

## Charles Towne Landing State Historic Site (CTL)

### Education Department Research Series

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### **The Pinckney Plat Mystery: Solved?**

By John Hiatt, Park Historian, CTL, January 2021

***Abstract:** Following a review of the existing plat evidence, I have reached the conclusion that the partial digital copy of the plat of Old Town Plantation that State Parks has on file (Figure 1) is most likely a detail from the final draft of Robert Q. Pinckney's 1836 plan of the property (Figure 11). The whereabouts of the original document, however, is unknown.*

The South Carolina State Park Service possesses a digital copy of a section of an historic plat of Old Town Plantation reputedly rendered by surveyor Robert Q. Pinckney in 1836 (Figure 1). How and when State Parks acquired the image remains unclear, but its source was likely the archaeologist Stanley South, who conducted excavations at CTL prior to its opening in 1970 and again roughly 30 years later. In his book *Archaeological Pathways to Historic Site Development* (published in 2002), South reproduced an annotated detail of the plat (Figure 3), crediting Robert Q. Pinckney with its 1836 authorship and also reporting that he had received his copy of the land record from Dr. Joseph Waring in 1969.<sup>1</sup> My attempts to track down the original have proven unsuccessful and I believe that it is either in private hands or has been lost. Thus, our partial copy lacks conclusive provenance. Nevertheless, I have found another photocopy of the elusive plat that indicates it was executed by Pinckney in 1836.

My search for the unprovenanced plat of Old Town has yielded two other plans of the property that Robert Q. Pinckney produced in March 1836, both of which appear to be drafts of the missing land record. They belong to the McCrady Plat Collection, which is housed between the Charleston County Register of Deeds and the South Carolina Historical Society. Designated McCrady Plats 5055 and 5827 (Figures 4 and 7), these documents are essentially facsimiles. McCrady 5055, however, is in better shape than its counterpart and seems to be a more definitive version. Not only does it depict an additional topographical detail (i.e., the "Spring" located to the west of the main house); it also includes a table of the property's tracts and their respective acreage in its upper right corner – a table that is not found on McCrady 5827. The McCrady plats are also identical to the unprovenanced plan (Figure 1) in almost every respect – the spatial organization, the convoluted course of Old Town Creek, the size and shape of the landforms, the locations of the buildings, etc. There are, however, a few significant differences. First, the "Grave Yd" denoted on the missing map (on the west side of Old Town Creek) does not appear on either McCrady 5055 or 5827 (Figures 2, 6, and 8). Furthermore, the

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<sup>1</sup> Stanley South, *Archaeological Pathways to Historic Site Development* (New York: Kluwer Academic/Plenum Publishers, 2002), 127, 301. Dr. Joseph Waring was the husband of Ferdinanda Legare Waring, who inherited part of Old Town in the early 1930s. The couple later sold the property to the State of South Carolina in 1969. The state, in turn, developed it into CTL, which opened its doors in April of the following year.

dependencies behind the main house and the dwellings associated with the “Negro Settlement” are better represented on the unprovenanced version, whereas they appear as simple tally marks and/or unadorned squares on the McCrady plats. Finally, the missing plat of Old Town is more extensively labeled than the others with several important features identified thereon. These include “Old Town Creek,” “Tomb Island,” the “Landing,” the “Negro Settlement,” and the “Grave Yd” (see Figure 11).

After having examined the two McCrady plats of Old Town, I felt fairly confident in the accuracy of the missing plat’s putative attribution and continued to credit Robert Q. Pinckney with its 1836 authorship. Another detail of the elusive plat, however, later emerged to complicate matters. The archaeologist Richard Polhemus included this photocopied detail (Figure 9) in a report that he prepared for the South Carolina Institute of Archaeology and Anthropology (SCIAA) in 1971.<sup>2</sup> Polhemus’ partial copy of the land record reveals more of its lower section, which bears a curious annotation. The main text of this comment is cut off, but it is signed by the surveyors “Hume & Tennent” and dated “Jan 7<sup>th</sup>, 1867.” Amelia Parker, owner of Old Town at the time, paid Hume and Tennent forty-five dollars for a “survey & plat of Old Town” on the last day of that same month.<sup>3</sup> While this plat has not surfaced, the South Carolina Historical Society preserves a partial tracing of what appears to be one of the Pinckney plats of Old Town (Figure 10). It is inscribed with the following comments: “Survey 1836 / Pinckney” and “Same as [illegible] / 1867 Hume & Ten / except X.” This document raised the possibility that Hume and Tennent could have actually produced the unprovenanced plat in 1867 by tracing one of the Pinckney plans.

