

The Archaeology and History of Coosaw River Estates

The Coosaw River Estates tract is a proposed 123-acre residential development located on the north shore of Ladys Island in Beaufort County, South Carolina. Recent archaeological and historical investigations at the Coosaw River Estates tract have unearthed a wealth of data on this small but interesting portion of Beaufort County. By combining the information gathered from historic documents with the artifacts recovered from archaeological excavations, archaeologists are able to determine who lived on the island, when they lived there, and how these people lived their daily lives.



Prehistoric Pottery Recovered for the Coosaw River Estates Excavations

History of the Coosaw River Estates Tract

The Coosaw River Estates tract has a history of ownership dating to the late seventeenth or early eighteenth century. It was during this time that Yamasee and Scottish immigrants began settling the area, expanding the Indian trade and temporarily stabilizing this southern frontier. Traders and investors responded by acquiring lands in the Port Royal area and particularly on the Sea Islands. In 1698, Governor Joseph Blake secured a portion of Combahee Island, and in 1707 his wife Elizabeth purchased a 500-acre tract of land from the Carolina Lords Proprietors. At her husband's death, Elizabeth Blake inherited a large portion of the island, which was renamed Ladys Island in her honor (Rowland et al. 1996:81–82).

In 1733, Walter Izard acquired a 500-acre tract on the island described as, "situate, lying and being in Granville County on the south side of Coosaw River on Combee Island butting and bounding to the northward on the said river to the westward on Henry Quintyne's land, the said Elizabeth Blake's land to the south and eastward on the said Elizabeth Blake's land" (State of South Carolina 1733–1775:vol. 3:392). Izard's ownership of the land is referenced again in a 1752 plat drawn for William Bull of his property, formerly Quintyne's, to the west. The Coosaw River Estates tract may include a small portion of the St. Quenten's Plantation.



The destruction of Beaufort's antebellum records makes it difficult to trace the property's ownership and use during the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, but a few sources suggest its active use as a plantation. A map from 1777 shows several cultivated fields, an orchard, and two structures in the area of the Coosaw Rivers tract (Des Barres 1777). The 1825 Robert Mills' Atlas of Beaufort District shows the name Verdier near the tract (Figure 1). This was probably James Robert Verdier (d. 1872), a physician and cotton planter and son of John Mark Verdier, a leading Beaufort merchant. James Robert Verdier was married to Sarah Fickling (d. 1885), whose family at that time owned the St. Quenten's Plantation (Mills 1980; Rowland et al. 1996:190; Davis 1929:34).

Figure 1. 1825 Mills Atlas Map of Beaufort District

The Archaeology and History of Coosaw River Estates

Figure 2. 1863 Map of St. Helena Parish.

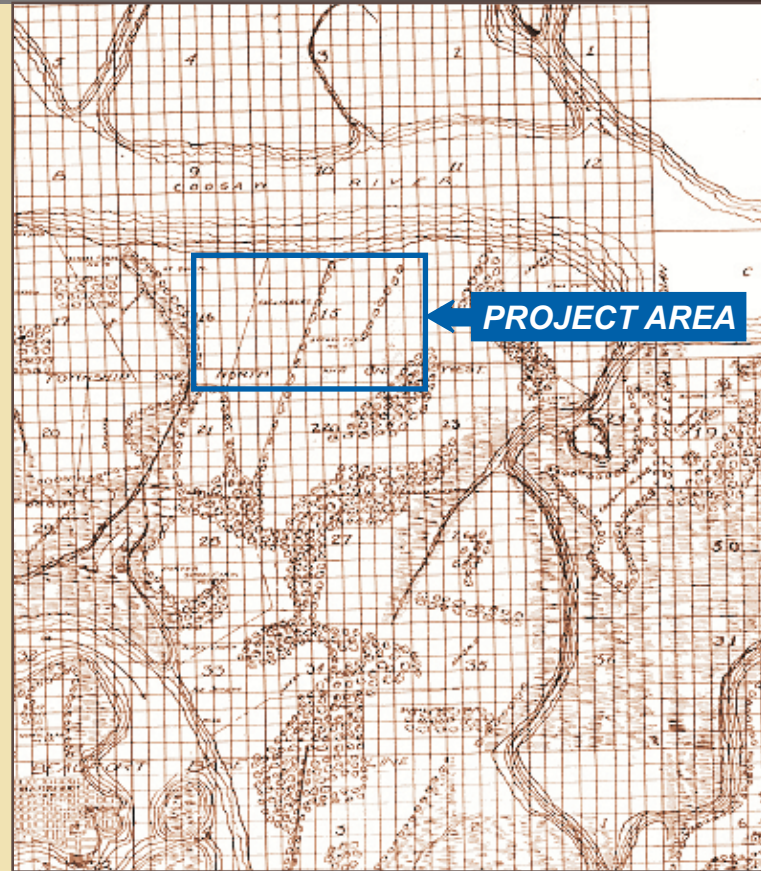
Verdier first appears in St. Helena's Parish in the 1830 census with a household of seven people and fifty slaves (United States Bureau of the Census 1830:294). Like most Sea Island planters, Verdier probably used his house in Beaufort as his primary residence; however, his interest in Ladys Island continued at least through the early 1840s as suggested by his signature on several petitions to the legislature regarding ferry services from the Town of Beaufort to the island (State of South Carolina, Records of the General Assembly c. 1826 and 1842).

