SLAVE HOUSING PATTERNS WITHIN THE PLANTATION LANDSCAPE OF COASTAL GEORGIA

By

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by

Stefanie L. Joyner
Dedicated to the memory of my father, Ernest H. Joyner, Jr.
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SLAVE HOUSING PATTERNS WITHIN THE PLANTATION LANDSCAPE OF COASTAL GEORGIA

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The African American slave experience has been analyzed from many different perspectives. Living conditions, labor requirements, discipline procedures, and familial and owner relationships have all been the focus of academic reports over the past hundred years. Regional studies document these issues by state, plantation size, and even agricultural crop. This study, which focuses on the coastal area of Georgia, analyzes slave housing patterns on these coastal plantations. The goals of this study were to document the placement of slave quarters within the plantation layout on coastal Georgia plantations; and then to compare the plantations for similarities and differences in spatial organization.

Specific types of plantation site plans were collected and studied to determine the placement of the slave dwellings; and their relationship to each other and the remainder of the plantation. Historic maps and documents (and recent archeological surveys) were used to document the plantation layouts. A total of sixteen site plans are included in this
research. These layouts show the plantations’ built environment; and other landscape features are included where appropriate. The rice and Sea Island Cotton plantation site plans are compared to ascertain similarities or differences within the coastal region. These plantation layouts are classified as *Block* or *Nodal-block* depending on their nucleated or dispersed slave housing pattern. Other academic studies were used to investigate the basis or motivation for these placement patterns.

Although definitive patterns were not found, it was concluded that the topography, crop cultivation, amount of acreage, number of slaves, and the prevailing mores of antebellum society probably influenced plantation layout. While the Georgia tidewater landscape provided the common environment for these plantations, further research within this target area is needed to definitively identify slave housing patterns.
CHAPTER 1
INTRODUCTION

Ulrich Phillips begins his book *Life and Labor in the Old South* by discussing the weather.

Let us begin by discussing the weather, for that has been the chief agency in making the South distinctive. It fostered the cultivation of the staple crops, which promoted the plantation system, which brought the importation of Negroes, which not only gave rise to chattel slavery but created a lasting race problem. These led to controversy and regional rivalry for power, which produced apprehensive reactions and culminated in a stroke for independence. Thus we have the house that Jack built, otherwise known for some years as the Confederate States of America (Phillips 1929: 3).

While the South’s climate controlled crop production and definitely contributed to the enduring power of slavery, it is noted that racism, avarice, and unity also played a part in America’s unwillingness to abolish its enslaved people. The coastal plantations examined in this project share that same history as others in the American South.

The purpose of this study was to examine a small part of the plantation system along the coast of Georgia for similarities or differences in the placement of slave quarters within the plantation layout. Because of differences in labor and machinery, this study was confined to coastal Georgia; and to sites with similar climate, topography, and crop production. From the mid 1700s to the Civil War, plantation owners along the coast of Georgia used the land mainly to produce rice and long-staple cotton. Both crops are included in this analysis to provide a comparison within the target area. The methodology includes gathering plantation site plans from many different sources (ranging from historical maps to academic books and Internet resources). Most of the information used
for plantations on the Savannah River comes from two sources: the Work Projects Administration (WPA 1941) Chatham County Map Portfolio; and a companion book edited by Mary Granger (1947) titled Savannah River Plantations, originally presented in the Georgia Historical Quarterly. The WPA began tracing original eighteenth and nineteenth century surveyors’ maps in 1941 to preserve the information represented in these documents. Now held at the Georgia Historical Society in Savannah, these maps show many of the antebellum plantations located along the Savannah River. The details vary between them: some present labeled structures; and others concentrate on drainage or acreage surveys. The book contains information from land deeds, wills, and estate account books that detail acreage, land usage and the progression of ownership from the eighteenth to the twentieth centuries. Regional publications and archeological studies provide the information on other coastal Georgia plantations, while republished journals and estate records outline firsthand knowledge of antebellum plantation life.

With the fact-finding complete, the layouts of the plantation site plans were compared with the other known facts about crop production, acreage and location. Once presented in a matrix, patterns were expected to emerge that could be studied and analyzed for basis and comparison. The value of this study is to provide further details about a time in southern history that was important to America’s identity and history; and possibly to determine how the settlement patterns affected the slaves themselves.

**Slavery in the United States**

Enslavement of African Americans in the United States began with the arrival of Dutch ships in Virginia in 1619 (Parish 1989: 12). Although the number of slaves remained small during the seventeenth century, they grew with each passing decade. In 1700 the slave population numbered 26,000 and was concentrated mainly in Virginia and
Maryland. By 1861, almost 4 million African Americans were enslaved throughout the American South (Durant and Knottnerus 1999: 78, Parish 1989: 12).

During the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries as new frontiers opened and land grants were readily offered, the number of indentured servants decreased; and the need for a permanent labor force became of vital importance to landowners in the mid-Atlantic colonies. In South Carolina, the emergence of the rice culture in 1690 only increased the need to use Africans for their knowledge of rice production and for the grueling labor necessary to bring the crop to market (Parish 1989: 14). The rise in importation of slaves continued and reached its peak between 1740 and 1760, bringing in more than 100,000 new workers, even while the native-born slave population steadily multiplied (Parish 1989: 15). In the years before the American Revolution, slavery existed throughout the south but was concentrated around the tobacco regions of Virginia and Maryland and the rice and indigo production areas of South Carolina and Georgia.

**Cotton Kingdom**

The last decade of the eighteenth century ushered in cotton production as an economically significant activity in the south. The industrial revolution fueled the need for more cotton and more labor. Planters on the coast of South Carolina and Georgia grew high-quality long-staple cotton, which was easily deseeded by hand (Berlin, Favreau and Miller 1998: xxx). Growing the crop inland, however, remained elusive. Proliferation of short-staple varieties was constrained by the intensive labor needed to deseed the fibers. In 1793 at Mulberry Grove (a plantation outside Savannah), Eli Whitney showcased his model of the cotton gin, a machine that separated the seeds from the cotton fibers. This invention revolutionized cotton production and helped spur the growth of plantations throughout the south (Morrison 1979: xii). In 1800, less than
100,000 bales of cotton were generated in the southern states. By 1860, 4 million bales were being produced (Berlin, Favreau and Miller 1998: xxi).

**Second Great Migration**

As the country expanded, so did slavery. The United States Constitution gave the institution of slavery “recognition and protection where it already existed” (Parish 1989: 18). Despite the importation ban in 1808, slavery continued to grow and move west and south with the cotton belt. Before 1810, most of the slave population lived between the Delaware and Savannah Rivers. By 1860, however, only one-third resided in the original slave regions (Berlin, Favreau and Miller 1998: xxiv). The slave population had shifted to the Deep South and the fertile “black belt” that stretched throughout Georgia, Alabama and Mississippi. Another concentration could be found along the Mississippi River (where sugar was joining cotton as a staple crop). Although many slaves had endured the first migration of a trans-Atlantic journey, many more suffered the harsh conditions of the westward expansion as they were moved, with or without their families, to newly created plantations and labor fields.

**Plantations**

As we all know, Tara never existed as a plantation. In fact, Margaret Mitchell’s prototype represented only 1% of the plantations in America on the eve of the Civil War (Vlach 1993: 8). Although many southern farmers owned slaves, few owned more than 5. In fact, of the 46,274 plantations extant in 1860, only 2,300 plantations had a workforce of a hundred or more; and 20,789 plantations had 20 to 30 slaves (Phillips 1929: 338, Vlach 1993:8).

Hesseltine (Prunty 1955: 461) stated that antebellum landowners believed that 900 to 1,000 acres was “the most profitable-sized agricultural unit,” and that 60 to 100 slaves
could work a unit of this size. Most often, “half or slightly more of the cropland was devoted to specialty staple crops and the remainder to plantation foodstuffs.” Acreage varied among plantations, with coastal plantations often having the largest number of acres; allowing for the ever-changing delineation of swampland boundaries.

Slave housing also varied, depending on the nature and wealth of the planter, the availability of materials and the degree of skilled labor. Joseph (1993:100) described the average slave dwelling along the Georgia coast:

…nineteenth-century lowcountry slave housing was normally of frame construction, with tabby and occasionally brick also employed as construction materials. Slave cabins were raised off the ground and placed on wood or brick piers; pierced construction made these cabins cooler in the summer and also more cleanly….

Houses were usually single-pen cabins, often with chimneys made of clay and sticks. Hall and parlor houses were also represented on the plantation landscape, offering a separate room for eating and sleeping. Occasionally, dormitories and two-story dwellings were also used as slave housing. Most of these examples are representative of the dwellings constructed for field slaves; oftentimes house or skilled laborers resided in larger or more comfortable dwellings than their counterparts who labored in the fields (Vlach 1993: 155-9).

