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POTENTIAL FOR HISTORICAL ARCHEOLOGY, WITH A VIEW
TOWARD HISTORIC SITE DEVELOPMENT

By

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December 1970

Introduction

At the request of Dr. Louis De Vorsey, Chairman of the Department of Geography at the University of Georgia, a two day study of the site and data relating to Fort Hawkins was undertaken on November 30, and December 1, 1970. Dr. De Vorsey is involved with detailed research on the site of the early nineteenth century fort located in the heart of Macon, Georgia, and therefore, this report will not go into detail on the history of the site. It will concentrate on the potential for historical archeology with the view toward revealing additional data of a historical and archeological nature, as well as for use in development and interpretation of the historic site. The report on the development of the site is being prepared by Dr. John Waters, Assistant Professor, School of Environmental Design, University of Georgia, in collaboration with Dr. De Vorsey. This present study, reported here, is designed to assist these men in preparation of their reports from the viewpoint of archeology and historic site development.

Historical Perspective

Fort Hawkins was built in 1806, and named for Benjamin Hawkins, a United States Senator from North Carolina, who was an Indian Affairs Agent who was very instrumental in dealings between the Government and the Creek Indians during the first two decades of the nineteenth century (John C. Butler, Historical Record of Macon and Central Georgia, Macon, 1879. Reprinted by Middle Georgia Historical Society, Inc., Macon, 1969: 59-74). Fort Hawkins was designed as a trading center and for negotiations with the Creek Indians. By the early 1820's the primary

military and trading function had been served, and the fort was the center of a settlement which was to become the city of Macon. It is in its role as a pivot for Government-Creek relations and as a nucleus for the city of Macon that Fort Hawkins deserves a place among the milestones of Georgia's history.

Historical Description of Fort Hawkins

One hundred acres of ground were, for many years, reserved for the uses of the fort. The fortifications consisted of two large block houses, surrounded by a strong stockade. The stockade was built of posts of hewn timber, fourteen feet long, and fourteen inches thick; they were sunk in the ground four feet, with port holes for a musket in every alternate post. The area within the stockade was fourteen acres (Butler 1879: 60).

In 1939, Benjamin L. Bryan, Junior Research Technician for Ocmulgee National Monument, The National Park Service, wrote a paper entitled "Fort Hawkins - Its History and Partial Reconstruction" in which he stated that he thought the reference to fourteen acres should properly be four. This would surely seem to be a correct interpretation; however, only archeology can perhaps answer this question for certain.

There were four long houses, one in the centre of each side of the stockade, their fronts forming part of the stockade to the width of each house, about twenty feet. These houses were used for soldiers' quarters, provisions, and for the factory goods to be sold to the Indians, and peltries received in return. In the centre, surrounded by oaks, were the officers' quarters (Butler 1879: 60).

From this description we learn that Fort Hawkins was a stockaded fort enclosing either four or fourteen acres, a fact to be determined perhaps through archeology. We learn that it had two blockhouses, probably at opposite diagonal corners, and that inside were four buildings built in the center of each of the four walls, taking up a space of

twenty feet along the wall, with the logs of the building acting as a part of the stockade for twenty feet. We also learn that there was a central building for officers' quarters.

The Fort Hawkins Blockhouses

Detailed descriptions of the blockhouse at the southeastern corner of the fort are available since this structure stood into the twentieth century. A sketch was published in Butler's book in 1879, showing the stockaded fort and the blockhouses. This sketch was drawn by E. D. Irvine of Macon, and is presumably made from the remains standing at that time, as well as the memory of those who had seen the fort in earlier days (Butler 1879: 61). A photograph of the southeast blockhouse was taken in 1878 by Henry E. Rees, which is an invaluable aid in understanding the appearance of the blockhouses (Forts Committee, Department of Archives and History, "Georgia Forts - Fort Hawkins" in Georgia Magazine. Vol. X, No. 6, April-May, 1967: 20). Any accurate model, diorama, or drawing for interpretive use should draw heavily on this photograph as a key to understanding.

In 1937-38, the Nathaniel Macon Chapter of the Daughters of the American Revolution, through the Works Progress Administration, rebuilt the southeast blockhouse of concrete. Benjamin Bryan (1939: 13) in his manuscript says of this:

From a distance the reconstructed block house appears to be an exact reproduction of the original structure as described by Butler and portrayed by late 19th century artists.

