

# CEYLON PLANTATION

## HISTORY OF CEYLON PLANTATION

Ceylon Plantation and cemetery are situated on property that Lieutenant James Nephew received for service in Colonel John Baker's Regiment of the Liberty County Georgia Militia during the Revolutionary War. Nephew and his wife, Mary Magdalene Gignilliat, were prominent planters who owned plantations in both Georgia and South Carolina.

The plantation was named after the Kingdom of Ceylon, now Sri Lanka, which was considered an exotic place dominated by rice and tea plantations. Ceylon was a very profitable rice plantation; 120 enslaved African Americans were living and working at Ceylon in 1859. After the war, turpentine and timber harvesting became important activities on the former plantation's lands.

Very little remains of the original plantation, although canals used to irrigate the rice fields are still visible in the marshes next to Cathead Creek. The most significant surviving component of the plantation is Ceylon Cemetery, which was the original burial ground for the plantation's African American workers. The local community still uses the cemetery today and honors those who are buried there; a sign marks the location and date of the cemetery and includes the word "Let The Dead Rest In Peace."

## RICE AGRICULTURE ALONG CATHEAD CREEK

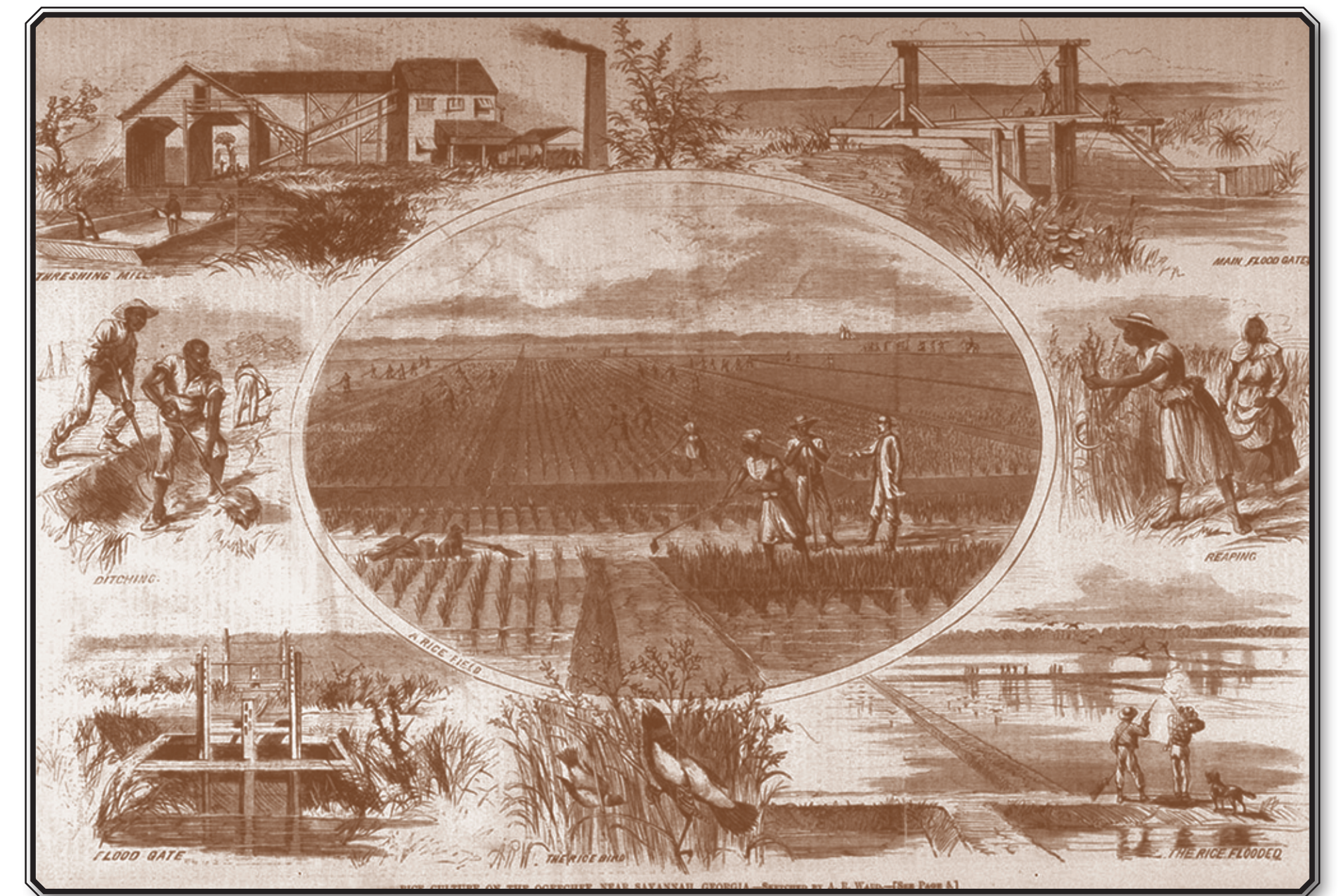
Rice agriculture has been practiced in North America since at least the 1690s, when it relied on rain or upland swamp water for irrigation. Rice agriculture was also practiced in West Africa