The crop production on these plantations shaped the inhabitants by determining their schedule, occupation, housing patterns, economy, managerial hierarchy and owner residency (Berlin, Favreau and Miller 1998: xxix). For this reason, this academic investigation is limited to analogous plantations on the Georgia coast. Here, situated in the tidewater region of Georgia, located between the Savannah River to the north and the St. Mary’s River to the South, the plantations’ main crops included rice and/or cotton.
Although some aspects of the coastal Georgia plantations were representative of many throughout the south, these plantations were defined by both their location, and the social climate of the Georgia lowcountry.

The proliferation of slavery promoted the growth of plantations along the antebellum landscape. With the emergence of the importance of slavery upon the economic health of the agrarian South, the antebellum planters enlarged their plantations, increased their slave workforce and experimented with crop cultivation. Some of the larger plantations became small, independent cities, producing their own food, clothing and housing. Although the percentage of the plantations with a workforce over 100 was small, their impact on the land and its people was enormous. A few of these plantations that existed along the coast of Georgia are examined here. The social milieu of antebellum Georgia and the process of rice and long-staple cotton cultivation are presented to provide the background for plantation culture. Social and environmental factors are examined to determine possible influences on the plantations’ built environment and then the plantation layouts are diagramed and categorized to compare their similarities or differences in spatial organization. Although not conclusive, the information examined here provides some insight about the plantation layout on the Georgia coast.
CHAPET 2
PLANTATION SYSTEM IN GEORGIA

Georgia, as the thirteenth colony, evolved differently than the others in the New World. Georgia was envisioned as a land where Englishmen, imprisoned from debt, could start over, and a land where mulberry trees would thrive and create a silk industry that would support colonists and sustain English looms back home. This new land would also operate without the labor of slaves, using white indentured servants to further the cause of the common man as the new landowner. Despite this vision, the Colony of Georgia evolved quite differently, emulating the other southern colonies in use of labor, slave ownership, and crop production. The emergent planter class, and the crops they cultivated changed the plantation landscape along the Georgia coast.

Georgia History

The founding of Georgia was based on three principles. First, that the colony was to provide relief for Englishmen imprisoned for debt. Second, the colony was to produce and provide raw goods for England, and thus increase the wealth of the mother country. Third, the colony was to act as a barrier for South Carolina against the Indians and Spaniards in Florida (Flanders 1933: 3). In 1733, General Oglethorpe arrived to establish the city of Savannah. He and his shipload of newly freed debtors and indentured servants agreed to follow the decrees of the colony Trustees. The Trustees had established that no
land grants could be over 500 acres, that no land should be granted to a Trustee for his indirect benefit, that 4 shillings quit rent per 100 acres be paid annually, and that 100 mulberry trees must be planted on each unit of land (Flanders 1933: 6). In addition to these conditions, residents were prohibited from importing “rum, brandies, and strong waters” and African Americans and slaves were excluded from the colony (Flanders 1933: 7). These restrictions immediately caused dissention. Petitions were circulated and presented to the Trustees in 1735, 1738 and 1745 for the repeal of the slave restrictions (Smith 1985: 19). At this time, slavery existed in all of the other twelve colonies and the Georgia residents felt hampered by the constraints. The Trustees were forced to listen, as scores of residents were migrating to South Carolina and other colonies. The Temperance Act was repealed in 1742. In 1750, the acts limiting acreage and prohibiting slavery were also repealed and the period of Trusteeship had ended; Georgia was a royal colony (Smith 1985: 20).

With the bans lifted, scores of new settlers rushed into Georgia. Small farmers pushed into new lands in the interior and large landowners established plantations along the coast. In 1750, a new system of rice cultivation was introduced that revolutionized the rice industry (Smith 1985:21). Population boomed and the residents of Georgia looked forward to a bright future.

**Revolution**

Similar to the other colonies, the residents of Georgia were torn apart by the American Revolution. Many plantation owners were Tories and lost their estates during the war. Many more lost their slaves, as the African-Americans escaped behind British lines. Newly successful plantations fell into disrepair, and an economic lull settled over the colony.
Nineteenth Century

After the war, and with the widespread use of the cotton gin, the population of planters and slaves exploded in Georgia. The cotton belt extended to the west and the number of slaves, as well as the bales of cotton, increased exponentially. In 1800, there were 59,406 slaves in the State of Georgia, mostly residing in the east. By 1850, 381,682 slaves lived and worked in Georgia, but less than half of that number remained in the east (Flanders 1933: 63). Cotton production steadily rose from 1,000 bales in 1790 to 399,273 bales in 1849 (Flanders 1933:66).

Sea Island Cotton

It is generally believed that James Spalding first planted the strain of seeds destined to become the famed Sea Island cotton in the spring of 1787. He received the black seeds from the island of Anguilla in the West Indies, and planted them, in addition to his other crops, on St. Simon’s Island (Sullivan 1990: 115). Sea Island Cotton requires salt air and moderate temperatures and “thrived from Georgetown, South Carolina southward to the St. Mary’s River, and up to about 25 miles inland from the sea” (Sullivan 1990: 117). Spalding’s neighbors probably began planting cotton about the same time and its popularity soon spread from Georgia to South Carolina.

There were many disadvantages to growing the long-staple cotton. Along the coast, storms were common and could often ruin a year’s crop. The cotton gin could not be used to separate the seeds, because the seeds often were crushed and stained the fibers. In 1794, Thomas Spalding inherited his father’s plantation and began to experiment with the cultivation of long-staple cotton. He followed the advice of a Bahamian planter, and increased the density of the plantings, and soon produced up to 350 pounds of cotton per
acre (Sullivan 1990: 117). Spalding was a founding member of the Union Agricultural Society in Darien, Georgia, whose mission statement read:

primary objects of the Society shall be the promotion of Agriculture and Rural Economy by means of a general diffusion of information, through regular meetings, correspondence with other Agricultural Societies and distinguished Agriculturalists, written communications, a collection of Agricultural Works; and by the establishment of premiums and exhibitions, exciting to emulation and experiment” (Sullivan 1990: 107).

No doubt Spalding shared the results of his experimentations with other planters and even published articles in agricultural journals to expound the importance of crop diversification and other issues (Sullivan 1990: 108). By 1798, Sea Island Cotton had replaced indigo as the staple crop for the tidewater region, and by 1828, this superior cotton was selling for $2 a pound (Sullivan 1990: 233). The planters reaped huge profits and soon became some of the wealthiest men in the south.

**Cultivation of Rice in Georgia**

Rice plantations in coastal Georgia also contributed immensely to the wealth of their owners. Although the initial outlay for machinery and labor was expensive, profits soon exceeded most expectations. By 1850, Georgia had replaced South Carolina as the leader in rice production and its rice lands along the coast had the highest concentration of slaves in the state (Sullivan 1990: 801). Although Fanny Kemble has given descriptions of deplorable living conditions on her husband’s rice plantation, it was generally believed that slaves on rice plantations fared better than their counterparts on cotton plantations.

Usually the task system of labor was used when harvesting or planting rice. The slaves were given an allotted task and could leave the fields on completion (to pursue other personal chores like hunting, fishing or gardening). Olmsted, during his journey
through the seaboard states, reported that he usually saw slaves leaving the fields after their allotted tasks between 1:00 and 4:00 in the afternoon (Olmsted 1856: 435). Regardless of finishing early, the slaves had a long, hard day of labor, usually starting at 5:00 or 6:00 AM and spending most of the day standing in mud. The coast of Georgia was well suited to rice cultivation; the planters utilized the tidal flow of the rivers to flood and drain the rice fields. The slaves built dikes and created miles of new rice fields out of previous marshlands. Although rice production was very laborious, and required a higher number of slaves, it was profitable and planters continued to increase their rice fields. The 1850 census lists 551 rice planters in Georgia, with a total of 125,000 slaves and an average of 226 slaves per plantation (Smith 1985: 9).

As with other parts of the South, Georgia embraced slave labor and used the practice to establish farms and plantations throughout the state. Cotton and rice became the staple crops for cultivation and allowed for the emergence of a very wealthy planter class. This was especially true along the coast of Georgia, where many planters enjoyed the best of both worlds that money could buy: the rural life on the plantation and the city life in Savannah.

The plantations created along the Georgia coast were shaped by both the physical environment and customs of antebellum society. Although the coastal Georgia plantations differed from those in other parts of the South, they did contain some similarities in plantation layout. Many factors influenced the plantation layout, some were unique to the topography and cultivation in coastal Georgia, but others were universal across the social milieu of the antebellum south.
In the afternoon, I left the main road, and, towards night, reached a much more cultivated district. The forest of pines extended uninterruptedly on one side of the way, but on the other was a continued succession of very large fields, or rich dark soil – evidently reclaimed swamp-land – which had been cultivated the previous year, in Sea Island cotton, or maize. Beyond them, a flat surface of still lower land, with a silver thread of water curling through it, extended, Holland-like, to the horizon. Usually at as great a distance as a quarter of a mile from the road, and from a half mile to a mile apart, were the residences of the planters – large white houses, with groves of evergreen trees about them; and between these and the road were little villages of slave-cabins…The cottages were framed buildings, boarded on the outside, with shingle roofs and brick chimneys; they stood fifty feet apart, with gardens and pig-yards…At the head of the settlement, in a garden looking down the street, was an overseer’s house, and here the road divided, running each way at right angles; on one side to barns and a landing on the river, on the other toward the mansion…(Olmsted 1856: 416-417).