Consequently, I launched yet another attempt to locate the original document and, this time, I met with partial success. I found an even more complete photocopy of the missing plat (Figure 11) in the papers of the genealogist Agnes Baldwin, who had conducted extensive research into the historic land records of the Charleston metropolitan area. The Baldwin copy shows that the elusive plat is actually much larger than the image on file with State Parks. In the upper right corner, it features the same table of tracts and acreage (verbatim) found on McCrady Plat 5055 and specifies that “Robt Q Pinckney” surveyed it in 1836. The complete Hume and Tennent annotation is also visible at the bottom, although the poor resolution somewhat compromises its legibility. Despite this limitation, it is possible to get a sense of the note’s intent: it refers to an area that is outlined in “red” and records the acreage of the land types (e.g., marsh) that it encompasses. Clearly, Hume and Tennent were not claiming authorship of the plat; they were just adding information to an existing land record. Rather than reinvent the wheel, the pair likely pulled Pinckney’s plat from the deed office and used it as the basis of their survey in 1867,

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<sup>2</sup> Richard Polhemus, “Archaeological Investigation of a Proposed Pipeline Ditch at Charles Towne Site (38CH1), August 30 – September 1, 1971” (Prepared for the Institute of Archaeology and Anthropology, University of South Carolina, October 1971). Stanley South also worked for SCIAA at the time. He probably kept his Charles Towne Landing research materials on file at the institute and gave Polhemus access to the plat of Old Town that he obtained from Dr. Waring. I had hoped that the plat might still be there, but SCIAA staff checked (in August 2018) and did not find it.

<sup>3</sup> Account Book of Amelia Parker, 1866-1868, Parker Family Papers (28/604), South Carolina Historical Society (Charleston, SC).

annotating the 30-year-old document in the process. While they might have also produced their own original plat, no record of it has been found.

If Hume and Tennent had actually executed the unprovenanced plat of Old Town, then one would expect to see an accurate representation of existing conditions in 1867. This, however, is not the case as it fails to show significant additions to the cultural landscape – as well as subtractions from it – that occurred between the mid-1830s and the late 1860s. One major change was the destruction of the plantation’s main house, which burned down at the end of the Civil War (circa 1865).<sup>4</sup> A January 1867 advertisement for the sale of Old Town reveals that the former structure’s remains consisted of its “chimneys and brick foundation.”<sup>5</sup> This notice was published around the same time that Hume and Tennent conducted their survey of Old Town. Surely, the partners would have observed the ruins, too, and would have indicated that the house was no longer standing on their plat, even if they were using a tracing of Pinckney’s 1836 map as its starting point. Also absent from the missing plat of Old Town is the overseer’s residence, which was built circa 1840 and eventually evolved into Legare-Waring House.<sup>6</sup> As the largest building on the property after the loss of the main house, it certainly would have warranted inclusion on a plat prepared in 1867. Furthermore, the number of dwellings that housed Old Town’s enslaved community had reached fifteen by 1860, but only six are depicted on the missing land record.<sup>7</sup>

The fact that none of the above-mentioned structures appears on the unprovenanced plat, while the main house still does, serves as further confirmation that it is documenting the property’s configuration in the mid-1830s, not the late 1860s. Thus, I have reached the conclusion that the partial copy of the plat of Old Town that State Parks has on file (Figure 1) is most likely a detail from the final draft of Pinckney’s 1836 plan of the property. This has important implications for the interpretation of Old Town’s cultural landscape, especially regarding the age of certain defining features, such as the “Grave Yd” depicted in what is now Old Towne Creek County Park.

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<sup>4</sup> Amelia Parker to Eliza Mason Smith, 6 November 1865, in Daniel E. Huger Smith, et al., eds., *Mason Smith Family Letters, 1860-1868* (Columbia, SC: University of South Carolina Press, 1950), 246.

<sup>5</sup> *The Charleston Daily Courier* (Charleston, SC), 21 January 1867, p. 3.

<sup>6</sup> John Hiatt, “Brief History of The Legare-Waring House” (Research Report, Charles Towne Landing State Historic Site, February 2014).

<sup>7</sup> 1860 U. S. Census, Charleston County, South Carolina, Slave Schedule, Saint Andrews Parish, p. 265B (pp. 30-31 handwritten), Wm McK Parker, Slave Owner; National Archives and Records Administration, NARA microfilm publication M653, roll 1232.