Mr. Bryan provides us with a good summary of the drawbacks and failings of the blockhouse reconstruction from a standpoint of accuracy. However, the blockhouse is such a permanent monument on the landscape, that regardless of its lack of accuracy of detail, is one that is not likely to be torn down and corrected. Therefore, we must accept it as given and proceed to examine other aspects of interpretation and research that can be undertaken to help to relieve, and perhaps compensate for the present warped picture presented by the sight of the concrete blockhouse standing alone as a self-conscious relic amid urban sprawl.

Description of the Fort Hawkins Site

The imposing concrete blockhouse reconstruction stands on the crest of a hill in the corner of a present schoolyard of Fort Hawkins School. A small area some forty feet square has been set off by a chain link fence around the blockhouse. It sits near Maynard Street (to the east) at its intersection with Stewart Street, and is on a block owned almost entirely by the Board of Education, a block being 437 feet square. The block is bounded on the north by Woolfolk Street, on the west by Fort Hill Street, and on the south by Emery Highway. A service station lot 105 by 210 feet has been sold from the block at the southwest corner, this being the only part of the lot not owned by the Board of Education except for the blockhouse site which is owned by the Daughters of the American Revolution.

Through the center of this block, on an east-west axis, in line with the south edge of the blockhouse, runs the crest of the high hill

on which the blockhouse and the schoolhouse now stand. The top of this hill is fairly level, probably having been graded to provide a more level playground around the school. The school was apparently built in the twentieth century, and a retaining wall was built around the block and along the crest of the hill and the drop-off along the streets, probably at the same time the school was constructed. This wall was very likely used to support fill dirt brought to raise the crest of the hill at the edge to provide a more level and functional playground. High spots in the center of the hill may have been leveled at this time also, producing a cutting effect near the center and a filling around the edge of the hill.

To the north, along the edge of Woolfolk Street, and to a lesser extent to the west along Fort Hill Street, there is a natural dropping-off of the hill, accentuated by the street outs. From a defensive point of view, then, the present schoolyard appears to be the most logically defensible ground, comprising the northern half of the block, being some two acres in extent (the blocks being slightly over four acres in size). Across Woolfork Street to the north, down the north-sloping side of the hill, low-income housing is present, as it is to the east and west of the Fort Hawkins block. To the south, urban renewal has erased low-income housing between Emery Highway and Main Street, and modern row-dwellings are apparently being constructed. To the south of this development is Ocmulgee National Monument, a project of The National Park Service of the Department of the Interior.

Early Archeology at the Fort Hawkins Site

In September, 1936, Gordon R. Willey carried out exploratory excavations on the site of the Fort Hawkins blockhouse, then under the process of reconstruction. His report, on file at the Southeast Archeological Center at Ocmulgee National Monument, is entitled "Report of Ft. Hawkins Excavations." This report describes various trenches opened to determine whether the reconstructed blockhouse was being built on the original site, and to locate the position of the stockade. It was found that the blockhouse was indeed on the original stone cellar site, with a row of palisade poles remaining in a badly rotten condition both on the north and west sides of the blockhouse. On the west side, trenches revealed that the stockade extended for some fifty feet before the evidence was lost, the posts either having been destroyed through disturbance of the ground, or the palisade line having turned. On the north side, the palisade was found for ninety feet, at which place there was a ten foot gap, then continued for ten more feet where there was another gap of twenty feet, whereupon the palisade apparently continued (Willey 1936). Two trenches were apparently cut on the north-sloping side of the hill, north of Woolfolk Street, in the yards of homes located here, but no evidence for the palisade was seen here. An interesting fact was that the stockade ditch was revealed as greener grass above it, more moisture apparently collecting in the stockade ditch than in the red clay subsoil. This phenomenon was not noticed in the present examination of the site, but could well be seen at various times of the year when soil and moisture conditions were such that it could be thus revealed.

