



September 2010 Newsletter

A Thatched Cabin on Cumberland Island, Georgia

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I wait for the Lord, my soul waits, and in his word I hope;
My soul waits for the Lord more than watchmen for the morning.
-- *Psalm 130, verse 6*

Contents

- | | |
|------------------------------------|-----------------------------------|
| 1. A Thatched Cabin | 6. Primus's Religion |
| 2. Primus Mitchell | 7. Interpretation of a Stereoview |
| 3. Cumberland's Great Inland Swamp | 8. Conclusion |
| 4. Cumberland in Wartime | References Cited |
| 5. Post-War Problems | Appendix A |

1. A Thatched Cabin

It all started with the scene shown in Figure 1. While viewing photographs in the Print Department of the New-York Historical Society, in October 1987, I came across an eye-catching, undated stereoview. Handwritten on its reverse side was "Camden County, off Georgia Coast" and "Thatched Cabin, Cumberland Island." No photographer was credited; the photo bears two different handwritings, one in ink, and one in pencil (Wendy Shadwell, Curator of Prints, New-York Historical Society, pers. comm. 1987). There was no "back list" on the picture, which would typically consist of commercial information printed on the reverse side of such an image. I immediately noticed the cabin's outstanding attribute, as had the unknown photographer: a fairly small frame cabin, seemingly one room, standing in an undistinguished open field, was roofed with a thick cover of thatch. The luxuriant thatch covered not only the roof but also the cabin's exterior walls. On the exterior at one end of the cabin stood a chimney flue, covered with large wooden shingles.



Figure 1. Stereoview photograph (New-York Historical Society Collections, PR 065; box no. 10; fldr. no. PR 065-0081-0005).

The opening of the chimney stack was level with the roof tree, or even slightly below it. A low central door faced the photographer, and presumably served as the cabin's main entrance. A wooden door-like construction stood at its side, abutting the exterior wall. In the background

gleams what appears to be a small whitewashed building. In the foreground can be seen several low tabby walls. The roof thatching hung down far enough to obstruct passage through the door.

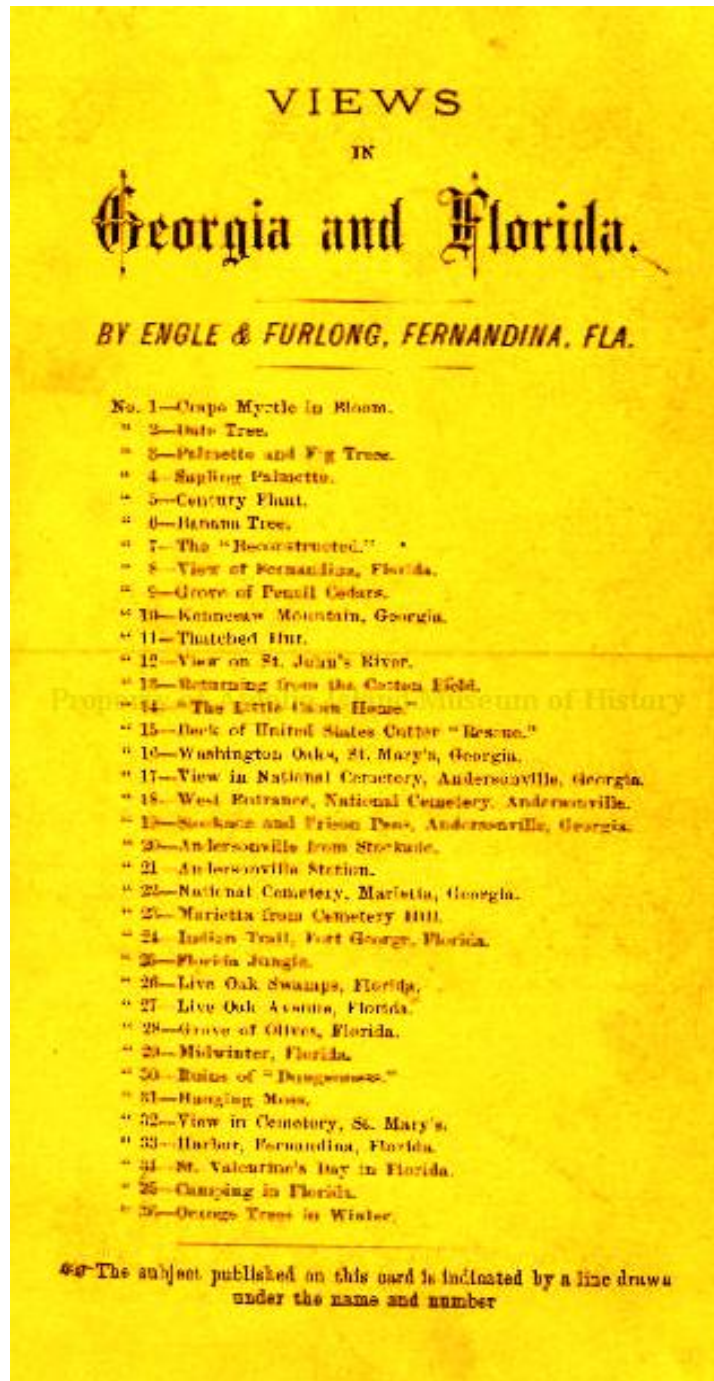


Figure 2. Back list on reverse side of an Engle & Furlong stereoview photograph (Collections of Amelia Island Museum of History).

Thatch over the door had been distinctively trimmed into a crescent-shaped cut. An extensive heap of oyster shell spills across the near foreground of the stereograph. Initially, the shell heap reminds one of a Timucuan shell midden, of which there are many on this island.

The only date immediately associated with this stereograph was its accession date, 1960-61. No recorded evidence provided a date for the image. This stereograph is presented on an unprinted, yellow-orange mount card. The albumen stereo image has rounded corners, set within the square-cornered and flat mount card. The stereograph can be dated to some degree by comparative studies of that card mount. Professional archivists estimate that it dates from the 1850s to the mid-1870s (Lee Eltzroth, pers. comm., 2009; Matthew J. Murphy, pers. comm., 2010).

Figure 2 presents another stereoview, identical to Figure 1. But this stereoview has a back list on the reverse side which states the stereoview was created and sold by “Engle & Furlong.” The back list describes the structure as a “Thatched Hut” (item no. 11), but it provides no geographic placement.



Primus Mitchell and Amanda, unknown date

Figure 3. Primus Mitchell and Amanda, his wife, ca. 1910 (private album collection, Cumberland Island scenes).

Figure 3 presents a photograph of another thatched-roof cabin on the same island. This photograph is an identifiable, labeled snapshot of a man named Primus Mitchell and his wife, Amanda, likely taken around 1912. This image came from a photo album whose many pictures (none of which are stereoviews) are either dated in ink lettering or by specific recorded evidence. The two cabins in Figures 1 and 3 are not the same building. Primus, however, definitely knew them both. Primus was a preacher, and he was protecting his church -- as he understood it. He awaited a real minister, who would come. Primus was of Gullah-Geechee heritage and was born into slavery on a Sea Island plantation in Georgia. Gullah is a word denoting ethnic and linguistic attributes of African Americans in the Sea Island regions of Georgia and the Carolinas. Geechee is sometimes used to describe the Georgia area in particular. Primus was born and died on Cumberland Island, and very likely spoke Gullah-Geechee, a creole type of English.

Many plantations had rudimentary structures where the Gullahs could “hold prays” (prayers and praise) on weekday evenings as well as Sundays. Generally speaking, northerners were appalled at the condition of the “Prays” or “Praise” Houses (e.g., Fig. 4). For black Cumberland Baptists, the Praise House somewhat resembled a plantation community hall where they related secular experiences, directed their religious lives, and openly expressed among each other their innermost frustrations. White brethren had duties and had need of frequent reminders about carrying them out. Resignations were frequent. Baptist church discipline kept alive the



Figure 4. Example of a surviving Praise House structure on St. Helena Island, SC (photograph by Dennis Adams, 2002).

“heavenly pattern which each church personified.” Discipline Committees typically met once a month. The thatched cabin shown in Figure 3 was very likely a Praise House familiar to Primus. While the locations of other such Praise Houses are unknown, others likely existed on the island (Creel 1988, ch. 7). Similarly, a cemetery for the enslaved laborers was almost surely present on Cumberland Island but has not yet been located.

Originally, I thought that, perhaps when the cabin was photographed, repairs on the main road were under way, possibly involving a bridge. To repair bridges, their access roads had to be improved, and oyster shell would have been gathered for this purpose. Crushed shell was a typical useful material for use in road repairs. The apparent midden heaps of crushed shell in the foreground of Figure 1 appeared to be in the process of being prepared for reuse. Oyster shells provide excellent drainage, and they provided very good fill material for filling ruts and depressions.

In Figure 1, it looks as if some tabby blocks had been hauled to the cabin site and deposited there, possibly to provide material to be broken up and used in such road repairs. Structural remains of tabby walls still stand on Cumberland Island (Fig. 5). Tabby

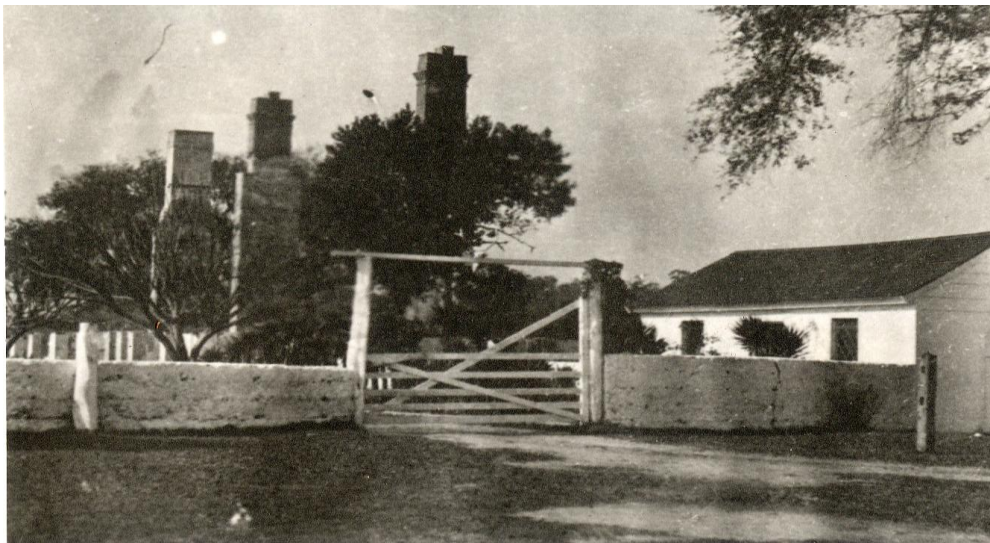


Figure 5. Photograph showing tabby blocks used in walls on Cumberland Island (1901).



Figure 6. Oyster shells: a raw material for tabby.

has good compressive strength and exposure to air hardens it; however, prolonged immersion in water causes its slow erosion and dissolution (Fig. 6). Dr. Lauren B. Sickels-Taves has made similar observations after testing original tabby from the Cumberland Island National Seashore for the National Park Service.

The building shown in Figure 3 held special significance for Primus. The cabin possessed an intangible value, not easily photographed. As an unlicensed Baptist minister, Primus would have been more than willing to open his dwelling as a church. Church attendance was part of his upbringing. Church was a place where he and his colleagues could meet, hold services, and hope to make sense of post-war conditions. The thatched-roof cabin shown in Figure 1 also may have been significant to him. Where on Cumberland Island was it located, and when was the stereoview in Figure 1 taken?

Closer examination of the photograph shown in Figure 1 yielded new data. What initially appeared to be a white-washed building in the background turns out to be a man's undershirt and socks hung out to dry. Magnification also showed the thatch to have been made of palmetto, not grass. A peculiarity of the cabin is its thatched roof. Although thatched dwellings are not uncommon generally, in the period of the 1840s-1870s distribution of such building methods was primarily in the coastal southeast of the United States, an area which had by 1865 undergone a critical sectional war. Generally speaking, the newly emancipated slaves underwent extreme economic hardship. Even the poorest black family, however, did not customarily use thatch.

Although in the hot and humid climate of summertime coastal Georgia the thermal qualities of thatch actually had many advantages, the roofs frequently caught fire.



Figure 7. Example of local salt grass.

The thatching visible in the two cabin photographs in Figures 1 and 3 turns out to consist of two different plants. The roof in Figure 3 is made of *palmetto*, a type of tree. The roof in Figure 1 is *sedge*, a grass. Both plants are common on the Georgia Sea Islands. Sedge, the name for any one of various rush- or grass-like plants constituting the genus *Carex*, is found in tidewater Georgia in any one of three coastal zones. First, next to the high land, is the high marsh border, defined as “infrequently-or rarely flooded.” *Black rush*, *salt-meadow cordgrass*, *milk-vine*, *sea lavender*, and *American three-square bullrush* grow there. Next comes the salt marsh habitat, land found between the island high land and the tidal creeks. The salt marsh zone is dominated by *smooth cordgrass*. And there is a third zone -- the grass standing furthest away from the island’s high land. Here is the *salt marsh grass-forb-rush* habitat, the one generally used by barrier islanders for their thatching sedge. You have to get your feet wet to obtain thatching sedge, and people make use of the daily tides to gather it. This grass community includes *Bigelow glasswort*, *salt grass*, *salt-water bullrush*, *nut-grass*, *black rush*, and *sea lavender*. Salt grasses with these strange and lovely names provided thatch free for the gathering (Fig. 7; Hillestad et al. 1975).

Timing was very important. The tall marsh grass must be cut when it is green. If it is cut too early, the thatch will be too short; if too late, the thatch will be insufficiently pliable. Once gathered and trimmed to a suitable size, tied bundles were laid over the roof-tree, somewhat like towels over a rack. Thatching roofs tended to be a family affair. Men mounted ladders; women and children carefully gathered the long straight bundles and handed them up. In about two years, a thatched roof will need repair, and the process will begin again (McDaniel 1982). Thatching provides shade and shelter; it is free and may usually be gathered for the asking; and it is easily repaired. But when used near the ever-present dangers of hearths and flues, dried thatch is dangerous and thoroughly combustible.

Almost all Sea Island inhabitants were capable of constructing thatch roofs, using old-time methods in coastal Georgia that dated back to the mid-eighteenth century (and much earlier if Timucuan occupation is taken into account). Oglethorpe had encouraged village construction at Fort Frederica and Cumberland for his soldiers' families. A Native American spy reported in 1738 that the British "huts" had thatched roofs. The dwelling shown in Figure 3 could have been any one of the thatched-roof cabins at Brickhill, another Cumberland Island settlement, one in which Primus was known to have resided. In 1891, the cabins in the Brickhill settlement were reported as housing black settlers who still knew how to roof their homes with thatch (Walker Papers). Nineteenth-century coastal dwellers interested in utilizing this inexpensive building material were apt to be: (1) white property holders who wanted inexpensive roofing; (2) black residents lacking title to the land on which they farm; (3) children playing at "marooners" on the beach; (4) some beach denizens, such as light-house keepers and coast guard rescuers, and, oddly enough, (5) mail-carriers who sometimes used barrier beaches as thoroughfares for their postal rounds.

Professional archaeologists have carefully examined both images. In their opinion, two different cabins were photographed. The images differ from one another in two important particulars. Not only does the thatch differ, but so does the flooring and door-sill (John E. Ehrenhard, past director, Southeast Archaeology Center, National Park Service, Tallahassee, FL., pers. comm., 2009; John M. Weeks and Jane Hill, University Museum, University of Pennsylvania, Philadelphia, pers. comm. 2009). The cabin in Figure 3 is thatched with palmetto; in Figure 1 the thatch is marsh grass (Florida Royal palm, or *Roystonea elata* and Cabbage palm,

or *Sabal palmetto*). The cabin in Figure 1 appears to use earth as its flooring; in Figure 3 the flooring appears to consist of planking.

Small-scale structures are difficult to classify. Anthropologists, in discussing fugitive communities, often distinguish between structures built by larger, more settled groups and those of smaller, more temporary groups. Members of this second category rarely build substantial houses. Many terms exist to describe dwellings built for rapidly-moving groups, such as huts, hunting camps, lean-tos, tents, tepees, and *champas*. A more substantial house usually separates living from sleeping quarters. When a structure has open and diverse uses, one might call it a cabin (La Rosa Corzo 2003).

In 1882 a wealthy Pennsylvania family named Carnegie took over administration of the properties on Cumberland Island from the estate of a deceased antebellum planter. Figure 3 appeared in an album containing photographs taken by members of this family and their numerous friends. Since the Carnegies did not arrive in the area until 1882, the cabin of Figure 1 was not photographed by anyone in the Carnegie family.

Stereo photographs are taken by means of a camera with two lenses. This provides two separate pictures 2.5 inches apart, about the distance between the eyes. Although the pictures appear the same, when looked at in a viewer, which has prismatic lenses, the two views will be “blended” by your eyes into one. The brain perceives it in three dimensions, as does normal vision.

The source of the handwritten information on the stereoview in Figure 1 remains unknown. The image may have been pirated. The numbering and distribution of stereoviews is extremely confusing. Many companies kept poor records, or did not number their views, or (in some cases) doubled up on numbers from different sets. Some publishers titled duplicate photos with several card or boxed-set variations, while others pirated views and negatives from rival photographers. Possible photographers for Figure 1 were Engle & Furlong of Fernandina, Florida, who later published the identical image for which the reverse side is shown in Figure 2.

The location of the cabin depicted in Figure 1 was determined by examining additional evidence. From 1849-1870, the United States Coast Survey worked on the preparation of a baseline survey of its North Atlantic coastline. A baseline survey is a special kind of survey whose recorded measurements will be used in the base map for the larger survey when

completed. Examining these records yields evidence that the geographic position of the thatched roof cabin in Figure 1 is latitude 30° 53' 53.729" North, longitude 81° 26' 40.605" West (Fig. 8c), which places the cabin at Brickhill landing, a site on Cumberland Island, Camden County, Georgia. Brickhill has been spelled in various ways in historical documents, and the name may derive from an historical function of the location, such as a kiln operation for making brick or lime. While this line of geographic evidence provides a partial explanation for the handwritten information on the mount of the stereoview shown in Figure 1, it does not explain why that photograph was taken. Although a surveyor and his party from the U.S. Coast Survey had placed markers about twenty feet from the cabin's chimney, they had not been ordered to photograph it.

Sub-Assistant Franklin Pierce Webber, a government surveyor who was working for the U.S. Coast Survey, determined his fixed station in 1860. Those coordinates marked Webber's exact geographic position when he had completed placing markers for his station (Fig. 8a). In a supplementary description, Webber recorded his station as follows: "Downes southernmost Negro house chimney, 1860, n.d." The letters "n.d." indicate that no description was provided for the station. Webber was recording geographic positions in order to complete work for a baseline survey. He was working on the triangulation of St. Simons and St. Andrews Sounds from December 5, 1859 through April 12, 1860, when he and his vessel reached New York. The chimney of the cabin in Figure 1 and in Webber's description stood in a clearing at Brickhill bluff near Cumberland's main north-south road (Fig. 8d). The nearest road, hardly more than a well-travelled trail, was often flooded (Fig. 8f).

