream to be left open, dams, fish traps, and the like, the law named a new set of commissioners whose duty it was to establish the main current of the river and to call on citizens of the adjoining counties to remove any obstructions to the main channel. They could not be required to work more than three consecutive days and not more than six days during any one year. They received no wages, but anyone refusing to work should be subject to a fine of $5.00 a day as long as he refused to work.\textsuperscript{42}

From this time to the middle of the century, law after law was passed, each generally repeating the previous one but specifying more particularly how the law was to be enforced. Most of these laws were more concerned with the passage of fish than of boats, and most of them linked Broad River with the upper Savannah in their application.\textsuperscript{43} Also it was a continuing problem to pro-
vide commissioners to look after river obstructions. Some when appointed refused to act and proceeded to resign; others remained inactive when they accepted appointment, being influenced by local interests; and most of these commissioners were not in any way qualified in the science of river engineering.

Boats and Boat Hands

The navigation of rivers, of course, presupposes boats, and their size and structure would naturally depend on the depth and difficulties of the channels they plied. Petersburg was primarily interested in boats that could be successfully used on the Broad and on the Savannah above the town and below to Augusta; but indirectly Petersburg's egress to world markets would depend on how well her commerce fared on the lower Savannah. As tobacco was the principal item of trade in Petersburg's first years, the transportation of this article on the river below Augusta was in what were called "tobacco flats." They were generally of the size to carry from fifty to seventy-five hogsheads of tobacco, though one advertised for sale in Augusta in 1801 was described as able to carry upwards of one hundred hogshead and drawing only three feet of water. Three years earlier there was offered for sale another which would hold from sixty to sixty-two hogsheads and it was asserted that none was "equal to her for running fast."

On account of more difficult channels to navigate, the boats used above Augusta were smaller and of special construction. They were known as "Petersburg boats." The smaller boats plying the upper Savannah and high up the Broad could carry nine or ten tons, depending on the stage of the water; and those on the lower Broad and down the Savannah to Augusta were much larger. A typical Petersburg boat was seventy or seventy-five feet long and five or six feet wide, and when loaded it drew only fifteen or twenty inches of water. It was laden with ten to fifteen hogsheads of tobacco and later, with the coming of cotton, it could carry as many as sixty bales, generally placed two layers deep. It was poled by five or six deck hands, with a captain or patroon at the prow. It could make the trip to Augusta and back within a week. In 1817 one of these boats laden with forty bales of cotton was reported to have caught fire with a complete loss of the cotton.

Petersburg was, of course, the center of the river traffic above
Augusta, and boat owners were ready at all times to engage cargoes. Shaler Hillyer did a considerable cotton trade down the river to Augusta, sometimes engaging the whole boat or only a part, as in 1813 when he wrote that he had “left eight Bales of Cotton to go in first Boat.” In one instance he loaded a boat with nineteen bales, but when they were weighed in Augusta, only eighteen bales were reported. He was never able to find out whether the boatmen had lost one on the river, or whether he had been robbed of a bale on the docks. Sometimes this river traffic was provoking in other respects. One Tuesday in 1806 at daybreak a boat laden with his cotton set out for Augusta. It was a beautiful morning and a good river, yet the boat did not arrive until Saturday. In the meantime Shaler had gone to Augusta to provide for its trans-shipment on a boat scheduled for Savannah. The Petersburg boat arrived too late, much to his discomfort.

The deckhands of the boats were almost uniformly slaves, either owned or hired by the patroon. Some of the captains of the boats and their pole-wielders were not above stopping at some convenient place along the river to do a little pilfering of corn, cotton, and other produce. In 1815 the legislature passed a law requiring all owners or agents of boats to carry a bill of lading of their cargoes and papers showing the name of the patroon and the consignee. Furthermore, the next year the legislature brought to an end the evil of allowing Negro or any other boat hands to carry to market any produce described as their own or to trade such items among themselves. The owners of boats were held “liable and compelled to pay for all pillages and thefts committed by their respective crews.”

Along the Broad River there was a more friendly attitude and greater honesty of boat owners and crews toward the inhabitants. Boats on their way to Petersburg were always willing to execute little commissions for trading articles in the Petersburg stores, extending these courtesies even to some slaves. These boats were provided with what were called “Petersburg boat bugles,” to be used to announce the approach of the boat. They were about five and a half feet long and five inches in diameter at the farther end and were made of smoothly-dressed wooden staves, highly polished, all held together by iron bands. The bugles were as thin and light as if they had been made of tin. The mouthpiece was made of cow horn. The whole construction was such as to add a melody to the sound, which was music to the ears of the Broad River
people. With favorable wind conditions the bugle could be heard for miles.  

