

**THE COMPLEX ANTEBELLUM LANDSCAPE  
AT STONEY/BAYNARD PLANTATION**

by

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## **Introduction**

For the past four years, The Friends of Stoney/Baynard and the Hilton Head museum have sponsored archaeological and historical research at Stoney/Baynard Plantation on Hilton Head Island. The site is composed of the massive tabby ruins of the main plantation house and three additional structures. Previous archaeological testing indicated that the additional structures represent a house slaves' quarters, a structure of unknown function, and a kitchen. The subsequent excavations focused on the house slaves' quarters and the kitchen. Thus far, the research has yielded data which clearly indicates that the plantation landscape is more complex than past archaeological research has suggested.

## **History**

Historical documentation and archaeological data suggests that this complex was probably constructed about 1793 when Captain John Stoney purchased the property. When Hilton Head fell to Union troops on November 7, 1861 the plantation was sporadically used by the military, but the house apparently never served as a school, nor were any of the numerous Northern missionary teachers ever billeted there. In fact, only one letter from a teacher (at nearby Lawton Plantation) has been identified which mentions the plantation. On January 22, 1863 a teacher wrote that:

Braddock's Point is occupied by the Baynard Plantation, and is the only place on the island which looks like a gentleman's Residence. It is the birthplace of John C. Calhoun (American Missionary Association H5178).

The Calhoun reference, while incorrect, suggests that the house was sufficiently grand to suggest that someone of his importance might have been born there. The comment also places the house in contrast to the other plantations on the island which were characterized by other teachers as poorly constructed, drafty, and little more than farm houses.

## **Archaeology**

The archaeological research at Stoney/Baynard Plantation is beginning to shed light on the complexity of antebellum plantation landscapes and planter/slave relations. Architectural recordation of the main house indicates that it consisted of a basement and a first floor which is small since basements were not used as living spaces. The small size of the actual living space is perhaps due to the fact that the planter was rarely there, and because of the isolation of the Sea Islands, guests were uncommon.

The outbuildings at Stoney/Baynard were oriented differently from the main house, along a narrow ridge. Archaeology at the house slaves' quarters indicated that the foundation was sloppily constructed. The northeast corner was misaligned during casting. Examination of the remainder of the tabby foundation reveals that the impressions of dowels used to hold the tabby forms together are frequently skewed on the east wall. Notches in the northwest, southwest, and southeast corners are the result of the interior form boards being too long for a proper fit. The construction of the north and south chimneys also suggests a general lack of attention to detail.

Ghosting of wood timbers on the southern half of the structure indicates that framing was erected before the tabby had completely set. Based on this ghosting, the structure appears to have contained two separate rooms, each measuring about 14 feet in depth by 12 feet in length (with the north room perhaps a foot longer).

Of equal interest is the construction of the two chimneys. Both were constructed, almost "added on," after the completion of the tabby foundation wall. The southern chimney consists of two parts. There is a massive crack which is the result of settling (also visible in the wall behind the box).

The northern chimney is perhaps even more complex and reveals a different approach. The foundation wall was laid up first and the chimney added afterwards, butting the wall to the west and forming a continuous eastern wall using the gap in the foundation.

More importantly, as the hearth area was being cleaned, a series of what appear to be floor joist casts were found. This would suggest that after the foundation was laid up, but before the northern chimney was constructed, floor joists were laid directly on the soil and that afterwards the tabby hearth was cast around them. This interpretation, of course, presents a multitude of problems, not the least of which is that we know of no slave house where you are forced to step up over the foundation to gain entrance into a room at or slightly below the exterior grade (such an arrangement would also create damp rooms, make cleaning very difficult, and create floors constantly subject to rot and insect attack). In spite of its seeming improbability, the casts exist and are real, the hearths as constructed are the correct height to be capped with brick for a ground level floor, and there is remnant plastering on the interior of the tabby foundation which terminates about 8 inches from the base. It is possible that the structure was adaptively re-used, resulting not only in this unusual access problem, but also the clearly added-on chimneys.

A large number of high status items were recovered from the yard excavations including expensive ceramics, lead glass tumblers, stemmed glassware, bone handle utensils, and jewelry and other personal items. Although still under analysis, the impression from the faunal material is that there is a large quantity of butchered high status cuts of meat. This suggests that the house slaves were eating a lot of the same foods that the planter was eating. Reverend James L. Belin specified that the inheritors of his house slaves give them daily "a plentiful supply of such food as they eat themselves; for my servants have been accustomed to such as my table afforded" (quoted in Joyner 1984:84).

The historical record reflects that there was a high degree of variability in the treatment and living conditions of house slaves. Captain Basil Hall, visiting the Charleston area in the first half of the nineteenth century, spoke to a plantation owner who explained to him that, "domestic slaves . . . were better fed and clothed, and generally better treated, than those employed out of doors; but, what was odd enough . . . every where the slaves preferred the field-work" (Jones 1957:102). This is perhaps because field slaves had greater freedom.

