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THE ARCHAEOLOGY OF PROSPECT HILL'S FIELD WALLS AND THE SOCIOECONOMICS OF PLANTATION LIFE

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ABSTRACT

Landscape and the built environment can have a profound effect, both intentional and unintentional, on the relationships and interactions of the people inhabiting a particular space. Walls by their very nature are boundaries that delineate spaces, define social landscapes, create barriers between people and between people and things, as well as structuring the places where groups come together. DePaul University conducted excavations at the site of Prospect Hill Plantation on San Salvador in the fall of 2010. As part of this research, a section of the field walls was mapped and analyzed in geographical relation to other structures on site. This paper presents an analysis of the ways in which the construction and placement of the field walls at the Prospect Hill plantation affected the social lives of both the owners of the plantation and the slaves who made up the workforce.

INTRODUCTION

In 1803, Scottish born Charles Farquharson received a land grant from the British Royal Government and came to San Salvador to settle a property of some fifteen hundred acres that would serve as a cotton plantation. (Craton and Saunders 1999:349) Farquharson was different from many of his fellow planters in the Bahamas in that he was not a Loyalist from the North American colonies. While many of the plantation owners who received land grants in the Bahamas were colonists from North America who remained loyal to England throughout the American Revolution, Farquharson traveled from the British Isles intent on becoming a successful plantation holder

on lands being made available in the archipelago. Farquharson also was unique in that, when most plantation owners left for Nassau when making a profit from cotton became untenable, Farquharson stayed behind and transitioned his plantation to subsistence farming and raising livestock. "Making the Island his home for more than thirty years, Farquharson extended his estate to some fifteen hundred acres as almost all of his white neighbors gave up the struggle to wrest a fortune from the meager soil." (Craton and Saunders 1999:350) He spent the rest of his life running his plantation and even acquired his neighbor's holdings at Kerr Mount. Aside from the main structures of the Farquharson plantation, including the manor house, slave quarters, kitchen, work buildings and stable, Charles Farquharson also ordered the construction of an extensive system of stone walls around the property. In most cases, these walls were built to delineate the agricultural fields, although there are some accounts of walls used to mark property boundaries. This paper presents an analysis of the ways in which the construction and placement of the field walls at Prospect Hill Plantation impacted the social lives of both the owners of the plantation and the slaves who made up the workforce.

"We would all agree that insofar as every landscape is a composition of spaces it is also a composition of boundaries." (Jackson 1984:13) Few things establish a boundary quite as well as a wall; although a wall may be built for a variety of reasons, its essential nature is to delineate space. These divisions in space can have a symbolic and social impact whether or not such impacts were intended. Walls can separate individuals and communities, they can create social spaces where people come together, or they can establish ownership or control over a

space by marking the boundary lines and restricting access. A powerful example of the functionality and symbolism of walls is The Berlin Wall. While this structure served to physically separate East and West Berlin, it also came to represent the conflict between Capitalist and Communist ideologies. The ways that walls define social and symbolic space make them relevant for study, including the effort and expense that go into their creation. Aside from obvious situations such as defensive walls built to protect against an attacking enemy, the question can be asked, was the wall worth the cost? In the case of Prospect Hill, the construction and maintenance of these walls was a very expensive, labor-intensive activity, so much so that “later in the nineteenth century, agents at the Farquharson plantation were criticized for ordering the construction of walls because of their expense.” (Baxter and Burton 2006:165) If the practice of building these walls was so costly, there must have been some value to them beyond simply marking different fields. When archaeologically studying wall structures, it is valuable to analyze both the functional purpose of the walls as well as their symbolic social implications.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

The first step in analyzing the network of walls at Prospect Hill was to analyze relevant historical background information on slavery in the Bahamas and the Farquharson settlement. One of the key aspects of historical archaeology is the ability to combine written records with archaeological remains. Aside from other historical sources, in the case of Farquharson, there is also his journal spanning the years of 1831-1832. This Journal was not of a personal nature, but rather was a day-to-day account of the agricultural work on the plantation. (Farquharson 1831-2 [1957]) While this journal is a valuable source for understanding the basic operations of the Farquharson plantation and the planter’s insights about these operations, it is especially useful for this analysis because it gives a clearer picture of the number and types of fields at Pro-

spect Hill, the type of crops grown, and the amount of time and effort spent on constructing field walls.

