

WILLTOWN BLUFF



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Linder, Suzanne Cameron. *Historical Atlas of the Rice Plantations of the ACE River Basin, 1860* (Columbia, S.C.: S.C. Dept. of Archives and History, 1995)



Colonel Lewis Morris (v) and Elizabeth Manigault Morris. (Berkley Grimball.)

In 1682 instructions to said, "We understand to build a Town. . . ." For Wiltown, also spelled Will and Charlestown for King with Mary, his wife, as Wiltown issued between 1697 and 1700, there is no evidence to support this claim.

During the Yemassee large war party of Native Americans from 1715 to March 1716, the fort was destroyed.

Many of the early settlers from about 1731. On September 1, 1731, a courier brought news of a large force of Indians moving toward the Edisto River. The settlers of the congregation were militia, and the slaves on a plantation were dispersed. Executed.

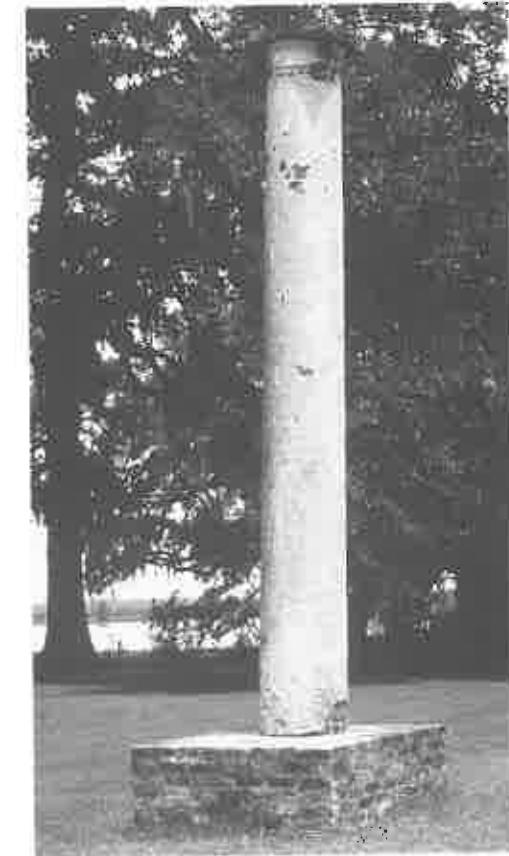
William Elliott, plan Wiltown in 1760.⁴ He developed the Wiltown area, and Lewis Morris, inherited the Wiltown known as Oak Island.

In 1682 instructions to Maurice Matthews, surveyor general of Carolina, the lords proprietors said, "We understand that there is on Edistoh River . . . a convenient fertill peece of Land fitt to build a Town. . . ." First called London and then New London, by 1697 the town had become Wiltown, also spelled Will Town. Logic suggests that just as Jamestown was named for King James and Charlestown for King Charles, so Will Town was named for William of Orange, who reigned with Mary, his wife, as William III, from 1688 to 1702. More than thirty grants for town lots were issued between 1697 and 1717, and one early account said there were eighty houses in the village, but there is no evidence to support so large a number.¹

During the Yemassee War of 1715, colonists constructed a small fort to protect the village. A large war party of Native Americans attacked the fort in July 1715 but were beaten off. From August 1715 to March 1716, the fort was used as a base for scout boats to patrol the area.²

Many of the early settlers at Willtown were Presbyterians, and there was a meeting house there from about 1731. On September 9, 1739, the Reverend Archibald Stobo was preaching when a courier brought news of a slave insurrection at Stono only a few miles away. The slaves were marching toward the Edisto River, destroying and burning as they went. Most of the male members of the congregation were militiamen and were carrying arms as required by law. They assembled and met the slaves on a plantation a short distance to the north. The militiamen captured many slaves, and the rest dispersed. Execution of the leaders signaled the end of the insurrection.³

William Elliott, planter of Charleston and Colleton County, was granted twenty-four lots in Willtown in 1760.⁴ He owned extensive lands in Colleton, and his family would control and develop the Willtown area for the next century. William Elliott's daughter, Ann, and her husband, Lewis Morris, inherited the Willtown lots and other property in the vicinity. They owned a house at Willtown known as Oaklodge.⁵ An 1817 plat shows a Colonel Lewis Morris—either Ann Elliot's



