CHAPTER FIVE

STRAWBERRY FERRY

(38BK1723)

Historical Background

In response to a request from the inhabitants of St. John’s parish Strawberry Ferry was established by Statue #246 through the provincial legislature in 1705 (McCord 1841:6-8). Its vestment was considered by the assembly because of “the want of convenient ferries and roads upon all occasions, hath as much prevented the uniting of her Majesties forces in the defense of this colony” (McCord 1841:6). Construction was approved by “his Excellency John Lord Granville ... and the rest of the true and absolute Lords Proprietors of this province, by and with the advice and consent of the rest of the members of the General Assembly” (McCord 1841:6). This crossing was the second registered ferry within the colony.

The construction of Strawberry Ferry is tied to the development of a local elite social network, consolidated through inter-marriage, economic expectations based on financial speculation, and the expansion of colonial transportation infrastructures based on social and economic needs. Each of these factors was considered by the residents of the western branch of the Cooper River when they undertook the responsibility of underwriting its construction. As such, the ferry is representative of communal cooperation and the consolidation of social and economic power within a local frontier settlement context.

At the time of the crossing’s construction the Carolina colony was only 25 years old. St. John’s parish, Berkeley county, had been established a short seven years prior to
its construction. Charles Town, still hiding from the interior behind its medieval moat and wall, was slowly developing into an established Atlantic port town (Coclanis 1989:4). As such it became a starting point for further exploration and settlement (Lewis 1984).

Bound by economic weakness and fears of the unknown (Coclanis 1989:5), initial colonization was slow to move beyond its Charles Town fetters. Tentatively, dispersed settlements were established on the islands protecting Charles Town’s harbor. Grants for land along the Ashley, Wando, and Cooper Rivers were parceled out as favors to those first settlers and other elite backers of the Carolina venture (Salley 1973[1910-1915]:150, 203, 233, 236). Men of vision and wealth saw opportunity for social and economic advancement in these wilderness lands.

In the late 18th century the frontier began to expand north towards the inland reaches of the Congaree, Santee, and Pee Dee Rivers (Amer et al., 1995; Lewis 1984; Weir 1983). Initiated by economic concerns, centralized areas containing dispersed settlements began to appear along Indian trade routes and rivers north of Charles Town. Eventually, nucleated settlements and frontier towns were established to serve the social and economic needs of these dispersed settlements that dotted the regional landscape.

Strawberry Ferry’s location on the expanding frontier is representative of the role ferry crossings played within settlement. The northeastern landing of Strawberry Ferry is referred to, historically, as Strawberry Landing. This designation is probably confused with the public landing, located in the southeastern quadrant of Childsbury Towne, which functioned as a loading place for supplies and goods shipped in and out of the area by waterborne transportation (Diamond 1811; Rogers et al., 1974:669; See page 52, Fig. 9).

Although the road to Charles Town, through Goose Creek, was constructed at the same time as the ferry in 1705, there is little early cartographic evidence of its existence (McCord 1841:7). The Edward Crisp map of 1711 (Fig. 15) does not show the ferry crossing or the road and causeway leading to it (Cumming 1962). The William DeBrahm
FIGURE 15. "A Compleat Description of the Province of Carolina."

(By Edward Crisp, 1711.)
map (Fig. 16), dated October 20, 1756, does show a road through Goose Creek however, this road extends only a short distance north between Goose Creek and the Cooper River. Kinloch’s Ferry is present, at its known location crossing the Santee River, with a partial road drawn south of the ferry heading toward the “Tee” of the Cooper River. Documentation from 1733 confirms the physical existence of the road between Charles Town, Goose Creek, Strawberry Ferry, and Kinloch’s Ferry (Merrens 1978:110-121).

The map by John A. Collet (1770; Fig. 17) does not extend as far south as the Cooper River area, ending just below the Santee River (Cumming 1962). By this time Kinloch’s Ferry had been renamed Nelson’s Ferry. This probably indicates a change in ownership (Barr 1993). On this map there are no roads south of the Santee River, but the road north to Charlottsburgh is noted as the “Road to Charles Town” (Cumming 1962). The Henry Mouzon map of 1776 (Fig. 18) updated the 1773 map of James Cook (Cumming 1962:102). The Mouzon (1776) and Cook (1773) maps are the first to show an established road leading from Charles Town to Strawberry Ferry on the Cooper River. Strawberry Ferry, Strawberry Chapel, and Childsbury Towne are all shown on this map. North of Strawberry Plantation the road circumvents the Hell Hole Swamp and continues toward Kingstree, crossing the Santee River at Lenud’s Ferry, the same as Kinloch’s and Nelson’s. Mouzon’s (1776) map, shows the Georgetown Road as being a viable coastal land link north by this time.

