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featuring

18th-Century Smyrnea Settlement
Sams Tabby Complex
Pottersville kiln site ... and more.

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Pottersville kiln site in South Carolina is a National Register of Historic Places listing making headlines in southern archeology. Read this article by archeologist George Calfas to find out why it is an important resource.

Notes from the Field: Asian inspired kilns in South Carolina?

The 2011 University of Illinois field school focused on the Pottersville kiln site (38ED011) in the Edgefield District of South Carolina. The Pottersville kiln remains are situated on the highest elevated point of a field, surrounded by a surface scatter of ceramic sherds in all directions. The seemingly gentle slope of the kiln actually allowed for the passage of cooling summer breezes. Aided by the use of light-weight tents and plenty of cold water, the Illinois-based field school students faired well in the southern heat.

Pottersville is home to America's first alkaline glazed stoneware vessels. The alkaline glazing process developed by Abner Landrum at Potterville replaced the need for lead and salt glazed vessels in South Carolina and remains a mainstay in modern day folk pottery. The Camden Gazette first wrote about the Pottersville vessels describing them as "the first of the kind" and "superior in quality" (1819:4-5). The high caliber of these vessels was later echoed by Robert Mills (1826) when he stated that the stoneware was "stronger, better, and cheaper than any European or American ware of the same kind".

About three years ago, with the support and guidance of Carl Steen, I began researching the Edgefield District and its outstanding pottery tradition. During the planning and preparation phase of the project we had planned to define the dimensions of the Pottersville kiln. Archaeological and archival research informed us that a "typical" alkaline stoneware kiln would be approximately 20-30 feet in length and 10-12 feet in width. While the kiln site at Pottersville has been known for decades, no one confidently knew which part of the hillside were kiln remains and which part was a waster pile. Without the assistance of geophysics, we began the project at the high point of the hill guided by stones just barely breaking through the topsoil. We felt that due to the elevation and prevailing winds this would be an ideal location for the kiln. We broke soil on the first afternoon of the field school and by the end of the day we realized that we were indeed on top of the kiln wall. The orientation of the wall was a bit different than we had expected; something we learned to get use to with this project. Using this same "exposed" stone methodology we inserted additional units down the hill and quickly learned that we were dealing with something much larger than we had planned.

Like all projects, the Pottersville kiln held many secrets until the final week of the field season and the project mantra became "Dig Deeper". By the end of the field season, we had discovered all of the major architectural features of a kiln; exterior walls to include all four corners; flues, firebox, bag wall, firing chamber, and chimney. The Pottersville kiln does fall within the

average for kiln width (12 feet wide) but the field school discovered that the kiln is a jaw-dropping 105 feet in length. The exterior wall is over 6-feet in height and the firebox is approximately 6 feet deep, 10 feet long, and 12 feet wide. The aforementioned first unit captured the left and right walls of the firing chamber. By the end of the second week the team encountered the chamber floor approximately 2.5 feet below surface level (bsl). After digging deeper and following the walls in search of terminal soil, we quickly realized that this 2.5 bsl level was the last floor utilized in the kiln and that the original floor was actually 5.5 feet bsl. We counted seven floor-building episodes in the chamber; presumably due to firing difficulties or a whole host of different production factors.

By 1820, the Edgefield District was the third most populated region in the South and an "industrial" sized kiln would have been needed to produce the colossal amount of vessels needed to store food for Edgefield's enslaved population. For example, pork was the main staple of the diet and for just its pickling and storage; over 11,000 five-gallon vessels would have been needed. The length of Potterville would have made it possible to produce the volume of vessels needed in the Edgefield District in 1820.

Archaeology never seems to provide the answers expected, if it did why would we dig? With the new information before us, a mountain of additional research begins—perhaps even research that takes a turn to Asian methods of production. For over 1,000 years potters in Asia have been firing ceramics is hillside kilns, must often referred to as Anagama, Dragon, or Snake kilns. The enormous length of the Pottersville kiln opens a host of research questions; including those regarding the fueling of the kiln, the regulation of internal firing temperatures, and many more.

Images: Courtesy of the South Carolina State Historic Preservation Office

Camden Gazette 1819 Camden Gazette, 3 June.
Mills, Robert 1826 Statistics of South Carolina: Including a view of its natural, civil, and military history, general and particular. Charleston: Hurlbut and Lloyd.