In the passage above, Olmsted describes his visit to the Georgia coast in 1855.

The plantation landscape varied throughout the South, as the individual layouts were often determined by the ethnic culture of the settlers, climate, crop production and topography. A few geographers and historians have attempted to identify predominant patterns in the plantation layout.

Prunty (1955: 460) outlined his definition of a southern plantation and its representative spatial order in The Geographical Review. Prunty characterized the southern plantation by six elements.

…a landholding large enough to be distinguishable from the larger ‘family’ farm; a distinct division of labor and management functions, with management customarily in the hands of the owner; specialized agricultural production, usually with two or three specialties per proprietorship; location in some area of the South with a plantation tradition; distinctive settlement forms and spatial organization reflecting, to a high degree, centralized control of cultivating power; and a relatively large input of cultivating power per unit of area.
The antebellum plantation had a distinctive pattern, Prunty believed:

The owner’s, or manager’s, house customarily was situated near a cluster of service buildings and slave quarters. Slave houses were grouped compactly in rows along short roads, forming a square or, more frequently, a rectangle of buildings….barns and sheds….were situated not only adjacent to the residence of the management but approximately centrally in relation to pasture, cropland, and labor quarters. Cultivating power was centrally located within the area to which it was applied and among the human elements whose effective employment depend on it (Prunty 1955: 466).

This pattern of a nucleated settlement became the basis for further study of plantation layout systems. The nucleated pattern was generally acknowledged, and its origins and possible objectives are discussed in Chapter 4. Where most cotton and inland plantations fell within the nucleated model, tidewater rice plantations often deviated from the “normal” spatial layout.

Joseph (1993: 223-4) states that a “general model of rice plantation settlement patterning has yet to be developed,” but based on the studies of historians, archeologists and geographers,¹ Joseph presents his own definition.

Because rice plantations frequently engaged large slaves populations, and because the location of rice fields was dictated to a large degree by the presence of suitable wetlands, rice plantations tended toward a dispersed village settlement pattern, which apparently concentrated slaves in relative close proximity to the fields in which they labored…The main house appears to have been frequently situated on high ground, usually at some distance from the rice fields themselves. Bluffs along major rivers may have been preferred settings. Structures associated with the main house appear to vary with the size of the plantation and social status and aspirations of the owner. On small rice plantations Prunty’s (1955) technological nucleus might have been duplicated…A more common arrangement seems to have been a main house with several dependencies often following a symmetrical arrangement, with one slave village located near by, but not immediately adjacent…Away from the main house were additional slave villages on the larger plantations. These were most frequently in relative proximity to the plantation rice fields…Overseer’s dwellings were sometimes located adjacent to slave villages, or at a convenient

¹ Based on material presented in Gunn 1976; Joyner 1984; Smith 1985; Heyward 1983; Lewis 1979; Lewis and Hardesty 1979; Lees 1980; Olmsted 1968; Scott 1984; Singleton 1980; Fairbanks 1983; Flanders 1933; Anthony 1976.
location between two or more villages. Villages were usually organized along ‘streets.’

Rehder (1999), another geographer, identifies three distinct settlement patterns for Louisiana sugar plantations, namely Linear, Nodal Block and Bayou Block. These classifications are very site specific to the Louisiana River Delta, but his Block plans are similar to the ones presented by Prunty and Joseph. Vlach (1993: 191) interprets Rehder’s (Bayou) Block and Nodal Block patterns in his book, Back of the Big House.

Plantations that follow a block organization cluster their structures together near the planter’s residence; the nodal-block plan groups buildings together at separate locations on the plantation property.

For the purpose of this study, the term Block is used to classify plantations under Prunty’s definition of a nuclear plantation, and Nodal Block is applied to those categorized under Joseph’s dispersed plantation description. However, leniency will be applied when classifying the plantations allowing for special occurrences, like the merging of separate plantations into one landholding. The classifications of the sixteen plantations are shown in Chapter 5 (Table 5-1).

The role played by individual settlements in a larger socioeconomic system is reflected in their physical structure. A basic element of structure is the overall arrangement, or patterning, of structures and activities at a habitation site and their differential use through time. Archaeologists have long recognized that patterns of settlement are sensitive indicators of economic, social, and political organization, and are capable of revealing continuity as well as change in adapting societies. Consequently, the observation of settlement patterning should be useful in identifying both traditional settlements and those evolving to meet changing conditions. (Lewis 1985:35).

Lewis and Anthony concur with Prunty about his nucleated (Block) plantation model, but believe that the spatial organization is designed to illuminate the social order of the planter and his slaves. The owner’s residence is large in scale and dominates the

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2 Chang 1967; Trigger 1967; Willey 1953
landscape, with the slave quarters located in deferential positions behind or to the side of the main house. This geometric layout of the plantations displays the Georgian ideals of “order, hierarchy and symmetry” and is represented in the models of many eighteenth-century plantations (Anthony 1976:13; Joseph 1993: 94). Mount Vernon, for example, exemplifies Anthony’s (1976:13) concept of a nucleated, and patriarchal household.

As one approaches by land, the mansion is visible from a great distance. The bowling green in the foreground presents the visitor with his first impression of a patriarchal family comfortably at play in the country. The mansion is flanked by large trees, emphasizing the importance of the big house, making it distant and monumental...A service lane runs through the village-like collections of buildings perpendicular to the main line of approach, and the courtyard of the big house serves as kind of a central square...The proximity of their dwelling to the big house indicated the social rank of the hands. The gardener and overseer were closest and symmetrically opposite.

In antebellum society, social rank was very important and mores of the times dictated that social classes did not commingle. Therefore, the planter and his family remained detached from the overseer, and in turn, the overseer required status symbols to show his “superiority” above the slaves. Architecture became the social indicator.

A nuclear plantation pattern was also a means of retaining centralized control. With all of the service buildings and slave dwellings in one location, the owner was able monitor the plantation occupants. Slave insurrection was always a possibility and the whites, especially on remote plantations, genuinely feared this happening. But always under the watchful eyes of the overseer or planter, the slaves were less likely to gain this power. This is evidenced by the shift in plantation layout after emancipation, as some of the power was transferred from the owner to the tenant farmers and sharecroppers who insisted upon dispersed housing (Prunty 1955; Orser and Nekola 1985). “The occupancy form has been modified whenever a change in control of cultivating power has occurred” (Prunty 1955: 490).
The idea of maintaining control has also been used as a reason for having a dispersed (*Nodal-block*) plantation layout. Singleton (1980: 110) mentioned that having a dispersed pattern deflected the “danger associated with a large assemblage of black people.” Again, the planters were concerned about insurrection, and the power a large body of slaves would have over the few whites on the plantation. In addition, uncooperative slaves could be removed from the rest of the workforce by sending them to the most remote housing settlement on the plantation. Apparently, Pierce Butler sent his intransigent slaves to Settlement Four, which contained the harshest living conditions on Butler’s Island (Joseph 1993: 215).

The location of rice fields also played an important part of the de-nucleated settlement pattern of the larger rice plantation. A successful rice operation required large, expansive fields and numerous slaves to work them. “Lacking mechanical transportation, planters always tried to keep their slaves settled near the fields in which they worked” (Joseph 1993:97). Rice plantations, located within the marshes of the tidewater landscape, also contained few areas of higher ground. Larger plantations also had a higher number of slaves, and housing them on one patch of elevated land may have been impossible. Since slave villages typically contained ten dwellings, “plantations with more than 60 or 70 slaves were likely to have possessed additional quarters” (Joseph: 1993:215).

The order and arrangement of the slave dwellings themselves reflected a certain measure of forced control. The houses were usually organized along “streets” in a grid or linear pattern (Prunty 1955: 465). This spatial pattern “was established for tidewater plantations and later replicated in other areas of the South” (Singleton 1980: 111; Stampp
1956:292). The arrangement also promoted supervision, control, and function by allowing for ease of inspections and cleaning.

In many ways, the planters could control the comfort level, health and relationships of their slaves by dictating housing size, location and construction. Although slaves typically built their own houses, they had little control over the design and size. Most planters or overseers provided the dimensions and specifications for the structures and the slaves or hired carpenters merely followed their dictates (Genovese 1972:528). The houses were usually identical in design and construction, sometimes with larger units available for overseers. Vlach (1993: 164-165) suggests that the practice of identical, uniform housing stifled the individuality of the slaves by limiting their social development and “familial identities” and that slave houses “were…incidentally meant as residences; they were, foremost, the planters’ instruments of social control.”

