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Expressions of African American Culture - 2009

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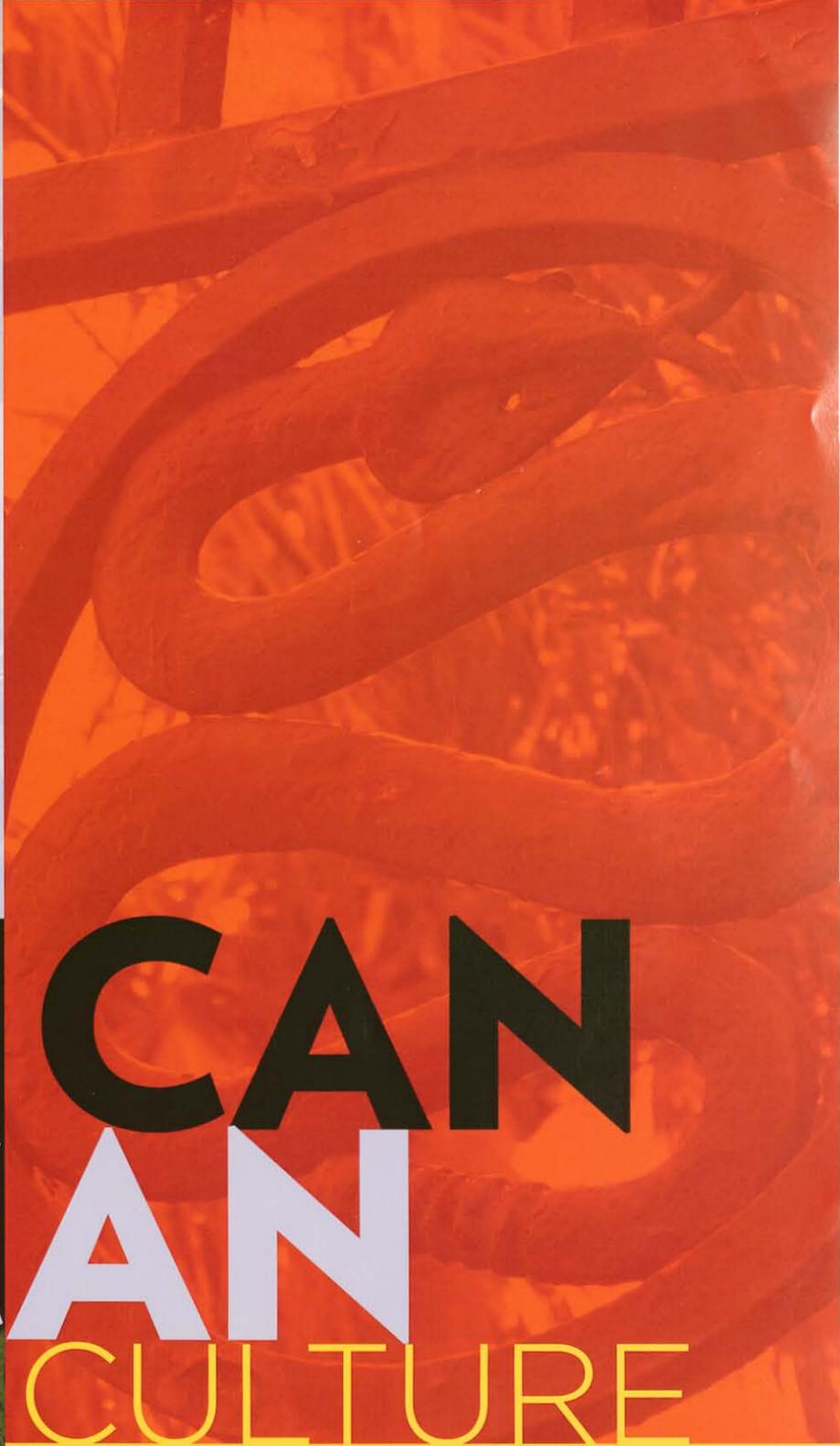