One pillar from the old
Willtown Church is still standing.
(Hugh C. Lane.)

husband or their son—commissioned a resurvey of a tract of 394 acres near Willtown Bluff. The plat indicates that it was part of a tract of 1016 acres granted to Landgrave Robert Daniel in 1714 and purchased by William Elliott from John Ash in 1756. Ann Morris inherited this tract as well.⁶

Ann Barnett Elliott and Lewis Morris were married in 1783 (see Hope). He was the first Lewis Morris to make his home in South Carolina and fourth in a distinguished line of gentlemen of the same name. Although he did not use the designation IV, for purposes of this sketch, he will be called Lewis Morris IV. His father, a signer of the Declaration of Independence and member of the Continental Congress, owned an estate called Morristown in New York. Lewis Morris IV, who was a colonel in the Revolution, came to South Carolina with General Nathanael Greene and decided to stay.⁷ It is sometimes difficult to differentiate between Lewis Morris IV—who died in 1824—and his son—who was born in 1785—for his son was also known as Colonel Lewis Morris and himself had two sons named Lewis, one of whom was deceased before the second was born.⁸

In 1802, the son—who in this sketch will be called Lewis Morris V—like his father, attended the College of New Jersey, later Princeton, but was suspended for a minor infraction and

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although readmitted never returned to complete his education. In the summer of 1807, he married Elizabeth Manigault, daughter of Gabriel Manigault and Margaret Izard.⁹ A distinguished amateur architect, Gabriel Manigault was associated with the arrival of the Federal style in South Carolina. He designed several houses and public buildings in Charleston, and the house he designed for his brother Joseph Manigault remains today as a house-museum.¹⁰

Lewis V and Elizabeth Manigault Morris built a house at Willtown Bluff in 1809. It has a distinctive polygonal room and is a rural adaptation of the Federal style, which was popular in Charleston at the time. Evidently Elizabeth was unenthusiastic about spending the winter in the country. Her mother, Margaret Izard Manigault, wrote from Philadelphia, "I hope that you will pass your winter comfortably—my dear Child. You will have your husband & your baby—& your house is convenient, & you have all that you want in it." Margaret advised Elizabeth to get some good books and amuse herself with her child, "and when Mr. Morris comes in amuse him with cheerful conversation—& enjoy all the happiness that you can at present—& look forward to joining us in the spring."¹¹ In 1814, Margaret was still reassuring Elizabeth that living in the country was not all bad. Margaret said, "We admire your economical bonnets, & the



Chimney of the rice threshing mill
at Willtown Bluff.
(Hugh C. Lane.)

advantages of living in the country. Emma however thinks that formerly, when you were young, you would have liked as little as she does passing your whole life in the country & wearing hats that were not the smartest. I tell them that it is very fine to live in retirement.”¹²

The Morrises often visited relatives in New York or Philadelphia, and their daughter Margaret Ann was born on board a boat bound from New York to Charleston in 1810. In their sixteen years of marriage, they were the parents of nine children: Elizabeth, Gabriella (m. John Butler), Margaret Ann (m. J. Berkley Grimes), Harry, Richard, Charles, Ralph, Lewis (d. 1822), and Charlotte (m. H. Heyward Manigault). Elizabeth Manigault Morris died in 1822 when she was crushed by a house that fell in a violent storm on Sullivans Island. Her daughter Margaret Ann, nicknamed Meta, wrote of her father, “He had become very much interested in religion just after my mother’s death, and through all the varied scenes of his long life his faith sustained him and comforted him.”¹³

Meta and her husband, J. Berkley Grimes, lived at nearby Pinebury and later at The Grove. When Meta attended the Episcopal Church at Willtown, she made it a point to stop at her father’s house. She said the visits were very pleasant to her. “He loves us all in his way and gives me some oysters which he buys from Mr. LaRoche’s man who brings them for sale to the church—and I hear family news.” Berkley Grimes was also close to Lewis Morris. Meta said, “The stately and old time politeness which was kept up between Mr. Grimes and Papa is not often seen now. Mr. Grimes read history to him and he made remarks and the two looked like specimens of long forgotten breeding only to be met in books: he heard more books talked of by Mr. G. than he ever heard in his life.”¹⁴

In 1834, Lewis Morris v married Amarinthia Lowndes, daughter of James Lowndes and Catherine Osborne. J. Berkley Grimes wrote, “To day the Col. in a note to Meta announced his engagement . . . we are inexpressibly astonished. It certainly is an excellent match for him. She is amiable,

intelligent, and not so young. His wife, Lewis Morris had a great grief to him, she was

In 1852, a controversy inadvertently built on land. Morris v explained that he thought it might be public land. Morris thought the land was his. In 1852, the court ordered the land to be divided since other lots included interest from 1809.