Few examples exist of slaves attempting to have some control over their built environment. Genovese (1972: 528) quotes two sources, Lay My Burden Down and South Carolina Narratives to cite an example of an attempt to individualize housing by an African born slave on St. Simon’s Island. The slave built an African style hut, only to have his master tear it down. Vlach (1993: 164) refers to another example written in Drums and Shadows: Survival Studies among the Georgia Coastal Negroes, about a slave named Okra on Hopeton Plantation, who also built an African house:

wuz bout twelve by foeteen feet an it hab dut flo an he buil du side lak basket weave wid clay plastuh on it. It hab a flat roof wut he make frum bush an palmettuh an it hab one doe an no winduhs.

This structure too, was soon destroyed.

Sometimes, unwittingly, a planter may have assisted his slaves in retaining their African heritage. One Mississippi African born slave would only have a dirt floor in her
cabin and other cabins seen by Olmsted during his journey were so small that they may have resembled typical housing in Africa.

Traditional building units in much of West and Central Africa frequently measure ten feet by ten feet or less, and many freestanding houses have no openings other than a single doorway (Vlach 1993: 165).

So many of the slaves imported to South Carolina and Georgia came from the Congo area in Africa (70% by 1740 and 40% by 1808) that it seems likely that they could have attempted to recreate some conditions back home (Vlach 1993: 166). To the planter of course, it seemed merely an economic solution to build compact, bare structures.

Another form of African influence may have been having the overseer or driver living at the “head” or end of the slave street. This position was important and reflected their social status above the other slaves.

While the use of slave streets and the linear arrangement of plantations in general has been characterized as a European-American settlement form, [Steven] Jones notes that such settlement patterning also had African precedents….the cooption of a linear structure with authority at its head echoed African cultural ideas concerning settlement form…. (Joseph 1993: 101).

As the number of American born slaves increased and with the importation of African slaves banned, the time and distance from African roots faded and the slaves began create a new existence and culture in America.

Plantation settlement patterns have been the focus of numerous academic reports that have focused on the origins, motivations and consequences of plantation organization. Simple characteristics like topography, slave quantity and plantation size presumably impacted the plantation layout. The settlement patterns examined here were influence by both physical and social factors. Some or all of these factors may have come into play when the plantations in this study were organized. The layouts are examined in the Chapter 4 for further similarities and differences.
CHAPTER 4
PLANTATIONS

The plantations described here were just a sampling of the hundreds of plantations lining the waterways of the Georgia coast. Of these sixteen plantations, ten were located along the Savannah River all within twelve miles of the city. Three plantations were located near Darien, a city about 50 miles south of Savannah. St. Simon’s Island, positioned about 20 miles south of Darien, held two more plantations in this study group. The southernmost plantation represented here was established on remote Cumberland Island, located just north of the Florida border (Figure 4-1).

When available, more detailed descriptions of the plantations buildings or slave life have been included. These descriptions were sometimes noted in plantation journals, slave lists, or by contemporary authors. Unfortunately for this analysis, Granger’s book included few descriptions, but contained the progression of ownership.

The City of Savannah supported and nourished the area planters. With its miles of tidewater mud flats, Savannah rivaled Charleston in cotton production and exportation. The Savannah rice planters grew wealthy, expanded their property and bought more slaves. They bought townhouses as well, and remained mostly absentee landowners. Although representative of the many plantations in coastal Georgia, the ones examined in this report included some of the largest, most productive and prosperous plantations in the area, increasing the chance that these planters owned multiple properties, and resided elsewhere.
Figure 4-1. Coastal Georgia Plantations. Drawing not to scale (Joyner 2003 adapted from Singleton 1980).
Hermitage Plantation

In 1819, the Hermitage was legally conveyed to Henry McAlpin, a Scotsman, educated as an architect. McAlpin was a colorful character, obviously industrious and inventive. In January 1820, McAlpin constructed the earliest known railway in the United States, consisting of a short length of rails located between his two kilns. Sand and clay bricks (including the “Savannah Grey”) were manufactured at the plantation. Many houses in Savannah used the locally made bricks and even Fort Pulaski sported Hermitage fired blocks. McAlpin also owned timber tracts upriver, and floated logs downstream to sawmills located between the plantation house and brick kilns.

In addition to rice planting and brick making, around 1820 McAlpin established an iron foundry. McAlpin’s friend, William Jay, promoted the foundry and advocated building with more iron including “…. floor joists of cast iron,…the roof to have iron rafters,…The shutters and sash frames to be of iron,…” (Granger 1947: 436). McAlpin’s friendship with Jay, an English architect of some importance in Savannah, no doubt influenced his design of the new house at the Hermitage. Very similar to every Savannah house Jay designed, the new Hermitage had double curving stairs leading to a columned portico. The house façade was identical from the front and rear, so that the same view was displayed whether arriving from the riverside, or along the oak alley know as McAlpin Avenue.

McAlpin continued to expand his acreage, and in addition to his mainland purchases, acquired a rice plantation on Argyle Island and worked it with 90 slaves. He sold this island tract in 1849 to Charles Manigault. By the time McAlpin died in 1851, the Hermitage contained 610 acres, 16 vehicles, 42 horses, 38 sheep and 172 slaves valued at $63,890. The estate was split between his 6 children, and plundered during the
Civil War. Being made of brick, most of the buildings on the plantation survived Sherman’s march, but the plantation remained desolate and the family moved to town. In 1935, the mansion and two slave houses were purchased by Henry Ford and the reconstructed slave houses placed on display at his museum in Michigan. (Granger 1947: 419-450).

Because the prominence of McAlpin and the Hermitage (and the brick constructed buildings), many sources of information are available about the plantation. Vlach (1993: 175) includes a reconstructed drawing of the Hermitage in his book, Back of the Big House, a study on plantation architecture. Vlach’s site plan was drawn by William B. Harper in 1936 and shows two rows of double pen slave houses forming a “T” along “McAlpin Avenue” on the land side of the plantation (Figure 4-2). The base of the “T” is made up of a double row of 12 houses placed an equal distance from each other. The whole slave settlement depicted here contains a total of 28 houses. The WPA reproduced map of 1889 also shows the same configuration with 25 houses, two on the north end of the “T” larger than the rest. The map reproduced on the Henry Ford Museum website shows 52 slave houses in a double rectangle or butterfly shape (Figure 4-3). The only inconsistency with this map compared to the others, is the break in the middle of the two rectangles, which is not shown on Vlach’s map, and is not quite clear on the WPA map.

The slave houses “were one family units, each with two rooms and separate kitchen with fireplace. A vegetable garden was located behind each unit, along with a chicken yard” (Smith 1985: 122). In 1864, a northern journalist described the slave street as “…about 70 or 80 Negro houses, all built of brick and white-washed so they look very
Figure 4-2. Hermitage Plantation. Drawing not to scale (Joyner 2003 adapted from Vlach 1993: 175).
Figure 4-3. Hermitage Plantation #2 (Henry Ford Museum and Greenfield Village website: http://www.hfmgv.org/education/smartfun/heritage/house/siteplan.html).
neat, and rows of live oaks between, making it the handsomest plantation…in Georgia.” (Smith 1985: 122). Pictures from the 1930’s show the remaining houses facing each other, with openings for windows and pyramidal roofs (Figure 4-4).

The Hermitage Plantation has a classic nucleated settlement pattern, with most residences and service buildings clustered in a central location upon the plantation. The main house, kitchen, smoke house and slave dwellings are all located near the northern land boundary and the river, with the rice fields extending to the west and south. Further south along the river are the wharves, brick kilns, sawmill and waterworks.

**Richmond and Kew Plantation**

The State of Georgia purchased Richmond and Kew plantation in 1786 and gave it to General Anthony Wayne for his service in the Revolution. In 1791 Wayne was elected to Congress and later given a command appointment in the American Army. Possibly these responsibilities, and a large debt, compelled Wayne to convey his interests in Richmond and Kew Plantation to Samuel Potts of London. The lands remained in legal limbo for twelve years and were finally sold in 1803 for 2,000 pounds; having been neglected for many years, the plantation probably had few acres of rice in cultivation at that time. (Granger 1947:114-125).

The plantation site plan (Figure 4-5) should be dated between 1788 and 1800, based primarily on the dates of ownership of the adjoining lands. Since this plantation changed hands and boundaries frequently, it can be assumed that the two separate housing settlements reflected two earlier plantations. The plan shows two clusters of smaller houses, totaling 22 structures, presumed to be slave dwellings. Since documentation could not be found verifying the number of slaves on Richmond and Kew
Figure 4-4. Hermitage slave cabins. (Georgia Historical Society collection: http://memory.loc.gov/ammem/ammemhome.html).
Figure 4-5. Richmond and Kew Plantation. Drawing not to scale (Joyner 2003 adapted from WPA 1941: 8).
plantation, using the number of 5.2 slaves per dwelling as presented by Fogel and Engerman (1974:115-116), the supposed total number of slaves housed in the 22 structures would be approximately 115. The other buildings are assumed to be owner and overseer residences, barns, stables, or mills. The overseer residence was possibly located at the end of the row of dwellings closest to the river, with the owner’s house being the largest structure.

This plantation is classified as a *Nodal Block* plan, since there are two distinct settlements, with a few presumed service buildings located between the two (Figure 4-6). The structures are centrally located within the plantation, with fields extending to the front and rear of the narrow land plot totaling 1,300 acres (WPA 1941: 8). This categorization is based on the fact that two plantations have been combined as one; separated, each would merit a *Block* classification.

