

## GENDER, FAMILY COMPOSITION, AND SOCIAL MOBILITY AT FORT FREDERICA, GEORGIA, 1736 - C. 1750

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### ABSTRACT

More complete documentary information on the identity of residents of the British colonial town of Frederica has allowed revised interpretations of the archaeological record there. Two tightly controlled excavations in the town reveal contrasts in site structure, refuse disposal practices, faunal remains, and material culture from 1736-c. 1750. The Hird site, dating from 1736 to 1748, was occupied by a husband, wife, and their three children (a son and two daughters); the Forrester site, c. 1742-1754, is attributed to a (presumably) solitary adult male. This paper explores the possible gender, family composition, and social mobility dimensions of the archaeological contrasts in addition to spatial and temporal factors affecting these sites.

### HISTORICAL OVERVIEW

The town and fort of Frederica, located on St. Simons Island, Georgia, was established in 1736 as a defensive outpost between the "disputed territory" of Spanish Florida and important British settlements and plantations in Georgia and Carolina. A regiment of 630 soldiers under the leadership of James Edward Oglethorpe, along with several dozen families from which a civilian militia was derived, provided a military presence for the small fortified settlement on the banks of the Frederica River (Figure 1). Frederica was too large and strategically placed for the Spanish forces based in St. Augustine to ignore if they were to attack Savannah or Charleston; at the same time, it was small enough for England to sacrifice in the defense of her more important holdings. However, Oglethorpe and the Trustees for Establishing the Colony of Georgia, a group of philanthropic English nobles, also had social and economic motives in mind when they planned the town. Besides its strategic importance, the settlement was naively envisioned as a self-sufficient transplanted English village, populated by the mother country's "deserving poor," who were expected to contentedly practice every sort of craft and trade imaginable *and* be part-time farmers. Predictably, the majority of these English urbanites found few opportunities to practice their livelihoods, and most of the town's residents were miserable failures at all things agrarian. As a consequence, the turnover at Frederica was remarkably high: one contemporary account estimated that after only five years, nearly 40% of the original settlers were either "Dead, Quitted, or Run Away;" for many, only two years was enough (Saye and Coulter 1949). Those who stayed depended largely on governmental handouts, or else served the thirsty needs of the military regiment. The death knell of this "artificial prosperity," such as it was, was sounded when a remarkably incompetent Spanish invasion of the island was repulsed in 1742 (Ivers 1974). Peace was declared, so the British regiment was disbanded in 1749, and the few residents who remained by that late date soon departed for greener pastures elsewhere. In 1758 what little of the town remained burned to the ground because no one was there to put the fire out.

Over the next two and a half centuries Frederica was sporadically occupied and farmed, and an orphanage was established there at the turn of this century. Thanks largely to the efforts of the Colonial Dames of America and local historian Margaret Davis Cate, the area of the town and

fort became a national monument in 1945, predating by a quarter of a century the advent of affordable metal detectors and the reprobates who operate them. Hence, looting at the site has been minimal. Archaeological explorations of the largely undisturbed fort and defensive earthworks began in the late 1940s under the supervision of Charles H. Fairbanks, the monument's first superintendent. His pioneering work aided greatly in the identification, interpretation, and restoration of several key features of the town (Fairbanks 1953), and in collaboration with Margaret Davis Cate, he was able to establish the original layout of the civilian house lots (Fairbanks 1956). Following Fairbanks' departure, over 40 trenching excavations were undertaken to locate substantial foundations (Deagan 1975). The extraordinary brevity of the trenching site reports often proved to be frustrating to later researchers. In 1975 and again in 1978-9, I excavated two domestic sites at Frederica (Figure 2) under the direction of Fairbanks (Honerkamp 1975a, 1980). No other major excavations have been carried out there since these projects were completed, although several papers and articles have been generated from the Honerkamp-Fairbanks data (Honerkamp 1975b, 1976, 1977, 1982, 1994; Honerkamp and Reitz 1982, 1983; Reitz and Honerkamp 1983, 1984).

