



Mitigation Case Study: Silk Hope, Cherry Hill, and Dublin/Richmond Hill Plantations

Archaeological investigations conducted by Brockington and Associates, Inc. for the Ford Plantation, LLC provide an excellent example of how Section 106 of the National Historic Preservation Act (NHPA) of 1966, as amended, works. The subject property lies on the Lower Coastal Plain of Georgia, in southern Bryan County. Named for automotive icon Henry Ford, who had a residence there in the early to mid-twentieth century, the Ford Plantation property once contained three antebellum rice plantations: Silk Hope, Dublin/Richmond, and Cherry Hill. Brockington and Associates, Inc. began fieldwork in 1998 for a proposed residential development on the subject property that required a permit from the US Army Corps of Engineers (USACE) under Section 404 of the Clean Water Act, thus initiating the Section 106 process.

One of the strengths of archaeology is its ability to compliment history, fill in the gaps, and tell the stories of those people and practices not well-documented in the written record. In this case, archaeology was able to tell us much more about the everyday lives of the enslaved African-American occupants of the plantations than any planter's journal could.

The earliest of the three occupations occurred at the Silk Hope Plantation. Archaeological evidence indicates that, especially at this relatively early date, African traditions had a major influence on slave culture. Archaeologists identified the remains of slave quarters that closely resemble the style of house one would find in West Africa.

Another indication that African cultural traditions were thriving in early colonial and antebellum Georgia comes from some of the pottery recovered at Silk Hope. Colonoware, a type of ceramics produced by enslaved African-Americans for their own use, was recovered from Silk Hope, some bearing engraved markings similar to those found on colonoware in South Carolina and believed by some to represent African religious/cosmological symbols.

Cherry Hill Plantation also produced evidence of African culture among the enslaved African-American population. In addition to colonoware, this site produced possible evidence of an African style initiation ritual involving animal sacrifice. A sheep burial was discovered in the back yard area of one of the slave cabins at Cherry Hill. The skeleton is intact and shows no signs of butchering, so it was evidently not used for food. It may have been a pet, but this seems unlikely in light of ethno-historical accounts of African rituals involving the slaughter of a sheep and subsequent burial in place by digging soil from underneath the body.

Also found in the same general area was a small pewter sheep figurine. Viewshed analysis conducted via geographic information system (GIS) indicates that such a ritual conducted at this location would have been out of sight from the overseer's house-an important detail since such rituals would have likely been forbidden or strongly discouraged.

Such details of African-American culture on the colonial and antebellum Georgia coast are seldom captured in the historical record and might have been lost to the archaeological record if there were not a procedure in place to evaluate historic properties and assess the effects that certain types of "undertakings" might have upon them.

In addition to archaeological data recovery, efforts were also made to mitigate adverse effects to architectural resources present in the Ford Plantation development. An architectural survey of Bryan County conducted in 1976 resulted in the nomination of a National Register Historic District including the mansion built by Henry Ford, the servants' quarters, Ford's laboratory (formerly a steam powered rice mill), and a Civil War gun emplacement overlooking the Ogeechee River. The Section 106 process also dictated that adverse effects to these eligible architectural resources be mitigated.

One of the steps taken to mitigate adverse effects on the Ford National Register District was to redraw its boundaries to include landscape elements such as nearby Sterling Marsh, where inhabitants of the Richmond Plantation once planted rice, and the "Oyster House" - a historic cabin that Ford had relocated to his property. This redrawn district was nominated for inclusion in the National Register of Historic Places.

All Ford Era architecture was documented according to standards and guidelines set forth by the Historic American Buildings Survey (HABS), which includes measured drawings, large format photographs, and written history.

Guidelines were put in place to govern locations for new construction to minimize their visual impact on the Ford National Register District. These guidelines also limit the design of new construction to styles consistent with those of the Ford National Register properties.

Finally, a plan was devised for monitoring those historic properties (which included both archaeological and architectural resources) that were to be preserved in place. This plan specifies the resources to be monitored, by whom, and how often. It also sets limits and conditions on the kinds of maintenance or other activity that can be conducted within the boundaries of protected properties.

The end result of this whole process has been positive for everyone involved. The Ford Plantation, LLC will have archaeological and historical exhibits that add value to their product. The City of Richmond Hill will also have museum exhibits, as well as a potential increase in heritage tourism. Bryan County Public Schools and libraries will receive cultural heritage education materials incorporating the recent work at Ford Plantation. Finally, we all have the satisfaction of knowing that these chapters in American history will be preserved for generations to come.

Some sources of more information include: *From Beautiful Zion to Redbird Creek: A History of Bryan County* by Buddy Sullivan, *Shades of Gray: The Clay and McAllister families of Bryan County, Georgia* by Carolyn Clay Swiggart, and papers posted at the Brockington and Associates, Inc. Web site.