Roads

Petersburg's location on the point of land where two rivers met was, of course, a great advantage in water transportation; but for traffic on land it was almost equally as great an inconvenience. In the early days the only highway out of the town which did not cross one of the rivers was one leading up the peninsula to Elberton. Of course, there were various secondary roads to plantations and homesteads up the Broad and Savannah rivers and the intervening interior. Yet Petersburg needed land transportation for bringing in the products of plantations (tobacco and cotton especially) to be shipped by river to Augusta, and also for travel. It should be noted in this latter respect, that the improvement of river navigation was designed for commerce and not for passengers. Apart from passenger traffic on the lower Savannah with the coming of the steamboat era, there was little anywhere else on the Georgia rivers. Therefore, since most travel out of and into Petersburg was by land, the development and maintenance of roads was of special importance to the town.

Despite Petersburg's location between the two rivers, it was at that point on the Savannah where land travel from the north and east crossed into upper Georgia, United States mail routes were directed through Petersburg. In 1794 the route from Washington, Wilkes County, ran through Petersburg and on through Elberton to Franklin Courthouse, a distance of about sixty miles, requiring two days for the trip which was made every two weeks. There was also a mail route from Augusta through Lincoln Courthouse to Petersburg and on by Elberton to Carnesville (formerly called Franklin Courthouse), to be served weekly.

A mail route did not necessarily mean a highway which might accommodate wheeled vehicles, for in the earlier days mail was generally carried on horseback; however, Petersburg was accessible from the beginning by wheeled conveyances, and in 1804 a monopoly in stagecoach traffic from Petersburg to Augusta was granted to John Beal. He was allowed to use any road he pleased "for the conveyance of passengers and their baggage." He was required to run a stage at least once a week, and his franchise was to last for ten years. Later an integrated stage line from Milledgeville to Washington, D.C., ran through Petersburg.
Whether mail route or stagecoach route, the Georgia roads were generally in a miserable condition. There was no state system either designated or aided, and private initiative asked for few toll road franchises. Roads were, therefore, considered only of local interest. The road law of 1792 vested in the county inferior courts the right and duty of laying out new roads and appointing road overseers, whose duty it was to keep the roads in good repair. All roads should "at all times be kept well cleared from logs, trees, bushes and other obstructions" for a width of thirty feet and all roots should be grubbed up for a space of at least sixteen feet across. If within sixty feet any trees deadened for making new grounds should fall across a road, the person responsible should suffer a fine if he did not remove the obstruction within two days. To keep the roads in good repair, "all male laboring persons" between the ages of sixteen and fifty were required to bring "proper tools" and work not more than twelve days a year. Wherever two highways met, sign posts either of stone or wood must be set up with inscriptions "in large letters" indicating the "most noted place" to which each of the roads led and the distance thereto. The next year the road law was amended and elaborated. Now, "all male white inhabitants, . . . free negroes and mulattoes, and all negroes and other male slaves from the age of sixteen to fifty years" were required to work on the roads, which should now be from twenty-four to thirty-six feet wide. Besides being required to bring proper tools, every white worker must "carry with him one good and sufficient gun or pair of pistols." It is difficult to explain this requirement unless it was called for to repel Indians, who were at this time on the war path. It could hardly be supposed to prevent the Negro workmen from running away. A more detailed description of how road work was to be carried out may be had from a road overseer's commission: The road must be put "in good travelling order" by "widening said road to Thirty feet removing all loose rocks, raising the middle above the sides, opening all side ditches, trimming the limbs high up the trees & cutting all necessary turnouts." With all the laws and regulations, the roads continued in almost a state of nature. Too often an overseer would have a pile of brush thrown into a ditch which had been washed across a road and, sprinkling a little dirt on it, remark that "it will do for the present." And then the next rain would wash it all away. A good roads advocate in 1823 argued that it took more than a few axes and hoes to work a road. Plows, scrapes, and other implements
were needed. With less than these, "You might almost as well clear up the Okafanoka swamp with a penknife." People should realize, he said, that on "the market roads, corn and fodder, if nothing else, always commands the highest price."62

