

MANAGEMENT SUMMARY OF ARCHAEOLOGICAL MITIGATION
AT 38GE294, WILLBROOK PLANTATION

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Chicora Research Contribution **19**

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Introduction

As a result of recent, additional survey investigations at 38GE294 (Trinkley 1987), the State Historic Preservation Officer (SHPO) found the site to be eligible for inclusion in the National Register of Historic Places. A Memorandum of Agreement (MOA), dealing with the proposed mitigation of golf course construction impacts to the site, was prepared by the SHPO and distributed to the concerned parties on July 23, 1987. On the same date, Chicora entered into an agreement with Litchfield-by-the-Sea to conduct the necessary archaeological investigations at the site, based on our July 15, 1987 proposal. This proposal had been provided to the SHPO for review on July 20, 1987 and was subsequently approved by Dr. Patricia Cridlebaugh, the SHPO's archaeologist. Because of the number of sites in the Willbrook Plantation development which may be found eligible, Litchfield-by-the-Sea opted for postponing the completion of a final report until all necessary archaeological mitigation work was complete, thus improving the archaeological synthesis and also reducing the project costs. This present management summary has been prepared immediately upon completion of the fieldwork and does not contain information on artifact analysis. It is intended solely to provide a brief descriptive statement of the work conducted by Chicora and to allow the SHPO to verify that the proposed work has actually been accomplished. According to the MOA, such a management summary is minimally necessary for Litchfield-by-the-Sea to obtain approval from the SHPO to continue the golf course development in the site area. This construction will destroy the site remnants and, of course, created the need for archaeological mitigation activities initially.

Archaeological investigations were begun at 38GE294 by a crew of five on August 3 and continued for four weeks, until August 28, 1987. A total of 731.5 person hours were devoted to work at the site, while an additional 66 person hours were spent off site in the field laboratory processing specimens during rain periods. As a result of this work, 1625 square feet of site area were opened and 1598 cubic feet of soil were moved in primary excavations, all screened through 1/4-inch mesh.

Auger Tests

surface indications, included an area 425 feet north-south and 225 feet east-west. The auger used a 12-inch bit and tests were dug into the yellow sand subsoil. All soil was screened using 1/4-inch mesh and all cultural material (including brick, shell, and mortar) was collected. For the purpose of the SYMAPs, only the count of historic and prehistoric specimens was recorded, along with the weight of the brick and shell. While the final SYMAPs are not yet available, draft maps were immediately made and guided the placement of the block excavations. The draft historic artifact density map revealed two major concentrations: one at the west edge of the field adjacent to River Road and the other at the center of the field tending toward the northeast. Within this second concentration were two core areas, one in the center and the other at the northeast edge, against the tree line (Figure 1 shows the placement of the auger tests, the block excavations, and Lepionka's test units). Both of these core areas also revealed large quantities of brick and mortar rubble. The auger tests along the eastern site edge also yielded small quantities of clam shell.

Excavations

The grid, established at N20°W, was tied into several Litchfield-by-the-Sea property markers in order to maintain long-term horizontal control. We were also able to identify two of Lepionka's grid points and were able to determine his grid orientation. This now allows all material collected from this site to be placed within the same horizontal control network. Vertical control was maintained through the use of a mean sea level datum (nail in the base of an oak tree south of River Road at the north edge of the site, 15.86 feet MSL).

The site area had been marked out in 25-foot grid units for the auger survey, with each point numbered in succession from south to north and west to east. These numbers, at 50 foot intervals, were used to number blocks, with each block designated by its southeast corner auger test number. Within these blocks a modified Chicago 10-foot grid was established, with each square designated by its southeast corner, from a 0R0 point at the southwest corner of the 50-foot block. Thus, square 12-10R10 would be located in the 50-foot square auger test block number 12 and the southeast corner of the square would be north 10 feet and right (or east) 10 feet from the 0R0 point (or the block's southwest corner). Soil was screened through 1/4-inch mesh using mechanical sifters. Units were troweled at the base of the plowzone, photographed in b/w and color slides, and plotted. Features were usually bisected, with both small soil samples and flotation samples collected. Features were usually excavated by natural soil zones and were separately photographed, plotted, and profiled during their removal.