In 1820, Lewis Morris v bought land at Mount Hope, bounded on the west by Drayton, and on the north by 100 acres of high land—the same land as his wife’s.

When Lewis Morris v died, his York estate, Morrisania, was left to his wife. “she being entitled to a large sum of money . . . that as soon as possible after his death, he will sell his South Carolina land and go to New York.”

In the succeeding year, Lewis Morris v died, leaving his York estate to his wife. He managed to cultivate rice. He managed to leave his York estate to his wife.

intelligent, and not so young as to shock propriety. She is withal likely to be rich." With his second wife, Lewis Morris had a son, Lewis (b. 1842) and twins, who did not survive to adulthood. After Amarinthia Morris died October 30, 1843, Meta said of her father, "The death of this lady was a great grief to him, she was very pious and sensible."¹⁵

In 1852, a controversy arose between the Morris and the Ashe families because the Morrises inadvertently built on land belonging to John Ashe, a neighbor. In a deposition to the court, Lewis Morris v explained that he had at first selected another spot for the house, but John Ashe advised that it might be public land and recommended the spot where Morris built in 1809. Both Ashe and Morris thought the land was part of William Elliott's grant of lots then owned by Morris's parents. In 1852, the court ordered Morris to pay \$400 to Ashe's heirs. Morris protested that the price was excessive since other lots in the area were selling for an average of \$26; the \$400, however, was to include interest from 1809.¹⁶

In 1820, Lewis Morris v purchased from Elizabeth and Ralph Izard the plantation known as Mount Hope, bounded on the south and west by Pon Pon River, on the east by lands of Colonel Drayton, and on the north by lands late of Charles Freer, containing 175 acres of swamp and 60 acres of high land—the same land conveyed to Ralph Izard by Sheriff Joseph Koger in 1814.¹⁷

When Lewis Morris IV died in 1824, Lewis Morris v inherited the mansion house at the New York estate, MorriSSania. In his will, Lewis Morris IV counseled his widow, Ann Elliott Morris, that "she being entitled to a large estate under her marriage settlement it is my advice and strong recommendation . . . that as soon as any children come of age that she provide for them."¹⁸ The bulk of the South Carolina land was part of her estate.

In the succeeding years, Lewis Morris v continued to acquire lands and to concentrate on cultivating rice. He managed his mother's property for a time, but because of the dissatisfaction of

his brothers and sisters, she relieved him of that responsibility. By 1851, in addition to Mount Hope, his personal estate included a 623.5-acre tract known as Clarke's; the 623-acre Willtown Bluff plantation; four lots in Willtown; and Bonny Hall, a 225-acre rice field in St. Bartholomew Parish across the Edisto—part of his mother's estate.¹⁹

Lewis Morris v represented St. Paul's Parish in the South Carolina House of Representatives from 1815 to 1817; he was a member of the committee on grievances in 1815 and a member of the committee on roads, bridges, and ferries from 1815 to 1817. He also served the state as a militia colonel and was appointed commissioner of schools for the parish for the 1830–1831 term.²⁰ Morris's principal residence was at Willtown Bluff. His home had a spectacular view of the Edisto River, overlooked both Willtown Village and Mount Hope, and was well known for its magnificent garden.²¹

In the census of 1850, Morris reported owning a total of 1400 acres valued at \$50,000. His lands produced 1,720,000 pounds of rice, 1,900 bushels of corn, 1,000 bushels of sweet potatoes, and 200 bushels of peas and beans.²² In the census of 1860, Morris reported 1785 acres and 232 slaves. His harvest included 900,000 pounds of rice, 1,200 bushels of corn, and 1,060 bushels of sweet potatoes.²³

