

CEMETERY HILL ARCHAEOLOGICAL PROJECT: - IN SEARCH OF JOHN C. CALHOUN'S PRE-EMANCIPATION AFRICAN AMERICANS

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Woodland Cemetery on the campus of Clemson University is believed to be the final resting place of the pre-emancipation African Americans who lived, worked and died in bondage on the farm of John C. Calhoun. This traditional burial ground is an ideal location for introducing volunteers and students to historical archaeology. The university does not have an Anthropology program, nor does it attract students who are interested in pursuing archaeology as an academic choice, hence, the Cemetery Hill Archaeological Project relies on student volunteers, community volunteers and the labor of the members of the Archaeological Society of South Carolina. Since the primary research goal is the location and identification of the burial ground, students and volunteers can learn archaeological methods and techniques without risk of significant data loss. A secondary goal of this project is to introduce African Americans students to archaeology as a potential career choice thereby increasing African American viewpoints and perspectives in a discipline dominated by European American males. This article discusses the research strategies as well as the strengths and weakness of this volunteer program.

The Cemetery Hill Archaeological Project searches for the final resting places of those pre-emancipation African Americans who lived and worked in bondage on the farm of John C. Calhoun. The project also seeks to identify evidence of the burials of six to eight convicts who died during the construction of the earliest buildings on the campus of Clemson College. The historical record suggests the graves of these African Americans, both bondsmen and convicts, are located on the west slope of Cemetery Hill. Most of this evidence is oral, however. Documentary research has not supported this oral tradition.

The historical archaeologist is often in search of records written by the occupants of a site which tell us in their own words what they thought, what actions they took, and what their response was to their environment and in this case their circumstances. The pre-emancipation African Americans who were owned by John C. Calhoun did not leave letters, diaries, wills, daybooks or journals. The convicts who died at Clemson likewise did not provide us with any written records that tell us of their life and times.

Specifically, written documentation of pre-emancipation African American responses to death and dying in the piedmont of South Carolina could inform this work immeasurably. For those individuals whose lives we seek to honor with this research, the only written records available were written by whites and reflect their biases and perspectives. We can often infer limited African American viewpoints from the archaeological record; in this instance we have been able to benefit from an African American perspective of the principal investigator and many of the project's crew.

Much has been written about African American burial traditions from the Sea Islands and the low country of South Carolina and Georgia by anthropologists, historians and linguists (e.g., Jones-Jackson 1987; Roediger 1981; Vlach 1978). Some pre-emancipation African American cemeteries have been archaeologically excavated with varied results (e.g., Combes 1974; Michie 1990; Thomas, South and Larsen 1977). To date, however, there have only been short chapters (Little 1989:102-134) devoted to African American burial traditions in the piedmont of North Carolina, South Carolina, and Georgia within a journal devoted primarily to rural, folk burial traditions. Still others mention upland traditions as a means of broadening patterns found in their research of other areas (Jordan 1990).

There is no archaeological evidence known for a traditional African American burial ground in the piedmont. Hence, the Cemetery Hill Archaeological Project held the promise to make a significant contribution to our body of knowledge about this extremely important aspect of African American antebellum life.

HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

Essennaca

At the time of European acquisition of the lands which came to be Clemson University, the Cherokee settlement of Essennaca was the nearest occupied village. Essennaca was located on the west bank of the Seneca River approximately one mile down river from Cemetery Hill (Pendleton District Historical and Recreational Commission

1973:3). Naturalist William Bartram wrote in his diary in May of 1775, that "(t)he Cherokee town of **Seneca** is a very respectable settlement, situated on the east bank of the **Keowee** river, though the greatest number of Indian habitations are on the opposite shore, where likewise stands the council-house" (Harper 1958:209). It should be noted that the Seneca and Keowee Rivers are one and the same, though the names are used interchangeably to designate various segments of the river at different points in time. It is likely the **Cherokee** used the rich bottom lands to raise corn and hunted and gathered inland. The road traveled by Bartram on horseback was probably a foot trail which paralleled the west bank of the Seneca River connecting Essennaca with other Cherokee villages to the north and west.

Fort Rutledge

During the American Revolution, the Cherokee were encouraged by the British to attack the colonists living near Cherokee lands. The Cherokee campaign against the frontier settlements was short. Andrew Williamson "with six hundred and forty men defeated the Indians in a severe battle. He then destroyed five of their towns and built a fort near the present Seneca" (White 1906:106-107). The fort established by Williamson in 1776 was Fort Rutledge. "Fort Rutledge was garrisoned until the fall of Charleston, in 1780, when it was destroyed by British troops from Augusta" (Badders 1976:55).

