



## June 2007 Newsletter

### Ned Simmons, American Slave: The Role of Imagination in Narrative History

By Mary R. Bullard\*

“It’s pure guess work.”  
David Hare, playwright, *Stuff Happens* (2006)

#### I.

History and archaeology cover the same beat, but in very different ways. The material remains of past human activity become data when the archaeologist recognizes their significance as evidence from the past and collects and records them. Artifacts are discrete entities whose characteristics of form result wholly or partially from human activity.<sup>1</sup> The archaeologist resembles the sociologist in looking for broad categories from which to issue broad generalizations. Historic archaeology has developed rather recently in the United States as a subset within the established discipline of professional archaeologists. In our country much of our historic archaeology has been devoted to answering questions of ethnicity. Americans have been interested, and for good reason, in exploring ethnic differences in the recovered artifacts. Ours is a country of immigrants and forced laborers, and part of the modern beliefs we share is that acceptance of ethnic differences is proper, both morally and practically. Historic archaeology accepts the challenge of whether or not racial differences are to be found in artifacts. Although it

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1. Robert J. Sharer and Wendy Ashmore. *Fundamentals of Archaeology* (Menlo Park, CA 1979) 70.

is hard to racially distinguish the owner of a cheap tin spoon found in a trash pit, archaeologists have succeeded in knitting together the probabilities inherent in the setting of the artifact.

Slave life has been viewed as dependent upon values held by the slaveholders' lives and aims. Slaves have been viewed variously as exploited, patronized, feared, subordinated, losers in a lifelong struggle with those who would benefit from slave labor. That a slave culture existed is now accepted by archaeologists. Its values differed from the slaveholders' values. Even when the two groups drew closer together in times of stress and deprivation, racial considerations continued to blind the economic elite to their many shared commonalities with their slave property.

In historical records the biography of an individual may be the activity most comparable to the preparation of an artifact for laboratory analysis. History, the written record of man's activities, frequently describes the activities of groups and classes, from which we suppose the individuals often conformed to the mores and values of the group. Biographies describe persons who have left a written record, either preserved by themselves and their immediate posterity, or gathered by contemporaries, friendly or hostile.

In historical archaeology of slave cultures in the United States, the personae (the slaves) often appear to have been nameless. Biographies of unknown persons are, practically speaking, a contradiction in terms. But among the problems to face the historical archaeologist in studying nineteenth-century slave cultures and patterns of life is the fact that often relatively few material remains can be found. The historical archaeologist is asked to produce solid evidence in regard to slave and white interaction from insufficient quantities of artifacts, features, or ecofacts. The historical archaeologist can quickly be placed in the embarrassing position (at

least to the historian's eye) of reiterating archaeologically that which is already known through the written record.

This article discusses an item which unites the historical archaeologist studying slave sites with the similarly-specialized historian. It signals the introduction of standards which might improve the study of African American genealogy. We seek a method to unite the anomaly with the typical. Each discipline uses the techniques of the other.

What does "artifact" mean to an archaeologist? It means a discrete object made or modified by human hand. A description of an artifact should answer these questions: (1) Since it came from somewhere in space, can we pin it down spatially? (2) Since it has substance, can we measure it? (3) Since it must be authentic, can we verify that it is so? and (4) Since it is discrete, can we quantify its singularity? Describing its provenience means describing where it came from, or placing it in its setting. The lost provenience means, in effect, a "lost" artifact. The indescribable or immeasurable artifact is another contradiction in terms, even though the archaeologist braces himself each season for more encounters with unusual or indefinable artifacts. By contrast, the historian, sometimes observer of human behavior at its bleakest, is less surprised by iconoclasts and "rogue" items.

In terms of action, discussing the artifact means the archaeologist must record its provenience, substance, weight, size, color, shape, and function. The archaeologist will then find comparative literature at his earliest convenience. The archaeologist will subsequently undertake a preliminary classification. Finally, the archaeologist must accommodate the possibility of a "new" or "unexpected" artifact, whose discovery may serve to extend knowledge of its class or series.

Would a sketch of a human being be comparable to an artifact? An historical artifact might, in that case, be defined as a discrete *statement* of an entity. The statement must have appeared in the written record, which can range from archaeological reports to oral history. Historians have some techniques similar to those of archaeologists when they first discover certain discrete statements. Provenience is all important. They consider the place of origin for the statement. How reliable was the source? The difference between “primary” and “secondary” sources is vital. Later, when the historian evaluates the primary sources, he realizes his perceptions of their value is only as good as his knowledge of the total “scene”: that is, he must understand the social and psychological bases underlying statements of vilification, vindication, distortion, omission, *apologia*, and so on. Primary sources with seemingly impeccable credentials come from a large category called “governmental”, since government, law, and justice govern most of our actions and were fundamental to the lives of the cultural group under discussion. Thus, we depend upon official records; unpublished evidence from officials; unpublished official records; state and county records regarding property; law digests and state codes; and opinion from the media of the period. Government and church sources are only as good as their transcribers, however, as historians know after struggling with the United States census and population schedules. The problem of deliberately-falsified official records may never be solved. Historians routinely question the authenticity of sources.

As the historian matures, his control of both primary and secondary sources becomes firmer. Perhaps his knowledge of his specialty has grown; perhaps his specialty begins to fill a publicly-expressed need. “In all historical writing, the historian’s own frame of perception plays an inevitably selective and ordering part,” writes George Steiner, art critic and historian. The historian’s ability to discuss relative value of his sources is comparable to the archaeologist’s

knowledge of the terrain about to be excavated. In both cases the specialist will require assistance from guides, interpreters, foremen, agents in the “city,” and field crews.

An analogue showing similarities of methodology in the two disciplines is presented below.

*Procedures*

<u>Archaeological</u>	<u>Historical</u>
1. Selection and definition of objectives; choosing the site and defending one’s choices.	1. Choosing the topic and defending the choice; defining the time span necessary.
2. Field reconnaissance.	2. Examination of the available literature through catalogues, indexes, bibliographies, and specific citations.
3. Selection of field crew	3. Communication with the keepers of the records.
4. Specific research strategies.	4. Planning to visit specific libraries and archives.
5. Excavation	5. Reading, transcribing, photographing, and filing.
6. Field analysis: cleaning measuring marking for retrieval cataloguing shelving	6. Selection and grouping of significant details for filing at home; evaluation of the significant written records
7. Retrieval for more sophisticated analytical procedures, through examination of comparative literature on every level of analysis. Preliminary reports can be published as a result, of Step 7.	7. Evaluation of all written records used, leading to the discard of sources once favored.  Preliminary papers can be written as a result, of Step 7.
8. Preparation for final publication.	8. Preparation for final publication.

Just as site selection is important to archaeologist, so selection of a topic is important to the historian. In this case, the topic is a man about whom, as an individual, almost nothing is known, although the historian may know a great deal about his home territory. Ned lived a large part of his life on Cumberland, a 24,000 acre barrier island off the coast of southeastern United

States. The island lies within a state unit called Camden County. In an age of slavery, Georgia's state and municipal laws, designed to safeguard slaveholders' rights, governed this island as well as the mainland. The vital statistics of this man were unknown to us. Site selection in archaeology is a sign of significant interest in a particular spot, showing where the archaeologist will excavate. Success in finding artifacts depends not only in turning up artifacts but in measuring them to compare with similar artifacts. Unusual or even unidentifiable artifacts may reflect the excavators' temporary ignorance, but many publications, exhibits, and catalogues are available to assist them. All artifacts can be measured, even when they are unidentifiable. Anomalies must be reported. Even though their presence may embarrass the excavator, publication of oddities and discrepancies may encourage discussion.

In reporting this particular artifact, we hope to extend our knowledge about all similar artifacts in its category. In measuring this man we extend our knowledge of human beings in his category. We think knowledge of him, as a human, will enrich our knowledge of humanity.

Below is the statement which marked discovery of the artifact.

Ned Simons, an old negro belonging to the Dungeness [sic] estate of Gen. Nathan Greene, on Cumberland Island, and who was left by the rebel inheritor, Nightingale, on his evacuation of the place, died here last week, at the house of the lady teachers, who have kindly cared for him since their arrival here. Ned was over one hundred years old, and remembered Gen. Washington well, and was one of the number who assisted in carrying him through the streets of Savannah on his last visit to that place. Old Ned . . . was deeply interested in the cause of education, and, though partially blind with age, he desired himself to learn to read. On being asked why he wished to learn, when he could not expect to live much longer, he replied, "As the tree falls, so it will lay;" his attainments on earth would contribute to higher attainments on high; and . . . during the last months of his life, he, with much labor and effort, acquired a knowledge of his letters and syllables. Poor old Ned!

The above paragraph appeared within a much longer news item by a correspondent evidently writing from Fernandina, Florida, during the Civil War. The writer was anonymous,

the item undated. It was printed in 1867 as part of a war miscellany called *Anecdotes, Poetry and Incidents of the Civil War: North and South, 1860-1865*, collected and arranged by Frank Moore.<sup>2</sup> The book was a veritable grab bag of poetry, ballads, jokes, puns, news stories, memoirs, songs, anthems, prayers, excerpts from diaries, scraps from official records, and letters. It had an excellent index, in which was found: “Simons, Ned,” “Fernandina, the schools of,” and “a slave song of Fernandina.” Nothing in the index indicated his presence in Georgia. At the time the name “Ned Simons” had no significance to the writer of this article. Notice that the artifact to be examined is a man, who was not described as *slave*. The newspaper article is not the artifact, although as an informative source, it too merits close examination. We say the artifact seems to have eight attributes -- points worth identifying by descriptions which may serve to differentiate this artifact from similar artifacts.

## II.

We distinguish eight outstanding attributes that can be found in the newspaper story. We will look up the following statements.

1. “an old negro”
2. “belonging to . . . estate of Gen. Nathan Greene”
3. “on Cumberland Island”
4. “left by . . . Nightingale”
5. “remembered Gen. Washington . . . assisted in carrying him through the streets of Savannah”
6. “Ned Simons” (in having both a Christian name and a surname)
7. “was deeply interested in the cause of education, and although partially blind with age, he desired himself to learn to read”

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2. Originally published by the Publication Office, Bible House, James Porteous, General Agent, the collection was republished in 1892 as *The Civil War in Song and Story, 1860-1865* ((P.F Collier, New York). The anecdote about Ned is the same in each edition.

8. “as the tree falls, so it will lay”

This anecdote’s effect upon this historian was galvanic. To find such a written statement was the equivalent of an unexpected earth mound to an archaeologist. It said: Start digging.

### 1. “an old negro”

We shall fasten down the artifact in time. As this artifact is a human, we should look for some vital statistics. If Ned said in 1863 he was 100 years old, then perhaps he was born in 1763. When did he die?

Ned was ninety-eight years of age when the Civil War began in 1861. He crossed into Union lines on February 5, 1863, at Fernandina, Florida, where he was registered as contraband, giving his age as 100 years.<sup>3</sup>

Ned declared his most recent residence to have been Cumberland Island. He did not tell the guard the island was in Georgia, because presumably the guard already knew that. Such an omission, however, gives the erroneous impression that Ned was from Florida. In answer to the question generally addressed to contrabands, Ned declared his owner to have been “Miller, Nightingale.” Ned was accompanied by Lucinda and Jack Dorrell. Lucinda, age 60, also declared her previous owner to have been “Miller, Nightingale,” but Jack, age 73, gave “Mrs. Debos” as his previous owner.<sup>4</sup> While Lucinda gave Cumberland as her “last residence,” Jack

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3. Florida State Genealogical Society. “Census,” Department of the South, 1864, for Jacksonville, Fernandina, and St. Augustine: Ordered by the Department of the South, Hilton Head, South Carolina, eds., Pamela J. Cooper and Kathlyn Graham (Heritage Books, 2002, Bowie, MD). The original document is Item #4289, Record Group 393, National Archives, Washington, D.C. The term “contraband” meant fugitive property. Its use here by the Provost Marshal’s office means Ned had been a slave until the Emancipation Proclamation (Jan. 1, 1863). The Union recognized Confederate claims to slave property. When such property crossed into Union-held territory, the Union recognized slaveholders’ terminology. The property was no longer at its place of origin, hence, it was “fugitive.”

4. *Census, 1864*, p. 68, line 6.

gave Nassau County in Florida as his last residence. A sensible guess is that Jack followed his Confederate owners when they fled Cumberland. But Lucinda was his wife, and the two Dorrells had lived together on Cumberland.<sup>5</sup> Jack and Lucinda Dorrell took Ned across Cumberland Sound, a distance of perhaps 2 1/2 miles. Although they could have rowed, it was a trip best made under sail. On landing at the city of Fernandina, all three walked to the Provost-Marshall's office. By order of Lieutenant Loveridge, acting commanding officer, Ned was allowed rations -- not because he was "destitute," as were many contraband -- but because he was "feeble." It may be that Lucinda was Ned's daughter. Possibly she and Jack persuaded Ned to ask for Union rations because Cumberland Island had no more food to give them. Their trip to Fernandina in 1863 almost surely resulted from local publicity given the Emancipation Proclamation announced about a month before, on January 1.

Ned died no earlier than 1863, and possibly he died no later than 1864. Although Fernandina was occupied by Union troops and vessels in February 1862, with some teachers appearing in that year, housing for teachers and missionaries remained unsettled until early 1863. If he was looked after by missionaries, they probably installed him in their own house. By 1863 Fernandina had become a Union military post, which meant that missionaries and officers alike were residing in confiscated Confederate homes. More than likely Ned's caregivers lived in housing which included outlying buildings for slave household servants. At his death he was between 100-101 years old.<sup>6</sup>

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5. In 1837 John Dubose, along with a few other young planters living at Cumberland's North End, purchased 1,000 acres from Phineas M. Nightingale. Dubose later sold his land to Thomas D. Hawkins, Stafford's nephew. Dubose was a Confederate.