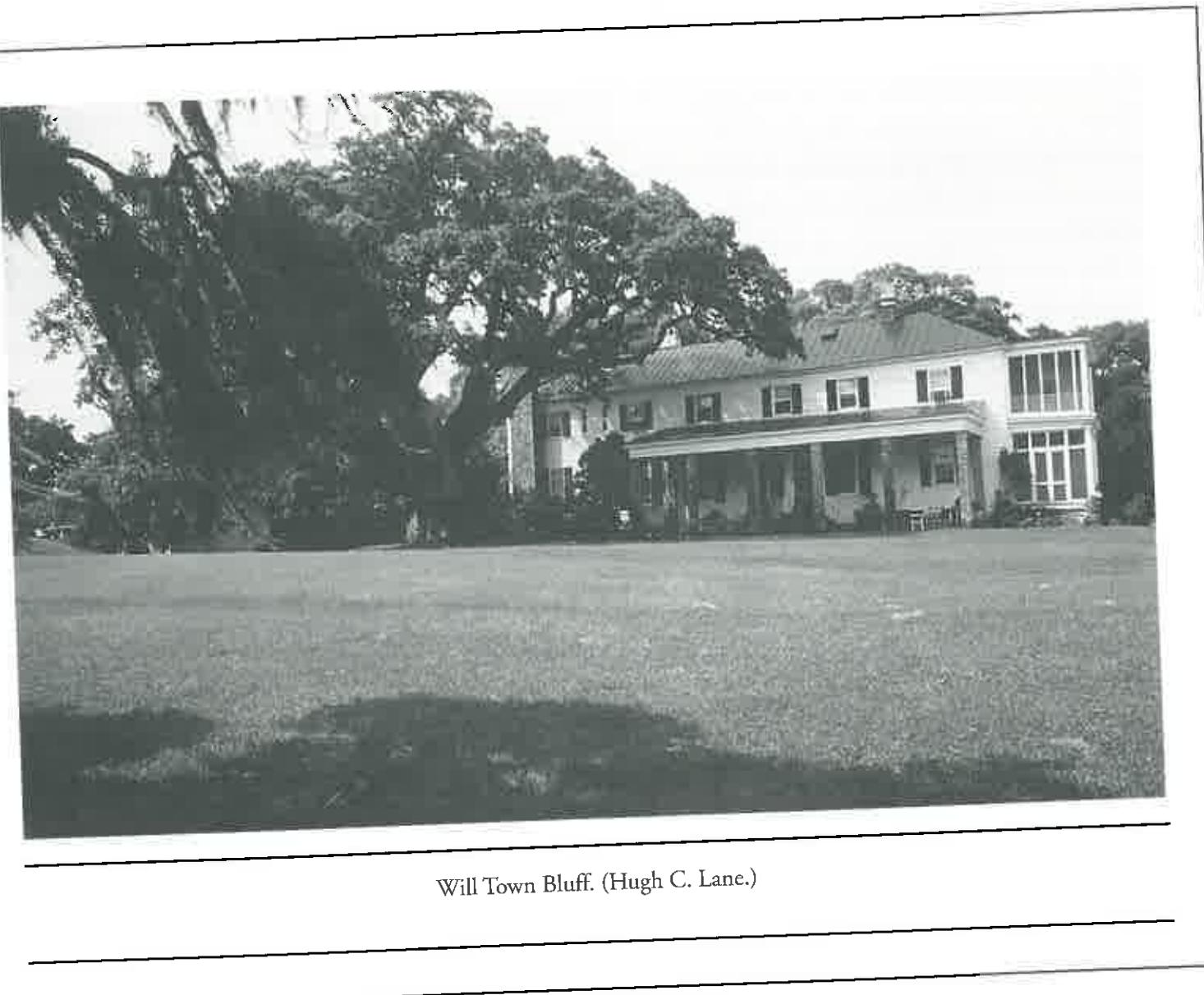
During the Civil War, Confederate forces fortified Willtown Bluff. On April 29, 1862, Confederates, with two pieces of field artillery, drove back a Union party approaching by boat.²⁴ In a letter of March 18, 1863, to his daughter Margaret Ann (Meta) Grimball in New York, Lewis Morris admitted concern about danger from Union attack. He said that "many are afraid that the soldiers will rob all the poultry from the Negroes."²⁵ On July 10, 1863, Colonel Thomas Higginson of the First Colored Infantry and Colonel H. K. Aiken, Sixth Cavalry, Adams Run, South Carolina, reported that a force of 250 men on the transport *Enoch Dean* and two smaller boats, the *Milton* and *John Adams*, approached Willtown under cover of fog. About 4:00 A.M. the three-gun battery of the Chestnut Artillery at Willtown Bluff began firing. The boats landed near the mill and moved on the