Bluffs in southeastern coastal Georgia are rarely high, and Brickhill bluff is no exception, with a height ranging from 2 to 5 feet at normal high water. At high water one can almost step ashore from the vessel. Because the depth at the landing is four fathoms (roughly, 24 feet), small sloops of the eighteenth century could easily sail right up to high land, the better to offload gear,

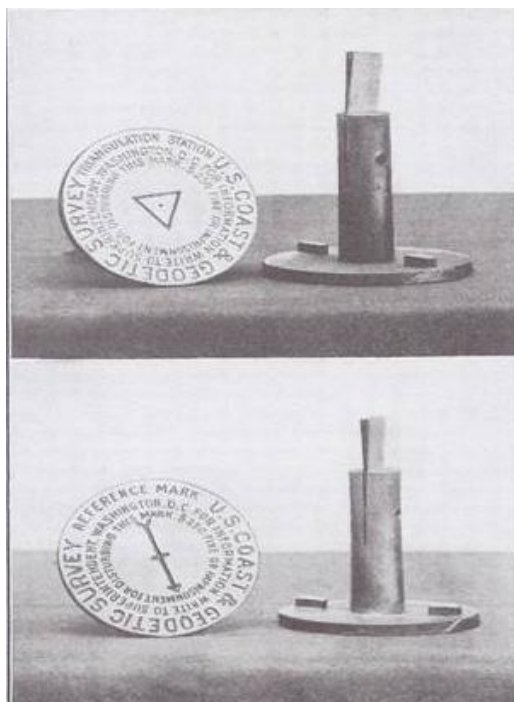


Figure 8a. Example of standard disk station-marker.¹

livestock, and passengers.² Water passage to the Sea Islands is blocked by the wide marshes, which are threaded by tributary creeks. For small vessels, the difficulty lies in finding a creek leading to the landing place of choice; for larger vessels, failure to find the “right” creek means one’s vessel may go aground. “At low tide the bluff is of course higher, and you get the beach slope leading up to a bluff with a maximum bluff height of maybe ten feet. . . . If you found the right spot at high tide you could pretty well step over from the bow . . . onto the bank” (John F. Fry, CUIS National Seashore, pers. comm. 2009).

At the same time, the marshes hid Brickhill bluff from the Inland Passage, a chain of sounds, bays, and estuaries between the mainland and the Sea Islands, making a north-south waterway from South Carolina to St. Augustine, Florida, for small craft anxious to avoid the open sea. Hidden as it was by tall grass -- sometimes twelve to fifteen feet high -- this landing

1. *Geodesy Descriptions of triangulation stations in Georgia*, by Clarence H. Swick, Special Publication No. 5, Dept. of Commerce (Washington, GPO 1917). The standard disk station marker consists of a disk and shank, as shown in Figure 8a. It is made of brass and cast in one piece.

² Drake, J.C., Ens., USN. *United States Coast and Geodetic Survey, Bulletin No. 19* (1891), “On the Sounds and Estuaries of Georgia, with Reference to Oyster Culture.”

place made a secure “safe harbor” for small sloops and piraguas, anxious to avoid unexpected encounters. In the great coastal marshes of Georgia a bluff is a low bank of high land with a sharp profile, near which is little or no ground foliage. Deep-water landings interested coastal Georgians, especially on the Sea Islands, whose western shores are shielded by almost impenetrable salt grass marsh.



Figure 8b. Brickhill bluff (1870). The oval outlines the area of the cabin settlement.³

3. T-sheet # 1152; see also "Report of the Superintendent of the United States Coast Survey, showing the progress of the survey during the year 1865." *Geographical Positions*, section V (Washington, D.C.,

Swick, Special Publication, #43, Triangulation in Georgia. Washington, GPO, 1917 unnumbered page

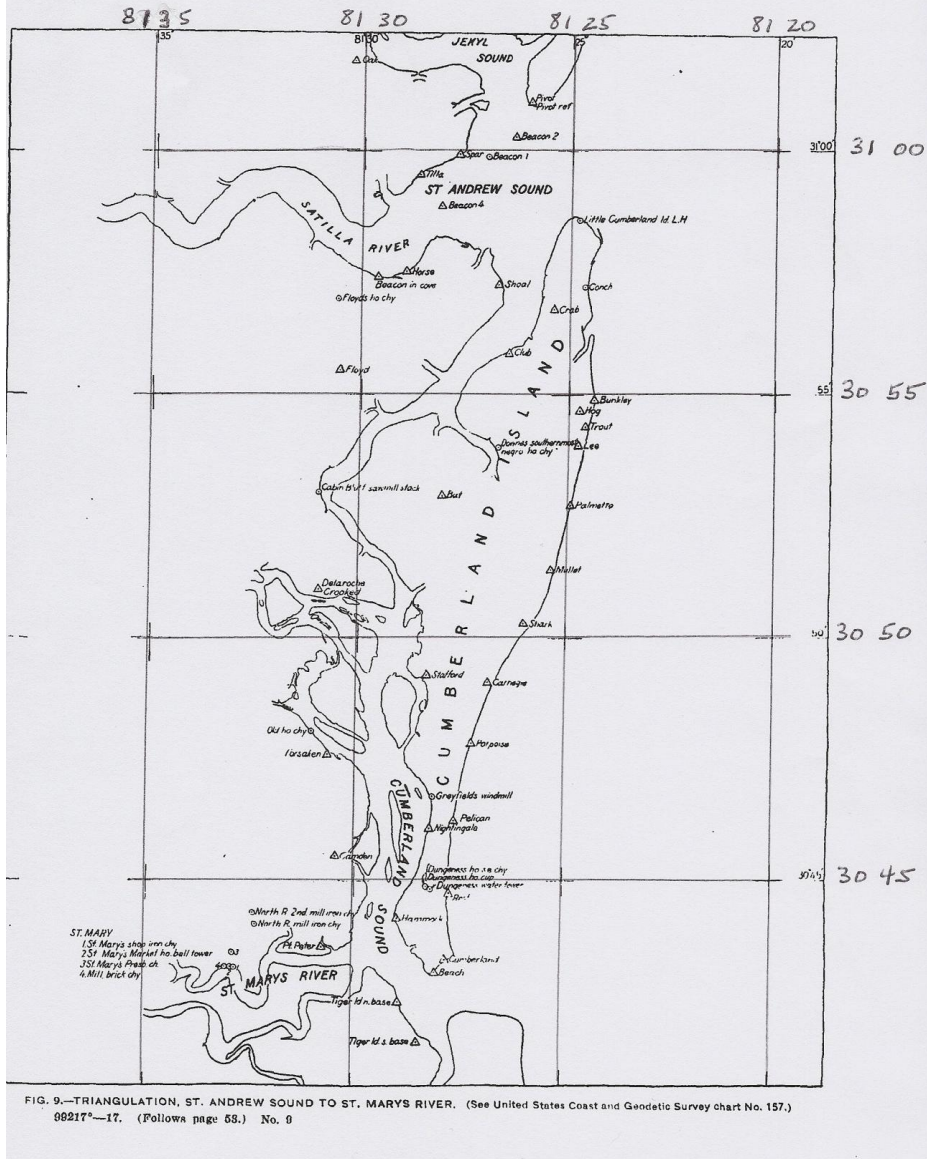


Figure 8c. Coordinates of the Brickhill settlement.⁴

GPO 1867), 51, in "Report of the Superintendent of United States Coast Survey. Geographical Positions Section", 116.

4. "Triangulation, St. Andrew Sound to St. Marys River," Figure 9, from Swick, *Special Publication No. 43* (GPO, Washington, DC, 1917). Parallels and meridians inserted by researcher Barbara Walsh.

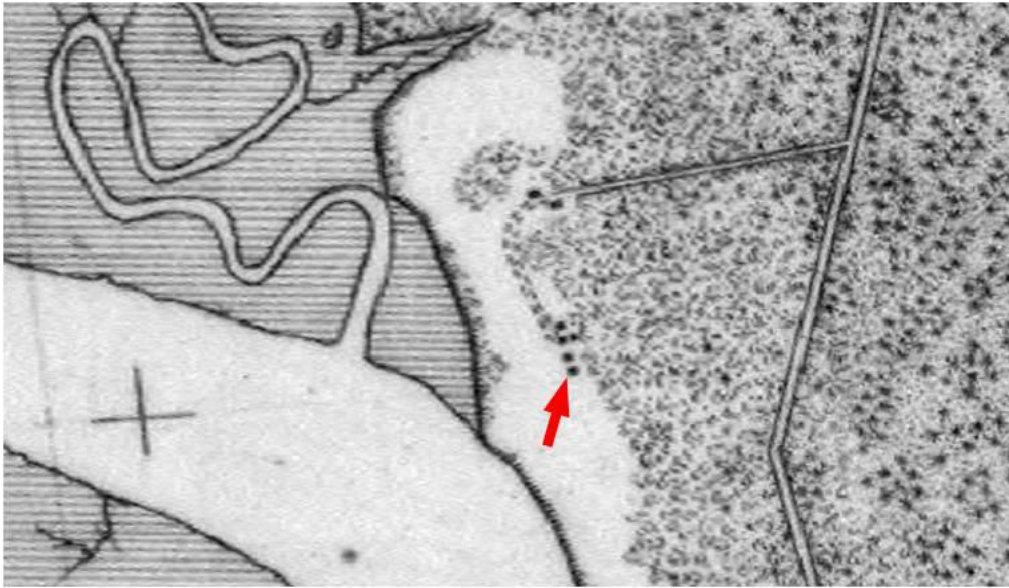


Figure 8d. Brickhill bluff, from a T-sheet. This image is from a Coast survey map, also known as a topographic sheet or T-sheet. They are topographic maps of the coastal perimeter of the United States and its major rivers.⁵

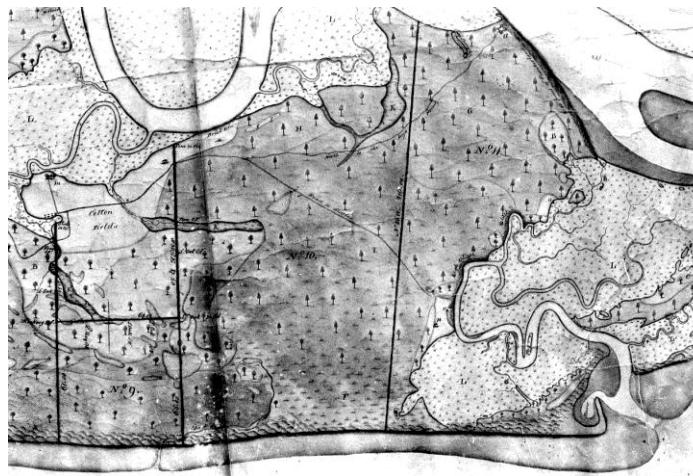


Figure 8e. Brickhill bluff (McKinnon map, 1802; courtesy of William R. Bullard).

5. U.S. Coast Survey. "Part of Cumberland Island and Vicinity Georgia" [T-sheet, topo map]. Surveyed by W. H. Dennis. Date of publication: 1870. Scale: 1 to 20,000. Register No. 1152. <http://alabamamaps.ua.edu/historicalmaps/Coastal%20Survey%20Maps/georgia.htm>.

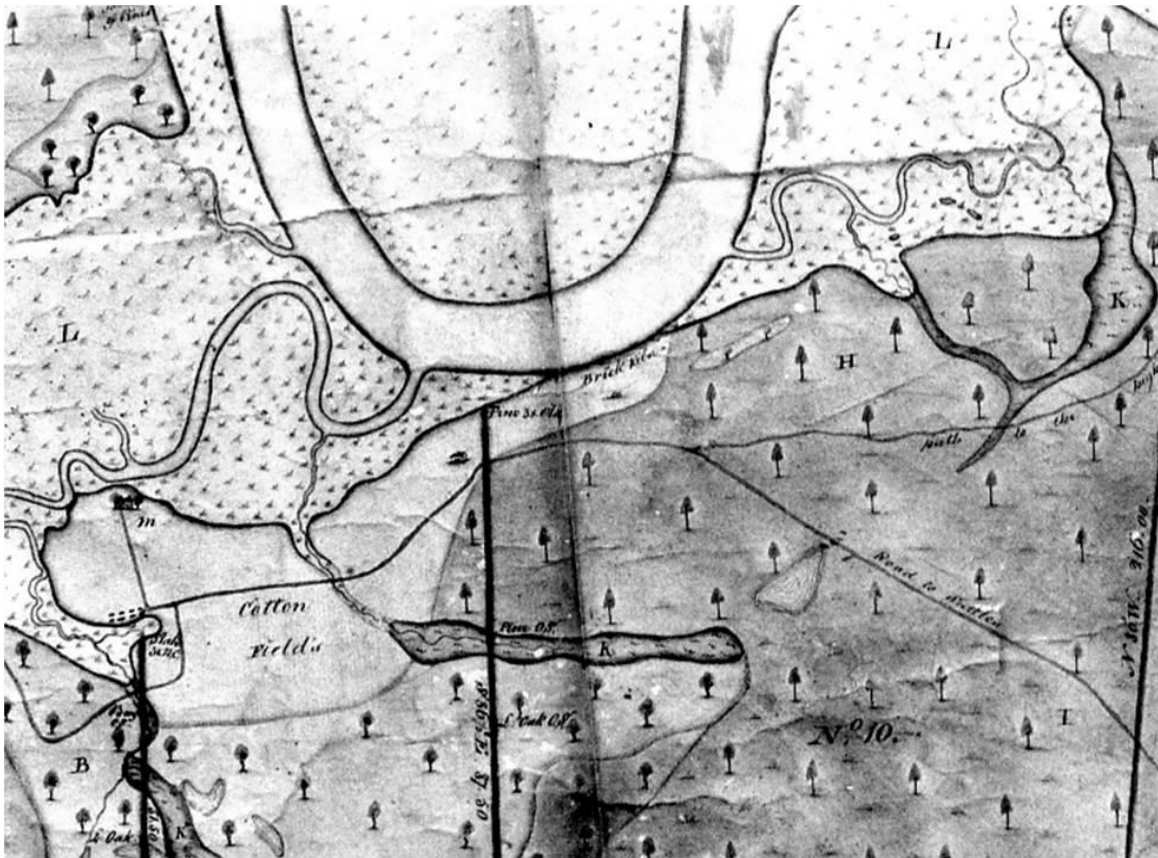


Figure 8f. Enlarged image of Brickhill in 1802. Note the spelling of “Brick Kiln” for Brickhill.

2. Primus Mitchell

During the immediate post-Civil War months, some Sea Island freedmen like Primus Mitchell (ca. 1825-1915) went to a good deal of trouble to remain on Cumberland. Not all freedmen left “their” island. Even after their status changed from enslaved to free, many freedmen tried to remain. They believed they had permission to call the land they tilled their property, and they wished to remain at home. Primus desired to stay on Cumberland for additional reasons which were peculiarly his. He was an unlicensed preacher who very likely felt an obligation to his church.

Primus was born into slavery on Rayfield Plantation. Rayfield was the name given to a small group of cotton fields on Cumberland Island that had been planted as early as 1802. Primus’ first appearance in the historical record was in 1834, when he was about nine years old. He appeared on a slave inventory, named Prime (perhaps a name for a first-born son). He grew

up to become a field hand. In later life, Primus told people he was born as property of Robert Stafford at Rayfield. Primus's birth year was around 1825. If so, Primus was born as a slave owned by Nathaniel Greene, son of the famous deceased general. Primus's first appearance in documentary records was on a land conveyance between Greene and Stafford when Greene sold Primus with the property called Rayfield (RCCG, Deed Bk. M 1834). Stafford paid \$11,000 for land and 53 slaves. The Rayfield plantation housed approximately 68 slaves in total, as Greene had sold 13 other laborers to Stafford the previous year (1833).

Because of the position of Primus's name in a slave inventory, written below the name "Judy," a young woman (estimated age 21 or somewhat younger), I had thought Judy was either his mother or his sister. From other evidence, I am now fairly certain that "Prime" and "Juda" were siblings. Stafford, a prominent Cumberland planter, had two wives in succession who were enslaved African Americans. I think Judah was his second mistress. They were termed "black" and "concubines" by the definitions then current in Georgia. Her children were sent by their father to free states well before the war.⁶

A white man from Rhode Island named Ethan Clarke was Rayfield Plantation's administrator when Primus was born. Clarke was not a complete success as a cotton planter. After an incident of some sort, in 1829 Clarke relinquished his Rayfield lease ahead of schedule to its owner, Greene. At that date, young Greene, having soundly renounced any further connection with slavery, departed with his wife and children for Rhode Island. His friend Stafford took over Rayfield's administration, including Greene's chattel property. Stafford purchased Rayfield five years later in 1834.

In 1837 the Cumberland Island mail carrier mentioned a Baptist mission church built two and a half miles north of Stafford's house.⁷ The mission church proved to be a major influence in young Primus's (age 12) life. I know of no other church for Cumberland's slave population.

6. In a 1906 court case, Primus Mitchell was called upon to testify that he was familiar with the children of Judy. See Bullard, *Robert Stafford of Cumberland Island: Growth of a Planter* (University of Georgia: Athens, 1995). See also Bullard and Castle, "Frau Doktor Nancy Stafford of Georgia: From Slave to Physician," *African Diaspora Archaeological Newsletter*, March 2009.

7. In ca. 1890 Cray Pratt, mail carrier in 1837, identified the location of the church. See Mary R. Bullard, "Ned Simmons, American Slave: The Role of Imagination in Narrative History," *African Diaspora Archeological Newsletter*, June 2007, 49-50, fns. 84, 85.

As a grown man Primus was noticeably religious.

Possibly Clarke had failed to react to the request of enslaved workers at Rayfield for a meeting house. Or perhaps black Baptist elders had pressured planter Stafford, the new owner, to build them a “praise house.” In the early days of the 19th century black elders were still able to achieve meaningful pastoral participation. The continued existence of Cumberland’s slave church may explain why, in post-bellum years, unlike many freedmen, Primus Mitchell did not permanently leave Cumberland Island. I think Mitchell considered the old church his responsibility and tried to protect it from intrusion and vandalism.

Primus Mitchell remained on Stafford’s plantation during the War. In 1863 Stafford reported that he had seventeen slaves working for him.⁸ No doubt Stafford paid them.⁹

Primus was in his mid-thirties at Stafford plantation when Confederate guerillas -- irregular forces, to be sure, but armed, imperious, and dangerous -- landed in 1862 and again in 1863 on the island. They entered Stafford plantation to rob it of food and stored cotton. Such armed intrusions were often designed to capture slaves. I feel certain that Stafford made every effort to help Mitchell and his family absent themselves during these raids.

On March 2, 1862 awestruck Cumberland residents watched the arrival of Union forces as Commodore Samuel Francis Du Pont’s naval squadron steamed and sailed into Fernandina harbor. The U.S. army and navy took over the city on March 3-5. On March 7, 1862, a small band of “contraband” (about fifteen persons, including children) from Cumberland entered Union lines at Fernandina. They entered shortly after the arrival of the Union squadron. The whole group declared itself Stafford property. Almost surely they were seeking Union protection

8. RCCG, “Tax Digests, 1840-1863. Jeffersonton District.” Stafford was punctilious about obeying Georgia law. Among the 17 enslaved laborers whom he reported owning in 1863, were his 2 daughters and their mother whom he had conveyed to Fernandina, a Union garrison, for their personal safety. Unfortunately, the laborers’ names were not given on the tax digest.