Although this record is called a *census*, it is actually a modified *register*, whose purpose was to give information about persons entering Union lines. Most were black persons, once slaves, now categorized as contraband. In addition, this register contained the names of some white men, who likely were deserters hiding upon Cumberland. Furthermore, and importantly, it contains many spelling errors. One very inconvenient error is the absence of any contraband named Ned Simmons. A contraband named “Sila Nightingale” had registered crossing the Union line on February 5, 1863, the same day as Ned. This ex-slave was registered as a centenarian, whose last residence was Cumberland Island, and whose last owner was given as “Miller, Nightingale.”

We think Ned’s name was transcribed as “Sila.” Luckily, we have an unpublished version of the same register.<sup>7</sup> While the published document is a compilation of various lists made in late 1863 for an unknown purpose,<sup>8</sup> the unpublished document shows that it contained many errors. We think the name “Miller” was mis-transcribed as “Sila.” Because there was no other 100-year old contraband whose previous owner was “Nightingale,” we think Sila

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6. No death date information was found for Ned Simmons in the extensive collection of cemetery lists at the Amelia Island Museum of History (Fernandina Beach, FL) Brien Laing, archivist, personal communication, Jan. 24, 2006.

7. “*Census*” *Department of the South, November 1864, Fernandina, Florida*, sub-title: *Condensed Report of Census taken at the Post of Fernandina, Fla. November, 1864*. Capt. John H. Brinker, 107 Ohio Volunteers & Provost Marshal. This is an unpublished copy of the same record. It was submitted from Captain Brinker’s office in Fernandina on December 20, 1864 and delivered to the Provost Marshal, District of Florida, Jacksonville, Florida. “Our records indicate that this document was obtained by someone locally who discovered it in the Archives in Washington, D.C. and copied it for us,” Brien Laing, pers. comm., Nov. 13, 2005. Location of document: Amelia Island Museum of History, Fernandina Beach, Florida: accession number 93.108.4. Short title: Brinker’s *Census, 1864*.

8. Florida political scientists suggest the list was possibly compiled to encourage voter registration for the 1864 presidential election. Prof. Robt. A. Taylor, Florida Institute of Technology, pers. comm., Nov. 5 and 20, 2005. See also Long, David E., *The Jewel of Liberty: Abraham Lincoln’s Re-Election and the End of Slavery* (Stackpole Books 1994) Long was silent regarding possible links between the “Census” of 1864 and the War election of Pres. Lincoln in 1864.

Nightingale is the same man as Ned Simmons. This is circumstantial evidence based on common sense. It is unlikely that two male centenarians, formerly property of Phineas Miller Nightingale, entered Fernandina from Cumberland on the same day. Regarding his former owner, we think the clerk understood Ned to have answered “Miller, Nightingale.” He therefore mistakenly gave Ned the surname Nightingale. Later, however, the contraband gave his name as “Ned Simmons” to the newspaper reporter.

## 2. “belonging to . . . estate of Gen. Nathan Greene”

In 1783 General Nathanael Greene (1742-1786), Revolutionary War hero, commander of the Southern Department, received from the State of Georgia a confiscated property on the Savannah River. It was a rice plantation called Mulberry Grove in Chatham County, across the river from Aiken County, South Carolina. In order to realize a profit from the holding, the general, a Rhode Islander, was obliged in 1784 to purchase slave labor despite his disinclination to become a slave holder.<sup>9</sup> The general died unexpectedly on June 19, 1786, at Mulberry Grove; and his widow, Catherine Greene, ran the plantation with slave labor until its forced sale in 1798.<sup>10</sup> At that time, Catherine Greene, now remarried to Phineas Miller in 1796, made plans with him to remove to Cumberland Island to utilize her deceased husband’s holdings there.

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9. Stegeman, John F., and Janet A. Stegeman. *Caty: A Biography of Catherine Littlefield Greene*, 111-112.

10. Savannah Unit, Georgia Writers’ Project, Works Projects Administration of Georgia. “Mulberry Grove from the Revolution to the Present Time”, GHQ, v. 23 (Dec. 1939) no. 4, 315.

Catherine Miller sold many Mulberry Grove slaves to meet debts of her late husband's Estate. She kept some of them to make the move to a new planting endeavor on Cumberland Island.<sup>11</sup>

Legal arrangements of the slaveholding class affected the lives of the slaves. Property belonging to the Estate, even though it was administered by the widow, was perceived by her as the rightful property of their children as well; and in 1810 the Greene family made an agreement to divide the Estate.<sup>12</sup> The Estate's chattel property totaled 196 slaves in 1810. The family division gave to each family member as follows: Catherine Littlefield Miller (mother), seventy; Martha Washington Nightingale (daughter) thirty-two; Cornelia L. Skipwith (daughter), twenty-nine; Nathaniel Ray Greene (son), thirty-three; and Louisa C. Greene (daughter), thirty. The agreement contained a restriction: "It is by the nature and meaning of this our voluntary agreement that the negro property be held by Catherine Miller until every debt against said Estate be paid." The name "Simons" [sic] was third from the last in the group of slaves given to Nathaniel R. Greene. Simmons was a slave. No second "Simmons" was listed in the Greene slave inventories.<sup>13</sup>

Ned (b. ca.1763-d. ca.1864) had another attribute placing him in another finite class or series. He belonged to a sub-category of slaves who once were property of the "Dungeness estate of Gen. Nathan Greene." The Estate of General Greene was the property of the deceased Nathanael Greene, of which the executors were Jeremiah Wadsworth of Hartford, Connecticut, and Edward Rutledge of Charleston, South Carolina. Grave financial problems pressing upon

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11. "He has been obliged like us to sell many of his slaves for debt." Cornelia Greene to Eliza Mackay, datelined Cumberland, May 3, 1800 (Mackay-Stiles Papers, Coll. 470, Southern Historical Collection, University of North Carolina, Wilson Library)

12. *Records of Camden County, Georgia*, hereafter called *RCCG*, Deed Book "H": 184-187. Instrument of agreement. Dated 24 April, 1810. Recorded 26 April, 1810.

13. Compendium of all Greene slaves on Cumberland, compiled by Bullard. Ms. privately held.

the deceased general's Estate for nearly twenty-five years, his widow made every effort she could to meet such debts. To do this she attempted to keep the Estate intact. Some real property in Chatham and Camden Counties was sold to meet the Estate's creditors, including Tract 1 upon Cumberland Island (Camden County). Tract I, called Dungeness, the tract where Catherine Miller's new house would be built, was purchased at public sale by a friend and gracefully returned to her possession. Of the remaining tracts on the island under Catherine Miller's administration, the impoverished Greene family invested in two of them by putting up money for planting cotton. These two tracts were named Littlefield and Rayfield Plantations, about ten miles apart.

### **3. “. . . on Cumberland Island . . .”**

Cumberland Island is a large barrier island which receives the full force of the North Atlantic on its eastern shore and shields marshes and creeks of its western shore. It is separated from a smaller island called Little Cumberland. Almost uninhabited before the Revolutionary War, by 1805 Great Cumberland attracted a few cotton planters, who moved to it with their slaves. Cotton cultivation was a fairly risky business. Cotton planters risked losing their entire crop from the cotton caterpillar or from the shrieking, hurricane-strength storms which flooded the fields and beat down the crop. Plantation life for Cumberland slaves was quiet, even monotonous. When cotton prices escalated, cotton growers could make fortunes, but in general the barrier islands supported planters and small farmers who grew large amounts of staple crops such as peas and corn. Cumberland was well-watered and fertile. Fernandina, Florida, and the small city of St. Mary's, Georgia, were the nearest seaports.

At the beginning of the nineteenth century Cumberland was almost uninhabited. By 1860 more than 500 slaves resided there in a black-to-white ratio of seven to one. At the end of the

Civil War (1861-65), military authorities placed Cumberland within the Sherman Reservation, a thirty-mile-wide land reserve running the length of the Georgia–South Carolina coasts. It was established (1865-66) as a reservation for freedmen to receive land of their own. A small freedmen’s settlement grew up on Cumberland. Although the concept of a reservation was sacrificed to politics by 1870, their Gullah-speaking descendants lie buried in a small cemetery at Cumberland’s North End, and a Baptist church, built by freedmen, still stands. The barrier island environment bred isolated, proud, and distinctive black communities whose speech patterns and spirituality differed noticeably from their mainland neighbors. Gullah attachments to their islands were proverbial.

A peculiar feature of Cumberland’s legal history was that, at the turn of the century in 1798-1800, the two islands were divided into twelve tracts, theoretically of equal value, running east-west in parallel strips. The division inhibited growth of large agricultural units. No single plantation on Cumberland was very large. When a slaveholder named Robert Stafford became owner of tracts 3-8, he became Cumberland’s greatest landholder. His maximum holdings in 1859, however, contained only 8,125 acres. The sole main road, running from the southernmost point of Great Cumberland to its opposite end, an area called High Point, held the “strips” together, so to speak. Slave loyalty to their homeland was directed to the island as a whole, rather than to any given plantation site. The landowners knew one another very well.<sup>14</sup>

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14. Many were closely related to one another. The phrase “Dungeness family” comes from a list of subscribers found in a few early (pre-1808) records of St. Mary’s Presbyterian Church. Among the first subscribers to the Union Church in St. Mary’s was “Ray Sands for the Dungeness Family.”

#### **4. “left by . . . the rebel inheritor, Nightingale, on his evacuation of the place . . .”**

The journalist was referring to Phineas Miller Nightingale (1803-1873), son of Martha Washington Greene Nightingale and her husband, John C. Nightingale of Rhode Island. They made their home on Cumberland. After her husband’s death in 1806, Martha remarried a Dr. Henry Turner of Rhode Island, and moved with him back to New England. Later in their married life, the Turners moved south to Savannah. From Chatham County, she frequently visited her son on Cumberland. Phineas had inherited Dungeness from his aunt, Louisa Greene Shaw. Mrs. Shaw, who was childless, made this nephew her heir, presumably because he shared her views. Like his aunt, Nightingale was a keen horticulturist. Both Shaw and Nightingale were followers of “humanitarian slavery.”

Humanitarian slavery believed that slaves were entitled to Christian sacraments. This phrase denoted a systematic approach to the slaveholders’ basic problem of how to reconcile Christian strictures with certain economic realities of plantation life. While planters acknowledged dependency upon a slave system for their economic success, and for their ease and comfort, they felt that the ignorant, or even brutalized, Africans, “shackled by innate vice” needed careful instruction before they could be considered rational enough to be independent. Religious instruction would instill “virtuous principles.” Scientific instruction, however, “would awaken them to a sense of their own misery” without in any degree benefiting them or advancing their happiness. Humanitarian slavery advocated benevolent reform within the system of slavery. Since slavery was a great evil, the only answer to its evil was total abolition. Abolition was not possible at the present time, nor would it be in the best interest of those who lived in the settlements. Africans lacked the self-discipline which was essential for freedom. In sum: Involuntary servitude was a great evil which only time will cure. Meanwhile, plantation

economy should allow the slaves to continue working as agriculturists for land owners.<sup>15</sup>

Nightingale's uncle, Nathaniel Ray Greene, refusing to remain a slave holder, turned his slaves over to his sister Louisa to administer. Gradually abandoning his southern properties, "Nat" sold Rayfield in 1834 to Robert Stafford and returned to Rhode Island to live there the rest of his days.<sup>16</sup>

Shaw's belief in "humanitarian slavery" guided her views on how to administer her slave force, which perhaps numbered over 149. Little is known about Shaw's administration. A Scottish naval surgeon present in 1815 during the British occupation, mentioned her overseer.

When we landed, she was reputed to be rich. Her slaves alone were worth ten thousand pounds sterling, the whole of whom have deserted. The overseer, a black man, carried the keys of the outhouses to his mistress yesterday and told her he intended to join the British.<sup>17</sup>

Possibly drawn from the large number of Aiken County (South Carolina) free men of color, the above-mentioned man may have been hired in 1798 to accompany the Greenes to Camden County, where a black overseer was uncommon. Similar unconventional views are suggested in Shaw's will, prepared in 1829. Louisa Shaw, regretting her inability to manumit her slaves and berating the laws that enslaved them, prohibited their sale away from Cumberland, their island home, and ordered a lifelong legacy to be given to one particular woman slave

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15. Clarke, Erskine. *Dwelling Place: A Plantation Epic* (Yale University: New Haven and London, 2005), 86. Author's adaptation from a letter by Mary Jones to her husband, Rev. Charles Colcock Jones. Rev. Jones was one of the antebellum south's outstanding proponents of humanitarian slavery.

16. We have only hints about Nathaniel's beliefs regarding slavery. He was a student at Nazareth Hall from 1789-1793, a Moravian academy in Pennsylvania. The Moravians were anti-slavery. Winterthur Museum and Library, *Nazareth Hall Coll.*, Winterthur, Delaware. Rather than administer slave property, Nate transferred administration of Rayfield Plantation in 1818 to his father-in-law, Ethan Clarke. In the deed, much emphasis was placed upon Nat's advisors, Christopher Greene, Elihu Greene, and Franklin Greene, described as his particular friends. *Robert Stafford of Cumberland Island*, p. 67, n. 37. They shared the belief that black souls were as valuable as white souls. Christopher's father had commanded a regiment of black soldiers during the American Revolutionary war.