and rice planters sought Africans who knew how to grow and process rice. Around 1750, planters began to use the tidal floodplains of Georgia and South Carolina for rice plantations. Plantations in the tidal zone could be flooded and drained with the tidal surge, which allowed for very productive and profitable rice plantations.

To make rice fields, marshes had to be cleared of trees and vegetation and the ground broken up and leveled. An earthen embankment was then built around a field, and a drainage ditch was placed outside the embankment to control water flow. An 1857 drawing from *Harper's Magazine* shows rice agriculture on the Ogeechee River near Savannah and illustrates the different parts of rice agriculture. Work in the field included clearing the marshland to make fields, digging ditches and building levees, digging furrows for rice seeds, hoeing the rice to remove weeds, harvesting the rice plants, and separating the rice seeds from the stalks. Fields were divided into half-acre plots containing 100-125 trenches, where rows of rice seed were sowed. Gates were used to let water in and out of the rice fields. If the gate was open at high tide, the fields would flood, and by closing the gate, they would remain flooded. The gate would be opened at low tide to let water out of the fields. Being able to flood and drain fields in the tidal zone of Georgia greatly increased the amount of rice that could be grown.

Rice hoes were recovered by the Golden Isles Archaeological Society from Ceylon Plantation. Hoeing, to remove weeds and other volunteer plants from the rice beds, was very labor intensive. The hoe at the right has been repaired with a piece of metal bolted onto the original blade, which suggests that this hoe was worn out through heavy use in the fields.

Image courtesy of *Harper's Magazine* 1857





# LIFE AND DEATH ON PLANTATIONS



Image Courtesy of Vanishing Georgia, Georgia Division of Archives and History, 2013

## THE TASK LABOR SYSTEM ON RICE PLANTATIONS

Rice planters employed a labor system known as “task labor” to manage enslaved African Americans working on their plantations. Under the task system, different tasks were assigned and once a task was complete, African American workers were allowed to use time as their own. Enslaved African Americans were classified by planters as “hands,” and different tasks were also defined by this system. A healthy adult male was considered to be a “full hand;” a female might be classified as a “three quarter hand” and children and the elderly as “half hands.” A planter would define the hoeing of a half-acre plot as a “full hand” task, which meant that a “full hand” was expected to take one day to complete this task, while a “half hand” would require two days. An advertisement for the sale of African Americans in Charleston, 1857, calls out that these African Americans were “Accustomed to

the culture of Rice.” Specific rice plantation skills were noted, such as Paul, who was identified as a “trunk minder,” which meant that he had experience with rice field trunks or gates. The African Americans to be sold at this auction were classified as full or prime hands as well as other hand fractions, including 3/4, 1/2, and 1/4.