9. Stafford’s principal bank in Georgia was the National Bank of the Republic of New York. Organized before the war under the laws of New York, it was nevertheless a Georgia bank, established by Gazaway Bugg Lamar, a successful cotton grower and broker in Savannah. During the war Stafford found ways to communicate with it. On 6 July 1865 Edmund Spalding reported he had rejected Stafford’s offer to pay him to go to Savannah for unstated purposes. For *banking*: Bullard, *Robert Stafford of Cumberland Island*, 288-289. For *Edmund Spalding*: NA, Provost Marshal Field Organizations (Civil War), Post of Fernandina Records, RG 393, E-1600, “Miscellaneous Records of the Provost Marshal, 1863-1865,” Vol. 2.

from Stafford's guerilla attackers.

A group referred to as the "Mitchel" [sic] group consisted of eight people. Primus Mitchell was not among them. The Mitchel group consisted of Amanda Mitchel, age 24, accompanied by Catherina Mitchel, age 5, Dority [Dorothy?] Mitchel, 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. Since hatred of Stafford seems not to have been their chief motivation, possibly fear of kidnapping by Confederate raiders (Stafford's principal enemies at this time) prompted them to go to Fernandina in 1862. In such a decision, Stafford, a pragmatic man, assuredly made every effort to assist them.¹⁰

Between 1862 and 1864 an informal black settlement developed at Dungeness.¹¹ Orders had been given in 1862 by Commodore DuPont to protect the mansion and property belonging to the descendants of General Nathanael Greene,¹² and a guard from Fernandina had been sent to watch over it. Rations were sent from Fernandina for the guard and, in 1864, for refugees camping around the "Big House." They had rounded up some of Cumberland's open-range

10. Cooper, Pamela J. and Kathlyn Graham, eds., 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 (Heritage Books, 2002, Bowie, MD). For Primus Mitchel [sic] family, see p. 50. Source stated by Graham and Cook (p. vii) to have been NA, RG 393, item #4289. At the head of each page of that document is printed "November, 1864." Item #4289 is very likely a Union officer's compendium (made in 1864) of current and previous lists. Evidently (as per the whole document) the little "Mitchel" group came into Union-occupied Fernandina in 1862, eleven months before the Emancipation Proclamation.

11. Dungeness is an English place-name of a prominent cobble-spit promontory on the Kentish coast, long famed as a marine hazard for Channel shipping. In the 1760s an unknown marine surveyor or pilot gave the name to Cumberland's distinctive sand-spit promontory marking the entrance to Amelia sound. The Greene family named their plantation on Cumberland after its American place-name. See Bullard, "In Search of Cumberland Island's Dungeness: Its Origins and English Antecedents," GHQ, v. LXXVI (Spring 1992) no. 1, pp. 67-86.

12. Commodore DuPont's "Official Report of the Occupation of St. Augustine," 13 March 1862, stated he had arranged with Brig. Genl. Wright that "our joint occupation of the Florida and Georgia coasts . . . [will include] protection from injury to the mansion and grounds of Dungeness, on Cumberland Island, originally the property of the revolutionary hero and patriot, Gen. Greene, and still owned by his descendants . . ." In *The Examiner* (St. Augustine) 13 March 1862; newspaper published by the Fourth New Hampshire Regiment, State of Florida Library (Tallahassee).

livestock to pen them within the famous Dungeness gardens. Dungeness served as an emerging market place for famished African Americans among the contraband groups.

Desirable land for the new class of agriculturists meant areas which they knew from experience were zones where successful market crops could be raised. Primus and his peers did not hope to plant cotton. They were rediscovering the commercial value of their homegrown crops. Their gardens could earn them money. Food staples below ground belonged to the landowner. Food staples growing above ground were, of course, available for the picking. Contrabands successfully harvested crops to sell to willing customers. The Union squadron had already benefitted from the agricultural skills of contrabands. Two contrabands from Sapelo Island -- Old Billy and Uncle Allie -- made their appearance at 4 PM in a dugout, having sweet potatoes, pumpkins, etc., to sell. Their goods met with a ready sale.

Dr. Boyer, a naval surgeon, reported buying and savoring peanuts (a popular item from St. Catharines Island), turnips, corn, and honey. Dugout canoes carrying these delicious items to Union vessels disposed of their cargo in a short time. On October 23, 1863, several officers returned from a tramp upon Sapelo Island, perfectly delighted with their stay. "Old Sampson reports that all their crops were splendid -- corn by the hundred bushels, pumpkins by the cartload, and potatoes (sweet) plenty to supply nearly all creation." The officers returned carrying sacks of peaches, figs, and watermelons. The mess cooks, serving up a dinner for the gentlemen of fresh beef, potatoes, corn bread, and eggs, were applauded.¹³

One Georgia ex-slave recalled that the St. Simons colony consisted of numerous small settlements "just like little villages." Despite fear of Confederate attack, women and children were free to move about at will and engage in social activities forbidden during slavery.¹⁴ On St. Simons, Sapelo, St. Catherines, Ossabaw and elsewhere, agricultural operations centered around food production and were apparently conducted on both a collective and an individual basis. The formerly enslaved combined subsistence farming with limited cash transactions in ways which harkened back to their previous commercial dealing in the rural South. They frequently sold

13. Elinor Barnes and James A. Barnes, eds. *Naval Surgeon: Blockading the South, 1861-1866: The Diary of Samuel Pellman Boyer* (Bloomington, 1963), 89, 181, 203.

14. Willie Lee Rose, *Rehearsal for Reconstruction: The Port Royal Experiment* (Oxford University Press, 1976), 166.

vegetables and poultry to the crews of nearby warships, and the women took in sailors' washing to earn extra money.¹⁵ Food production was an important function of these villages.

Special Orders 15, establishing the Sherman Reservation (January 16, 1865) specified that freedmen could request permission to settle an island or an area of land within this reservation when "three respectable negroes, heads of families" came together for that purpose. Once the "inspector of plantations and settlements" (as Sherman designated the officer in charge of the area and of the process by which the former slaves would settle it) approved the request, the freedmen could claim their land and subdivide it among themselves and any other freedmen who wished to settle near them, allotting no more than forty acres of tillable ground to each family.¹⁶

A "special census" of 1865 showed colored persons (presumably refugees) on Amelia Island.¹⁷ On it were Primus (40), and his wife, Amanda (30), with two daughters, Dorothy (8), and "Katherine" (6). This special census also showed his friend Rogers Alberti (40), his wife, Ellen (24) and their year-old son, William.¹⁸ Listed immediately after Mitchell and Alberti were the Webber and Price families, headed by Craig Webber (40), his wife Esther (24), and their daughter, Barbara (5); and by Calvin Price (45), his wife Maria (44), Sarah Samuel (26), possibly their daughter, with her son Theodore (10), and her daughter Lucinda (8).¹⁹

Mitchell, Alberti, Craig Webber and Calvin Price were exactly the sort of "respectable" African Americans that white planters (and Federal officers) would encourage to settle near the fertile soils of Cumberland's Great Inland Swamp --- family men and agriculturists who knew

15. Clarence L. Mohr. "Before Sherman: Georgia Blacks and the Union War Effort, 1861-1864," *The Journal of Southern History* (Vol. XLV, No. 3, August 1979), 331-352.

16. Paul A. Cimbala. "The Freedmen's Bureau, the Freedmen, and Sherman's Grant in Reconstruction Georgia, 1865-1867," *The Journal of Southern History* (vol. LV, No. 4, November 1989) p. 599.

17. General Orders No. 154 directed the Provost Marshal General to do a "census of all persons within the military lines of this Department." RG 393, E-4285. "Lists of refugees. 1864-65."

18. William Alberti grew up to become one of the 4 trustees of the "Col'd Baptist Church of Cumberland Island." RCCG, Deed Bk. "V," p. 425, 9 May 1894. His brother, Rodgers [sic] Alberti, with William, bought 2 other house lots on Cumberland in 1894. Fanny Mitchell, daughter of Primus, married Thomas Alberti, descendant of Rogers, 25 Aug. 1896. She bought a house lot at High Point as a widow.

19. For Rodgers Alberti, son of Rogers Alberti, see Figure 9.

how to plant food crops. Alberti's wife, Ellen, was a Cumberland Islander, from an industrious family.²⁰

All four men were friends of one another. They stood next to each other to register for this census, they are in the same age group, and all are family men. Primus Mitchell and Rogers Alberti were to remain life-long friends. Three of them (Alberti, Webber, and Mitchell) gave Stafford as the name of their former owner. Price, naming no former master, said his family was free.²¹



Figure 9. Rodgers Alberti, ca. 1920, on Cumberland Island.

20. Ellen was a slave laborer of the Bunkley plantation. See Mary Miller, Bunkley family's slave lists.

21. NA, RG 393, Post of Fernandina Records: E-1600. *Miscellaneous records of the Provost Marshal, 1863-65, Volume 2*, "Census of Colored Persons on Amelia Island Fla. taken pursuant to Special Order No [number not given] from Post Hd Qrs 1865." Probably General Orders no. 154.

3. Cumberland's Great Inland Swamp

Primus's church was the Cumberland African Church, established in 1837. Built with Nightingale and Stafford's approval, at its inception this Baptist mission served as a small biracial church.²² It was very likely built on Tract 7. At that time there was no other church on the island, although services may have been held at Dungeness House when the Nightingale family was in residence. Its site was doubtless selected because of its proximity to water. The "outflow," long ago straightened and deepened to become a canal, may have held associations for Primus of baptism through immersion, an essential part of spiritual rebirth for Baptists. Damming the canal would have been quite possible. A former Virginia slave reported on immersion at his plantation.

Dey dammed up de crick on Sadday so as it would be deep enough on Sunday . . . At dem baptizin's dere was all sorts of shoutin', and dey would sing *Roll, Jordan, Roll, De Livin' Waters*, and *Lord, I'se Comin' Home*.²³

This particular planting area abutted Cumberland's valuable "Inland Swamp." So desirable was inland swamp acreage that the very first Crown grantees sought land grants there as early as 1765. Local residents' utilization of this inland swamp, as shown by its numerous canals, banks, and ditches, dates back to the 1770s when an entrepreneurial family named Lynch from South Carolina tried to regulate its drainage for rice production. Tracts 6-7 included a large portion of the Inland Swamp. For over two centuries agriculturists have been draining what are still called Old and New Swamp Fields. As a result, about two and a half miles of artificial

22. For name of church: *Sunbury Baptist Association Minutes, 1834-1864*, entry for 1847, "The Cumberland African Church applied for admission, which was granted . . ." One of its longtime delegates was a black man named B. Nightingale, elsewhere an unusual surname, but not uncommon on Cumberland Island. The church had 124 African-American members. The author is grateful to Robert G. Gardner, Senior Archivist, Mercer University, 11 Nov. 2006. For details regarding the church, see Mary R. Bullard, *Ned Simmons, American Slave: The Role of Imagination in Narrative History* (ADAN, Newsletter, June 2007).

23. Alfred J. Raboteau, *Slave Religion: The "Invisible Institution" in the Antebellum South*. (1978), p. 227, citing *The American Slave: A Composite Autobiography*, ed. George P. Rawick (vol. 13, Georgia Narratives, pt. 3, 252-53; vol. 17, Florida Narratives, p. 245), Greenwood Pub. Co., Westport, CT. (1972).

canals have been excavated, enabling plantation owners to utilize the rich soil of Cumberland's inland swamp. Tract 7's southernmost portion, which contained about 1,500 acres criss-crossed by relict banks, is still called "Bank Field."²⁴



Figure 10. Great Inland Swamp (1802). The dark irregularly-shaped area marks Great Inland Swamp on an 1802 map of Cumberland. Its drainage, indicated here by a stream from the swamp flowing into Brickhill River, is fresh water until it comes up against saline water brought by the daily incoming tide.²⁵

Typically, rice was grown in inland swamps, usually fed by a brackish tidal stream, by accumulating water in a reservoir, then releasing the stored water for the irrigation of fields as required during the growing season. Fields were then alternately drained and refilled as required

24. Mary R. Bullard, "Title Search for Great and Little Cumberland Island, Camden County, Georgia," typescript, copyrighted Nov. 1, 2001. See Great Swamp Field (southern portion), original grantee, James Bulloch, granted June 5, 1765.

25. This map is published in *The Papers of General Nathanael Greene, Volume XIII: 22 May 1783 - 13 June 1786, with Additions to the Series*, edited by Roger N. Parks (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2005). Original is at the Georgia Dept. of Archives & History. Carnegie heirs found this map on Cumberland Island and donated it to Archives.

by the various stages of growing and weeding.²⁶ Weeds and grass were suppressed by salt water flooding. While Lynch owners doubtless had ordered clearing and flooding Cumberland's inland swamp in preparation for rice-planting, this long and cruelly fatiguing task was interrupted by the American Revolution, and rice production never became much of a money crop on this island. Instead, the Greene family ownership invested in cotton with profitable results.

Inland swamps tend to have natural drainage systems. These natural drainage systems are called "outflows" (streams). When the season has been a wet one or when the inland swamp is saturated, outflows make road travel difficult. The island, a slender, elongated body of land, has only one north-south road. Where an outflow crosses the road, its rapidly-flowing stream eventually causes wash-outs.²⁷

Old Swamp Field is a freshwater wetland, containing four springs.²⁸ Smaller patches of freshwater wetland dot the agricultural areas of Cumberland. Many are fed by natural springs. When saturated, these patches overflow. When the outflows cross the main road, the resulting watery places (which can be quite deep) can be further deepened by incoming tidal streams. Cumberland's main road has always been important to island residents. Although numerous trails exist, there is no other north-south road. To travel directly from one end of the island to the other, the traveler takes either the main road or the beach. Occasionally the torrential summer rains of southeastern Georgia create impassable wash-outs which cannot be forded or detoured (see Fig. 11). Where an outflow crosses the main road, small bridges or culverts are necessary. The slippery passage through the stream bed is risky for mule- or ox-hauled wagons. With the onset of war repairs on the main road slowed down or ceased.

26. "All Under Bank": Roswell Kin, Jr., and Plantation Management in Tidewater Georgia, 1819-1854, ed. and introd. by Buddy Sullivan (sponsored by the Liberty County Historical Society, 2003)

27. Hillestad *et al.*, 45-7, water resources, by James Richardson. See also Frick, E.A., Gregory, M.B., Calhoun, D.L., and Hopkins, E. H., "Water Resources Investigations Report," United States Geological Survey [*Water Resour. Invest. Res. U.S. Geol. Surv.*] no. 4082, [np]. 2002, for Cumberland's 2500 acres of what the authors call *freshwater wetlands*.

28. Hillestad *et al.*, p. 62, see sections on outflows; aquifers, by James Richardson.



Figure 11. Tidal stream, at half-tide, on Cumberland's main road (courtesy Nancy Butler, 1960s).

Thomas Carnegie, brother of the steel magnate, made his initial purchase in this region in 1881. Photographs of Primus and Amanda were taken by members of this family. The Carnegies were quite unfamiliar with the American South. They knew little of the inheritance bequeathed by slavery. Primus to them was little more than an elderly man, affable and voluble. When the Carnegies first met Mitchell in the mid-1880s, he lived near the Stafford Outflow: “very close to the Canal, just a few feet away from it.”²⁹

29. “I remember Uncle Primus very well. He lived in Banks Field on the canal when I knew him. Aunt Amanda had already died and had been buried at High Point. . . Mr. Stafford was very good to them. They had good food and he [Primus] showed me the two chimneys that face each other, which was the hospital When my grandfather came, he [Primus] and Amanda were still there, and [they] were given

The Carnegies thought Primus lived at Bank Field. “Primus lived in a rickety old cabin beyond the bridge, in Banks Field.” Clearly remembering Primus’s cabin, they were unequivocal about its location. “Once Primus and Amanda came over when we were having a picnic and talked with us.” Nan laughed as she recollected how her whole family watched Amanda covertly extending an almost-prehensile big toe to reach a silver spoon which had fallen to the ground, only to see its owner retrieve it at the last possible moment. “Primus talked in a gabbling sort of way,” said Lucy. He was a good man, recollected Nan. He was crazy, said Lucy. Island blacks believed his wife Amanda was a witch and took good care to stay out of her way.

Mitchell was among the seventeen persons reported as laborers at Stafford plantation during wartime. Although Mitchell’s peers were reluctant to submit to white control, he personally was not unwilling to work for Stafford. As freedman, Mitchell knew Bank Field (adjacent to Big Old Field), already cleared, was eminently suitable for growing the small plot of corn, melon, and okra he planned. Hunting and fishing would take up the balance of Mitchell’s time. He could preside over his church. Perhaps the church -- through Primus -- could once more find a deacon.

The exact location of Stafford’s main provision fields remains unknown. A provision field is the area where plantation administrators provided space to grow food for enslaved personnel. Little is known of Cumberland’s agricultural layout, and one can only suppose much of it was planted for home consumption. Of that amount, some was for humans and some became fodder.

4. Cumberland in Wartime

After 1862, Cumberland Island was largely abandoned by its residents, most of whom were Confederate sympathizers. Four landholding households did not abandon their land. Robert Stafford remained at his home, Planter’s House; Edmond Spalding, the lighthouse keeper, and his family stayed at their farm on the island’s North End; Rachel Church, a middle-aged woman remained at Cumberland’s High Point (Spalding and Church, who were kinfolk,

the cabin where I knew him.” Nancy C. Rockefeller to author, 1990; Nancy Carnegie Rockefeller, *The Carnegies & Cumberland Island* (privately printed 1993), p. 258.

lived on adjacent farms); and the Unionist Clubb family remained at High Point. Although most Confederate property owners departed for the mainland where they felt safer, the island was not totally deserted. From visitors carrying military passes, to the occasional Union or Confederate deserter, to shipwrecked passengers and their ships' officers, to outright cattle thieves, there was no telling who would be met on the island's roads and trails. A large turpentine camp on the island was maintained by Confederate sympathizers.³⁰ Island residents who remained on their property were thought to be Unionists, but few people were perfectly certain where Stafford's allegiances lay.

A few Cumberland Island slaves departed their homes in 1862, possibly for their own safety, a week after the arrival of Union forces in Fernandina. Many more slaves left in January 1863 immediately after the Emancipation Proclamation.³¹ By mid-1863, not only was there a shortage of hands to gather food crops, but Confederate forces more frequently gathered, guerilla style, to descend upon the islanders to take what little food they had left. A wartime visitor reported one such foray to Congress.³²

I refer to the great Cumberland island lying off the coast of Georgia, the greater part of which is owned by Colonel Stafford; he was born and brought up there; he is now an old gentleman seventy-four or seventy-five years of age. About a year ago, before the war ended, I visited him on his island; he was living there all alone, attended by two or three negro women, all the servants that were left to him on his immense plantation of thirty thousand acres, of which ten thousand are under plough. When the war broke out the confederates ordered off both islands all the

30. In 1865 "Regulators" from the mainland threatened Union officers with raids. On April 8 Henry Peoples, a refugee from "Rebel Land," gave information about a proposed attack upon Cumberland Is. "They propose to land at the turpentine works, enter the works, and leaving destroyed and pillaged everything accessible to effect their attack." NA, RG 393, E-1421.