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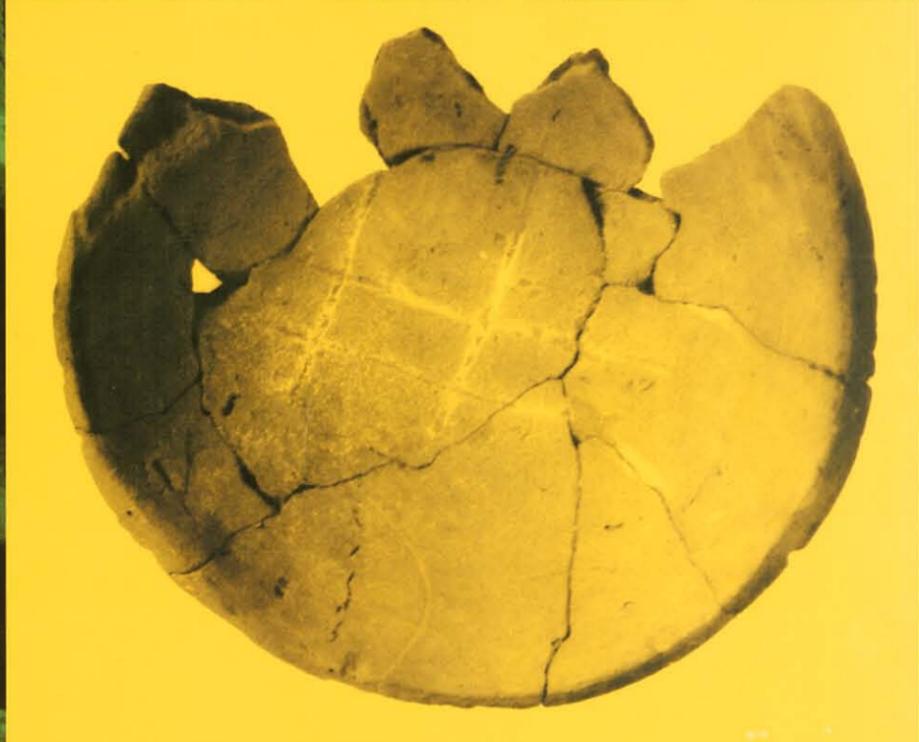
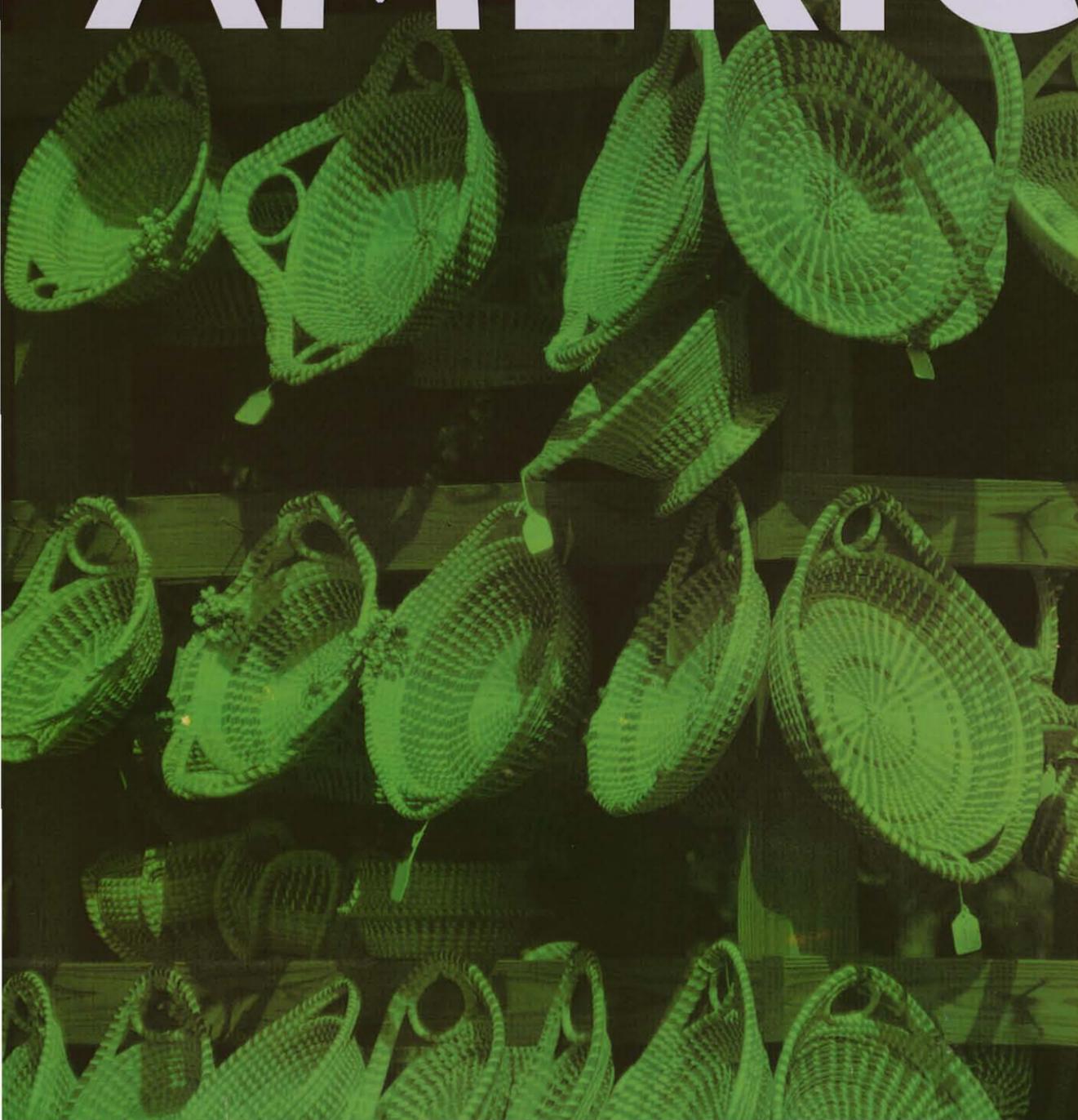
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EXPRESSIONS OF
AMERICAN
AMERICAN
CULTURE