**Fairlawn Plantation**

In addition to Fairlawn, Thomas Gibbons owned other plantations, and generated most of his profit in rice production from his other Argyle Island tracts. At his death, Gibbons’ Georgia properties passed on to his son, William Gibbons. William, like his father, did not live on his plantations, but resided mostly in the Savannah townhouse or on the family estate in New Jersey. William’s time of ownership coincided with the era of prosperity in Savannah from 1828-1848, and he continued to expand his property and slaves. Upon William’s death in 1852, the Savannah properties were conveyed to his son, William Heyward Gibbons. William Heyward settled in Savannah and often took his friends on day trips to hunt on the plantation lands. It has not been established how many slaves worked the Fairlawn tract, but in 1860, it is known that there were 700 acres
Figure 4-6. Richmond and Kew Plantation (WPA 1941: 8).

The structures are located in the center of the drawing, near the rice fields.
in cultivation on Fairlawn and the two Argyle Island plantations, with a workforce of 600 slaves. There were two housing settlements for these 600 workers, one on Fairlawn and the other on one of the Argyle Island tracts. (Granger 1947: 303-323).

This map of Fairlawn dates to 1830-42 (Figure 4-7) and shows nine extant slave houses on the 479 acre tract (WPA 1941:17). Using Fogel and Engerman’s estimate of 5.2 slaves per dwelling, even if these were double houses, they would likely shelter less than one hundred slaves, leaving the majority of the workforce housed on the Argyle Island tract. With incomplete information and a map dating to 1842 and statistical data from 1860, it is impossible to reconcile these two sources. The slave houses are in two rows of four, perpendicular to the river, with one house at the end, between both rows. The overseer’s house is a small distance away, at the end of a road, between the slave quarters and the river. The stockyard and barn are closest to the river, surrounded by rice fields. Fairlawn is noticeably a defined as a Block plan, with all of the buildings located near the river and rice fields with no other settlements visible on the extensive land holdings to the west (Figure 4-8).

**Gowrie and East Hermitage Plantation**

Purchased in 1833 and 1849, the Gowrie and East Hermitage plantation sites on Argyle Island became some of the most profitable rice lands on the Savannah River. Charles Manigault, a South Carolina planter, expanded into Georgia, but remained mostly an absentee owner to his Savannah plantations, relying heavily upon his overseers and managers to administer both neighboring properties.

Charles and his son, Louis, expanded operations and by 1855, had planted 650 acres in rice, averaging over 19,000 bushels a year from 1855 to 1860. The Manigaults’ held onto the lands during the Civil War, although Union forces burned most of the
Figure 4-7. Fairlawn Plantation. Drawing not to scale (Joyner 2003 adapted from WPA 1941: 17).
Figure 4-8. Fairlawn Plantation (WPA 1941:17).

The buildings on this plantation are located at the top of the picture, near the river. The overseer’s house is noted with the letter “B” and the slave dwellings immediately behind with the letter “a”.
buildings. However, the slave houses survived, and after the war Manigault began renting some of the property and acquired a workforce to continue planting.

During its heyday, Gowrie and East Hermitage plantation housed over 100 slaves, with reinforcements brought in from Manigault’s South Carolina plantations during harvest time. The slaves lived in two settlements, one on each plantation (Figure 4-9). Gowrie contained four double slave houses and the owner’s residence, while East Hermitage had seven double houses and the overseer’s dwelling. The threshing mill, which did not survive the war, is shown near the Gowrie settlement on Manigault’s 1870 hand drawn map. The settlements, one each parallel and perpendicular to the Savannah Back River, were surrounded by rice fields to the side and rear extending to the Middle River. (Clifton 1978: vii–xlvi).

The descriptions of the houses on both tracts were as follows:

The four Gowrie houses were “…eighteen-by-eighteen-foot dwellings intended for four inhabitants…Probably each such ‘house’ comprised a single room, above which there may have been a loft. Two such dwellings were built side by side, in a wooden frame into both of the adjacent houses. Commonly four people – not necessarily all in the same family – lived in each half of a double house.”

In 1861 four brick double houses with slate roofs replaced some, or all, of these dwellings on the Gowrie tract. The East Hermitage houses were always brick,

The East Hermitage slave dwellings consisted of “…seven brick double houses, built on brick stilts six and a half feet above the ground. Presumably…each dwelling comprised of a single room…there were sometimes…more than four slaves to a room.” (Dusinberre 1996:185).

Taken as separate plantations, each settlement would fall into a Block pattern designation. However, since the two plantations were combined under Manigault’s ownership, the plantation received a Nodal Block classification for this study.
Figure 4-9. Gowrie and East Hermitage Plantation. Drawing not to scale (Joyner 2003 adapted from Clifton 1978: xvi).
Mulberry Grove Plantation

In 1782, when Major General Nathanael Greene was given Mulberry Grove for his heroic services during the Revolutionary War, the plantation had been deserted for ten years. The fields were overgrown with weeds and marsh grass, but the General was very pleased with his gift. His description of the plantation was transcribed by William Johnson in *Sketches of the Life and Correspondence of Nathanael Green*.

We found the house, situation, and out-buildings, more convenient and pleasing than we expected. The prospect is delightful, and the house magnificent. We have a coachhouse and stables, a large out-kitchen, and a poultry-house nearly fifty feet long, and twenty feet wide, parted for different kind of poultry, with a pigeon-house on the top, which will contain not less than a thousand pigeons. Besides these, there are several other buildings convenient for a family, and among the rest, a fine smoke-house. The garden is in ruins, but there are still a great variety of shrubs and flowers in it.

General Greene and his family began to cultivate the plantation and gardens, but in 1786 while visiting his neighbor, William Gibbons, the General had a sunstroke and died. Mrs. Greene and her children remained on the plantation with Phineas Miller, the children’s tutor and newly promoted plantation manager. Mrs. Greene hosted many guests to the plantation, including two visits by President Washington. Another guest, Eli Whitney, invented his cotton gin while staying at Mulberry Grove and took on as a partner Phineas Miller, to finance the endeavor. Whitney and Miller spent many years in court defending their patent, and since Mrs. Greene had married Miller, the financial resources of Mulberry Grove probably supported the lawsuits as well. Following an economic depression, Mr. and Mrs. Miller were forced to sell Mulberry Grove and move to Dungeness Plantation on Cumberland Island.

In 1798, Mulberry Grove was offered for sale in *The Columbian Museum and Savannah Advertiser*:
…There is 500 acres of river swamp, under good dams and well drained; and 200 acres of upland, in good order for cotton or provisions. The remaining part of the tract, which contains in the whole more than 2000 acres, consists of oak and hickory, and well timbered pine land. There is a large and complete water machine for cleaning out rice, with barns, overseers houses, and other suitable plantation buildings, well constructed, and in good repair. There is also a convenient and well finished Dwelling House with suitable outbuildings, and an excellent garden, containing a variety of shrubs and trees both for use and ornament.

Despite this attractive advertisement, the plantation did not sell. It was finally offered at public auction and sold for a low price of $15,000 to Major Edward Harden. Though Major Harden did not hold the land for long, he made numerous repairs to canals and embankments before his death in 1804. Mulberry Grove passed onto numerous Harden heirs and was finally sold in 1819 to James Wallace for $10,000. Given the low sale price, it is likely that the plantation was allowed to deteriorate prior to this sale. (Granger 1947: 71-83).

The plantation map of 1819, presumably done upon the sale to James Wallace, surveys the eight hundred acres of Mulberry Grove (Figure 4-10). Few structures are shown making it unclear if the structures mentioned in the previous descriptions still existed, or if the surveyor and owners were more interested in the fields and canals. Whatever the reason, a house is noted on the bluff, with a row of five slave houses appearing in a line behind it parallel to the Savannah River. Another larger house, located to the right of the main avenue, is possibly a part of Mulberry Grove conveyed to James Wallace. Yet, on the original 1819 map, the survey stakes do not encompass this dwelling, but on a composite map of 1887, printed in Savannah River Plantations, this dwelling appears to be included. Mulberry Grove is plainly a Block patterned plantation. All of the buildings appear to be near the river and northern boundary. The rice fields and woodlands extend to the west without any visible structures.
Figure 4-10. Mulberry Grove Plantation. Drawing not to scale (Joyner 2003 adapted from WPA 1941: 9).
Drakies Plantation

Daniel Cuthbert first purchased the land for Drakies Plantation in 1750. The Cuthbert family owned the land for almost fifty years, passing it to brother, then nephew and finally to Mrs. Ann Cuthbert who sold the plantation in 1797. During this time it was described, as a rice plantation comprised of 1,800 acres and slaves numbering from 57 to 80. The Cuthbert settlement appeared on a 1778 map, and again in the map of 1873.