31. Cooper, Pamela J. and Kathlyn Graham, eds., 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* (Heritage Books, 2002, Bowie, MD)

32. Report of Mr. Wells of his conversations with Mr. Robert Stafford of Cumberland Island, in report to Congress (1866) 39th Congress, 1st session, House of Representatives, Report, No. 30, pt. 2. "Reconstruction," submitted by the Select Committee on Reconstruction, United States Congressional Serial Set (U.S. G.P.O.), p.112.

people, white and black. In some instances they did not go, and among those who remained was Colonel Stafford. The confederates came in boats to remove his corn and his cotton; he understood they were coming to remove his cotton, and he determined they should not have it. He first asked them to let him alone, saying he was an old man beyond the conscript age; that he was on an island: that he wanted no excitement, and wanted to be let alone on his own little island. They determined to remove his property and to remove him, but he declined to go alive, and they let him alone. He had, as he informed me, six hundred bales of Sea-Island cotton of his own raising, piled up and in his gin houses. He set his negroes to work piling up that cotton, and on the approach of the confederates to carry it away, rather than they should have it, he fired it and he burned it up. He would have fired all his corn-cribs, but he could not do it without burning all his buildings; consequently they loaded their vessels with his corn and carried it away. He had a twenty-thousand acre range of pasture land on which he had large droves of cattle. The confederate forces drove off steamboat-loads of his cattle for their use; the federal gunboats came in and drove them away, and the federals helped themselves to beef, and pork, and honey, &., so that the old gentleman was awfully stripped by both armies, while he never gave anything to either. Among other things, as he told me, three hundred of his able-bodied negro men went either into the United States army or the United States navy. [A]nd now the old gentleman says, standing on his porch with tears flowing down his face, and with his long gray locks floating in the wind, "Here I am with nothing but the land, and the order of General Sherman takes me off the island."³³

Although Mitchell's family fled to Fernandina, Primus himself remained on Cumberland Island, not anxious to join the crowds of displaced slaves seeking refuge in Fernandina. Mitchell's family went to a Union garrison town for their personal safety, thereby introducing Primus to missionary Ansel E. Kinne (1820-1890). Primus would have identified himself as a

33. In referring to General Sherman's order, Stafford was referring to Circular Order No.13, Article III (2 July 1864) defining "abandoned land." This order preceded the more far-reaching order which established the "Sherman Reservation" in 1865. Of this episode, a Camden County boy named William Frederick Penniman (1843-1908) recollected: "It was about this time Mr. Robert Stafford, a very wealthy bachelor on Cumberland, deliberately fired some 300 bales of Sea Island cotton, worth at that time around \$1.25 per pound, to keep it from being seized by the Federals." *Penniman Papers*, p. 22, at University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, Southern Historical Collection. Young Penniman assumed Stafford was a Confederate sympathizer like himself.

gardener for Mr. Stafford and -- perhaps at Kinne's instigation -- may have promised to find additional field hands to settle there with him. It would be a natural development if he had done so. The army was unable to feed all the hungry refugees.

In March 1865 Kinne was appointed an agent of the Bureau of Refugees, Freedmen, and Abandoned Lands (BRFAL) in Fernandina. The year before, in 1864, Kinne, with his wife and his sister-in-law, had been working as missionaries in that seaport. This meant Kinne was the first missionary to deal with the African-American encampment which was developing at the Dungeness area, at Cumberland's southern end. The Dungeness area traditionally turned to Amelia Island for its news and supplies. Fernandina, only two easy miles away by water, had long provided the southern portion of Cumberland with its basic provisions.

When the BRFAL was established (January 1, 1865), many volunteer missionaries withdrew, but some were urged to stay on as Bureau appointees. Kinne remained to become a civilian employee. He was appointed Assistant Superintendent of Teachers in January 1865 by General Rufus Saxton, and in April Saxton appointed Kinne as Superintendent of Freedmen at Fernandina, Florida. Too valuable an individual for the Bureau to lose, Kinne subsequently became the first Sub-Assistant Commissioner of the BRFAL in Fernandina. He was succeeded in this post by Captain Thomas Leddy, sometime in November 1866, Kinne having become by that time the Superintendent of Education, by order of General J. Lyman of the BRFAL.³⁴

Kinne remained at this post in Florida until 1867, reporting voluminously on public education in that state. In his professional career as educator, he seems to have been an

34. Kinne was the eighth son of Prentice Kinne (father of eleven children), a farmer in Onondaga Co., N.Y. Young Kinne studied at Casenovia Seminary, a Methodist-Episcopalian institution with an active missionary department. The students of his first school assembled in a log cabin in DeWitt, N.Y. He married (1849) Emma Merrick of Syracuse. In the spring of 1851, he removed to Syracuse, built a house in the Fifth Ward, and entered business for four years. In 1855, he was made principal of Prescott School in Syracuse, where he remained until January 1864. In 1864 Kinne, his wife, and sister-in-law Chloe Merrick, were sent by the American Freedmen's Union Commission (AFUC) to Fernandina, to become civilian teachers to the freedmen. He was offered the appointment of Superintendent of Schools of the State of Florida but was obliged to decline this appointment, as it came after he had planned to return north for the education of his children. In November 1867 he returned with his wife to Syracuse, where he resumed teaching. He remained in this school, doing -- as he always had -- "missionary work in trying to reclaim the truant and disobedient belonging to his school" until his death on January 16, 1890. Edward Smith, *A History of the Schools of Syracuse from Its Earliest Settlement to January 1, 1893*, 308-09 (Syracuse, NY, 1893: C.W.Bardeen, Publisher).

unusually able administrator. Kinne handled both his army and missionary careers with outstanding efficiency and clear-headedness. Although he dealt with many Cumberland Island problems, his reports and correspondence appear frequently in the BRFAL's Florida records rather than Georgia. The Kinne family resided in Fernandina. He did much of his office work in Fort Clinch.

Food shortages in Fernandina in early March 1864 were causing distress among the swelling number of contrabands. In an effort to follow his rather confusing orders from the Army, Kinne sent a group of refugees in Fernandina back to Dungeness where food and some planting implements were distributed to them for subsistence purposes. A new settlement, whose location was not given, was beginning to develop. A year later (in a letter dated September 30, 1865) another Bureau agent named Eaton reported a growing settlement "at the property once owned by Mr. Nightingale." Of it, Eaton said: "There were ten acres under cultivation, one building, five cabins, and sixty freedmen."³⁵ He was describing a new hamlet. In 1865 Kinne sent lumber for building purposes to the freedmen at that area.³⁶

Eaton had not meant Dungeness Place. He meant Tracts 6-7, which were once owned by Nightingale and sold to Robert Stafford in 1834. The settlement which Eaton described was begun in 1864 by the encouragement of Kinne, very probably with the full cooperation of Stafford, its owner. There had been a mix-up by the Army regarding its support of contrabands. The army could no longer provide enough rations to feed the large number of homeless freedmen congregating in Fernandina.

In mid-1864 (June 22), well before establishment of the BRFAL, Captain Edw. Myers, Office of Provost Marshal, Fernandina, wrote to Captain Wild, Provost Marshall, District of

35. NA, RG-105. "Unregistered Letters Received, August 1867-December 1868, St. Marys, Ga.," William Royal, BRFAL agent, #1002. Although this report was dated 1865, it had been filed with 1867-1868 records for reasons connected with a later Downes correspondence regarding labor contracts. Cited by Bullard, *An Abandoned Black Settlement on Cumberland Island, Georgia* (DeLeon Springs, FL 1982), p. 76. The "building" Eaton reported may have been the Cumberland Baptist Church.

36. NA, RG-393, District of Florida, E-1421, Vol. 2. Fernandina, May 18, 1865. Kinne reported the deplorable condition of freedmen and requested that 20,000 feet of lumber be sent him to build huts for their shelter. His requests were approved in E-1419.

Florida, saying he was ordered to send to Jacksonville all refugees, contrabands, and all civilians who asked subsistence from the Government. This would (he said) include several hundred whites and about the same number of blacks, most of whom were women and children. Captain Myers, surprised at his orders, said that -- based upon observation and “upon the statement of Mr. Kinne” -- almost every family of the above, “both black and white, will soon be able to support themselves. If these people are sent away, the government will have to provide for them.”³⁷

A few weeks later, Captain Wild responded, angrily deploring Myer’s “extraordinary misapprehension . . . of orders.” He was surprised at Myer’s lack of understanding and forbade him to interfere with those who were loyally making their own living or “needed for labor upon the public works whether white or black -- and will send to me only those who are suspicious characters [,] prisoners of war or deserters from the ennemy [sic] or refugees for whom no employment can be found & who are a burden upon the government beyond your means to supply their wants”³⁸

No freedmen’s land certificates have been found for Cumberland Island. On Edisto Island in South Carolina, resident contrabands who desired land warrants had been asked to fill out application forms, after which the freedman would receive a “blank” -- a ticket with a number. “Each Freedman staked out his own land, subject to future official survey and inspection.” Major Cornelius described the forms used by the army in South Carolina. As far as I know, no such blanks were distributed in Camden County. The officer in charge had added sadly: “Very few of the settlers returned the ‘Blanks’ -- most blanks were lost.”³⁹ If any were issued in Camden County, I have not seen them.

37. NA, RG-393, Provost Marshal Field Organizations (Civil War), Post of Fernandina Records, E-1426. *Miscellaneous records of Provost Marshal, 1864-66.*

38. NA, RG-393, E-1426, *Miscellaneous records, 1864-1866*, p .276. Capt. Wild to Capt. Myer, Provost Marshal Dist. Fla., Head Qrtrs. U.S. Forces, Fort Clinch, Fla., July 7, 1864.

39. BRFAL, NA, M-798, Roll 36, “Unbound Miscellaneous Papers,” from Charleston, S.C., (Feb. 1866) by Sub. Asst. Commr. Major Cornelius, in charge of “Island District” Cornelius dated his report “1865.” The discrepancy in dates is a filing error.

Tillson issued vouchers to all freedmen who had lost their certificates. He also issued vouchers to all who had not received certificates but had been settled on the land by Saxton's agents prior to October 19, 1865. Between November 14, 1866, and January 19, 1867, Tillson issued a total of 160 first-class warrants and 16 second-class warrants for land in Georgia. The lots claimed ranged in size from ten to forty acres.⁴⁰ I have not found any for Camden County.

William F. Eaton, Bureau agent for several of the Georgia sea islands, including St. Simons, informed General Tillson that all of the Sherman lands in Georgia had finally been surveyed, but as late as February, 1866, titles had not been issued to the freedmen. Word had reached the missionaries that possibly the guarantee for would-be land holders was not going to be honored after all.⁴¹

Only those persons having titles were to be permitted to keep the land upon which they had settled. On February 17, 1866, Tillson issued an order permitting restoration to previous owners of much of the land on St. Simons Island. He ordered Eaton to consolidate all grants held by freedmen on one portion of each plantation; the remainder of the plantation was to be restored to the former owner who agreed to hire those freedmen holding invalid warrants. Tillson made no provision to indemnify the freedmen who were dislocated by his orders.⁴²

I cannot find that any titles were ever issued to freedmen on Cumberland Island.⁴³ Although possessory grants were made to St. Simons freedpeople in great numbers, it does not seem that such grants were ever validated on Cumberland Island. Nightingale and Stafford showed by their actions that the Cumberland freedmen were no longer welcome on their tracts.

40. Oubre, *Forty Acres and a Mule*, 46-71, n. 38. D. Tillson to O.O. Howard, September 24, 1866, Registers and Letters Received (BRFAL), in RG-105, Microcopy 752, Roll 37, pp. 1067-68; Sample land warrant issued by Tillson, Roll 13, p. 732; List of warrants issued, November 14, 1866, to January 19, 1867, Roll 36, pp. 353-62.

41. Jan. 1, 1866. BRFAL agent Eaton at St. Simons in writing to his friend and fellow missionary George Whipple, referred to having heard some talk locally of "this territory being restored to former owners." American Missionary Association, letter #19542.

42. Oubre, *op.cit.* 65-66.

43. Registers of Land Titles Issued to Freedmen, April to September, 1865, Roll 36, pp. 233-352.

Dungeness was returned to Nightingale on February 27, 1866. It was to Nightingale's personal advantage to keep in his possession the majestic Greene mansion (not yet lost to fire)⁴⁴ and its beautiful gardens, because he wanted to sell it. Nightingale, who was in poor health, had announced he would not return to planting on Cumberland.

Stafford too was getting old. He may have tested the possibilities of selling out. In 1866 Stafford received offers to purchase his land. "Mr. Friend" of New York City wanted to put 300 German settlers on Cumberland Island to grow cotton. A similar news item appeared in Savannah's *The Daily News and Herald*, adding -- "it being a well-known fact that a better quality of Sea-Island [cotton] is raised on Cumberland than anywhere else on the Atlantic coast."⁴⁵ As far as I know, nothing came of these proposals.

In accordance with agent Eaton's orders, both Nightingale and Stafford turned over some acreage to their freedmen. Camden County's tax records show (1866-1867) a loss to Nightingale of 80 acres, and to Stafford, of 125 acres.⁴⁶ The missing acreage was recorded as theirs once again in the 1874 Camden County tax records. But the African-American settlers were gone -- scattered to the turpentine camps of southeastern Georgia, to the trawlers of Brunswick's fishing communities, or to Albany and Augusta of inland Georgia to seek their relatives.

Kinne apparently had informed Cumberland freedmen that land allotments would be made to them. In a narrative report dated February 5, 1868, a Bureau agent said one of his chief

44. Dungeness burned shortly after April 23, 1866. A passenger on a steamboat saw it just before that date.

45. Sometime before June 1866 Stafford was offered \$100,000 in gold for 18,000 acres on Cumberland, excluding his house and adjacent land. "Mr. Friend" represented a German colonization society. *New York Times* (mid-June 1866); *New York Daily Tribune* (June 13, 1866); *Savannah Morning News* (July 12, 1866). *The Daily News and Herald* of Savannah (July 12, 1866) ran a similar article, concluding with the comment, "The purchasers have certainly made a great bargain." There was no mention of "Mr. Friend." Possibly he was fictitious.

46. Sources: RCCG, tax digests, and the United States Census, Agricultural Schedule, 1860, 1870, 1880. The tax digests for Camden County are incomplete for the 1860s. For the 1874 tax digest, see Robert Stafford, Charles Hardee reporting as his agent, on page beginning with *Cribbs*. The 1874 county tax digest reported 8125 acres once again for Stafford. Bullard, *Robert Stafford of Cumberland Island*, p. 263, n. 20.

problems in Fernandina was trying to allay the freedmen's disappointment on learning they were not going to receive title to land.

Very few of them are able to refer this disappointment to the legislation of the U.S. Congress but rather to my want of interest in or sympathy for them. They are wont to contrast my counsels with those of one Mr. Kinney who was agent of Freedmen during the last years of the war and for a short period after peace was established. Such agents often were allowed a wide latitude of authority & generally indulged it.⁴⁷

Stafford and Nightingale were ageing and discouraged. Neither man felt able to start over. Nightingale died in 1873, Stafford in 1877. Without strong policies favoring black land tenure, private landowners in southeastern Georgia would have refused to honor the certificates. Enforcement of strong policies became impossible. Few freedmen dared to plant against determined white opposition. For that matter, few whites were up to doing so either.

Stafford was one of the few white slave-holders who had dared oppose publicly-accepted racial policies. His lifelong support of his children by slave women had earned him contempt, hostility, and derision. Disappointment in his sons and daughters was surely a factor. Stafford did not lack courage, but regret and cynicism, as well as age, combined to force his retreat from planting.⁴⁸

BRFAL agent Eaton evidently disliked Robert Stafford. Eaton believed him to be an ardent Southern "fire-eater."

Robert Stafford, who is a man of no mean natural ability, and who still lives upon Cumberland, is doing all in his power to urge back the former owners, and being a man naturally born to control, does much to render the people restless and hence unsuccessful. His

47. NA, RG 105, E-591, David Hammond to Lt. Jackson, February 5, 1868, "Unregistered Letters and Narrative Reports Received from Subordinate Officer, Nov. 1865-Dec. 1868," for Fernandina, FL. Bullard, *Robert Stafford of Cumberland Island*, p. 259.

48. By 1872 both sons had died, one from battle-related illness incurred while serving the Union; the other in a Connecticut school for retarded boys. Of his six daughters, only the eldest, Mary Elizabeth, consistently maintained a familial relationship.

sympathies are strongly southern, and there is no question but he did all in his power to aid the rebellion.⁴⁹

As early as 1864, some freedmen very likely moved into Stafford property before the passage of the Sherman Act. Primus Mitchell would have been one of them, assuring the others of their welcome. Primus, not anticipating any opposition, would have vouched for Stafford's ability to pay wages, something most white slave holders adamantly refused to do. In 1864, Stafford, to encourage planting upon his land, would definitely have considered a rental arrangement. As Eaton had commented, Stafford was for ending the war and returning to normalcy.

Primus had a pretty fair opinion of his ex-master. The Carnegies once asked him if Robert Stafford was a good master. Primus remembered his master as a man who never struck a slave but once, when he boxed a man's ears. He reportedly had replied, "Yes, 'e was a good man. Never knew 'im to hit but one man. He hit one man so hard that 'e lost all his hearing in that ear ever after." Mitchell knew a great deal about Stafford's daughters Cornelia and Nancy, and, as noted, was very likely their uncle.⁵⁰

Kinne encouraged a move by contraband groups at Dungeness in late 1864. To stave off their approaching famine, he advised them to take advantage of the planting season in Stafford's provision fields. Although Stafford may have threatened the freedmen in 1866,⁵¹ their mutual disagreements probably began as early as 1865 over profit-sharing. Camden County planters

49. Records of the Assistant Commissioner for the State of South Carolina, 1865-1870. M869, Roll 34: *Capt. A. P. Ketchum's Records: Reports of Conditions and Operations, July 1865-Dec. 1866*. Letter dated Dec. 1, 1865, Rev. W. F. Eaton to Genl. Saxton.

50. For Robt. Stafford's second extralegal family, see Bullard, "Frau Doktor Nancy Stafford: From Slave to Physician" (*ADAN*).

51. *Early Reminiscences of Camden County, Georgia, by an old St. Mary's Boy in his 82nd year*, by James S. Silva (Kingsland, Georgia: *Southeast Georgian*, reprint 1976), reported this allegation. Archaeological work at Stafford Chimneys, however, revealed no signs of burning. John Ehrenhard and Mary R. Bullard, *Stafford Plantation, Cumberland Island National Seashore: Archeological Investigations of a Slave Cabin* (Southeast Archeological Center, National Park Service, U.S. Dept. of the Interior, Tallahassee, FL, 1981), "Summary," 64. Walls and chimneys at Stafford slave cabins were still standing in 1889 (*The Atlanta Constitution*, Atlanta, Georgia, Feb. 24, 1889).

were accustomed to their slaves selling plantation produce at the public market in St. Marys. It was not always clear who profited from such sales.⁵²

Stafford, a meticulous agriculturist, maintained a fine plantation.

On this island there was at one time the best equipped cotton plantation in the world. It was the “Stafford Plantation” and consisted of 8,000 acres, 5,000 of which were cultivated. The owner took a great pride in it and his Negro quarters were laid off just like a town, and everything about the place was neat and orderly.⁵³

His provision fields were said to yield astonishingly good crops. In early 1862 a Satilla River rice planter (probably Confederate Colonel Duncan L. Clinch) ordered confiscation of corn from Stafford’s property as a “gift” to his soldiers. They made off with about 500 bushels of the “largest, handsomest ear corn I had ever seen.”⁵⁴ Stafford trained his plantation hands well. In 1870 he was unique on Cumberland Island in reporting a market garden, from which he reported \$300 worth of market produce.