Detailed information of the road leading to Strawberry Ferry from Goose Creek is presented in *A Specimen of an Intended Traveling Map of the Roads of South Carolina* published by Walker and Abernathie in 1787 (Fig. 19). This map shows Strawberry Ferry and the causeway that was constructed over the freshwater marsh between the high ground north of Goose Creek and the southwestern landing of Strawberry Ferry. Walker and Abernathie (1787) are the first cartographers to provide detailed evidence that the road and causeway actually existed.
FIGURE 16. "Map of the Colonies." (By William DeBrahm, 1756.)
FIGURE 17. "A Compleat Map of North Carolina." (By John Collet, 1770.)
FIGURE 18. "An Accurate Map of North and South Carolina."

(By Henry Mouzon, 1776.)
FIGURE 19. "A Specimen of an Intended Traveling Map of the Roads of South Carolina." (By Walker and Abermathie, 1787.)
Historical evidence supports my conclusions that the causeway existed much earlier than any of the historic period maps referred to indicate (Merrens 1978:110-121). The causeway was probably constructed under the direction of the commissioners when Strawberry Ferry was established in 1705. Statute #391, passed in 1719 by the assembly, refers to an existing 1/2 mile long causeway by stating that "the said causeway leading to the ferry at the Strawberry or Childsbury ... [is to] be made twelve feet wide and well and sufficiently repaired" (McCord 1841:43-45). The causeway leading to the ferry was again of concern in 1745 when, through passage of Statute #728, the assembly authorized the "commissioners of the high-roads ... to make a new causeway" (McCord 1841:137).

The type of causeway that was constructed across the marsh through Bluff Plantation to the southwestern landing is unknown. Many causeways, associated with ferry crossings, were long wooden trestles. Quite often their remains, in the form of trees growing from the upright support posts, may be seen along the rivers of the Carolina low country. An example of this is found at Bonneau's Ferry (38BK1267). The absence of these causeway markers south of Strawberry Ferry raises questions concerning the type of causeway used in conjunction with the ferry. Walker and Abernathie's (1787) map seems to indicate a trestle like structure was used at Strawberry Ferry (Fig. 19). An 1811 map of Bluff Plantation, drawn by John Diamond, indicates that the causeway constructed for Strawberry Ferry ran along the top of an inter-tidal rice field dike along the Cooper River south towards Goose Creek (Fig. 20). It was a common practice in the low country for dikes to be used as roadbeds (Rowland 1987:126).

In 1745 the assembly passed an order for the construction of a new causeway for Strawberry Ferry. This order may represent an early date for the practice of inter-tidal rice agriculture along the Cooper River. Inter-tidal rice agriculture was already a common practice at the time of Walker and Abernathie's (1787) map. Although a trestle may have been used during the early 18th century, any vestiges of its existence would have been destroyed during field preparation for inter-tidal rice agriculture.
FIGURE 20. Plat map of Bluff Plantation. (By John Diamond, 1811.)
Although the crossing at Strawberry Ferry does not appear on maps until that drawn by Walker and Abernathie (1787), historical accounts allow a temporal setting for the initial establishment for the crossing (McCord 1841:6-8, Merrens 1978:110-121). A published “gentlemen’s travel account” from 1733 (Merrens 1978) confirms the existence of Strawberry Ferry within the local and regional transportation infrastructure. According to this man’s journal, his initial foray into South Carolina’s wilderness was to Kingstown, a newly established township approximately 50 miles north of Georgetown, located at the head of Winyah Bay (Merrens 1978:115). After spending the night at Goose Creek, he and his companions crossed “Childsbury-Ferry, alias the Strawberry or Cooper River” ferry (Merrens 1978:112). From Childsbury the road continued north, through plantation lands owned by the Ball family, and crossed the Santee River at Kinloch’s Ferry. From there, travelers could either go east toward the port of Georgetown or north toward Charlottsburgh and the great wagon road to Pennsylvania.

Even without the concomitant rise of Childsbury Towne, a number of socio-economic observations may be drawn from the construction of Strawberry Ferry. Communal co-operation, communication, and socio-economic interaction, such as religious activity, marriage, fairs, and markets were dependent upon the ease of public access (McCord 1841:6; Terry 1981:190). Public defense, against the incursion of hostile forces or dreaded slave insurrections, required a localized meeting place for residents who were members of the local militia. Rapid access to Charles Town for reinforcements or retreat required a viable method to cross the only major waterway within the area (McCord 1841:6). Passage across the Cooper River was free of charge on Sundays for those attending church services and during military emergencies.

The construction of the ferry at Strawberry Plantation resulted in the establishment of an inn or tavern to serve patrons of the crossing. The construction of interior roads led to the establishment of inns located along highways and at ferry crossings. Inns provided travelers with food, lodging, stores, and a place to socially
interact or conduct business. Although taverns and inns are well documented through historical literature from the colonial period, extant structures at ferry crossings have been difficult to locate (Neuffer 1967:33). Most were allowed to decay, due to a lack of social and economic activity. Archaeological documentation of tavern sites at ferry crossings confirms historical information concerning their presence (Rockman and Rothschild 1984).

The Records of South Carolina Journals of the House of Representatives 1792-1794 contain a proposal recommending that: “keepers of ferries and toll bridges be required to keep inns” (Stevens 1988:492). During the colonial period inns and taverns were established at ferry crossings by individual owner/operators and commercial stagecoach companies. Walker and Abernathie’s (1787) travel book highlights the associated inn or tavern at Strawberry Ferry. Eventually the tavern and inn at Strawberry Ferry was incorporated into Childsbury Towne (See Chapter 6).