The **Pickens** Chapter of the Daughters of the American Revolution (DAR) were actively involved in the erection of monuments and grave markers at all known sites or graves from the revolutionary war. With the aid of convict labor from the stockade at Clemson College the approximate site of Fort Rutledge was excavated. On the site they believed to be that of Fort Rutledge "they unearthed the foundation of the five-sided lookout bastion which stood on one corner of the original fort" (Calhoun 1970:15). The Board of Trustees of the College were "then persuaded...to erect a twelve foot replica on the old base" (Calhoun 1970:15).

We have no way of knowing at this point what the DAR excavated, nor do we have any evidence which supports there having been a larger structure on that site. The funding for this project has not permitted an exhaustive search for written documentation regarding Fort Rutledge. It would be informative to know how substantial the fort was, the shape it took, and of what materials it was constructed. There is no locally held history of

Fort Rutledge, nor are there any papers of the original participants of Williamson's campaign or of the excavations of the DAR, to which we have access.

The actual location of the fort has never been archaeologically explored and based on a preliminary map review of the lands on the Seneca River belonging to Fort Hill, it would appear Cemetery Hill may well have been its actual location. One local historian indicates John C. Calhoun's home overlooked the site of the fort (Badders 1976:55). Unfortunately, this really does not inform this discussion, because Fort Hill is on the highest knoll on the homestead. From Fort Hill the fort would have been visible on any of a number of lower points.

This preliminary map review has been inconclusive in pinpointing the location of Fort Rutledge which may be crucial to this project. Most of the maps showing cultural resources from the period, 1800-1860, fail to show the fort. At least one map (undated) of the march of Williamson in the 1776 campaign shows Fort Rutledge at the deepest bend in the Seneca River (Badders 1976:viii). This point can be seen today on the university campus immediately west of Cemetery Hill. This segment of the river course survived the Army Corps construction of Lake Hartwell in 1959-61. A 1784 plat map shows the fort south of Mill Creek which would place it south of campus and almost adjacent to the now submerged Essennaca Village.

These two sites must be seen in light of their value as defensive locations. Cemetery Hill is on the highest bluff at the deepest bend in the river, a location well suited for a fort. The site below Mill Creek is on the bottom land in the area shown on one map as having been occupied by the Essennaca Village. This location does not provide any particular advantage either for defense or as a potential vantage point from which to observe activity on the river. Further, we know that historically the river occasionally inundated the bottoms (Wilson 1983:319) making a fort on this location impractical.

Based on a 1951 U.S.G.S. topographic map (U.S. Department of the Interior 1951), the Calhoun House was situated at an elevation of 758 feet above mean sea level, Cemetery Hill is 700 feet, and the monument to Fort Rutledge is located at an elevation of 620 feet. The Seneca River prior to Lake Hartwell was at 600 feet at the location of the Essennaca Cherokee Village. It is a fairly safe assumption that either site would have been visible

from the Calhoun House. Cemetery Hill is significantly closer to the House and was probably unobstructed by trees making it the more logical location for Fort Rutledge.

Clergy Hall

After the Revolutionary War, the land was owned by a series of speculators before it was purchased by the Reverend James McElhenny, who constructed the first house on the site in 1803. Rev. McElhenny was the pastor of the Old Stone Church in Pendleton and called his homestead Clergy Hall (Pendleton District Historical and Recreational Commission 1973:16). The Rev. McElhenny was deeded 904 acres on January 20, 1802, title conveyed by Henry William DeSaussure. After McElhenny's death in 1812, there is no indication as to the use of Clergy Hall until its purchase by Mrs. John Ewing Colhoun, John C. Calhoun's mother-in-law, in 1820 (Littlejohn Papers 1900-1961).