SOUTH CAROLINA
ARCHAEOLOGY MONTH
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Yard Studies at the Slave Village of Dean Hall Plantation
Andrew Agha, Brockington and Associates

Dean Hall Plantation has a near 300 year history, being first settled in 1725 by the Nesbitt Family from Scotland. The plantation saw its ups and downs, with its worst times coming during the Revolutionary War, when it was seized by British troops and then the State of South Carolina as a Loyalist holding. In 1821, Dean Hall changed hands, being sold to William Carson, a successful Charleston area merchant. Carson desired to be a rice planter, and managed and improved the plantation until his death in 1856. After his wife mortgaged the property for nearly a decade, Dean Hall remained in the Carson family until 1909, when it was sold to the Kittredge Family from New York. They managed the plantation as a hunting ground and winter retreat. In the 1930s, Benjamin Rufus Kittredge transformed the old inland rice reservoir and surrounding area into Cypress Gardens, the premier botanical garden for the Charleston area that is still a park today.

Brockington and Associates conducted archaeology at the slave village of Dean Hall (38BK2132) in the fall of 2007, in response to the need to construct a Kevlar plant at the DuPont polymer facility located on the Cooper River. The entire site was first sampled through 689 shovel tests, spaced 7.5 meters (25 feet) apart from each other. Excavations uncovered intact features relating to all aspects of daily life for the enslaved Africans there. Intact midden deposits were present, which allowed the archaeologists to isolate temporal periods in the units that were dug. Besides all of the excavations at the cabins, we dug a large sample of units in the yards of the cabins. However, we wanted to investigate the yards further, and we did so through close interval shovel testing. To study the uses of the yards and activities within them, we excavated shovel tests every 2.5 meters (8 feet) in select areas of the yards of three cabins. The results of these tests were very impressive, but before divulging the results, a brief introduction to yard studies is needed.

Based on work in Africa and the Caribbean, the research of the 1960s-1980s let historical archaeologists focus not only on the houses of the enslaved, but their yards. Yards in Africa and the Caribbean were seen as primary activity areas through these studies, with all aspects of daily life being represented in the yards of the houses—cooking, eating, and other kinds of household labor. Archaeologists began to focus their attention on the outdoor spaces to extract more evidence of the daily lives of the enslaved. Work in Virginia has set the precedent for yard studies, as sites like Thomas Jefferson's Poplar Grove plantation have had specific excavations conducted to investigate the slave houses and yards equally, and to test for evidence of yard sweeping, cooking areas, fence lines, planting holes, discreet activity areas, bottle trees, and refuse disposal. At Dean Hall, the slave village was embanked, so the yards of the houses had definite boundaries. We dug two blocks of close interval shovel tests between three unit excavation blocks. Figure 1 displays these shovel test blocks in relation to the units, landscape features, and house outline. After these tests were dug, we scraped a large portion of the area to uncover features related to the activity we found from the strata above.

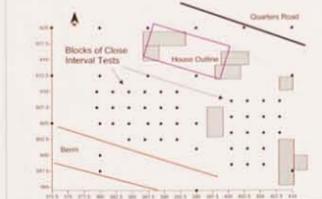
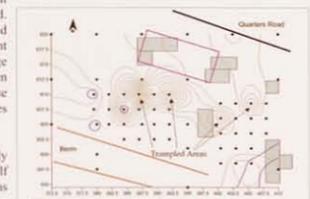
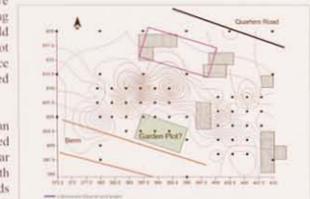


Figure 1. Map showing the Units (shaded), house outline, landscape features, close interval shovel test blocks, and 2.5 meter interval tests.

Patterns appeared when we mapped the artifact densities found in these shovel tests. Figure 2 displays the concentrations of the smallest sherds recovered, with up to 36 residuals of Colonoware present in some tests. These areas indicate heavily trampled areas of the yard. We know these houses had back porches. High numbers of sherds outside the back porch of the house helps to show that they swept out their houses into the yard. Concentrations of large Colonoware and Euro-American sherds near the embankment suggests communal sweeping and/or large trash collection points, probably between yards, where the families in each house worked together to get large trash piles outside of their yards.



Most important to note is the extremely clean void of artifacts in the southern half of this block. Figure 3 displays distributions of the smallest and largest sherd categories, and where this garden plot may have been. This clean space could represent a small vegetable garden, which would have benefited from water in the ditch. Testing this area to see if it was a garden would not have been fruitful, as there should not have been features showing planting, since the ground would have been hand-tilled repeatedly for years.



The excavations of the slave village at Dean Hall Plantation revealed facets of enslaved lifeways that we rarely see from similar sites throughout the Lowcountry of South Carolina. Here is one example of the kinds of methodologies that can be employed at sites, where the information and data can be interpreted to reflect minute aspects of daily life that are usually hard to recover from the archaeological record. Sites are damaged through timbering and forestry activities, plowing, and other land clearing methods that can disturb the places where artifacts originally entered the ground. At Dean Hall, these activities were at a bare minimum, and we believe that what we see in the yards is a true representation of past activity and intention acted out by the enslaved. Historical records tell us that enslaved Africans had their own garden plots, and conducting this kind of fieldwork may help us to find these, and other, special places in the future.

Figure 3. Shovel 9.0 map showing Colonoware sherds at various sizes to illustrate a void for a garden.

Presencing African Americans at the Seibels House
Terrance M. Weik, University of South Carolina

In 2002, the Historic Columbia Foundation invited University of South Carolina (U.S.C., Columbia) archaeologists to examine the African Americans who lived on the Seibels House Property, located in Columbia, South Carolina. The Seibels House acquired broader recognition after it's listing on the National Register in the 1960s. The property containing the house was home to wealthy families and their enslaved and free servants for a century prior to that time. A nineteenth century brick kitchen behind the house was of particular interest to the Historic Columbia Foundation, because of its known use by former African American domestic workers (Figure 1). Our research here focuses on rethinking the ways that African Americans have been represented at the Seibels House property, on expanding our ability to detect the presence of enslaved residents' life and work at various points on the local landscape, and on using ceramic decorative motifs to propose alternative ways of understanding material culture at the site.