Interpretation of the Willey Excavations

Willey's work clearly revealed the fact that the blockhouse reconstruction was on the original cellar walls, with the stockade abutting the north and west walls. However, the nature of the data do not allow us to know exactly where the stockade line was positioned, so these will eventually have to be relocated through additional archeology at the time further research and interpretation of this architectural feature is undertaken. We do know, however, that the blockhouse is that at the southeast corner of the fort. The stockade abutting the north wall of the blockhouse, and extending toward the north, however, provides us with a possible size for this east stockade wall, as seen through Willey's excavations. His report reveals that the east wall ran a distance of ninety feet, at which place there was a ten foot gap. Willey suggests that this may represent a gate, and if very well made. Beyond the gap is a ten foot run of posts and then another gap of twenty feet, which Willey states had probably been completely scraped off at this interval. In the absence of good plan and profile drawings, we have no archeological control as to whether this gap was as Willey supposed, or whether this was a gap into which a twenty foot wide building had once stood. As we have seen, Butler mentions a twenty foot wide building in the center of each wall, with the building forming a part of the wall itself at these central points. We might then expect no palisade ditch for this twenty foot section if horizontally laid logs were used for the buildings. If we suppose this interpretation to be correct for the gaps found by Willey, then we have the

following conjecture:

Blockhouse/
(90' stockade) (10' gate) (10' stockade) (20' building) ...

From this data we see that from the blockhouse north to the center of the twenty foot building, is a distance of 120 feet. Since the twenty foot building was said to have been in the center of the fort wall on each side, we learn that the length of the east wall so derived would be twice this distance, or 240 feet. Scaling this figure north from the blockhouse on modern maps of the block, we find that 240 feet comes in the cut of Woolfolk Street north of the block. It very well may be that this street originally was laid out just outside the original stockade wall of Fort Hawkins, and that as the street was graded and widened, the ditch for the stockade was cut away. Archeology in the schoolyard should help toward answering this question. The 1879 sketch mentioned earlier reveals a gate and interior building in the same basic relationship as that suggested by Willey's data.

If the above interpretation based on Willey's data, the position of Woolfork Street, as well as the topographical lay of the land on the hilltop is to be accepted, then the size of Fort Hawkins' stockade would be some 240 feet square, or slightly over one acre (provided it were a square fort). If, however, it commanded the entire top of the hill, it would likely have been 240 by some 430 feet, or around two acres. This, of course, does not fit with the reference by Butler that the stockade enclosed fourteen acres, or our interpretation of fourteen acres as "four" acres, but it certainly does fit with the terrain, Willey's data, Woolfolk Street, and the diagonal street entering Fort

Hill Street at the northwest corner of the Fort Hawkins block (which was shown as being north of Fort Hawkins on an early land plat). Thus we have strong circumstantial evidence pointing toward the high ground now occupied by Fort Hawkins School as the original stockaded area of Fort Hawkins. The only manner that this can be demonstrated one way or the other is possibly through archeology on the site. If we stick to our "four" acre interpretation, we find that the stockade would have to have extended toward the north over the crest of the hill and down the north-sloping grade as far as an alley crossing Smith Street between Maynard and Fort Hill Streets. This would seem to be extremely unwise defensively, and we are faced with a running length of stockade wall some 430 feet long with a single storage shed only twenty feet wide in the center of the wall, a situation that would throw such structures somewhat far apart and insignificantly out of scale to known forts wherein sheds are utilized as part of the curtain wall of the fort. The effective range of a musket should also be considered, 240 feet being a more easily covered distance than 430 feet.

In summary, then, it appears to this observer that Fort Hawkins may well have been two or even only one acre in extent, perhaps 240 by 240 feet square, in which case the northwest blockhouse and the west wall would have been destroyed in the construction of Fort Hawkins School. If it were two acres, it would have been a rectangle, in which case the blockhouse site and the west wall may very well be remaining beneath the schoolyard along Fort Hill Street. Only archeology can answer these questions.

Recommendations for Exploratory Archeology at the Fort Hawkins Site

Slot trenching, such as was carried out by Willey, is still a valid method of following fortification ditches such as the Fort Hawkins stockade. However, improvement in technique, recording of plan and profile data, extensive use of photography and detailed mapping, as well as the growth of an entire new field of historical archeology, have come about in the thirty-four years since Willey's work was done. A relocating of his stockade line will be necessary, and once this is done, it should be carefully followed to determine, as far as possible, its extent. Beneath the schoolyard on the site, lie the answers to some of the questions raised in this discussion. Hand labor, as well as some machine work, can be carried out by a competent historical archeologist on the site in order to follow more completely the stockade found by Willey. It may well be that it cannot be followed beyond the limit of Willey's excavations, but this seems unlikely. It is, however, a possibility. This exploratory project would take from one to two weeks with a crew of five men and should produce answers to questions regarding the extent of the stockade and how much evidence is still remaining beneath the schoolyard.

