



**Barry Lawrence Ruderman
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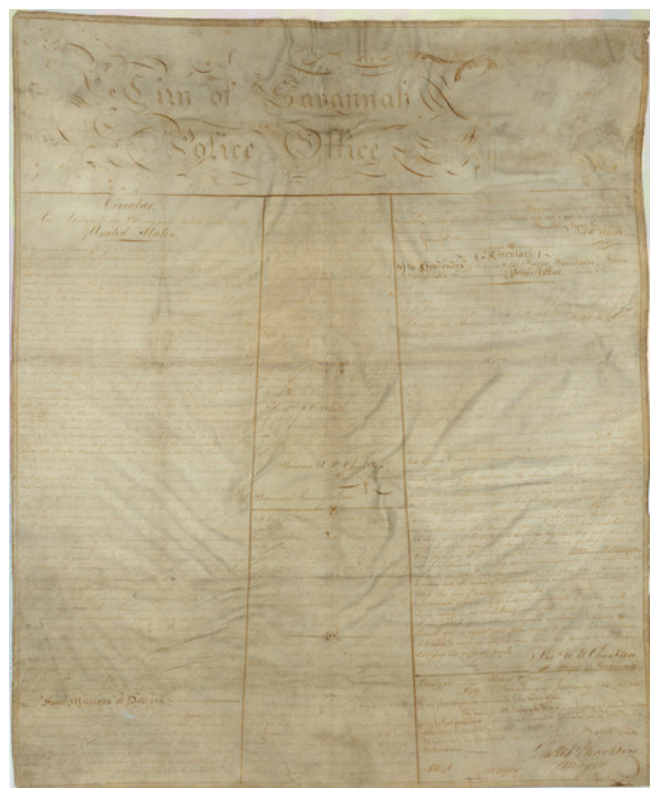
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[Savannah, Georgia] [Manuscript document on vellum:] The City of Savannah. The Police Office. Circular. An Address to the Citizens and Inhabitants of the United States... January 12th 1820... Circular to the Governors of the Several States, Mayors, Intendants, Police Magistrates... January 13th 1820... Georgia -- Police Office -- City of Savannah, January 25th 1820...

Stock#: 90741
Map Maker: Charlton

Date: 1820
Place: Savannah, Georgia
Color: Uncolored
Condition: Good
Size: 22 x 27 inches

Price: \$ 7,400.00



Description:

"An Evil Has Fallen on Our City"

Savannah, Georgia Fire of 1820

Impressive Manuscript on Vellum Carried by Official Canvasser for Donations on a Journey of Charity

An Appeal to the People of the United States from the Mayor of Savannah

A large and impressive manuscript document on vellum, accomplished in a fine copper-plate style



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hand, signed by Thomas Usher Pulaski Charlton, the mayor of Savannah, Georgia.

On January 11, 1820, Savannah suffered one of its worst fires, rivaling the great fire of 1796. A cataclysmic event for the town, the 1820 fire inspired the U.S. Senate to pass a March 8 bill for the relief of the victims. The present neatly written manuscript appeal is addressed to the nation from the mayor of Savannah. Specifically, the document served as a warrant for a designated private citizen, Dr. Joshua E. White, to travel and receive donations with the blessings of the city officials. A committee was established to distribute clothing, food, and other provisions collected primarily from Georgia and surrounding southern states, and White was part of that effort, volunteering to undertake a "journey of charity."

Charlton begins his appeal for help in rather dramatic language, declaring that "An evil has fallen on our City":

To beg, is never a pleasant office, for it is revolting to the pride of character and man generally professes a spirit of independence which forbids the humiliation - But there are times when modest reluctance to ask for charity should be laid aside: from the imperative nature of the occasion which demands it... An evil has fallen on our City...