During the colonial period taverns and inns served a variety of socio-economic functions. They became local meeting places for political events, horse races, militia musters, and offices for merchants and farmers conducting local business (Longrigg 1972:110; Terry 1981:225). The social function of taverns and their associated inns is related by David Doar who states,

There was welcome warmth, good talk, food, and a place to sleep, though sometimes three or four to a bed. There was room for any number on the floor, rolled up in blankets by the huge log fire. Always there were the tall tales and never ending bragging, yarns, [and] tales of the road they had come, deep with dust in the summertime and mud in the winter (McIver 1967:33).
In the “gentlemen’s” account of his travels from 1733, he wrote that their party, upon returning from Kingstown, arrived at Strawberry at six in the evening “where [they] slept that night” before resuming their journey to Charles Town the next day (Merrens 1978:118). Also, C.F. Neuffer writes that “an unusual practice during these days (early 19th century) was for the post office to put off mail [for the local residents]. This was done as a public service by all of the taverns” (Neuffer 1968:49). The practice of dropping off mail at Strawberry Ferry for the local residents continued into the mid 1800s (South Carolina Historical Society, Ball Family Papers, 11-515-34).

Strawberry Ferry and its associated tavern and inn became known as a place for social gatherings and as a convenient place to conduct local business. A review of the Strawberry Ferry Ledger of Lancelot Smith 1777-1779 (1964) exemplifies the role the ferry and tavern played within the local community (Wates and Lee 1964). This ledger book lists the debts of those individuals requiring personal items such as food, drink, sugar, saddles, handkerchiefs, and or ferriage across the Cooper River (Wates and Lee 1964).

My investigations into the Lance Smith ledger book concentrate on the five month period between February and June of 1777. A total of 401 listings were entered in the credit ledger during this time period (Appendix V). Of these listings 61% are for ferriage of slaves, 60% for ferriage of horses, 21% charged to the debtor for personal crossings, 20% for liquor and sundries, 13% for carriages, and 01% for livestock that included sheep and cattle. The names of the people associated with these entries indicate a brisk trade by local residents and merchants from Charles Town (Hamer et al., 1970:257, 201, 381; Irving 1932[1842]:46, 104; Rogers et al., 1974:599, 628-629; Terry 1981:225; Appendix IV). There is no data regarding those who paid cash for services rendered, so the ledger must be considered biased towards those local and Charles Town residents who were in an economic position to charge.
Strawberry Ferry and the tavern were primarily concerned with local traffic and business dealings associated with Charles Town on a daily basis. Where that business was conducted and why allows insight to class structure and socio-economic status within the local community. The fact that this business was conducted in Childsbury Towne confirms the socio-economic importance of the settlement to the local community.

The percentages related to liquor, charges for personal crossings, and carriage traffic may represent either business dealings or social interaction within the community. Although only 20% of the charges in Lancelot Smith's ledger were for liquor, a review of these purchases allows insight to how the local community viewed Childsbury. From my examination of the Smith ledger and other historical documents a more refined picture of the social and economic structure in Childsbury Towne emerges. These findings detail a definite social structure to the business dealings in and around Strawberry Ferry and Childsbury Towne (Rogers et al., 1974:597-598).

George Terry, in "Champaign Country": A Social History of an Eighteenth Century Lowcountry Parish in South Carolina, St. Johns Berkeley County (1981), details the evolutionary development of taverns within St. John's parish and pays exceptional attention to the one operated by Lancelot Smith (Terry 1981:215-226). He suggests that the majority of the "inhabitants purchasing liquor at the tavern were all from, and almost all lived in St. John's for only a few years" (Terry 1981:226). He also states that persons from the lower and middle class tended to drink at the tavern.

Data from Henry Laurens and Lance Smith's ledger supports Terry's (1981) conclusions. This suggests that the elite tended to conduct business in private homes as opposed to public taverns. Indeed, only three "persons of any wealth [are] mentioned as having been billed for liquor" at the tavern (Terry 1981:226).

So, if the elite were consuming alcohol somewhere other than the tavern and were obviously conducting business in private homes what do the purchases for alcohol at Strawberry Tavern represent. Terry, (1981) implies that they were a group of local
drunks worth very little to the community of elite planters that lived along the western branch of the Cooper River. Indeed, he states that by "judging from the amount of refreshments Lancelot Smith's customers drank, it would have been a small miracle for them to have even gotten out of bed the next day" (Terry 1981:225).

The seemingly excessive amounts of grog and rum consumed by Smith's customers may be biased by late 20th century attitudes concerning the personal consumption of alcohol. Sample entries from account books kept for a hotel and tavern operated in Harpers Ferry, Virginia from 1822-1823 and 1839-1840 implies that the amount of alcohol consumed at Strawberry Ferry's tavern was minimal in comparison (Halchin 1994). As well, studies conducted in South Africa on colonial period shipwrecks have shown that the alcoholic content of some beverages was substantially less during the 18th century than that found today (Harris 1995).

