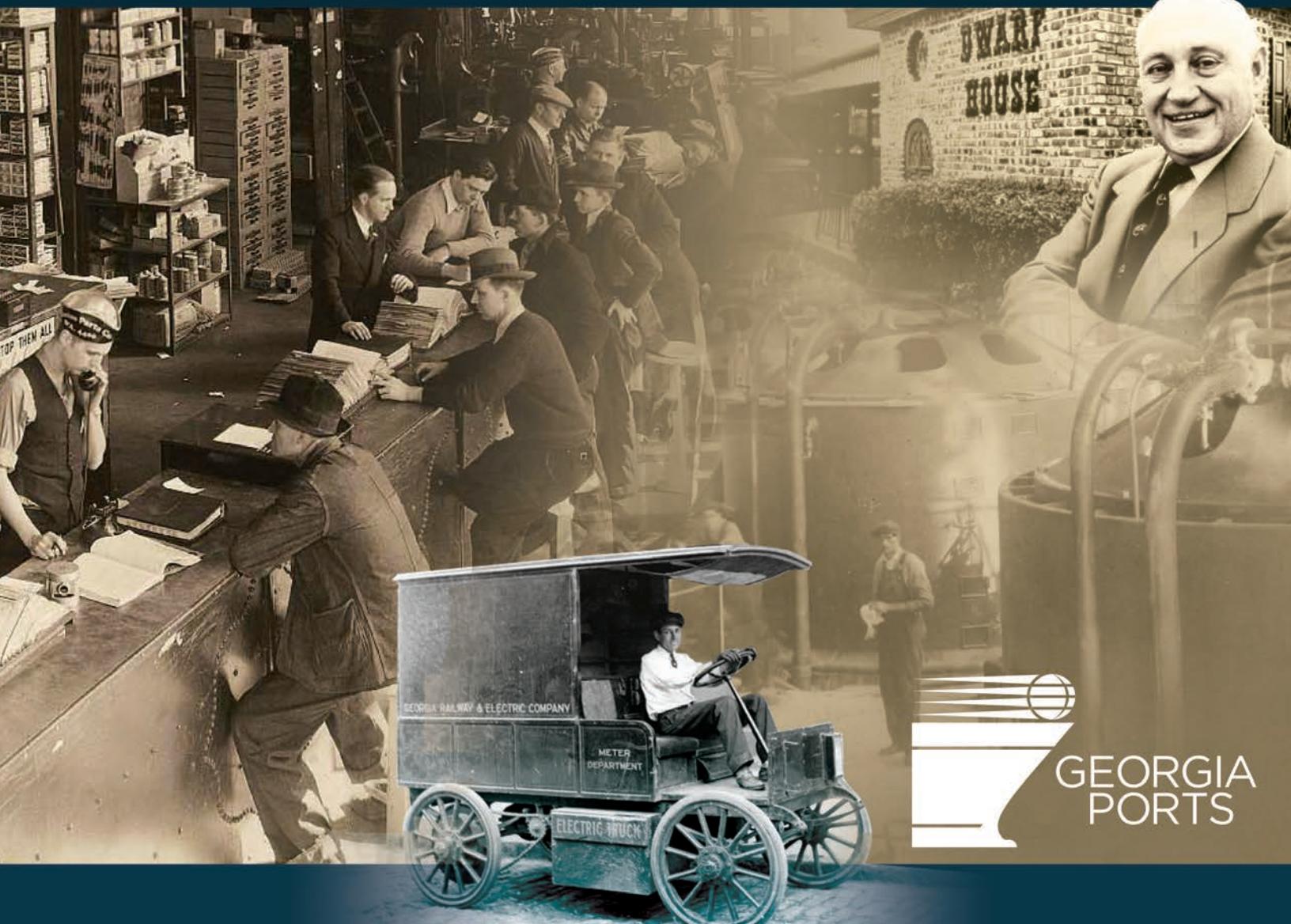


GEORGIA HISTORICAL SOCIETY



## GEORGIA BUSINESS HISTORY INITIATIVE

*Sharing the Stories of the Businesses that Built Georgia*



GEORGIA  
PORTS





## GEORGIA PORTS AUTHORITY

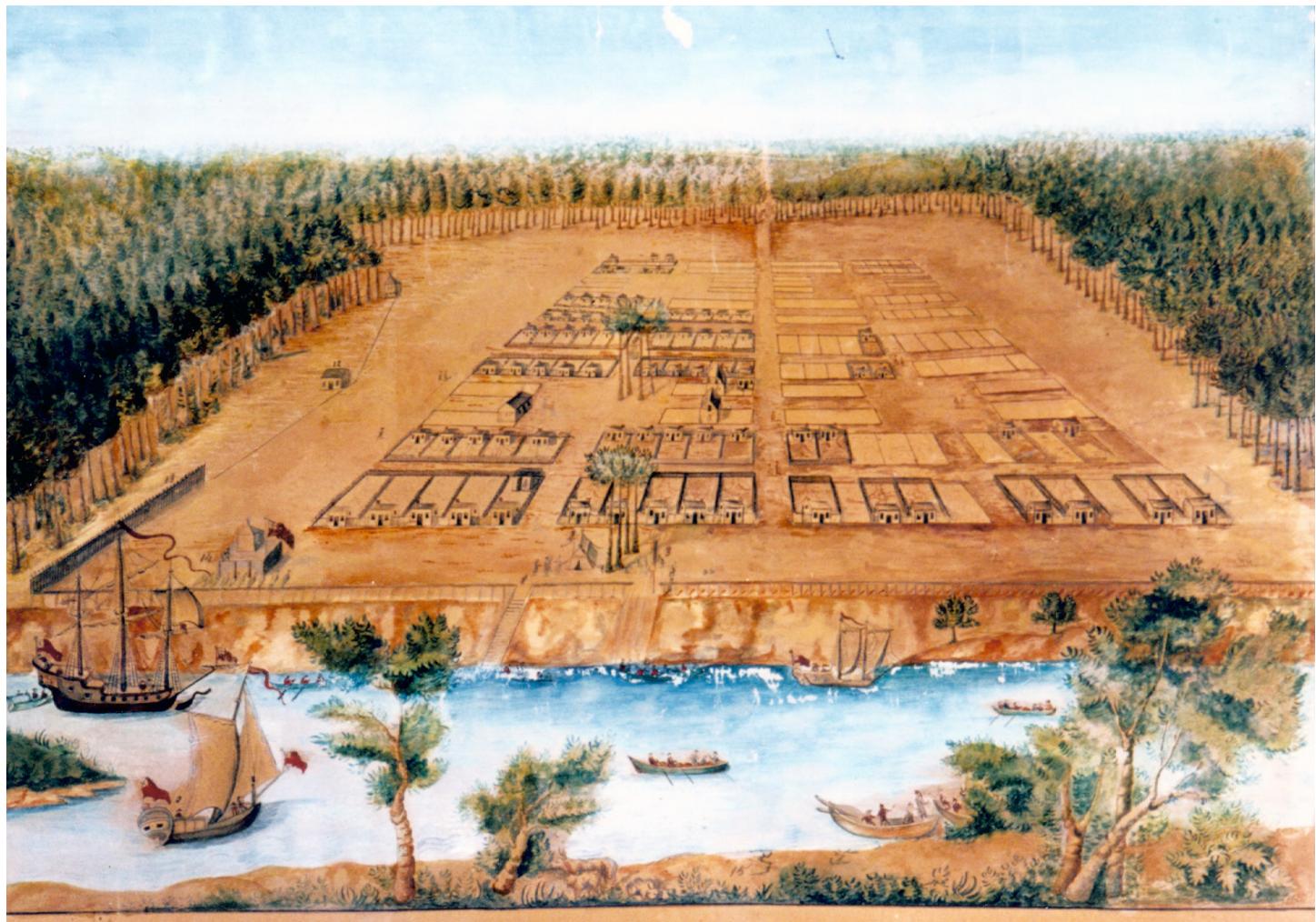
A PROFILE IN GEORGIA'S BUSINESS HISTORY

The Georgia Ports Authority (GPA) operates port facilities where goods, including commodities and natural resources, pass into and out of Georgia. At various ports around the state, goods are loaded onto and unloaded from vessels for shipment to and from ports around the world. In 2019, more than 38.5 million tons of large and small, natural and man-made, imported and exported goods passed through deepwater port terminals in Savannah and Brunswick.

GPA was created in 1945 by the Georgia General Assembly in the wake of the economic boom from World War II. The creation of GPA marked the first official state operation of the Port of Savannah and Port of Brunswick (all previous operation was conducted under private ownership). GPA's mission statement—the summary of its goals and values as an organization—is “to empower entrepreneurs, strengthen industries, sustain communities and fortify families by relentlessly striving to accelerate global commerce.”