Mrs. Cuthbert sold the property to Jacob Read who already owned adjoining tracts and expanded Drakies to 3,700 acres, including land on Isla Island. The plantation prospered under Read’s ownership and although he lived in Charleston, Read built a house to occupy while visiting the property. At one time he owned 208 slaves and built a rice mill to service Drakies’ crops. In 1831, the Read family sold the plantation. Subsequent inventories listed slaves numbering 177 in 1836 and down to 154 by 1846. The mansion was burned during the war, and afterwards the plantation operated somewhat successfully as a sharecropper farm. (Granger 1947: 135-160).

The plat map of 1873 shows a triangular settlement labeled “Mrs. Cuthbert” believed to be the village used during the Cuthberts’ ownership, consisting of 10 houses, that appear to be slave dwellings with a larger house at the base of the triangle, which could have belonged to the overseer or owner (Figure 4-11). In between the Cuthbert settlement and what is labeled “Read’s House,” is a linear configuration comprised of 11 smaller houses and one mid size dwelling. At one time there was a mill on the property, and it might have still existed in 1873 and could be the larger dwelling depicted here. If “Read’s House” existed in 1873, the location of the “plantation mansion” that Granger refers to, as being destroyed during the Civil War is unclear. Five smaller dwellings
Figure 4-11. Drakies Plantation. Drawing not to scale (Joyner 2003 adapted from Granger 1947: 136).
cluster around “Read’s House,” which could have been dependencies like dairy sheds, smokehouses, dovecotes, or even more slave houses.

Although there are three distinct settlements, all are located centrally on the plantation near the river, and there is no discernable record that these were separate land holdings. The placement of these settlements seems to reflect the preference of the owner, and not the economy of close proximity to the rice fields. Therefore, this plantation will be categorized as a Block plan.

Rae’s Hall Plantation

In 1797, Rae’s Hall Plantation was sold to Thomas Young, who already owned nearby tracts on Hutchinsons and Kings Island. With his newly purchased property, Young set about creating a rice plantation. His endeavor was short-lived, however, because he died in 1808, and his nephew, also named Thomas Young, became the majority owner in the plantation. Listed on the inventory of the estate were 80 slaves for the island tract and four slaves across the river on the mainland tract, which was used principally for food production. Thomas had control of the plantation until his death in 1830. During this time he expanded production, planting cotton on the mainland and building a canal with Thomas Gibbons, his neighbor on Fairlawn Plantation. After Thomas Young’s death, executors of the estate continued to operate the plantation until 1837. When it was sold in 1838 to Mitchell King, the plantation inventory listed 525 acres of rice, 1,158 acres of highlands and 200 slaves. (Granger 1947: 357-372).

The survey map of 1838 shows a slave settlement of 14 houses in two parallel rows adjacent to a stockyard and a probable rice mill, as indicated in an 1825 McKinnon map. It appears that the mainland tract of Rae’s Hall contains 12 buildings, one at the
Figure 4-12. Rae’s Hall Plantation. Drawing not to scale (Joyner 2003 adapted from WPA 1941: 20).
and of a road that may have been the house built by John Rae, the previous owner. Thomas Young resided at the townhouse in Savannah, so it is not known if he used this dwelling for visits. The other smaller buildings appear to be dependencies or slave houses, and are in two separate clusters near the river. Fields and woodlands extend to the property boundary to the west (Figure 4-13).

Because this plantation has two separate clusters of structures, separated by the Savannah River, it will be classified as a *Nodal Block* plan. It is undetermined when the structures may have been built or whether these land boundaries may have been separated into different plantations at one time. Regardless, under Thomas Young’s ownership, the estate operated as a *Nodal Block* plantation.

**Estates of Ebenezer Jackson and Peter Ward**

Detailed facts about these two estates, located side by side on Hutchinsons Island, have not been located, but the site plans surveyed by John McKinnon in 1817 are included for comparison. According to the map, the Ward estate contains 390 acres and it appears that there are eight slave dwellings in two parallel rows. The Jackson estate contains fewer dwellings with possibly two to four slave houses on 205 acres. Since rice was the crop cultivated on the remainder of Hutchinsons Island, it is assumed that these estates grew the same. Each of these estates can be simply classified as *Block* plans (Figure 4-14).

**Wormsloe Plantation**

In 1737 Noble Jones applied for and received 500 acres of property on the Isle of Hope near Savannah. There, he built a fortified residence of tabby, which stands in ruins today. Upon his death in 1775, his daughter, Mary Jones inherited the property and retained ownership until 1795, when the property passed to her brother, Noble Wimberly
Figure 4-13. Rae’s Hall Plantation (WPA 1941:20).

Most of the structures here are located near the top of the page, above Marsh Island. The others are directly below and to the right on the mainland.
Figure 4-14. Ward and Jackson Estates. Drawing not to scale (Joyner 2003 adapted from WPA 1941: 24).
Jones. The terms of a lease in 1819 indicated that only 20 acres of land was cleared at that time for cotton production. During the Jones family’s tenure, an additional 342 acres were added to the original 500. (Kelso 1979: 1-15). Despite the added acreage, Wormsloe was “never operated as a principal agricultural establishment, but remained a country residence where planting was secondary” (Coulter 1955: x).

The WPA map retraced an original survey map of 1870, showing Wormsloe with a main residence and 14 outbuildings (Figure 4-15). Ten of them appear to be slave houses, forming two parallel rows of five each. An 1807 inventory of the plantation listed 60 slaves, which would fall near the established estimate of 5.2 slaves per dwelling (Kelso 1979: 161-163). Wormsloe would also be classified as a Block plan, with all of the buildings in close proximity, centrally located on the plantation (Figure 4-16).

Hofwyl-Broadfield Plantation

In 1807 William Brailsford purchased Broadfield Plantation on the Altamaha River near Darien. Upon the marriage of his daughter to Dr. James M. Troup, the management of this plantation passed to his son-in-law who later expanded operations and purchased more property. By the time of Troup’s death in 1849, he had accumulated 7,300 acres and 357 slaves. Within a year, the original residence on Broadfield had burned, so Ophelia Troup and her new husband, George Dent moved to Hofwyl, which was part of the original plantation, given to the couple as Ophelia’s dowry. The new house was constructed with slave labor and still stands today. Although severely diminished following the Civil War, the plantation continued cultivating rice until 1913 when the family began a dairy farm. The property was donated to the Nature Conservancy in 1973 and the Georgia State Parks Service maintains it as a museum. (Sullivan 1990:175-176).
Figure 4-15. Wormsloe Plantation. Drawing not to scale (Joyner 2003 adapted from WPA 1941: 36).
Figure 4-16. Wormsloe Plantation (WPA 1941:36).

The main plantation structures are located to the right and below the “m”.
According to the model at the Hofwyl-Broadfield historic site, the plantation had two settlements of slave houses, as well as two main house complexes including rice mills and a winnowing house, where slaves separated the rice grain from the husk. The first slave settlement had two rows of houses, perpendicular to the road in front, and the second contained 14 houses, its two rows running parallel with the road in-between. Both settlements are some distance from the river, beyond the rice fields (Figure 4-17). Since the family owned other properties, it is not clear how many acres and slaves belonged to Hofwyl-Broadfield. A chart lists 300 slaves at Broadfield, Hofwyl and New Hope, a plantation adjoining Hofwyl to the west (Sullivan 1990: 182). It is undetermined if there was slave housing on the adjoining tract. Using the 5.2 average per dwelling there may have been approximately 105 slaves housed in the 20 slave dwellings on Hofwyl-Broadfield. Although this property was originally two separate plantations, under the Dent’s ownership, Hofwyl-Broadfield fits the cluster pattern of the Nodal Block plan.

Stafford Plantation

In 1800 Robert Stafford’s family began purchasing land on Cumberland Island. By the time Robert was 38, he had established a thriving Sea Island Cotton plantation and had increased the acreage to 1,360 with 148 slaves. Robert continued to increase his holdings and by 1850 Stafford Plantation comprised a contiguous 4,200 acres and a workforce of 348 slaves. Stafford built a house on the plantation and divided his time between Cumberland, New York and Connecticut, where he and his common-law mulatto wife lived with their six children during the summers. (National Park Service 11/18/2002: 1-7).
Figure 4-17. Hofwyl-Broadfield Plantation. Drawing not to scale (Joyner 2003 adapted from model presented in Visitors Center at Hofwyl/Broadfield State Historic Site).
Figure 4-18. Stafford Plantation Slave Settlement. Drawing not to scale. (Joyner 2003 adapted from Ehrenhard and Bullard 1981: vii).
The only site plan available for Stafford Plantation shows the layout of the slave settlement as produced by a 1981 archeological survey. As shown on the site plan, the 20 slave houses formed three parallel rows with a perpendicular row facing at the end. There were three additional houses in a line near a larger building, which may have been the slave hospital (Figure 4-18). Stafford’s slave houses “were constructed of English brick; they were slightly elevated from the ground and had steeply pitched roofs. These were single-family dwellings with one room and a loft above where children slept” (Smith 1985:70).