As for the archeological field methods, it was important to map and analyze layout and construction of the field walls. The mapping and analysis was focused primarily on walls located near the standing architecture of the site. These features were placed in spatial reference to the other major structures of the plantation to better understand the impact of the walls on the greater landscape of Prospect Hill. The mapping process involved taking compass bearings for a stretch of wall and then measuring that section with reel tape. The area was densely overgrown with vegetation so all sections of wall that were mapped were cleared out with machetes and saws. In addition to being mapped, the walls were evaluated for construction techniques and the height and widths of the walls were recorded.

RESULTS

Wall Structure at Prospect Hill

The walls mapped in 2010 formed an extensive section that was located between the Planter’s manor house and the slave quarters. The location of the walls mapped in this research is shown in Figure 1. The map of the walls themselves is displayed in Figure 2.

Wall construction is a time consuming, labor intensive activity. Although the stones used in wall construction were often found while preparing fields and needed to be removed, building extensive walls instead of depositing the stones in one location is not an efficient use of time and manpower. Because of the difficulty and required manpower, the wall construction probably dates to a time when there was sufficient extra labor available. This suggests that the walls were constructed during the period of slavery when Charles Farquharson oversaw a large enough workforce to expend effort on tasks like wall building.

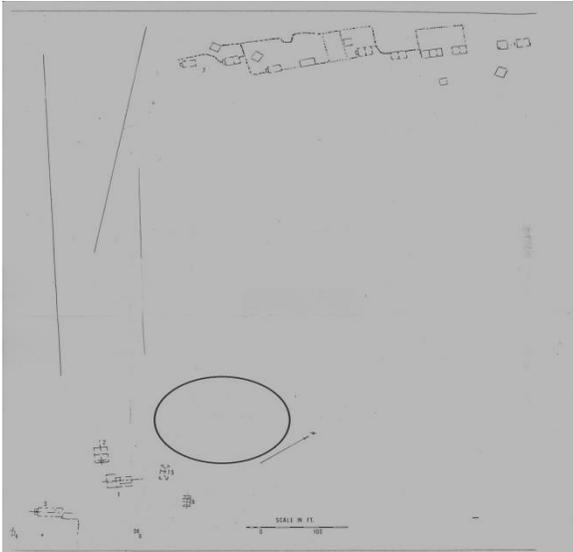


Figure 1. Map of Prospect Hill. The Manor house, Kitchen, and stable are at the bottom left while the slave quarters are at the top. The area in the circle is the location of the walls mapped in 2010. Base map by Kathy Gerace 1970x.

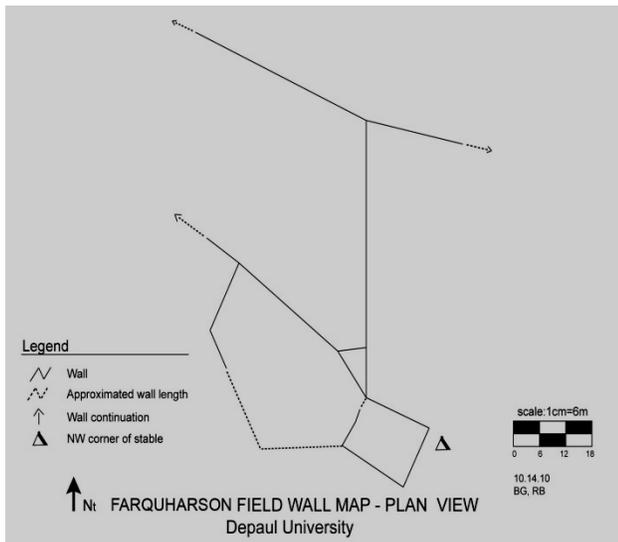


Figure 2. Map of wall structures researched in 2010

Field walls were constructed from blocks of stacked limestone. In most sections, the walls were about eight courses high by two courses thick or about 1.5/1.6 m by 0.6 m. However, a few sections were only six courses high. The area of field walls mapped during this excavation were located on a stretch of land that separated the manor house kitchen and stable on the eastern side of these fields from the slave

quarters which were on the western side. The longest section that was completely mapped was 69.2 m long and ran to the north of the stable. Near the stable were the only two completely enclosed sections that were mapped. One was a polygonal shaped area measuring 19.7 m by 15.7 m by 18.9 m on three sides with the last side comprising two sections of slightly different bearings, one being 2.9 m and the other 6.6 m. The other was a triangular pen that was 13 m by 11.4 m by 9.0 m; the nine meter section served as a bridge between two larger walls that extended from the northern-most corner of the polygon. Of these two larger walls, one was the north/south aligned 69.2 meter wall, while the other ran to the west and extended for 47.8 meters and continued on, but there was insufficient time to map it in its entirety.