In mid-nineteenth century even the most citified American urban dwellers still remembered that for successful planting, good soil must be prepared well in advance. “Unlike the seasons of the North, there is here no perceptible line of demarcation between them. We cannot positively assert that spring has opened or summer or winter begun.”⁵⁵ So wrote a Northern journalist playfully complaining of Georgia’s seemingly perpetual spring. Southeast coastal Georgia has essentially two planting seasons: late September-early October for *cool weather vegetables*; late March-early April for *summer vegetables*. Cool weather vegetables include turnips, collards, rutabegas, lettuce, carrots, beets, peas, and broccoli. Summer

52. Planters often placed warning advertisements advising neighbors to buy their garden produce instead of the offerings by enslaved laborers. Cumberland slaves sold island produce by transporting it in their master’s flats (Silva, *Early Reminiscences*, 22).

53. *The Atlanta Constitution* (Atlanta, Georgia) Feb. 24, 1889.

54. *Penniman Papers*, p. 22.

55. Frederick A[lbion] Ober, “Dungeness, General Greene’s Sea-Island Plantation,” *Lippincott’s Magazine*, XXVI (August 1880), 241-249.

vegetables include sweet potatoes, okra, eggplant, tomatoes, squash, beans, and peas. Summer vegetables will continue to produce until autumn. The first frost comes usually around December 1. On the Sea Islands, however, inhabitants can dig for sweet potatoes well into spring, unless the season is very wet. Irish potatoes are usually planted on Valentines Day. Heat usually kills the plants about June 1, but digging for potatoes can continue for another month if it is not too wet. Planting dates are April 1 for warm weather vegetables, and October 1 for cool weather vegetables, but when farm animals are used, field preparation might begin a month ahead of each of those dates.⁵⁶

Stafford's threat to burn their cabins was perhaps aimed specifically in 1864-1865 at the new community then planting on Stafford's land, near the Cumberland Baptist Church, in Tract 7. This fertile area would be where Primus Mitchell recommended planting. Their experiment in sharing the land did not succeed, and Mitchell with others of the little settlement departed Cumberland Island, probably in 1866, probably forced out by Stafford.

In 1868 a resident of Brunswick, Georgia, brought charges against one "Primas Mitchell" at "Dungeon S." If the charge was desertion, Primus's first wife may have made representations at this time, seeking a legal divorce. Primus may have made himself scarce.⁵⁷

By 1870 Mitchell turned up at another small unidentifiable community near St. Marys. The census enumerator, himself uncertain, tentatively called it "Crooked River Settlement". This time Mitchell was residing with his family. Primus Mitchell, age 45, with Amanda, his wife, age 45, was living in a mixed-race community of about 55 persons. The census enumerator placed it "in vicinity of St. Marys." Judging by the number and nature of its residents, this hamlet more

56. James B. Ferguson to author, pers. comm., June 22, 2009. Ferguson cleared and planted garden produce within Cumberland's Great Inland Swamp in the 1970s.

57. National Archives, RG 105, E 801, sub-heading 1. Sub-Assistant Commissioner David Hammond, Fernandina, to Lieut. D. G. Risley, Jan. 23, 1868. The charges may have been desertion. Primus was George Merrow's great-grandfather. Hattie was Primus's first wife. Merrow said Hattie and Primus were grandparents of Catherine Mitchell (named Caterina on *1864 Census*). Hattie had an African name. Her mother was Sarah Mbota, carefully spelled out in this manner on the slave inventory. Bullard, interview with George and Audrey Merrow of Cumberland Island, 1970; also Bullard, private collection Cumberland slave inventories.

resembled the farm of a maritime worker rather than a plantation of an agriculturist. For one thing, it was small. Residents of Fernandina (Florida) and St. Marys (Georgia), seaports both, often made careless agriculturists. They earned their living from local waterways. What interested most of them involved water transport, legitimate or occasionally illicit -- pilotage, shipbuilding, ship repairs, smuggling, or even (in the early 1800s) occasional piracy.⁵⁸

Mitchell moved back to Cumberland in 1874. In 1878 he was assessed for back taxes due for property somewhere on the mainland. Missing pages in the county records make it impossible to determine its location. He re-appeared as a Cumberland resident on the U.S. Census in 1880, with his family, now consisting of seven persons: Primus, his wife, and five children. They lived at Brickhill, the small all-black settlement in the less cultivated northern portion of Cumberland Island. Its abandoned slave cabins were thatch-roofed. They housed about thirty-five property-less freedmen. Eighteen of them came from Cumberland Island.⁵⁹

Mitchell seems not to have moved from Cumberland Island again. By 1900 Primus and Amanda were stated to be living near Stafford Place. When she died,⁶⁰ Primus took a job with William Carnegie, looking after the hounds kept for hunting. Primus is buried at High Point.

58. Probably Cherry Point, at the site of present-day Crooked River State Park. Primus may have been working for landowners Lewis Pacetty and R.H. Frohock (U.S. Census, 1870, Population Schedule, visitation #157). For location of settlement, we thank Charles R. Davis Sr. of St. Marys, pers. comm, Mar. 15, 2009. Primus' and Amanda's family consisted of Dorothy, 19, Catherine, 15, Laura, 3, and Irene, 1. Older folks under the same roof were Stepney Mitchell, 73, Amaritta Mitchell, 57, and a youngster, Solomon Spaulding, 5.

59. RCCG, *Superior Court, Tax Digest, 1878-1907*, under "Colored," Index, p. 144; U.S. Census, Population Schedule, 1880. According to this census, Primus (55), Amanda (50), lived with son James (6), Elizabeth (5), Jane (12), Louisa (13) and Catherine (18). In ca. 1895, a young girl noted: "The guests at the hotel begin to thin out. Papa has more time to take us on trips with him. We ride with him down to Brickhill where Quash lives, with Mandy and thirty or forty other negroes, young and old . . . Their cabins . . . were built of logs, thatched with palmetto and each cabin had a big coquina or tabby chimney. Inside, each one has a huge fire place not only to warm them during the few cold days of winter, but for cooking -- a whole pig can be roasted in one of them, and the woods are full of wild hogs . . ." Walker, *op. cit.*, 76. Her account appears to be our sole contemporary description.

60. The death dates of the Mitchells were not given on their gravestone. Their joint photograph appeared in an album containing mostly 1912 photos.



Figure 12. Gravestone of Primus Mitchell and Amanda, his wife (Photograph by Burt Rhyne, 1960).

Although Primus lived in “interesting times,” his life was relatively uneventful. Apparently aware of his own limitations, he was always looking for a “real” preacher to come to his church. He lived in a revolutionary period, and he kept hoping for regeneration of his church. By “church” Primus meant a building of some sort, where believers like himself would testify and bear witness to their gratitude for living. The people who had known Primus remembered him best for his humility and his unquenchable hopefulness.⁶¹

5. Post-War Problems

A cloud of disappointment, sorrow, and anger hung over Camden County in the immediate post-war period. All Cumberland Islanders had reason to fear retaliation by “Regulators” from the mainland. And when angered, some Union sympathizers on Cumberland became as murderous as any Confederate guerilla.

61. Sources for these statements were the author’s father, Oliver G. Ricketson Jr., and his sister, Lucy R. Ferguson, both of whom well remembered Primus. Neither was aware of any specific details of Primus’s life. Ricketson also remembered him for his humor.

Unionist James A. Clubb resided at High Point.⁶² Descended from John Clubb, a member of Oglethorpe's Regiment, this Clubb family had lived on Cumberland Island since 1802. Loyalists throughout the American Revolution, they held their heads high through adversity. They had always lived on close terms with their relatively few field hands. Edmund Spalding, light-house keeper at the island's North End, testified to Lieutenant Coolidge at Fort Clinch about an atrocity committed by Clubb.

. . . . Mr. James Clubb in company with Lewis Harris took one of the Negroes formerly belonging to Mr. Clubb -- tied him to a tree, piled wood around the Negro of James Clubb, named Cato and set fire to the wood and burnt the Negro to death. During this time the parties laughed and made sport of his agony⁶³

This ghastly episode took place on Turtle River, above Brunswick. Clubb lived upon Cumberland in "the pine woods to the east of the Swamp" [i.e., Great Inland Swamp], in the area known nowadays as "Yankee Paradise." Word of this event no doubt spread immediately to Clubb's neighbors and servants on the island.⁶⁴

Immediately following the war, many planters attempted to establish a new labor system. A variety of labor systems developed following the abolition of slavery, one of them being the squad system.⁶⁵ In Camden County some planters employed gangs of workers who worked together in return for a share of the crop. "Squads" allowed planters to use the existing plantation settlements. Over time tenant agriculturists departed, some to the big city, others to

62. James A. Clubb applied for restoration of his land Nov. 30, 1867. Having complied with section 11 of Circular Order 11 on Nov. 8, Clubb regained his property Nov. 30, 1867. NA, RG 105, E-804, pp. 20-21.

63. NA, Provost Marshal Field Organizations (Civil War), Post of Fernandina Records, E-1600, "Miscellaneous Records of the Provost Marshal, 1863-1865," Vol. 2. Affidavit attested July 6, 1865.

64. Cray Pratt's *Memorandum* (written ca.1890s) giving his recollections of Cumberland Is. during 1830-1840s.

65. Sharecropping, share renting, standing- and cash-renting were the most prominent.

establish new, more isolated homes and fields.⁶⁶ This is what happened on Cumberland. Black agriculturists departed for Fernandina (FL), Brunswick (GA), or retreated to isolated hamlets like Brickhill, on Cumberland Island.⁶⁷

General Davis Tillson reported to General Saxton in 1866 his belief that the Sea Island freedmen -- like freedmen state-wide -- expected more done for them as a result of the Sherman Act. Tillson's report emphasized his success in reducing their expectations.

During the latter part of last year [i.e., September 1865] and the beginning of this [January 1866?] the freedmen were impressed with the belief that the Government would give them land, animals, implements and food to enable them to begin planting for themselves. Grave apprehensions were felt and expressed throughout the State . . . the disappointment of their hopes. The freedmen would rise on Christmas or New Years and attempt to take by force what they had been led to expect would be given them It is difficult to ascertain the source whence they became possessed of this idea but as far as could be learned, the charge that it has been disseminated by the officers of the Bureau is utterly groundless . . . the freedmen were finally induced to make contracts to labor this year [i.e., 1866]. It was only after the most persistent efforts that employers could be persuaded to pay the freedmen reasonable wages. In some instances they compelled them by threats, the laborer to furnish his own clothing and medicine. Learning these facts, the parties were notified that such contracts would not be permitted, and that the freedmen would receive reasonable compensation for their labors. The employers refused to annul these contracts, or to allow the freedmen to go to other parts of *the country* [emphasis in original] Employers on the coast, Sea Islands, and Southwestern Georgia, were easily induced from the first to offer good wages. Soon after the freedmen commenced making contracts. It became evident that the demand for labor exceeded the supply that freely sold in the open market it would command a higher price than that had been

66. J.W. Joseph, Theresa M. Hamby and Catherine S. Long, New South Associates. *Historical Archaeology in Georgia* (University of Georgia, Laboratory of Archaeology Series, Report #39, Georgia Archaeological Research Design Paper No. 4 [GARD #14] Athens, 2004), pp. 83-84.

67. An Ohio newswoman visiting Bunkley's hotel at High Point in 1882 reported that the negroes worked "but little" for anyone on Cumberland. They worked by families when ordered by their headman. Angele C. Davis, *Cincinnati Commercial*, June 24, 1882, quoted in *Brunswick (Georgia) Advertiser and Appeal*, Sept. 1882

required by the Bureau, thereby fully establishing the justice and wisdom of the course being tried. Employers eventually became conscious of that fact and cheerfully acquiesced in the decision of the Bureau.⁶⁸

In a later memorandum, added to the above (February 14, 1866) Tillson added more of his observations under the title "Organization of the Labor on the Sea Islands".

On the first of January last, order reached this office directing that the Sea Islands of the State, which up to that time had been under the control of Bvt. Major General Saxton, should be placed in my charge . . . On the 3rd of February [1865] I proceeded to the Islands, and on investigation found them in a very unsatisfactory condition. With the exception of the Rev. W. F. Eaton, agent of the [BRFAL] at St. Simons Island, and whom I have found to be thoroughly honest and competent -- there were no white men on the outer and more important islands. The freedmen were armed and would not allow any white person to land. They were mostly fed on Government rations, and with very few exceptions were spending their [?] time in hunting, fishing, and destroying the cattle, large numbers of which had been left on the Island by the former owners. It was found that while Government was sending them rations they were slaughtering the deer which abound upon the islands and selling the venison at high prices in Savannah.

Tillson found that the freedmen on the Sea-Islands wanted to continue receiving government-issued rations. He opposed their continuation.

They insisted that the Government should continue to furnish them with rations, in whole, or in part, representing that they had all the animals, implements, seed, and nearly all the food required to enable them to make a crop this year. But as on the Sea Islands and rice-fields of the State, they had failed the year previous even when they were fed and assisted by the Government to raise sufficient food for their own support, and as there was a great

68. Excerpted from memorandum entitled "Organization of Labor" (p. 14), in Tillson's report for State of Georgia, to Saxton, showing operation of the Bureau, from September 24, 1865, to November 1, 1866. NA, RG 105, "Records of the Asst. Commr. for the State of Georgia, 1865-1869," M-798. Roll 32, *Reports: Operations, 1866-1868*. Sent by BRFAL, Office Sub Comm. State of Georgia, Savannah, February 14, 1866.

demand for labor at high prices on the coast I declined to accede to their request, but sent the following order.

Tillson ordered Sea Island freedmen go to work or face removal. Anxious to obtain labor for the worried coastal planters, in a letter to Eaton dated April 17, 1866, Tillson asked him to determine immediately why the islanders would not return to wage work.

I learn from Col. Fox, Maj. Devereaux . . . who have been endeavoring to obtain laborers on the Sea Islands that there are many col'd people not having grants of land, who are cultivating a small patch of land totally insufficient to give them a support and that these freedpeople refuse to work for wages during the time they might well spare from their own small crop, but are spending it hunting, fishing and loafing . . . You will at once examine into the condition of all the freedpeople upon the islands and will require all those situated as above stated . . . to go to work at once for someone who will give them reasonable compensation or else leave the island without delay. Should any freedperson refuse to obey this order you will use any force at your disposal to compel obedience.⁶⁹

Tillson personally saw to it that his orders were broadly disseminated. Starting March 1866 he undertook visits to the Sea Islands where he convened assemblies of freedmen and white landowners to listen to him. In an addendum to his report to General Saxton, Tillson was pleased to say that he successfully mediated their labor disputes.

. . . . A little later, this order was made to apply to all the Sea Islands of the State. Procuring a small steamer from time to time I took the former owners to the different Islands, gathered the freedmen together and explained impressing on both parties the object and wishes of the Bureau. I was gratified to find a more reasonable disposition on the part of both, than I had dared to anticipate. And whereas, in many cases, each had threatened to shoot the other on sight, when brought together much of this ill-feeling disappeared, and very soon they were able to make arrangements for the owners to return, and the freedmen to labor for them on mutually satisfactory terms.

69. NA, M-798, Roll 36, no pagination, about three-quarters toward end of roll. Although unsigned, Agent Eaton noted the sender. Copy of Genl. Tillson's orders was to be sent Mr. John Dickens, Agent, Bureau, Sapelo Island. Orders published in full, Bullard, *Abandoned Black Settlement*, 81.

In some instances, the poverty of the owner prevented his planting this year, and upon my recommendation several Northern gentlemen of capital purchased, or rented their plantations, and employed the freedmen. By some [?] two weeks personal effort I finally succeeded in settling their question [?] along the entire coast, in an amiable manner without once resorting to force

Tillson valued the opinion of Rev. William F. Eaton. He praised Eaton's guidance in these labor disputes.

In this, and all other similar experiments in the State which have come to my knowledge, it has been clearly demonstrated that the freedmen if left to work for themselves and control their own labor, will not attain any considerable success. This is the opinion to which the Rev. W. Eaton, who has been agent of this Bureau for St. Simons and adjacent islands from the time the freedmen were first sent there, has been reluctantly forced. No man has had a better or wider opportunity for observation -- and no man of my acquaintance is better able to form a just and unbiased opinion. At no time during the existence of the race have the freedmen as a mass been called upon to exercise care, economy and [illegible -- 'forethought'?] It cannot be expected they should, without cultivation, suddenly become possessed of these qualities.⁷⁰

Eaton was a Free Will Baptist minister who came from Maine in 1864 responding to the call for missionary teachers. He and his wife were stationed on St. Simons Island, residing at The Retreat, a plantation owned by Mallory King (a son of Stafford's old congressman, Thomas Butler King). Eaton became a Bureau agent in 1865,⁷¹ with the title of "supervising agent of this

70. NA, RG 105, Records of the BRFAL, 1865-1872, *Records of the Asst. Commr. for the State of Georgia, 1865-1869*, M-798. Roll 32, "Reports: Operations, 1866-1868"

71. William F. Eaton (b. ca. 1826), native of Portland, Maine, graduate of New Hampton Theological School (New Hampshire), pastor to Free Will Baptist congregations, was sent (April 1, 1864) by the American Missionary Association [AMA] to Beaufort, S.C., to aid Union wounded and to teach ex-slaves. On March 1, 1865 (shortly after the Sherman Act was announced) Eaton became -- by orders of General Saxton -- "General Superintendent of Colonization," charged primarily with placing mainland freedmen upon Edisto Is. Genl. Saxton required Eaton and his wife to take up residence at St. Simons Is., not only to relocate returning freedmen to that Sea-Island but also to supervise and report colonization on Sea Islands further south. The Eatons lived at Retreat Plantation, where both taught school to the freedmen. By January 1, 1866 Eaton wrote that he realized there was a prospect of the Sea Islands being returned to their former owners. In October 1866 Eaton was informed his services were no longer

Bureau for St. Simons and of the Sea Islands south thereof on the coast and belonging to the State of Georgia.” Shortly after 1865 he reported on the condition of freedmen on islands lying further to the southward. On July 31, 1865 he reported that a few colored people had settled on the lower end of Cumberland Island, placed “by Mr. Kinney.”⁷²

Nothing in the records suggests the two missionaries knew one another, although apparently their jurisdictions overlapped. Both agents filed reports in 1865 relating to freedmen at Dungeness.⁷³ Eaton, still resident on St. Simons Island, reported no freedmen in any other place on Cumberland Island. Either none was there, or he was unaware of their presence. Eaton did know, however, that some freedmen, clustered at Dungeness, had been encouraged by Bureau agent Kinne to go out from the overcrowded Dungeness encampment back to the fields to plant foodstuffs. Freedmen understood they were to keep what they grew, presumably to feed their families and also to sell at a market place.

No Bureau agent was more active in guiding the freedmen on Cumberland than Kinne. As destitution and illness increased in Fernandina, Kinne increased his encouragement to freedmen on Cumberland Island to return to the fields and resume planting food crops. Eaton and Tillson tended to ignore the freedmen’s ability to sell foodstuffs. Eaton, a doctrinaire abolitionist from Maine, was unfamiliar with local marketplaces. The degree of his familiarity with farming on the Sea Islands is unknown.

In Fernandina, problems with the Army’s system of food distribution stimulated military thinking on the subject. The military decided food acquisition must be conducted in an orderly manner. Rationing did not provide the perfect solution to the burgeoning numbers of hungry

required by the BRFA, and in December 1866 the Eatons returned to Portland. Bullard, *An Abandoned Black Settlement*, p. 73, n. 67.

72. NA, RG 105.”Unregistered Letters Received, August 1867-December 1868, St. Marys, Ga.,” William Royal, BRFA agent, #1002. Although this report was dated 1865, it had been filed with 1867-1868 records for reasons connected with a later Downes correspondence regarding labor contracts.