# A BRIEF HISTORY OF PORTS IN GEORGIA

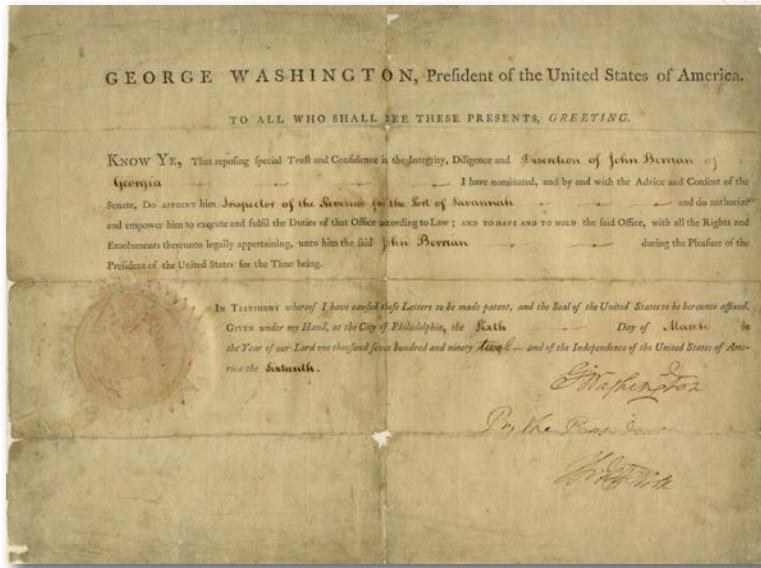


A View of Savannah as it stood the 29 March 1734, by Peter Gordon. *Georgia Historical Society Collection.*

## Establishing a Port

In 1733, Savannah was the first city established in the British colony of Georgia. Its location—18 miles inland from the Atlantic Ocean—was chosen personally by General James Oglethorpe, the colony's first leader and one of 21 founding Trustees. He chose a one-mile-long piece of land along the Savannah River known as Yamacraw Bluff. The bluff provided a steep riverbank almost 40 feet high overlooking the river. As Oglethorpe and the first colonists established the city of Savannah, they also created Georgia's first port.

In 2002, archeologists discovered remains from an Indian trading post located on land being developed by the GPA for an expansion of the Port of Savannah. The trading post belonged to Mary Musgrove, a Creek Indian who was central to trade between Native Americans and European settlers.



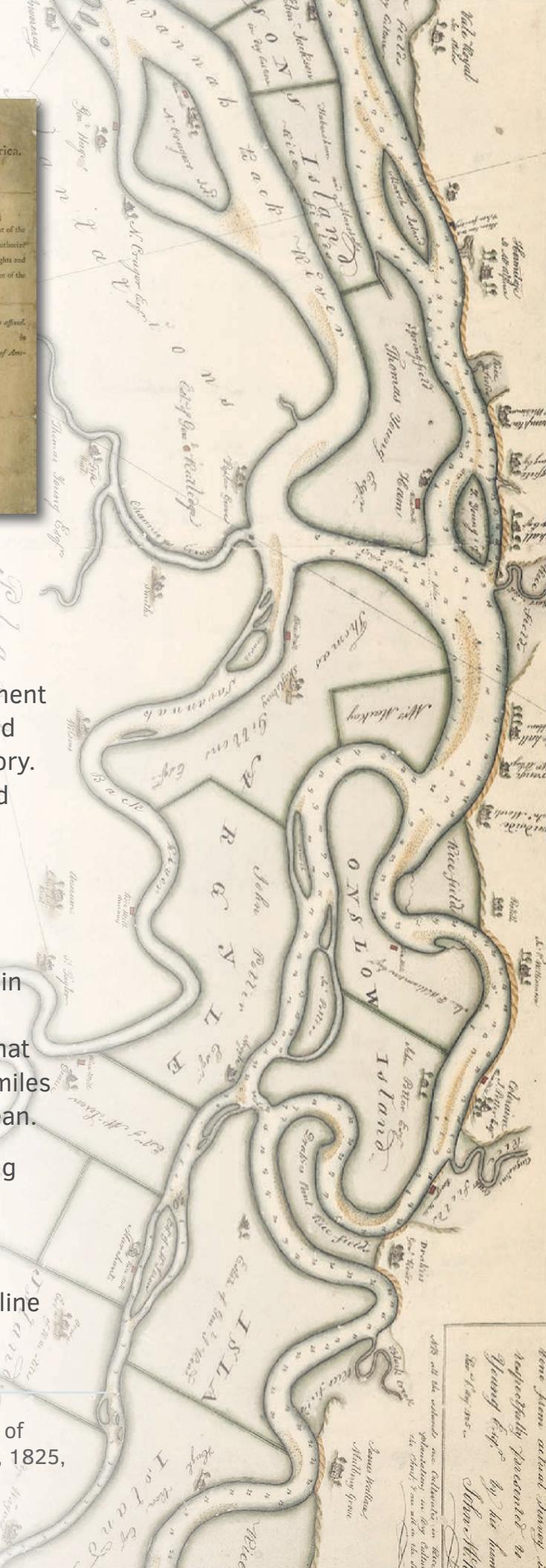
## The Savannah River

The Savannah River is one of the state's most extensive waterways and has been a central element in Georgia's economic development. It has served as a shipping channel throughout Georgia's history. It was used by Native Americans who established trading posts along the river prior to European settlement.