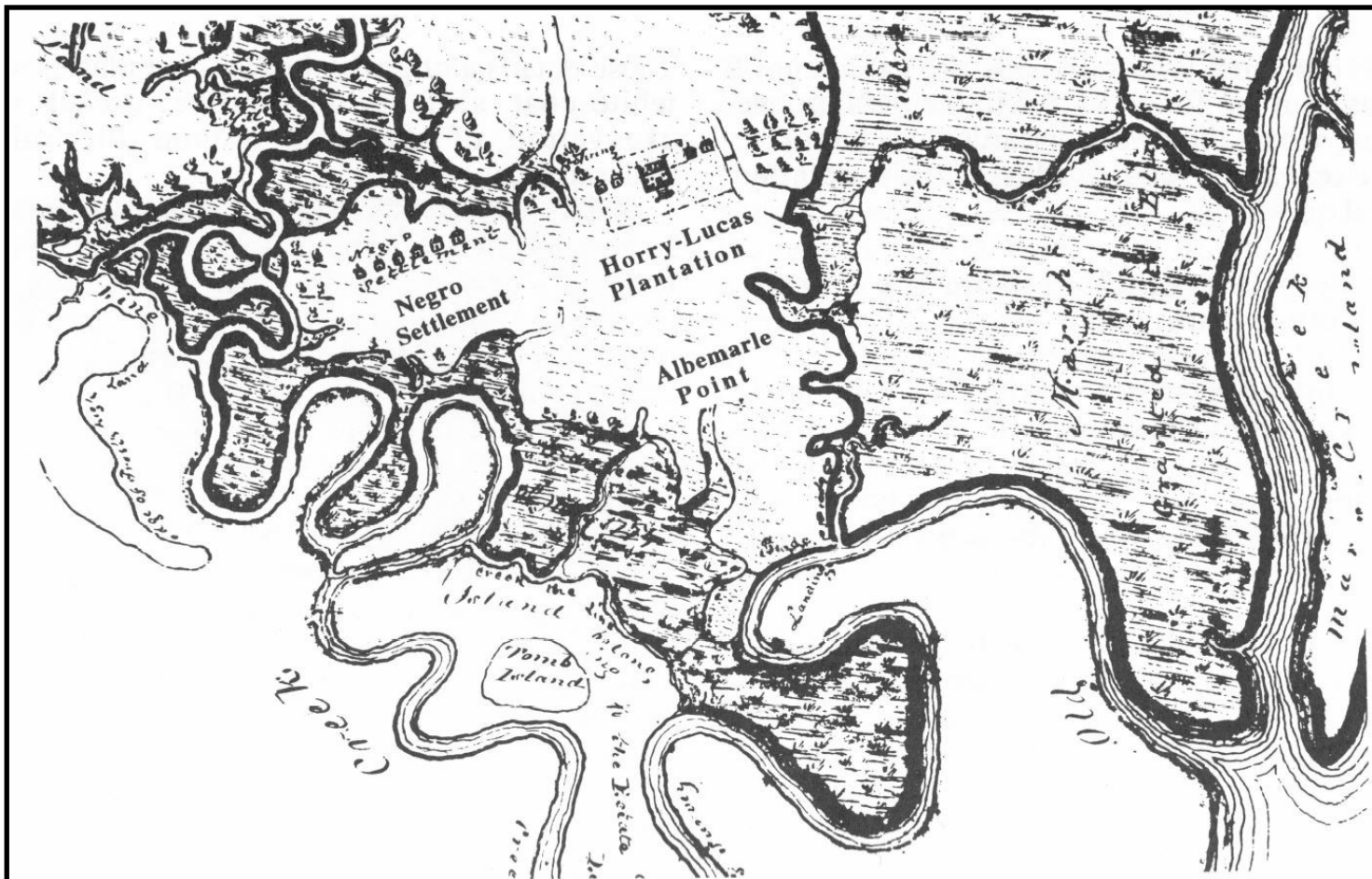


**Figure 1:** The detail of the unprovenanced plat of Old Town Plantation that is on file with SC State Parks. See Figure 11 for a more complete photocopy of the plat. This image appears to be a section of the missing final draft of a plat that Robert Q. Pinckney rendered in March 1836 for Jonathan Lucas, owner of Old Town.