The cost of such a project would be estimated as follows: archeologist for five days \$500.00, machine rental \$200.00, labor (5 men) \$400.00, subsistence \$100.00, map and report preparation (one additional week) \$500.00, equipment and photographic supplies (equipment could perhaps be furnished by some institution) \$300.00. Total cost of a one week exploratory project would thus be \$2,000.00 (two weeks \$3,000.00).

This suggested project is only architectural in nature, which means that if important features are located, such as cellar holes, burials, garbage pits, foundations of buildings accompanying the stockade wall, wells, privies, etc., their outline in plan will be revealed and mapped as far as seen, but no excavation of their contents can be undertaken in the limited time available for the project. Such features will have to await a more detailed archeological project which should be outlined after the results of the first project are known. Uncovering foundation walls, footings, features such as these, all require more time and funds than those outlined in this project. However, detailed work such as this is productive of much more data than an architectural search alone can supply.

Of course, before such a project as the above is undertaken, permission from the Board of Education to disturb the schoolyard should be obtained, and a suitable time for excavation determined. A sponsoring group, such as the Fort Hawkins Commission, or the city of Macon, should be the agency to deal with the archeologist in a contractual manner. Such an agency would handle payroll obligations, payment to machine owners, insurance, etc., and would administer the funds for the project. This exploratory project is designed to reveal the nature of the data remaining on the site, and the extent of the stockade, if possible. Willey's report indicated that the stockade evidence tended to disappear on higher ground, which may limit the amount of data left to be recovered. The exploratory archeology outlined here, however, should be done as preparation for any more extensive development of the Fort Hawkins site, with further plans awaiting the results

of this archeology. It may well be that a more extensive project will be found to be out of the question due to disturbance of the data by school construction and playground leveling. This first project is necessary, however, to allow for long-range planning for site development, for it is important to know whether the original stockade enclosed one, two, four, or fourteen acres. If only one or two acres are involved, the fort itself would be limited to the top of the hill in the area of the schoolyard. If four acres are involved, then private property in the area north of Woolfolk Street would be on the original fort site. In any case, for a major interpretation of the Fort Hawkins site, these houses around the hilltop site will have to make way for the historical park to provide space for visitor facilities, parking, etc. If, however, it is found through an exploratory project that the fort was only 240 feet square, then it is within reason to plan a development of the site on the hilltop block above. However, an historic park on such a commanding site surrounded by low-income dwellings is not the ideal situation for a park, to say the least, and broader goals should be outlined early in the planning stages.

A Discussion of Historic Site Development

Historic site development can take many forms, from Disneyland type tourist traps primarily designed to make money, with little or no concern for historical accuracy and authenticity, to restorations that concern themselves in the most minute manner with details of accuracy in order to successfully bridge the gap between the historic past and the present. Historical societies and commissions are finding that

grants from Federal agencies and foundations have made available hundreds of thousands of dollars for research and development of historic sites, where in the past only a few hundred dollars were on hand. These agencies are also requiring that standards never before required become standard practice in restorations and reconstructions. No longer is it considered sufficient to mark a major historic site with no other means than a roadside sign. Such sites deserve better treatment if we are to fulfill our responsibility as stewards of the past, building roadways of understanding from the past to generations of Americans yet unborn. If we fail in this responsibility and construct false images to warp the understanding of children and unsuspecting adults, we have not fulfilled our obligation to the past and to the future. We should make sure that our efforts will be so firmly rooted in research and archeology that generations of the future will not say that we have failed in our challenge.

There are examples where palisades have been built on historic sites where no palisade type fort ever existed, and the interpretation had to be torn down to make way for an earthen fort rooted in the firm soil of archeology. Throughout America today, there is a phenomenon I have called "the log cabin syndrome" which occurs when a group bent on interpreting the past decides that the best way to do this is to strip the countryside of log cabins and plant them in clusters on historic sites like pseudo-historical mushroom towns springing up overnight, often without regard for the potential wealth of historical and archeological treasure the site may otherwise possess. In doing this, we erase the unique character a site may possess and place it in a

category along with a myriad of other sites that have been interpreted through the stereotype of the log cabin. Our historic sites deserve better than this at our hands.

