

Timber Supplies, Services, and Logistics of the Wando River and Cainhoy Plantations During the American Revolution, 1775-1776 ~

While general history books paint a picture of South Carolinians simply harvesting trees on Sullivan's Island itself, the reality of the 1776 structural timber supply chain is far more complex. Sabal palmettos do grow in coastal strands, but the sheer volume required to construct two parallel, 500-foot-long walls, stacked sixteen feet apart and ten feet high, completely outstripped the natural resources of a single barrier island. Sullivan's Island could not have been the exclusive source of trees and timber for defense.

The vast majority of the logs were harvested from maritime forests and swamp borders on the mainland, specifically from Christ Church Parish (not a part of Berkeley County), the Cainhoy Peninsula, Daniel Island, and the Wando River basin. They came from specific plantations and geographic locations that allowed easy water access to transport the heavy, water-logged timber.

The geography of the Wando River made it the perfect natural conduit; heavily forested plantation tracts directly fronted the deep water or major tidal creeks, allowing massive rafts of logs to be loaded downstream with the outgoing tide.

The Addison family held substantial acreage along the Wando River, Beresford Creek, and the Cainhoy peninsula (including tracts near the Thomas Addison and John Addison holdings). These lands featured extensive forests rich in old-growth palmetto and heavy structural live oak. Timber from these properties was stripped, dragged to the riverbanks by enslaved labor forces, and lashed together into immense timber rafts to be guided down into the Charlestown harbor networks.

Further up the Wando and into the French Santee/Cainhoy corridor, plantations owned by prominent patriot families like the Gaillards and Lynches provided significant wood reserves. These tracts sat on high bluffs where palmettos, mixed with dense stands of longleaf pine, were used for the heavy inner framing and gun platforms of the fort.

The Fogartie and Rose tracts, located near the transit point of Cainhoy Ferry, served as combined harvest sites and staging grounds. The proximity to the ferry landing meant infrastructure was established to move heavy materials from inland forests down to the water's edge.

Daniel Island sits like a wedge between the Cooper and Wando rivers, making it an incredibly convenient timber depot for the provincial forces.

During the mid-eighteenth century, Daniel Island was divided into major plantation tracts, notably those held by the Lesesne, Scott, and Logan families. The southern and eastern edges of the island – facing the Wando River and Nowell Creek – were thick with marsh border palmettos.

Because these trees grew right at the edge of the pluff mud and tidal creeks, they could be felled directly into the water or onto flat bottomed plantation boats (flats) without needing miles of overland transport via draft animals.

Getting thousands of unbuoyant logs to Sullivan's Island required an intricate knowledge of local tides.

The provincial government utilized "log flats" – large, wide, shallow-draft barges, typically used to transport rice barrels. Enslaved boatmen, who understood the complex, shifting currents of the Wando River and the harbor better than anyone else, steered these heavily laden flats down the river. They navigated through the sheltered waters between Daniel Island, slipping down through Beresford Creek to bypass the open harbor entirely, delivering the raw materials safely into the tidal cove directly behind the rising fort.

During the critical window of 1775 and 1776, there were prominent Lowcountry families along the Wando River, Cainhoy, and Daniel Island corridors who were heavily impacted by the patriot military's demand for raw materials to secure Charlestown's water defenses.

The Lesesne family held vast timber-rich tracts spanning Daniel's Island, the Wando neck, and the Cooper River marshes. Their records are among the most explicit for lumber and boat utilization in the harbor's early defense system. Records indicated the impressment/use of flats (plantation transport boats) and enslaved rowers to float supplies down to the Hobcaw shipyards and Sullivan's Island. Thomas Lesesne's (AA4520) estate files include retroactive auditing for palmetto and pine logs harvested directly from his Daniel's Island properties during the early fortification push. Issac Lesesne's lands faced the water avenues, perfectly situated for maritime logging. His accounts reflected timber cut for the construction of barracks and the reinforcement of platforms supporting the artillery batteries guarding the harbor.

The Walker family name appears frequently within the Wando River basin records, functioning both as landowners losing timber and as active localized captains transporting logistics. Benjamin Walker (AA8128) shows documented

claims for providing flatboats used for ferry building materials and troops across the Wando River during the frantic movements before the June 1776 British naval attack. Thomas Walker's (AA8138) account for wood and forage, shows certificates for cordwood and heavy timber delivered to the early state forces alongside claims for provisions supporting the militia camped alongside the transport route.

The Fogartie family was deeply rooted in the Cainhoy area. Lewis Fogartie eventually formalized the village layout of the Cainhoy river port town. During 1775-1776, their water access made their docks primary staging grounds. James Fogartie (AA2444) had claims for wood, timber, and ferry/boat transport. In 1776, positioned near the critical ferry links along the Wando River and Cainhoy paths, Fogartie's claims cover the usage of river craft to shuttle timber out of the local creeks down toward the coastal redoubts. His records detail the harvest of local standing timber, including live oak and palmetto roots/logs used to secure river obstructions and boom defenses.

The Addisons controlled key properties along the eastern banks of the Wando River and adjacent mainland necks, making them a prime resource for timber forages looking for straight pine piles and durable palmettos. John Addison (AA37) shows an account for provisions, lumber, and wood, and filed claims detailing logs cut for the public service. During the 1776 rush, his lands were heavily utilized to supply fuel wood and heavy structural logs for the expanding militia cantonments guarding the approaches to the city. Thomas Addison (AA39) had claims for timber and militia supplies; vouchers indicate material pulled from his properties for military engineer use in constructing defensive works.

Because Martin is a common name, their files require careful separation. However, specific Wando-area Martins served as vital mariners and suppliers in the harbor network (boat hire and Coast Guard Service). James Martin (AA4799) operated a small coastal and river craft along the Cooper and Wando waterways, and his claim explicitly details the "hire of a pilot boat" and flats utilized by the Council of Safety to patrol the marsh gaps and transport heavy cargo. William Martin (AA4824) handled localized provisioning, showing receipts for timber and wood cut down for defensive fortifications or military encampments during the early phase of the conflict.

Resource: *South Carolina Department of Archives and History (SCDAH).*

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*A Note from SCDAH reminds us that when pulling the physical microfilms or digital indices, many of the files contain the original certificates signed in the late 1775 or 1776 by military officers (such as engineers or quartermasters) on small slips of paper. These slips were kept by the citizens for years until the state finally issued formal interest-bearing *Principal Indents* in the 1780s to resolve the old 1776 debts.

*Use the **Audited Account (AA)** listed above, when pulling physical microfilms or digital indices.