**Hampton Plantation**

In 1793, Major Pierce Butler began building Hampton Plantation located on the north end of St. Simon’s Island. The nuclear plantation complex was situated at the northern most end, and consisted of the main house, smokehouse, overseer’s residence and other dependencies, including six slave dwellings located in a row. Four of these slave dwellings were of tabby construction and the other two of red brick. It was not known if they were built at different times, or if the two brick dwellings had other uses such as a hospital. An 1815 inventory listed six duplex cabins on the property.

During Fanny Kemble’s visit in 1839, a new overseer’s house was under construction about a mile from the main complex (Figure 4-19). It was noted that this structure was “centrally located for the supervision of the slaves” (Moore 1981: 75). Nearby were two additional structures; Moore ascertains that these three structures made up the settlement *Busson Hill.* Hampton is obviously a *Nodal Block* plantation, with each of the outlying slave villages given a name to distinguish them. The *Jones* site was located approximately two miles from the main house complex and included five
Identified Slave Dwellings

identified buildings. After enlarging the plantation in 1824, Mr. Butler and his overseer decided to build a new slave settlement, called St. Annie’s, closer to the new fields. The number of slaves living and working on Hampton varied from 235 in 1811, 250 slaves in 1830 and 279 in 1848. There were 3,590 total acres for Hampton Plantation listed on the 1815 inventory. (Moore 1981: 72-93).

**Butler’s Island Plantation**

The Butler’s Island plantation remained in the Butler family for over 120 years. It appears that Major Butler was the first owner to begin cultivation. Like the plantation at Hampton, Butler’s Island began as a cotton enterprise. However, while Hampton’s main crop continued to be Sea-Island Cotton, by 1820, rice had become the staple crop on Butler’s Island. Because both the Major and Pierce Butler operated as absentee landowners, they had to rely heavily upon their overseers for the management of the plantation. There are volumes of documentation about the Butlers and their overseers, the Roswell King family, but it is rare indeed for an antebellum planter to retain the services of one family for over thirty years. Fortunately for historians, much of the correspondence between the two families has been retained in libraries throughout the south. (Singleton 1980: 49-89).

Fanny Kemble described the slave settlements at Butler’s Island in her published journal:

There are four settlements or villages (or, as the Negroes call them, camps) on the island, consisting of from ten to twenty houses, and to each settlement is annexed a

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3 There were seven buildings listed here on the 1815 inventory.
Figure 4-20. Butler’s Island Plantation. Drawing not to scale (Joyner 2003 adapted from Sullivan 1990: 192).
cook’s shop with capacious cauldrons, and the oldest wife of the settlement, for officiating priestess…[the slave] cabins consist of one room about twelve feet by fifteen, with a couple of closets smaller and closer than the stateroom of a ship, divided off from the main room and each other by rough wooden partitions, in which the inhabitants sleep…Two families (sometimes eight and ten in number) reside in one of these huts, which are mere wooden frames pinned, as it were, to the earth by a brick chimney outside… A wide ditch runs immediately at the back of the se dwellings, which is filled and emptied daily by the tide. Attached to each hovel is a small scrap of ground for a garden, which, however, is for the most part, untended and uncultivated (Kemble 1995: 18, 30).

These four settlements were spread throughout the 1,500 acres on Butler’s Island, with No. 1 containing the overseer’s house, garden and largest slave housing complex located on the “highest, most accessible land” (Bell 1987: 120). The other three settlements were located along the main canal, protected by banks (Figure 4-20).

There were between 350 – 500 slaves on Butler’s Island Plantation during the nineteenth century. There were 356 slaves reported in the 1830 census (Singleton 1980: 77) and 505 slaves listed in the 1860 census (Sullivan 1990: 827). This increase in 1860 could have reflected the shift of importance to Butler’s Island from Hampton, as profits increased for rice production. As with Hampton, Butler’s Island was obviously operated as a Nodal Block plantation. The nuclear hub is clearly discernable, with the remaining three slave housing settlements dispersed over the plantation lands.

Cannon’s Point Plantation

John Couper owned Cannon’s Point Plantation from 1794 to 1850. Like the Butler’s, his neighbors on St. Simon’s Island, Couper soon chose long-staple cotton as his main crop and had some success before a series of disasters reduced his profits. Hurricanes, embargoes, the War of 1812, and other occurrences diminished the number of slaves and crop production on the plantation. He diversified his crops and began to reduce his holdings. John Couper died in 1850 and Cannon’s Point passed to his son,
Figure 4-21. Cannon’s Point Plantation. Drawing not to scale (Joyner 2003 adapted from Otto 1975:23).
John Hamilton Couper, who continued to manage this property and Hopeton Plantation until the Civil War.

Using antebellum maps, archeological data and academic interpretations from leading historians, Otto (1975) identified four sites on the 812 acre plantation: administrative complex, north slave cabins, overseer’s house and south slave cabins (Figure 4-21). The administrative complex contained the planter’s house, kitchen, warehouse and a possible hospital. The two slave settlements are in a row of four dwellings each; with the south ones identified as duplex cabins. The overseer’s house was located between the north and south slave quarters. (Otto 1975: 20-43, 98). During its most productive time, Cannon’s Point Plantation had a workforce of approximately 120 slaves (Ferguson 1994: 96). As with the other island plantations, this property had a clearly discernable *Nodal Block* plan, containing an administrative nuclear complex and outlying slave housing settlements.

**Hopeton Plantation**

Although James Hamilton Couper grew up on Cannon’s Point Plantation, by age 24, he was manager and half owner in Hopeton Plantation on the Altamaha River. Hopeton acquired a reputation as a first rate plantation, with well managed slaves and efficient crop production. Couper was a knowledgeable planter and under his tenure, Hopeton produced successful crops of Sea-Island Cotton, sugar and rice. By 1832, rice became the staple crop. Although he sold his share of Hopeton in 1841, he continued on as manager until the Civil War. (Sullivan 1990: 774-75, 808). According to the 1850 census, 523 slaves (Otto: 1975: 42) worked the 4500 acres that comprised Hopeton Plantation (Flanders 1933: 101; Prunty 1955: 464).
Hopeton’s site plan was reproduced in Prunty’s article (1955: 464), and shows the numerous buildings that housed the machinery and people that made the plantation so successful. This plantation had a *Block* plan, with one nucleated settlement that included the main house, numerous service buildings and approximately 32 slave dwellings (Figure 4-22). Smith (1985: 117) notes that Hopeton boasted a nursery among its service buildings, “remarkably neat and clean, well ventilated, and heated by steam.” The children were taken to the nursery at sunrise, and returned home at sunset. Prunty’s map shows the plantation in 1827, during the decade when Hopeton produced cotton, sugar and rice in “near-equal quantities” (Sullivan 1990: 775).

These plantations were representative of many located in the Georgia tidewater. Although there are many variations in their spatial organization, the similarities may provide some clues about their inhabitants and the nature of antebellum society in general. The data collected here could provide the basis for further study in this arena.
Figure 4-22. Hopeton Plantation. Drawing not to scale (Joyner 2003 adapted from Prunty 1955: 464).
Although the plantations examined here share many characteristics, each plantation was molded by the collective histories and personalities of its inhabitants. This data is merely another tool to examine the overall plantation culture on the Georgia coast.

Despite the designation of a *Block* or *Nodal-block* pattern, each plantation’s layout was determined by both social and environmental factors. However, more research is required to establish the basis for these factors and the motivation for the specific settlement patterns.

Initially few similarities appear to exist between the classifications of plantations having a *Block* or *Nodal-block* settlement configuration (Table 5-1). Out of the ten plantations producing rice as a staple crop, six have a *Block* pattern. Of the three classified cotton plantations, two are *Nodal-block*. As expected, the higher acreage plantations generally have the *Nodal-block* designation. Out of the five plantations with over 1,500 acres, three have a *Nodal-block* configuration, although the two plantations with the highest acreage, Hopeton and Drakies, retain the *Block* pattern.