John C. Calhoun

Calhoun is said to have visited Clergy Hall for the first time in 1825, and he and Floride moved there the following year. Calhoun rented the house and 600 acres of land from Mrs. Colhoun for \$250.00 a year, until her death (Littlejohn Papers 1900-1961). He renamed it Fort Hill, in honor of Fort Rutledge. He was deeded Fort Hill along with 550 acres by his mother-in-law's estate in 1836 (Pickens County Book of Deeds, 1836). Calhoun owned Fort Hill until his death in 1850. After his death, Floride and Cornelia deeded the farm "1110 acres, fifty negro slaves and all personal property for \$49,000.00" (Clemson Agricultural College 1925:17) to her eldest son, Andrew, in 1854. As payment they held his bond which was secured by a mortgage on the place and the bondsmen (1925:17). Andrew operated/mis-managed Fort Hill until his death intestate in 1865, when the farm was lost through foreclosure to his sister, Anna Maria Calhoun Clemson to satisfy Floride Calhoun's bond (Lander 1983:224).

Calhoun along with his son, Andrew, also owned Cane Brake, a large cotton plantation in Marengo County, Alabama, where the majority of the slave population worked (Cook 1965:82). It is difficult to determine how many individuals were actually present at the farm at any time. There is some indication that Fort Hill was not profitable enough to warrant the numbers employed there; hence, consideration was given to sending some hands to pick cotton at Cane Brake (Wilson 1983:656). Shortly after he made the commitment

of 10 to 15 hands to Cane Brake, Calhoun remedied this situation at Fort Hill by adding 275 acres, the majority of which was good cotton land. As a result, Calhoun felt there would no longer be any necessity for "sending any more [hands to Cane Brake] for many years" (1983:830).

The resolution of numbers is further complicated by the fact that Calhoun also owned a gold mine, O'Bar, in Lumpkin County, Georgia, and pre-emancipation African Americans purchased from Floride's uncle, John Ewing Colhoun, were sent to work there in 1834 (Wilson 1979:370-371). In 1835, Calhoun, his two partners and 20 of his hands from Fort Hill reportedly had the gold mine operating profitably without affecting the functioning of the farm (1979:555). By 1842, Thomas Green Clemson, Calhoun's son-in-law, had apparently moved to Dahlonega, Georgia to manage the gold mine, increasing its profitability while decreasing its labor force to a more manageable number. He wrote to Calhoun asking him to "make arrangement, to purchase hands or send out your own I can employ enough to work another tunnel besides stamping & washing in the rocker" (Wilson 1984:283). Further, Clemson inquired as to the disposition to be made of Calhoun's pre-emancipation African Americans sent out in 1834 (1984:283). Calhoun complied by sending "three of the boys" from Fort Hill and he made the necessary arrangements for the hiring of additional hands as needed (1984:285).

The "Slave" Burial Ground

Oral tradition tells us John C. Calhoun designated an area to the west of the family plot as "the slave burial ground," circa 1837. This practice would be consistent with what Jordan calls an almost universal practice "of siting southern cemeteries on high ground or slopes" (1990:33). The only written evidence is a relatively recent report, prepared in 1957, which indicated "(a)pproximately 100 yards to the west of the Calhoun plot is a burial ground reportedly established for slaves. ...A number of rough stone markers can today be located in this area, but it is impossible to determine the number of graves" (Anonymous 1957). Further, the report indicates that, "(i)n addition to the slaves reportedly buried here, a number of convicts who died while working on the construction of the first college buildings are buried in this area (Anonymous 1957).

The use of unmarked/unworked fieldstones is another southern tradition which can be found

throughout the piedmont (Jordan 1990:43). Evidence for this practice can be seen in church cemeteries and white family cemeteries, as well as markers of pre-emancipation African American burials. It has been suggested that rough fieldstones were used in white family cemeteries to differentiate slave burials from family burials, however, in some cases they may have been used to mark the grave of an infant, who died during the first year of life before it was named. There are a number of variables involved and ethnicity may not necessarily be a determining factor.

This oral tradition fails to take into consideration the prior owner of Fort Hill and the pre-emancipation African Americans held in bondage by the Rev. McElhenny. Rev. McElhenny's slave holdings based on the 1810 U.S. Census were 25. I would assert the reason Calhoun designated the area on the hill as the family memorial plot, upon the death of his grandson in 1837, was due to the knowledge within the slave community of existing graves on that hill. These graves likely predated Calhoun's purchase of the homestead. While the Cemetery Hill Archaeological Project searches for evidence of burials for the pre-emancipation population of John C. Calhoun, circa 1825-1865, we cannot ignore the potential that a number of graves may well include the bondsmen and women of Rev. McElhenny.