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Will Town Bluff. (Hugh C. Lane.)

fort. The Confederate artillery abandoned the position on the bluff, and the Union troops took control of the area. After putting the Confederate guns out of commission, the Yankees returned to the boats with the intention of destroying the railroad bridge upstream, but because spikes had been placed across the river, the *Enoch Dean* and the *Milton* ran aground. Confederate troops forced the *Adams* to turn back. The *Dean* worked free and was able to join the *Adams* headed downstream with the falling tide. The crew of the *Milton* boarded the *Dean*, and the invaders burned the stranded vessel. Union forces burned Lewis Morris's rice mill and stores of rice, and they cut the dams of the ricefields on their way down river. They also confiscated six bales of quality cotton and between 120 and 130 slaves.²⁶

Meta Grimball wrote in her diary, "Papa has had all his negroes carried off in a recent raid on Pon Pon (Edisto River). Heyward Manigault's too; Papa's house was sacked by his own negroes, his mill burnt, and he lies ill at Adams Run." Charlotte Morris Manigault was there with her father, attending him. On October 4, 1863, Meta received news from Charlotte of their father's death. He had been bedridden for twelve weeks, suffered from paroxysms of difficulty in breathing, but "through all that his faith never wavered, and he has gone to that rest and that joy he so longed for, he must have been seventy-eight years of age."²⁷

Although Prospect Hill and other homes in the neighborhood were burned, the Morris house at Willtown Bluff survived the Civil War. In 1871, the heirs of Lewis Morris sold the plantation to Edward Manigault Barnwell, a cousin and neighbor. His heirs sold it in 1885 to Meta Morris Grimball's son, John Grimball.²⁸ Christopher FitzSimons purchased Willtown from John Grimball in 1893 and transferred it to Samuel G. FitzSimons in 1911.²⁹

The FitzSimons family lived in the Willtown house until 1925. Mrs. Samuel FitzSimons reported several encounters with ghosts. One evening when her children were in bed and the house was quiet, she went upstairs to her room. "As I opened my door to enter," she said, "I saw standing

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behind a large easy chair an old woman, a stranger to me. Only for an instant did I see her—then the place was vacant."

On another occasion, Mrs. FitzSimons saw a black woman, who resembled one of the women who lived on the place, in the dining room. As she entered the room, however, she realized the figure was "a house servant of the old regime, as simply dressed as a quakeress and immaculate in her tight waisted calico dress with its full skirt. She moved with purpose at an accustomed duty . . . and she realized I saw her and she was dismayed and shrank with a thin sound of fright up against the old side-board, and then there was a whiff of mist, and I was alone."

Several years later, Mrs. FitzSimons was folding clean laundry. Busy and preoccupied, she raised her eyes and looked through the open door into a passage that led outside. There in the passage she saw a tall, erect black woman with a gentle, pleasing face and neatly arranged hair; she was wearing the regulation calico dress of the house servant with its tight waist and full skirt. Mrs. FitzSimons said, "She had lifted an accustomed hand toward one of the hooks, either to put something on it or take something off. It was but for a heart beat, and she was gone. I think of her always as 'Agnes' for many a stately Agnes like her had I seen in the old days."

The apparitions did not frighten Mrs. FitzSimons. She loved the house and liked to sit on the "vine wreathed piazza with its frieze of pink roses" waiting for the sunset. She said, "Do I feel no awe of the mysteries it holds as I sit there alone in the night? As soon can I fear my own soul with its unknown depths as fear the old house which has become a part of me and of my life."³⁰

Samuel FitzSimons sold Willtown Bluff to William E. Harmon in 1925 and Harmon's estate sold to Arthur Whitney in 1930. Since 1945, Hugh Lane has owned the plantation. The house built by Lewis and Elizabeth Morris in 1809 still stands on the bluff overlooking a curve of the Edisto River. The addition of a kitchen on one end and a porch on the other have not altered its basic

character. The chimney of Lewis Morris's rice mill stands as a sentinel over the old ricefields, which have been kept in repair and are now operated as a habitat for waterfowl. The same tide that irrigated Lewis Morris's rice continues to flood the fields. And the view of the sunset from the piazza continues to be one of the most spectacular vistas in the region.