Confirmation of a lower to middle class socio-economic communal structure may be visible through a study of John Prestly's bill. Approximately 64% of his time at the tavern associated with Strawberry Ferry was during a time of possible business opportunity. This implies that the socio-economic significance of Strawberry Ferry and Childsbury Towne to the local community extended beyond the 1750 date accorded its demise to "no more than a ferry stop with a tavern and the church" (Terry 1981:13). This data also shows that Prestly's activity at the tavern co-incided with a number of local market days and annual fairs held in Childsbury Towne.

Terry (1981) states that Prestly (Pressly) was "a small planter and overseer at Wadboo Barony" (Terry 1981:225). Although Terry (1981) does not reference this statement, it is historically known that John Colleton died in 1762 and had left Wadboo to his widow, Margaret, who lived in England (Salley 1900:332). Salley (1900) suggests that Margaret Colleton never came to South Carolina, thus she would have required an overseer to operate the barony for her. I assume that Robert Raper's Charles Town firm, Raper and Company, continued to represent the Colleton interest in South Carolina at this
time (McCann 1981:112). Support for Prestly's position as overseer of the Colleton properties may be found in the ledger of Lancelot Smith. Prestly had his passage charged to Robert Raper on a number of occasions (Wates and Lee 1964).

Accepting that Prestly was the overseer at Wadboo Barony, his charges may indicate lower to middle class business dealings conducted at the tavern of Lancelot Smith. Prestly was at the tavern quite often. In the five month period between February and July of 1777 he visited the tavern a total of 33 times and charged items a total of 38 times. On five occasions he made two charges on the same day. His primary purchases were generally grog, which was probably consumed at the tavern. His secondary purchases were for rum by the quart or gallon, which he possibly carried back to his home at Wadboo. All of his purchases were for either grog or rum except one purchase of 50 pounds of sugar on May 3. Sugar would be considered a household staple, thus it is important to note that there were no purchases by Prestly for other staples such as coffee, salt, or flour.

As overseer of Wadboo Barony, I assume he lived there. Wadboo was twenty-two miles from Childsbury Towne and the tavern at Strawberry Ferry. Using the figures for the time of overland travel as accounted in Merrens (1978), it would have taken Prestly approximately four hours to make the trip one way. Wadboo was only four and one-half miles from Monck’s Corner. In 1777 there were a number of taverns and stores located there (Terry 1981:214-220, 228). It would have taken Prestly only one hour, round trip, to go to these establishments in Monck’s Corner. I suspect that the majority of locally purchased staple goods and equipment, required for the operation of Wadboo, were bought there.

A comparison of Prestly’s visits to Strawberry Ferry’s tavern and socio-economic aspects related to Childsbury Towne may offer an explanation for his presence there. Statute #478, passed in 1723, established a weekly market and bi-annual fair in
Childsbury Towne. Markets were to be held “upon every Tuesday and Saturday in the week” (Cooper 1838:204). The fairs were to,

commence the third Tuesday in May, in every year, and to
end upon the Friday then next following, being in all four
days inclusive, and no longer, and the second fair to begin
and commence the last Tuesday in October, in every year,
and to end upon the Friday then next following (Cooper
1838:204)

Advertisements for the fair and other public events held in Childsbury Towne were published in the South Carolina Gazette as late as 1768 (Cohen 1953:88). I suspect that after 45 years of holding these annual and weekly events that their date and times were well known throughout the low country of South Carolina. I suggest that they continued to be held during the entire colonial period.

The times that these markets and fairs were held would have been excellent venues from which the local residents along the Cooper River could conduct business and interact socially. As such, the crossings within the ledger should correspond with market days and the four day period of the fair. Factors considered of importance in this comparison are the total number of ferry crossings to credit entries, the number of crossings listing multiple horses and livestock, the days of the week these crossings were made, and monthly percentages related to these factors.

Of 400 entries found in the Smith Ledger, 318 listings, or 80%, are for ferriage. Of those 318 crossings, 39% constituted multiple numbers of horses with 01% being cattle or sheep. Market days in Childsbury Towne were held on Tuesdays and Saturdays of each week. Ferriage on those days alone constituted 42% of all the traffic listed in the
ledger. Multiple numbers of horses totaled 29% and cattle and sheep made up the remainder.

Of 400 crossings 17% were made in February, 19% in March, 23% in April, 25% in May, and 16% in June. Of the 123 crossings that ferried multiple numbers of horses 15% were in the month of February, 24% in March, 27% in April, 24% in May, and 09% in June. Although these monthly percentages do not indicate a difference in crossings related to the fair, the rise seen in March, April, and May may reflect patterns related to the seasonal aspects of rice and indigo production (Terry 1981:229-231; Fig. 21).