### THE HIRD FAMILY

The 1975 excavation was concentrated on Lot 13 in the North Ward of Frederica (originally designated as Lot 12; see Scott 1985, Part 1, for a discussion of the revised lot numbering system). According to documents and maps, this 60 by 90 foot lot was occupied by Thomas Hird and his wife Grace, along with their three children (John, Phoebe, and Frances) from 1736 until at least 1747-48, when Thomas died (Scott 1985). An adult son, Mark, owned the adjacent Lot 12. The family's passage to the New World was paid for by the Trustees, indicating a low economic position upon arrival at the town, and Thomas' messy, smelly trade as a dyer was a low-status livelihood in the 18th century. Reinforcing their modest social status, the location of the family lot was off the beaten path, that is, away from both the main streets of the town and the actual fort, and a contemporary map indicate that the family lived in a "range of small shingle houses" (Scott 1985:21). The largest, most elaborate, and expensive houses at colonial Frederica occur in close proximity to the fort, and always on the two main streets (see Deagan 1975). Thomas also came into possession of Mark's lot, who had left Frederica by 1739.

The elder Hird seems to have been engaged in everything *except* dying at Frederica: he was the town constable, a lay preacher (one of the few colonists in all of Georgia to listen to, let alone support John Wesley), a successful farmer who established a "plantation" on an island he discovered, a landlord to soldiers who lived on Mark's property, and an astute businessman. He owned a boat and made frequent trips to Savannah and Charleston, on one occasion traveling to the former city on Oglethorpe's orders to acquire "Silk-Worm Eggs," "Mulberry Plants," and "Vine-Cuttings" as part of an economically dysfunctional attempt by the Trustees to encourage Georgia's colonists to produce silk and wine (Candler 1908:98). He also borrowed a substantial sum of money from Oglethorpe in order to set up a brewery, but without discernible success.

Thomas Hird distinguished himself quickly. After only a few years, most accounts of his character were enthusiastic and positive: he was singled out by those who knew him as a "very knowing and industrious man" (Candler 1913: 92), and one of the town's "principal Improvers" (Candler 1906: 73). When combined with evidence of his considerable entrepreneurial flexibility and his unusually long occupation at the town, these contemporary accounts concerning Herd's industrious nature and many improvements indicate a relatively high socioeconomic status at Frederica toward the end of his life.

Rising social rank is assumed for the rest of the household as well, for which there is precious little recorded in contemporary documents. Grace and Phoebe apparently shared the same religious convictions as the family patriarch, as they consented to being baptized by John Wesley on the voyage from England to Georgia (Curnock 1938:114). This also indicates that Phoebe was old enough to make such a decision. Thomas's youngest son John is listed as still living on Lot 13 in March of 1749 (Candler 1937:433), implying that he was alone by that date, and also that he too reached adulthood, or semi-adulthood, while at Frederica. An unspecified Hird daughter married John Joyner, who in 1759 petitioned for the title to Hird Island and the "many considerable improvements thereon;" Joyner also mentioned that since Thomas' death the rest of the family had been "dispersed and not known whether living or dead" (Candler 1907:202). In all likelihood, John Hird abandoned the original family lot by 1750.

Thus, the documentary image of the Hird family reveals a relatively successful adaptation to the rigors of frontier life. From a modest beginning as an object of the Trust's charity, this family seems to have persevered and even thrived at Frederica while others quickly drifted away. Not surprisingly, dying fabrics seems to have played a minor role, if any, in the Hirds' success. Instead, agrarian activities were combined with other unspecified business pursuits, and Thomas was continuously employed as a civil servant to supplement the family income. The Hirds seem to have been the one thing that the settlement needed most: model colonists, sober, religious, and hard working.

#### WILLIAM FORRESTER, BACHELOR

When originally excavated, South Ward Lot 41 was thought to have been occupied by Robert Patterson and his family, who was reported to have kept a "bawdy house" on his property. However, halfway through the 30 week fieldwork session at this site, re-analysis of the historic map showing the lot numbering system convinced Frederica Chief Historian George Bendt that an error had occurred: the lot was actually 31 South (see Honerkamp 1980:60-64). This lot was owned by a number of settlers, beginning with Elisha Dobree, a clerk whose wife considered him to be "too whimsical" and refused to join him in Georgia (Egmont 1923:377). But once burned twice shy, and it was at this point that I began to pursue research questions that were not contingent upon the precise identification of any particular occupant at the site. Instead, I assumed that *whoever* lived there was probably of a lower socio-economic bracket due to the undesirable location of the lot and the apparent absence of brick or tabby house foundations. This was a fortuitous decision since historian J.T. Scott has subsequently and convincingly demonstrated that the lot in question was in reality 41 South, and that the actual occupant was one William Forrester.