The mayor's statement is followed by the text of a letter by Dr. White to Mayor Charlton and the Savannah City Council, dated January 12th, volunteering his services to collect contributions (this half column of text is somewhat faded, but the text is legible with a magnifying glass); then follows a warrant for Dr. Joshua E. White, who, "occupying a high place in the confidence and good opinion of his fellow citizens, who has volunteered his services for a journey of charity, we are confident of receiving the commiserations of our countrymen and of making our appeal successful."

At the end of the last column of text is a notice dated January 25th:

To my fellow citizens and inhabitants of the United States. The bearer of this, Dr. Joshua E. White, a worthy citizen of Savannah, is desired by the Corporation to receive from the benevolent, wherever he may go, donations and contributions of any description for the relief of our justified people. He carries with him the confidence, respect and best wishes of the Mayor and Aldermen. Thos. U.P. Charlton, Mayor.

The third column of text is largely taken up by Charlton's appeal:



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... All is lost!!! Flames themselves unconquerable, but still aided by the dreadful alliance of a high wind, bade defiance to every exertion to arrest the march of their terrific and heart rending ravages. Their lightening advance seemed only impeded by a deficiency of valuable materials for destruction... short respite was given to our fainting citizens, to save and protect the valuable merchandize, furniture and articles thrown confidently into the streets and squares, upon which the thief and vagrant had already commenced this nefarious depredation. It pleased All Mighty God to decree that amidst the entire exertions of our citizens, the seamen in our harbour, and other transient persons, few, if any lives were lost during the short period of this awful and terrific conflagration. With gratitude and humility we acknowledge this evidence of his mercy and goodness towards us. Our losses may be fairly estimated at upwards of Four Millions, and if as observed in another circular, the suspension of business, and its incidents, are taken into the calculation more than Ten Millions will be drawn into the vortex of this wide-spread, overwhelming calamity. With this view of our situation described with a warmth which my affectionate attachment towards the inhabitants of this city, will, I hope, justify... I now address you... to request your fellow citizens to consult their comrades and speedily to send any relief it may be in their power to afford, to our distressed and suffering people.

The Fire

The fire broke out at 2:00 AM, raged for twelve hours and completely decimated Savannah's business district. Strong winds combined with the vulnerability of the mostly wooden structures of the town, certainly exacerbated the situation. Approximately 450-500 buildings were completely destroyed, and hundreds of people were left homeless. Early estimates of losses were put at \$10,000,000, though reported claims were close to \$1,000,000, still an immense sum in the early 19th century, certainly so for a town of 7500 people. Mayor Charlton cited the higher figures in his appeal to the nation for relief. New York stipulated its \$12,500 contribution to the relief effort "be applied exclusively to the relief of all indigent persons, without distinction of color..." Savannah was insulted and sent the money back, commenting, "An injustice has been done our citizens by the direction of the Resolution." Six months after the fire, the slave ship *Antelope* was brought into Savannah, and by August, some of the 300 enslaved people onboard were put to work to help rebuild the city.

Dr. Joshua E. White (died of yellow fever, 1820) was a founding member of the Georgia Medical Society (1804), author of a number of medical papers, and someone greatly concerned with improving the general



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health of enslaved people. White observed that many ailments affecting enslaved people resulted from lack of proper clothing, poor housing conditions, and inadequate diet.

Thomas U.P. Charlton, a respected jurist, served six terms as Mayor of Savannah and was highly praised for his efforts in leading the town through the aftermath of the fire and a deadly outbreak of yellow fever later that same year. He corresponded with Thomas Jefferson and welcomed Presidents Madison and Monroe during their visits to Savannah.

Rarity

Original contemporary documents relating to the 1820 Savannah fire are very rare. For example, the great Georgia Library of Wymberley Jones De Renne lists only a single printed document from 1820 concerning the fire, a broadsheet bill issued by the New York State Assembly, also relating to the relief of the victims of the fire. There are no 1820 items relating to the Savannah fire citing in RBH. A remarkable survivor of an early American disaster.

Detailed Condition:

Manuscript on vellum sheet. Embellished with hand-drawn decorative border. Some sunning and fading in places. Several old fold marks. Minor damage at center fold. Overall condition is quite good.