The Savannah River extends from the Piedmont geographic region of Georgia, characterized by rolling hills, stretching south into the Coastal Plain where it forms the border between Georgia and South Carolina. Its navigable area (the portion that ships or boats can travel) is approximately 200 miles long, extending from Augusta to the Atlantic Ocean.

Augusta (a city that was initially an Indian trading post and was later settled by English colonists) marks the location of the fall line where the hilly Piedmont region drops off to meet the low-lying Coastal Plain. Waterfalls are common on the fall line and restrict boat travel farther north.

Top: Commission of John Berrien as Inspector of the Port of Savannah, March 6, 1792. Right: Chart of Savannah River, 1825, by John McKinnon. *Georgia Historical Society Collection.*



During the 18th century, rice and cotton were the first staple crops grown in Georgia. They were cultivated along the banks of the Savannah River, below the fall line in Georgia's "agricultural heartland" or Inner Coastal Plain. These raw materials were exported via the Port of Savannah (located in the Outer Coastal Plain or on the coast of Georgia) as part of the colonial system of mercantilism—the English economic policy focused on exporting raw materials from the colonies to England, the mother country, where they were turned into finished goods that were then re-exported back to the colonies.



Bolls of cotton picked in 1915.  
*Georgia Historical Society Collection.*

## King Cotton

During the 19th century, cotton became the single most important crop in Georgia's agricultural economy. Georgia's economic dependence on cotton created the need for a large, cheap labor source. The port of Savannah played a primary role in the transportation of Africans who were forced into slavery and were brought to the United States via the Atlantic Slave Trade during the 18th and 19th centuries.

The cotton trade was vital to Georgia's economy during the Civil War, making the port of Savannah and the Savannah River targets for the United States strategic blockade of Confederate ports. The U.S. blockade aimed to limit the goods the Confederacy (the 11 states that seceded from the United States in 1860-1861) could ship in order to finance the war.

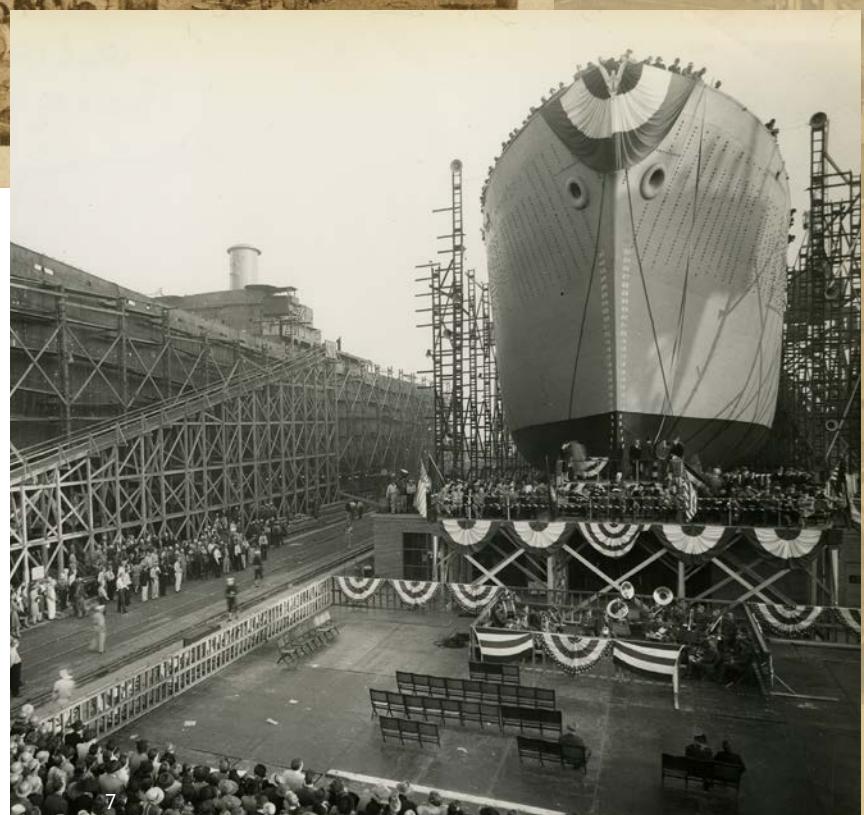
During the early 20th century, the cotton industry declined in Georgia. One major factor was the devastation caused by the boll weevil, an insect whose larva feeds on the cotton plant. The decline of the cotton industry heavily impacted ports because of the drop in demand for cargo transport.