A number of informants have contributed their memories of the "slave burial ground" to the project's lore. Some informants tell us the burial ground was 100 feet down from the family memorial plot, others have agreed with the 100 yards indicated in the 1957 internal memorandum and still others believe it was 400 yards west of the Calhoun Plot. All remember the graves being inside the fence on the west side of Woodland Cemetery and the graves were marked by unmarked fieldstones well into the second half of this century. Reportedly those fieldstones were randomly scattered all over the hill (Les Jones and Mel Wilson, personal communication 1991).

If the traditional African American burial ground was 400 yards west of the family plot, it was destroyed during the construction of a commuter parking lot. Those informants who have indicated the graveyard was 100 yards down the west slope are probably describing the convict burials which date to circa 1892 (William Burley, personal communication 1992). A photograph was taken in the late 1950s or early 1960s prior to the removal of the fieldstones marking the convict burials (Figure 1), but its location is ambiguous.

Weighing the credibility of the informants, it is my belief that the most reliable distance for the eastern boundary of the slave burial ground is 100 feet.

African Americans at Fort Hill

The Pre-emancipation Population. Based on the 1860 U.S. Census, Slave Schedule, there were 54 pre-emancipation African Americans at Fort Hill. For 1850, Fort Hill's African American population was 75, according to the census data. However, in a letter dated October 1, 1850, Floride Calhoun, John C. Calhoun's widow, writes to her daughter, Anna Maria Clemson, "dear old Fort Hill having been the home so long of your father now belongs to Cornelia, and myself together with fifty Negroes" (Clemson Papers 1825-1889), a decrease of 25 from the census taken just two months earlier. Sixty-nine slaves were counted in the 1840 census and there were 37 African Americans at Fort Hill in 1830.

It is commonly held that the census notoriously under counts African Americans and the antebellum period was no exception. There are various explanations for the under counts ranging from census taker competence to a desire by the owner or his representative to reduce his property tax liability. In spite of its obvious drawbacks, census data remain our best source of historical information on the pre-emancipation African American population in the absence of journals, diaries, daybooks and other sources of demographic data which do not adversely impact the owner's bottom line.

Mortality data is equally difficult to get a handle on for this time period. The 1860 mortality schedule gives us a total number of slave deaths for Pickens County, none of which can be assigned to Fort Hill. The mortality schedule for 1850 enumerates four slave deaths which appear to be attributable to Fort Hill during the six month period prior to the taking of the census. DeBow indicated in his 1854 compendium that the mortality total for the seventh census "is certainly too small" (DeBow 1854:92), and the percentage of the slave population which died during this period is ironically 10 percent less than predicted for Calhoun's pre-emancipation population. While fraught with problems, the mortality schedules are the only data available, therefore it is from this information, that we have extrapolated death rates.

The formula used to estimate the expected number of deaths is the population for a given period times the known percentage of deaths for



Figure 1. Historical photograph of Cemetery Hill prior to removal of unmarked fieldstones (courtesy of Clemson University Libraries).

1850, which was 16 percent. Mathematically, then, the expected number of deaths for 1830 would be five; 11 for 1840; eight for 1850; and, nine for 1860, bringing the total for census years alone to 33. Because we can be sure death occurred frequently and not just in census years, the actual number is likely to be significantly higher.

The greatest mortality was probably among the children, especially infants (Genovese 1976:497). The 1850 data for Fort Hill support this assertion with the death of only one pre-emancipation African American adult, a female, Sophia, who died in childbirth. The rest of the deceased individuals enumerated with the status of slave were Aleck, age 12, along with John and Elizabeth, both of whom died at age two.

Convicts at Clemson College. In 1888, Thomas Green Clemson, in his last will and testament, left the land and money for the establishment of an agricultural college, as well as an agricultural experiment station at Fort Hill (Bryan 1979:17). Clemson's bequest "comprised the Fort Hill home place, 814 acres which became

site of the campus, and about \$80,000 in other assets" (1979:19). Construction was begun on the college buildings in 1890, utilizing "lumber sawed from trees on the place, bricks made nearby from local clay, and some convict labor supplied by the state" (1979:34).

Convicts were used for both construction and maintenance with significant costs savings and constant irritations. The correspondence between penitentiary officials and the college board suggests the first group of 50 convicts did not work out satisfactorily, many having escaped (Department of Corrections 1889-1901). A letter dated January 8, 1891, from the committee to the president of the college, reads in part, "(w)e had an interview with the Penitentiary authorities about the convicts and they took action on the fifty agreeing to furnish Negroes of the kind described and also furnish Negroes in place of the whites now on hand (Simpson Papers 1814-1893). This request was complied with and sixty convicts were delivered later that month.