17. Rev. John McIlraith, *Life of Sir John Richardson* (London 1868), 57.

named Abu.<sup>18</sup> Nightingale, like his aunt, believed in humanitarian slavery. Doubtless this is the reason why she devised her valuable property to him out of all her nephews and nieces. She died in 1831.

Nightingale married a well-to-do Manhattan girl named Mary Alsop King, daughter of prominent New Yorkers. With her he raised a fine family of six children to live year-round in Dungeness House, with a tutor for the boys and a succession of governesses for the girls. While Shaw's will forbade Nightingale to sell any of her large work force away from Cumberland Island, with certain slaves, however, Nightingale maintained a patron-client relationship, helping them to "leave" slavery, either by emigration to free states or by financing their education in Georgia.<sup>19</sup>

Unfortunately, Nightingale was unable to surmount the nationwide economic disaster known as the "Panic of 1837." By selling Cumberland tracts 4, 6, 7, and 11, Nightingale endeavored to keep his head above water. Although sales of slaves were recorded as separate transactions, whenever Nightingale sold one of his developed tracts, he sold its slave residents

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18. "I positively forbid any sale exchange or alienation of my negroes whatever . . . . I feel it a very peculiar and binding duty to guard the happiness and comforts of those poor people in every way in my power I hereby positively prohibit my said negroes from being removed to any place over fifty miles from Cumberland . . . unless a war or some circumstance which menaces their safety should . . . render such a measure necessary . . . ." Will of Louisa Shaw. RCCG, Will Bk. "B", 7-14, recorded May 3, 1831 (a copy is in the Ravenel Coll., Georgia Historical Society, Savannah)..

19. Louisa Shaw's personal maid servant-slave Abu received a yearly annuity from Shaw's executor, Nightingale. In the 1830s he assisted Abu in a permanent move to Hartford, Conn., where she worked as a nurse in a doctor's office. By 1860 Abu, age 60, resided in Springfield, MA, where she described herself as "lady's nurse, born in Georgia." In 1870 Abu appeared as "Abby Shaw," resident in the home of her son-in-law, John B. Ritter, of Springfield. U.S. Census, Population Schedules, by Tracy Castle (UK). In 1829 Nightingale assisted Lewis Jackson, a boy slave on Cumberland, to become apprenticed to a skilled trade in Savannah. Bullard, *Cumberland Island: A History*, 145.

with the plantation. Nightingale's chattel property thus remained in their island homes. After the 1830s, when a process of plantation consolidation began, there were larger and fewer slave settlements, strengthening the slaves' ties to the island and adding to the casual observer's impression the island was a single large plantation.

Eventually natural increase among the slave population produced overpopulation. There was not enough agricultural work for Cumberland's slave force. Nightingale leased many of his able-bodied male slaves to public-service enterprises such as railroad- and canal-building; took a paid job on the Flint River in inland Georgia; and eventually recouped enough of his fortune to begin again with a rice plantation on the Altamaha River. When war came, Nightingale was too old to enlist. He threw in the towel and, evacuating inland to Waycross (Georgia), abandoned his Cumberland Island property, leaving an elderly Scotch gardener and one black family to guard the family mansion.

When Nathaniel Greene and his children sold Rayfield Plantation in 1834 to Robert Stafford, Ned, then age 71, was sold with the plantation. He had known four masters, all from the "Dungeness family." It evidently trusted Stafford, Ned's first owner outside the Greene unit, to continue a doctrine of humanitarian slavery. The northerners of the early war years in occupied Fernandina thought "General Greene's estate" meant Dungeness House, a four-story mansion of tabby block surrounded by six acres of beautiful gardens containing examples of exotic planting foreign to most coastal Georgia plantations. Yankee military and journalists were ignorant of antebellum land- and slave-exchanges. The journalist would know that the Union commanders, as one of their first actions (March 1862) in occupied Fernandina, had placed a special guard over Dungeness, still in Nightingale's hands. A black community remained at

Dungeness throughout most of the war, where it regularly received army rations. We notice Ned was among the few Cumberland contraband who did not call Stafford a “former master.”

### **5. “remembered Gen. Washington . . . assisted in carrying him through the streets of Savannah”**

Ned could indeed have helped to “carry” President Washington. Ned’s age in 1791 might have been twenty-eight years old, old enough to have undertaken a responsible trip to Savannah.

President George Washington, General Greene’s good friend and fellow soldier, visited Mulberry Grove twice in May, 1791, before and after his three-day visit of celebration to Savannah, part of his extended Southern tour.<sup>20</sup> We not only verify Ned’s story; but its verification reveals something of Ned’s background. When Ned said he carried the general, he employed a southernism: that is to say, he, other slaves, and numerous white persons of the slaveholder class helped transport the most distinguished American of their time in a celebratory journey from Purysburg in South Carolina to the city of Savannah and back again. Washington’s triumphal trip involved boatmen, carriage drivers, horse tenders, stable boys, and the like, performing the numerous necessary tasks often relegated to slaves. Under these special circumstances, Ned might even have witnessed cheering white men taking over some of his tasks. President Washington wrote in his diary of the first day of his 1791 visit to Georgia:

Thursday, 12th. By five o’clock we set out from Judge Hayward’s, and road [sic] to Purisburgh 22 miles to breakfast. . . . At that place I was met by Messrs. [Noble Wymberley] Jones, Colo. [Colonel] [Joseph] Habersham. Mr. Jno. [John] Houston, Genl. [Lachlan] McIntosh and Mr. [Joseph] Clay, a Comee. [committee] from the City of Savanna [sic] to conduct me thither. Boats were also ordered there by them for my accommodation; among which a handsome 8 oared barge rowed by 8 American Captns. attended. In my way down the River I called upon Mrs. [Catharine] Green the Widow of the deceased Genl. [Nathanael] Green, (at a

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20. Stegemans, *op. cit.*: 149-150.

place called Mulberry Grove) and asked her how she did. At this place (2 miles from Purisburgh) my horses and Carriage were landed, and had 12 miles farther by Land to Savanna. The wind and tide being both agst. us, it was 6 o'clock before we reached the City where we were received under every demonstration that could be given of joy and respect. We were Seven hours making the passage which is often performed in 4, tho' the computed distance is 25 miles. Illumns. at night.<sup>21</sup>

Washington left Savannah on May 15 and returned again to Mulberry Grove for a few hours, where he dined with Catherine Greene. Cheering crowds, the booming and crackle of cannon and military salutes, and most impressive of all to a country man, the glories of Savannah's fireworks, all worked on Ned's mind to create a lifelong memory which he shared with the journalist.

#### **6. "Ned Simons" (in having both a Christian name and a surname)**

Most slaves were perfectly clear who their former owners were. Sometimes they took their owners' surnames for their own. Often they did not.

An unusual attribute of our human artifact was that he bore two names. Before Emancipation, most slaves bore one name only, given them by their parents or their masters. Regardless of the fact that many slaves were certainly known to bear several names, some of which were not revealed to a white world, generally slave inventories gave one single name per person. Their names were assigned and recorded by slaveholders. Other groups, such as probate courts, the tax assessor's office, and the like, used slaveholders' lists. Sometimes identifying labels were added by other members of the slaveholding elite, such as "Parker's Jack" for Jack, owned by one Parker, although such nomenclature was viewed as inappropriate.

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21. John C. Fitzpatrick (ed.), *The Diaries of George Washington: 1748-1799* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Co., 1925), 175-176; Archibald Henderson, *Washington's Southern Tour* (Boston,: Houghton Mifflin, 1923), 199-230.

At first glance his name appears only to indicate that Ned gave himself a Christian name and a surname upon his full understanding that he was at liberty to do so. According to this register of incoming contraband, Ned stated that his former owners had been “Miller, Nightingale.” We turn to the 1864 register to see if there are any other “Nightingale slaves.” From a total of 85 black persons entering Fernandina from Cumberland Island in 1863, there were three. (All the others stated their previous owner to have been Robert Stafford.) The three other ex-Nightingale slaves named themselves in various ways.

Belle Nightingale, age 80, did not register on the same date as “Sila” Nightingale and Lucinda Dorrell. She registered on April 12, 1862, a short time after the Union navy occupied Fernandina in February 1862. Belle declared her owner had been “Robert Stafford.”<sup>22</sup> She took Nightingale as her surname. One other Nightingale slave registered, calling himself “Bulter Nighingale [sic]”, age 68.<sup>23</sup> His name was probably Butler Nightingale. He said his owner had been “T. M. Nighingale” (he must have meant “P. M. Nightingale”), and his last residence was Cumberland. He registered March 4, 1864. There were several slaves named Butler in the Greene family inventories. He too took Nightingale as his surname. Hannah Magill, age 42, from Jacksonville, gave P.M. Nightingale as her previous owner. She had not come recently from Cumberland. She registered April 22, 1864. Since this “census” is actually a compilation of various registers, Hannah may come from a different list. She did not take Nightingale as a surname.

Among the variables to be taken into account when considering this slave register (the ex-master’s choice of name, or the name assigned by the provost-marshal’s office, or, as in Hannah’s case, marriage), one of the most important was the now ex-slave’s *freedom of choice*.

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22. *Census, 1864*, p. 71, line 25.

23. *Census, 1864*, p. 55, line 43.

To give yourself a name is power.<sup>24</sup> Our human artifact had wished to be called “Ned Simmons” as much as forty years earlier. The circumstances were unusual. Ned had once briefly been an enlisted man. When British naval officers asked for his name in 1815, Ned exercised his power of choice, and at that time, he did not choose the Nightingale name for himself. Examination of the documents of British admiral, Sir George Cockburn, invader of Cumberland Island (17 January-17 March, 1815) casts new light upon Ned’s name. He had voluntarily left Cumberland to join the British in the War of 1812.<sup>25</sup>

In 1814 a British proclamation invited enlistment in British military units or resettlement in British colonies, saying: “all those who may be disposed to emigrate from the United States, will with their families, be received on Board his Majesty’s Ships or Vessels of War, or at the Military posts that may be established upon or near the Coast of the United States.”<sup>26</sup>

The proclamation issued by the British admiral, Sir Alexander Cochrane, encouraged slave families to enter the military post of Cumberland, which the British occupied. The British flag was raised at Dungeness in January 1815, and for almost two months the plantation was a British garrison. Able-bodied men (and some women) were invited to enlist. Sea island and other coastal slaves eagerly responded to the proclamation. Almost 1500 slaves turned up on Cumberland trying to take advantage of this promise. They congregated at Dungeness between

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24. Darryl Pinckney, “Branding in America,” book review, *New York Review of Books* (Nov. 2, 2006), p. 57, c.2. Pinckney discussed the slave's sense of empowerment when allowed to name himself.

25. Among the Dungeness slaves departing with the Royal Navy was a Greene slave, “Carpenter Ned” and family. We think this man may have been son of Ned Simmons. RCCG, Deed Bk. "H", 184-187.

26. “Minutes of the Council of the City of Savannah”: pp. 153-154, dated proclamation 2 April, 1814. It was used wherever the British ships and troops appeared. The flag ship, Albion, carried a printing press. Seen at Georgia Historical Society, Savannah, Microfilm Box M-1. The proclamation was also published in *Niles Weekly Register*, VI (June 11, 1814) p. 242.

January 2 and March 13, 1815.<sup>27</sup> Many white witnesses testified to the quality and efficiency of the British recruitment and drilling of the male recruits on the adjacent sea islands as well as upon Cumberland Island.<sup>28</sup> Admiral Cockburn ordered the transshipment of “refugee” slave families from British vessels of war anchored off Cumberland to ships being ordered back to Bermuda. From Bermuda many black families were sent to Halifax, Canada. A substantial number (100) of enlisted men with their families were later given land on Trinidad, a large island off the Venezuelan coast, where they and their descendants lived throughout the 19th century (and are living still, some on the same allotments). Printed copies of the proclamation were pinned to trees or hand-distributed by British officers. Georgian slaveholders were genuinely horrified.

The enemy has resorted to a measure the most fatal and deadly to our hopes, that of raising an army from our negro population -- to every negro man they gave a bounty of Sixteen dollars & a complete suit of British uniform . . . .<sup>29</sup>

Admiral Cockburn was aware of the terms of the peace treaty before the arrival of two American commissioners.<sup>30</sup> He was determined to ship away as many absconding slaves as he

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27. For full details see Mary R. Bullard, *Black Liberation on Cumberland Island in 1815* (E. O. Painter Printing, DeLeon Springs, FL, 1983). The author, using a pocket calculator, added the totals of persons “entered” upon supernumerary lists of the Royal Navy vessels of war. They totalled 1483. Excluded from the totals were white refugees, Lascars (Indian seamen) from captured merchantmen, foreign nationals, and supernumeraries who did not seem to be slaves.

28. Among the most eloquent witnesses was Zephaniah Kingsley, slave holder, Fort George Island, Florida. “Whoever was so unlucky as to see, on Cumberland Island, last war, the magical transformation of his own negroes, whom he left in the field but a few hours before, into regular soldiers, of good discipline and appearance . . . .” from *A Treatise on The Patriarchal or Co-operative System of Society as it exists in some governments and colonies in America, and in the United States/ under the name of slavery/ with its necessity and advantages*, by Zephaniah Kingsley, 1829 (reprint, 1970), 11, n. 6.