Naval stores—products such as lumber, railroad ties, rosin, and turpentine—replaced cotton as Georgia's largest exports. Between the 1890s and World War II, the ports of Savannah and Brunswick led the nation in the shipment of naval stores. New industries also developed near the ports including the Savannah Sugar Refinery and Union Bag and Paper.



Left: Naval stores docks. Brunswick, Ga, not dated.  
*Georgia Historical Society Collection of Postcards.*

Bottom: Launching of the Liberty Ship *Oglethorpe*, November 20, 1942.  
*Foltz Photography Studio Photographs Collection.*



Prior to the creation of the GPA, from 1942-1945, 187 Liberty ships were constructed at the ports of Savannah and Brunswick. The construction of the ships was Georgia's largest civilian contribution to World War II. Liberty ships transported troops and supplies to the European and Pacific theaters and were vital to the American war effort.

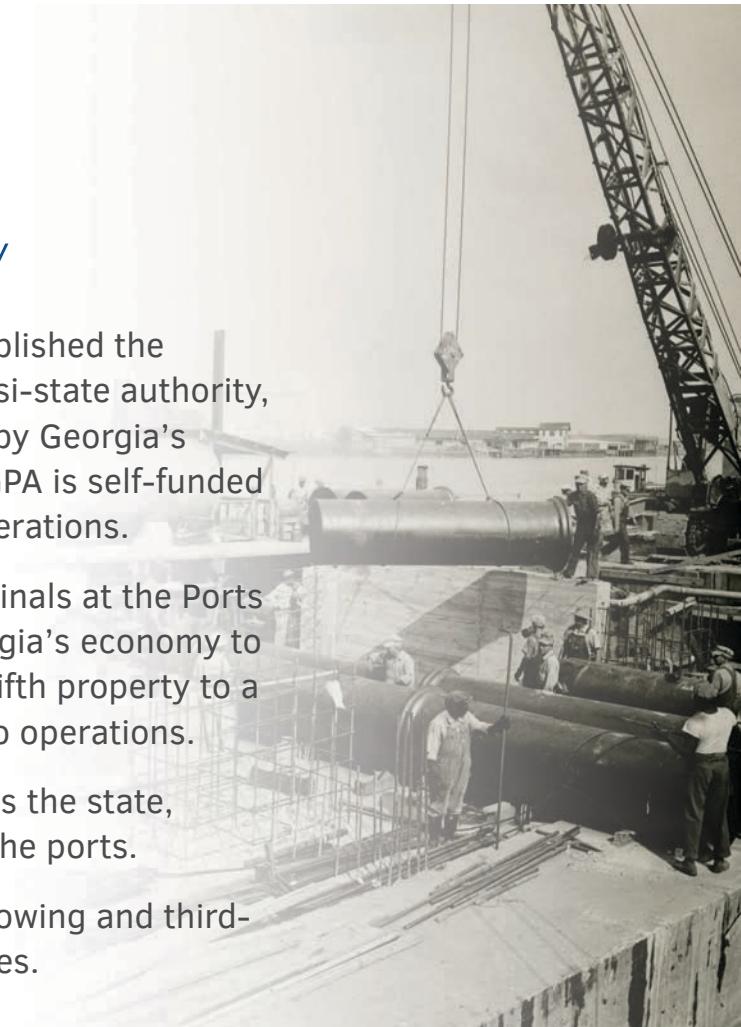
# Creation of the Georgia Ports Authority

In 1945, the Georgia General Assembly established the Georgia Ports Authority (GPA). GPA is a quasi-state authority, governed by a 13-member board appointed by Georgia's governor, but not supported by tax dollars. GPA is self-funded through income generated from business operations.

GPA owns and operates four deepwater terminals at the Ports of Savannah and Brunswick connecting Georgia's economy to markets across the world. GPA leases out a fifth property to a terminal operator in Brunswick for bulk cargo operations.

GPA supports more than 400,000 jobs across the state, meaning that one in every 11 jobs relies on the ports.

Today, the Port of Savannah is the fastest-growing and third-busiest container gateway in the United States.





**1733:** Gen. James Edward Oglethorpe and 114 colonists land on what is then known as Yamacraw Bluff on the Savannah River and establish Savannah and the new colony of Georgia.



**1749:** Repeal of the anti-slavery provision in the Charter of the Colony of Georgia, an act permitting the importation of slaves to Georgia.



**1779:** The Siege of Savannah, the second deadliest battle in the American Revolution takes place.



**1793:** At Mulberry Grove Plantation on a bluff above the Savannah River, a young teacher named Eli Whitney invents the cotton gin, forever transforming the agricultural landscape of the South.



**1833:** The Central of Georgia Railway is established connecting Savannah to western parts of Georgia.

**1862:** United States strategic blockade of Confederate ports during the Civil War begins. Savannah is targeted as Georgia's most significant port city.