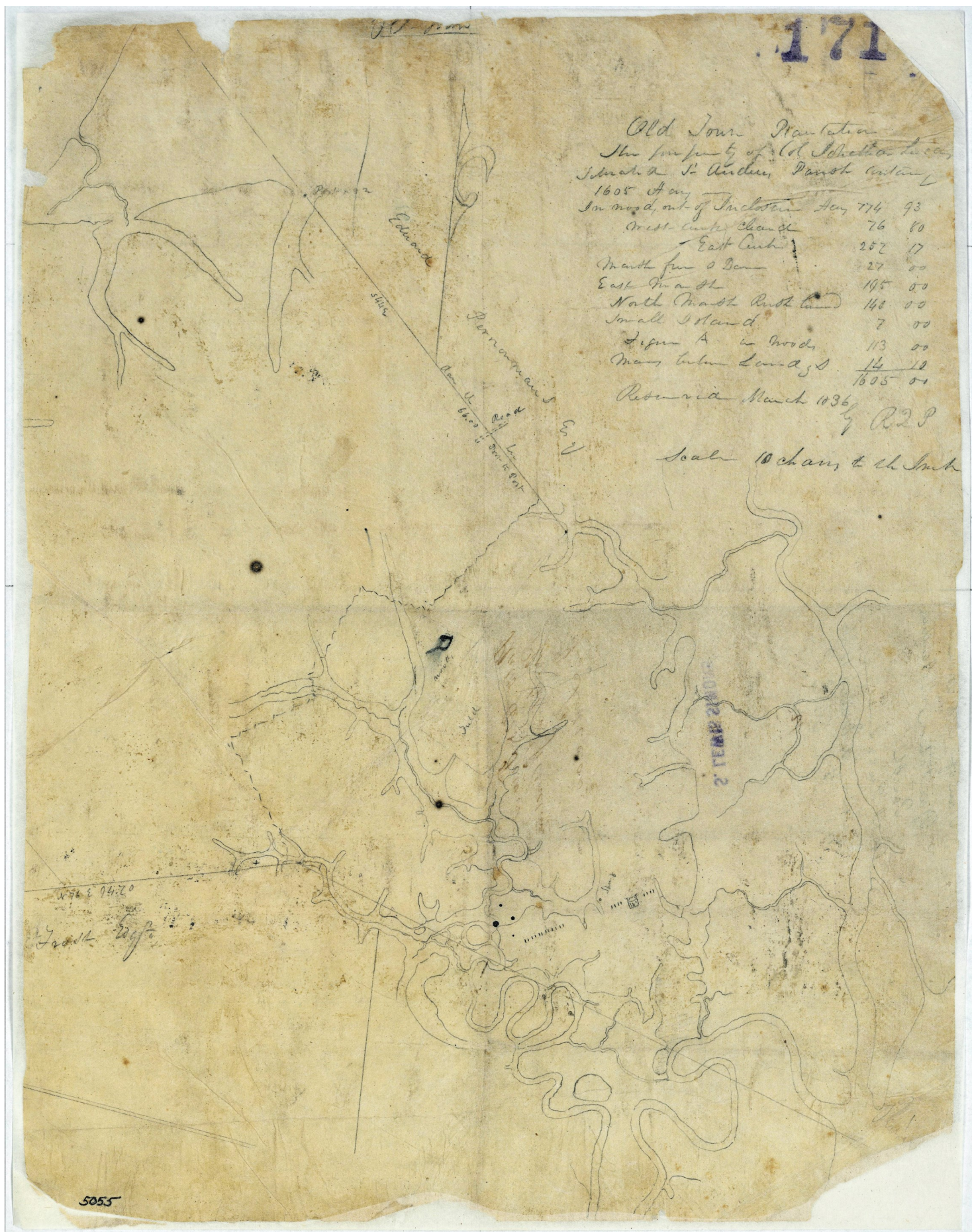


**Figure 2:** Closer detail of the unprovenanced Pinckney plat, showing the “Grave Yd” (inside the red circle) on a bluff located in what is now Old Towne Creek County Park.