Historical records suggest that the property continued to function as an agricultural operation after the Civil War, although apparently on a relatively small scale. On an undated map showing sections of the island to be sold at auction in 1863, the area is noted with the name "Ed. Cuthbert," probably Edward Cuthbert who also owned land on the island to the southwest (McGee n.d.; Adams and Trinkley 1991:30–31) (Figure 2).

The western portion of the Coosaw River Estates tract was known at that time as Walnut Hill, and was one of several plantations acquired by Joseph Reed in the 1863 land sale. Reed also purchased St. Quentin's Plantation and the Johnson School Farm to the west, and Pleasant Point School Farm to the southwest. Reed later moved to Chicago and defaulted on payments to James G. Cole, an overseer he had hired, and to a local merchant from whom Cole purchased supplies for the plantations. The claims against Reed included a list of goods sold to Cole, including simple household furnishings, cattle, three horses, three carts, two gins and one corn mill. When the lands were sold at auction in 1876, Cole purchased the properties and they remained in his family until his death in 1904 (Adams and Trinkley 1991:30–32).

The eastern portion of the tract was described on the ca. 1863 map as "School Farm No. 17" and next to it is an unmarked area suggesting that there was little or no activity in this area. A portion of the United States Tax Commission map from 1862, however, shows that Edwin R. Holden purchased this land, divided into Section Nos. 66 and 67. This map also shows a row of four buildings, probably a slave row, with the name "Verdier" (United States Direct Tax Commission 1862). Holden, an investor from Providence County, Rhode Island, sold the two tracts containing 136 and 138 acres, to Lewis A. Phillips in 1865 for \$3,000.00. Phillips was also a resident of Rhode Island (Beaufort County, Deed Book B:173–174). This may be the tract later referred to as Springfield Plantation.

The map also may be helpful in understanding use of the property in previous decades. Unlike St. Quentin Plantation to the west, where a main house and slave row are shown on postbellum maps, there is no indication that a large plantation complex was built on the Coosaw River Estate lands, or of the slave row shown on the 1862 Tax Commission map. Former slaves would sometimes continue to live in the same houses, but move them from the original slave row to a new location (Johnson 1960:190).



The Archaeology and History of Coosaw River Estates

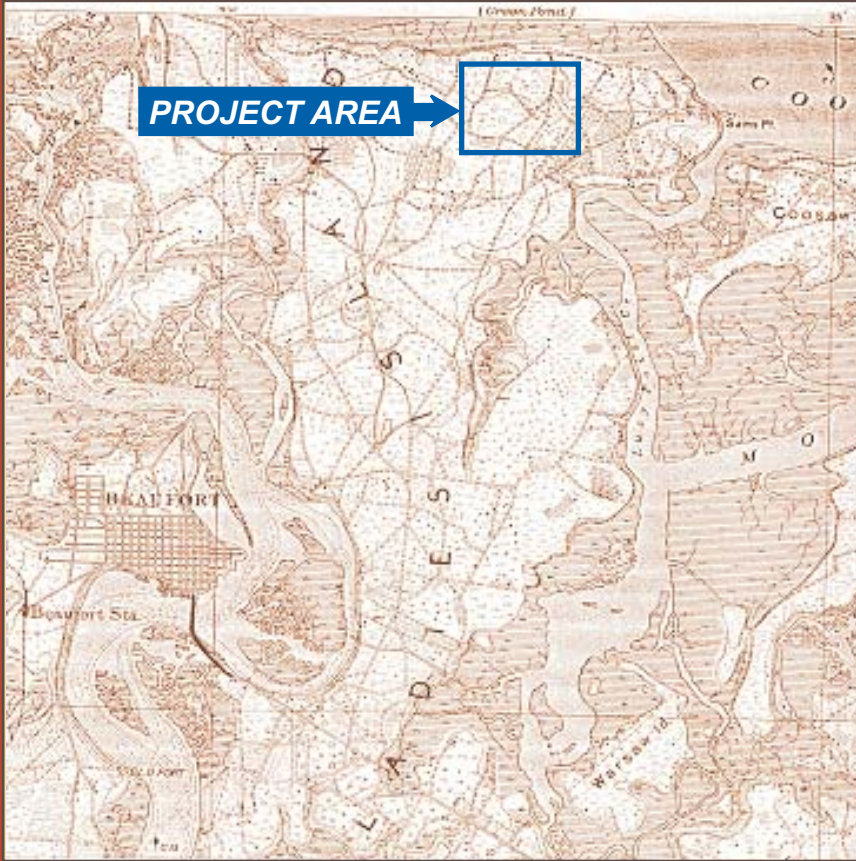


Figure 3. 1918 USACE Fort Fremont Quadrangle.