Many of these positive views were contradicted by Frances Anne Kemble, based on her residence at her husband's St. Simon plantations, Butler Island and Hampton Point during 1838. She remarked:

The house servants have no other or better allowance of food than the field laborers, but have the advantage of eking it out by what is left from the master's table -- if possible, with even less comfort in one respect, inasmuch as no time whatever is set apart for their meals, which they snatch at any hour and in any way that they can -- generally, however, standing or squatting on their hams round the kitchen fire; the kitchen being a mere outhouse or barn with a fire in it. On the estate where I lived, as I have mentioned, they had no sleeping rooms in the house; but when their work was over, they retired like the rest to their hovels, the discomfort of which had to them all the additional disadvantage of comparison with their owner's mode of living (Kemble 1984:361).

Genovese (1976) expands on these few accounts, providing a synthesis of the house slave's life. He finds, as suggested by even the accounts repeated here, exceptional variation in how such slaves were treated. He also notes that many house slaves did fare better, materially, than the field hands, either because of their special bond with their white families, or because they were in a position to take what they wanted.

At Stoney/Baynard plantation it appears that the house slaves were eating high status foods and possessed relatively expensive items, but lived in a house which was probably uncomfortable. If our architectural interpretation is correct, then the house would have been damp, hard to keep clean, and the slaves may have been constantly battling an insect problem.

Turning to the archaeology at the kitchen, extant remains consisted only of the base of a tabby chimney. The excavations south of the chimney revealed four post holes. Each post hole was roughly rectangular in shape and the fill from these post holes contained midden refuse and both fired and tabby (lime) brick. These post holes represent the western wall of the structure. Using the available posts it is possible to estimate that the structure associated with the chimney measured 18 feet in length (north-south) by 14 feet in width (east-west).

A fourth post hole was found further south, not aligned with the others. The morphology of this post hole was also distinct. The most convincing explanation for this post hole is that it represents the center support for a porch at the gable end of the structure, opposite the chimney.

This interpretation would create a relatively small structure, 14 by 18 feet, with a gable roof. There is a large chimney support at the north gable end, while at the south gable end there was a porch measuring about 5 feet in width, probably spanning the entire gable end. The chimney support indicates an interior fire box opening measuring about 5 feet -- much larger than would be expected for a structure of this size.

Although there are few detailed descriptions, photographs, or drawings, the information available indicates that this is an unusual configuration for a kitchen. Often the kitchen and the washroom or house slaves' quarters were located in the same building such as the archaeological example at Vanderhorst Plantation on Kiawah Island (Trinkley 1994) which was a double panned central chimney structure. Kitchens illustrated for the South as a whole depict primarily double panned central chimney structures, gabled end chimineyed structures with a lateral end door, and occasionally a dogtrot building.

While Vlach (1978) argues that the gable-front structure is an African-American style, we cannot totally discount other explanations tied to the narrow landform and possible function, at least for this one particular structure at Stoney/Baynard. The structure expands the architectural styles of plantation kitchens found at low country plantations, reminding us that there is much we do not yet know about plantation buildings.

The artifacts here are low status, similar to an assemblage one might find at a 19th century field slaves' house. This is somewhat perplexing since cooks normally had a high position in the plantation hierarchy. Here the faunal remains, which are most likely associated with the planter's meals, are similar to those found at the house slave's quarter which strongly suggests that the house slaves were eating most of the same foods as the planter.

## **Conclusion**

The information collected on the architecture at Stoney/Baynard Plantation is so unusual that it will certainly be reviewed by architectural historians. At the tabby chimney it was possible to identify an antebellum structure measuring about 14 by 18 feet with a gable end front porch which, we believe, served as the plantation kitchen. Like the house slaves' quarters, this is a somewhat unusual architectural style and will likely disrupt our complacency regarding architectural interpretations.

The house slaves' quarters was poorly constructed and may have undergone adaptive reuse. Two gable end chimneys were added on, and the evidence of floor joists suggests that the slaves had to step down into the building to a ground laid wooden floor which probably made the house damp and uncomfortable.

Stoney/Baynard has revealed some of the complexity of the antebellum landscape and challenged our way of looking at low country plantations. In spite of a decade of laborious excavations and number crunching, we seem unable to recognize, or accept, the exceptional variety at these plantations. As an example, consider Stoney/Baynard without standing ruins or in situ tabby. In their place, imagine only below ground features. Add to this scenario the reduced sampling strategy used for most "compliance" projects. Then consider some of the findings of this research and try to imagine the conclusions which might otherwise

be drawn. It is likely that the complexity of the plantation would be masked by our desire to find a simple solution, or would thwarted by inadequate samples which allowed us to see only a small part of the whole.

It seems not enough to distinguish between rural and urban -- the sea islands were beyond rural, they were in many respects a world apart. This isolation helps to explain the unusual aspects of Stoney/Baynard. The house slaves' quarters becomes less of an oddity as we attempt to understand it in the context of isolation and limited resources. A moderately dysfunctional design was selected and implemented since it was easier and required less labor than any other choice possible. The end gabled kitchen structure is likewise more understandable in the context of an isolated plantation ruled more by the African American slaves than the white master.

In sum, the research at Stoney/Baynard Plantation has made it evident that perhaps the most insidious logical fallacy is that which allows us to over generalize on too little data. We all strive to do the most, and best, we can with what data we have, therefore we fall prey to it, often without realizing either the act or the consequences. Regardless, it is incredibly damaging since it makes the complex appear simple, creating an almost monotonous landscape where simplicity replaces complexity. The result, of course, is that the texture, and reality, of the past is lost and in its place is created a version of reality which would likely be unrecognizable to the people of the period.

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