29. Ebenezer Jackson to his son, Ebenezer Jackson Jr., Savannah, 15 February, 1815. In private possession of Mrs. Mary B. Muir, Philadelphia. The Jacksons were New England friends of Louisa Greene Shaw.

could. Unfortunately, from Cockburn's point of view, the American commissioners reached him before he could receive his superior's orders approving his decisions. The two commissioners, Thomas Spalding of Sapelo Island, and Captain Thomas Newall, demanded on March 5, 1815, that all property taken by the British be returned to their American owners. Furiously angry, Cockburn informed Spalding and Newall that he would return only the property which had been on Cumberland on the date of British occupation, and which, being "originally captured here," still remained on the island as of 11 PM, February 17, 1815, the hour and the date of the ratification of the Treaty of Ghent. Cockburn made it clear to Spalding and Newall that property "from elsewhere" would not be returned.

In 1815 Louisa Shaw was the greatest slaveholder on Cumberland Island. She was administering not only her own but also her brother Nat's property. Many Camden County residents noted that she and her cousin, Ray Sands, another Dungeness resident, found their slaves returned to them.<sup>31</sup> Neighboring slaveholders noted angrily that "Cockburn, though her negroes were the first to join him, had them all returned to her, together with a quantity of cotton, some of which belonged to other persons . . . ."<sup>32</sup>

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30. One of Cockburn's captures was a Swedish merchantman, the *Carl Gustaff*, carrying the latest European newspapers. On Jan. 25, 1815, Cockburn acknowledged having read a newspaper dated Dec. 27, 1814, giving the terms of the Treaty of Ghent. George Cockburn Papers, v. 25, "Letters Sent, March 12, 1814 - March 3, 1815. Miscellaneous.": p. 60.

31. Louisa Shaw was administering perhaps 149 slaves. Slaves returned to Dungeness by Cockburn totalled approximately 80. Thus, about 69 Dungeness slaves went away with the British. See Bullard, *Black Liberation*, 42. Information derived in part from Camden County tax digests and Royal Navy lists.

32. Blackshear, General David. *Memoir of General David Blackshear* (Philadelphia, 1858), 465. General John H. McIntosh to General Blackshear, 2 April, 1815.

Cockburn sent a list to Spalding and Newall of property and slaves “originally captured on Cumberland Island, and which appear to have remained on it at 11 PM, 17 February, 1815.”<sup>33</sup>

There were eighty-one names. Among the few with surnames were:

James Nightingale  
Norris Sands  
Phoebe Sands  
John Miller  
Ned Simmonds [sic]

Slave property listings carrying the names or surnames of “Shaw, Simmon and Miller” appear on the Cumberland Island garrison list on January 20. They were sent to HMS Devastation in January, 1815. A large number of the men on the Cumberland garrison lists are shown as going into the “Black Company” on January 28 or -- a month later -- entering on February 27-28 into the “3rd Battalion.”<sup>34</sup> Ned was enlisted in the Third Battalion of Colonial Marines where he received the proper accouterments. They were taken from him, however, on March 11, 1815.

If the under mentioned Negroes joined the British forces on Cumberland Island and enlistees into the 3rd Battalion of Royal and Colonial Marines subsequent to 17 February, it is my directions that they are sent in the Boat, which carries this

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33. George Cockburn Papers, vol. 26. Letter of Cockburn to Captain Newall and Thomas Spalding, 11 March, 1815. The name “Ned Simmonds” also appeared on another list entitled “A List of Slaves and Property to be given up with Cumberland Island in Conformity with the Treaty lately concluded between Great Britain and the United States,” in NA, RG 76, Entry 185, Folder 27. This second list was also in response to the earlier request of Spalding and Newall but it was dated 18 March, 1815, which could be a clerk’s error. The two lists are almost identical; the first list named 81 slaves, the second named 77 slaves. Other differences were noted, one of which is the order in which slaves’ names were presented. The first list (11 March, 1815) presented their names in such an order that the reader can easily see for himself that they conform fairly well with family-grouped slaves’ names on the Appraisal of Catherine Miller's Estate (17 April, 1815). This appraisal appeared in the National Archives with Mrs. Shaw's claims for indemnity for her losses to the British. It may be in the RCCG, but the author has not yet found it there. It is possible Catharine Miller’s written claim was copied (with modifications) from her Estate appraisal.

34. John Weiss to author, personal communication, email 12/13/05. Mr. Weiss is an independent scholar concentrating upon the slave diaspora from the British raids upon American soil in the War of 1812. See John McNish Weiss, “The Great Escape,” paper presented at the conference on *Mutiny: Narrative Event and Context in Comparative Perspective*, Columbus, Ohio, October 1998.

Order, taking from them such necessaries & Appointments as may have been supplied to them.<sup>35</sup>

Admiral Cockburn returned property to Cumberland -- as he had told the two commissioners he would -- that was originally found there when he captured it and was still on it by February 17. As ill luck would have it, Ned, who was among the first to enlist, was returned to servitude by the same officers who had so eagerly recruited him.

Had he wished of his own volition to return to Cumberland? Probably not. Many plantation owners were given permission to go aboard the British vessels in order to plead with their ex-slaves to return. In the case of Louisa Shaw, her slaves were actually brought ashore, where she begged them to come back. Every one of her ex-slaves refused.<sup>36</sup> We can only speculate what Ned's thoughts were as he returned his uniform and other accouterments to the British naval officers. Henceforward we will call him "Ned Simmons" or "Simmons."

**7. "... was deeply interested in the cause of education,  
and although partially blind with age, he desired himself to learn to read . . ."**

We do not know why Ned Simmons could not read. Possibly he had unsuccessfully tried to learn when he was younger. While it is a truism that slaveholders feared slave insurrection inspired by abolitionist literature, even the most hardened master agreed in the civilizing effect of the Old Testament. Not all literature was inflammatory. Oral knowledge of the Old Testament was considered safe in most cases, and visiting preachers could be warned to avoid discussion of enslavement and insubordination. In post-Civil War days the Reverend Robert Q. Mallard,

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35. *George Cockburn Papers*, vol. 46. "Fleet Orders, January – April, 1815," p. 12.

36. "Mrs. Shaw . . . has lost every negro she owned -- they went on shipboard, and as Admiral Cockburn and Colonel William, the commander of the land forces, occupy Mrs. Shaw's house as HQ . . . at Mrs. Shaw's request all her negroes were brought on shore, and she gave them a long talk and told them how kind they had been treated by all the family -- all this had no effect . . . they all preferred to go on shipboard again." Ebenezer Jackson, writing his son, Ebenezer Jr., Savannah, Feb. 15, 1815.

member of a prominent Liberty County rice-planter family, remembered how slave reading was handled in his low-country home.

. . . . [the reader] will understand the motive of some laws passed in the South, forbidding the instruction of the negro in the art of reading. It was our mistake; but there was in the fact just stated at least a palliation, and in most States the law was a dead letter. The white children were always ready to, and did, teach any who wished it, to read.<sup>37</sup>

Ned Simmons must have received his first lessons in reading in Fernandina. In 1862 the Freedmen's Aid Society of Syracuse, New York, organized schools in Fernandina and St. Augustine. When Ned crossed into Union lines in February 1863, hardly any Yankee teachers had as yet arrived. The Syracuse group was the only organization working at that date in Fernandina. Its organization sent Ansel E. Kinne, his wife Emma, and Emma's sister, Chloe Merrick, who later married Harrison Reed, the first governor of Florida after the war.<sup>38</sup> Ned Simmons may have been housed and fed by members of the Kinne family of teachers. Missionary teachers tried to help the near-blind.

The great eagerness of them, to learn to read the Bible, prompts them to such diligence and perseverance that I have no doubt they will soon succeed if they can get the large-print Testaments. Can you furnish them?<sup>39</sup>

Ned perhaps learned his alphabet and how to sound out his name.

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37. Robert Q. Mallard. *Plantation Life Before Emancipation* (Richmond, VA 1892 ), pp. 115-116. The University Library, University of North Carolina, Chapel Hill. <http://docsouth.unc.edu/mallard.html>, Jan. 1, 2006.

38. Richardson, Joe M. "We are truly doing missionary work"; Letters from American Missionary Association Teachers in Florida, 1864-1874." *Florida Historical Quarterly*, LIV (October 1975), 178-195.

39. Richardson, *op cit.*, 181-183. Letter from Mrs. H.B.Greeley to Rev. G.Whipple, corresponding secretary, America Missionary Association, St. Augustine, Jan. 23, 1865.

## 8. “as the tree falls, so it will lay . . .”

Ned Simmons wished to learn to read even though he was going blind, because (he said) “as the tree falls, so it will lay.” His most singular attribute was this sentence. The figure of speech derives from the Book of Ecclesiastes in the Old Testament. But Simmons could not read his Bible. The journalist repeated what he was told, which leaves us to speculate how Simmons had learned it.

The sentence is a figure of speech which has had a long life. Qohelet is the supposed author of *Ecclesiastes*. Qohelet was a hakim, or sage -- a wise man -- who in the tradition of the Near East, defers to one who is greater than he, in this case, a greater wise man, Solomon. Qohelet’s aphorisms and similes derive from the “wisdom tradition” found in theological documents of the Near East. Wisdom literature in the Bible uses many literary forms, the parable, the precept, and the rhetorical question being among the best-known. Although often Christian wisdom literature has been relegated to the children’s shelf (fables and riddles come quickly to mind), through the centuries the wise sayings of our elders have always attracted a wide audience. The famous seventeenth-century preacher John Bunyan was but one in a long English tradition of using allegory through personification. Proverbs are heirs to an even longer tradition of wise sayings, clever, often mystifying, intended to teach and edify the the ignorant.

*Ecclesiastes* xi:3 reads: “If the clouds are full of rain, they empty themselves on the earth; And if a tree falls to the south or to the north, in the place where the tree falls, there it will lie.”<sup>40</sup> An English translation from the Hebrew interprets this to mean that man should proceed with a life of good deeds despite the uncertainty of his future.<sup>41</sup> But the maxim has received many other

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40. *New Oxford Annotated Bible with the Apocrypha Revised Standard Version*, eds., Herbert G. May and Bruce M. Metzger (New York: Oxford Univ. Press, 1973, 1977).

glosses. Another common interpretation is this (italicized): “And if a tree falls whether in the south or in the north, the place where the tree falls, there it will be. *Whenever the uprooted tree falls, know you cannot prevent its happening.*”<sup>42</sup>

In English its interpretation is almost ubiquitous. Essayist William Hazlitt gave the phrase an agnostic spin in his essay, “On the Fear of Death” (1822): “Once is enough. As the tree falls, so let it lie. Shut up the book and close the account once and for all!” Tennyson’s narrative poem *Rizpah* dramatized a criminal hung in chains at the gallows: “Falls? what falls? who knows? As the tree falls so must it lie.” The phrase turns up in Christian hymns, Tamil proverbs, German-English phrase books; and genteel Victorian literature such as *Gentlemen’s Magazine*. It has been translated into Xhosa, a Bantu language. A Quaker missionary carried it to the Pacific. It was a favorite for the cemetery trade which adapted the maxim to their needs (“As the tree falls so must it ly”), and the author has seen it on an elaborate concrete tribute to a lumber baron in Waldo, Florida.<sup>43</sup>

But the significance for Ned of this figure of speech became most meaningful in regard to Judgment Day. For any denomination which believes in a final day of reckoning, man’s mortality resonates in the cautionary words of this maxim. Brigham Young, the Mormon leader, spoke of death in an 1856 sermon in these words:

I do know that the trying day will soon come to you and to me; and ere long we will have to lay down these tabernacles and go into the spirit world. And I do know that as we lie down, so judgment will find us, and that is scriptural; ‘as

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41. Cohen, Rev. Dr. A., ed. *The Five Megilloth, With Hebrew Text, English Translation, and Commentary* (Soncino Press Ltd. London, 1961), 181-182.

42. Seow, Choon-Leong, transl. and commentary. *Ecclesiastes: A New Translation* (The Anchor Bible, Doubleday, New York, 1997), 328.

43. The author is indebted to a Google Search for the information in this paragraph.

the tree falls so it shall lie,' or, in other words, as death leaves us so judgment will find us."<sup>44</sup>

Ned Simmons employed the figure of speech in the sense Brigham Young intended. By putting this gloss on the maxim, Simmons more nearly approached the meaning given it by a seventeenth-century English preacher, a Dissenting Puritan. Someone had read him a sermon by John Bunyan, part of which he had memorized.

John Bunyan (b. 1628-d. August 31, 1688) was an itinerant English preacher, born to very poor but pious parents. At that time England was convulsed by religious conflict, which concluded with the execution of Catholic monarch Charles II by Oliver Cromwell's ruthless army of grim Puritan warriors, in which Bunyan served a few months. Bunyan married a wife as poor and as pious as he. Together they read religiously uplifting books. A period of intense spiritual anguish for Bunyan followed, but eventually he found peace for his sins in forgiveness and was received into the Baptist Church at Bedford in 1653. He began preaching in the country adjoining Bedford, to meet with immediate success. Bunyan's imprisonment by government authorities, beginning 1660, continued, with the exception of a few weeks, for twelve years. A third imprisonment began during the winter-early spring of 1675-76. During this last, he began his most famous work, *Pilgrim's Progress* whose first edition appeared in 1678.<sup>45</sup>

Bunyan's *Pilgrim's Progress* became one of the great Protestant proselytizing documents of all time. It was reprinted in North America almost as soon as printing presses were set up, and copies were passed from hand to hand when early colonists moved westward. While its great

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44. Brigham Young, "Blood Atonement Sermon: Journal of Discourses." Vol. 4, 51-57. [utlm.org/onlineresources/sermons\\_talks\\_interviews](http://utlm.org/onlineresources/sermons_talks_interviews)

45. James Blanton Wharey. *A Study of the Sources of Bunyan's Allegories*. (Gordian Press, New York, 1968), 6-10.

popularity grew partly from its subject matter -- how best to achieve salvation in such a sin-filled world -- its greatest success came from Bunyan's use of fables and allegories by which he hoped to reach ordinary folk. It is in Bunyan's choice of sturdy, homely language that his sermons attracted thousands in England.