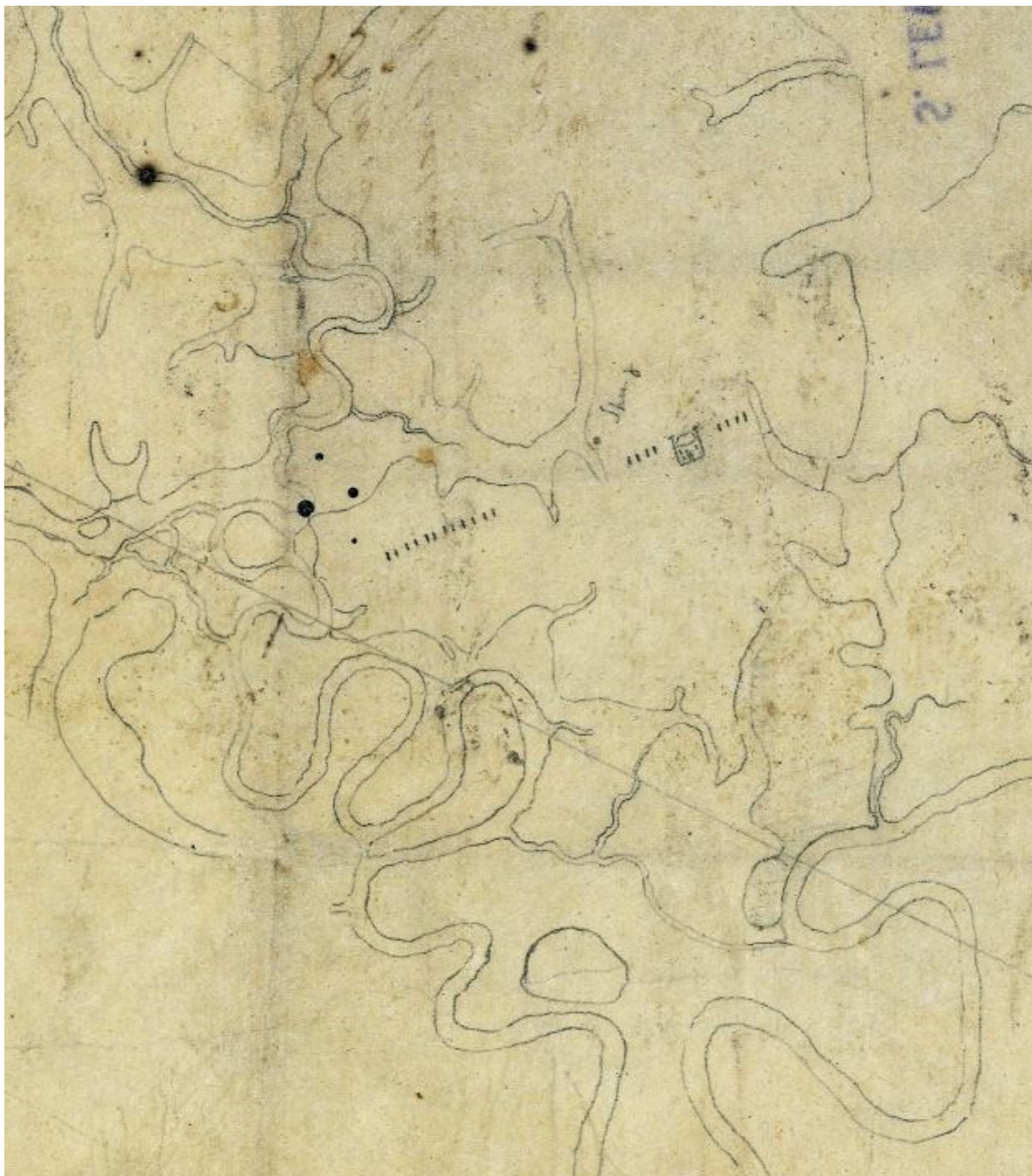
**Figure 3:** Stanley South's annotated detail of the missing plat of Old Town as it appears on page 127 of his book *Archaeological Pathways to Historic Site Development* (published in 2002).





**Figure 4:** McCrady Plat 5055 of Old Town Plantation (1605 acres), dated March 1836. Clearly, the initials "RQP" are those of Robert Q. Pinckney. This plan appears to be a draft of the more-polished unprovenanced plat (see Figure 1). (Digital image credit: South Carolina Historical Society.)