Of 38 purchases made at Strawberry Tavern by Prestly in the five month period between February and July of 1777, 24% of those visits fell on Tuesday or Saturday. Approximately 25% of his charges were made on Sunday when passage on the ferry was free to those attending church. As overseer and representative of the 12,000 acre Colleton Barony at Wadboo, being at the ferry on Sundays would offer him a chance to converse or conduct business with a number of planters, farmers, and other overseers while they waited for the ferry to carry them back across the river. Half of his Monday charges, 06%, were on days his passage was paid for by Robert Raper and may have been related to Colleton business. Approximately 09% of his time spent at the tavern in May was during fair week, again, another important time to conduct business and socially interact with others in the community.

Although it is acknowledged that Prestly did enjoy a drink or two, the use of comparative data related to his account in the Smith credit ledger and the social calendar of Childsbury Towne enhances the picture presented by Terry (1981). The ability to interact within the social and business sphere of frontier societies was severely restricted because of time restraints related to plantation management and distance between dispersed settlements. Much work was required to keep large plantations profitable and therefore limited opportunities for this interaction to public events within the community.
FIGURE 21. Seasonal activity at Strawberry Tavern 1777-1779.

(Per George Terry, 1981).
If all Prestly had wanted to do was drink, the tavern's in Monck's Corner would have been much more convenient.

From the arguments presented above apparently there was a social order for conducting business within the local community of small dispersed settlements along the Cooper River. This business was conducted at Childsbury Towne and is seen as representative of the importance of ferry crossings and their associated taverns to the local socio-economic landscape. This socio-economic structure is defined through studies of those persons who held positions of responsibility and importance to the ongoing success of the local community. Conclusions are that the elite did tend to conduct their business at private residences and the lower to middle classes tended to conduct their business at well known, communally significant gathering places. As a settlement Childsbury Towne was important to all classes within the local community.

Another aspect of the socio-economic position Strawberry Ferry held in the local landscape of lower St. John's is the relevant power vested in the appointment of commissioners who designed, constructed, and maintained the inter-related interior infrastructure. When ferry crossings were established by the South Carolina assembly local residents were appointed as commissioners to oversee their construction. Responsibilities inherent with their appointment was "for the making, mending, and keeping clear, the said common roads or highways within the parish" (McCord 1841:7). Along with these commissions came the power to levy taxes on local residents and appropriate personnel, usually in the form of slaves, for the construction of ferry crossings, bridges, and roads (McCord 1841:6-7). Male slaves "from the ages of sixteen to sixty" were required to work on these projects (McCord 1841:6).

Generally those appointed as commissioners were from the highest social class, thus persons of influence within the local community. Five commissioners -- John Ashley; Peter Jacob Geurard, Esquire; James Child; Elias Ball; and Thomas Hubbard --
were appointed to oversee the construction of Strawberry Ferry in 1705. Their responsibility, inherent within their appointment as commissioners, was to “direct and appoint the keeping of a ferry for the transportation of man or horse... to and from the said Strawberry Plantation, or to such other place as the commissioners shall think fit” (McCord 1841:7). They were also responsible for the construction of a road along the north side of the Cooper River from Peter Colleton’s Barony at Wadboo to Elias Ball’s plantation at Comingtee. Roads were also to be constructed on either side of the eastern branch from Strawberry Ferry to the plantation of Mr. Peter Jedeau (McCord 1841:6). Statute #246 also commissioned the construction of the road from the southwestern landing to Goose Creek which connected Strawberry Ferry to the main highway to Charles Town (McCord 1841:7).

As an economic enterprise the viability of the crossing at Strawberry Plantation was supported by a number of factors. Vested in the ownership of this ferry was the right to charge for ferriage across the river with rates established by law. According to the Statutes at Large of South Carolina (1841) James Child, as owner and operator of the ferry at Strawberry, was authorized to charge “for the transportation of each passenger, take and demand... [a fee] not exceeding one royal, and no more; for the passage of one passenger and horse... [a fee] not exceeding two royals” (McCord 1841:7). According to the Oxford Royal Dictionary a royal was worth ten shillings (Wates and Lee 1964).

By 1748 only one commissioner of the original five, Elias Ball, was still living (Terry 1981:192). Three were required, by the assembly, to oversee the rates of passage and to insure its proper operation (McCord 1841:7). Thus, it was not uncommon, in 1748, for disputes to arise, on a daily basis, concerning the rate of passage (Terry 1981:192). These disputes prompted the assembly to re-certify the right of operation in that year. Lydia Child Chicken Ball, wife of Elias, was vested in the ownership and operation of Strawberry Ferry at that time. The rate of passage, also established with this act, was considerably less that first granted her grandfather, James Child. She was only
allowed to charge two pence for cattle, three pence per foot passenger and per horse, and one shilling per chaise or wagon (McCord 1841:148). Penalties were enacted for undue delays in passage across the river (McCord 1841:149).