Bunyan believed common people like himself could understand the message of the Lord as well as or even better than the message preached by Catholic and Anglican clerics. Those hierarchies were often represented by proud and worldly prelates. Bunyan, himself a cobbler, preached and read sermons understandable to poor congregations who were illiterate and disenfranchised. Bunyan deliberately wrote in parables so as to make his message clear to the meanest understanding. As a biographer of Bunyan put it: "The popular style of preaching and writing, to which Bunyan and many of his fellow preachers looked for the establishment of Christ's earthly kingdom, was simple, colloquial, redundant, and conspicuously metaphorical . . . The lay preachers employed the idiom of their social class . . . they drew their metaphors and analogies from the Bible and from the common life about them . . ." <sup>46</sup> For an earthy example illustrating what we must do to eradicate evil from our souls, Bunyan even drew upon the life of a lice-infested family to illustrate what he meant by the proliferation of evil.

For example . . . suppose a family to be very lousy . . . the quickest way to clear that family or at least to weaken the so swarming of those vermin, is, in the first place, to sweeten the skin, head, and clothes of the chief breeders . . . Now, let the Lord Jesus, in the first place, cleanse these great breeders [with] a nip to those swarms of sins that used to be committed . . . I speak by experience. I was one of those lousy ones, one of these great sin-breeders; I infected all the youth of the town where I was born . . . <sup>47</sup>

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46. William York Tindall, *John Bunyan, Mechanick Preacher* (New York 1934), 166-167.

47. Tindall, *Bunyan, Mechanick Preacher*, 172-173. The lice-ridden family is quoted from Bunyan's *Jerusalem Sinner* (pub. 1688), I, 79. Archaeologists on Cumberland Island excavating Stafford Plantation's slave quarters have found brass lice-picking combs. John E. Ehrenhard, SEAC, personal communication, Jan. 24, 2006.

John Bunyan used the fallen tree metaphor in one of his most famous sermons, “The Rich Man and Lazarus” (1658).

This is also verified by the words in this parable where Christ says, “The rich man also died, and was buried; and in hell he lift up his eyes.” As the tree falls so it shall lie whether it be to heaven or hell.<sup>48</sup>

To the poor and ignorant, Bunyan had preached by parable. Bunyan himself referred to his use of short, pithy, popular sayings as *similitudes* -- that is, short sayings embodying a familiar truth. But Bunyan died seventy-five years before this slave’s life began. We think Simmons learned this similitude from a minister. Bunyan was speaking of the unregenerate soul. Simmons, poor, ignorant, and nearing death, feared for his soul. His preacher was familiar with Bunyan’s style of preaching. In an age when the Bible’s entire text was inaccessible to most church-going slaves, the basic purpose of a sermon was to connect some passage of the Bible to daily life. Even though many of them were illiterate, listeners were expected to demonstrate mental agility. Since in nineteenth-century Georgia the felling of trees was a natural and regular chore, the simile was vividly attractive.

No church is known to have been erected on Cumberland until the end of the nineteenth century, long after Simmons’s time. We imagine that a pious man taught him at his home plantation.

### III.

Narrative history means describing the past to make an interesting and coherent story. We have discussed eight verifiable attributes of this American slave. While they perhaps throw light

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48. “The Rich Man and Lazarus,” sermon by John Bunyan, in *The Reformed Reader* (1999-2005), a Reformed Baptist Church publication. <http://www.reformedreader.org/rbs/bunyan03.htm>

on him personally, we need to know how he fits into his present setting. All artifacts have a provenience within a *matrix*.

In archaeology the medium frequently consists of earth in any one of its various forms (humus, sand, silt, gravel, pumice, etc.). *Context* is an adequate equivalent. We test for similarities and dis-similarities. For example: If an archaeological site in Cuba produced a single *green* obsidian tool, where all its previous obsidian artifacts were *black* or *gray*, the archaeologist suggests a foreign provenience. The archaeologist may suggest that the green obsidian came from the Valley of Mexico, far from the excavation site. The archaeologist is allowed to speculate this because the Mexican site is known to furnish green obsidians. Having discussed its probable provenience, the archaeologist must then consider the reason for its appearance in a site so far from its place of origin. The archaeologist will analyze the *matrix* of the artifact. If the provenience of green obsidian is coupled with the supposition that it was a trade item, there follows the intellectual need to show *why* that particular type of artifact was desirable in that culture. A highly sophisticated linkage system comes into play. Our question becomes, "What is this artifact doing here, in this place?" or more exactly, "What did this elderly slave man do on Cumberland about religious study and devotional practice?"

We need to understand more of his social environment -- his matrix. We seek more knowledge of how Simmons interacted with a wider circle. We need some associative links to his *time* and *space*. As archaeologist Nicola Lanieri put it: "Archaeology can be viewed as narrative fiction based upon a subjective interpretation of . . . material culture." This type of interpretation is founded on the analysis of symbols and metaphors represented by material culture. There will be a constant dialogue between the archaeologist and his experience within

the archaeological matrix. “This process is not static, but fully dynamic.”<sup>49</sup> Lanieri means that the discovery through excavation of a single blue bead at a slave site may be interpreted as the archaeologist sees fit. Was it a trade item? or a Mediterranean good luck charm? or simply a bead stolen from the slave owner’s little daughter?<sup>50</sup> Experience will tell the archaeologist which interpretation to emphasize. We consider Simmons’s religious orientation interesting. We suggest that history can also be viewed as a “narrative fiction” based upon a subjective interpretation of Simmons’s emotional universe.

Furnished with what we now know about Ned Simmons, we can now examine some associative links. We look for similarities among Simmons’s links. Determining the matrix (context) can be a tool in itself. Since the artifact always has its provenience, the archaeologist can always record (and reconstruct) its *associates*. An artifact generally appears in association with other adjacent artifacts. Perhaps we can find some associated artifacts to link with Ned Simmons. A collective unit, such as a clerk’s office or a plantation unit, can be an associative link. Although we may be sure Simmons had a wife, none of the associative links presented here seem to point to one. A list of suggested associative links is part of the dialogue between the archaeologist and the archaeological discipline.

Below are seven persons to be paired with Simmons. They are *associative links*. Space permits us to examine only three of them (starred). We seek common bonds consisting of emotional and legal connections -- of kinship or economic relationships, or of causative links formed by bonding from “perilous moments” and intervals of loss. Note that we have chosen

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49. Nicola Lanieri, “Is Archaeology Fiction? Some Thoughts About Ways of Communicating Archaeological Processes to the ‘External World,’” in *Ancient Muses*, 181-2

50. Ascher, Robert, and Charles H. Fairbanks. “Excavations of a Slave Cabin, Georgia, U.S.A.” *Historical Archaeology*, 5 (1971), 13-14. The excavators suggested, with insufficient linkage, that a single blue glass hexagonal bead was an ambassador bead.

*associative links* with humans from the same restricted ecological niche (a Georgia barrier island) and from the same narrowly restricted time unit (1790-1865), thereby reducing the number of variables to be analyzed.

Ned . . . with Butler Nightingale?  
Ned . . . with Lucinda Durrell?  
Ned . . . with P. M. Nightingale? \*  
Ned . . . with Nat Greene?  
Ned . . . with Ethan Clarke? \*  
Ned . . . with Primus Mitchell? \*  
Ned . . . with Robert Stafford?

The historical archaeologist looks up as many of the associative links that he has time to do. We are attempting to find a social matrix. It may take a long time.

*Primus Mitchell as Associative Link.* Primus first appeared in the historical record as property of Nathaniel R. Greene, the general's surviving son. Primus himself told people he was born property of Robert Stafford and that he was born at Rayfield. In that case, Primus' first appearance is on two conveyances between "Nat" and Stafford in 1834, when Greene, with the consent of his children, by then all adult, sold Stafford the property called Rayfield and its resident slaves.<sup>51</sup> Primus, about nine years old, seemed to be son of Judy. His parents may have come from the Greenes' Savannah River plantation, which we know was a center of black evangelism. Although a change of ownership may not have affected the residences of Rayfield slaves, the sale may have affected them in other ways. We note that Ethan Clarke, Nat's father-in-law, leased Rayfield Plantation from him for eleven years previous to its sale to Stafford.

On March 2, 1862, when a Union naval squadron dropped anchor in St. Andrews Sound, the war became a reality to Cumberland. Cumberland's slaves watched the arrival of the

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51. RCCG, Deed Bk. "M", p. 193, deed of sale to land, dated April 2, 1834. Deed of sale to Negroes, dated same day. Both deeds were recorded May 27, 1834. Stafford paid \$11,000 for land and Negroes. Fifty-three slaves went with the property. Rayfield Plantation had, however, about 68 slaves. We know that, because in the previous year (1833) Nat had sold Stafford thirteen slaves who came from Rayfield.

gunboats with fear and anticipation. A few days later (March 7), a small group left Cumberland to enter Union lines at Fernandina.<sup>52</sup> There were about fifteen persons in the March 7 group, including “Amenda Mitchel” [sic], known in later years as Primus’ wife.<sup>53</sup> Remarkably, Primus seems not to have departed Cumberland on March 7 or any other date.

Commodore Samuel Francis DuPont and Brigadier General Horatio Wright soon (March 13, 1862) made arrangements to post a permanent guard at Dungeness. In 1865 the Bureau of Refugees, Freedmen and Abandoned Lands [BRFAL] urged homeless freedmen in overcrowded Fernandina to take up planting at Dungeness to support themselves -- garden produce for their families, cotton for the government. The army and the BRFAL provided basic rations. Soon a fairly large black settlement developed at Dungeness, penning their mules and cattle inside the famous Dungeness gardens. Primus either resided at or often visited this encampment, for in 1868 a resident of Brunswick, GA, brought charges against one “Primas Mitchell” at “Dungeon S.”<sup>54</sup> Mitchell seems to have remained on Cumberland throughout the war.

By 1870 he moved to a area on Cumberland called “Brick Hill” where a small black settlement was beginning to take shape, and where he cultivated a small patch of earth for corn and melon. Amanda lived with him, with their children. Primus did not work again for Stafford; indeed, he did not appear to work for anybody on Cumberland.

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52. *Census, 1864.*

53. With Amanda came young children, known in later years to reside in the same dwelling as Primus and Amanda on Cumberland. Of the fifteen, eight were people connected somehow with Amanda Mitchel, age 24. She was accompanied by daughters Catherina, age 5, and Dority [Dorothy?], age 8; Amanda’s sister, Eve Mitchel, age 26, and Eve’s man, John Ellwood, age 28. The next three are offspring but there is no good way to determine whether they belonged to Amanda or Eve: Stapna (Stepney?) Mitchel, age 7; Julia Mitchel, age 6, and Lark Mitchel, age 4. *Census, 1864.*

54. National Archives, RG 105, E 801, sub-heading 1. Sub-Assistant Commissioner David Hammond, Fernandina, to Lieut. D. G. Risley, Jan. 23, 1868.

In 1893 Primus Mitchell, reputed to have been a Baptist exhorter (a licensed preacher, not authorized to give the sacraments), was among the founders of a black church. In that year he succeeded in buying acreage on Cumberland for the purpose of building a new mission, to be built at the island's northern end. A log church, it was called the "Old Baptist Church of Cumberland Island,"<sup>55</sup> its very name suggesting some sort of predecessor, one which Primus remembered.<sup>56</sup> Its deacons were his sons-in-law. Three families, the Albertys, the Trimmings, and the Merrows, can be identified as the most interested in building a church on Cumberland. Their forebears were married to Mitchell's daughters.<sup>57</sup>

It is possible Primus, born at Rayfield, remained on the island throughout the war. He certainly lived on Cumberland from 1870 until his death in ca. 1912. Amanda was feared as a witch. He is buried at an island cemetery at its North End. Primus' link with Simmons is his lifelong association with the island. Primus seems to be a religious sort of person.

*Ethan Clarke as Associative Link.* Ethan Clarke administered Rayfield Plantation for eleven years, from January 26, 1818, to April 20, 1829. Clarke did this at the request of his son-in-law, Nat Greene, who had told his family he refused to own human property. Mrs. Miller having been widowed again by Phineas Miller's death in 1803, the Dungeness family privately

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55. RCCG, Deed Bk. "V", p. 425. Deed of sale, Mason Burbank to William Alberty, Charles Trimmings, Thomas Alberty, and Primas [sic] Mitchell, Trustees for the (Old) Baptist Church of Cumberland. Dated May 9, 1894.

56. The log church burnt down in 1937. In the 1890s some ex-Confederate landholders named Bunkley, who returned to their homes at High Point at the end of the war, were running a saw mill to recoup their ruined fortunes. The log church undoubtedly utilized the Bunkleys' saw-mill. The first vestrymen of the Old Baptist Church were saw-mill hands. The present church, built in 1938, replaced the log church.