Bringing to light the presence of people of African descent in urban settings may be even more challenging than it is in the numerous rural, plantation environments that are the familiar focus of African American archaeology. Examining the material culture and physical setting from more of an African American perspective provides an alternative approach to the Eurocentric, top down, materialist, political, and economic foci of primary sources and older archaeological approaches to nineteenth century life in the United States. Various artifacts recovered at locations across the U.S. have been associated with cultural or individual African American beliefs and behaviors. Archaeologists have examined European and African world views in order to explain how people used artifacts, shaped the landscape, and adapted to new environments. Research has suggested a preference for hollowware vessels and English ceramics with specific colors and motifs (Otto 1984, Ferguson 1992, Wilkie 2000).

In order to better understand the ways that material culture reflected and impacted the worldviews and modes of ceramic appropriation enacted by African American enslaved and free residents of the Seibels House Site, 1,328 European and Euro-American-made ceramics were examined, with emphasis on decorative motifs. The numerically dominant category of ceramics is undecorated sherds (n=231) which may be a result of the portions of the vessels we recovered or that these wares were inexpensive, making them more affordable. A category of ceramic that may relate to Africa is Banded wares (n=46). Wilkie (2000) provides an interesting perspective on banded ceramics that recognizes the parallel usage of dots and bands by historic European potters and ethnographic African potters of the Bakongo culture area. It is thus important to recognize that pottery producers and users may have employed similar decorative motifs, even if their other decorative techniques, world views, color choices, or aesthetic preferences differed. Despite the prevalence of central Africans in South Carolina's slavery demographics, it is difficult to make an argument like Wilkie's for the Seibels House without more information on the identity of the enslaved laborers there.

One of the landscape designs that was most intriguing, though rare, is the "Dromedary" pattern (Figure 2). Dromedary is a species of camel that can be found in northern Africa, the Middle East, and western Asia. The dromedary design includes camels, palm trees, and pyramids (emulating the ones in ancient KMT [Egypt]). From 1814 to 1828 the "Dromedary Pattern" was produced by English potters. The imagery may have been familiar to enslaved Africans and their descendants for a variety of reasons. Camels, palm trees, and pyramids have existed in Africa for millennia. Even if the enslaved people who worked at the Seibels House were not born in Africa—and demographic studies of Southern slavery suggest that most enslaved people were not by the abolition of the Atlantic slave trade (1807)—they may have heard stories about the continent from other members of enslaved communities. The stories they heard may have resonated with motifs inscribed on the objects that they handled daily, such as pottery exhibiting the Dromedary design. Another possible



source of information and imagery that could have informed the enslaved Seibels House inhabitants' beliefs about the Dromedary pattern is Christianity. The Exodus story may have been inspirational, for it is not hard to link it to the oppression facing African slaves and to the possibility of escaping bondage. African Americans and Europeans have a long history of fascination with KMT, for a variety of reasons beyond the scope of this paper. This fascination led to the emergence of Egyptian-inspired motifs—pyramids, busts, sketches, etc.—that entered people's homes via books, ceramics, maps, and other forms of nineteenth century material culture.

I have attempted to demonstrate that enslaved people contemplated their material culture and world, and had feelings about their surroundings and their tasks. Mundane or material aspects of their lives were infused with aesthetic judgments, economic valuations, traumatic experiences, and spiritual overtones. They not only called on cultural memory, but also created new customs to suit their environment. Examining material culture, written sources, oral history, and social and physical spaces from African and African American perspectives is a necessary corrective that can provide alternatives to Eurocentric, male, elite biases that exist in the larger and more detailed writings of slavery proponents. Archaeological studies of magic, religion, and consumer preferences have demonstrated that enslaved people's worldviews can be revealed from interviews, primary sources, musical traditions, and material assemblages (Wilkie 1997). My study seeks to illustrate the potential of various lines of evidence to make African American's history more visible at archaeological sites and to provide an insider's perspective on slavery.

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The Enterprise of the Enslaved: Studying the Slaves' Internal Marketing System
Nicole Isenberger, Brockington and Associates

Through recent research on African American landscapes we have learned about the spatial and cultural organization of slave settlements, including their houses, gardens, and yards. Historical archaeologists have also studied enslaved landscapes in urban contexts, including their living quarters and work areas, as well as the mansions, formal gardens and yards of their elite owners. However, what is lacking in African American landscape studies are the social, economic, and cognitive linkages between the plantations and their urban counterparts. By framing our research to incorporate and understand the effects of their economic endeavors, we are able to speak to the complexities found within enslaved African culture that can help us give a more dynamic portrayal of the lives of the enslaved.

For over 20 years scholars have been researching how enslaved Africans used their free time to develop and maintain their own marketing systems throughout the New World. Such studies allow us to look at the material items that these Africans would have used within their marketing systems and the linkages between the plantations and urban markets. In most slave societies, the enslaved were allowed to sell and barter goods that they were able to grow in their own gardens, hunt or catch, or make in their own free time. The slaves' internal economies in North America were not as extensive as they were in other slave societies such as the Caribbean, but historical evidence has shown that it was a prominent and key aspect of master-slave relationships. The internal marketing system in the South Carolina Lowcountry was unique in that it was more extensive than elsewhere in North America, and it allowed Lowcountry slaves to be more self-sufficient, post-emanipation, than freedmen elsewhere in the South.

So what would have the landscape of the slaves' internal market been? Markets are places. Places are both physical and cognitive. The enslaved would have traveled through a variety of means to trade their goods at these meaningful places, entering into exchanges with a variety of clientele. The experiences of each individual would have been unique. The goods exchanged within a market give a community its outward material expression which is used in the maintenance of that community. The goods obtained through market exchanges were then used in the upkeep of their places elsewhere within their landscapes. Therefore, the actions of the enslaved within their internal market would have helped create and maintain their own distinct culture, as well as that of the Euro-Americans. This being said, the multitude of economic interactions would have continually changed and molded the physical and cognitive landscape of the slaves' internal market. Through its use that the enslaved were able to express their own values and worldviews and obtain the material means of expressing what was important and meaningful to them. And by looking at how extensive and complex a market they created, we are able to show their ingenuity and hard work in a more dynamic way.

