

PLANTATION'S "PILE OF TRASH"...

By George Pledger

When Robert Black of Seabrook, SC (hobby license #2579) called the SCIAA Underwater Archaeology Division office in Charleston and offered several containers of pottery shards that had been collected from a Combahee River plantation site, Lynn Harris jumped at the chance to have a ceramic sample from a defined area (see Flotsam and Jetsam, December 1995 issue).

When the "sample" of pottery shards arrived at the office it consisted of several hundred pounds of mixed prehistoric, colonoware, stoneware, earthenware, and porcelain. If it was made or used in the Southeast, there was undoubtedly a sample in the several large containers.

For those of you who have attended SCIAA's Underwater Archaeology Field School (the next one is in September) you can imagine the look that Carl Naylor and Eddie Weathersbee gave Lynn for allowing this mass of material through the front door. My first reaction was "what a pile of trash," but that is what most sport divers are all about--old trash. And, this pile of "trash" would give us a view of a river site that would reach back through five millennia of human occupation. It is greatly appreciated that Robert Black would share his find with the rest of us.

Under Lynn's supervision, the samples were separated into groups--prehistoric, stoneware, earthenware, and porcelain. My part in this project was to identify the fragments that were either porcelain or earthenware with porcelain-like decorations. This consisted of more than 300 pieces of porcelain, pearlware, and creamware. I managed to identify the designs on 178 of these through publications such as Ivor Noel Hume's "A Guide to Artifacts of Colonial America," and Ralph and Terry Kovel's "Dictionary of Marks on Pottery and Porcelain." Also, several local antique dealers contributed their expertise in the subject of export porcelain and custom creamware patterns from the early nineteenth century.

Using these sources, many of the fragments were identified by their patterns or by the proprietary or house marks on them. For example, several of the pieces were marked "Folch's Genuine Stone China," which, I learned, was made in the Staffordshire area of England around 1835. This type of ceramic was in high style between 1830 and 1845.

What was left took a little more research. Several shards were identified as Canton porcelain (1790-1842) by their greenish-gray body. Some shards pre-dated early versions of willow and bridge patterned pearlware which began production in England around 1795. Some good examples of Chinese export porcelain were among the fragments and dated from 1790 to 1830.

Custom fired stoneware and European creamware was also found that dates from 1830 to 1850. These have very un-Oriental designs, mostly pastoral scenes, and one can only regret that one of these scenes was not of the Combahee River plantation itself.

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Historic sources already tell much about this plantation site. For instance, we know that prior to 1775 the Middletons and Atkins owned the immediate area of the plantation and the nearby Middleton homesite was the scene of a Tory raid in 1779.

Between 1785 and 1790 Nathaniel Heyward started to acquire plantations along the Combahee River, including the plantation where these ceramics were found. The Heywards built a modest cottage on this site which continued to be Nathaniel Heyward's main plantation throughout his lifetime. He did own other plantations however, including Middle House, Rose Hill, Pleasant Hill, Lewisburg, Amsterdam, Antwerp, Rotterdam, Hamburg, Copenhagen, White Hall, The Pines, Savannah, The Vineyard, Marshland, Clay Hall, and Blanford, all mostly on the Combahee River.

From the diary of Major General George Izard, the Heywards were well known to Charleston as well as Savannah society. General Izard's diary entry for January 31, 1815 notes that the house at this particular plantation was not exceptional, but the entertainment was "good and comfortable".

Nathaniel Heyward was acclaimed by his peers as the most successful rice planter of his time. Heyward's rice production for 1815 was reported to be in excess of 4,000 tons. The Mills Atlas of 1826 shows two rice stamping mills on the Combahee River above and below "The Heyward Place." These rice mills operated until 1863.

Nathaniel Heyward died in 1851 and his vast holdings were divided among his nine children. The plantation house on the Combahee was destroyed by Yankee raiders on June 23, 1863 when Col. Montgomery's 1st South Carolina Black Regiment was moved up the Combahee from Port Royal by steamer. A description of this raid can be found in the *Charleston Mercury* for July 3, 1863.

This tract was kept with the Heyward family until 1911 when it was bought by the DuPonts who built the house that presently occupies this site.

What can a pile of broken dishes add to all this? By identifying and dating the various shards of pottery we are able to add significant details to the story of this plantation. First of all, the prehistoric pottery found on the bottom of the Combahee River reveals a native presence dating back 5,000 years.

Closer to our own time period, the low number of pottery fragments dating before about 1785 suggest that occupation on the site before then was meager. Also these pre-1875 shards consist mostly of stoneware and colonoware types that were used by slaves and common folk.

The fragments of pottery we studied also show that after Nathaniel Heyward purchased the property the area began to prosper. This is indicated by the discovery that the first evidence of high-status pottery, specifically Chinese export porcelain, can be dated to between 1780 and 1795. This prosperity seems to have reached its height between 1820 and 1850 as suggested by the profusion of porcelain pieces dating from this period.

This is only a preliminary study of all the pottery pieces Robert Black has brought to us for examination, and while adding little to the recorded history of the site--the who

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and when of those living there--they have already revealed much about the style of those who occupied the site.

Additional References Consulted:

Godden, Geoffery A., *Illustrated Encyclopedia of British Pottery and Porcelain*.

Chaffers, Wm., *Marks and Monograms on European and Oriental Pottery and Porcelain*.

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