

## SUMMARY AND CONCLUSIONS

Research topics proposed for the work at Jervey Plantation included an examination of the economic and social changes in Christ Church parish and the effects those changes had on plantation owners, as evidenced in the archaeological record. We also sought to examine the main plantation house for architectural remains with an eye toward evaluating the status and well-being of the owner. And we also hoped that the combination of economic and archaeological data might help us to better interpret the living conditions of the Jervey slaves. Some, although not all, of these research goals were met.

### Historical Synopsis

Our economic reconstruction of Christ Church, given that data for the parish are limited to the 1850 and 1860 agricultural censuses, cannot be considered authoritative. However, it does suggest that between 1850 and 1860 Christ Church did see a significant realignment in agricultural production. There was a noticeable move to ranching, although its economic success is questionable. Otherwise, there was a surprising (given the proximity to the Charleston market) turn away from the early efforts at truck cropping while planters placed their faith in "King Cotton." Coupled with the rise in cotton and decline in subsistence crops, the Parish's planters also sought to cut their costs by dramatically reducing their slave populations.

Turning to the study tract, what we found is that by 1850 the owner was - like others in the Parish - focusing on ranching, although unlike most of his peers he had not forsaken

inland swamp rice. In this sense, the plantation appears to display considerable conservatism, refusing to turn away from a crop that had been productive for so many years. While not "typical" of the agricultural pursuits of the bulk of other planters in the Parish, we found no evidence that the plantation was anything other than typical in terms of wealth. The research could not be extended into the last decade before the Civil War since the plantation could not be identified in the 1860 agricultural census.

Our examination of the owners reveals a mix of both resident and non-resident owners, with a few whose status is unknown. The plantation was probably settled very early - perhaps in the first decade of the eighteenth century by Roger Player and certainly by the time of Thomas Player, Jr. During the mid to late antebellum, when the census data provides important insights, the owner was Thomas Jervey. It was also during this period that the initial settlement was abandoned - with the slave settlement being moved to the west and the main house at 38CH927 no longer being used.

### Environmental Conditions

Pollen and phytolith samples were taken from several locations at the Jervey Plantation, primarily in the hope of identifying either cultigens or possibly domesticated garden plants. Neither goal was realized.

The combined samples are indicative of a disturbed habitat dominated by grasses and weedy plants. Some of these plants are specific to wet environments, others are found under

drier conditions. There is some indication of grazing animals (based on the *Sporormiella* dung fungal spores) – providing further support of the early ranching activities. The analysis also contributes to our belief that the existing vegetation was cleared, probably by burning, prior to construction.

### Archaeological Findings

The investigations focused on three primary areas – what was determined to be the kitchen (based on artifacts and dispersion), the main house (based on intact foundation remains), and a slave settlement (based on artifacts and the identification of one wall trench structure). These remains provide an excellent view of a “typical” Christ Church plantation during the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries.

#### **The Kitchen**

In the kitchen area, about 75 feet to the southwest of the main house, we identified the remains of two structures. The earliest structure was a frame kitchen supported by massive wood piers. Later, this structure was replaced by a more substantial structure, still frame, but set on brick piers, situated just a few feet to the north of the earlier structure.

A plaster sample from the second kitchen reveals a single, thin layer of dark gray to black pigment that was not readily water soluble – suggestive of sooting. While this is not unexpected, that it is such a thin layer reveals that the kitchen walls were periodically cleaned (although not whitewashed). This lack of whitewashing is unexpected and suggests that not all plantations were equally fastidious.

Most of the artifacts from this area were found in a large trash midden that may represent an early antebellum clean-up effort on the plantation. While excavated in two zones in an effort to detect temporal differences, this activity does not seem to have been successful.

Artifacts in the kitchen deposits date from about 1670 to as late as 1900, with the intensity of occupation probably jumping dramatically about 1760 and maintaining a high level to about 1820, after which time refuse disposal tapers off. This suggests occupation from the latter half of the Player tenure through Morrison’s absentee ownership.

Most significantly, we believe that the kitchen deposits provide good evidence of a gradual improvement of status from the mid-eighteenth century through mid-nineteenth century. The dominant vessel form changes from bowls to plates and decorations change from inexpensive annular and edged wares to hand painted and transfer printed motifs. Combined with these changes, we also note that much of the utensil assemblage consisted of spoons – indicative of pottages or one-pot means – with fewer forks.

The analysis of faunal remains from the kitchen area not reveal a prevalence of higher quality cuts (forequarter and hindquarter), but the remains are also suggestive of on-site butchering. Taken together, this suggests that the plantation was involved in ranching prior to the 1850 census.

#### **The Main House**

The main house was found to measure about 20.2 feet north-south by approximately 40.3 feet east-west, resulting in a first floor plan of 800 square feet. The one identified chimney is centered on the west wall and, we presume, there was a mate on the east wall, typical of a through-hall plan. The first floor was likely raised several feet off the ground (on brick piers) – not enough to allow storage or to be considered a basement. The roof was shingled and the building itself was frame. There is evidence of a portico or porch on both the north and south elevations.