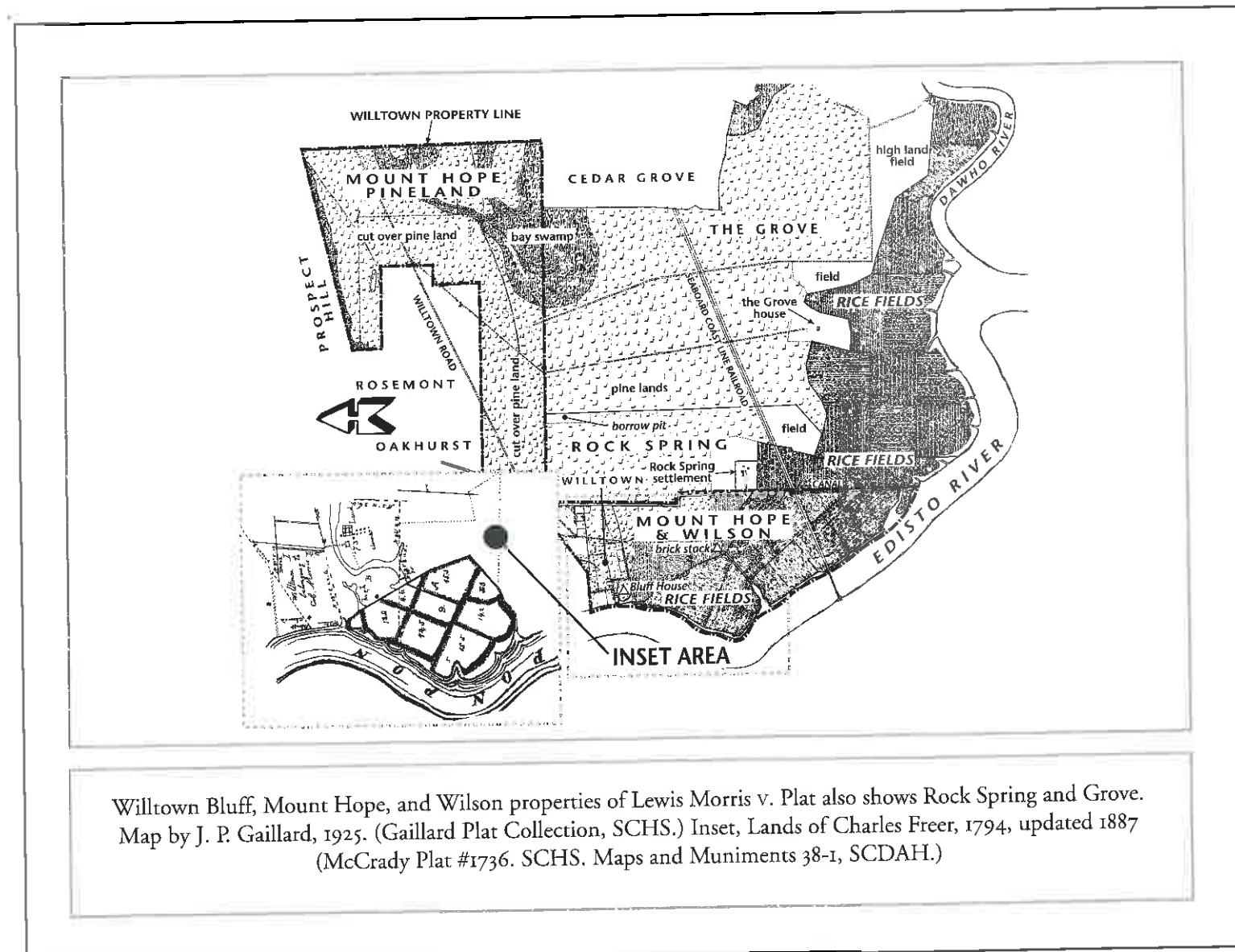


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Willtown Bluff, Mount F
Map by J. P. Gaillard, 19
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NOTES