According to Scott, Lot 41 was unclaimed during the early years of Frederica's existence (an indicator of its undesirable status), and Forrester, an unmarried soldier, ranger, and snuffmaker was credited only with building a "hut" there (1985:22). He was also paid to be the postman from Frederica to St. Simons, and he remained in Frederica as late as 1747, and probably some years beyond that. Nothing else about his life is known from documentary sources.

#### ARCHAEOLOGICAL RESULTS: THE HIRD SITE

A total of 111.5 square meters was excavated at the Hird site, with most of the units located in the "back yard," that is, the center of the lot. This represents approximately 22% of the total lot area. As was the case for most of Frederica, the entire site had been plowed, which obliterated the original colonial ground surface, along with the tops of colonial features, but

otherwise the archaeological record was undisturbed. Below the plow zone there was a high degree of visibility, and 10 major features were easily defined (Figure 3). At both sites all contexts, including the plow zone, were screened using 1/4" mesh. Just 1% of the 4695 ceramic fragments at this site had beginning manufacturing dates of 1762 or later, indicating only minimal secondary postcolonial deposition and no postcolonial occupation had occurred. The mean ceramic date for the site was calculated at 1742, dead center in its documented occupation span; this was the case for plow zone and feature ceramics. Using the Binford pipestem formula on 1149 stem fragments, a date of 1741.7 was calculated, which agrees closely with the mean ceramic date.

The mid-area of Lot 13 North contained a high density of features, primarily trash pits, as well as a barrel-lined "cooler" (Honerkamp 1994:9). Evidence for any of the modest "shingle houses" documented for this site was seen only in the form of a probable root cellar at the back or south end of the lot; no architectural features were noted on the front, or street side, of the lot.

#### ARCHAEOLOGICAL RESULTS: THE FORRESTER SITE

The field strategy at the Forrester site was to excavate as much of the entire 60 by 90 foot colonial lot as possible using three by three meter squares. The 63 units that were completed (465 square meters) represent approximately 85% of the total lot area. The large number of equal size units allowed the application of SYMAP imagery to visually chart different artifact class and type distributions. Only 2.3% of the 12431 ceramic artifacts from Lot 41 was manufactured in 1762 or later, and the majority of these came from the extreme northeast corner of the site, which was in the vicinity of the modern orphanage. None of the 30 features uncovered (Figure 3) contained "late" ceramics or cut or wire nails, another postcolonial temporal marker. A mean ceramic date of 1744 was derived for the Lot 41 assemblage, reflecting the documented later start of an occupation there. However, the date calculated for ceramics in the colonial-period features is considerably later, at 1749, and the pipestem formula for 3718 pipe stems produced an even later date of 1766. Apparently the lion's share of smoking occurred in the later occupation range of the site, when 4/64 inch pipestem bore diameters were more common than the earlier larger diameters. I conclude from this ceramic/pipestem temporal information that Forrester's stay at Frederica started and ended later than did the Hirds'.

Forrester's documented "hut" is consistent with the rectangular arrangement of postholes discovered near the north or street end of the lot (Figure 4). It is also apparent from the SYMAP images that a heavy concentration of artifacts (especially glass and ceramics) in the northwest corner of the site is probably associated with trash disposal from the adjacent lot, so the two westernmost squares are excluded from the Forrester Site artifact totals to adjust for this (i.e., 448 square meters {61 units} of total area excavated).

#### SOCIAL DIMENSIONS

Although the samples generated from each site differ considerably in size, they are both believed to be sufficiently large to be representative of their respective universes, and therefore comparable. That the sites were occupied by a successful, long-term family composed of a married couple with three children who probably reached adulthood versus a solo bachelor snuffmaker provides interesting comparative questions that can be explored. In this paper I am interested in three areas: gender, social mobility, and family composition,.

Whither Gender? I begin with what is to me the most interesting but most elusive question, with some caveats to go with it. Identifying gender-specific artifacts or artifact assemblages at Frederica or other early 18th century British colonial sites has not progressed

much beyond the "ceramics/women and guns/man" level of interpretation. One factor that has increased the difficulty in discerning gender (and social) distinctions at Frederica is the fact that the Trustees provided provisions and supplies to a considerable number of colonists, for an extended period, from the town's central stores. This seems to have created a Waring blender effect in the material assemblages, resulting, for instance, in a consistent presence of 5% to 10% porcelain for ceramic assemblages derived from sites of widely differing economic levels (Honerkamp 1980). Another complication has been the different occupation spans of the sites, and demographic variables relating to high turnover: artifact density is contingent on both. Also, gender-specific artifact markers are flat-out difficult to isolate in the colonial archaeological record. For example, the presence of pins, scissors, and thimbles can be interpreted as a by-product of sewing activity, but who is doing the sewing--a seamstress or a tailor or both--is not intuitively obvious. Finally, gender is a cultural construct that is contingent on and conflated with class. That makes life difficult for archaeologists.