**1915:** The boll weevil is introduced to Georgia decimating the cotton industry in the state and the Southeast.

**1925:** The first airport is established in Atlanta eventually becoming Hartsfield-Jackson International Airport.

**1942–1945:** 187 Liberty ships were constructed at the ports of Savannah and Brunswick for World War II.

**1945:** The Georgia Ports Authority—with control over the deepwater ports in both Savannah and Brunswick—is created by an act of the Georgia legislature in response to the post-World War II economic boom.

**1956:** The Federal-Aid Highway Act establishes the interstate highway system.

**1995:** Port of Savannah chosen as primary port of entry for the 1996 centennial Olympic games.

**2002:** Archeologists discovered remnants from an Indian trading post located on land being developed by the GPA for an expansion of the Port of Savannah. The trading post belonged to Mary Musgrove, a Creek Indian who was central to trade between Native Americans and European settlers.

**2003:** Savannah's port is ranked the fourth busiest in the country.

**2019:** The final stage of the Savannah Harbor Expansion Project begins.



CASE STUDY:

## The Georgia Ports Authority and its Role in Georgia's Four Systems of Transportation

A major function of Georgia's economy is trade. Integral to trade is transportation—or shipping methods. Georgia has four major systems of transportation that facilitate the shipment of goods into and out of the United States. Known as the “transportation hub” of the Southeast, Georgia's deepwater ports, interstate highways, railroad tracks, and major international airport work together to ship goods around the world and provide jobs to thousands of Georgia's citizens.

Deepwater ports are where cargo is loaded and unloaded from ocean-going vessels. Georgia's two deepwater ports are located in Savannah and Brunswick. The Georgia Ports Authority (GPA) owns and operates Georgia's deepwater ports where millions of tons of cargo are imported and exported each year. The Port of Savannah includes two terminals, Garden City Terminal—the largest single-terminal for container operations in North America—and Ocean Terminal.

Most cargo that moves through Garden City Terminal is containerized, or packed into and transported in large containers. Ocean Terminal also handles breakbulk and Ro/Ro cargo. Breakbulk is cargo not shipped in containers but packed separately. Ro/Ro or “roll on/roll off” is wheeled or tracked cargo, such as cars, trucks, tractors, and heavy equipment that are driven on and off a ship.

Intermodal transportation is moving cargo using more than one means of transportation. The four systems of transportation in Georgia working together is an excellent example of intermodal transportation.

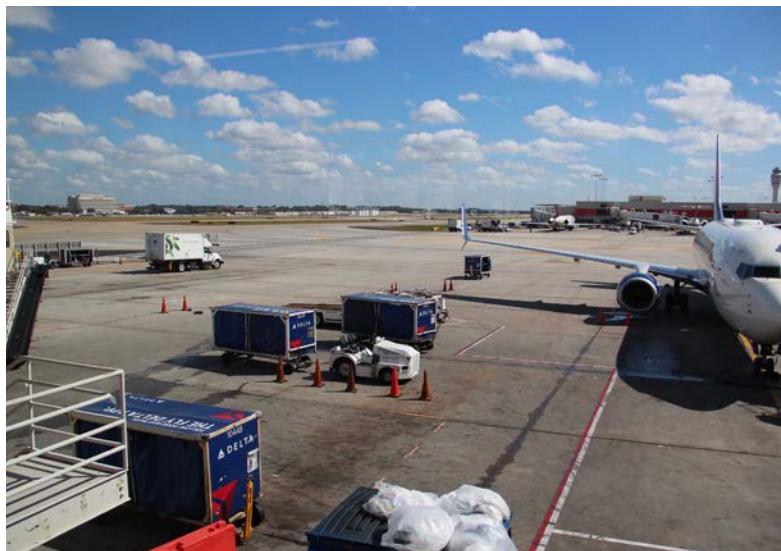
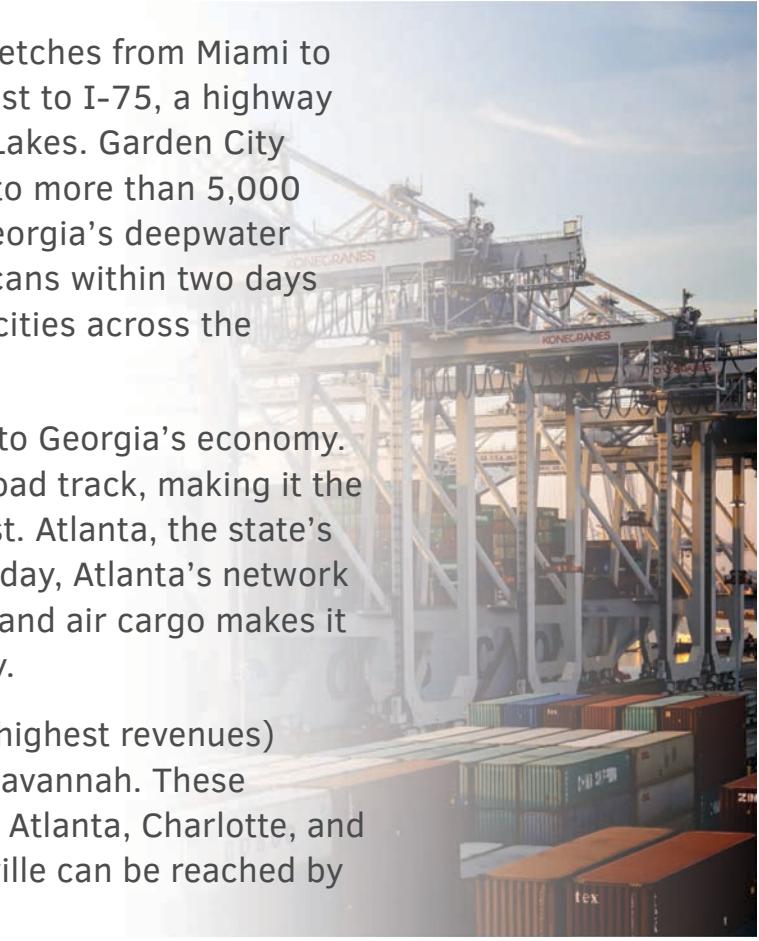
The National Interstate Highway System was established by the federal government in the 1950s to support the movement of goods across states. Georgia has more than 20,000 miles of high-performance roadways and 12,000 miles of interstate highways. Garden City and Ocean terminals at the Port of Savannah have direct access to