Yet, over rudimentary roads, trails, and horse paths Georgia's overland travel and trade went on from Colonial times far into the nineteenth century. Apart from the few stagecoaches, people traveled in wagons and buggies, in sulkies, and on carts and horseback. A few people in Petersburg made short trips around in their "elegant" carriages. Some hardy people traveled long distances on foot, as did the "crazy preacher" Lorenzo Dow. Bishop Francis Asbury traveled thousands of miles over Georgia's roads and trails and elsewhere on horseback or in his chaise. Eli Whitney in visiting some of his interests in Georgia and South Carolina, in 1802, traveled about 2,800 miles "in a Sulkey & the same horse performed the whole journey."63

People migrating to Georgia generally came in wagons and carts, into which they could pack their belongings, with some in these parties riding horses. The Few family, of which William was a member, in their journey from Maryland to North Carolina and proceeding later to Georgia, set out with their movable effects in a four-horse wagon and a cart drawn by two horses.64 Another party coming from Virginia in 1775, consisting of two men, a woman and her child and a Negro boy, made their way with two horses and a cart drawn by one horse.65

Before the coming of railroads, wagonage became a business participated in by many people. Some owned only a wagon or two with the necessary horses, while others made large investments and became wagon magnates, ready to go near or far in this land transportation. Every town of much size had its "Waggon yard," the one in Augusta being an enclosed area with accommodations for both man and beast.66 The owner of a wagon line in Greensboro advertised in 1815 that he had "four excellent Waggons and Teams, with honest and careful drivers, which he will run to any part of the United States, as he designs to keep them constantly on the road."67

Francois Michaux, the French traveler, in 1802 saw large wagons drawn by four or six horses going from upper Georgia and the Carolinas to Charleston, carrying such articles as cotton, tobacco, smoked hams, and deer and bear skins.68 Bishop Asbury in his Georgia travels during the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries saw the roads gorged with wagons going to
Augusta. And one person in a little Georgia town received this notice in a dispatch sent to a Milledgeville newspaper: “There is in this village a very curious little man, whose occupation being of a man very sedentary kind, makes it his business to collect facts concerning matters for which no body else cares a farthing. Among other things, either for his amusement or information, he thought proper to count daily the number of wagons which passed his house,” and he found that the average for the whole year was six coming and going daily.

During the period of the War of 1812, when the coastal traffic was cut off, land transportation by wagons reached its height. Cotton was sent as far as Baltimore to be exchanged for merchandise. Shaler Hillyer wrote a merchant firm in New York to send him salt and sugar by the first wagon possible. A Petersburger wrote to his friend in North Carolina in 1813 that there were 30,000 bales of cotton piled up in Augusta and equal amounts each in Savannah and Charleston, and that it would require 10,000 wagons to haul it to Northern markets.

The impetus given to land transportation during this period put the rivermen in serious competition with the wagon men, with whom they had to wrestle for years thereafter. In December, 1817, it was reported in Augusta that during the previous eleven days, 10,000 bales of cotton had been brought to that town by wagons. Sometimes wagons would either by design or by chance line up in cavalcades of from fifteen to twenty, and their characteristic narrow-rimmed wheels would make the roads almost impassable by the time they had gone by. Ordinarily wagons traveled from ten to twelve miles a day, but sometimes as far as twenty four—all depending on the condition of the roads.

A resident of the Petersburg region during the wagon era observed that these wagon drivers were “an institution, a profession, a community—expert and skilled, with rules, regulations, and customs governing themselves and the vast number of farmers residing along the different roads leading to Augusta, with whom these wagons had transactions of various sorts.” These wagoners were white men of the better class, for only such could be trusted with the kind of business in which they were engaged. A sort of boisterous camaraderie among them set them apart.

John Lambert, a widely-traveled Englishman, wrote in 1814: “These waggoners are familiarly called crackers, (from the smacking of their whips, I suppose). They are said to be often very rude and insolent to strangers, and people of the towns, whom they
meet on the road, particularly if they happen to be genteel persons. I have heard of several ludicrous, and some shameful tricks, which these gentry of the *whip* have been guilty of. There are instances of their having robbed people; but in general they confine themselves to a few mad pranks, which they call *jokes*. In almost every part of the United States, there seems to be an invincible antipathy between the towns' people and these waggoners, who take every opportunity they can to give each other a thrashing. The waggoner constantly rides on one of the shaft horses, and with a long whip guides the leaders. Their long legs, lank figures, and meagre countenances, have sometimes a curious appearance when thus mounted; especially if a string of them happen to pass along the road.”