The triangular pen was the only area in the fields where evidence of cultivatable plants was found. In this section, there was a concentration of *Bryophyllum pinnatum*, also called Life Leaf, which is used as a remedy for a variety of ailments in Bahamian bush medicine, including headaches, strains, asthma, whooping cough, tuberculosis, and burning urination, and can be administered by boiling and ingestion. (Hannah-Smith 2005) The Life Leaf was growing well inside this enclosure but was not present in adjacent areas. While this suggests a cultivation of the plant, no other parts of the field area had any observable remains of crops, and the rest of the walled-in fields were completely overrun with thorn trees and cacti.

An interesting aspect of these two enclosures was the lack of entryways. They were completely enclosed by stone walls. A third larger possible enclosure was identified to the west but, since there was insufficient time to map it in its entirety, it is represented on the map by dotted lines showing its estimated course. This section included the northwestern wall of the pen closest to the stable and the 47.8 m section running to the northeast. Around the enclosures, there were areas where the walls had collapsed. Other sections appeared to be less carefully constructed, especially in the case of the nine foot section of the triangular plot. There

were few examples of artifacts found around the walls and what was observed was not collected but was noted and described. There was a single dark green glass bottle of a style that seemed typical of wine bottles. The only other item observed was a considerably rotted two-by-four leaning against a section of the triangular enclosure wall.

Farquharson's Journal and Field Usage

Farquharson's journal lists at least twenty-one fields with a variety of crops distributed among the fields. The journal also discloses that some fields were allotted to slaves to grow their own provisions, including those he named as Allan's Field, Jeaney's Well Field and William's Field, all of which correspond to names of slaves mentioned by Farquharson. (Farquharson 1831-2 [1957]:x-xi) The journal provides insight into some of the crops that were grown, as stated in the preface: "the chief crop of the estate appears to have been Guinea Corn, known elsewhere as sorghum... This was chiefly a subsistence crop grown as food for slaves." (Farquharson 1831-2 [1957]:iv) The journal also mentions growing and selling cotton but only about 12 bales were produced during the time the journal was written. Aside from those two staple crops, many other cultivated plants were grown on the property:

"Next in importance were Pigeon Peas and Indian corn. Fodder for cattle was grown in quantity and was chiefly Guinea grass, often referred to simply as grass. Other crops mentioned include red or cow peas, black-eye peas, yams, sweet potatoes, snap beans, castor oil, cabbage, pumpkins (not actually mentioned but inferred from the name "pumpkin field")" [Farquharson 1831-2 [1957]:v]

The journal also reveals that Farquharson grew sage and catnip and raised cattle, sheep and pigs.

The emphasis on subsistence farming and the raising of livestock may have had to do with the fact that Farquharson arrived in 1803

during the decline of cotton's role as a cash crop in the Bahamas. "However, in 1794, the chenille attacked the cotton crops of the Bahamas again, and two-thirds of the cotton crop was destroyed. Four years later in 1798, cotton bugs almost demolished the crop, and between 1794 and 1805 cotton exports seriously diminished" (Shepherd 2002:130) From an economic standpoint, it seems livestock offered some relief on the Farquharson plantation as an alternative to cotton. Craton and Saunders state that, "with the decline of cotton, stock animals were the remaining hope for a regular, if small economic return for the Farquharson estate. In the two years 1831-32, only 12 bales of cotton were shipped to Nassau (worth perhaps £200), but at least 24 cattle, 70 sheep, and considerable numbers of pigs and poultry, worth at least twice as much." (Craton and Saunders 1999:358-359) Given the population of livestock and the fact that the cattle were free roaming, a considerable amount of work at the plantation was dedicated to erecting barriers to keep livestock out of some areas as is stated in the journal's preface: "however, this unrestricted roaming of the stock involved much construction of and attention to a diversity of defenses: making walls, stumping walls, making and mending up stump fences, likewise making and mending wood fences and also brush fences." (Farquharson 1831-2 [1957]:vii)

As stated previously, the construction and maintenance of stone walls was a labor intensive activity. The journal entries from November 7 through November 9, 1831 suggest that being assigned to wall construction could sometimes be seen as a form of punishment:

Monday 7 Nov. Employed 6 hands making wall on the upper side of Hercules field the women weeding pastor in Cato's field and Alick making Castor-oil – Weather threatening rain but very little fell on the land.