Fieldnotes were prepared on archival paper and photographic material was processed to archival standards. All original fieldnotes, with archival copies, will be curated at The Charleston Museum, along with the collections, as Accession Number 1987.49. All specimens will also be evaluated for conservation needs and will be

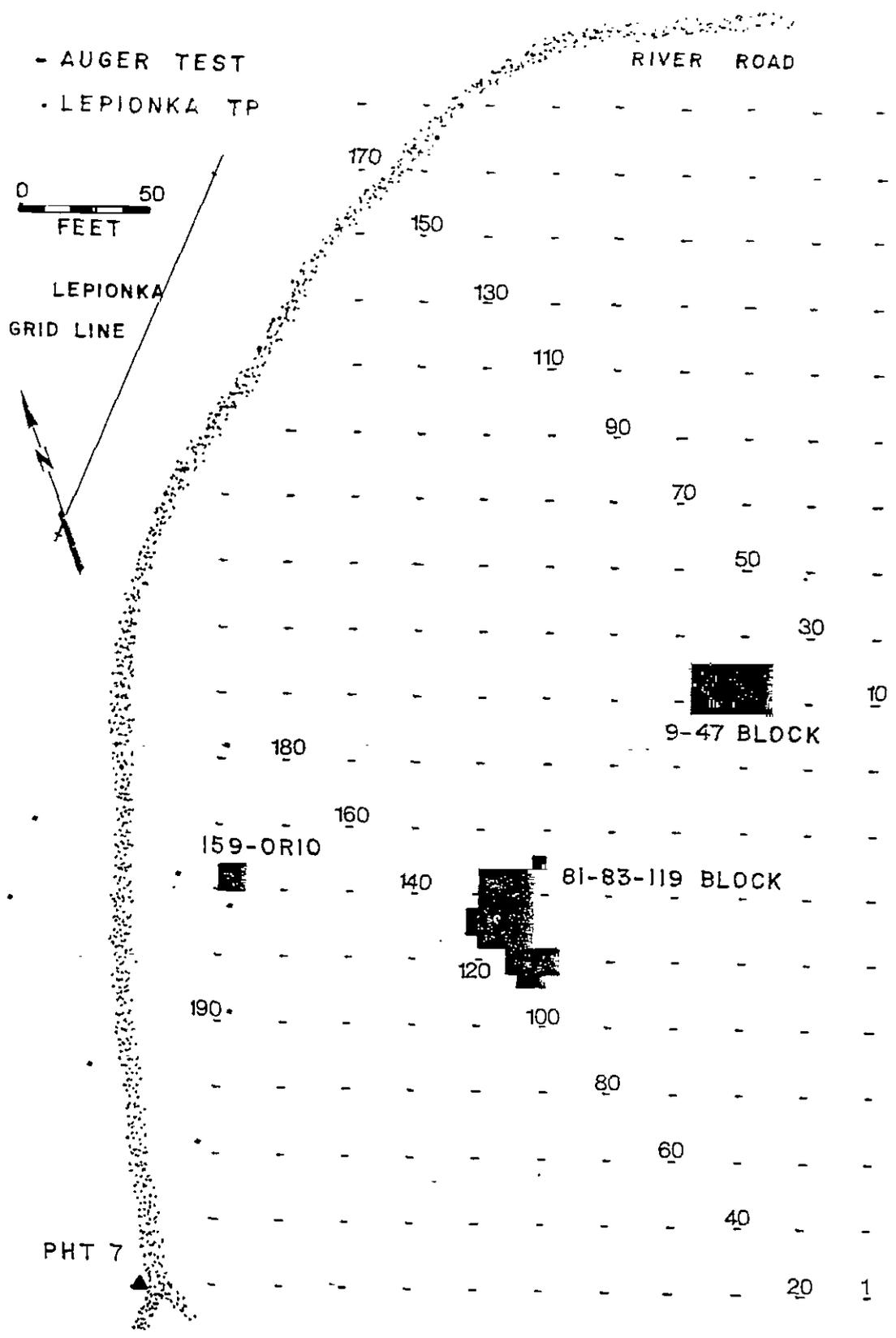


Figure 1. Site 38GE294, showing the auger tests, block excavations, and Lepionka's test units.

treated prior to curation.

The first block excavation, in the center of the field, opened 925 square feet and is termed the 81-83-119 block. The area revealed a dark brown plowzone, about 0.9 to 1.2 feet in depth, overlying a yellow sand subsoil. The plowzone was found to contain abundant brick, mortar, and fine plaster rubble, along with primarily architectural remains (although domestic refuse was also encountered, particularly in the southern half of the block). These remains reflect an early nineteenth century date, although some late eighteenth century ceramics are also present. The previously established mean ceramic date of 1836 seems corroborated by this fieldwork (see Trinkley 1987:12). The subsoil contained a very low density of aboriginal material, primarily relating to the Early Woodland (ca. 1800 B.C. to A.D. 500).