**BRIDGES AND FERRIES**

Though Petersburg, on the point of its peninsula, was cut off by water from land roads leading in every direction except to the northwestward; it was not in a state of isolation from them, for from the very earliest times it was supplied with ferry service. In fact even in Colonial days when Fort James was there, a ferry must have been maintained across the Broad River at this point. Certainly a Thomas Carter was maintaining a ferry there by the end of the Revolution, for in 1784 Dionysius Oliver received the right to run the ferry which Carter had formerly owned. In this same year Barksdale Ferry was authorized by the South Carolina legislature across the Savannah River “below Fort Charlotte,” which, however, could not serve the point of land where Petersburg was to grow up; but this place was taken care of at the same time by the South Carolina legislature authorizing another ferry “above Fort Charlotte” at John Sharp’s plantation.

John Oliver, son of Dionysius, soon entered the picture as a ferry master among his many other interests. His father transferred to him ferry rights across the Broad in 1787 (the year after Petersburg was started); and in 1792, when Petersburg began to flourish, the South Carolina legislature granted to him the ferry rights across the Savannah where the John Sharp ferry had run. These were the authorized ferry tolls there: for wagons and four-wheeled carriages, three shillings each; for a one-horse chaise, chair or cart, one shilling and six pence; for a man on horseback, four pence; for foot passengers, two pence; for cattle, sheep, goats, and presumably other animals “ferried or swam over,” one penny;
and for a "rolled" hogshead of tobacco with horse and driver, seven pence.  

There was constant ferry service across the Savannah from Petersburg to Vienna, which had grown up contemporaneously with Petersburg. By 1817 there were at least two ferries running, for this year South Carolina authorized John Watkins to run a ferry across to the foot of Commerce Street in Petersburg, and at the same time it gave ferry rights from Vienna to Petersburg to James Russell, the unfortunate preacher who had turned commercial. The established ferry tolls were now: wagon or four-wheeled carriage, driver, and horses, 75 cents; riding chair, cart or other two-wheeled vehicle, driver and horse, 25 cents; man and horse, 12½ cents; foot passenger, 6¼ cents; hogshead of tobacco, 25 cents; horses, cows, sheep, and goats, 2 cents each.  

There was, of course, continuous ferry service across the Broad River between Petersburg and Lisbon, and in 1808 the Georgia legislature gave Joshua Grinage the ferry rights across Little River on this road to Augusta for those who did not care to risk the ford there. The following tolls were established: for an empty or loaded wagon with four horses, 37½ cents; for ox-cart, 25 cents; for four-wheel pleasure carriage, 50 cents; for two-wheel pleasure carriage, 25 cents; for man on horseback, for every "led or drove horse," and for every foot passenger, 6¼ cents; for most "neat cattle," 6½ cents; and for goats, sheep or hogs, 2 cents each.  

Ferries were, of course, authorized and used across streams too dangerous to ford or too wide for bridges; however, as the state was not spending money on roads it left the building of bridges to local authorities and to private individuals, who were to charge tolls. By the road legislation of 1792 the overseer and his workmen were required to build bridges wherever needed and make them not less than fifteen feet wide; but if the bridge across the swamp or stream could not be built within three days, then it was the duty of the county concerned to have the bridge built and paid for out of a tax levy. Apparently this system was ineffective, for four years later the legislature authorized certain persons named to erect bridges on five streams and to charge certain specified tolls, except that citizens passing "on public occasions, or going to or from divine service," should not be required to pay a toll.  

Still the legislature's worries over bridges were not ended, for the next year it repealed this law except for two of the bridges, announcing that it had been "found from experience that toll
bridges are prejudicial, and not of that benefit to the inhabitants contemplated"; however the owners were to be recompensed by money raised by a special tax. Then, in 1808 a law provided that the owners of all “toll bridges, ferries and turnpike roads” should erect at a conspicuous place a board painted black with white lettering giving the tolls required, and if anyone failed to do this, no toll could be charged.

Roads, bridges, and ferries served Petersburg about as well as they did any other town in the state, and rivers were Petersburg’s special benefactors. Any decline in its prosperity could, therefore, be little attributed to the lack of these forms of transportation. However, with the coming of the next era of transportation, that of the railroads, Petersburg’s fate was largely sealed, lying as it did on the eastern edge of the state, almost surrounded by water hazards incident to railroads. The new lines of commerce passed by Petersburg, leaving it far to the side.