57. Mary R. Bullard, *An Abandoned Black Settlement on Cumberland Island, Georgia* (DeLeon Springs, FL 1982), 120. Renda was grandmother to Beulah Alberty. Rogers Alberty, Jr. married Hattie Mitchell; William Alberty married Renda Mitchell; and Thomas Alberty married Fanny Mitchell. Catherine Mitchell married Nelson Merrow.

surmised that Clarke wished to present himself as a possible suitor for Mrs. Miller's hand.<sup>58</sup> Clarke, a Rhode Island businessman who had frequently visited southeastern Georgia, invested heavily in Camden County real estate. Although Clarke and Greene's original arrangement was for twelve years, both parties were willing to terminate the lease a year early. After Nat Greene released Clarke in 1829 from any further administrative responsibilities, Stafford agreed to administer Rayfield, and a few years later in 1834, he bought it. Although Stafford had effectively been in charge of Rayfield slaves since 1829, they did not become his property until 1834. Possibly Clarke was unresponsive to the concept of humanitarian slavery. It is worth noting that 1829 was the year Louisa Shaw prepared a new will. One wonders if there had been an incident at Rayfield that caused the Dungeness family to banish Clarke. His disappearance, Nat Greene's definitive relinquishment of slave property, and Shaw's revision of her will making Nightingale her heir all took place in 1829. Simmons's association with Ethan Clark comes through their labor relationship at Rayfield Plantation.

*P. M. Nightingale as Associative Link.* Many planters knew Nightingale to be deeply interested in his slaves' spiritual state. The nation-wide social phenomenon called the Second Great Awakening, or the Great Revival, a movement which persisted through the 1840s, provided the impetus for Baptist expansion into South Georgia and Florida. The Great Revival commenced in Kentucky about 1790 and spread eastward until it hit the Atlantic. Converts expressed their conviction and ecstasy by "strange physical phenomena," which included outbreaks of "the jerks," "barking," shouting, weeping, accompanied by frantic running, rolling

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58. Ethan Clarke was listed among the pre-1808 subscribers to the Union Church in St. Mary's. For the Greene family comments, see Richard K. Murdoch, coll. and ed., "Letters of Dr. Daniel Turner: A Rhode Islander in South Georgia", *Georgia Historical Quarterly*, v. 53, no. 4, (1969) Part II, pp. 486, 489, 491, 505 n. 140, 507 n. 158. In Rhode Island, Clarke, a dealer of wine and spirits, had figured as an old friend of Gen. Greene.

and jumping. Revival meetings drew men, women, and children. White and black converted together. Meetings were remarkable for their emotionalism. Presbyterian, Methodist, and Baptist preachers would be present, all preaching at the same time. The preachers sought immediate conversions, and proof of faith was to be expressed in action. These camp meetings, as they were called, provided an outlet for lonely frontier families otherwise deprived of religious communities.

The Greens had moved with their slaves from Mulberry Grove to Camden County around 1798. Although in 1800 the small city of St. Mary's did not offer much in the way of churches, its outlying plantations provided a few congregations. At the beginning of the new century, in Camden County most plantation meeting houses were Methodist and inter-racial.<sup>59</sup>

Stormy weather and rough seas often prevented Cumberland Island residents from crossing Cumberland Sound. At the beginning of the century, we imagine Ned was deprived of the solace of a church. The Greens were nominally Quakers. A typical Friends meeting was held silently unless the Holy Spirit moved a member to talk. Although slaves were considered part of the Dungeness "family," mere proximity to the Greene-Nightingale-Sands household would not have satisfied Ned's need for spirituality, nor would he have been satisfied with Quaker rhetoric.

Nightingale was a lifelong Episcopalian who served his slaves. In the early 1840s he and Colonel Miller Hallows, a fellow planter at Point Peter, were elected wardens for the Church of the Messiah, a projected Episcopal church in St. Mary's.<sup>60</sup> Of Nightingale, a contemporary from

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59. Reddick, comp. *Camden's Challenge*, section "Churches."

60. James Holmes, *"Dr. Bullie's" Notes: Reminiscences of Early Georgia and of Philadelphia and New Haven in the 1800s*, ed. Delma Eugene Presley (Atlanta: Cherokee, 1976), 201.

a prominent rice-growing family in Bryan County commented wonderingly although uncensoriously:

The religious services on the plantations were conducted in various ways. Mr. Nightingale, for instance, taught his Negroes himself and was their preacher.<sup>61</sup>

Among Nightingale's southern friends was Reverend Horace Southworth Pratt (1795-1840), a new resident of St. Mary's. Pratt, a Yale graduate, was graduated from his college at a time (1817) when it was a hive of missionary activity. Under the leadership of its remarkable evangelical president, Timothy Dwight, countless graduates left university to prepare for ordination. Like the Baptists, the Presbyterians felt faith must be expressed in action. A growing emphasis on perfectionism came to mark the preaching of the Second Great Awakening. God was remaking society in anticipation of the coming Kingdom.

Pratt hailed originally from Connecticut. About seven years older than Nightingale, he was a energetic minister, like his younger brother Nathaniel Pratt. The two Pratts attended the same Presbyterian seminary in Princeton, New Jersey, finishing within two years of one another. In 1821 Horace arrived in St. Mary's where a few leading citizens had already created a Union church in an attempt to appeal to a wide range of citizens. Not until 1822 did the church become Presbyterian (before that date, Pratt preached in a Methodist church). Pratt, who was well-to-do, married the daughter of a wealthy landholder in St. Mary's. We imagine his missionary zeal would attract the attention of "the Dungeness family," including Nightingale, a wealthy, well-educated New Englander like himself. Pratt would soon have been invited to participate in the

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61. Georgia Bryan Conrad. "Reminiscences of a Southern Woman," 13-14 (reprinted from the *Southern Workman*, Hampton, VA: Hampton Institute Press, 1901). In about 1851, when a Episcopal church was being built in a new mission field in Albany, GA, to which Nightingale had moved, Bishop Stephen Elliott specifically mentioned Nightingale's participation in mission activity to serve his slaves. Nightingale was chosen as senior warden of the newly organized St. Paul's Church, in Albany. In the late 1860s he was elected a warden of St. Peters Church (Episcopalian), Fernandina, FL.

Dungeness family's social life, for Louisa Shaw was a hostess who was fond of entertaining. By 1830 Pratt had become a slave holder and plantation owner on the mainland. He would have been encouraged to bring the Gospel to the Shaw slaves.<sup>62</sup> The Liberty County Association, a Presbyterian group further up the Georgia coast, supported inter-denominational plantation preaching stations: why not in Camden County? Some black Baptist churches were essentially run by local Presbyterian churches.<sup>63</sup> Although Pratt was described as having built a church for blacks, it has long been assumed they were in St. Mary's.<sup>64</sup>

Pratt knew Nightingale well enough to lend him a large sum of money. As security for a loan of \$15,000, in 1837 Nightingale conveyed Tract 7 on Cumberland to Pratt. The loan was to be repaid by 1840. While it is true that in 1837, as a result of the nationwide Panic of 1833, Nightingale was in desperate financial straits, as were most planters up and down the Georgia coast, this loan may represent Pratt's interest in, or even familiarity with Cumberland. Possibly Nightingale counted upon Reverend Pratt to take the land off his hands, for Nightingale needed the money. In any case, Nightingale failed to repay his debt, because he encountered staggering

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62. H.S.Pratt bought slaves. See RCCG, Deed Book "L", pp. 443-445 dated April 14, 1830. Pratt purchased 52 slaves from J. H. McIntosh. The next deed shows Pratt purchasing Mush Bluff Plantation on the Crooked River (named Brentwood at the time) from Henry R. Sadler (previously owned by John Houston McIntosh who purchased it from the Elliott estate). Included with the land were 12 slaves. Work of Tara Field, 2/16/06.

63. Sobel, Mechal. *Trabelin' On: The Slave Journey to an Afro-Baptist Faith* (Greenwood Press, Westport, Connecticut, 1979), 408. According to Charles C. Jones of the Liberty County Association, Presbyterian pastors supported inter-denominational plantation preaching stations.

64. Charles C. Jones wrote: "The Rev. Horace S. Pratt previously to his appointment to a professorship in the Alabama College at Tuscaloosa, and while Pastor of the St. Mary's Presbyterian Church, gave much of his attention to the religious instruction of the Negroes and prepared at his own expense a comfortable and commodious house of worship for them, and which they occupy at the present time." *The Religious Instruction of the Negroes. In the United States: Electronic Edition*, by Charles Colcock Jones (1804 - 1863), pp. 79-80.

new debts from relatives within the Greene family. To meet these obligations, in 1840 Nightingale offered his Cumberland properties for sale.<sup>65</sup> He was unable to offer Tract 1, the Dungeness tract, for it was claimed by a relative.

Reverend Pratt died in 1840. In 1843 his Estate foreclosed on Nightingale, and the mortgaged property was put up for public sale. Tracts 6 and 7 were sold August 5, 1843, to Stafford.

We suggest that these two pious young men, Pratt and Nightingale, collaborated in establishing a mission on Cumberland, probably encouraged by Mrs. Shaw. Not only would the mission be inter-denominational but it was likely inter-racial, at that date still common in Camden County. The county's earliest records suggest its (generally Methodist) churches featured inter-racial congregations.<sup>66</sup> Considering Nightingale's religious beliefs, we think he was the one who read Bunyan's similitude to Ned. If Nightingale visited Dungeness in 1861 to close his home -- which he could well have done, there being at that date no troops to stop him -- Nightingale could have read the familiar words to the decent old man whom he had known all his life and would not see again. Nightingale and Simmons are linked by a common sense of spirituality.

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65. In 1840 Nightingale advertised "Cumberland Plantation for Sale." He advertised 3680 acres of which 2100 acres were hammock land. The land could be divided into 3 tracts "each with a landing." He advertised the plantation had 22 Negroes houses, stables, smith's shop, large and commodious cotton house, gin house, and 2 gins, overseers house, other out-houses, corn crib housing, 4000 bushels corn, orange, citron, lemon, limes, and olive are "growing there in perfection." (signed) "P. M. Nightingale at Dungeness." The tracts constituting the "plantation" were probably Tracts 2, 6, and 7. *Savannah Daily Georgian*, 7/3/1840, see Mary Davis Cate Coll. Dungeness stood on Tract 1; Stafford owned Tract 5.

66. Marguerite Reddick, comp. *Camden's Challenge*, section "Churches."

#### IV.

The links seem to point to the existence of some sort of mission on the island, perhaps established by a Presbyterian minister. We suggest a mission was in process of being established in the late 1820s by Reverend Horace Pratt. Although the bustling little seaport was not particularly interested in doctrinal matters, local lethargy on religion was vigorously dissipated when this hardworking young divine moved to St. Mary's in 1822.

The Dungeness family, nominally Quaker, were not attracted to what it felt to be "frantic" Methodist emotionalism. The Society of Friends, another name for Quakers, has been called "Presbyterianism's left-wing." The Greene family was new to plantation life and slavery. When left to their own devices, non-observant Quakers were apt to ally themselves with a more intellectual Presbyterianism, with which they shared an emphasis on free will. Like Presbyterians, Quakers strongly believed in schooling and training to strengthen the enlightened soul. Quakers so firmly supported the principle of free will and inner light that, like the Presbyterians, most Friends believed that slaveholders would eventually want to free their slaves. In the 1830s, American Presbyterians themselves split over slavery. A majority felt that, while slavery was an abomination, if slaveholders were to abandon it, it must be of their own free will. Until then, the slaveholder must be content with practicing "humanitarian slavery." When Catherine Greene Miller died in 1814, she made her daughter Louisa Shaw heir to Dungeness and its slaves. The Greenes exemplified a humanitarian approach to slavery. Shaw expected nephew Nightingale to continue their tradition. Although by no means an ordained minister (at least as far as we know), Nightingale sought amelioration of his slaves' servitude by ensuring a chance at spirituality.

Ned did not come from the coast. It is not known where Ned was born. All we know is that he seems to have come with the Greene family from Mulberry Grove, a plantation some thirty miles upriver from the Savannah coastal marshes. After the Revolutionary War the Silver Bluff Church, established 1774 or 1775, of Aiken County, South Carolina, flourished as an independent church until it was absorbed into the First African Baptist Church of Savannah. Aiken County lies on the Carolina side of the Savannah River.<sup>67</sup> Since his own recollections of residence with the Greene family at Mulberry Grove suggest that in 1791 he was already a mature man, we suggest that Ned Simmons was brought up near or in Aiken County, South Carolina, a pre-Revolutionary War center for slave evangelism. Ned Simmons almost surely was a Baptist, and furthermore, very likely an early convert. We imagine he was a member of Silver Bluff, the earliest black Baptist church.<sup>68</sup> Most black persons in this area were members, for it was here that the Baptist churches of Georgia began.

In 1733, one or two Baptists had arrived on the ship *Anne* with General James Oglethorpe. Baptist churches seemed peculiarly suited for frontier living. The colony was a good fit for them. Their members were characterized by their great belief in independence and church autonomy. By 1800 Georgia had more than 4,700 Baptists, about 3 percent of the population.<sup>69</sup> In 1802, the black and white churches of Savannah and the Newington Church formed the Savannah Baptist Association. From its very beginning, the Savannah Association showed better

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67. Henderson, Walter, *The Silver Bluff Church: A History of Negro Baptist Churches in America* (Washington, DC: Press of R.L. Pendleton, 1910) short title: Henderson, *Negro Baptist Churches*.