Tuesday 8. Employed all hands in the same way as yesterday.- weather dry – wind about Northeast a very stiff breeze.

Wednesday 9. Employed all hands in the same way as above except Alick gone to wall building as he says the wind blows too hard and the tide does not suit for making oil – weather dry – wind about N.E. a very strong breeze. [Farquharson 1831-2 [1957]:42]

In a footnote to these entries, editor Dean Peggs elaborates on their implications: “this superstitious excuse on the part of the slave, I think is considered rather a joke by the master who puts him to wall building, which is much harder work.” (Farquharson 1831-2 [1957]:42) Another important observation to take away from this is that Farquharson was indeed constructing walls to delineate separate fields even into the 1830’s, well after he had first settled his plantation. In addition, this description provides an example of the size of the work force that would be tasked with wall construction, in this case six men.

ANALYSIS

From *Farquharson’s Journal*, we learn that there were at least 21 different fields at Prospect Hill. Some of these fields were divided and named based on the crops grown in them such as Pumpkin Field and Corn Field. Other fields were allotted to slaves to grow their own provisions. (Farquharson 1831-2 [1957]:x-xi) By enclosing the fields in stone walls, the overall sense that the landscape at Prospect Hill was owned by Charles Farquharson was projected by the planter onto his slaves. This clear sense of ownership is a key aspect of the socio-economics of slavery. “The slave’s landscape was described from the point of view of someone surrounded by other people’s power. And its landmarks were plantation houses and fields differentiated by ownership.” (Upton 1985:70) Aside from enclosing agricultural fields, the walls also served to create a boundary between the planter space and the slave space, as the fields were located between the manor house and the slave quarters. This spatial ordering seems to be intentional on the part of Charles

Farquharson as part of structuring the landscape to create a sense of social hierarchy: “The layout of the communities or plantations reveals the nature of the slave cotton economy and the social organization on which it was based. The slave houses were always located at a distance away from the main house area, with the industrial buildings being near the plantation owner’s home.” (Gerace 1982:221) Moreover, the burden of building the extensive wall system fell to the slaves. As evidenced by the entries from Farquharson’s journal, in some cases, he could assign the difficult task of constructing field walls as a means of disciplining his slave work force. This role as punishment gives the walls further significance as a symbol of the plantation owner’s authority.

CONCLUSIONS

A wall serves the purpose of separating and defining spaces. This can be done for the purpose of keeping something out such as animals, enemies, etc. or to define a symbolic or social space. “Boundaries stabilize social relationships... It is when we find ourselves in a landscape of well-built, well-maintained fences, hedges and walls... that we realize we are in a landscape where political identity is a matter of importance.” (Jackson 1984:15) In the case of Prospect Hill, the purpose behind the walls appears to be as much symbolic as they are practical and functional. The symbolic function of walls appears to have been enacted in multiple ways. First, the walls served to mark the symbolic property boundary around the Prospect Hill Plantation. Also, the walls enclosed the agricultural fields, forming a symbolic boundary between the planter’s space, of the manor house and associated yard, and the slave quarters. This separation helped define a social distinction between Charles Farquharson and his slaves. Solidifying this sense of separation, the walls had no gates and were high enough to discourage climbing; they blocked any direct route from the slave quarters to the manor house. This left just one route of approach for the slaves: a single road that went around the property and ap-

proached the manor from the north. Finally, the tasking of slaves to build field walls may have been a form of discipline which helped to establish the planter's authority and strengthen the perception of the walls as a symbol of that authority. The concept of constructing field walls to delineate agricultural property and to create a sense of spatial order is of European planter origin and does not reflect traditional African concepts of land use or later nineteenth or twentieth century Afro-Bahamian practices. The walls at Prospect Hill date to a period of plantation slavery and their construction played a functional and symbolic role in the landscape of Prospect Hill.

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