A Plantation Settlement of Diversity in British East Florida

The archeological resources of the Smyrnea Settlement tell the intriguing story of an abandoned British colony in East Florida. The numerous archeological sites along a river in Volusia County are evidence that a large plantation was in business for over nine years before its settlers left for better opportunity in St. Augustine and elsewhere.

After the (first) Treaty of Paris in 1763, Florida switched from a Spanish territory to a British one. In an effort to fill the vast lands with white settlers, the British government advertised land grants in the notable British papers of the day. One man interested in such a venture was Dr. Andrew Turnbull. A wealthy man of Scottish birth, Dr. Turnbull was well-known in many respectable British circles. He had connections with a number of titled gentlemen, including his eventual business partners Sir William Duncan and Lord Temple. These three men were also members of the East Florida Society, a group eager to explore the newly acquired British territory for financial gain.

Turnbull's efforts to establish a colony were troubled from the start. The land grant required white Protestant settlers to occupy the newly acquired territory. Turnbull had no luck convincing white Protestants to come with him for the Florida plantation settlement. Instead, Turnbull turned to other Europeans, the vast majority of the Roman Catholic faith. He convinced 200 Greeks, but found the most success in Minorca, a tiny island nation in the Mediterranean. A number of Italians, Turks, and Corsicans, also joined the diverse group of potential settlers. There was a high rate of intermarriage among these groups and they are referred to today as "the Minorcans of Florida." Turnbull now had the required number of workers, although they were not of the requisite faith, to inhabit his plantation which he named after his Greek wife's birthplace – Smyrnea.

In 1768, eight ships set sail for East Florida carrying the 1255 people who would survive the more than three months' journey and became the workers and inhabitants of the Smyrnea Settlement. They were greeted by at least fifty African American slaves who had begun to clear the land and build structures for plantation life. These enslaved African Americans continued to live and work at Smyrnea for the next nine years and grew crops such as rice, corn, sugar cane and cotton. The primary agricultural focus, however, was the growing and processing of indigo. Large plantations cornered the indigo production market, due to the expensive equipment and complicated processing needed. Smyrnea was the largest exporter of indigo from East Florida during the settlement's peak years of production. Later years in the settlement's short history, other exports such as tar, turpentine, and lumber became the focus. This was a direct result of the War for American Independence, where these types of exports – especially lumber – would aid the British war effort, and therefore, be more valuable cash crops.

The settlement became an independent town organized in a linear fashion along a river, much unlike the grouped-community housing that the Mediterranean workers were accustomed to. There were numerous building structures, including houses for Turnbull, enslaved African Americans, colonists, overseers, two Catholic priests, and one Anglican preacher. Smyrnea also included a Catholic church (perhaps an Anglican one as well), workshops, storehouses, wharves, bridges and agricultural buildings. The remnants of roads, drains, gardens, and mills have also been found through archeological research.

In 1777, the Smyrnea Settlement was in a state of rapid decline due to a number of factors including poor weather conditions and escalation of rifts between the settlers and Dr. Turnbull. Lacking the support of his partners in the venture, the British Government, and the territorial Governor of Florida, things went from bad to worse for Dr. Turnbull. Agricultural production halted and the colony dissolved. In late November 1777, "the Catholic church on the settlement, San Pedro, and its priest were transferred to the city of St. Augustine, marking the official end of the colony. This singular movement of a village was termed a rare case on record where a whole parish, priest, and people, moved from one place to another" (NRHP Nomination pg. 23).

In the second Treaty of Paris, marking the end of the War for Independence in America, Britain gave back Florida to the Spanish in return for the Bahama Islands, thinking Florida an insignificant territory. Though the Spanish now ruled Florida for a second time, former British subjects remained in East Florida, joining the diverse population made up of Spanish soldiers, slaves, white and black immigrants from the United States and Caribbean, Seminole Indians, and other European immigrants, quite resembling the cultural and ethnic diversity of the Smyrnea Settlement.
Archeological Resources of the 18th-Century Smyrnea Settlement is a multiple property nomination. Most of the resources are archeological sites of different types, including: artifact scatters, middens, building remains, and structural remains. Various structures are present, such as vats, wells, bridge remains, canals and ditches, roads and trails, and cemeteries. The site has potential for data related to understanding the British experience in East Florida, related to settlement organization, potential for economic reconstruction, and potential for socio-cultural reconstruction. Some of the archeological resources listed under this nomination include the canal system, colonists' houses, and more.