68. Henderson, *Negro Baptist Churches*.

69. Tarver Library, *Georgia Baptists*.

organization than did other Georgia Baptist groups.<sup>70</sup> Beginning in 1807 the Savannah River Association contained many Baptist churches, especially in the neighborhood of Savannah. By 1817 this association had grown to thirty-three churches with 5,771 members. The First and Second Colored churches in Savannah, together with the Great Ogeechee Colored churches, comprised 2,743 of the total membership. After a division of the Savannah River Association, the South Carolina churches retained the original name; while the Georgia churches became the Sunbury Association.

Outside Savannah, the Baptists were at first regarded as simply peculiar. The Great Awakening has been called the seedtime for planting Christianity in the Lowcountry.<sup>71</sup> When the Second Great Awakening, or “Great Revival,” came, it provided the impetus for Baptist expansion into South Georgia and Florida. The Great Revival lasted some fifty years -- from the 1790s to the 1840s -- and spanned the entire United States. It was definitely a Protestant phenomenon. Methodist and Baptist denominations experienced a surge of membership, and their huge public response prompted intense competitiveness from the Anglican, Presbyterian and Congregational churches. Great numbers of converts were made through itinerant Methodist and Baptist preachers who presided over emotionally charged revivals.

From its beginnings, the Baptist faith in the South was black as well as white.<sup>72</sup>

Racially diverse congregations were the rule rather than the exception. Blacks benefited from the

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70. Huddleston, J.R., and Charles O. Walker. *From Heretics to Heroes: A Study of Religious Groups in Georgia with Primary Emphasis on the Baptists* (Pickens Tech Press, Jasper, Georgia, 1976), 40; Cornelius, Janet Duitsman. *Slave Missions and the Black Church in the Antebellum South* (Columbia, SC, 1999), 16.

71. Creel, Margaret Washington. *‘A Peculiar People’: Slave Religion and Community-Culture Among the Gullahs* (New York University: New York and London, 1988), 108.

72. Cornelius, *op. cit.*, 25.

Baptists' democratic inclusiveness. In the early years of Baptist expansion in America, blacks were received as equal members of congregations along with whites, baptized at the same time as whites, called Brother and Sister, and given the "right hand of fellowship" equally with whites. White preachers performed black marriages and licensed blacks to exhort or ordained them to preach. Blacks joined whites in organizing churches on the frontier and were accepted into membership on the condition that they fulfill the same high standards for moral uprightness that were expected of white members. In sparsely settled areas, blacks and whites organized churches together. Names of slave and free black women and men appear alongside those of whites. Moreover, under the loosely interpreted congregational principle, blacks also formed their own congregations and chose their own preachers.<sup>73</sup>

In the early decades of the church all Baptist congregations were completely autonomous. Black leadership was formalized through licensing and ordination. All congregations came together in associations, which also granted black preaching privileges.<sup>74</sup> The Sunbury Association, which included Savannah's large black churches (its list also included hundreds of small churches), counted ten black ordained ministers in its early years. Even in the 1840s and 1850s one third of Sunbury's ordained ministers were black.<sup>75</sup> Black Baptists also led early efforts to establish domestic missions to the slaves. The black-dominated Sunbury Association was among the first to send missionaries to Savannah's slave population. The Sunbury

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73. Anonymous. "History of the Baptists in Georgia, 1733 to Present" Jack Tarver Library, Mercer University Special Collections. <http://tarver.mercer.edu.archives/GaBaptists.php>; short title: Tarver Library, *Georgia Baptists*.

74. Cornelius, *Slave Missions*, .27.

75. Cornelius, *Slave Missions*, quoting minutes of the Sunbury Association, 28-30.

Association often funded small black churches that had no ministers of their own. The Sunbury Association also helped rural churches.

Although Savannah soon became a successful mercantile center, southern Georgia remained a troublesome frontier long after the American Revolutionary War; in fact, not until the taming of Florida in the 1820s did the state militia relax about the Indian menace. At first, Baptist emotionalism was ostracized in the Sea Island regions of Carolina. But, gradually, as the Baptist faith swept southwards to the less settled coastal areas, revivalism became popular and Baptist views on baptism and church membership became acceptable.<sup>76</sup>

Baptist meetinghouses usually matched their rough and ready preaching.<sup>77</sup> It has been said, “Except for a handful of Catholics, mostly around St. Augustine, and a few stray Presbyterians and Episcopalians in the better settled areas, Methodists and Baptists of one stripe or another had a virtual monopoly of the religious scene in most of antebellum South Georgia and Florida.”<sup>78</sup> Cumberland’s isolation bred distinctive cultural adaptations to the many African ways of his fellow slaves. Perhaps Ned was a church leader among Cumberland’s Gullah-speaking slaves.

In the Gullah-speaking island communities the most important people were religious leaders. There were two kinds of religious leaders. One kind consisted of black elders. The second group consisted of the elders’ helpers, often referred to as “spiritual parents.” Black elders were chosen by whites. These black leaders, referred to as “deacons” or “watchmen,” were responsible for the “watchcare” of members of plantation societies. They were the

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76. Creel, *A Peculiar People*, 132.

77. Crowley, *Primitive Baptists, Wiregrass*, 12. The church buildings in the “Wiregrass” portions of Georgia consisted of log cabins with backless benches.

78. Crowley, *Primitive Baptists, Wiregrass*, 20.

experienced church members, having knowledge of Christianity, perhaps taking their religion more seriously than the other slaves in their community. Planters hoped they would encourage virtue. Slaveholders expected them to use Christianity as a soothing influence. Law forbade black religious gatherings without three slaveholders being present, although these laws were routinely disregarded.<sup>79</sup>

The second group, the “spiritual parents,” were not white-sanctioned. Often both missionaries and planters recognized these spiritual parents as leaders who incorporated non-Christian elements into white Protestantism. From this group came “Praise House” leaders, and also the slaves who supervised slave courts or teams, punishing transgressors. To many ministers, these leaders only encouraged the persistent belief in Africanisms and superstitions by the slaves. They interpreted dreams, signs, and visions; they advised upon healings; and they passed upon marital justice.<sup>80</sup> Slave-holders did not necessarily approve of their strictures, but they recognized the existence of the spiritual parents. What Protestant missionaries failed to understand (or were too prudish to see) was the persistence of African-inspired kinship groups, evolved from the African need to control sexual development and procreation within a community. As guardians of group culture, they considered initiation ceremonies to be within their jurisdiction. Among the matters which slaves took into their own hands were marital difficulties, infidelity, and abuse within the slave community. The spiritual leaders’ influence

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79. Creel, *A Peculiar People*, 283-4.

80. Africanists find a strong correlation between these “parents” and West African community organization. It is in this sense that the word “church” should be thought of as “meeting house.” Slaves met at church to discuss their own affairs as much as they met to hear sermons. The conversion experience of the Baptists converged somewhat with West Coast initiation rites into their secret societies. Immersion was common to both. See William S. Pollitzer, “The Relationship of the Gullah-Speaking People of Coastal South Carolina and Georgia to Their African Ancestors,” *Historical Methods* 26: 1 (1993): 53-68; also Albert J. Raboteau, *Slave Religion: The Invisible Institution in the Antebellum South* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1980)

belonged to a tradition older than the role taken by black elders.<sup>81</sup> Between 1800-1830 few were actually affiliated with any Baptist churches as compared to later. Religious activities facilitated approval of the slaves' own independent "Negro Societies."

In doctrinal matters Baptist and Methodist preachers held their congregations strictly accountable. The work of the visiting minister was aided by the watchmen, who were parishioners reporting to the minister transgressions of church discipline.<sup>82</sup> After the minister arrived on a scheduled visit to his missionary station, the first people summoned were his watchmen, for whom he convoked a private prayer meeting. After that, the watchmen spoke regarding the spiritual progress of their co-religionists.<sup>83</sup>

For financial reasons, during the 1840s the Nightingale family began to withdraw support of Dungeness Plantation, treating the mansion more as their summer place. Their work force had largely been conveyed to Stafford, who by 1837 was administering some 159 slaves. Planters often saw slave religion as a form of social control. It may be that planter Stafford, not noticeably religious, felt the need to control a new meeting place for his slaves.

## V.

We turn to a previously unexamined link, whose only mention in the written records comes from a man of mixed racial ancestry named Cray Pratt, once the island post-carrier. Pratt's name was linked once with Robert Stafford. In 1890 Pratt reminisced about his role in

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81. Creel, *A Peculiar People*, 284-287.

82. Robert Q. Mallard, *Plantation Life Before Emancipation* (Richmond, VA 1892), 103. Rev. Mallard came from a wealthy Presbyterian, rice- and cotton-growing family in Liberty County.

83. Scripture made it clear the penalty for silence was particularly severe for those who were watchmen. It was a *watchman's* duty to report the presence of non-believers and skeptics. "[I]f anyone hears the trumpet but does not take warning and the sword comes and takes his life, his blood will be on his own head . . . that man will be taken away because of his sin, but I will hold the watchman accountable for his blood." Ezekial 33:2-6.

the old days, to a small informal audience who wrote down his words. This memorandum had been deemed unreliable because Pratt, a transient, was neither slave holder nor slave; but it seems he remembered a slave church that once existed in the middle of Cumberland's plantations.

My first trip to Cumberland was in 1837 . . . . To the south of that Stafford had a church for his colored people on the north of the bridge, twelfth . . . and on the east side of the swamp in Pine Woods Mr. J[ames] Clubb, thirteenth -- and two miles to the South was Mr. Stafford, fourteenth . . . .<sup>84</sup>

Cray Pratt placed it within a tract which in 1837 was not yet fully cleared for planting.<sup>85</sup> He said the church was "north of the bridge." We imagine this to be one of the only two bridges crossing Cumberland's Main Road. We identify it as a bridge over what was called the "Plum Orchard outflow," which drained a large (2500-acre) swamp in the middle of the island.<sup>86</sup> We note the bridge passes over a man-made canal, a very desirable proximity for baptismal purposes.<sup>87</sup>

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84. From a memorandum made by William and Gertrude Carnegie, entitled "Mr. Pratt's Account." Recorded before February 12, 1899. In Stafford House Guest Book, in possession of Nancy McF. Copp.

85. In 1837 Nightingale's wife, Mary, wrote from Dungeness, to a friend: "Mr. Nightingale is absent almost the whole day at his plantation which is seven mile [sic] off . . . ." Letter from Mary K. Nightingale to Miss Jane Botts of Jamaica, Long Island, March 3, 1837. Bryan-Lang Historical Library, Woodbine, GA. Seven miles north of Dungeness brings us to the bridge.

86. Tract 6, a 1200-acre unit, was called "Oakland Plantation," owned by James Shaw, husband of Louisa Greene. He died in 1820, and Oakland was devised to his widow. Although James Shaw purchased slaves to work his land, seemingly he did not live long enough to see it become a successful agricultural unit. James Shaw may have purchased the land directly from its previous owners, the Lynch family, but he seems not to have completed paying for it. See Bullard, *Title Search for Great and Little Cumberland Islands*. Title was in the Lynches' name when Nightingale bought it from them May 27, 1831.

87. Access to immersible water suitable for baptism is surprisingly difficult on Cumberland. Miles of salt marsh separate the island from the Inland Waterway; the long rolling combers of the Atlantic Ocean attracted almost no one until the 20th century; and the island's tidal creeks are mucky when the tide ebbs.

In 1847 a church by the name of Cumberland African [Baptist] Church sent a delegate to the Sunbury Baptist Association.<sup>88</sup> Little is known about it. The delegate's name was "B. Nightingale." We do not know whether he was white or black, nor do we know if he was its pastor, a deacon, or an unordained member.<sup>89</sup> In 1847 it had a membership of 124 African-Americans, not a large congregation but a respectable size for a plantation church, suggesting Baptist activity prior to 1847. Entries for this church ended about 1861.<sup>90</sup>

Cumberland African Church has been unknown to historians. Sobel called such groups "un-noticed churches." Even large black churches often did not make the move onto paper. Traditionally, a Baptist church could be constituted wherever two or three baptized believers gathered, but a church was not deemed a proper one unless a presbytery of at least two ordained ministers had approved and formally constituted it. This came to mean that without association approval (the associations delegated ordained preachers to carry out the task) a new church could not achieve recognition. This provision gave the associations power far beyond their legal prerogatives. Black churches were anxious to gain association legitimation. Prior to the war, some sixty-six southern black Baptist churches were members of mixed (commonly known as "white") associations.<sup>91</sup>

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88. Sobel, Mechal, *Trabelin' On: The Slave Journey to an Afro-Baptist Faith* (Greenwood Press, Westport, Connecticut, 1979), Appendix I, p. 328, and footnote 129, on p.425. The name and delegate of this church appeared on a register of Baptist churches affiliated with the Sunbury Association. See *Minutes*, Sunbury Association (1847) See also personal information, Dr. Robert Gardner, Senior Archivist, Baptist Archives, Mercer University, Macon, GA, November 18, 2006

89. "B. Nightingale" could have been the "Butler Nightingale" (black) listed among contraband departing Cumberland in 1864. In 1848 he would have been 52 years old.

90. Sobel, *Trabelin' On*, 183-185; see also Gardner, Senior Archivist, Baptist Archives, Macon, GA, November 20, 2006.

91. Sobel, *Trabelin' On*, 184.

The formal black churches established missions (sometimes called “societies”) on the plantations. The societies absorbed the more purely African modes of worship, which the more formal Baptist churches were beginning to shed. White preachers, running their “joint” association in the 1840s, forbade the black Baptists to continue bringing the ordinances of baptism and communion to the plantations.<sup>92</sup> In Cumberland’s rural setting, and given the home training of the Greene slaves, holding secret services was unnecessary. Larger churches, sending deacons, lay exhorters, and elders into the countryside, succeeded in maintaining a deep spiritual conversation with the rural population. No large urban black church existed near Cumberland Island, however, suggesting yet another reason for its non-appearance in the historical record.