73. By March 8, 1865, Kinne at Fernandina had become “Supt. of Freedmen.” NA, RG 393, District of Florida Records, E-1421, “Registers Letters Received, Apr. 1864-Dec. 1865, Vol. 2.” His letters of February 28 and May 18 1865 both identify Kinne as such.

refugees. Although the idle must not be rewarded, starvation threatened increasingly large numbers of freedmen. The Union officers floated the idea of a marketplace, urging its consideration to help feed Union soldiers.

The Major-Genl Commanding desires to call the attention of agriculturists in this Dept. to the importance of raising fruits and vegetables; and in order to facilitate and encourage owners of land in the undertaking hereby orders a free market to be established at each Port in the Dept. where persons will be permitted to sell their produce from boats and wagons within the lines of the market district. A free competition it is believed will soon regulate the prices. A guard will be at the market to maintain order.

The soil of these Islands is peculiarly adapted to raising vegetables, and the crop will amply repay the expenditures required to produce it. The persons living within the limits of the Department requiring military protection should have a due regard for the wants of the soldiers, and feel a desire to contribute as far as they can to their necessities. Every facility will be given producers to dispose of their crops.

By command of Maj.Gen. J.G. Foster, Asst Adjutant General.⁷⁴

A week later, the Provost Marshal at Fernandina ordered (November 17) a roster of persons currently receiving government rations. Deserving refugees were to continue receiving them, able-bodied men with families being preferred.

You are hereby directed to furnish to this office a duplicate roster of all persons to whom rations are issued at the Post of Fernandina. And further to guard against such issues as much as possible, only granting them in case of absolute necessity. You will perceive the importance of this caution, by consideration of the heavy burden now resting upon our Govt. which ought not to be increased by feeding able bodied persons either male or female.⁷⁵

74. 1864, Nov. 11. General Orders no. 155, required a "free market to be established at each Post in the Department," Department of the South. By command of Maj.Gen. J.G.Foster, Assistant Adjutant General. The Bryan-Lang Historical Library (Woodbine, GA) is unable to furnish a date, probable or actual, for the re-establishment of St. Marys' city market in post-bellum years.

75. NA, RG 393, E-1429, *Letters sent by the Provost Marshal*, p. 74. To Lieut. Miller, Provost Marshal, Fernandina, from Office of the Provost Marshal, Jacksonville, Nov. 17, 1864.

The Bureau responded to the general suffering as best it could, but its resources were limited. On May 31, 1865 General Oliver Otis Howard informed his assistant commissioners that relief was to be discontinued as rapidly as possible. General Davis Tillson, going even further, criticized freedmen for what he termed their general laziness and their over-eagerness to accept handouts from relief agencies. Neither Tillson nor his successors thought of the freedmen in their area as anything but potential agricultural labor. Yet the Bureau failed to provide certain agricultural necessities for which cash payments were required: for example, seed.⁷⁶ Mules and oxen are used for specific farm purposes; so are their wagons and carts. Few freedmen had cash to buy these necessities. An active market place was needed.

Trouble between freedmen and planters on Cumberland began when freedmen who were strangers to Robert Stafford settled upon Tracts 6 and 7. Article Four of the Sherman Act required that freed people now on the Island and having grants of land would not be forced to leave their present domicile until the landowners shall have offered them opportunity of labor on such terms as are satisfactory to the Bureau. If freedpeople refused to accept this offer, then they were to remove from such plantations, allowing the owners the opportunity to hire others. Many owners were unable to pay wages for farm labor. It was this proviso which soon became unacceptable to both planters and the BRFAL.

Planters King, Bass, and Stafford were among the first Sea Island property owners who were ordered by BRFAL agent Eaton to find consolidated acreage within their properties which would be suitable for freedmen to settle upon. Obviously agriculturally-savvy freedmen would look for cleared land, richly fertilized, not too far from some form of transportation by which their crops could be distributed to the mainland. For Cumberland islanders, this meant water transportation. Stafford's well-equipped docks at a deep-water landing were widely known.

Stafford was familiar with share-tenancy, a type of tenantry in which tenants would work land on which they were living, allowing landowners to act as brokers. The Stafford family had

76. Paul A. Cimballa, *Under the Guardianship of the Nation: The Freedmen's Bureau and the Reconstruction of Georgia, 1865-1870* (University of Georgia Press, Athens and London, 1997), p. 86.

themselves been share-tenants of the general's family. Stafford, who had many white tenants on Cumberland, evidently considered share-tenancy an admirable working model.⁷⁷

The original idea behind share-tenancies by freedmen was that the freedmen would become tenants instead of working in gangs. The landowner would assign each family a small tract of land to farm and would provide food, shelter, clothing, and the necessary seeds and farm equipment. When the crop was harvested, the landowner would take the crop to market; and after deducting for the "furnish" (the cost of all items the tenant had been furnished during the year), gave half of the proceeds to the tenant. Stafford (acting as a broker) would sell the freedmen's crop for them, giving a portion of the sale receipts to the tenants. The advantage for tenants was that they had a place to live and an opportunity to earn some money at the same time. Subsistence crops and hunting provided tenants, white and black, with food to eat. Stafford very likely cleared much of his land through share-tenancies to white tenants. Timber cutting was an important plantation activity on Cumberland Island.⁷⁸ Whatever the reasons, however,

77. Usually Stafford's tenants were hopeful young white men, without much acreage, looking for a way to keep their slaves busy while accumulating a small but steady profit. One such man was James T. O'Neill, who did some of Stafford's logging for him and made a profit while doing so, meanwhile supporting his family. Other Island residents who seem to have been Stafford's share-tenants included: Alexander Holzendorf, husband of Jane Spalding (Stafford's half-sister); John Creighton, from a wealthy East Florida family; and John Parker at Cumberland's Cotton Bluff (the current Squawtown), a scapegrace who had been financially helped by his father, Isaac Parker of South Carolina. Not so young, but similarly a share-tenant, was James A. Clubb, from a long-time Cumberland family, probably a logger, who needed money but did not wish to leave the island. Although the Holzendorfs actually resided upon the land they worked, they did not own it. The Creightons eventually departed Cumberland Island and moved to St. Marys. The Clubbs had their own land at High Point.

78. Some southern labor contracts with freedmen were arrangements which greatly resembled *share-tenancies*. In 1866 D.W.M. Shad entered into a contract with twelve freedmen (including men and women). Shad agreed to *furnish* a plantation of 250 acres of cleared land, situated on New River, about six miles from Savannah, in Beaufort District, South Carolina. "If there are no buildings on [it] these persons are allowed to cut lumber to build houses -- but are not allowed to cut or sell my wood or lumber." Timber was to be cut at their expense. They were to labor faithfully, to plant at least 5 acres in cotton, corn, and provisions, to keep the land clear, to prevent trespassing, and to give Shad 1/3 of all cotton and provisions grown during the year [terms of lease]. Shad furnished only the plantation, the freedmen were to find themselves (to pay for their living expenses). The freedmen (who were the tenants) all signed their marks. Shad's labor contract resembles Stafford's share-tenancy with James T. Neill, of Florida and Georgia. In the 1840s O'Neill failed to repay Stafford for monies borrowed to log Stafford's property on Cumberland. O'Neill's long, shamefaced letter is at P.K. Yonge Library, Box 1 (now the George Smathers Library), Gainesville, FL. Cited in Bullard, *Robert Stafford*, 76, 78. Shad's

neither labor system worked out for Cumberland Island, and the island was almost depopulated by 1867.

Instead, white landowners on Cumberland were invited to make labor contracts. Money payments for conventional rental arrangements were scarce in St. Marys, because in 1867 hard currency was scarce. Landowners were dealing with penniless freedmen. Since money was scarce in post-war southeast Georgia, some Cumberland landowners were asked to accept a rental from freedmen in the form of a share of the crop. A dollar amount was suggested in 1867 by Lieutenant Douglas G. Risley to Margaret Downes of Cumberland Island, now residing at St. Marys. William R. Bunkley, another Island landowner and ex-Confederate soldier, had previously urged Risley to mediate Downes's increasingly contentious relationships with freedmen. The lieutenant wrote to her.

I have enquired into the difficulty between yourself and certain (would be) tenants of yours on Cumberland Island -- Quash Germain and Archy Orfut have planted a certain amount of land the former some 2 ½ and the latter 3 ½ acres -- the crop looks well -- Having expended their time & labor they are loath to loose both -- I would respectfully suggest to you that you let them remain this year and accept the rental of the land they cultivate of 2 dollars per acre, payable to you on or before Oct 1st 1867 in money before the winter ends if they raise no crop⁷⁹

Mrs. Downes, however, declaring that she had been personally insulted by freedmen working on her property, refused Risley's offers of a mediated settlement. Stafford, more pragmatic than Downes, would have accepted black tenants.

Stafford was long said to have threatened to burn down the freedmen's homes if they refused to work for him.⁸⁰ It was thought that the freedmen's cabins were the twenty-four cabins at the site now called Stafford Chimneys, where their standing chimneys are still visible. However, archaeological investigation conducted in 1978 by the Southeastern Archaeological

contract, dated 6 Feb. 1866, in NA, RG 105, E-1018, "Labor Contracts, 1865-1868," filed under Chatham County, Georgia.

79. NA, RG 105, #797, "Letters Sent March 1867-June 1868," in v. 201, p.15.

80. James S. Silva, *Early Reminiscences of Camden County, Georgia, by an old St. Mary's Boy in his 82nd year, 1914-1915* (Kingsland, Georgia: *Southeast Georgian*, reprint 1976).

Center for the National Seashore, revealed no evidence of burning.⁸¹ Most of the area in Tracts 6-7, now covered by forest with a thick understory, has never been excavated. Further archaeological investigation is needed at Bank Field near the church. The new freedmen's settlement at Bank Field was very likely the area which angered Stafford.

Anthropologists often apply the word "foraging" for subsistence techniques such as fishing, hunting, and trapping. For Tillson as well as many of his advisors, however, they sounded suspiciously like "loafing." Without land title or possessory notes guaranteeing land usage or ownership, Cumberland's freedmen were either compelled to work on contract for the former owner or urged to move to another site. Tillson was told that landless freedmen would not work for wages, even though they were actually doing so on St. Simons Island. At no point in his correspondence did he indicate that many freedmen would work for profit (although he had noticed there was a market for venison). Besides, planters were desperate for labor. But most planters had no money, and many refused to pay living wages.⁸²

6. Primus's Religion

Primus was an exhorter or, even more likely, a "Praise House" leader. Born into a Baptist background, he had been stimulated by the "Great Awakening."

The Baptists had a simple hierarchy. Among its components were their exhorters -- licensed preachers, not authorized to give the sacraments. This spiritual movement provided the background of the Greene family's slaves, who came with the Greens in 1800 from the

81. John Ehrenhard and Mary R. Bullard, *Stafford Plantation, Cumberland Island National Seashore: Archeological Investigations of a Slave Cabin* (Southeast Archeological Center, National Park Service, Tallahassee, FL, 1981): Summary, p. 64. The slave cabin walls were still standing in 1889. "The place has gone down now and is owned by a northern man who keeps it as a game preserve, but the walls and the chimneys of the old Quarters are still standing mute as reminders of the old regime." *The Atlanta Constitution* (Atlanta, Georgia, Feb. 24, 1889)

82. The menu offered by William R. Bunkley's hotel, open to paying guests by 1875, presented at least eight items which came from foraging on Cumberland Island: fish, oysters, clams, venison, birds, honey, milk, butter, English peas, celery, beets, and Irish potatoes. "Chronicle No. 2," *Georgia Weekly Telegraph and Messenger*, May 1, 1877. Foraging by both white and black persons brought food to the Bunkley hotel. Freedmen Quash Merrow and Charlie Trimmings were specifically mentioned in the Hermione Ross memoir as outstanding duck hunters and fishermen for the hotel.

Savannah River area. Judging from what others have said about him, Primus may have lacked the necessary *gravitas* to become a lay preacher.

The Great Awakening has been called the seedtime for planting Christianity in the Lowcountry.⁸³ 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.⁸⁴ Racially diverse congregations were the rule rather than the exception. Blacks benefitted from the 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. 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, African Americans also formed their own congregations and chose their own preachers.⁸⁵

In the early decades of the church all Baptist congregations were completely autonomous. Black leadership was formalized through licensing and ordination. Black Baptists also led early

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

84. Cornelius, *Slave Missions*, 25.

85. 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*.

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

In the Sea Island slave communities, the most important people were religious leaders. There were two kinds of religious leaders. One kind consisted of black elders. Black elders were chosen by whites. These black leaders, referred to as "deacons" or "watchmen," were responsible for the watch-care of members of plantation societies. They were the 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.⁸⁶

A second group consisted of the elders' helpers, often referred to as "spiritual parents." The spiritual parents were not white-sanctioned. Primus Mitchell probably belonged to this group. 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 individuals 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.⁸⁷ Slave-holders did not necessarily approve of their strictures, but they recognized the existence of the spiritual parents. Among the matters which enslaved African Americans took into their own hands were marital difficulties,

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

87. 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.

infidelity, and abuse within the slave community. “Spiritual parents” belonged to a tradition older than the role taken by black elders.⁸⁸

Although Primus Mitchell may have been a natural leader, not everyone would have considered him particularly spiritual. Known to be pious, he was also intensely superstitious. The use of charms and counter charms, to harm or to ward off harm, is an essential trait of conjuring. Materials of great power for fixing (conjuring) someone, are hair and nail clippings, a piece of clothing or personal object belonging to the victim, dirt from a person’s footprint, and, especially, grave dirt.⁸⁹ Mitchell was familiar with the slave cemetery. He would know which people had no right to be buried there, and he would have known the reasons why. He would certainly have believed that particular funerary rites had to be observed in order that the spirit may rest quietly. The African custom of decorating a grave with the personal belongings of the deceased was practiced on Cumberland Island as late as the 1940s, so one may suppose Primus and Amanda were familiar with the obligations of the living toward the dead. In 1881, African-American settlers at Brickhill reacted fearfully to an apparition of the Devil -- red, with tail and horns -- worn by a visitor as a joke. In the 1890s white observers noticed that the island residents were terrified of “Witch Mandy.” When Amanda cursed an off-island visitor who challenged her, Cumberland Islanders were not astonished when he died one year later of tuberculosis, and her claims to supernatural powers were instantly reinforced.⁹⁰

The thatched roof cabin shown in Figure 1 undoubtedly held special significance for Primus. It may have possessed an intangible value, not easily photographed. While I cannot prove that this structure was Mitchell’s cabin, I think he may have tried to use his home as a

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

89. Raboteau, *op. cit.*, in discussing African folk beliefs in North America, p. 82.

90. Hermione Ross Walker, “Cumberland Island,” *ms.* Her account was later published by Preston Stevens, a relative. At the High Point hotel administered by the Ross family, Hermione’s mother built a thatched-roof pavilion constructed by the men from Brickhill. Hotel guests considered it a great success (1890). *The Hermione Ross Walker Papers*, #822-z, Southern Historical Collection, The Wilson Library, University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill.

church. Church attendance would have been part of his whole upbringing, where he and his colleagues could meet, hold services, and hope to make sense of post-war conditions.

Planters were aware of -- and permitted -- “un-Christian” practices among slaves who were members of Baptist congregations. Most planters knew that their slaves had societies organized “among themselves.” Planters believed the societies to be very corrupt. They also understood that the societies exercised great control over punishment, but they regretted that the societies had a different point of view on what constituted a crime. Stealing from the master, for example, was not viewed as a crime. Community control served to regulate it. Those people who betrayed community interests by divulging the secrets of stealing, were, in Gullah society, guilty of a serious crime. This Gullah interpretation of sin was at variance with the Christian instruction planters sought to promote. Penance for such a sin usually involved performing a singularly difficult feat -- not necessarily painful, but lengthy and tiresome -- such as picking up a bowlful of benne seed from the floor.⁹¹

The Sunbury Association, which had included Savannah’s large black churches (its list also included hundreds of small churches), counted ten African-American ordained ministers in its early years. Even in the 1840s and 1850s one third of Sunbury’s ordained ministers were African-American.⁹² 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 Association often funded small black churches that had no ministers of their own, and also helped rural churches.

I suggest that, as war forced the Sunbury Association to abandon Cumberland, at the Brickhill black community Primus undertook to conduct services in an area where he was personally known, near a slave cemetery where fellow blacks were buried, and where -- at that

91. Creel, *A Peculiar People*, pp. 182-85, citing *Christian Advocate and Journal*, for memoirs of Richard D. Turpin, in “Missionary Sketch,” Jan. 31, 1834. Turpin, a Methodist missionary, detailed his failures in converting enslaved workers. We lack specific accounts of Geechee (Gullah) life on Cumberland.

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

time -- there existed no other opportunity to attend religious services.⁹³ Primus felt an obligation to take care of the Cumberland African Church. As his cultural world crumbled around him, Primus struggled even harder to uphold his religious values. But times were changing, the Gullah-Geechee community on Cumberland Island had diminished, and Primus' audience was fast disappearing. By the end of the nineteenth-century the whole of Cumberland Island was close to becoming one large private estate, run along the lines of English or French country houses, a style of living much admired by the newly-affluent industrial classes. In 1890 the permanent black population of Cumberland, now reduced to about thirty-eight persons, was found living at one of three areas only, either at High Point, Brickhill, or Dungeness.

Although Cumberland's African-American settlements were still quite primitive in their layout, their residents lived well from the island itself.

They were comfortably housed in small cabins, each with sufficient ground for a garden, hen house and pig pen. . . . [They could buy] rations of corn or grits, meal, bacon, salt and articles of food [once] grown on the plantations. . . . Oyster, fish, crabs and shrimp were abundant. . . . Coons and 'possums stocked the marshes so with the products of their little gardens, these people fared sumptuously. . . . They planted little patches of sugar cane, pumpkins, melons, or whatever they cared for and raised chickens and hogs.⁹⁴

A large group of African-American workmen at Dungeness left each week-end to go home to St. Mary's, returning from the mainland each Monday to work on the island. In 1889 Fordham had ordered the Brickhill community, whom he viewed as his tenants, to vacate his property, and in 1890 he put his land on the market. He too envisaged an estate to be restricted to moneyed white people. To remain on their home island, some Brickhillers purchased small house lots at High Point, for which they paid cash, \$16.00 for a lot. Some families left Brickhill

93. I know of no church at the Brickhill settlement, although it maintained its own cemetery, marking graves with wooden crosses. Mary Miller to author, pers. comm., 1960.

94. Silva, *op. cit.*, 1976:10-11. Use of the U.S. Census (Agricultural Schedule 1880) shows the Brickhill community made money by selling their produce, including honey. Although Silva was describing Stafford's ante-bellum slave settlements, his words could equally describe the Brickhill community. Brickhill freedmen were occasionally asked how they found their food. At first evasive, eventually they revealed their foraging and production methods.

to move to High Point. In 1900 Primus Mitchell (75) and wife Amanda (65), however, were among the four African-American families living near Stafford Place.⁹⁵

Although Primus was becoming an anachronism, he remained faithful to his mission as unlicensed preacher. He was the instrument through which was revived his Baptist church. In his old age he successfully persuaded his sons-in-law to buy property at High Point, the only land on Cumberland available for sale to blacks. In 1894 Mitchell succeeded in obtaining acreage on Cumberland for the purpose of building a log church, to be called the “Col’d Baptist Church of Cumberland.” Its first trustees were his sons-in-law.⁹⁶

Four families, the Mitchells, the Albertys, the Trimmingses, and the Merrows, can be identified as the ones most interested in building a church on Cumberland. Their descendants married Mitchell’s daughters and grand-daughters.⁹⁷

7. Interpretation of a Stereoview

Settlement had long existed at Brickhill bluff. Land was cleared for cotton planting as early as 1802 (see Figures 8e and 8f). But the bluff may have been occupied considerably earlier by a large community of white settlers. In the late 1750s the deep-water landing at this low bluff had attracted the attention of Georgia frontiersmen who formed part of the restless group known

95. U.S. Census, Population Schedule, 1900, Cumberland. Militia District #1489, George Holzendorf, enumerator, house visitation #307. NA, microfilm T-623, roll 183, p. 116 A.

