CHAPTER ONE
INTRODUCTION

All towns start out small, but this obvious fact is ignored in studies of urbanization that start by studying the communities successful enough to survive. Understanding success also requires an understanding of failure, and to accomplish that one must approach the subject developmentally by examining what was attempted, not just what succeeded (Hudson 1985:ix).

South Carolina contains many locations within the lower coastal plain where settlements, established during the colonial period, failed to succeed through the 18th or into the 19th century (Smith 1913:198-203). The substantial role played by Charles Town and the growth of huge rice plantations often hindered the acknowledgment and study of significant urban development during this period (Coclanis 1989; Terry 1981; Weir 1983). Although many excellent archaeological studies have been conducted within this geographical zone, most have concentrated on the extensive development of plantations and other dispersed settlements (Drucker 1979; Fairbanks 1984; Ferguson and Babson n.d.; Isley et al., 1985; Lees 1981; Paynter 1982).

The lack of attention given to colonial settlement in the lower coastal plain is based on a number of factors. Most studies of frontier settlement in South Carolina consider only the economic importance of these towns to local and regional populations. Established towns in the lower coastal plain were considered insignificant through the use
of this limited criteria. A number of these low country settlements were very near to present-day Charleston. Some have been overtaken by suburban sprawl, and very few of the buildings constructed within these settlements, if any, are still standing. Generally, these settlements were quite small and their perceived importance has been equated to their size as opposed to their function within the local communities they served.

This thesis concentrates on the small settlement of Childsbury Towne and its associated ferry in St. John's parish, Berkeley county, South Carolina. Its intent is to assist in answering a number of questions related to settlement in the lower coastal plain. Foremost among these is, why were these towns established if a slave based plantation economy eliminated the need for settlements? What form did they take? What was the extent of construction? What was their function within the local areas they served, and is size a viable marker of their significance to the local community?

The construction of Strawberry Ferry in 1705 and the settlement of Childsbury Towne, two years later, was designed to reap economic or financial gain from an advantageous location along the expanding Carolina frontier. The settlement was supported by the white, elite residents that lived along the western branch of the Cooper River (Terry 1981:246). To ensure Childsbury's success, they collectively submitted petitions to the general assembly for a communal fair and market and the construction of the ferry and public buildings. Individually, they purchased lots within the town limits and contributed funds for public education. This enabled those who invested an opportunity to take advantage of the socio-economic possibilities inherent in the town's geographical position. The ferry and the town represent power, control, and dominance by the white, elite over local populations, indigenous natural resources, and routes of trade.

I have concluded that the functional aspects of Strawberry Ferry and Childsbury Towne are the most significant markers for their existence. The function of a settlement is defined by the communal and social events held there. The location of a settlement is
affected by its place within local agricultural production areas and its relationship to local and regional trade and communication routes (Ernst and Merrens 1973). The geographical location of Strawberry Ferry and Childsbury Towne, 30 miles by road and 60 miles up river from Charles Town, placed them on the leading edge of early colonial frontier expansion. Small settlements within the low country should be defined by their functional ability to serve the general needs of the community at large.

Within the general area of Childsbury Towne there were a number of individual farms, and plantations (Ferguson and Babson n.d.). Connections to dispersed settlements were a factor in Childsbury's development. Much like Charles Town, Childsbury Towne was a place for the shipment of commodities processed and packed on local plantations. This spatial pattern of dispersed settlements within the local area is reflected by the dendritic form of the local trade and communications network (Lewis 1984). Although part of Childsbury Towne's function within the community was the export of locally produced commodities, it was also a place where finished goods were imported into the community from regional or worldwide centers of production. Certain non-agricultural specialized activities took place within the town.

Archaeological investigations were used to determine the actual extent of the town's development and the structure and significance of its associated ferry crossing. There are, within the defined limits of Childsbury Towne, extant public buildings that are considered "key structures" within the community. Key structures are buildings that embodied social and economic importance to the local area (Ernst and Merrens 1973). Only two key structures from this early community still exist; Strawberry Chapel and the northeastern landing of Strawberry Ferry. Structures no longer standing, such as Strawberry Tavern, also held social and economic importance to the local community.

The archaeological record helps define the nature of Childsbury's population and the "communal concepts of place" (Rodman 1992), held by its supporters and residents. Various ethnic groups lived there and each held different views, from one another, of the
landscape in which they lived. Childsbury's Native American, African American, and white residents viewed the settlement from individual perspectives that defined their particular notion of community and their function within the community.

These inter-related socio-economic factors and their importance to the local community are considered crucial to understanding why settlements such as Childsbury Towne were established within the Carolina low country. Dynamic changes within the economic base of production and related transportation infrastructure are also significant to the rise and fall of low country settlements. Much of this study is concerned with the dynamic nature of local and regional transportation infrastructures and the primary role ferry crossings played in frontier settlement. My inclusion of Strawberry Ferry as a key structure within Childsbury Towne emphasizes the importance of ferrys to social and economic changes within the local and regional area.

It is recognized that settlements grow, falter, and decline due to the competitive nature of colonization. Their rise and decline is affected by changes in local transportation infrastructure and the dynamic nature of economic conditions within regional or world markets (Coclanis 1989:146-147; Lewis 1984:113). These outside forces affect the socio-economic function of the local community. Childsbury's growth and decline corresponds with South Carolina's changing economic conditions during the colonial period. In many ways Childsbury represents a unique example of the evolving nature of low country frontier development.

Chapter two presents a theoretical base for this thesis and defines the concept of settlement as it applies to this work. The study of Strawberry Ferry and Childsbury Towne has allowed insight to questions concerning the social and economic function inherent within the settlements development. Their function is represented by the cultural, social, and physical use of place (Rodman 1992). These use patterns may be defined by the archaeological study of local community buildings or key structures (Ernst and Merrens 1973). The extent and type of structures within the town limits and the
artifacts associated with them, help determine the socio-economic status of the town’s residents and patrons. Their status, tied to local and regional trade systems, defines the role Strawberry Ferry and Childsbury Towne played in low country frontier settlement (Ernst and Merrens 1973). Known production sites within the local area and their relationship to transportation routes help fine tune the social and economic importance of the ferry and town. Changes to and the lack of improvements within that infrastructure would lead to the establishment of competitive transportation routes and communities that would adversely affect the ferry and town’s position (Terry 1981).

A history of low country South Carolina (1680-1783) is presented in chapter three. This chapter includes social, economic, and transportation factors that were instrumental in the development of Strawberry Ferry and Childsbury Towne. Archaeological data pertaining to St. John’s parish is used to support their significance.

Chapter four introduces the methodology used for the recovery of archaeological data pertaining to this study. Data acquisition required detailed information from both the terrestrial and underwater portions of the site. Although the site contains multiple environments, the remains of Strawberry Ferry and Childsbury Towne were investigated as one single unified archaeological site.

The history of Strawberry Ferry and archaeological data related to its significance to studies of frontier settlement is addressed in chapter five. The functional role of the ferry and the northeastern landing is related to social and economic needs within the community of Childsbury Towne. Terrestrial and underwater archaeology determined the physical form of the landings. The recovery of this data has assisted in the development of a preliminary construction typology for low country ferry landings (Barr 1995).

Chapter six addresses the specific form and function of Childsbury Towne. Archaeological and historical data is used to determine the extent of general construction
within the settlement. The socio-economic position of its residents along with spatial factors related to class relationships are examined.

Chapter seven is a synthesis of all the data presented in the thesis. This data is drawn from a combination of historical documentation and archaeological investigations. Conclusions related to that synthesis are the basis for this chapter.