Although the legislation of rates for passage tended to relieve these disputes, concerns related to the cost of passage at Strawberry Ferry continued. Of 400 crossings only 24, (06%), were charged to the account of Henry Laurens (Wates and Lee 1964). All of these charges were for ferriage of slaves or business associates. None were charged for Laurens' personal passage. Laurens preferred to travel by horseback and possibly took the long way to Mepkin through Monck's Corner (Rogers et al., 1974:597). The lack of charges for his passage may also reflect a personal attitude concerning ferries expressed by Laurens in a letter to William Bampfield in 1768. Laurens advises Bampfield to travel an extra 17 miles on his journey from Georgetown to Charleston via Mepkin Plantation because the entertainment is surer and better and you avoid the excessive Charge of Ferriage. The abuse of Horses, sometimes Loss of them, besides the Risque of being an hour or two upon the water in an open Boat exposed to bleak Winds [are of concern] (Rogers et al., 1978:181-182)

Robert Raper is charged for passage only eight times out of the 400 entries listed in the Strawberry Ferry ledger book. Ferriage for Prestly's passage totaled almost half of Raper's charges (43%). The remaining charges were 14% for the ferriage of slaves, 29% for ferriage of a riding chair, or carriage, and 14% for ferriage of himself and a carriage. An explanation for Raper's lack of travel across Strawberry Ferry is found in a letter to John Colleton dated the 6th of December 1759. Per his letter, Raper,
ordered 5 Ordinary Negresses to be settled at Mepshew to plant Corn and partly to keep a Boat to Carry over the River the Manager or Attorneys which is necessary to save ferage at Strawbury which costs near £10 Sterling a year (McCann 1981:113).

The ability to charge a fee for the crossing was only one aspect exemplifying the crossing’s economic potential. The construction of Strawberry Ferry also served a larger economic function that corresponds to South Carolina’s changing economic conditions during the colonial period. Because of short term variations in economic interests, Strawberry Ferry represents a unique view of the evolving nature of frontier development. This variation can be tied to the diverse economic resources found within the back country north of the Cooper River “Tee.”

The trade in deer skins and Indian slaves, cattle, naval stores, and the introduction of rice as a staple crop were likely factors in the ferry’s construction. As such, its position on the frontier of Charles Town suggests that its initial construction was designed to profit from the export of these goods and related traffic. As indicated earlier, there was already a brisk trade with the Indians for deer skins and slaves.

Along with the importance of rice came associated social and business connections with Charles Town. Between 1736 and 1775 there was a slow continual growth in the wealth of South Carolina’s elite. As the local planters along the western branch of the Cooper River became more prosperous they began to invest in land throughout the colony and in barges and ships to transport their product to market (Hamer et al., 1972:1972:209; Rogers et al., 1974:638-642; Terry 1981:203). Rice production, added to naval stores and the deer skin trade, increased the economic importance, thus significance of Strawberry Ferry to the local economic landscape.
Evidence that Strawberry Ferry continued its functional role as a known place of commerce during the late 18th century is reflected in the letters of Henry Laurens and through advertisements published in the Charles Town Gazette (Hamer et al., 1972:41; Rogers et al., 1974:599; Cohen 1953). In an advertisement placed by Henry Laurens in the Charles Town Gazette on July 19, 1760 he advertised,

TO BE SOLD very cheap, on Tuesday the 22nd of this Instant July, at STRAWBERRY-FERRY, A Choice Cargo of about TWO HUNDRED very Likely and Healthy NEGROES, of the same Country as are usually brought from the river Gambia . . . (Hamer et al., 1972:41).

Archaeological Investigations

The upkeep of the landings for the ferry crossing was of extreme importance to the settlement of Childsbury Towne. Money for these projects was supplied from funds held by the treasury or from parochial taxes levied on the local residents (McCord 1841:6-7; Terry 1981:180, 185). As late as 1801 Elias Ball, owner of Strawberry Ferry, complained that the road commissioners refused to “repair the slips at Strawberry Ferry” (Terry 1981:194). In his complaint he also stated that “the slips on each side must be expensive to make and keep in repair from the necessary length of them and the infirm foundation on which they must be built” (Terry 1981:194). Archaeological data has confirmed Elias Ball’s statement.

As important as ferry crossings were to early settlement and colonial socio-economic support infrastructures there is a lack of fine detail concerning their construction. There are no descriptions or diagrams from the colonial period delineating the engineering techniques used in their construction. Unfortunately, there are also very few extant ferry crossings left within low country South Carolina available for
archaeological study. Those that do exist are generally in very poor condition. Recent archaeological investigations within the South Carolina low country (Barr 1994, 1995) has shown them to be much more complex than first imagined (Beard 1993:63).

David Beard, in Causeways and Landings: An Archaeological Study of Riverine Adaptation in the South Carolina Lowcountry (1993), suggests that ferry landings were constructed using a crib-like structure, similar to those found in early colonial docks (Beard 1993:67). The dock structures found at Fort Dorchester, on the Ashley River, and Mepkin Abbey, on the west branch of the Cooper River, would represent that type of construction (Fig. 22). Unlike the construction found at Strawberry Ferry, these structures consisted of a framework of round longs approximately 20cm x 20cm. After completion of the crib structure they were probably floated into place, filled with rubble, and sunk in the desired location (Coker 1987:39).