College lore indicates 8-10 convicts died during these construction activities. Department of

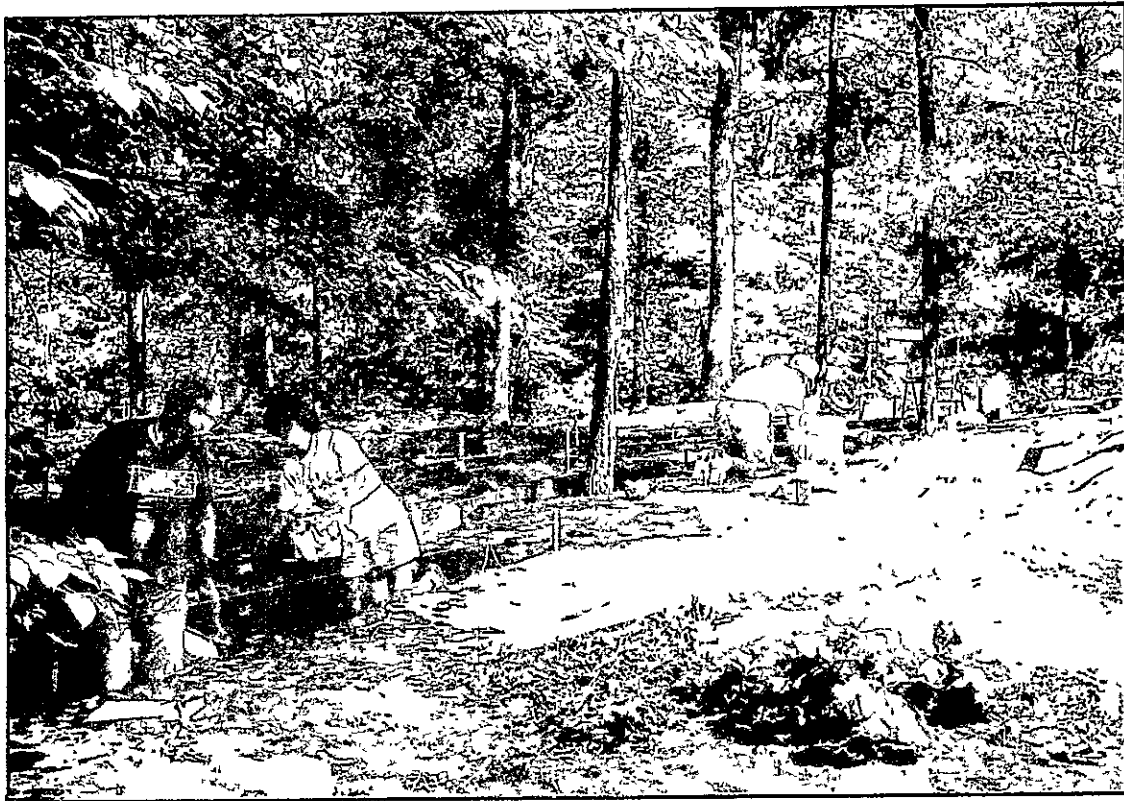


Figure 2. 1992 field season volunteers (left to right: Mike Laughton, Marta Bowen, Robert Benedict, and Julia Barham).

Correction's records, however, only provide us with the names of five prisoners. *The Pickens Sentinel* dated October 8, 1891, supports the oral tradition insofar as location of the burials is concerned, indicating only three or four convicts had died as of that date and are "buried at the graveyard once used for servants of the Calhoun estate" (*Pickens Sentinel* 1891).

ARCHAEOLOGICAL RESEARCH

It is against this historical backdrop that the Archaeology Program at Clemson University developed. The program was established as a result of a directive from the Board of Trustees to archaeologically locate evidence of the burials of the African Americans in Woodland Cemetery, both pre-emancipation and convicts, before Board authorized expansion of the cemetery. Woodland Cemetery, also known as Cemetery Hill, is a contemporary cemetery surrounding the Calhoun Plot. It is a benefit of employment for university trustee's, president's, faculty and staff, who consider it an honor to be buried in the shadow of Death Valley, the university's football stadium.