Reconstructing the landscapes of the slaves' internal marketing systems allows us to link up the urban and rural places where their economic activities would have occurred. On the plantations, we can look at the organization of gardens and activity areas where they would have produced and prepared their goods for market. We are able to research nearby market areas and plantations where they could have sold and bought their goods. Routes and pathways can be mapped with GIS to better understand the distance and difficulty they had for getting their goods to these markets. We can further study the urban markets and material goods on the urban house lots to look for evidence of marketing activities and compare access to goods between urban and rural settlements.

Another means of studying the slaves' internal market is to look at the material remains of the goods and foods that they produced, used, and acquired through their economic activities. The most prominent item of archaeologically derived material culture that has been linked to their marketing is Colonoware, a low-fired unglazed earthenware ceramic that was produced by the enslaved for their own personal use as well as for trade or sale in the markets. Research has shown that some varieties of Colonoware were produced by the enslaved for the urban markets. Therefore, Colonoware analyses have the opportunity to better understand the social and economic interactions of the enslaved. The system of slavery displaced Africans and forced them to continually create and change their identities within their new environments. Analyses of these material goods allow us to better understand how enslaved Africans used their markets to develop their own families and communities and provide themselves with foods and goods they normally would not have had access to. By focusing on the material goods that they acquired, we are also able to better understand what they themselves placed importance and meaning on. Most importantly, understanding the choices they made and their use of their marketing systems allows us to reflect on the experiences of enslaved Africans.

From Slaves to Citizens on James Island
Carl Steen, Diachronic Research Foundation

Fort Johnson, on the tip of James Island, has long been a singular place. In the 1680s an early settler built a windmill, and the place was known as Windmill Point. In 1708 it was made into a fortification and named for the Governor, Nathaniel Johnson. Although it was named and armed, for the next 150 or so years it never saw direct military action. But it served as a public place, with a dock for boats shuttling passengers and goods to the city. During the 19th century the surrounding land became a summer resort for the planters of James Island, and their families and servants. At the same time Fort Johnson was the home of the Army's Engineers, who oversaw construction at Fort Sumter and other harbor defenses, hiring slaves to provide the bulk of the labor. So this was a place where people of all races interacted in a non-plantation context, lending it an atmosphere that must have been a little more free. At the least, a welcome change from everyday life, providing opportunities for meeting new people and celebration.

A plantation society grew up on James Island just as it did elsewhere in the Lowcountry, and the enslaved, made up of African Americans, Native Americans, and people of mixed race, outnumbered the masters by a large margin. When freedom came the ex-slaves found themselves in a world they were poorly equipped to cope with. Few had skills beyond farm labor. Most could not read or write, and lacked experience with handling money. As a result of this insecurity many chose to stay in what they saw as their homes, in the communities they had lived all of their lives, or at least, close by. But this is not to say that they didn't hope for more, and parents pushed their children to learn to read and write, and better themselves.

The summer town of Johnsonville was not re-established after the war. Instead the old fort became the site of the state's Quarantine station. In 1874, a mortar battery was proposed for Fort Johnson in what would have been a part of the nation's third system of coastal defenses (Wald 1977). In a note accompanying the plans an unnamed author stated, "There is nothing left of the old fort at this place except some rough mounds of earth and some Confederate guns which are almost completely buried in the ground" (RG 77 Drawer 67, Sheet A). He noted the presence of a frame house (70 by 25 feet) and two frame structures (12 by 12 feet), all of which were used for storage. He also said, "There are besides some rough cabins on the reservation occupied by colored people under whose authority is not known, but there seems to be no occasion for disturbing them" (RG 77, Drawer 67, Sheet A).

In 1880 the federal government took over the Quarantine Service, and their inspectors made maps of the property several times between 1880 and 1906. One of these, made in 1892, shows eight buildings well inland that are labeled "Negro Cabins." When plans were made in 1995 to build a new marine research laboratory on Fort Johnson an archaeological survey was done (Steen et al 2002). The remains in the chosen area were diverse, but we concluded that some parts could be protected, and others could be excavated to allow the land to be re-used.

One of the areas excavated contained the remains of at least two late 19th century houses which, even if we did not have maps telling us who lived there, we would have attributed to poor African Americans—Gullah people. The houses did not have brick chimneys or footings; they were built up on posts and probably had dirt floors. The construction did not require a tremendous amount of nails like you would see in a frame house made of new, sawn lumber. Very little window glass was found, suggesting shuttered windows, if the places had wall openings at all.

While it is easy to focus on what they didn't have, it's also important to remember what they did have: freedom. The people who lived here were a little more free than many of their neighbors, living in a no-mans-land, squatting on the government's unused property, scratching out their subsistence with gardens, livestock, hunting and fishing. At least one of their number became a boatman for the Quarantine and his wife, the laundress. The others probably provided labor when needed.

But this was an important step on the march to true citizenship that wasn't really culminated until the 1960s. Here, the archaeology tells us with bits of slate and pencils, these free families learned to read and write. A lost coin or two and store bought plates and dishes tell us they learned to work for wages and buy and sell things in the marketplace. Although white society continued to oppress blacks, a separate, segregated society was developing, with black teachers, professionals, and businessmen, as well as craftsmen, laborers, and farmworkers interacting more internally than externally. The people at Fort Johnson did not live opulent lives, but a few fancy buttons, and pieces of costume jewelry suggest a standard of self pride and "presentability." In the Lowcountry this would be on display at church every Sunday, for the judgement made in the church was not simply one of heaven or hell, but of one's place in society. Freedom and citizenship did not come without a struggle, but the fundamental tools that pushed the efforts came from the lessons learned at home in places like Fort Johnson.