In comparing the Forrester and Hird artifacts, few gender-related types stand up to be counted. One prominent contrast is perhaps the most obvious: despite excavating only 1/4 as much area, 29 beads were recovered from the Hird site compared to only 5 from the Forrester site. However, other gender-sensitive types--or *presumed* gender-sensitive types--did not arrange themselves in startling contrasts. For instance, additional clothing/adornment items were not conspicuous at the Hird site; in fact, the Forrester site contained an absolutely and relatively higher number of shoe buckles. Similarly, while I expected a higher fraction of arms-related artifacts (as a percentage of the total assemblage) at soldier Forrester's site than at civilian Hirds', they turned out to be identical (1.1%). Measured in terms of artifacts per square meter excavated, Hird was actually higher, 1.35 to 1.06.

Historical archaeologists instinctively seek to define social status differences on the basis of ceramic comparisons, and the tendency to identify gender dimensions using the same approach is similarly strong for those of us with the appropriate genotypes. Refined earthenwares, stonewares, and Oriental porcelain comprised a smaller portion of the total ceramics at the multi-female site than the lone-male site (37.9% and 47.5%, respectively), with the porcelain being almost twice as abundant in the Forrester assemblage (10.7% versus 5.5%). While the former figure may relate to a military-based concern with the tea ceremony, the way I presented this relationship assumed, of course, that the refined ceramics are somehow more "female-related" than the utilitarian types, when in fact the utilitarian wares may well be more reflective of the day-to-day realities of female involvement in food storage, preparation, and consumption practices in 18th century Frederica, particularly for the Hird occupation (I am unable to think of a way to determine if either class of ceramics was *procured* by Thomas or Grace). Thus, a more accurate statement would be that the practical lead glazed earthenware crocks, creampans, and coarse salt glazed mugs are more representative of female activity than Astbury bowls and porcelain tea sets, at least at Frederica. In particular, utilitarian salt glazed wares were relatively more numerous at the Hird than the Forrester lot (14.1% versus 4.1%). While a status correlation is also implied by these refined/utilitarian contrasts, the fact that the Hirds were clearly documented as a higher status household argues against the simple one-to-one mantra of "more porcelain equals a higher socioeconomic ranking." Instead, in the frontier conditions of Frederica, I'm suggesting that utilitarian wares bear--and bare--the mark of a feminine hand.

I should also note that the delicate refined types are considerably more fragile than the thick-bodied practical ceramics. Perhaps there was a steep learning curve in the children-laden household regarding appropriate serving wares, so that the sturdy types became the service of choice for all ceramic needs. This question is one that can best be addressed through analysis of

vessel shape/form and minimum number of vessels, an approach that unfortunately I did not attempt when I had the Frederica artifacts within my grasp.

A striking difference in glass artifacts is also present between these sites. Both assemblages contain almost identical dark green bottle fragment percentages (20.8% Forrester, 21.9% Hird), but flat-sectioned case bottle fragments make up almost 40% of the total bottle glass for Forrester, but not quite 15% for Hird. The apparent preference for wine at the Hird site could be a gender-based contrast, but it could simply be a reflection of the entire Hird family's strong religious convictions, coupled with Oglethorpe's constant moral refrain on the twin evils of rum and gin. Suffice it to say that Forrester had distinctly different preferences for sophisticated adult beverages than did the Hirds.

Similarly, I'm unsure of the smoking habits of males and females in the 18th century, but I do know that an addiction to tobacco was prevalent at both sites, with the Forrester site exhibiting a slightly higher percentage of the total artifacts (13.8% v. 11.8%). The SYMAP distribution for plowzone pipe fragments indicates that Forrester's smoking activities were concentrated on his "hut" that was located through excavation.