We imagine Reverend Horace Pratt was offered the use of an outlying Dungeness building, in which either he or Nightingale preached at irregular intervals. By 1837 the island’s balance of power shifted from the Dungeness family to Robert Stafford, and Cumberland’s slave community needed a more centrally located church. We think “Stafford’s church” was a successor to an earlier church, inspired by Horace S. Pratt and Louisa Shaw, located later on a tract inherited by Nightingale.<sup>93</sup> Pratt, who was criticized for inattention to his church duties, may have been building a mission on Cumberland.<sup>94</sup> The records of preaching stations were

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92. Sobel, *Trabelin’ On*, 171.

93. Careful examination of Rev. Pratt’s holdings in St. Mary’s reveals his ownership of two large plantations without mention of an African church. Traces of a balcony gallery in St. Mary’s Presbyterian Church suggest remodeling at one time to accommodate black congregants. No document has been found showing that Pratt erected a church for his slaves.

94. Camden County, suspecting Pratt of a worldly preoccupation in his properties, criticized him for his inattentiveness toward godly duties, although, sighed the writer of one letter, religion didn’t count for very much in St. Mary’s. The woman stating this in 1830 as a “fact” also wrote grumpily that Reverend Pratt was not attending to his pastoral duties in St. Mary’s. Perhaps he was too often visiting Cumberland

supposed to be kept by the congregation involved, not by the Presbyterian Church. Perhaps Nightingale kept records at Dungeness, but his house was totally lost by fire in 1866. As a result, together with the black church's general failure to preserve records, it may be accepted as fact that, although a pre-Civil War black church had existed on Cumberland Island, it was a "hidden institution." We imagine it was a Baptist church, a theoretical supposition based not only upon linkage but upon some circumstantial evidence as well.

A limited Baptist cultural tradition has persisted on Cumberland Island up to the 1930s-1940s. Two scraps of circumstantial evidence make us think the old slave church had been Baptist. A third piece of evidence, far more than a scrap, comes from the island of Trinidad.

(1) It was the influence of Primus Mitchell that created a new church building at Cumberland's north end, and it was his influence that gave it its name, the "Old Baptist Church." An older church stood somewhere else on Cumberland, to be remembered by Primus. Primus Mitchell and Ned Simmons are linked by a shared memory of the Old Baptist Church.<sup>95</sup>

(2) The last ordained minister of the extant church was told about its Baptist origin. A second scrap of circumstantial evidence comes from him. In about 1951 Reverend Lenworth Samuel Morrison was interviewed by Beulah Alberty, from Cumberland, an energetic vestrywoman descended from one of its original deacons, in search of a qualified minister to attend this isolated spot. In an effort to persuade him to come to Cumberland, she told him there was a Baptist congregation on the island "before the war."<sup>96</sup> A properly constituted board of

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Island. Letter, dated April 1, 1830, *E. H. Steele Paper*, Coll. 754, Georgia Historical Society, Savannah, GA.

95. See n. 56 and n. 57, p. 39.

96. In 1973, the author interviewed Rev. Lenworth Samuel Morrison, aged 91, the last Baptist pastor of the Old African Baptist Church, of High Point, Cumberland, at his home in Oneill, FL. Born 1882 in Jamaica, Rev. Morrison joined the British army at age 16 where he served 3 years 8 mos. At age 23 he

deacons still existed who would undertake to welcome Reverend Morrison.<sup>97</sup> Beulah and her grandfather Primus shared a link by wishing to revive a Baptist church.

(3) A third piece of evidence for Cumberland's early Baptist roots is that the Baptist denomination was the church of choice for so many Georgia recruits in 1815. Not only did many come from Camden County, but over 100 of them came specifically from Cumberland. When they settled in the area called Company Villages in Trinidad, they brought a strong Baptist tradition with them. In 1825 the superintendent of the Company Villages in Trinidad reported that its settlers were three-quarters Baptist and one-quarter Methodist. (They also included twenty Muslims.) Nearly all authorities on the Company Villages agree the "Merikens" were the ones who brought the Baptist church to Trinidad. Each of the six villages had their own church, characteristic of Presbyterian churches, each being autonomous.<sup>98</sup> Simmons's fellows with their families departed Cumberland in 1815 and established a strong Baptist tradition in an otherwise Catholic country. Except for Cockburn's legalistic interpretation, Simmons would have done likewise.<sup>99</sup>

Treating Simmons as an artifact may stimulate researchers' imaginations. At no time, however, have we lost sight of the scientific tradition underlying historic archaeology. A

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emigrated to U.S. via Tampa, FL, where he was converted at the Bethel Baptist Church. After working for 4 years, he attended Morehouse College from 1909-1914. His first pastorate began 1915 at St. Johns Church, in Boston (MA), where he resided for 10 years. In 1927 he answered a call to First Baptist Church of Fernandina (FL), where by 1947 he had become a leading preacher.

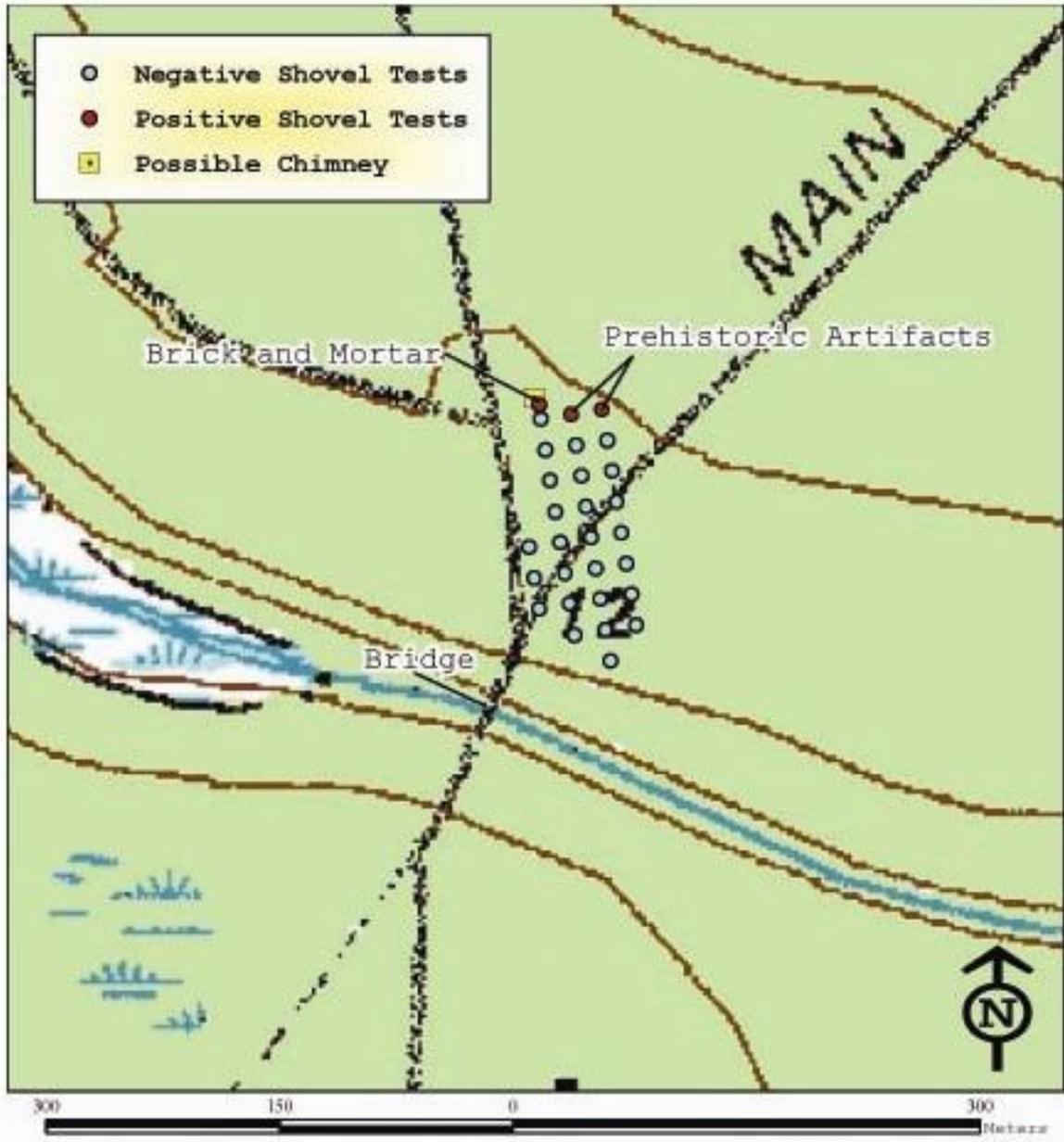
97. In 1951 Beulah Alberty of Cumberland made arrangements for Rev. Morrison to meet with the church's board of deacons: Charles Trimmins, William Alberty and Philip Trimmins, descendants of the church's first deacons: C. Alberty [Chester Alberty], Philip Trimmings, and N. Merrow [Nelson Merrow]. See Bullard, *Settlement*, for family relationships.

98. John Weiss to author, personal communication, email, May 16, 20, 30, 2006.

99. Mainland planters suspected Cockburn of sympathizing with Mrs Shaw, his involuntary hostess. It may be true. Realizing her financial ruin if he removed all her slaves, the admiral brought ashore all those who were still in Cumberland Harbor, then evidently sailed away without picking them up again.

thorough archaeological reconnaissance north of the bridge may some day prove worthwhile. Although Cray Pratt's description of a slave church's location was imprecise, his accuracy in many other particulars suggests to us its possible site on Cumberland. In an archaeological search that began subsequent to this article, building remains have recently been found north of the bridge. Limited archaeological reconnaissance and subsurface testing by the National Park Service for evidence of a slave church took place June 28-30, 2006. A pile of tabby bricks were found in a location about 219 yards due north of the suggested site at the bridge (see map below). The location lies within Tract 7, the tract which Reverend Pratt bought in 1837 for \$15,000 (but seemingly never utilized for cotton planting). These bricks, seemingly identical to chimney bricks found in association with a dozen slave cabins about two miles away, serve to date the site in the 1830s-1840s. Their discovery may justify a soil chemistry survey immediately surrounding the potential chimney. A seemingly intact shell midden abutted the possible chimney. While indisputable evidence of a slave church has yet to be identified, archeologists from the Southeastern Archeological Center (Tallahassee) are convinced that they have found some slight indicators that there was indeed a slave church on Cumberland Island at this location.

Although tabby bricks in themselves do not constitute discovery of a church chimney, their attributes define a datable structure. Our human artifact displayed eight salient attributes, from which we draw certain, limited conclusions. Their examination suggests that a pious black man lived as a slave for a century in Lowcountry Georgia, residing for over half that time on a large sea island in coastal Georgia. He was almost surely a Baptist in his childhood and because of his longevity and dignity, he may have become a leader of some sort in a Baptist church. Treating his residence as an artifactual matrix suggests that, although during the course of his long life he was a careful servant, he suffered from his slave status and tried to escape it. Traces



**The map above shows the location of shovel test pits excavated in the National Park Service’s project area. Two test pits were positive for a prehistoric-period shell midden and ceramics, and one test excavated adjacent to a possible chimney pile recovered brick and mortar.**

of a Baptist tradition illuminate his life and that of his fellows at their isolated settlements. Some associative links emanating from his eight major attributes suggest he had once been a bright and alert young man, well able to assume responsibility. It is possible that he once served as the overseer at Dungeness, where in 1815 British officers noted the presence of a black

superintendent. Ned Simmons's environment contained certain named white slave holders with whom he maintained a lifelong interaction. Although they acknowledged his immortal soul, nearly all of them required his complete submission to their material needs. Imagination, firmly grounded on an assemblage of objectively viewed facts, led to an inescapable conclusion that Simmons, faced with these particular people and residing in these particular places, would seek an emotional outlet in a Baptist church. In his search, he was both like and unlike other slaves in Georgia. Our artifactual approach has enriched our knowledge of the category of *slave* and may have found, in passing, a previously-unknown church.

### **Note**

\* The author, Mary R. Bullard, is the daughter of two archaeologists, Oliver G. Ricketson and Edith B. Ricketson, both of whom worked with the Carnegie Institution of Washington. Her archaeologist husband, William R. Bullard, worked for Harvard University; the Royal Ontario Museum of Toronto; and the Florida State Museum in Gainesville, Florida. After Dr. Bullard's death in 1972, the author worked in the lab at Quirigua, Depto. Izabal, Guatemala, for the University Museum of the University of Pennsylvania. The intricate field cataloguing system of that project provided a basis for this article.

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Court Records of Camden County, Georgia [RCCG] [Records from Camden County relevant to this paper can be found in the notes and need not be recited again; there are, however, four deeds, one will, one Minutes of the Inferior Court, and one Appraisement by order by the Court of the Ordinary (the old name for Inferior Court).]

### **Field work**

June 28-30, 2006, Cumberland Island National Seashore, 3-man team reconnaissance conducted by SEAC.

### **Interviews**

Conducted by author, with Rev. Lenworth Samuel Morrison (1973) and Beulah Alberty (1959).

### **Return to June 2007 Newsletter:**

<http://www.diaspora.uiuc.edu/news0607/news0607.html>