The Cemetery Hill Archaeological Project began in the fall of 1991, and relies on student and volunteer labor. Since Clemson does not have an Anthropology Department, hence no archaeology graduate students, students come primarily from history, education, and engineering with a few students from architecture. Volunteers have been Clemson faculty spouses, staff, people from the community, and members of the Anderson Chapter of the Archaeological Society of South Carolina (Figures 2 and 3). In addition, during the second summer session of 1992, ten African American high school students from Clemson's Career Workshop participated.

In the fall of 1991, we surveyed the entire west slope of Cemetery Hill looking for evidence of graves. Our efforts did not reveal any evidence of depressions which may represent burials, nor did it permit us to eliminate any portion of the area. Operating under the assumption that the burial ground is at least 100 ft west of the Calhoun Family Plot, the decision was made to begin excavation in an area 100 ft wide, and 100 ft down from the west boundary of the family plot.

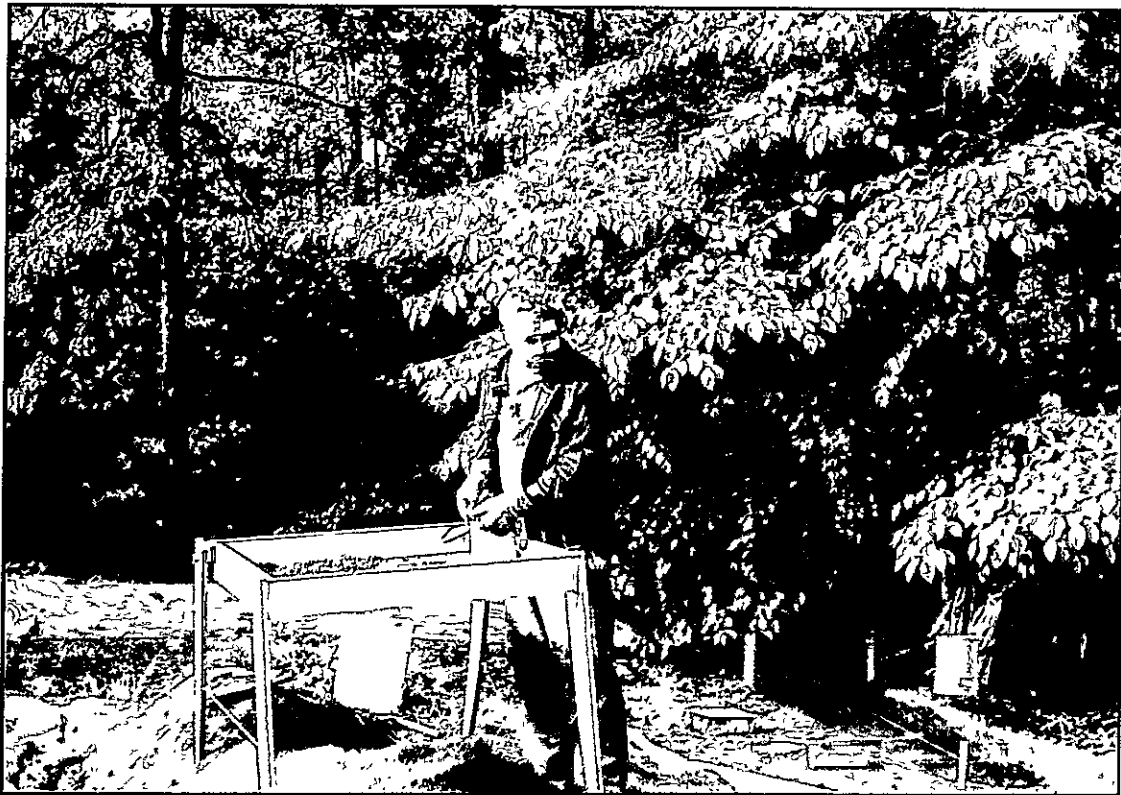


Figure 3. Bill Westbrook, Anderson Chapter President, Archaeological Society of South Carolina.

The site's datum was established in the southeast corner of the 100 x 90-ft rectangle going down the west slope and trenches 10 x 3 ft were laid out on a north-south axis. The north-south orientation of the trenches maximizes the possibility of locating graves, which are dug on an east-west axis regardless of whether the burial tradition is Christian (European-American) or West African. Fall semester we opened four trenches and four more trenches were opened during the summer of 1992, two of which were at the bottom of the hill in the area where informants had indicated the convicts were buried.