The crossing at Strawberry Ferry exhibits in-place construction. This construction technique would affect the manner in which they were built. The method used to restrict the flow of water around the construction site is unknown. It may have been during an opportune time of extreme drought or perhaps through the use of sand bags; a technique used to excavate inter-tidal areas during archaeological investigations today. However, this method of in-place construction is a factor that should be considered in their typology. This is primarily because of the patterned brick floors (Fig. 23) and slope associated with these landings (Barr 1994:83: Fig. 24).

Comparative data is drawn from three extant low country ferries: Strawberry Ferry (38BK1723), established in 1705 on the western branch of the Cooper River, Ashley Ferry (38CH1506), established in 1711, on the Ashley River, and Bonneau's Ferry (38BK1267), established in 1712 on the eastern branch of the Cooper River (McCord 1841:6-8, 23; Terry 1981:189). Two of these early colonial ferries, Strawberry and Ashley Ferry, operated into the 19th century. Bonneau's Ferry was circumvented in
FIGURE 22. "Baker's Wharf," Old Dorchester. (By William R. Judd.)
FIGURE 23. Brick floor pattern, northwestern landing, Strawberry Ferry.
(By William B. Barr and Martha Houston.)
FIGURE 24. Slope and plan view of northwestern landing, Strawberry Ferry.
1737 by Huger's bridge over the eastern branch of the Cooper River (Deas 1978[1909]:134-135; Terry 1981:196). These ferry crossings are found to be quite large.

The northeastern landing of Strawberry Ferry is in pristine condition, because of its location on the inside curve of the river. Fluvial action, over time, has covered the terrestrial and underwater portion of the landing promoting a heavy growth of trees and sawgrass along the bank (Plate 3). This has protected it from both natural and human damage (Barr 1994:82). The southwestern landing at Strawberry Ferry has not been so fortunate. Erosion from fluvial action and boat wakes has destroyed a majority of the landing and exposed much of the interior structure (Plate 4). The condition of the southwestern landing allowed study of the interior construction and negated the need for a full scale excavation of the northeastern landing.

Investigations conducted on the northeastern and southwestern landings of Strawberry Ferry were designed to delineate the parameters of the northeastern landing and to determine the mechanics of construction related to these structures. These landings utilize timber and brick in their construction. The northeastern landing extends over 10m from the high water mark toward the terrestrial side of the site and over 15m toward the river side. The terrestrial side is located under approximately 30cm of overburden and the river side is located under approximately 15cm of overburden and 1.3m of water at low tide (Fig. 24).

The landing is approximately 2.5m wide and has a slope of 7 degrees. The slope of this landing applies very well to the construction of ferry craft as delineated by Mark
Newell (Newell n.d.). The Potatoe Ferry craft, on the Black River, has a bow and stern slope of 7 degrees (Fig. 25). Two ferry craft found at Brown’s Ferry, also on the Black River, have slopes of 9 degrees (Fig. 26). Unfortunately, no extant ferry craft has been found in association with the landings at Strawberry Ferry. Construction techniques for ferry craft were probably brought over with the original colonists from England. This would imply that the technology found in the construction of the landings was probably incorporated at the same time.

The main structural members of Strawberry Ferry extend three timbers deep with each timber approximately 20cm square. Cross members are located approximately every 6.5m (Fig. 24). A patterned brick floor rests between the timbers with puncheon stakes and planed timbers supporting the side walls of the brick. The brick floor of the landing is at least 3 courses or layers deep. Data suggests that originally there were probably five courses with two courses, along with one layer of timbers, missing due to either environmental factors or from human interaction. The survey determined that the brick floor extends over the entire site with brick found in test excavations both 3m and 6m from the high tide line. The patterned brick floor was found to extend over 13m below the high tide line.

Neither of the two landings associated with Ashley Ferry are in very good condition. The northwestern landing is in the best condition. This is probably due to its location on the inside bend of the river. It is afforded some protection by the present-day Savannah to Charleston rail road bridge approximately 60m up river from the site. Even with this protection the landing is heavily eroded with very little left of its original structure except for the round base logs possibly used for support of the landing (Plate 5). The southeastern landing of Ashley Ferry was destroyed during phosphate mining operations conducted by the Drayton family in the late 19th century.

Both the northeastern and southwestern landings of Bonneau’s Ferry are in poor condition. The northeastern landing has practically disappeared between the high and
FIGURE 25. Potatoe Ferry craft. (By Mark Newell and Lynn Harris)
FIGURE 26. Brown’s Ferry craft. (By Mark Newell and ECU Volunteer Students.)
low water mark. Site surveys indicate that there is a possibility that much of the underwater and terrestrial portion of the landing remains intact (Plate 6). The heavily eroded southwestern landing has most of its upper structure gone. Even the disarticulated timbers from that structure, seen in 1991, have now disappeared leaving only the round base support logs and a few 5cm x 20cm planks. These planks confirm the use of board and puncheon technology in its construction. Much like the northeastern side, site surveys indicate the possibility that much of the terrestrial and underwater portion of the site may remain intact.