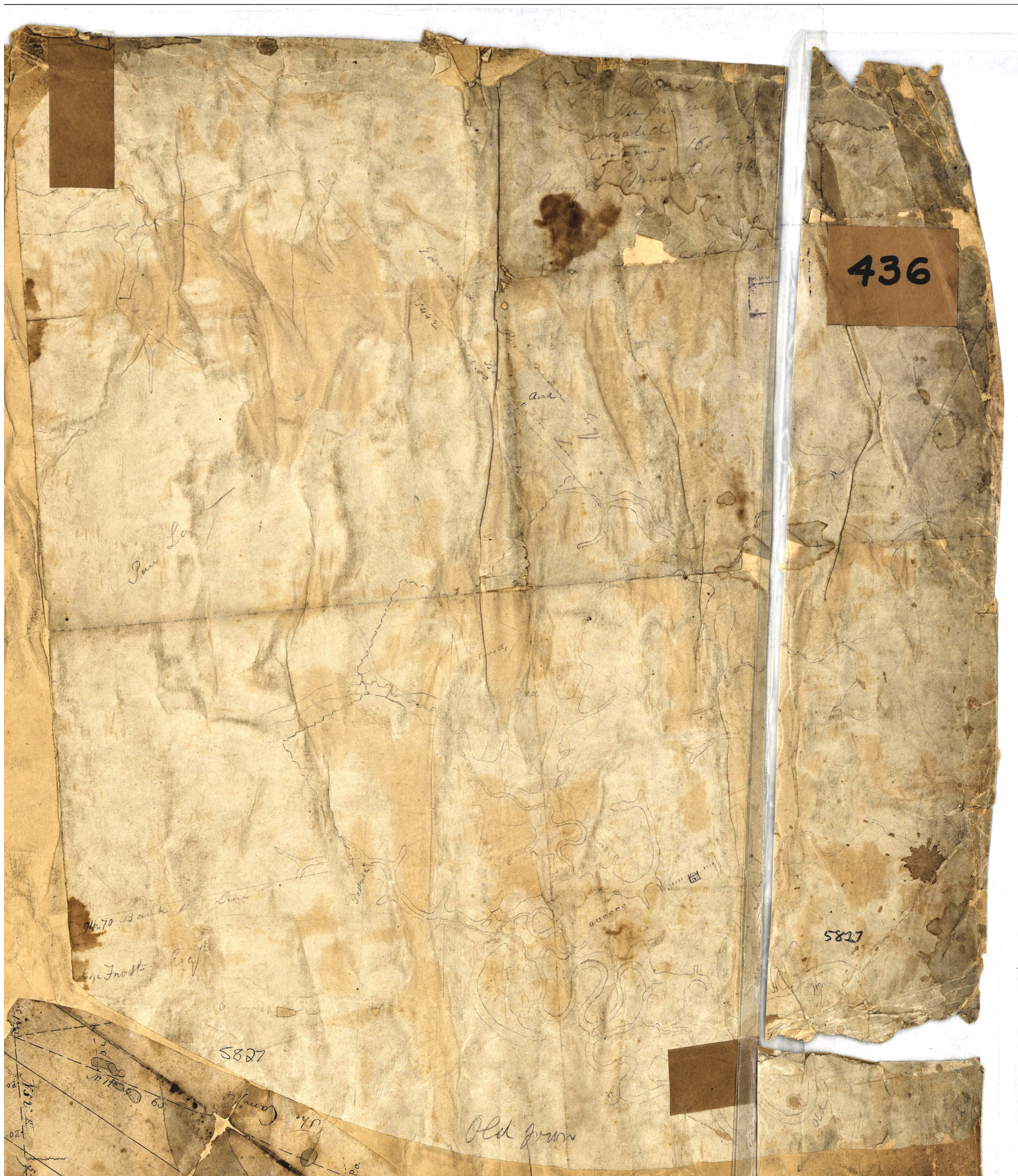
**Figure 5:** Detail of McCrady Plat 5055.





**Figure 6:** Closer detail of McCrady 5055, showing the main house and the “Spring.” Short, vertical “tally marks,” however, represent the dependencies flanking the house and the dwellings of Old Town’s enslaved community, indicating that this is an unfinished draft. This might explain why the map fails to depict the “Grave Yd” (red circle) that appears on the unprovenanced plan (see Figure 2).