On to Social Mobility. Since ceramics do not clearly mark the documented social and economic rise of the Hird family, as noted above, what does? Qualitative factors can be cited, such as the presence of a mother-of-pearl snuff box lid, numerous glass-inset sleeve links, a fancy brass candlestick holder, and rare and unusual clear glass decanter bottles--none of which appear in the Forrester assemblage. A quantitative indication is also seen in the glass category (excluding window glass). Fragments from clear glass tumblers, goblets, and decanters make up only 6.5% of all glass artifacts at the Hird site, but that is double the Forrester site percentage; the 2-to-1 ratio also obtained when measured as artifacts per square meter excavated. Whatever beverage might have been contained in these elegant vessels, the Hirds served it in a more refined manner than did Forrester.

Interestingly, another status indicator has been defined at Frederica and other colonial sites that involves faunal remains. Biomass (i.e., meat weight) and MNI figures for archaeologically-recovered bone were generated for all species identified at each site, as reported by Honerkamp (1979, 1980). Since beef was part of the food rations provided to Frederica's residents, it was proposed that a higher percentage of domesticated species, particularly beef, would be associated with low status sites. Conversely, wild resources, particularly deer, would be relatively more expensive to obtain, especially for the city slickers at Frederica who would generally be ill-prepared to hunt or fish effectively. As predicted, the Hird faunal collection has a substantially higher biomass percentage (21.9%) of wild animals than Forrester (9.7%), excluding commensals such as rats, snakes, and toads. When comparing the three most important food animals at the sites, that is, cattle, deer, and pig, the following results are obtained as a percentage of total site biomass:

	Hird %	Forrester %
Cattle:	67	78
Deer:	15	6
Pig:	10	9

Cattle are more common at Forrester, deer are more than twice as abundant at Hird, and pigs are about equal. Deer has also been found by Betsy Reitz to represent a high-status food source at other British and Spanish colonial sites (Reitz 1979).

While there is a clear division between the biomass figures for both cattle and deer at the sites, no such clear-cut distinction can be made for swine. Perhaps this reflects the ambiguity of

pigs as feral animals at Frederica. The normal mode of "husbandry" of pigs up until very recently on St. Simons Island has been to let them fend pretty much for themselves, with "owners" feeding them occasionally and killing and butchering them when opportunity and need were conjoined. Reflecting this strategy, 46% of the pig elements that could be aged were found to correspond to the juvenile or infant category.

And Finally, Family Size/Composition. This dimension also provides distinct Forrester-Hird contrasts. It is assumed that cycling of artifacts into the archaeological record is directly related to family size, holding occupation duration constant (which is what I'm doing in this paper). Thus a denser artifact deposition would be expected at the Hird lot, with its larger family, especially since all colonists were constrained by their 60 X 90 ft lots to dispose of trash at home, as it were, and the well-known "Brunswick Pattern of Refuse Disposal" for British colonial sites championed by Stanley South (1977) was apparently adhered to at Frederica. One way to measure artifact density, and indirectly family size (if not composition) at the two sites is by dividing the artifact totals by the total square meters excavated. Excluding faunal remains, the Hird site is twice as dense as Forrester: 130 to 56 artifacts per square meter. But differences in food bone disposal are even more dramatic, with the Hird site containing 337.6g/m<sup>2</sup> compared to 93.1g/m<sup>2</sup> at the Forrester site.

Another significant contrast occurs in where the artifacts are deposited. Both sites are characterized by "bimodal trash disposal" in sheet deposits and subsurface features, but there are some significant differences. At the Hird site 43% of the food bone and 78% of the inorganic artifacts was found in the plow zone, corresponding to sheet deposit behavior of the "Brunswick Pattern" persuasion. This leaves 57% of the faunal remains and 22% of the artifacts in features such as abandoned wells and a series of mid-lot trash pits. A clear proclivity to deposit odoriferous bone (but not ceramics, glass, nails, etc.) in subsurface features is seen in this differential disposal, and it probably results from the high volume of butchered remains that were generated by the Hird family over the years, combined with a finite amount of space in which to get rid of it. Forrester, however, with less volume to contend with, was pleased to dump roughly equal amounts of bone in features (51%) and the yard (49%). As with the Hirds, most of Forrester's nonfaunal artifacts (82%) were associated with sheet deposits, but even here he threw more trash into the yard. A gender-based explanation is also possible for the sheet-versus-subsurface deposits of bone by Forrester: that he was a typical bachelor slob. Here, finally we get to the crux of true "family composition." However, this vicious stereotype will not be explored further in this paper.