Under the task system, work tended to be completed more efficiently and required less supervision. Field and processing work was frequently divided by sex. Male fieldworkers charged with preparing fields, maintaining field ditches and earthworks, and preparing and hauling bags or barrels of harvested grain for export, while females were responsible for hoeing, harvesting, threshing, and pounding the grain. Women were

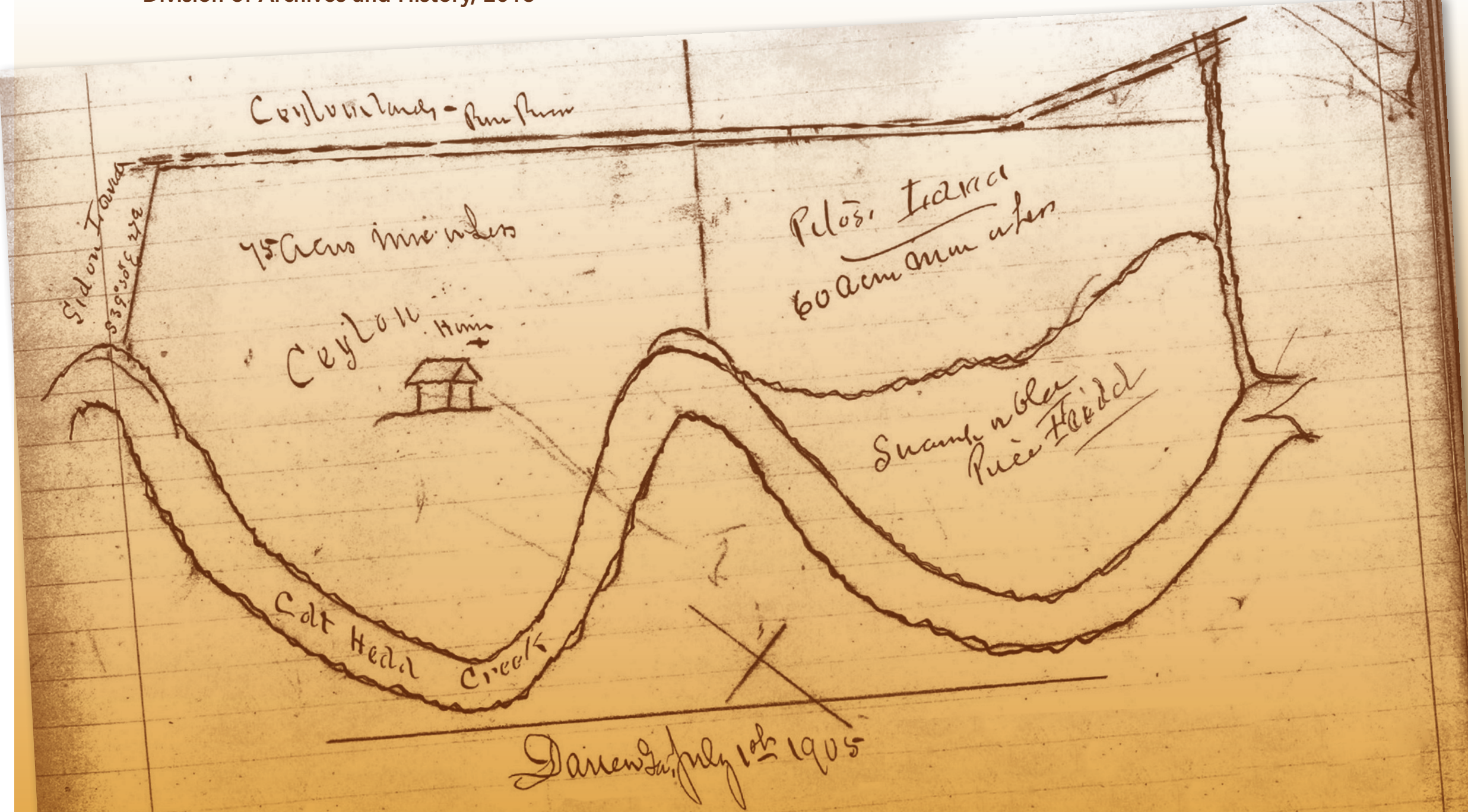
considered better suited to threshing and pounding grain and less likely to damage the rice itself. On many rice plantations, female workers outnumbered their male counterparts because of the effort involved in processing rice. The photograph from the Vanishing Georgia Collection at the Division of Archives and History shows African American women winnowing rice on Sapelo Island.