Use of the property called Walnut Hill appears to have increased briefly after Cole's death. His heirs sold the property to F. W. Scheper in 1904, along with the adjoining plantations to the west. The next year, Scheper sold the tracts to W. F. Sanders for \$3,000.00. In 1906, J. Mauldin of Hampton, South Carolina, acquired the properties from Sanders and held them until his death in 1920. (Beaufort County, Deed Book 26:46, 156, 515; McCrady Brothers & Cheves 1920:plat #3152). No deeds were found tracing the ownership of Springfield Plantation after Phillip's ownership.

Activity on the Coosaw River Estates tract appears to have increased slightly during the early twentieth century. A map produced by the Army

Corps of Engineers in 1918 shows five structures clustered together within the tract in the same area where the two structures appeared on the 1876 map (Figure 3). Several dirt roads also cross through the property (United States Army Corps of Engineers 1918). This small community quickly declined, however. A USGS topographic map from 1937 shows active communities to the west at Brickyard Point and to the east at Sams Point, but no structures or roads crossing through the Coosaw River Estates tract.

ARCHAEOLOGICAL INVESTIGATIONS

In May and June of 2003, TRC conducted archaeological investigations at the Coosaw River Estates tract. Archaeological evidence indicates that people lived in the area from about 4,500 years ago to the present. Pieces of pottery, stone tools, clay pipes, glass, and other artifacts recovered from the property are the tangible remains of the various Native American, African-American, and Euro-Americans who once lived on the island.

In all, 17 archaeological sites and one cemetery were recorded during the investigations. Artifact analysis indicates that seven sites were occupied during the historic period (18th - early 20th centuries), while 12 sites contained evidence of prehistoric occupations. Six of the prehistoric sites had probable Mississippian period occupations (ca. AD 1000-1540). These sites were scattered throughout the entire project area, indicating a widespread Mississippian presence on this portion of Ladys Island.

Of the 17 sites recorded, three are believed to contain significant information and will be preserved. These sites include the remains of a nineteenth century plantation associated with James Robert Verdier (38BU2042), an early to mid eighteenth century house site (38BU2071), and a late nineteenth/twentieth century African-American cemetery (38BU2043).

The Archaeology and History of Coosaw River Estates

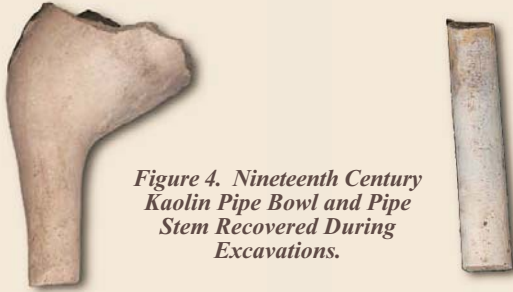


Figure 4. Nineteenth Century Kaolin Pipe Bowl and Pipe Stem Recovered During Excavations.

Archaeological site 38BU2042 contained artifacts dating from the Middle Woodland period (ca. 2600-1500 years ago) to the early nineteenth century. Based on the artifacts recovered, this site is primarily a nineteenth century domestic site associated with James Robert Verdier (Figure 4).

Site 38BU2043 is a late nineteenth to twentieth century cemetery located on a small knoll overlooking wetlands to the east. Five grave markers and a number of grave-like depressions were observed. The grave of Corporal Nat Ausborn is particularly interesting (Figure 5). The inscription indicates that Ausborn was a Civil War veteran from Company H of the 34th U.S. Colored Infantry. This division, previously known as the 2nd South Carolina, played an important role in the Darien (Georgia) campaign. The presence of Corporal Ausborn may indicate that other Civil War veterans are buried in this cemetery.



Figure 5. Headstone of Corporal Nat Ausborn

Verdier's ownership of this property is indicated on Mills Atlas (1825). In 1861 and 1862, Verdier submitted an account of property losses during the Union invasion that included items alluding to his plantation and town properties. The claim described "a two-story house with eight rooms, office, outbuildings &c., medical store, drugs, chemicals, instruments, books, furniture &c.," probably his house in Beaufort. The claim also listed eighteen slaves, with a total value at over \$13,000. Plantation tools, 35 bales of Sea Island cotton, peas, corn, potatoes, cotton seed, livestock, a large flat and sailing boat, mill stones and groceries were added to the claim for a loss totaling over \$27,000 (State Auditor 1861). These slaves, plantation tools, livestock and crops may have been his property on Ladys Island, or they may be part of another plantation owned by Verdier in St. Helena Parish. This question can possibly be resolved with additional archaeological investigations at 38BU2042.

Site 38BU2071 is a Colonial Period site containing tabby mortar, brick, and nails, along with colonoware (a type of slave made pottery), stonewares, delftware, and eighteenth century Chinese porcelain (Figures 6 and 7). Information obtained from this site can offer us a rare glimpse into the lifeways of the Colonial Period residents on Ladys Island.

The archaeological investigations at the Coosaw River Estates tract have documented a continuing pattern of occupation dating from 4,500 years ago to the present. Current plans are to preserve the three archaeological sites mentioned above. By preserving these sites, future researchers may learn important information regarding the lifeways of people who once called Ladys Island their home.

Figure 6. Slave Made Colonoware Pottery



Figure 7. European Made Creamware Pottery



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