PLATE 5. Northwestern landing of Ashley Ferry.
Each of these ferry landings exhibits similarities which aid in the development of a construction typology (Fig. 27). Round 10cm logs are common to all three of the ferry crossings studied. They are found at Ashley Ferry (Plate 5), Bonneau’s Ferry (Plate 6), and the southeastern side of Strawberry Ferry. There is no evidence of round logs at the northwestern landing of Strawberry Ferry because of its excellent condition. From other data presented I feel that round logs are used for the base structure of the landing; much like a corduroy road. A layer of 5cm x 20cm boards, laid on top of the round logs, would give additional support to the final structure. These too are common to all of the landings except the northwestern landing at Strawberry Ferry. A 20cm x 20cm timber frame,
constructed in true “Lincoln Log” fashion with each beam resting upon the other, was then constructed on the support planks (Plate 3, 4). These beams, with cut-outs for cross members, are found at both landings of Strawberry Ferry and in 1991 at the southeastern
landing of Bonneau's Ferry. Board and puncheon technology was then used for the support of a patterned brick floor used for its final covering Plate 7, 8; Fig. 23, 27).

Large amounts of brick are found in association with all of these landings. The brick for Strawberry Ferry's landings may have been locally produced. Child's town site map notes that a brick yard was present near the river in the southeastern quadrant of Childsbury Towne (See page 50, Fig. 7). Although no investigations were conducted in the southeastern quadrant, large deposits of red clay, which may have been used for brick manufacturing, are prevalent within the southeastern corner of the southwestern quadrant. I suspect these deposits continue along the bluff and into the southeastern quadrant of the town.

Plate 8. Southwestern Landing of Bonneau's Ferry.
Ball’s complaint of the landing’s “infirm foundation on which they must be built” is related to geo-morphological aspects of the Cooper River’s riverine environment (Terry 1981:194). The base of the Cooper River is composed of marl, an extremely dense, light sand-colored clay. Pluff mud, a thick, gooey mixture of loam and sand, is heavily deposited over the marl. Anything of substantial weight immediately sinks into this soil. A timber and brick structure, such as the landings at Strawberry Ferry, would constantly require repairs over time because of these conditions.

The repairs to the landings and the inter-related overland transportation network leading to the crossing at Strawberry Ferry required a concerted effort by persons of various economic and social status. It was to the elite’s advantage that any work required for the maintenance and improvement of these systems not be delayed any longer than agricultural restraints would allow. These efforts were rewarded through an increase in realized profits related to ready access through timely shipments of export goods to Charles Town and overseas markets.

Legislation, passed in 1721, standardized the then existing transportation network within South Carolina (McCord 1840:49-57). This act superseded all previous legislation concerning roads, bridges, and ferries and voided all previous statutes. It also appointed commissioners for each parish to oversee “all and every the highroads, private paths, causeys, bridges, creeks, passages, and water courses, laid out and to be laid out ... ” (McCord 1840:49-57). In St. John’s parish, Berkeley county the commissioners appointed were Thomas Broughton, Johnathon Drake, Elias Ball, and Isaac Child (McCord 1840:49-57). Even though the statutes of 1721 voided the permit for Strawberry Ferry, it can be seen from the “gentlemen’s written account” that the ferry was still in operation 12 years later.

Although the majority of persons who used the tavern were not from the elite elements of the community, analysis of the surface artifact collection from unit SF#1441 presents a different picture as far as Strawberry Ferry is concerned (Appendix VI). The
artifact assemblage from this unit contains ceramics that include creamware, blue transfer-printed pearlware, ironstone, Chinese-export porcelain, annular transfer-printed pearlware and whiteware. This collection also includes the base of a stemmed wine glass. The overall date range for this material is from 1760 to 1860. Stanley South's "mean ceramic dating formula," for dating English ceramics, was applied to this material (South 1977). This formula provides a mean date of 1791± 4 years for the northeastern landing. The attributes associated with these artifacts would imply a landing used primarily by the elite whose use continued past the end of the colonial era.

Conclusions

The elite, through their social and economic status, continued to define the colonial period relationships among the diverse demographic elements within lower St. John's parish. Each class was fully aware of its place and worked within limits imposed by the existing social order. By doing so they adapted to and worked within those social and economic restrictions.

In 1825 the area around Strawberry Ferry was again mapped by the well-known cartographer Robert Mills (1964[1825]; See page 40, Fig. 4). His map, similar to that of Mouzon's (1776), shows Strawberry Ferry continuing to be a viable link in the road and river systems within the low country of South Carolina. It also shows Strawberry Ferry as being the third and northernmost river crossing on the Cooper River at that time. The construction of the ferry crossing at Strawberry Plantation allowed the residents of the western branch of the Cooper River to retain control throughout the colonial period of a major intersection along one of the earliest roads and rivers within low country South Carolina north of Charleston. The northeastern landing of Strawberry Ferry continued its function as a major crossing within the low country transportation infrastructure. Its location as a known meeting place for political rallies in the late 1870s testifies to its continued social importance within the local community (Deas 1978[1909]). But, never
again would it achieve the prominence it held within Childsbury during the early colonial expansion of the Carolina frontier.