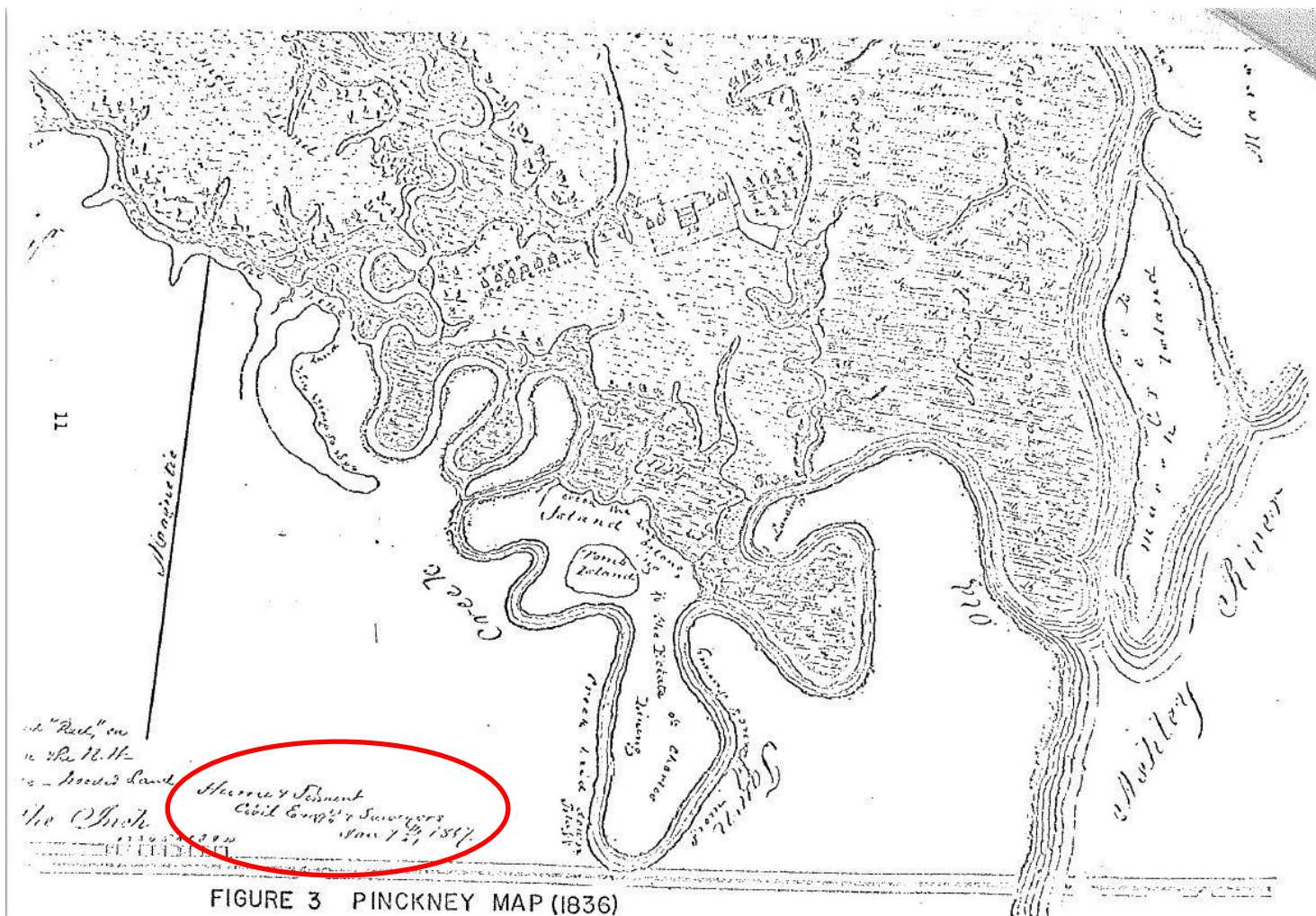


**Figure 7:** McCrady Plat 5827 of Old Town Plantation (1605 acers). Surveyed by "R. Q. Pinckney" in March 1836. This appears to be an even rougher draft of the missing Pinckney plat than McCrady 5055 (Figure 4). (Digital image credit: Charleston County Register of Deeds.)