However, basing patterns on acreage should be done carefully. Sometimes the number of acres on a plantation includes *total* acreage, while others include *cultivated* acres only, without definitive notations. Plantation boundaries constantly change as properties were bought and sold and as boundary landmarks (like rivers) shifted. Plantation owners often bought the plantations “next door” and incorporated the new fields and structures into the original landholding. Listed plantation acreage also varied...
Table 5-1. Coastal Georgia plantation comparison.*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Plantation</th>
<th>Location</th>
<th>Principal Crop</th>
<th>Number Slaves</th>
<th>Number Acres</th>
<th>Map Date</th>
<th>Settlement Pattern</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Hermitage</td>
<td>Savannah</td>
<td>Mixed Use</td>
<td>172</td>
<td>610</td>
<td>Varies</td>
<td>Block</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Richmond And Kew</td>
<td>Savannah</td>
<td>Rice</td>
<td>115</td>
<td>1,300</td>
<td>1788-1800</td>
<td>Block</td>
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<tr>
<td>Fairlawn</td>
<td>Savannah</td>
<td>Mixed Use</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>479</td>
<td>1842</td>
<td>Block</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gowrie</td>
<td>Savannah</td>
<td>Rice</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>650</td>
<td>1870</td>
<td>Nodal-block</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mulberry Grove</td>
<td>Savannah</td>
<td>Rice</td>
<td>Unknown</td>
<td>800</td>
<td>1819</td>
<td>Block</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Drakies</td>
<td>Savannah</td>
<td>Rice</td>
<td>150-180</td>
<td>3,700</td>
<td>1873</td>
<td>Block</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rae’s Hall</td>
<td>Savannah</td>
<td>Rice</td>
<td>200</td>
<td>1,683</td>
<td>1838</td>
<td>Nodal-block</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jackson Estate</td>
<td>Savannah</td>
<td>Rice</td>
<td>Unknown</td>
<td>205</td>
<td>1817</td>
<td>Block</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ward Estate</td>
<td>Savannah</td>
<td>Rice</td>
<td>Unknown</td>
<td>390</td>
<td>1817</td>
<td>Block</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wormsloe</td>
<td>Savannah</td>
<td>Cotton</td>
<td>50-100</td>
<td>842</td>
<td>1870</td>
<td>Block</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hofwyl Stafford</td>
<td>Darien</td>
<td>Rice</td>
<td>200-300</td>
<td>Unknown</td>
<td>Current</td>
<td>Nodal-block</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Cumberland Island</td>
<td>Cotton</td>
<td>348</td>
<td>4,200</td>
<td>1981</td>
<td>Unknown</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hampton</td>
<td>St. Simon’s Island</td>
<td>Cotton</td>
<td>235-279</td>
<td>3,590</td>
<td>1981</td>
<td>Nodal-block</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Butler’s Island</td>
<td>Darien</td>
<td>Rice</td>
<td>300-500</td>
<td>1,500</td>
<td>1839</td>
<td>Nodal-block</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cannon’s Point</td>
<td>St. Simon’s Island</td>
<td>Cotton</td>
<td>120</td>
<td>812</td>
<td>1975</td>
<td>Nodal-block</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hopeton</td>
<td>Darien</td>
<td>Rice</td>
<td>523</td>
<td>4,500</td>
<td>1955</td>
<td>Block</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Data obtained from plantation summaries in Chapter 4. Information in italics is assumed.
widely by source. For this report, three different total acreage amounts, in the range of 2,750 to 11,000, were obtained for Hopeton plantation.4

Slave numbers should also be given the same consideration. As plantation acreage varied, so did the number of slaves who worked them. Planters often shifted their workforce between plantations, as Manigault did with his slaves on Gowrie and Silk Hope. The number of slaves could also fluctuate from year to year, allowing for a cholera epidemic or the division of an estate, or a poor crop yield where the planter may have had to sell some of his slaves for cash, or even a successful year where the planter could afford to supplement his workforce with more slaves. Although Hopeton, with the highest number of slaves at 523 retains a Block classification, Butler’s Island (300-500), Hampton (235-279) and Hofwyl (assumed 200-300) with the next three highest concentrations of slaves has a Nodal-block configuration. This seems to support Josephs’ statement that plantations with higher number of slaves would have additional housing5.

Vlach (1993: 192) offers that numerous settlement patterns may be reflected in one plantation. He uses Uncle Sam Plantation in Louisiana to illustrate this example,

The residential, work, and slave domains are clustered together in a typical block plan, whereas the slave quarters are arranged in a linear pattern. Further, the division of the slave quarters into two widely separated sets suggests a degree of nodal planning. Perhaps the Uncle Sam plantation illustrates a …fusion of French and American plantation ideals.

4 Prunty lists total acreage in 1827 at approximately 4,500, and cropland acreage at approximately 840 (Prunty 1955: 464). In 1821, Phillips lists total acreage, including Carr’s Island at 11,000 acres, and notes that approximately 730 acres were planted in cotton, corn, rice, sweet potatoes, and cow-peas (Phillips 1929: xvi, 264). Sullivan cites a deed dated 1827 listing “2,000 acres in Glynn County on the Altamaha River known as Hopeton Plantation…500 acres on the same river…and 250 acres known as Carr’s Island…”(Sullivan 1990:808). Flanders obviously notes cultivated acres in her undated comment, “Of the five hundred acres in the plantation, 170 were planted in cotton, 330 in sugar cane” (Flanders 1933: 101).

5 His estimate included plantations with a workforce over 70, a trend not noticed here.
The only possible notable pattern in this study is that eight out of the ten Savannah plantations have a Block orientation and of the two that are Nodal-block, Gowrie Plantation was originally two separate landholdings. Further research might reveal that the other Nodal-block plantation, Rae’s Hall, could have been split as well. If so, a pattern may emerge that all of these plantations spatial organizations originated as a Block plan. The Savannah plantations generally contain fewer acres and slaves than the plantations farther south, so it may be that these characteristics contributed to their plantation layout.

The linear configuration of the slave quarters themselves seems to be a recurring pattern in all of the plantations examined here. Presumably all of the slave houses in the quarters are arranged in a linear pattern along streets or pathways. Whether in a triangular arrangement at Rae’s Hall, or simply in a row at Mulberry Grove, all of the quarters appear to be aligned for ease of cleaning and supervision. This linear pattern appears in both the Block and Nodal-block configurations of these antebellum plantations. On tenant and sharecropper farms after emancipation, the pattern seems to dissipate and the houses eventually become dispersed along the landscape.

The physical factors involved in plantation layout have to be acknowledged. The location of the rice fields along the river or the lack of available higher, drier lands probably affected building placement. Comprised of hundreds of acres, the plantation landscape usually included varying degrees of elevation allowing for both crop cultivation and settlement. While containing the types of elevations suitable for each, these lands may not have been contiguous or allowed for unlimited housing placement.
Although some examples of the plantation built environment and its inhabitants has been presented here, further study is required to definitively identify any specific housing patterns on coastal Georgia plantations. Many more site plans are needed to determine similarities or differences within the plantation layouts and further limitations on crop or location could possibly facilitate more definitive hypotheses. Perhaps a more plentiful sampling of plantations along the entire Georgia coast would impart a more comprehensive basis of study and comparison. Obtaining an equal number of plantations located proportionately within the target area might yield more significant information. It could also be valuable to reduce the number of variables by examining plantations within a smaller geographic location or single crop production. By intensely analyzing rice plantations, or comparing Savannah plantations with those near Macon, more patterns and similarities could emerge within the study groups.

Most of these site plans come from secondary sources such as academic books and archeological studies. While gathering the data for this report, many references to other site plans found in coastal survey and plat maps were noted, but not reproduced. Further research would be required to reconcile these maps with other historical documents to ascertain plantation boundaries and ownership. The coastal survey maps are a good source of information and should be utilized for any further research on this topic.

Along with the coastal survey maps, topographical maps may provide more valuable information about the environmental factors shaping these plantation layouts. Finding significant remnants of rural plantations today is practically impossible, due to development and the change from an agrarian landscape to an urban one. In addition, the coastal environment is forever changing as rivers and tidal marshes evolve. Studying
topographical maps could reveal the elevation, drainage and river boundaries on these antebellum plantations and impart more information about building placement. Most of the body of research presented here concentrates on the social factors affecting plantation layout. Adding the environmental determinants to this study would convey a more complete depiction of the antebellum plantation landscape.

Whether these plantation layouts were determined by environmental or social factors, the decision for building placement was probably controlled by the owner or paid overseer. Despite some instances where slaves attempted to manage their own surroundings, their world was completely dominated by the ruling white population. Slaves were subjugated to this environment and struggled to maintain a semblance of their own identity.

In some respects, people are a product of their communities. In the plantation era, slaves were degraded, treated as chattel, and often isolated from other plantations or towns and always segregated from the white population. By necessity, they had to create their own kinship and communities around the only space they identified as their own, the housing “quarters” or “villages.” Slave hospitals and churches were also considered part of this community and helped the slaves carve out an identifiable existence in a world determined to dehumanize them. To assert this point, Vlach (1993: 230) quotes Leslie Howard Owens:

the Quarters, sometimes partially, sometimes entirely, and often mysteriously, encompassed and breathed its own special vitality into these experiences, frequently assuring that the bondage did not snuff out the many-sided existence slaves created for themselves.

Perhaps the slave community did create some respite from the harsh realities of the plantation existence.
Historical research is always important to identify the cultural changes inherent in society. By documenting plantation histories and settlement patterns, more information can be obtained about the plantation inhabitants and how their lives were affected by their surroundings. Included with other research, the data gathered in this report may provide some insight about the people who lived and worked in antebellum Georgia. This compilation of plantation layouts can provide a basis for further research into the determining factors for the spatial organization of coastal Georgia plantations.
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BIOGRAPHICAL SKETCH

Stefanie L. Joyner was born in Portsmouth, Virginia on February 17, 1970. She attended Zephyrhills High School in Zephyrhills, Florida. After becoming an accountant by trade, she earned her B.A. in American Studies from the University of Florida in 2001. In May 2003 she completed her Master of Science in Architectural Studies degree (with a specialization in historic preservation) from the University of Florida.