We note that the structure is typical of those reported by Shelley Smith (1999) as being built in the last half of the eighteenth century, a time when planters’ houses became less

elaborate and more “vernacular” in response to a greater emphasis on the Charleston townhouse.

In the yard area surrounding this main house we found an assemblage with a mean date of about 1801, but a range from about 1760 through 1830 – suggestive of the period from at least Thomas Player to Richard Morrison (a non-resident). There is decreasing evidence of occupation from that time through the Jervey ownership of the late antebellum.

The main house assemblage itself exhibits a mean date of 1816, although there is a strong peak in occupation between 1760 and 1820 – consistent with other assemblages at the site and representing the occupation of Thomas Player, Jr. through Richard Morrison. There is possible evidence of occupation through perhaps 1860, although the data suggest only intermittent or infrequent use.

The main house ceramic assemblage is more clearly dominated by flat wares than is the kitchen, although there is still evidence that the proportion of flat wares compared to hollow wares increased over time. We believe that this assemblage documents the gradual increase in the display of wealth, featuring more and more expensive motifs at the expense of less costly designs.

We also believe – based on the low proportion of furniture-related items, that the structure sat abandoned prior to its final destruction by fire. This period of abandonment, coupled with the low use the house may have received during the late antebellum, may help explain the low incidence of tableware and other relatively high status items in the collection.

The small collection of framing and large framing nails in the main house (and kitchen) suggests that both structures were built using craft traditions and framing nails were used only for later repairs or modifications. The large assemblage of small nails in the main house is consistent with exterior cladding and

interior lathe. Architectural hardware, while wide-ranging, is relatively uncommon. This suggests that salvage took place, probably before the structure was burned. Remains also suggest that fireplaces were tiled and walkways used flag stones.

Taken together we believe that the main house was likely constructed by Thomas Player. It continued to be used – at least intermittently – through the Morrison tenure. After Morrison, and through the Jervey occupation, the house probably sat vacant, perhaps being used only very occasionally. Around mid-century it appears that it burned, but not until after much of the architectural detailing was salvaged.

Faunal remains at the main house are suggestive of less meaty or lower quality cuts – something of an anomaly. On the other hand, the remains also exhibit a greater proportion of pig and wild mammals.

The main settlement remains are difficult to interpret, since it would seem that food destined for the planter’s table would originate (and the bones be discarded in) the kitchen trash. Therefore, we may better combine the kitchen and main settlement remains, in which case the poorer quality cuts are a much less significant dietary contributor.

### **The Slave Settlement**

The slave settlement produced one intact wall trench structure, measuring 18 feet east-west by 24 feet north-south, representing a floor area of 432 square feet. The presence of other, seemingly isolated, post holes may suggest the presence of other structures in the area and, perhaps, rebuilding episodes.

Here again the artifacts reveal an occupation from about 1760 through 1830 – consistent with the main house and kitchen. The ceramics are suggestive of discards coming from the planter’s table or being scavenged by the slaves for their own use. Colono ware is surprisingly uncommon. Personal items – or any

items that might reflect some very modest comforts or pleasures – are sparse or absent. Overall the assemblage provides a bleak picture of the plantation’s enslaved population.

The faunal remains from the slave settlement are suggestive of a beef diet and the quality of the cuts tends to support the idea that the plantation was producing its own beef.

### **Synthesis**

As is often the case when archaeological studies are examined honestly, we have found some critical information capable of addressing some questions, raised many more questions, and have been unable to address a few others.

The research has provided at least a historical framework for the plantation, even though many of the early owners remain shrouded in considerable mystery. This research also correlates well with the archaeological findings – allowing us to identify who developed the plantation. We also realize, using the archaeological evidence combined with a single period plat, that the settlement location and nature changed prior to the Civil War.

We believe that there is evidence (for example in the ceramics and table utensils) of the plantation’s owners increasing wealth and social status. There is also evidence from various sources that the emphasis on ranching noted by 1850 probably began much earlier – perhaps with the initial settlement of the plantation.

The research provides architectural accounts of a main settlement from Christ Church. Little more than a farm house, it helps us understand the range of variation in architectural style and begins to fill in the gaps noted when using standing, preserved architecture (recognized as typically the best of the best). We also have yet one more wall trench structure – and one that may well have been used (with repairs, undoubtedly) into the early nineteenth century.

The data from this plantation also suggests that interpretation of slaves’ economic well-being may be far more difficult than previously anticipated. While the ceramics are consistent with discards from the main house and other artifacts seem suggestive of a bleak existence, the faunal remains suggest that the slaves – by virtue of the plantation’s ranching roots – had a relatively good diet.

The work at Jervey again points out that while Christ Church was in the “shadow” of Charleston, we know very little about its occupants and their lifeways. The work reveals something of the complexity in making social status and wealth determinations, especially for the early period. And it suggests that more work needs to be done along similar lines to obtain a larger, and more representative, sample.