

CEMETERY  
Orange Grove Plantation  
Frogmore vicinity  
St. Helena Island  
Beaufort County  
South Carolina

HABS No. SC-865

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SC-865

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HISTORIC AMERICAN BUILDINGS SURVEY  
National Park Service  
U.S. Department of the Interior  
1849 C St. NW  
Washington, DC 20240

ADDENDUM TO:  
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WRITTEN HISTORICAL AND DESCRIPTIVE DATA

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## HISTORIC AMERICAN BUILDINGS SURVEY

### Addendum to CEMETERY

HABS No. SC-865

Location: Orange Grove Plantation, Frogmore vicinity, St. Helena Island, Beaufort County, South Carolina.

Owner: John M. Trask, Jr.

Significance: Good example of historic plantation cemetery, enclosed by tabby walls.

#### PART I. HISTORICAL INFORMATION

The history of Orange Grove Plantation on St. Helena Island is imperfectly known although it seems clear that the name dates back at least to the mid-eighteenth century when the tract, which then incorporated 473 acres, was owned by Peter Perry. It has been suggested that Perry bought the property from William Chapman in 1753 for £1892, and that it was he who subsequently transformed it "into a completely developed and prosperous indigo plantation."<sup>1</sup>

Although rarely of high quality, indigo production in South Carolina had been encouraged by an Act of Parliament passed in 1748 which "allowed a bounty of sixpence per pound on all indigo raised in the British American plantations."<sup>2</sup> Mid eighteenth-century agricultural commentators agreed that indigo needed a dry, well drained soil, and the pine barrens located near open water, where there was some protection against frost if properly fertilized, proving ideal. Most sea island plantations included at least some land meeting these requirements, and the north side of St. Helena Island particularly well suited to indigo cultivation.

Nothing definite is known about Perry's operation except that at the time of his death in 1765 he owned forty-six slaves, which suggests an substantial investment, one set of cypress indigo vats, and quantities of livestock. Similarly, little is know about Perry's personal life. He married Elizabeth Ladson just before or soon after purchasing Orange Grove. The couple's first son, Peter, died in infancy on 5 September 1757. Another son, Joseph, was born in 1756 and a daughter, Elizabeth, born in 1758.<sup>3</sup>

Where the elder Peter Perry was buried is not certain although it seems possible that he was interred at Orange Grove, in what was to become a family cemetery. If so, no marker has

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<sup>1</sup>Rowland et al, (1996),165.

<sup>2</sup>Carrol (1836), I: 386.

<sup>3</sup>*South Carolina Historical and Genealogical Magazine* 23: 148.

survived. It is documented that Elizabeth Perry and John Fripp of St. Helena Parish were appointed to administer Perry's estate, and at some uncertain date sold Orange Grove to John Evans who continued planting indigo on the property.

At the time of his death on 28 March 1774, Evans owned two sets of indigo vats and a "processed crop of indigo worth three thousand pounds currency" items which suggest that production was substantial. In his will, Evans mentions a house on the property where he then lived; he bequeathed it to his wife Sarah only for the period of her widowhood. Apparently, Orange Grove was to pass to his son, William, when the latter achieved his majority. It is difficult, however, to reconstruct the actual outcome of events.

It is likely that the plantation was eventually divided, one portion passing to Thomas Fuller, Senior, who sold his interest containing 350 acres, to Edgar Fripp, planter of St. Helena Island, for \$6,000 in 1845. The legal description accompanying this transaction is of interest since it attests that, despite sales and property transfers, Perry family members were still living then at Orange Grove or in its immediate vicinity. Fuller's property is described as:

half of the tract originally belonging to the late Peter Perry, Sr. deceased lying on a branch of Beaufort river (Wallace Creek), bounding north on [Wallace Creek], south on lands of the late Thomas Pritchard deceased, William Chaplin and Col. Stapleton, east on Sarah Perry, widow of Peter Perry Sr. and her son P. W. Perry, west on land now or late of Thomas Pritchard.<sup>4</sup>

Other legal records dating back to the 1840s indicate that portions of Orange Grove passed into Chisholm family ownership. Mrs. Charlotte Fripp bought 207 acres from George A. Chisholm and Mary E. Chisholm, his wife, under a deed from William J. Jenkins who was their Trustee in 1859. But discrepancies in acreage figures plus an obvious lacunae in the historic record make it hard to assess who owned the cemetery at Orange Grove over the first half of the nineteenth century when both Perry and Fripp family burials are attested by inscriptions. Incomplete genealogical information, as well as the confusion generated by multiple repetitions over several generations of the same given names, also makes the identification of the individuals noted in the inscriptions uncertain.

## PART II. ARCHITECTURAL DESCRIPTION

### A. Description

Overlooking Wallace (Chowan) Creek on the inland side of St. Helena Island, the cemetery at Orange Grove Plantation measures approximately 50' north-to-south x 30' east-to-

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<sup>4</sup>Sarah Fick Charleston, South Carolina, to author, Personal Communication, April 2003.

west, its boundaries defined by a low tabby wall which was originally about 12" wide and now rising only about 18" above present grade. Part ruin, the wall is incompletely preserved and has lost any stucco finish which it may have once possessed. Within the enclosed area toward its southern extremity, stand three stone memorials, the most conspicuous being a brownstone or perhaps "marl" box tomb with gothicising decoration. It was dedicated to Mrs. Anne Fripp, who was born on 17 August 1799 and died 26 June 1830. Other gravestones in the immediate vicinity mark the burial of Peter Perry, who died at age twenty-four on November 4, and Martha Ann, who was the daughter of James and Ann Fripp. Martha Ann died on 20 August 1825, aged one year and twenty-five days.<sup>5</sup>

While it is highly likely that other burials exist with the cemetery, their markers have disappeared. Likewise, almost all traces of the original Orange Grove plantation house and its dependencies have gone, the only early architectural remnant now visible above ground being the tabby fragments of what was perhaps a chimney base located slightly southwest of the burial ground.