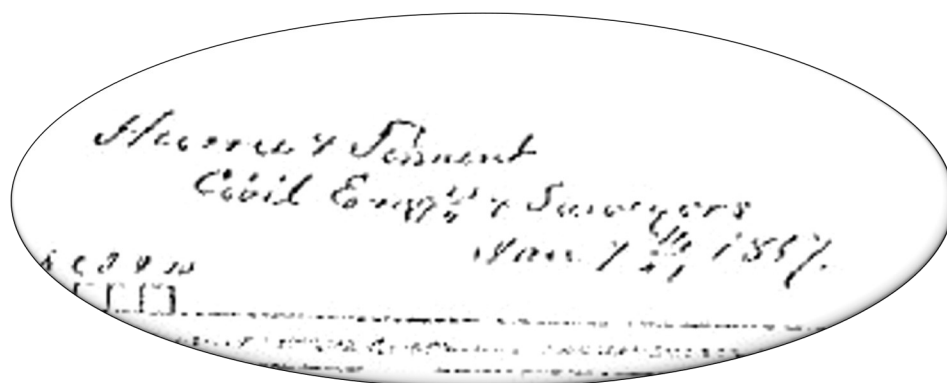




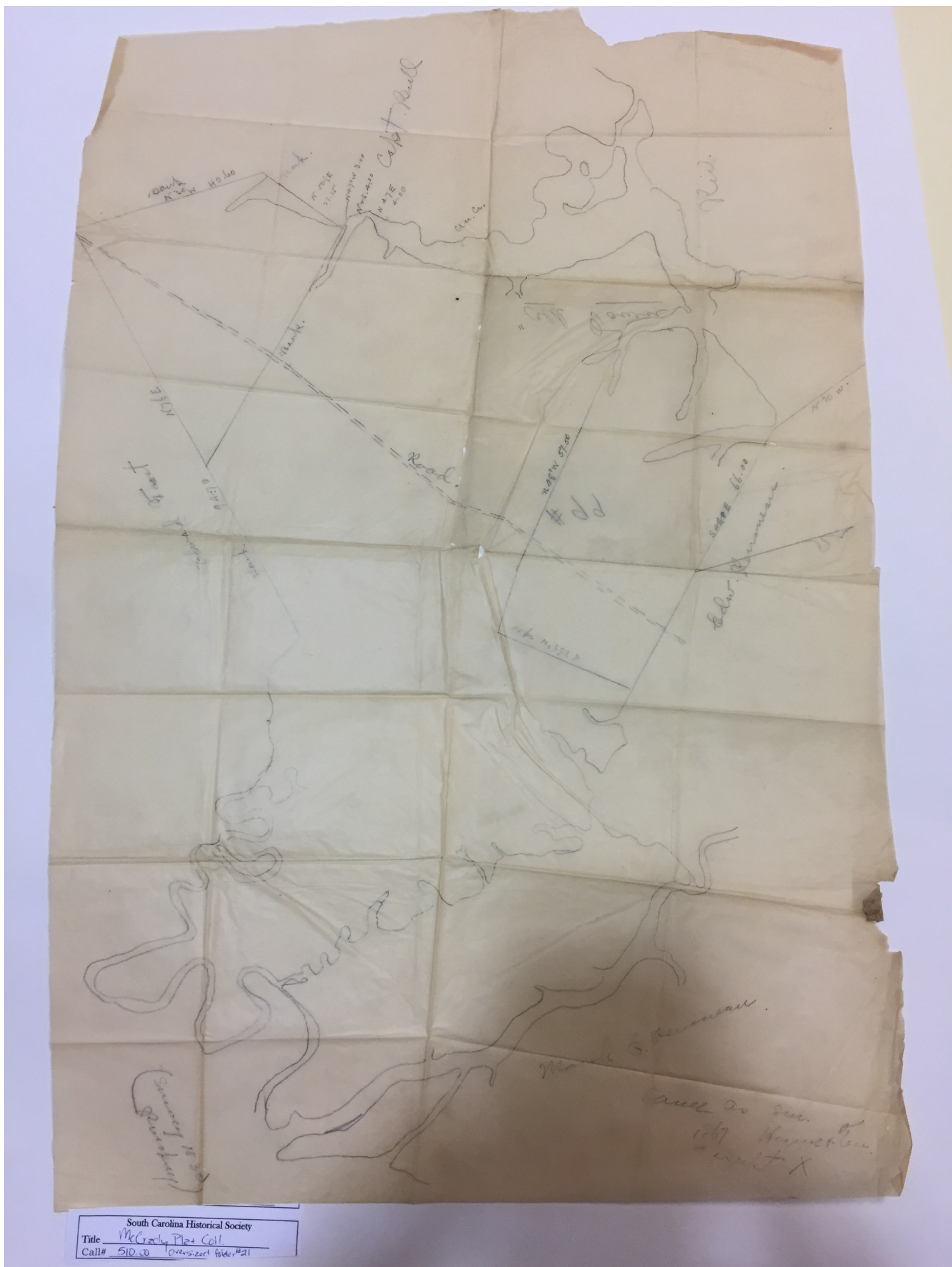
**Figure 8:** Detail of McCrady Plat 5827.



**Figure 9:** Detail of the missing plat of Old Town that the archaeologist Richard Polhemus included as a figure in his 1971 report documenting the investigation of a proposed pipeline ditch at CTL. It is signed “Hume & Tennent / Civil Eng<sup>rs</sup> & Surveyors / Jan 7<sup>th</sup>, 1867.” See red oval, above, and enlargement, below.







**Figure 10:** McCrady Plat Collection, No. 510, oversized folder 21, South Carolina Historical Society. This document appears to be a tracing of one Pinckney's 1836 plats of Old Town.