National Archives, Record Group 77, Drawer 67, Sheet A and Sheet 44
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The Charleston Freedman's Cottage
Paige Wagener, Brockington and Associates

In the decades following the Civil War, black Charlestonians began to construct a free identity steeped in the local architectural traditions of the old southern city. Employing the small, unassuming structure commonly referred to as the freedman's cottage, African Americans enlisted the architectural cues of their immediate environment to build new identities as free men and women.

The freedman's cottage appears throughout Charleston's northern neighborhoods over an approximately sixty-year span and follows a basic form consisting of three one-story rooms arranged in a linear fashion. With its gable end facing the street, the freedman's cottage has a north-south orientation. A privacy screen and door front a long side porch or piazza, similar to those found on the dominant Charleston dwelling, the singlehouse. Arranged side by side in the sparsely populated neighborhoods, freedman's cottages establish a visual rhythm which shapes the sense of local community and tradition surviving in the streets today.

The freedman's cottage echoes the form and placement of the larger and more common Charleston house type, known as the "single house," a two- or three-storied structure, one-room wide and two-rooms deep. Standing with its gable end facing the street, the single house characterizes Charleston's built environment as the most popular dwelling solution in the nineteenth-century city. The freedman's cottage should be understood as a subset of the single house due to its obvious physical resemblance, as well as its north-south orientation, one-room wide plan, and long side piazza. However, while the Charleston single house symbolizes the architectural and social culture of the white upper class, the freedman's cottage represents the African-American employment of local forms in ways that suited their environment and circumstances.



Like the single house, the freedman's cottage relied on local traditions and technology passed down through generations. The single house dominated the Charleston landscape by the middle of the nineteenth century, and it is safe to assume that African Americans found themselves familiar with the form and techniques of the building type. With the imprint of local architectural traditions in their minds, the free African-American population appropriated the single house form to meet their needs and financial means. Looking at the single house as a model for free identity in the city, African Americans constructed an architectural response to their new position in society.

As the most prevalent architectural form within the city, both before and after the Civil War, the single house came to epitomize free urban identity for African-Americans, who were forming their own building language in the late nineteenth century. The proliferation of the vernacular freedman's cottage allowed African Americans to negotiate the turbulent circumstances of the post-antebellum South. As African Americans migrated to the urban centers at the War's end, housing for the population was in short supply. All over the country, cities looked towards quick and inexpensive housing to meet the needs of growing African-American communities. The simple form of the freedman's cottage provided an affordable approach for the new population's housing. The layout of an affordable, two- or three-room house would not have varied much from place to place, but the fact that black Charlestonians chose to arrange their cottages following the traditional single house model may suggest an attempt to appropriate the local vernacular. The economical freedman's cottage may have elicited a sense of new found freedom to a generation of once enslaved individuals.

The widespread appearance of the freedman's cottage into the twentieth century reflects the way in which African Americans utilized local architectural traditions to create not only their own building form, but an identity steeped in new found freedom. The freedman's cottage was an adaptive strategy used to fashion a communal architectural dialogue among African Americans, as well as the city's white population. Instead of acculturating into society, African Americans appropriated forms to declare their independence and shape a sense of community that continues in those same neighborhoods today.

The freedman's cottage represents an African-American building typology that speaks of both a specific time and locale. The type belongs specifically to the Charleston landscape and may symbolize the attempts made by local African Americans to develop their own sense of identity through architecture. The forms of the buildings appear local, but the socio-economic conditions of the post-emanipation environment are shared across international borders. The freedman's cottage is not an isolated phenomenon, other examples of post-emanipation architecture built by freed slaves of African descent share common attributes with small Charleston dwellings. The shotgun house, a form derivative of West African and Caribbean traditions, and the board house of the Caribbean, are examples of small, one-story, timber-framed structures constructed by former slaves after emancipation. The freedman's cottage and its distant cousins share common formal characteristics, but more importantly the structures provided a means in which newly freed slave populations created their own architectural language that spoke of freedom and cultural identity.

Though it is important to recognize the freedman's cottage as an example of Charleston architecture, its value to the larger architectural history of the South remains evident in the free black identity it came to represent. With a fuller comprehension of Charleston's built environment as a goal, the freedman's cottage deserves a place among the single houses, double houses, and plantation estates that currently occupy the front row of the city's architectural story.

Sweetgrass Basket Making in Mount Pleasant, South Carolina
Carol Poplin, History Workshop, Brockington and Associates

Travel along US Highway 17 in Mount Pleasant and you will see one of the oldest, most important, and most vibrant folk traditions in the United States, the art of making baskets from sweetgrass. Three hundred years ago, African captives sold into slavery in South Carolina brought their knowledge of growing rice and other valuable skills, including the craft of basket making. The earliest slave-made baskets were winnowing baskets called farmers. The farmer was an essential tool on rice plantations used to separate the rice from the chaff. These early baskets were made from coiled bulrush sewn together with split oak or palm. Basket making skills have been passed down from generation to generation in the African American communities that grew up in Mount Pleasant after the Civil War. While the sweetgrass basket may have its origin in West Africa, today it is an American art form unique to the Lowcountry.