96. 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 C Old [Col’d] (*Colored*) Baptist Church of Cumberland and Their Successors.” Dated May 9, 1894. Burbank received \$30, for which he acknowledged sale of Lot #16, known as part of the Luther Martin Half Moon Bluff Tract, containing 5000 feet, for “the only proper use, benefit, and behalf of the Trustees of the Cumberland Baptist Church.” The log church burnt down in 1937. The present frame building, which replaced the log church, was built in 1938. It is the one which saw the wedding of John F. Kennedy Jr. in 1996. For Trimmings genealogy, see the Clubb family Bible.

97. 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 Mellow. Bullard, *Abandoned Black Settlement*, 120.

in provincial Georgia as “Gray’s Gang.”⁹⁸ Although these rough-and-ready settlers upon Cumberland were traders, they followed two businesslike leaders who were Quakers. After covenanting among themselves to live peacefully, they built homes and carried on a prosperous trade from approximately 1754 to 1766 with friendly Native Americans and occasional Spaniards.⁹⁹ Their tabby chimneys remained standing until the 1880s.



Figure 13. Brickhill bluff, erosion after heavy storm in 2007 (Courtesy John Fry, CUIS National Seashore).

When in 1860 United States surveyors first visited the settlement, the area had long been subdivided and renamed “Longwood Plantation,” a relatively small (600 acres), unproductive

98. No traces of settlement at Brickhill bluff were depicted on the 1891 map, although a trail to it was shown.

99. The name Brickhill may derive from “Brick Kiln,” a reference to the process of calcination. Lime is created by burning, or “slaking,” shell. In the 1750s Edmund Gray, a Quaker, led a group of fellow frontiersmen to Cumberland where they resided illegally until the colonial government began granting land (1765) to petitioners from Georgia. See Figure 8f for place-name. For an overview of Edmund Gray and Ephraim Alexander, see Bullard, *Cumberland Island: A History*.

plantation belonging to James H. and Margaret (Bernardey) Downes.¹⁰⁰ Its fancy name belied the fact that by 1858 these owners, deliberately cultivating little in the way of crops, rather hoped their slave property would look after themselves. Theirs was not a well-supervised plantation like Stafford's. Within this Downes tract were about 100 acres of fertile uplands wetland from which the freedmen coaxed extraordinarily rich crops of corn and garden produce. James Downes had acquired the tract in 1855. Widowed in 1858, Margaret Downes did not sell but instead held on to her island property throughout the Civil War. In 1870 she sold it to two northerners.

The African-American settlement which developed at Brickhill lay within a decaying plantation. Brickhill remained marginalized, all-black, and almost completely self-sufficient from 1858-1889, paying a token rental to Fordham, its white owner after 1871.¹⁰¹ Unthreatened by white intruders, this African-American community was able to retain its old ways. The settlement may have welcomed a visiting (although unordained) preacher like Primus, who reminded its residents of their community duties by holding religious meetings in a cabin at Brickhill. William R. Bunkley opened his new saw-mill at High Point in about 1874.¹⁰² He was soon solicited for advice as well as logs. In the early 1870s he and Robert Stafford were the only white islanders remaining on Cumberland possessing the necessary authority -- specifically, enough money and local social importance -- to get road-building and repair started. Stafford and Bunkley hired and paid men from the island. Cumberland freedmen, reputedly unwilling to

100. Longtime 19th century Cumberland residents William and Winifred Downes had 2 sons. James H. and Robert Downes consolidated their mother's tracts with purchases of their own, creating a bloc of property on Cumberland Is. whose components were: (1) the High Point Plantation; (2) the Longwood tract; and (3) Fairmont Plantation. Brickhill bluff was known as Downes's landing. Mrs. James H. Downes, widowed, sold (January 12, 1870) all her late husband's Cumberland properties to Silas Fordham and Joseph Shepard, with "the exception of 8 acres lying between Downs' Creek and the high land." (*RCCG*, Deed Bk. Q, 211) By 1870 the excluded acres had become a legally-recognized freedmen's settlement (white-owned). Recognition did not mean ownership.

101. Downes had considered the tract an investment in real estate rather than agriculture. *RCCG*, Deed Bk. "Q," pp. 200-210 (1870), testimony by widow in petition to Superior Court.

102. W. R. Bunkley's application for restoration of his land was granted November 27, 1867. NA, RG 105, E-799, vol. 197, p. 24. He became the lighthouse keeper by 1870. The Bunkley's hotel began in the mid-1870s, probably around 1874. An 1874 plat of W. R. Bunkley's land, made by surveyor John Dilworth, showed no hotel as yet but does indicate a small sawmill.

work for white men, remained islanders who understood their common need for a bridge. They would have consented to work for Bunkley, a Confederate veteran who built the saw-mill, and for Stafford, a Unionist slave-holder who possessed money. The Brickhill community evidently understood that they were working for the common good. The Bunkley community understood that labor must be paid for.

Stafford, who would die in 1877, was now an ageing invalid.¹⁰³ Bunkley at High Point on Cumberland had become the man to see.¹⁰⁴ His sawmill initiative gave Cumberland freedmen an unusual opportunity to earn regular wages. The sawmill was established in 1874, and Primus Mitchell very likely returned to Cumberland Island at about that time. Primus was then about 49 years old. As an old-timer, Primus shared memories with the Bunkleys, not necessarily unpleasant ones. He weathered most of the difficulties of early Reconstruction fairly well. He survived this painful transition period partly by temporarily leaving his island home, and when he returned to it, by lying low in the all-black Brickhill settlement occupied by his friends. Beulah Alberty, secretary of the church, descended from Rogers Alberty, who in 1864 stood alongside Primus Mitchell in Fernandina as they both sought permission to settle on Cumberland.

After repairing a few bridges, Bunkley would find customers to buy yellow pine from his own property. With the establishment of the successful Bunkley hotel, steady wage work followed for those islanders who sought it. The Bunkley hotel became widely known, attracting visitors from both coastal and inland Georgia. Its gradual growth provided a nucleus for a new community of black and white residents. To accommodate the expanding village, Bunkley and other managers set up a commissary which sold the necessary standbys for simple housekeeping: lard, sugar, matches, grits, kerosene and white bacon. At about this time (1884) the African-American community on at the north end of the island found they could have their mail delivered

103. See Appendix A.

104. Informant Mary Miller, High Point, Cumberland Island, descendant of William R. Bunkley. See Bullard, *Abandoned Black Settlement*, p. 41, for U. S. Census 1870. Two Bunkley slaves, Ellen and Chaney, married respectively Rodgers Alberty and Quash Merrow.

to a post office called “Bunkley.” High Point had become a new, racially-mixed settlement, with two churches, its own (segregated) school, access to a cemetery, and a good deep-water dock which could unload goods and produce from the mainland.

Before her death, Primus and Amanda had lived partly with relatives at High Point, where Mitchell had successfully pressed for a church, and partly at Stafford, where he worked for the Carnegies. After Amanda’s death, William C. Carnegie hired Mitchell to look after his pack of hounds which he kept for deer hunting (Fig. 14). Primus moved to Stafford House area where he occupied a dilapidated shack as his base of operations. Mitchell lies buried at High Point on Cumberland, his grave-stone placed in a biracial cemetery by a Carnegie who had known and liked him.



Figure 14. Primus Mitchell and Cray Pratt feeding the hounds at Stafford, Cumberland Island (ca. 1912).



Figure 15. Beulah Alberty, church clerk, Cumberland Island, 1960s (Courtesy Joe Graves).



Figure 16. Primus Mitchell, ca. 1912.

8. Conclusion

The stereoview of a thatched cabin shown in Figure 1 is an unusual example of vernacular architecture which can be placed locally and dated. It is also unusual in giving us a pictorial view from a very isolated freedmen's village, one which persisted after 1865 for at least three decades. Perhaps it is chiefly remarkable for showing up at all. Life in the swamps is not the best place to find vestiges of religious life, and this cabin may have been a Praise House. Its discovery is quite amazing. I remain unsure, however, why it was photographed.

Stereoviews were mounted on colored cards to be shown to lecture audiences who would be impressed by the clarity of the photographic images and by their fascinating three-dimensional quality. Each stereoview had its own title. On the reverse side of the card was printed the back list, giving titles and numbers of the stereoviews. Hopefully, members of the audience would purchase the cards. Sometimes stereoviews were purchased by local residents, proud of their city. Sometimes stereoviews were purchased by visitors and tourists as mementos of a journey. Many were the reasons for preserving these colorful and amusing records.

When tourists visited Fernandina in the late 1860s, they viewed its breathtaking beach and inhaled the fragrance of coastal flowers. As early as 1866, boat rides could be arranged to take short excursions to Cumberland Island where visitors went ashore to view the famous Dungeness gardens and the ruined mansion. In 1880 Florida Republicans escorted ex-President Grant himself over to the little Greene family cemetery where "Light-horse Harry Lee," father of Confederate hero Robert E. Lee, was buried. The camera and the sketchbook accompanied the visitor. But who was interested in the houses and meeting places of African Americans?

Quite a few, as it turns out. Engineers and architects took pictures of buildings as a matter of course. Survey photography was commonly employed to extract visual evidence from land. Photographic images were increasingly accepted as visual evidence of works important to cultural legacy and national determination. This stereograph of a thatched-roof cabin may have

been intended to celebrate the abolition of slavery and all its relicts, or it might as easily have served to dramatize the plight of freedmen.¹⁰⁵

In the 1860s the photographer worked hard to get his pictures. The technology of photography tied him to a laborious set of procedures any time he wanted to capture an image. He was fettered by his heavy equipment.

Each glass plate on which he wished to secure a usable negative had to be coated with a syrupy mix of gun cotton, ether, and bromide and then bathed in a silver nitrate solution; the photographer had to tilt and angle each plate to make the syrup flow and spread evenly across the glass surface. To prevent exposure of the light-sensitive plate, he performed all these chemical gymnastics in the dark, in either a makeshift tent or his trusty wagon. He then put the prepared plate in a thick plate holder, and if he was lucky and the outside temperature was not miserably hot and the humidity level not exceedingly high, he had about ten minutes to rush to his camera and tripod . . . insert the plate, and expose it.¹⁰⁶

Perhaps our photograph was not originally intended to be a stereoview. Stereo images can be created without a stereo camera. Stereo images might perhaps sell better, and it was not difficult to create them.

The simplest way of producing a stereo pair of images is sequentially, i.e. by taking one photograph, moving the camera a few inches to one side and taking another. The result will depend on the separation between viewpoints, but also on what happened between the two exposures. If something in the subject area has moved in this time, the two images may be very different, which can be annoying; but if the discrepancies are small, the effect is often very engaging and entertaining.¹⁰⁷

105. *Encyclopedia of 19th Century Photography*, pp.1360-1363.

106. Anthony W. Lee and Elizabeth Young, *On Alexander Gardner's Photographic Sketch Book of the Civil War* (University of California Press, Berkeley and Los Angeles, 2007) 22-3.

107. Brian May and Elaine Vidal, *Stereo World Magazine*, Vol. 16, No. 2, 1989.

Perhaps it was intended to become a glass slide to be used in a stereopticon, a kind of slide projector or “magic lantern” designed to allow one view to fade out while the next is fading in, very popular in the 1870s. Thanks to their educational value, in the late 1870s glass-slide-illustrated sermons and lectures were sweeping the nation. If this image was of a freedmen’s Baptist church, one can easily imagine the photographer showing it at Baptist audiences in New England.

To make a map, surveyors must take sightings to fix points. A succession of points, of course, makes a line. The points themselves are called “stations” (stations being geographic positions). This picture of a thatched-roof cabin was meant to be a stereoview, because it is mounted in the same way all stereographs were mounted. But I am not sure that the surveyors intended to produce a marketable photograph for tourists and lecture halls. Their sketches and measured drawings supplemented a benchmark. One wonders if the photographer was more interested in the benchmark than in the cabin.¹⁰⁸

The benchmark records the correct geographic position. A surveyor takes the position, records it, installs the markers, and moves on to the next position. A benchmark is a relatively permanent monument giving the exact elevation, usually along with the latitude and longitude that serves as a reference point. Perhaps the surveyors lacked confidence in the monument’s permanence, which is understandable in a frequently flooded area. While the surveying party was not required to photograph the fixed station, perhaps a special reason had appeared for doing so.¹⁰⁹

108. Schultz, Dr. William J. “Exploring the American Frontier: Part I -- Legacy of the Land Surveyor in the Daguerreian Era,” *The Daguerrian Annual 2004*, *passim*.

109. Schultz, *op. cit.*, 61.

A few American daguerrotypists took surveying photographs as early as the 1860s, and Augustus LePlongeon, a British surveyor and archaeologist, used the wet plate process to document ancient ruins in 1862.¹¹⁰ A surveyor may have been ordered to take the photograph to illustrate the stereoscopic method of “photographic surveying.” Plane-tabling is more time-consuming than photography, and economies of time were important factors for the U.S. Coast Survey.¹¹¹

In 1857 Superintendent Alexander Dallas Bache was interested in baselines. The Survey had just completed a successful baseline survey in New England. The Epping Plains Base Line, measured in Maine in 1857, was the last of the great base lines measured by Bache.¹¹² Photographs of the innovative process, in which the techniques of field surveyors were combined with photography, were taken by Mr. Black of the Boston firm, Whipple and Black (John Adams Whipple and James Wallace Black, prominent photographers with a wide scientific acquaintance), and were turned over to the American Association for the Advancement of Science. No one knows the present location of these photographs, but enough was known of the links of terrestrial navigation to land-mapping to suggest that a definite interest in experimentation may have motivated the Survey party to use a camera before the Civil War.

110. Schultz, *ibid*, 117.

111. “Stereoscopic Method of Photographic Surveying,” *Nature*, vol. 66, 139-141 (June 5, 1902). Photographs were taken with a surveying camera at a pair of points, the plates being exposed in the vertical plane passing through both stations. A reseau (a grid of fine lines forming little squares of a standard size: used with celestial photographs and plates for reference or measurement) or a graduated back frame, gives the means of measuring the coordinates of any point on the plates with reference to the optical axis of the camera.

112. The rocky terrain of Maine precluded a level site, and the Epping Plains Base Line had over 140 feet of relief. It was the first baseline measured on uneven terrain, but this turned out to be a minor inconvenience as progress in its measurement exceeded that of the other 6 baselines measured by Bache. The first three days’ work on this baseline was shortened by arrangements for photographing the apparatus. Even so, the base line was completed on the 7th day. Although the photographs are lost, this marked the first time that photography of field operations was attempted. Bache, A.D., 1858, “Notes on the measurement of a base for the primary triangulation of the eastern section of the coast of the United States, on Epping Plains, Maine.” In: Bache, A.D., *Report of the Superintendent, 1857*. Appendix No. 26, pp. 304-305. Measured photography was of great interest to scientists, astronomers, and mathematicians. Bache was not trying to record the survey parties’ daily activities, although NOAA has many charming and descriptive photographs in its records.

Difficulties presented by the great Georgia marshes perhaps stimulated experimentation by the Survey.

In 1857 Survey Assistant A. M. Harrison reported conditions at Cumberland Island to his chief, Professor Bache.¹¹³

The topography of the country embraced by this sheet [sheet # 1] is varied. Cumberland island, Georgia, is generally level, the southern extremity being formed of marsh, divided irregularly by Beach creek and its many branches. The outer or ocean shore consists of low sand hills and a sandy beach, constantly washed by the breakers of the Atlantic. The rest of the island . . . is composed of the cultivated lands surrounding Dungeness, the residence of the proprietor, Mr. Nightingale, and thick woods of Spanish bayonet, oak, and some pine. A road extends nearly in a straight line northwardly through this forest, and its continuation still further north, upon or near which is located the proposed site for the base [i.e., the baseline] . . . The boundary line separating Georgia and Florida runs between this and Amelia island . . . and thence follows westwardly the channel of the St. Mary's river.

After reading Harrison's report, no reader would be faulted for thinking Nightingale owned the island. In 1857, however, about five other landowners were living there, their holdings comprising about 10,000 acres of upland and marsh. At the beginning of the war, it was Stafford, not Nightingale, who, by lending landowners money and then buying their holdings when they defaulted, owned most of Great Cumberland Island. Nightingale had not made public that he too was greatly in debt to Stafford.

In 1860 Sub-Assistant F.P. Webber, with a work party in schooner *Hassler*, resumed his Survey duties begun by Harrison. Webber also reported upon Georgia's great coastal marshes.¹¹⁴

113. Capt. Alexander Medina Harrison, USCS (1829-1881). He died at age 52. He is buried in Plymouth, MA, next to his wife, Anna Russell, in a Russell family plot. He was cartographer in a Survey party to the California coast in 1849-1850.

114. Sub-Assistant Franklin Pierce Webber (birth ca 1836 and death in 1873) was attached to the South Atlantic blockading squadron during the war, where he was assigned to surveying steamer *Vixen*. He served under Assistant Boutelle, who supervised the complete development of channels leading into Charleston harbor. His widow, Mary C. Webber, in applying for a pension, stated that Frank entered the

The Inland passage, through which it was necessary to carry the triangulation, is about three miles wide, and a branch of the fresh water of the Altamaha river has caused the grass to grow to the height of twelve to fifteen feet. The hard land [i.e., fast land] being on a level with the marsh, I was obliged to built four tripod signals with scaffolds, for observing with the theodolite. One of these was twenty-five feet high, and the others each sixteen feet.¹¹⁵

Harrison gave a graphic description of their watery domain.

The rest of the topography of sheet No. 1, including the mouths of the streams . . . consists of marsh, cut up by many bayous and creeks, with occasionally a hammock or “island” of fast land [i.e., salt grass fastened to the muck by roots] rising slightly from the level of the surrounding swamp, and covered with a growth of pine and palmetto. In heavy gales this marsh is frequently submerged.

He apologized for sketching. The marshes presented a “confused network of muddy streams and sloughs . . . the intricacy is so great in this region, and the foothold is so bad, that the topography could not be executed with the ordinary minuteness, and recourse to sketching was rendered unavoidable.” Harrison reported his latest work.

Sheet No. 4 contains the results of a reconnaissance for the base site as proposed by you, upon Cumberland island. The survey represents the road . . . running northwardly from Dungeness through woods and cleared fields. The topography is given for about an eighth of a mile on either side of the road, and four profiles of elevation and depression are also furnished.¹¹⁶

service of the U.S. in the Coast Survey when only seventeen years of age, and worked diligently for almost twenty-four years in that capacity, without any leave of absence. In July 1877, while attending to the duties of his profession in Alabama, near the Tennessee Valley, he contracted malarial fever, of which he died in his tent at age 45. She had always accompanied him in the field, acting as caterer and provisioner for Frank and his party. In 1873 Mrs. F.P. Webber sent arrowheads from Marietta, GA, to the Peabody Museum of Harvard, a small but touching indication of the Webbers’ pastimes.

