

Samuel J. Pregnall & Bros. Shipyard

A Brief History of the Pregnall Shipyard

by William S. Pregnall



Samuel J. Pregnall

When the keel was laid for the *Spirit of South Carolina*, the building site will- thanks to the City of Charleston- be within a hundred yards of the original location of the "Samuel J. Pregnall and Bro. Shipyard" on Concord at the "foot of Laurens." Incorporated by 1878, it may have been a place for boat/ship repair a few years earlier. It was there that coastal pilot schooners such as the Frances Elizabeth (named for Samuel's wife, Frances Elizabeth Richardson) were built. The Smithsonian Institution supplied the hull line drawings of such a schooner built at the "Pregnall Shipyard."

The site of the shipyard was within easy walking distance of the young Pregnall boys who grew up on Henrietta St., the home of Henry and Eleanor Jane (Stewart) Pregnall, their parents. Eleanor gave birth to thirteen children of whom six boys lived to adulthood- all working at the shipyard. Only in their twenties, the two oldest brothers, Henry N. and Samuel J. Pregnall, were the proprietors. Samuel was the entrepreneur- also a City Councilman. The original site was known as Pregnall's wharf and marine railway. In 1880 a whale came into the harbor and was overcome after several days' hunting and hauled up upon the Pregnall's marine railway where its remains were placed for display (and soon displeasure as the stench overwhelmed Charlestonians).

Surviving the 1886 earthquake, S.J. Pregnall & Bros. bought a dry dock from the heirs of James Marsh, who had operated a shipyard nearby for fifty years before his death in 1851. The "Great Hurricane of '93" destroyed that restored dry dock, but the Pregnalls expanded to a new site on Concord at the "foot of Hasell." With the wane of sail and rise

of steam their business shifted to coastal and river steamers. Ironically, in 1890 with the shipyard flourishing a steam leak at the shipyard fatally scalded the youngest brother, Arthur H., twenty-five. He was possibly the heir-apparent to the family business. Within two years, Henry N. and James T. Pregnall became independent contractors. 1911 brought another hurricane wreaking havoc. In 1913 Samuel J. died. In 1914 William S., long time superintendent, died. Robert R. Pregnall, Samuel's younger son, was left to settle the estate for his mother. The shipyard closed in 1915, but later the Charleston Shipbuilding and Drydock Co. came into being at its original site.

In 1896 an article stated, "One of Charleston's most important waterfront industries is the marine railway and repair shops of the Pregnalls. . . (who) now do nearly all of the work on the boats plying around Charleston harbor and vicinity." The *Spirit of South Carolina* will join a noble list of schooners and steamers built by the Pregnalls, among which were the pilot coastal schooners- *Frances Marion*, *Hampton*, *Bristol*, *Sophie Amelia K*, and *Harlian* and steam driven- *Cambria*, *Planter*, *Merchant*, and *Gadsden*. Also known to have been repaired/possibly built there were *Sappho*, *Thomas Morgan*, *Beulah Barton*, *Eutaw*, *Lotta*, *Water Witch*, *Atlantic City*, and *Susan A. Bryan*.