Overseers were assigned to supervise field operations. They were usually white men who answered directly to the planter; in a few cases a skilled African American assumed the duties of overseer. Overseers set quotas for how much work was to be accomplished within a given day. Corporal punishment, in the form of lashings or beatings, was doled out to those who could not, or would not, work at a given pace. Typical workdays began at dawn to avoid as much of the afternoon heat as possible. During planting and harvest times, workers were expected to work from sun up to sun down.

## CEYLON CEMETERY

The Ceylon Cemetery is the burial place of enslaved African Americans from Ceylon Plantation and their descendants. The cemetery is estimated at 1.18 acres in size. It is unknown exactly how many individuals are buried here, as the majority of graves are unmarked, but surveys indicate there are at least 76 burials

present. Burials may have originally been marked with wooden markers that have decayed over time, or marked with shells, stones, or grave offerings that have been broken, buried, or lost. Family names that are known to be present in Ceylon Cemetery include Bailey, Blige, Butler, Carter, Cooper, Gibbs, Harris, Mansson, Mungin, Sheffield, Wilson, and Young.



A 1905 plat map from the McIntosh County Courthouse Deed Book showing Ceylon plantation’s main house and neighboring Potosi plantation land. Plantation main houses, worker’s villages, and agricultural buildings and livestock pens were built along the Cathead Creek bluff line, overlooking the creek and its marshes, which were used for rice fields. African American plantation cemeteries were also placed on the high ground. (Image courtesy of the McIntosh County Courthouse, 2013).

**55 PRIME NEGROES,**  
Accustomed to the culture of Rice.  
**By LOUIS D. DeSAUSSURE.**  
On Wednesday, 21st January, 1857, at *Ryan Bond Lot*  
will be sold in families, at 11 o'clock, A. M., in the city of Charleston, *Chalmers Street*  
**An uncommonly prime gang of Rice-Field Negroes.**

CONDITIONS:—One-third Cash. Balance by Bond, payable in two equal annual Instalments, with interest, payable annually from day of sale, to be secured by a mortgage of the property, and approved personal security. Purchasers to pay for papers.

Nos.	Ages.		Nos.	Ages.	
1 John	50	trusty driver, full hand.	30 Taggy	40	3-4 hand <i>fast hand</i>
2 Mary	40	prime	31 Juba	50	1-2 hand, plantation cook
3 June	20	"	32 Tenah	22	prime
4 Paddy	16	3-4 hand, cart boy <i>work hard</i>	33 Infant	6	months
5 Lydia	9	<i>crippled in one leg</i>	34 Jenny	20	prime
6 Love	6	"	35 Manwell	1	"
7 Charity	2	"	36 Moses	23	prime <i>4 1/2 inch</i>
8 Ben	60	1-2 hand	37 Paul	35	prime, trunk minder <i>260</i>
9 Patty	60	"	38 Jacob	45	full hand, ploughman and wagoner. <i>1 1/2 inch</i>
10 George	30	prime	39 Manwell	55	1-2 jobbing carpenter
11 July	28	"	40 Doreas	40	3-4 child's nurse
12 Jacob	26	"	41 Penda	4	"
13 Bacchus	25	"	42 Rinah	20	prime
14 Flanders	23	"	43 May	2	" <i>8 3/4 inch</i>
15 Patience	30	full hand & house serv't	44 London	50	full hand, complains. <i>40</i>
16 Clarinda	14	house girl	45 Martha	23	prime
17 Infant	5	months	46 Jack	19	full hand, ploughman
18 Guy	35	prime hand, deaf	47 Solomon	16	3-4 "
19 Hannah	35	" trusty	48 Andrew	13	1-4 hand
20 Harriet	15	3-4 prime girl	49 Pompey	30	full hand, one eye
21 Cretia	7	"	50 Dianah	28	3-4 hand <i>360</i>
22 Joshua	2	"	51 Maggy	5	"
23 Binah	20	prime	52 Adam	55	3-4 hand
24 Abram	1	"	53 Maria	50	1-2 hand, sick nurse, sickly
25 Cyrus	22	prime	54 Mary	20	prime
26 Plymouth	19	"	55 Ned	4	"
27 Nanny	35	full hand			
28 Less	7	"			
29 Scilla	30	full hand, recently had dysentery.			