It was our belief that the west slope had never been filled and thus, our plan was to excavate down 12 inches to sterile soil under the assumption that there would not be more than 12 inches of natural deposition over the last 150 years. The evidence from the first trench we excavated in the southeast corner of the site, however, demonstrated there is a significant amount of fill on the upper slope. A 1973 penny was found at 16 inches during the second summer session of 1992. We now believe the fill is a result of grading to pave the circular drive and dumping displaced soil from Woodland Cemetery graves at the top of the hill.

It now looks as if the fill may only extend six to nine feet down the slope from the drive.

The soils in the excavated portion of the west slope indicate this is a somewhat eroded site with a fairly thin organic layer. The trenches reveal a plow zone of six to seven inches of sandy loam mixed with coarse sandy loam. The transitional layer is a sandy clay loam with the subsoils being red clay (Bill Smith, Clemson University Agronomy Department, personal communication 1993). The site is very consistent with the sterile red clay subsoil, showing up at 10-12 inches, hence the research design proved adequate for locating evidence of grave shafts, in spite of the 1973 penny.

We have not recovered any artifacts which date to the pre-emancipation occupation of Fort Hill. Most of the artifacts recovered are early twentieth-century residential kitchen debris, slag glass from the ceramic kilns in Ceramic Engineering, and coal slag. We have also found lots of evidence of charcoal along with vast quantities of brown, green, and clear bottle glass from more recent tailgating parties; and, a sizable quantity of spent blanks representing ceremonial

gun salutes for **military burials** all in the organic layer and the plowzone. No artifacts have been recovered from the sandy clay loam or the red clay layers.

This cemetery has not revealed any of the artifacts which we have come to associate with traditional **African American** cemeteries and graveyards in the low country of South Carolina. At this point we have no reason to believe that it will either. Evidence from other piedmont cemeteries surveyed by the author suggest a more European than African pattern in African American burial traditions from the antebellum period.

We have recovered two projectile points, both from the plowzone, with one found in association with a feature uncovered in the area that is believed to be the location of the convict burials. This feature is a builders trench which is oriented east-west. The trench was discovered during the final week of excavations during the second summer session of 1992 and will be a focus of the project in 1993.

A builders trench is totally inconsistent with the **documentary** evidence for the west slope as well as the soils analysis. We have no reason to believe there **was** ever a structure constructed during the Calhoun-Clemson tenure on the land. The most compelling argument for this feature was suggested initially by Stan South when he visited the site in 1992, that it is a possible fort or fortified structure (Stan South, personal communication 1992). Hence, extensive archaeological investigations should be undertaken to **determine** the extent of this builders trench. Further archival research for a description of the construction of Fort **Rutledge** should also be conducted since our research to date has called into question its location and strongly points to Cemetery Hill as the fort's actual site.

CONCLUSION

The Cemetery Hill Archaeological Project has not yet yielded evidence of burial shafts for either **Calhoun's** pre-emancipation African Americans or the African American convicts who died during the construction of the earliest college buildings. The research design will yield the **desired** results given adequate time and funding to support this project. We are **still** in search of the final resting places of those individuals who made significant contributions to the operation of the **Calhoun farm** and who's labor made the college building plan a

reality. This project is dedicated to honoring their memory.

The volunteers to this project have been extremely valuable members of the crews on which they **served**. They continue to offer valuable assistance to us in the form of potential archival research sources. The career workshop students were exposed to historical archaeology as a possible career choice, however, that effort **cannot** be measured at this time. If only one student enters an Anthropology Department as a potential archaeology graduate student we will have made a major contribution to African American Archaeology and to the discipline.

Acknowledgements. The author wishes to express her deepest gratitude to the following individuals who through their labor, as well as their emotional support, have made an invaluable contribution to this project: Kirt Gross, an anthropology major at Wayne State University in Detroit; Shawn Small, a Clemson University history major; Elizabeth Fendley, Queens College, Charlotte, North Carolina; and, Bill Westbrook, and members of the Anderson Chapter of the Archaeological Society of South Carolina, who so generously gave of their time. Each, in his or her own way, has contributed to the success of this project. Their professionalism and friendship made an otherwise difficult place tolerable. Excavation in the red clay hills of the Piedmont of South Carolina in June and July can be a miserable experience; their comradeship and delightful sense of humor helped all survive the heat, humidity, bugs, and that detestable red clay.

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