While the end of the Civil War brought freedom to African Americans, it created a new set of hardships as well. The Lowcountry economy was devastated by the war and money was scarce. Despite these and other challenges, many African Americans purchased or rented land and took up farming for themselves. Today's communities of Seaview, Greenhill, White Hall Terrace, Hamlin, Six Mile, Seven Mile, and others were created on old plantation lands by former slaves. In the 20th century, some of these new freedmen's settlements became the heart of Mount Pleasant's basket-making tradition.

No longer required to mass-produce agricultural baskets, basket makers developed new designs and forms to use for their own purposes. At the same time, farmers from Mount Pleasant began to sell their surplus produce in Charleston. Women and children traveled by ferry from Mount Pleasant to Charleston every day to sell their wares. They carried their ferns in large vegetable baskets balanced on their heads. In the early 20th century, women and young children with their head-tote baskets were a common sight on Charleston's streets.

In the late 19th century, proponents of the American Arts and Crafts movement encouraged a new appreciation for authentic handmade products. The Lowcountry coiled basket was recognized as an emblem of African American culture. Encouraged by Charleston's expanding tourist trade, sewers created new shapes and designs to serve these new customers. At this time, flexible, strong, and sweet-smelling sweetgrass became the basket maker's material of choice.

Sam Coakley, a patriarch of the Hamlin Beach community, is credited with mobilizing residents to take up basket making as a source of income. Mr. Coakley acted as a go-between for sewers and local businessmen. The most famous partnership was with Charleston businessman Clarence W. Legerton, who ran a gift shop on King Street. In 1916, Clarence Legerton created the Sea Grass Basket Company. He sold baskets as far away as New York and the Midwest. Basket makers produced sewing baskets, tablemats, trays, and cake baskets, forms that were functional and easy to ship. In the early 1930s, Mount Pleasant's basket-making industry was transformed by enterprising basket makers determined to control their own prices and products. With the paving of US Highway 17 and the completion of the Grace Memorial Bridge in 1929, this coastal route became an important transportation artery bringing tourists from the north to Charleston. Basket makers were quick to take advantage of the opportunity to sell directly to their customers and set up roadside stands to display their wares. The first basket stands were constructed with sapling posts set in the ground. Strips of wood were nailed between the posts. Nails served as pegs to display the baskets. Today's stands have not changed much. Saplings have been replaced with treated timbers, and some stands have roofs and windows to provide protection from the weather. There are approximately 100 stands along US Highway 17 and 500 people sewing baskets in Mount Pleasant.

Today, the art and craft of basket making thrives in Mount Pleasant. However, if this important art form is to continue to flourish, it will require the nurturing of new generations of basket makers as well as protection of the natural resources needed to make baskets. The Town of Mount Pleasant recognizes the importance of sweetgrass basket making as a historic industry. Local residents value and take pride in the unique character that Lowcountry baskets bring to the town. To honor the contribution of basket makers to our heritage, the town helps sponsor the annual Sweetgrass Cultural Arts Festival, is undertaking an extensive sweetgrass planting program on town property, and works with local business owners to build new basket stands in safer, more accessible places along US Highway 17.

In 2006, South Carolina designated sweetgrass baskets the official state handicraft and a portion of US Highway 17 as Sweetgrass Basket Makers Highway. Recently, the federal government established the Gullah-Geechee Cultural Heritage Corridor. Sweetgrass baskets are an essential feature of the corridor that extends from North Carolina to northern Florida. The Sweetgrass Cultural Arts Pavilion located at Mount Pleasant's new waterfront park is a tribute to the generations of basket makers in Mount Pleasant. Through dedication to their craft and respect for their elders, these artisans have transformed a simple agricultural tool into a world-renowned art form.



A Letter From the Gullah-Geechee Cultural Heritage Corridor
Greetings!

The Gullah-Geechee Cultural Heritage Corridor Commission in early 2009 embarked on a series of 21 public meetings for the development of a Management Plan. We are working to fulfill the Commission's Vision "to recognize and sustain an environment that celebrates the legacy and continuing contributions of Gullah-Geechee people to our American Heritage." On behalf of Chairman Emory Campbell and the Gullah-Geechee Cultural Heritage Commission, I am writing to sincerely thank you for your attendance, cooperation, and participation. In 2006, Congress established the Gullah-Geechee Cultural Heritage Corridor, which extends roughly from Wilmington, NC, to Jacksonville, FL. Since then, Grassroots Community Groups, Community leaders, and the General public have been identified as potential partners who have an interest in our management plan development. The management plan will take three years to complete, and we cordially are also inviting educators, historians, clergy, and community advocates to join us as we move forward.

Through our next phases of the management plan, we will be seeking additional comments from governmental entities and elected officials on how Gullah-Geechee resources, arts, and traditions should be preserved, interpreted and managed. This group also will be encouraged to comment on places, issues and items that have been and are important to Gullah-Geechee heritage in their respective cities, towns, counties, and communities. Partnership is vital to success! We look forward to your joining the Gullah-Geechee Cultural Heritage Corridor Commission in this quest to develop and implement an effective and sustainable management plan for the Gullah-Geechee Cultural Heritage Corridor. Please visit this website (www.ngps.gov/guce) for further information and notification of future meetings.

Sincerely,
Michael Allen
NPS Gullah-Geechee Coordinator



Philip Simmons: Remembering a Charleston Icon
Nicole Isenberger, Brockington and Associates, Inc.

This summer Charleston mourned the passing of renowned master blacksmith Philip Simmons, who died on June 22, 2009 at the age of 97. Simmons has left behind a legacy of over 500 pieces of ornamental wrought iron including balconies, fences, gates, hinges, railings, and window grills. His decorative works adorn homes, gardens, and civic buildings throughout the City of Charleston. His ornate scrollwork has become a symbol of Charleston, but more importantly, his work has maintained the long tradition of African American blacksmiths who have created works that are both functional and beautiful since the 1730s.