interstate highways I-95 and I-16. I-95 stretches from Miami to Canada, while I-16 connects Georgia's coast to I-75, a highway that connects central Florida to the Great Lakes. Garden City Terminal alone transfers cargo from ships to more than 5,000 trucks per day. Goods shipped to one of Georgia's deepwater ports can reach up to 80 percent of Americans within two days via interstate and highway connections to cities across the United States.

Railroads have been historically significant to Georgia's economy. The state currently has 5,000 miles of railroad track, making it the most extensive rail network in the Southeast. Atlanta, the state's largest city, developed as a railroad hub. Today, Atlanta's network of intermodal traffic between rail, highway, and air cargo makes it one of the largest cargo hubs in the country.

Two Class I railroads (the carriers with the highest revenues) operate directly on terminal at the Port of Savannah. These carriers offer overnight service to cities like Atlanta, Charlotte, and Birmingham. Cities like Memphis and Nashville can be reached by rail in two days and Chicago and Dallas in three days.

In 2018, GPA in partnership with Murray County, Georgia, and CSX Transportation, opened the Appalachian Regional Port. It is an excellent example of an inland intermodal terminal where goods move from truck to rail or rail to truck on their way to and from deepwater ports.





Thanks to direct access via highway and rail transportation, Georgia's deepwater ports are connected to the world's busiest airport: Hartsfield-Jackson International Airport in Atlanta. Hartsfield-Jackson serves more passengers than any other airport in the world and is one of the largest air cargo hubs in North America. The airport has more than 2 million square feet of warehouse space to hold cargo shipped from deepwater ports. Once cargo leaves the Atlanta airport, it can reach up to 80 percent of U.S. markets in two hours.

Another economic advantage of GPA and Georgia's four transportation systems is the creation of jobs in manufacturing and logistics, the industry responsible for commercial activity involving transporting goods. GPA supports more than 400,000 jobs, which is 9 percent of Georgia's total employment. One in 11 jobs in the state is dependent on the ports. More than 5,000 companies in Georgia employ people to move goods and more than 30,000 companies rely on cargo movers.

The Savannah Harbor Expansion Project (SHEP) will deepen the inner harbor of the Savannah River to 47 feet and the outer harbor to 49 feet at low tide in order to accommodate the increasing size of vessels used to ship goods. The project is scheduled for completion by 2022.

## Vocabulary

**Port:** any place where persons and/or merchandise can pass, by water or land, into and out of a place.

**Deepwater Port:** important waterway used for shipping cargo; Georgia's two deepwater ports are in Savannah and Brunswick.

**Goods:** products and materials that people want.

**Hartsfield-Jackson International Airport:** the world's busiest airport; located in Atlanta; named after Atlanta mayors William B. Hartsfield and Maynard Jackson.

**Intermodal:** transportation involving more than one form of carrier, such as truck and rail, or truck, ship and rail.

**Interstate Highway System:** national highway system established by the federal government in the 1950s.

**Railroads:** an important mode of transportation used to ship a large amount of goods nationwide; many of Georgia's cities were developed due to the railroad.