1. H. A. M. Smith, "Willtown or New London," SCHM, 10: 20, 30-31.
2. L. E. Ivers, *Colonial Forts of South Carolina 1670-1775*, Tricentennial Publication #3, 75.
3. Henry A. M. Smith, "Willtown or New London," *South Carolina Historical and Genealogical Magazine*, 10: 28.
4. Charleston Co. Deeds H5: 62.
5. Will of Mary W. Wayne 4/3/1874 says Oaklodge Tract being lots 61, 62, 77, 78; VanderHorst Papers, SCHS 12/196A/4.
6. McCrady Plats 1773 and 1804; Charleston Co. Deeds H5: 62.
7. BDHR, III, 513-14.
8. Family Genealogy, VanderHorst Papers, SCHS. The replication of names has resulted in errors reported in secondary sources.
9. BDHR, V: 413-15.
10. Mills Lane, *Architecture of the Old South* (New York: Beehive Press, 1989), 108-9.
11. Margaret Izard Manigault to Elizabeth M. Morris, November 14 and November 19, 1809, Southern Historical Collection, University of North Carolina, typescript microfilm in Kenneth Stampf, ed., *Records of Southern Ante-bellum Plantations*, Series J, reel 17.
12. Margaret Manigault to Elizabeth Morris, May 15, 1814, Southern Historical Collection.
13. Yates Snowden, *History of South Carolina* (Chicago: Lewis Publishing Company, 1920), III: 24; Will of Lewis Morris, Jr., Will Book I: 11-18, Colleton County Ordinary/Probate; BDHR, IV: 413-14; Diary of Meta Morris Grimball, October 4, 1863, Southern Historical Collection, University of North Carolina, typescript microfiche, South Caroliniana Library, University of South Carolina.
14. Meta M. Grimball Diary, March 29, 1861, November 5, 1862, Southern Historical Collection.
15. Diary of J. Berkley Grimball, October 21, 1833, Southern Historical Collection, University of North Carolina, typescript microfilm, Kenneth Stampf, ed., *Records of Southern Ante-bellum Plantations*, Series J, Reel 13; Diary of Meta M. Grimball, October 4, 1863; BDHR, IV: 414; Chalmers Davidson, *The Last Foray*, (Columbia: University of South Carolina Press, 1971), 231.
16. Charleston Co. Equity Case, *John S. Ashe (heirs) vs. Lewis Morris*, 1852, #51, part 1.
17. Charleston Co. Deeds E9: 293-94.
18. Charleston Co. Will Transcripts 36: 1079-86.
19. Bacot-Huger Papers, SCHS 11/56/9, "Abstract to Title . . ."; Charleston Co. Equity Bills 1847, #20; *Morris v. Morris* in Charleston Decree Book 1849, 68-70; McCrady plat #1775.
20. BDHR, IV, 413-14; Davidson, *Last Foray*, 231-32.

21. Charleston Co. Equity Bills
22. 1850 St. Paul Agricultural Sc
23. 1860 Slave Schedule, St. Pau
24. *Official Records of the War o*
25. Lewis Morris Letters, South
26. *War of the Rebellion Series 1*
27. Diary of Meta Morris, Aug
28. Charleston Co. Deeds B27:
29. Charleston Co. Deeds K27
30. Typescript dated May 10, 1

21. Charleston Co. Equity Bills 1852, #51; garden mentioned in Colleton Co. Deed Book 3: 115.
22. 1850 St. Paul Agricultural Schedule, p. 499, line 33.
23. 1860 Slave Schedule, St. Paul, 474-75; St. Bartholomew, 374-75; 1860 Agricultural Schedule, St. Paul, p. 545, line 38.
24. *Official Records of the War of the Rebellion* Series 1, 14: 13.
25. Lewis Morris Letters, South Caroliniana Library.
26. *War of the Rebellion* Series 1, 28: 194-99.
27. Diary of Meta Morris, August 4, October 4, 1863.
28. Charleston Co. Deeds B27: 283; H27: 107.
29. Charleston Co. Deeds K27: 122; N27: 111.
30. Typescript dated May 10, 1922, in possession of Hugh Lane.