Work in this block, particularly to the northeast and southeast, was hampered by the discovery that the subsoil had been subjected to major disturbance as a result of the previous ground clearing operations. Little evidence of extensive agricultural activities was noted. In spite of the disturbance to the site, this work revealed evidence of a major plantation structure (termed Structure A), oriented approximately north-northwest - south-southeast. Two rubble-filled trench features, interpreted to represent brick piers for front steps, a corner brick pier, and remains of three additional piers (also of brick) provide some evidence of the structure's dimension (approximately 30-32 feet on the front and at least 30 feet on the side). Further construction details are provided by the abundant window glass, nails, fragments of mantle marble, and fine plaster. One feature in the block is interpreted to represent a lime slaking pit, probably used to produce the mortar for the structure's construction.

A second block excavation, the 9-47 block, incorporated 600 square feet on the east edge of the field, adjacent to the tree line. This block revealed the eastern half of a double pen slave cabin (total dimensions are estimated to have been about 28 by 14 feet), termed Structure B. This portion of the field revealed very intact deposits and few indications of disturbance outside of a shallow plowzone (about 0.7 to 0.9 foot in depth). The excavations exposed a builder's trench with brick piers, the remnants of the brick fireplace, and a large feature which has been interpreted as a clay extraction pit (possibly for the production of Colono ware ceramics). This structure yielded abundant domestic and architectural refuse, and was probably built in the early nineteenth century. At the present time there is little indication of occupation into the postbellum.

The concentration on the west edge of the field was investigated by a single 10-foot square. This unit revealed a spoil zone about 0.2 foot in thickness overlying a thick plowzone of dark brown sand about 1.0 foot in depth. Artifacts, primarily domestic refuse, were abundant and the unit contained a smudge pit feature and several postholes. No further work was conducted in this area

because of time constraints. The assemblage appears to date from the same time period as Structures A and B.

Interpretations

Historic documentation indicates that Martha Allston married John Pyatt in 1812, bringing both Oatland and Turkey Hill plantations to the marriage. John Pyatt likewise owned several plantations and at the present time there is no information concerning where Martha and John resided. In 1820 John Pyatt died and Martha apparently began managing Oatland and Turkey Hill. When her daughter, Charlotte, married William Trapier in 1846, Trapier took over the operation of Turkey Hill, while Martha Pyatt continued to operate Oatland. While Turkey Hill was briefly taken over by the Freedmen's Bureau, Oatland was not, perhaps because the plantation provided the sole means of support to Pyatt's widow. The 1850 and 1860 census indicate that Martha was living on the property; in 1850 there were 247 slaves on Oatland, while by 1860 the number was down to 212 and there were 40 slave houses. Martha died in 1869 and Oatland became the property of William and Charlotte Trapier, who continued to live at Turkey Hill (see Nylund 1987 for additional information).

This archaeological study is thought to have identified the Oatland Plantation house (Structure A) occupied by Martha Pyatt at least from 1846 until 1869. Since there was a plantation house on Turkey Hill, it may be that John and Martha Pyatt lived there, with Martha moving to an overseer's house on Oatland at her daughter's marriage. Alternatively, John Pyatt may have erected the house shortly after 1812 and lived on Oatland with Martha. Structure A, while yielding an early nineteenth century mean ceramic date, does evidence a small quantity of earlier ceramics. This question will be further examined in the final report. The structure, while not large, was well constructed with substantial brick piers, steps, and a very fine plaster. The recovered ceramics do not suggest a particularly high status, perhaps because the house was occupied by a widow. A similar middling status has been observed at the Sanders Plantation in Charleston, which was also operated by a widow in the mid-nineteenth century (Trinkley 1985). The recovered artifacts suggest abandonment of the structure in the late nineteenth century, immediately after Martha Pyatt's death in 1869. At some point the structure was removed, with considerable evidence of brick robbing.

The proximity of Structure B to Structure A is interesting and may suggest that this slave house was occupied by house servants. The main slave row is thought to be represented by 38GE336 to the southeast, and 38GE295 may represent portions of a second, small slave settlement, as well as some possible support structures. Structure B, while only a portion has been studied, appears to have been a well constructed double pen slave house, with each compartment measuring about 14 feet square. The ceramics at this site indicate that the occupants were using Colono ware ceramics, as well as cast-offs from the main house.

It is clear from these investigations that 38GE294 is a very significant plantation site, worthy of the study it has received. The initial concerns that site integrity might be low have been shown to be unjustified, with the exception of localized damage caused by clearing operations. Since 38GE336 was destroyed prior to Chicora's survey, Structure B may provide the only information available from Oatland regarding slave lifeways. There may be additional slave structures in the woods to the east of the defined site boundaries, but this area was not investigated.

The final report will incorporate artifact analysis, further architectural reconstructions, analysis of the faunal and floral material, and specialized studies as appropriate.

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