Simmons was born on June 9, 1912 on Daniel Island and reared by his grandparents. At the age of eight he left Daniel Island to live with his mother in Charleston and enrolled in the first class at Buist Academy. Once in Charleston, he began to admire the ironworks and started frequenting the shops of various craftsmen. He was drawn to the blacksmith shops and at the age of 13 began an apprenticeship with former slave Peter Simmons (no relation), who ran the blacksmith shop at the foot of Calhoun Street. Philip worked here for the remainder of his career. The blacksmith shop was built prior to the 1800's by Guy Simmons, father of Peter Simmons. Philip started making ornamental ironworks in 1938, which have become his most renowned works. Today his works can be found not only throughout Charleston, but also in private collections and museums around the country and abroad.

Simmons received much honorable recognition for his artistic career including the Order of the Palmetto, the National Heritage Fellowship Award, an honorary doctorate from the South Carolina State University, and The Elizabeth O'Neill Verner Governor's Award. He was inducted into the South Carolina Hall of Fame in 1994. In 1998, Governor David Beasley presented Philip Simmons with the "Order of the Palmetto," the highest award given by the State of South Carolina. The states' blacksmith guild is named after him; The Philip Simmons Artist-Blacksmith Guild of South Carolina. The Philip Simmons Gardens in Charleston and Simmons Park on Daniel Island were dedicated in his honor. Some of his commissioned works were produced for the Charleston Visitor's Center, Daniel Island, the South Carolina State Museum, the Smithsonian Museum, and the 1996 Summer Olympics. Several books have been published on Simmons's life and works, most well known are those by John Michael Vlach.



John Paul Huguley was inspired by Philip Simmons to found the American College of Building Arts. This is the only school for building arts in the nation, and one of only two worldwide. The first class graduated this year and Simmons was able to attend the commencement ceremony.

Many of the city's historic gates have been preserved by Simmons' repair work, including the well-known Sword's Gate on DeLoe Street. Despite his acclaim, we do not have a complete catalogue of all of his work. The Philip Simmons Foundation and Historic Charleston Foundation partnered in 1995 and began to document Simmons' work. Some of Simmons' works have been stolen or sold on Ebay, while others have been taken to new homes when homeowners moved. Many people are not even aware that they own a piece of Simmons' work. The Foundation's endeavors have been further complicated by the spread of urban revitalization on the upper peninsula. Homes containing his works have fallen into disrepair are at risk of demolition with the encroachment of new construction. The Simmons Foundation is working on several projects that will help document and preserve his works including using Google Earth to electronically mark the locations of Philip Simmons' works, developing self guided audio walking tours, and helping to produce a documentary. The Simmons Foundation is currently working to restore Philip Simmons' downtown home and workshop as a National Historic Site. The National Trust for Historic Preservation placed this property on their *America's 11 Most Endangered Places* list in 2007. The Foundation has received grants to begin the restoring and converting his workshop and home into a museum, gift shop, and working office.

Philip Simmons has left us with a large portfolio of ornamental works that decorate the City of Charleston and beyond. Through his works we can see the continued melding of African American folk culture that has so greatly influenced the development of Charleston and the Lowcountry. Simmons will be greatly missed. However, through the documentation and preservation of his works, the American College of Building Arts, and the continuation of his legacy by his cousin Joseph "Ronnie" Pringle and nephew Carlton Simmons, among others, his influence can continue to inspire us all.

Additional Readings and Resources
Books:
Leland Ferguson
1992 *Uncommun Ground: Archaeology and Early African America, 1650-1800*. Smithsonian Institution Press, Washington, DC.
Mark W. Hamer
2008 *An Archaeology of Black Markets: Local Ceramics and Economies in Eighteenth-Century Jamaica*. University Press of Florida, Gainesville.
Dale Rosegarten
2005 *Grass Roots: African Origins of an American Art*, Museum for African Art, New York.

Theresa A. Singleton, editor
1999 *"I Too, Am America": Archaeological Studies of African American Life*. University Press of Virginia, Charlottesville.
John Michael Vlach
1990 *The Afro-American Tradition in Decorative Arts*. Brown Thrasher Books, University of Georgia Press, Athens.
Richard Westmacott,
1992 *African American Gardens and Yards in the Rural South*. University of Tennessee Press, Knoxville.

Betty Wood
1955 *Home's Work, Men's Work: The Informal Slave Economies of Lowcountry Georgia*. The University of Georgia Press, Athens.
Websites:
African Diaspora Archaeology Newsletter (Chris Fennel, University of Illinois) <http://www.diaspora.uiuc.edu/newsletter.html>
Avery Research Center for African American History and Culture <http://avery.etcf.edu/index.htm>
Philip Simmons Foundation <http://www.philipsimmons.us/>
Annual Sweetgrass Cultural Arts Festival <http://www.sweetgrassfestival.org/>

Atlantic Slave Trade & Slave Life in the Americas: A Visual Record (J. Handler and Michael L. Tuite Jr., The Virginia Foundation for the Humanities and the University of Virginia Library) <http://hitchcock.ic.virginia.edu/Slavery/index.php>

Freeman's Cottages, President St. Charleston SC taken by Paige Wagener
Philip Simmons Snake Gate, 329 East Bay St., Charleston SC taken by Andrew Agha
Incised Colonoware Bowl, Spring Island Plantation, Beaufort County SC, taken by David Diener
Sweetgrass Basket Stand, Town Center, Mt. Pleasant SC taken by Carol Poplin

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