Image courtesy of John W. Hartman Center for Sales, Advertising & Marketing History, Duke University, 2014



# SIDON PLANTATION

## HISTORY OF SIDON PLANTATION

Sidon Plantation was originally part of a several thousand-acre tract awarded to Sr. Patrick Houston by the English crown in 1757. On Houston's death in 1798, James Smith, a wealthy planter, purchased the plantation. Smith owned several plantations in the area and this one became known as Sidon, named for a Middle Eastern biblical city. Smith's daughter, Elizabeth Dunwody, managed the plantation. The plantation consisted of approximately 300 acres of marshy rice fields and 2,000 acres of high ground used for homes and cemeteries. When Smith died in 1856, Mary Dunwody, his granddaughter, purchased the property. Sidon's main house likely stood along the western side of what is now the Magnolia Bluffs Mall; the tabby ruins of former slave quarters were visible about 300 yards (275 meters) south of this location until the late twentieth century. The rice fields survive today, despite not being a part of the main house landscape. The main house and tabby ruins have been lost to commercial development. The Dunwoody Cemetery represents the last surviving part of the original plantation main house landscape and was the burial ground for the enslaved African Americans on Sidon Plantation.

## GROWING RICE ON CATHEAD CREEK

Rice agriculture began in early spring. Fields had to be drained, plowed, and irrigation systems repaired. Furrows were cut just wide enough to allow workers access between them, then rice seeds were scattered in the furrows. The fields were flooded until the plants sprouted, after which time they were alternately flooded and drained to keep the plants moist, retard weeds, and deter birds and animals. It was important to carefully control water levels because a crop could be ruined if the grain was allowed to soak and mold in an over-flooded field.

Rice does not respond well to competition, so it was important to limit weed growth by constantly hoeing around individual plants. Rice hoes consisted of a three- to five-pound hoe head placed on the end of a handle. Rice plants, particularly young ones, are not very tall, so plant care required a lot

of stooping or kneeling. Many field workers opted to furnish their hoes with four- to six-foot long handles to reduce back stress. Care had to be taken not to damage the rice plants. On average, a field worker was expected to hoe one half-acre field plot per day.

Rice grains develop at the top of a stalk. After three to four months of growth, the rice seed matures and turns white. When the rice plants had matured, the fields were drained and the rice was harvested. This 1859 engraving shows harvesting, done with sickles known as rice hooks. The rice hook shown under the engraving was found during excavations at Sidon Plantation. Cutting the entire plant approximately a foot off the ground provided a platform for the harvested rice plant bundles to dry for a few days to a week. The circa 1895 photograph shows a group of African American women and children on a mound of harvested rice stalks. The harvested rice would be taken to the plantation's main house and barns for threshing.

Dried rice plants were placed on threshing floors and the grain was removed from the shafts by trampling or beating them with a stick. Threshing floors varied from a clean flat floor, where the grains were swept up afterwards, to slotted floors in a winnowing house where the grains fell through and into waiting bushel baskets below.

African Americans made wide shallow baskets, called fanners, from local grasses and palmetto leaves to winnow the remaining husk or chaff from the grain. These baskets were made like those in West Africa. Basket winnowing involved tossing pounded rice into the air and allowing the wind to carry off the lighter plant debris. Some plantations used a two-story winnowing house to allow the rice to fall through the air and the wind to blow the chaff away. Processed rice was bagged or placed in barrels for shipment by boat to the port of Darien, and from there, in larger ships to other cities in the U.S. and Europe.