#### B. Affinities

For local planters who after death desired to be interred on their own land, tabby served to enclose family cemeteries, adding an air of permanence and dignity when so employed. Other examples of tabby used in this way on St. Helena Island include a small Fripp family cemetery, now called Piedmont Cemetery, located off Olde Church Road.<sup>6</sup> Another located on the island's south side is Mulberry Cemetery, placed within sight of the Harbor River, off what is now Ocean Breeze Road.<sup>7</sup>

Although enclosing an area of similar size, Piedmont's tabby walls are more substantial than those of the cemetery at Orange Grove, measuring 24" in height. At Piedmont, the earliest marker now visible is dedicated to William Fripp, who died in 1794. The cemetery itself is currently (2003) abandoned and densely overgrown.

At Mulberry Hill, the cemetery is laid out as an elongated octagon made by cutting off all four corners of a basically rectangular enclosure. The result is curious since the headstones are aligned not with its long sides but rather with the much shorter cut-off corners. The enclosure is

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<sup>5</sup> St. Helena Island Cemetery Survey 1999, Site U-13- ST H 31

<sup>6</sup> St. Helena Island Cemetery Survey 1999, Site U-13- ST H 11

<sup>7</sup> St. Helena Island Cemetery Survey 1999, Site U-13- ST H 33

defined by a continuous 24" high x 15" wide tabby wall cast above ground in a single lift.<sup>8</sup> Internal faces preserve clear impressions showing that formwork was fabricated from three horizontal timber boards of equal width. When the construction occurred is not recorded, but the earliest visible headstone belongs to John Fripp who died (aged 40) in 1797.

Elsewhere in Beaufort County, tabby was employed to enclose the churchyard at St. Helena's Church in Beaufort around 1800 and again for the Sams Family Burial ground on Dataw Island during the early nineteenth century.<sup>9</sup> Plantation cemeteries surrounded by tabby walls are not confined to Beaufort County, a well-preserved example standing at the Du Bignon Cemetery located near the Major William Horton House on Jekyll Island, Georgia. This cemetery is approximately 40' square, its tabby enclosing walls standing to a height of 6'-0". Corners and intermediate buttresses on Jekyll are fabricated in fired brick.

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### PART III. SOURCES OF INFORMATION

#### A. Bibliography

Carrol, B.R. *Historical Collections of South Carolina*. New York: Harper & Brothers, 1836.

Dabbs, Edith M. *Sea Island Diary: A History of St. Helena Island*. Spartanburg: The Reprint Co., [ca.1983].

Rowland, Lawrence S., Alexander Moore, and George C. Rogers, Jr. *The History of Beaufort County, South Carolina, Volume I, 1514-1861*. Columbia: University of South Carolina Press, 1996.

St. Helena Island Cemetery Survey. Unpublished report, Historic Beaufort Foundation, Beaufort, 1999.

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<sup>8</sup> Mulberry Hill Cemetery is also abandoned and heavily overgrown, a condition which, along with an extraordinarily luxuriant growth of poison ivy, prevented full measurement in July of 2003. However, it was ascertained that the enclosure is not aligned with principal compass points, long walls being laid out on a bearing running approximately 30 degrees west of north. The reason for this is not clear since no physical features now exist which would condition such a layout although it does seem possible that the tabby walls were cast so as to enclose pre-existing burials which had been somewhat randomly aligned. Nothing is known of associated settlement at either Piedmont Cemetery or Mulberry Hill.

<sup>9</sup> See Minutes of the Vestry of St. Helena's Parish, 4 February 1800, when the Church Wardens were to "apply to Col. Thomas Talbird to know if he is prepared to build the tabby wall round the churchyard on the former conditions spoken of between the Vestry & himself."

Salley, A.S., ed. *Minutes of the Vestry of St. Helena's Parish, South Carolina 1726-1812*.  
Columbia, SC: 1919.

#### PART IV. PROJECT INFORMATION

This project was sponsored by the Historic Beaufort Foundation and by the Historic American Buildings Survey (HABS) division of the National Park Service, Paul D. Dolinsky, Chief, HABS. This report is one component of a larger survey of extant examples of tabby architecture within Beaufort County, South Carolina. The documentation was undertaken by HABS under the direction of Paul D. Dolinsky with assistance from Virginia B. Price, HABS Historian, who worked with Jefferson G. Mansell, (formerly of) the Historic Beaufort Foundation, Ian D. Hill, Beaufort County Planning Department, and Colin Brooker, Brooker Architectural Design Consultants, to identify subjects of study and locate them in the field in 2002 and 2003. Colin Brooker, whose research underpinned the project, wrote the historical report. Evan Thompson, now with the Historic Beaufort Foundation, assisted Brooker in the production of the reports. Jack E. Boucher, HABS Photographer, took the large format photographs.