Today we think in terms of historical research, archeological research, on-site interpretive exhibits such as fortification ditches and parapets in the exact position revealed by archeology, stockade walls replaced in their original positions, ruined cellars opened and left open as field exhibits with interpretive displays beside them, visitor-center museums and parking facilities to handle large numbers of visitors, restroom facilities, refreshment areas, nature trails, dioramas, and audio-visual techniques to aid in a greater understanding of the historic site. The day of the sign beside the road, the inaccurate reconstruction, the construction of Indian villages from whole cloth as tourist traps, the reconstruction that is open only on Sunday afternoon or perhaps on some occasion once or twice a year, is over as far as serious historic site interpretation is concerned. And with the passing of that era, there also passes the attempts to interpret major historical sites on a few hundred dollars of funds, or through volunteer efforts of a few concerned citizens. Research, archeology, and historic site development with a view toward life as it is rapidly evolving toward the future, is an expensive undertaking, but our heritage is as important to us as our future, and we must look closely at our past to better understand and be prepared for the life to come. Those of us involved in studying and interpreting this heritage for those yet unborn have an overwhelming responsibility to fulfill. To fulfill it we should use every means at our disposal to firmly anchor our efforts in the rich soil of research archeology.

Recommendations for Development of the Fort Hawkins Site

We know that the site at Fort Hawkins once involved a very important feature, a stockade wall of upright poles set in a ditch in the ground. For some thirty-five years, visitors to Fort Hawkins have thought only of the blockhouse they have seen on the site. They asked themselves (for no permanent guide has been on hand to talk with), "Is this all that was here? Was there a stockade? When was it originally built? Is this cement blockhouse like the original?", etc., a situation that seriously needs to be changed if Fort Hawkins is to achieve the type of recognition it should have.

A big question is the status of the site of Fort Hawkins (other than the blockhouse site). In order to properly interpret and develop the site, the school would have to be acquired by the agency or commission that is to assume permanent administrative control of the project. Archeology can, hopefully, determine the position of the original stockade, and perhaps other structures. These can then be interpreted in a variety of ways depending on the nature of the archeological pages revealed beneath the ground. Buffer land must be acquired to provide parking facilities, interpretive center, visitor facilities, etc., all of which would cost enormous amounts of money. However, funds are now available for such projects when the site is of historical significance, and has champions who will take the effort to push for the realization of the dream of having the story the site has to reveal told in an effective and moving manner, with accuracy and authenticity, through research and archeology, and on-site exhibits.

Assuming that these problems are solved, then we can outline some suggestions that would effectively move toward a more complete interpretation of the Fort Hawkins site than the warped view now presented through the lonely concrete sentinel on the hill surrounded by urban Macon. The first step would be, as outlined above, archeological study through an exploratory and then possibly a full-scale archeological project under a competent historical archeologist. From this work, the stockade ditch would be revealed, and a rebuilt stockade could be carried out under plans and specifications drawn by the archeologist based on his findings on the site. A partial or complete reconstruction of the fort wall could be undertaken depending on the nature and extent of the archeological data. This step alone would make a dramatic change in the impression now received by visitors to the Fort Hawkins site, an impression much closer to the appearance of the fort as it once stood than it is now possible to obtain from a visit to the site.

Before any interpretive work such as this is undertaken, however, the plan for the development of Fort Hawkins as a major historic site should be well under way, with the removal of the schoolhouse, etc., all a reality rather than a dream. To do otherwise would be impractical in the extreme, for what sense would it make to have a rebuilt palisade wall running in two directions across a school playground? Yet, to continue to allow Fort Hawkins to be interpreted as a cement relic on the side of the hill in a schoolyard is an equally unfortunate situation. The site deserves better than this. Fortunately, the Daughters of the American Revolution were concerned in those years of the thirties, and took steps to insure that Fort Hawkins would not be forgotten. They

are due our gratitude for taking the steps they did, for if they had not, the site of Fort Hawkins may well have been totally lost to urban Macon. For a city to have lost the memory of its nucleus in such a manner would be as unfortunate as if the Creeks had forgotten that the spirit of their nation lay in the mounds of Ocmulgee. Fort Hawkins could become a shrine for Macon as refreshing and productive of reflection as that monument to the Indian at Ocmulgee. We hope that Macon will not fail to take advantage of the opportunity that offers itself at this time, for to delay another decade will likely spell the end of Fort Hawkins, and only a faded memory will remain.