Creeks and rivers were the highways of coastal Georgia in the plantation era, and much travel occurred by boat. Barges, bateaux, and other watercraft were used to move crops to market and to bring purchases to the plantation. African Americans made and used dug-out canoes for fishing and transportation along Cathead Creek. Workers on Sidon Plantation would have rowed back and forth across Cathead Creek to access the rice fields where they worked each day.



Above Image Courtesy of the William Lynch Stereoview Collection, Spartanburg County (SC) Public Library, 2014. Center Image Courtesy of the Granger Collection, 2014



Image courtesy of North Wind Picture Archives, 2014



# DUNWOODY CEMETERY

## LIFE AND DEATH ON PLANTATIONS

The plantations along Cathead Creek were home to large numbers of enslaved African Americans. Rice plantations were very profitable enterprises and depended on the work of slaves. One account in the early 1700s estimated that each enslaved African produced rice worth \$975, at a time when an adult slave could be purchased for \$150. Rice planters used their profits to buy more African workers and additional plantations. As one individual noted “Rice is raised so as to buy more Negroes, and Negroes are bought so as to get more rice.” The plantations along Cathead Creek were home to large numbers of African Americans.

Rice plantations were also dangerous places to work. Working in wet, muddy conditions under the hot Georgia sun, enslaved African Americans were exposed to snakes, alligators, and rodents, as well as mosquitoes and other insects that carried diseases like malaria. It is estimated that a third of newly imported Africans who

worked on rice plantations died in their first year. Poor diet and the lack of health care also led to the deaths of large numbers of infants and children.

Working under conditions where diseases and death were prevalent, enslaved Africans sought whatever sources of protection they could find to help them survive. Silver coins were believed to provide spiritual protection; the color silver was believed to help ward off evil spirits and silver coins, like the half-dime shown, were pierced and worn by enslaved African Americans as spiritual charms.



## DUNWOODY CEMETERY

The Dunwoody Cemetery is the burial place of enslaved African Americans from Sidon Plantation, their descendants, and other members of the local African American community. The cemetery is approximately 1.6 acres in size. The number of burials present in the cemetery is unknown, although archaeologists estimate that there are at least 313 burials. These include burials that were relocated from nearby construction, as well as American Indian burials discovered on Sidon Plantation and re-buried in the Dunwoody Cemetery. African American family names that are known to be present in the Dunwoody Cemetery include Butler, Frazier, Howard, LeCount, Shaw, Singleton, Waldburg, Wilson, and West.

While most of the burials in the cemetery are now unmarked, historically they would have been located with hand-made wooden markers. This 2013 photograph of a 1934 burial shows a decaying cedar marker at the Butler Cemetery in McIntosh County. This type of marker would have been used on the plantations; in this instance, family members have purchased and placed a granite monument in front of the cedar marker on the grave. Burial locations of most enslaved African Americans are no longer marked as a result of the passage of time and the decay of wooden markers.

Burials may also have been decorated and marked with personal belongings, stones, or seashells. Objects were often placed on a burial to show love and respect. Possessions, including toiletries, glasses, plates, cups, tools, false teeth, and medicines were commonly left on top of the grave for use by the dead. Frequently, these objects were among the last touched by the deceased; it was believed that they were still charged with the decedent's spirit. Water was an important symbol of the transition between life and death, as great bodies of water were thought by West Africans to separate the worlds of the living and the dead. Jars of water, seashells, silver utensils, coins, foil, shiny potsherds, glass, and other reflective materials were commonly left on top of the grave. These reflections were believed to trap or dazzle a wandering spirit, providing them a pathway to the spirit world. The 1919 photograph from the Vanishing Georgia collection above shows an African American burial on Sapelo Island.

Image Courtesy of Vanishing Georgia, Georgia Division of Archives and History, 2013