## CONCLUSION

This is an exploratory paper, attempting to correlate artifact differences with aspects of gender, family size and composition, and social variables. It was inspired by the realization that two intensively excavated British colonial sites were occupied by two very different family aggregates. Clearly, the conclusions I have reached remain tentative until other comparable British colonial sites at Frederica or elsewhere can be excavated and contrasted to Forrester and Hird. In the meantime, this exploration has revealed to me, and I hope to you, the elusive and subtle nature of gender, family, and status that resides in the archaeological record.

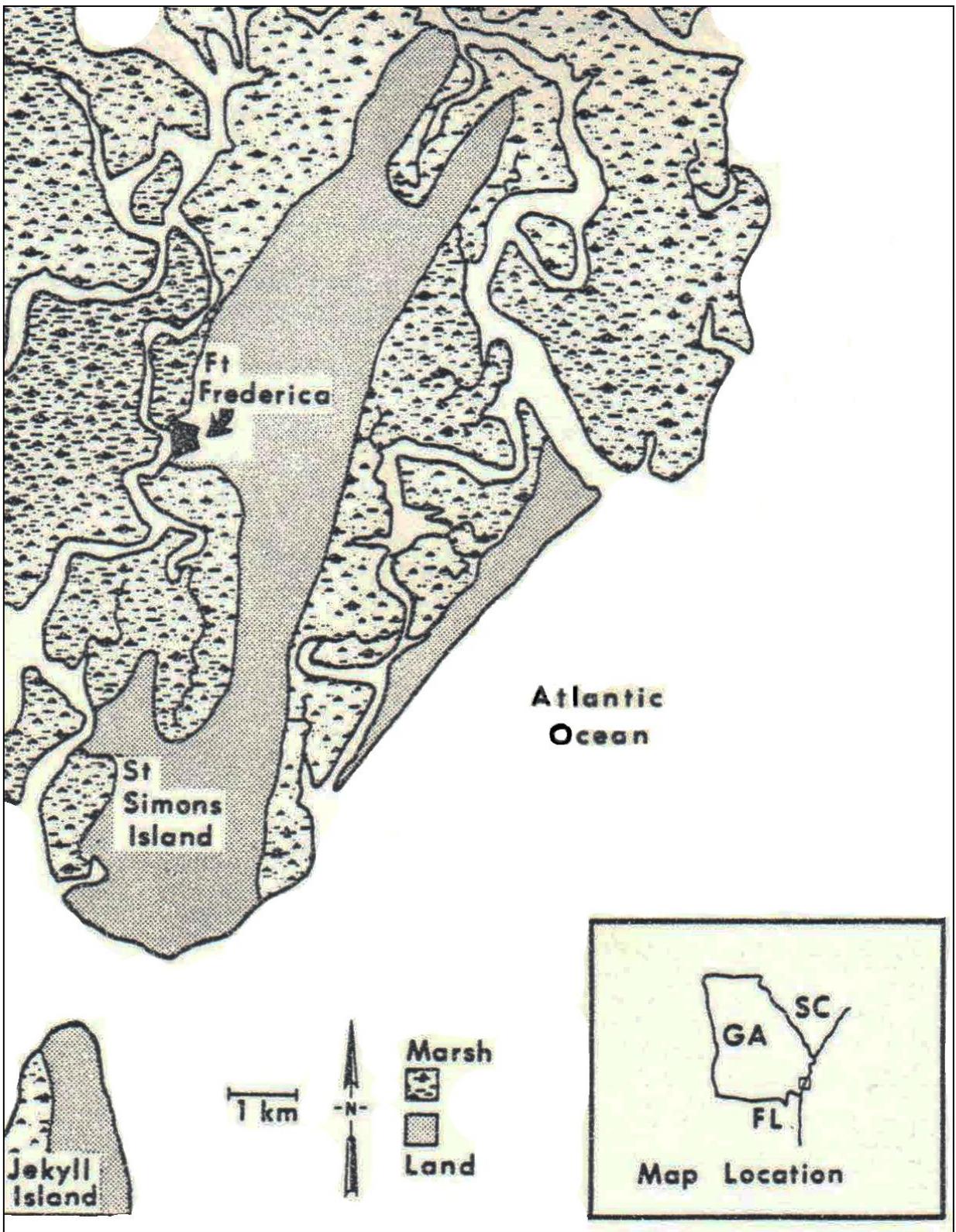


Figure 1. Frederica Vicinity, St. Simons Island, Georgia.

Figure 2.

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