115. *Report of the Superintendent of the Coast Survey showing the Progress . . . for 1860* (Washington GPO, 1861) 58-59.

116. *Report of the Superintendent of the U.S. Coast Survey for 1858* (Washington GPO, 1859) Appendix No. 40, “Extracts from a report by Assistant A. M. Harrison, schooner Pierce, June 23, 1857,” 377-79.

Harrison added thoughtfully that oysters and fish of excellent quality abounded in those marsh streams.

The Survey, interrupted by the outbreak of hostilities, resumed its work at the end of the Civil War. In 1869 U.S. Coast Survey Assistant William H. Dennis, carrying a Survey party in the schooner *Caswell*, completed the plane-table survey of Cumberland Island. Dennis had received orders to recommence at the point where the survey had left off before the war (see Figs. 8a-8c). At Brickhill landing (at that time called Downes landing) the surveyor drew a cleared area containing seven dwellings. The thatched cabin of our stereoview is the seventh cabin, the southernmost (see Fig. 8d). Our stereoview records Dennis's geographic position.¹¹⁷ Webber's benchmarks were still in place. I found no records for orders given the government surveyors to photograph their geographic positions. Perhaps commercial photographers were responsible for our stereoview.

After the departure of the U.S. Coast Survey in the early 1870s, commercial use of its photographs would not have been considered particularly unethical. Engle & Furlong, commercial artist-photographers, were dealers who were interested in acquiring stereographs which they could sell. Printed on the back of a portrait stereograph by Engle is the following information: "Jno. F. Engle, Artist in Photography, Dealer in Scopes and Stereoscopic Views."¹¹⁸ Inclusion of this view of a thatched-roof cabin would enlarge their marketable stereoscopic holdings. Engle & Furlong were in Fernandina in the early 1870s when they published their *Views of Georgia & Florida* with the imprint Engle & Furlong, Fernandina, Fla. [sic].¹¹⁹ Whoever photographed the cabin described as "Downes southernmost Negro house

117. Dennis had worked throughout the war for the South Atlantic Blockading Squadron, beginning November 1862. He was an experienced marine surveyor from Lowell, Massachusetts. Throughout the war Dennis worked closely with Union coastal pilots in planting buoys for southern harbor and channel entrances. In 1869 he received orders to return to his original assignment of mapping sections of the Inland Waterway. His new instructions were given him by Supt. Benjamin Peirce, a Harvard professor of geography who succeeded Bache. For his new assignment of "mapping sections between Romerly Marshes and Fernandina," Dennis worked from December 15 to May 15 (1869-1870). He finished his plane-table survey in 1870.

118. Carol Johnson, Curator of Prints, Prints & Photographs Division, Library of Congress, to Barbara Walsh, researcher, Dec. 2009.

chimney, 1860, n.d.,” was perhaps following someone else’s orders. This cabin stood in an awkward, almost inaccessible area for professional land-based photographers. Possibly Engle & Furlong copied an original made by the Survey party.¹²⁰

It is possible . . . that the original image of the thatched cabin on Cumberland Island was a daguerreotype . . . many stereograph makers were copying famous and popular images to be made into stereographs, and the only way to reproduce a photograph at that time period was to take another photograph of it. . . .¹²¹

Cumberland’s more prominent landowners occasionally offered to help the Survey parties.¹²² One member of the Greene family in particular, Phineas M. Nightingale, proprietor of Dungeness, had long been troubled by the institution of slavery. It was he who inherited Louisa (Greene) Shaw’s fairly large property of 149 slaves.¹²³ In the late 1850s, before the outbreak of war, Nightingale had extended many courtesies to members of the Coast Survey. After the end

119. The 1870 U.S. Census for Nassau Co. Florida shows a “John F. Engle, Photographer” with family, found in the “Boarding House of J. H. Hazen in the town of Fernandina.” His wife was Belle. “Her occupation was artist (coloring photographs); meaning she was assisting her husband, as any colored photos or stereoviews were hand-colored with water colors in those days. Engle is known to have produced stereoviews and *cartes de visite* of Fernandina and surrounding areas.” Photo archivist Lee Elzroth to author, February 2009. Engle & Furlong may have copied a U.S. Survey image.

120. John Forman Engle (1824-1908) was born in New Jersey. Before the war he had been an itinerant photographer in North Carolina. During the war Engle was associated with the First Army Corps, U.S.A. After the war his name appeared sporadically as a photographer-artist in Pennsylvania, South Carolina, and Ohio. From 1868-1876 Engle was a partner in Florida of a photographer named James Furlong. Together they produced *cartes de visite* from Gainesville (Florida) and Fernandina, with the imprint “Engle & Furlong, Artists.” Occasionally they identified themselves as “Traveling Photographers.”

121. Print Room librarian (New-York Historical Society) Matthew J. Murphy to author, March 7, 2010.

122. “Under the direction of Assistant Harrison, a minute survey was made by him of the site proposed for a baseline on Cumberland island.” p. 82, paras. 2, 6. Special thanks were extended to Mr. Nightingale for courtesies extended to the survey party. *Report of the Superintendent of the U.S. Coast Survey showing progress of . . . work, year ending Nov. 1, 1857* (Washington, GPO., 1858).

123. For the role of Phineas M. Nightingale (b.1803-d.1873) who sold his Cumberland acreage on which to build the Cumberland African Church, see Bullard, “Ned Simmons, American Slave” (*ADAN*, June 2007), pp. 39-41. Although family tradition says Nightingale was Shaw’s favorite nephew, more probable is that Shaw trusted Nightingale to treat her enslaved workers humanely. Neither owner permitted their property to leave them, although Nightingale occasionally facilitated departure of a slave to Savannah for apprenticeship. In Nightingale’s final years, Dungeness was occupied by his Savannah relatives as custodians.

of the war, successive survey parties renewed their acquaintance with Dungeness. They would have discussed Congress's renewed interest in the Inland Waterway, commiserated over wartime losses, and exchanged observations regarding the baseline survey.¹²⁴ Nightingale, however, no longer lived on the family property. He resided, sick and dispirited by his debts, with his family in Brunswick where he died in 1873. Possibly he commissioned Engle & Furlong.

I do not think they intended to pirate the surveyors' photography. Engle and Furlong produced stereoviews to attract customers, and they perhaps marketed this one under their own name because they felt they had a right to do so. Aware that many Fernandina residents were familiar with Cumberland Island, Engle would have seen no harm in appropriating the work of a government surveyor to sell under their own name. Although it is quite possible that they took the photograph, I doubt it. It is a long walk from Dungeness to Brickhill -- slightly over eleven and a half miles -- and land-based photographers would need a horse and carriage (or mule and covered wagon) for at least an hour and a half just to cover the distance from Dungeness to Brickhill. In 1870 Engle was residing in Fernandina, where the partners arranged for the distribution of their stereoviews by Norman Brownson of Fernandina, owner of a stationery store. All his stock was lost in a large city fire in Fernandina in 1876 in which Brownson's entire shop burned to the ground.¹²⁵

To summarize: The image of a thatched roof cabin at the New-York Historical Society shows us a cabin at Brickhill landing on Cumberland Island, in Camden County, Georgia (Fig. 1). Depending on when the photograph was taken, the image from Brickhill's black settlement was either taken before the Civil War (suggested dates: 1857 or 1858), in which case it is a slave cabin, or after the War (suggested dates: post-1865 to early 1870s), in which case it is a freedman's cabin. The picture was almost certainly taken by members of a Survey party, sent by

124. The baseline survey, in triangulation, meant measuring the side of one of a series of coordinated triangles the length of which is measured with prescribed accuracy.

125. Brownson (var. sp. Bronson), originally from Vermont, moved to Fernandina after the war where he was soon named chairman of the Nassau County school system when it was organized on April 24, 1869; on Jan. 8, 1872 Brownson elected as alderman; in 1876 Brownson elected as councilman; in 1879 Brownson elected mayor. The author thanks Lee Eltzroth, Peachtree City, GA; Marvin Housworth, Atlanta, GA; and Kathy Nemaric, Fernandina Beach, FL.

the U.S. Coast Survey. From 1857-1870 the Survey was working on a baseline from Cumberland Island, with time out for war. I suggest that sometime in 1858 (after the Survey's successes in Maine) a U.S. Coast surveyor on Cumberland Island received orders to experiment



Figure 17. Photographed 1939 by Muriel Barrow Bell and Malcolm Bell Jr., published in *Drums and Shadows* (1940), grave markers carved by Siras [Cyrus] Bowen in Bowen family burial ground, at Sunbury Baptist Church, Sunbury, GA. Courtesy of Library of Congress, Prints and Photographs Division, reproduction number LC-USZ62-137160.

with a binocular camera.¹²⁶ The surveying party may have returned to the site of the thatched cabin to check their chronometers. A Fernandina stereographic firm, anxious to promote sales, acquired a glass plate negative of the Survey benchmark -- marked by a thatched cabin -- to add to their inventory of local views. Engle and Furlong may even have accompanied the Survey party for the day.

The curious pipelike items in the lower left of Figure 1 present another puzzling detail. I had thought that they were some form of survey marker. However, those small column-like items in Figure 1 may be graveyard markers of the simple yet symbolic style long favored by conservative Gullah-Geechee communities (see Fig. 17). If so, then the long tabby blocks in the foreground of Figure 1 may well be remnants of a low tabby wall. The community's burying ground must have lain between the cabin and the long low curve of Brickhill river. Doubtless the relentless erosion caused by decades of spring tides has toppled the sapling behind the tabby wall (Fig. 1; see Fig. 13 for soil erosion at Brickhill landing). Since signs of extensive flooding are apparent in Figure 1 -- a toppled tree, tumbled tabby blocks, and slumped earth behind tabby walls -- may we also suppose that Brickhill landing was often flooded? If so, then this stereoview may be interpreted another way: (1) the tabby blocks once formed a low cemetery wall, of which several examples remain upon Cumberland, the most visible being the small Stafford graveyard; (2) what seemed a shell "midden" was instead a manmade ground-cover of shell, commonly used in Gullah-Geechee and other island graveyards to suppress grass; and (3) the two small column-like figures were Gullah-Geechee mortuary sculptures. Sometimes called "pole and head" sculptures by art historians, they were generally called "head-sticks" by the Gullah.¹²⁷ Brickhill landing was known to have a graveyard, and this may be it.¹²⁸

126. See A. D. Bache, "Notice of the determination of the longitude of Fernandina, Amelia Island, Florida (in connection with Mr. C. A. Schott) by means of chronometer exchanges from Savannah, Georgia," *Proceedings of the American Association for the Advancement of Science*, 1857, p. 166. Carl A. Schott was appointed (July 1, 1855) chief of the Computing Division, Coast Survey. Scott, a brilliant theoretician, was deeply interested in territorial magnetism and its effects in ground mapping.

127. *Memoirs of the American Folk-Lore Society*, "Folk-Lore of the Sea Islands," n.d., informant #17.

Although wood-cutting on neighboring properties was discouraged, plenty of wood was available. Drift wood in great quantities appears regularly at the base of the high bluff on Cumberland Island known as the site where Fort St. Andrew “formerly stood,” about two miles in an air-line from Brickhill landing (see Bullard, *Cumberland Island: A History*, for illustrations following page 50). Driftwood can be retrieved by oxen hauling skidders or by floating it out on a rising tide.¹²⁹ The Walker Papers allude more than once to a graveyard at Brickhill landing, and hotel-manager Ross attended at least one funeral there for a young man who had drowned. Ross returned considerably shaken by the services, described as heartrending. Several people resident at High Point were aware of the destruction of graveyard markers through their re-use for firewood.

Based on the little that is known about Primus Mitchell, a Cumberland Island man with a reputation as a preacher, this thatched cabin was very possibly the Brickhill community’s Praise House, in which they with Primus awaited the coming of their Lord.

128. An eminent folklorist wrote of Cyrus Bowen's grave markers: “Wooden markers never last long since the weather and termites eventually reduce them to splinters, but those that do survive sometimes stand as a mute witness to the abilities of their sculptors. . . . The central piece in this group is a rudimentary human form similar to the common place headboards. Standing almost five feet high, it consists of a round head on a cylindrical post, a three dimensional treatment of the normally flat marker The head has oval eyes and a thin line for a mouth; even in three dimensions, this monument is still a minimalistic sculpture. . . . The two flanking pieces, now lost, were both serpent-like forms. With these sculptures, Bowens took advantage of the natural shapes of branches.” The commentator felt the serpentine quality of Bowens’s sculpture suggested a relationship with reptile motifs found in some African-African carving. “Only the simple pole and head statue remains as a hint of Cyrus Bowens’ exciting vision for the cemetery, the world of the dead.” John M. Vlach, “Graveyards and Afro American Art,” *Southern Exposure*, 5 (1977) 165; see also Mason Crum’s *Gullah: Negro Life in the Carolina Sea Islands* (Duke University 1940), p. 97.

129. By utilizing their expert knowledge of the Cumberland Dividings and half-tides, Brickhill boatmen could have regularly floated driftwood to their community. The author thanks Captain Troup Nightingale of Brunswick for sharing his expertise on flood and ebb tides at Brickhill river.

Note

* Mary R. Bullard, 5 Sunview Terrace, South Dartmouth, Massachusetts. The author thanks Barbara B. Walsh of Chevy Chase, Maryland, for her invaluable assistance at the Library of Congress, the National Archives, and the library of the National Oceanic & Atmospheric Administration.

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“Triangulation in Georgia,” by Clarence H. Swick, Geodetic Computer, U.S. Coast and Geodetic Survey, Special Publication No. 43 (Washington, D.C., GPO, 1917), p.51. The station called “Old house, S. chimney, 1860, n.d.” (p. 51) is our citation. Same latitude and longitude as the station called “Old House, south chimney” (on p. 116) pub. in *Report of the Superintendent of United States Coast Survey.--Geographical Positions, Section V.* (p. 116).

U.S. Census (1850, 1860, 1870, 1880, 1890, 1900, 1910), Population, Agricultural Schedules.

Interviews

George Merrow and his wife, Audrey Holzendorf, of High Point, Cumberland Island, Georgia. Merrow was a descendant of Primus Mitchell (grandson of Catherine Mitchell, a daughter of Primus).

Mary Miller, of Brunswick and Cumberland Island, Georgia, Bunkley descendant (through Charles A. Miller).

Maps

Cumberland Island Map, The Lucy Carnegie Estate, Watts Engineering Company, Waycross, Georgia (January 1965) Base map from Hillestad *et al.*, taken from Watts map.

U.S. Coast Survey, T-sheet #1152; see also *Report of the Superintendent of the United States Coast Survey showing the progress of the survey during the year 1865--Geographical Positions, section V* (Washington, D.C., GPO 1867); see also House of Representatives, 39th Cong., 1st session, ex. doc No. 75, p.116.

Place Names Map, "Aquatic Systems," Cumberland Island, Camden County, Georgia, 1975, prepared by the Institute of Natural Resources, University of Georgia, for the Department of Interior, National Park Service (in Hilburn Hillestad *et al.* 1976).

Drake, J.C., Ens., USN. *United States Coast and Geodetic Survey, Bulletin No. 19* (1891), "On the Sounds and Estuaries of Georgia, with Reference to Oyster Culture."

McKinnon, John. *Map of Great & Little Cumberland Islands* (1802). This map may be found in vol. 13, *The Papers of General Nathanael Greene, Volume XIII: 22 May 1783 - 13 June 1786, with Additions to the Series*, ed., Roger N. Parks. (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2005). Original was found on Cumberland Island by the Carnegie heirs who later donated it to Georgia's Department of Archives & History (Morrow, GA).

Appendix A

On April 21, 1877, a visiting journalist (probably the "H.H.J." who wrote for the *Macon Weekly Telegraph*) left the newly-established Bunkley Hotel at Cumberland's North End to accompany a small group of visitors to Robert Stafford's house. Stafford died at home on August 1, 1877. This report gave his portrait three months before his death. Note that Stafford was lying on a couch.

A committee of one . . . advances forthwith into the presence of the old Island Monarch, and finds him stretched upon a lounge in a handsome parlour. . . . He is received courteously when his mission is made known, albeit the old man, being quite deaf,

ROARS RATHER THAN TALKS,

and does resemble a superannuated lion. Our companions are invited in and introduced, and then [a] little interviewing ensues, with the following results: Mr. Stafford was born at Dungeness on Cumberland Island, and is near *ninety* years of age, though his erect figure and unshrunk frame show him to be still possessed of considerable vigor. His has been an eventful life, owing to early family differences, improper to be mentioned, but which cast a glamor over the future, and perhaps has no little to do with the comparatively reckless life he has led, and utter disregard for the customs, proprieties and conventionalities of society.¹³⁰

130. The journalist's account reflects his laudable hesitation to repeat gossip. Article signed by "H.H.J.," writing in a series called "Chronicles of Cumberland Island." His previous contribution was dated April 21, 1877. His next contribution, Chronicle #3, was undated. The text above is from Chronicle #3. *Georgia Weekly Telegraph and Messenger*, May 1, 1877. I am greatly indebted to Tracy Castle of Cornwall, England, for finding this account.

But we do not intend to lift the vane [sic] upon the sins and eccentricities of our almost

CENTENARIAN HOST,

but prefer to cast over them the mantle of charity, only regretting that he should still continue to “swear like a pirate.”

The old gentleman accumulated a vast fortune in the cultivation of a fine grade of Sea Island cotton, and was once the owner of about 500 slaves, 2,000 head of cattle and *nine hundred* horses. The latter ranged in a perfectly wild condition over his immense estate of twenty thousand acres, with no attention save the introduction of imported stallions from time to time. They subsisted wholly

UPON THE RANK SALT GRASS

which exists in limitless fields all around the island, except seaward, and were possessed of great beauty and endurance. When wanted they were driven into strong enclosures and *lassoed*. Whole ship loads were frequently caught and sent North, bringing an average price each of about *one hundred dollars*. We saw grouped close together in one field *forty* of these animals, some of them exceedingly handsome and well-grown.

The old man informed us that the yankees had destroyed 200 bales of Sea Island cotton, worth \$1.25 per pound, killed all his cattle, and carried off nearly every one of the horses.

When asked casually *who* fired his cotton,

HE YELLED OUT,

“D-m ‘em, they made Robert Stafford do it.”

In the midst of our colloquy suddenly he shouted to his alter ego, Mr. McHardy, the old Scotchman we first met, “bring out the jug.” The old man fumbled over a bunch of keys as though he did not know the right one and was again saluted with a thunderous oath and ordered to hurry up.¹³¹

During the serving of the refreshments a

FUNNY LITTLE BY-SCENE WAS ENACTED.

131. Stafford’s friend was probably Alex McNaily [McNeily?], age 70, rice farmer, born in Scotland, personal property valued at \$10,000 (U. S. Census, Population Schedule, 1870, Georgia, Camden County, Cumberland Is., visitation #7). He lived at Plum Orchard, probably as Stafford’s tenant.

The “canny Scot” at a moment when the host was not observing, turned his back to him, and pouring out a tumbler of the poteen with a comical leer of the eye exclaimed, “now I’ll get even with him” and downed it at a gulp. These old men have been living together for a quarter of a century.



Figure 18. Robert Stafford, ca. 1876 (courtesy and copyright Eloise Bailey Thompson)

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