By Stephanie Massaro

References:

Archeological Resources of the 18th-Century Smyrnea Settlement of Dr. Andrew Turnbull MPS Cover submitted by the Florida State Historic Preservation Office.

Florida Under British Rule, 1789 (Map), Caroline Mays Brevard, A History of Florida (New York, NY: American Book Company, 1919) 84; Downloaded from Maps ETC, on the web at http://etc.usf.edu/maps [map #f2073]

Spanish and Chamorro Culinary Collide in Guam

The Paulino Outdoor Oven in Guam was built in 1947 by Jesus Meno Crisostomo of Inarajan and is representative of the vernacular outdoor baking structures built in Guam during the early 20th century. These ovens carry on a cultural tradition that originated with the Spanish settlement period (1668 - 1898). Although the construction materials used to build the ovens changed over time, the oven style retained the same basic shape. This oven represents a rapidly disappearing property type associated with long-standing cultural traditions of the Chamorro people of Guam.

Originally these stone and brick ovens were probably built to provide the foreigners living on Guam after A.D. 1668 with bread and other foods prepared in ways that were familiar to them. Over time the Chamorro, who cooked foods using hot rocks, adapted the outdoor ovens. Called hotno in Chamorro after the Spanish term for oven, horno, these ovens were traditionally used for the cooking of bread, biscuits made from grated coconut and tapioca, arrowroot or cycad flour, breadfruit, and meat from animals introduced by the Spanish including pigs, chickens, turkeys, and goats. The oven was built in a corrugated tin frame and has a base made of coral rocks and mortar.

Further investigation at the Paulino Outdoor Oven site could yeild addition information about construction techniques as well as the oven's use over time.

Over 100 Years of Plantation History Preserved at Sams Tabby Complex

The Sams Tabby Complex contains the remnants of a successful plantation, including building structures and domestic artifacts from those who worked it. Tabby is an architectural term referring to both building method and the building materials/components. This method of construction was very important in the south eastern territories and colonies. Wooden boards are used as brackets, or frames, to form walls and openings for windows and doors. A handmade liquid mixture, a primitive concrete, made of crushed shells, sand, clay, and some forms or bits of limestone are poured into the wooden frames. These wooden cases were filled slowly and in stages to decrease the chances of air pockets. Once hardened, tabby structures were as strong as stone, like manmade limestone, and fireproof.

Although the plantation was most likely occupied before 1783, it was purchased by Barnwell Sams in that year. In the early 1800s he expanded greatly upon the tabby complex adding wings to the main house for his growing family, additional slave quarters, a large kitchen, smokehouse, barn/stables, and well/dairy house. There were many other structures in the complex, but only a few remain standing. Sams' plantation grew indigo, cotton, and oranges. Based upon the archeological evidence, remaining structures, and documented history of the Sams' business and exports, it is believed that hundreds of enslaved African Americans were needed to operate the plantation.

After the Civil War, the plantation continued to function through the work of freedmen until the main house burned at the turn of the century. It is believed the entire plantation was abandoned by the start of the twentieth century. Sams Tabby Complex exhibits excellent integrity and is both archeologically and architecturally significant. Archeological evidence at this site can give insight into the actual date of the earliest complex structures. It can also provide important historical and anthropological information that adds to a range of research questions, such as: comparison and contrast of the lifeways between the freedmen on site who varied in social status, the lifestyle and treatment of enslaved African Americans who worked in the house versus other types of jobs, and finally the lifeways of freedmen living at the plantation without white owners.

By Stephanie Massaro

References
Sams Tabby Complex (38BU581) National Register form, submitted by the South Carolina State Historic Preservation Office
Thornton, Richard. "What is Tabby architecture?" Examiner.com. http://www.examiner.com/architecture-design-in-national/what-is-tabby-style-architecture (accessed July 19, 2011).