# Georgia Standards for Excellence

## **SS8H2 Analyze the colonial period of Georgia's history.**

Analyze the relationship between James Oglethorpe, Tomochichi, and Mary Musgrove in establishing the city of Savannah at Yamacraw Bluff.

Give examples of the kinds of goods and services produced and traded in colonial Georgia.

## **SS8H5 Analyze the impact of the Civil War on Georgia.**

Explain Georgia's role in the Civil War; include the United States blockade of Georgia's coast, the Emancipation Proclamation, Chickamauga, Sherman's Atlanta Campaign, Sherman's March to the Sea, and Andersonville.

## **SS8H9 Describe the role of Georgia in WWII.**

Evaluate the purpose and economic impact of the Bell Bomber Plant, military bases, and the Savannah and Brunswick shipyards.

## **SS8H12 Explain the importance of developments in Georgia since the late 20th century.**

Analyze Georgia's role in the national and global economy of the 21st Century, with regard to tourism, Savannah port expansion, and the film industry.

## **SS8G1 Describe Georgia's geography and climate.**

Distinguish among the five geographic regions of Georgia in terms of location, climate, agriculture, and economic contribution.

Locate key physical features of Georgia and explain their importance; include the Fall Line, Okefenokee Swamp, Appalachian Mountains, Chattahoochee and Savannah Rivers, and barrier islands.

Analyze the importance of water in Georgia's historical development and economic growth.

## **SS8E1 Explain how the four transportation systems (road, air, water, and rail) of Georgia contribute to the development and growth of the state's economy.**

Evaluate the ways in which the Interstate Highway System, Hartsfield-Jackson International Airport, deepwater ports, and railroads interact to support the exchange of goods and services domestically and internationally.

Explain how the four transportation systems provide jobs for Georgians.

# Image Credits

**P. 2-3:** Georgia Ports Authority.

**P. 4:** A View of Savannah as it stood the 29 March 1734, by Peter Gordon. *Georgia Historical Society Collection*.

**P. 5:** Top: Commission of John Berrien as Inspector of the Port of Savannah, March 6, 1792. Right: Chart of Savannah River, 1825, by John McKinnon. *Georgia Historical Society Collection*.

**P. 6:** Bolls of cotton picked in 1915. *Georgia Historical Society Collection*.

**P. 7:** Left: Naval stores docks. Brunswick, Ga, not dated. *Georgia Historical Society Collection of Postcards*. Bottom: Launching of the Liberty Ship Oglethorpe, November 20, 1942. *Foltz Photography Studio Photographs Collection, Georgia Historical Society*.

**P. 8:** Top: Savannah Electric and Power Company (SEPCO), Progress extension of River Street, C. 1948. MS 1360. *Foltz Photography Studio Photographs Collection, Georgia Historical Society*. Left: View from National Bank showing Mill Haven and Merchants and Miners docks, C. 1912. MS 1381. *Savannah Electric and Power Company (Ga.) Photograph Albums Collection, Georgia Historical Society*. Bottom left: Man painting the draft numbers on the hull of a ship, C. 1955. MS 1700. *Georgia Ports Authority Photographs Collection, Georgia Historical Society*. Middle right: View of the Savannah River showing industrial cranes and water towers along it's shores and a cargo ship on the water, C. 1955. MS 1700. *Georgia Ports Authority Photographs Collection, Georgia Historical Society*. Bottom right: Savannah Electric and Power Company (SEPCO), Progress on Riverside Station, C. 1948. MS 1360. *Foltz Photography Studio Photographs Collection, Georgia Historical Society*.

**P. 9:** 1) Map of the American Colonies in 1733. Map Detail, Oglethorpe Meeting Indian Chief, 1733. MS1361. *Georgia Historical Society Map Collection*. 2) Central of Georgia Railroad "R.R. Cuyler." *Foltz Photography Studio Photographs Collection, Georgia Historical Society*. 3-5) *Georgia Ports Authority*.

**P. 10:** *Georgia Ports Authority*.

**P. 11:** Top: *Georgia Ports Authority*. Bottom 3: *Wikipedia*.

**P. 12:** *Georgia Ports Authority*.

**P. 16:** Open Cargo Ship, C. 1975. MS 1361. *Georgia Historical Society Photograph Collection, Georgia Historical Society*.

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GEORGIA  
BUSINESS HISTORY  
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The logo consists of a teal-colored silhouette of the state of Georgia. To the right of the silhouette, the words "GEORGIA BUSINESS HISTORY INITIATIVE" are written in a serif font, with "GEORGIA" on top, "BUSINESS HISTORY" in the middle, and "INITIATIVE" on the bottom line.